

Out of Time:
History, Presence, and the Departure of the Italians of Egypt, 1933-present

by

Joseph John Viscomi

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Dario Gaggio, Co-Chair

Professor Andrew Shryock, Co-Chair

Associate Professor Pamela Ballinger

Professor Joshua Cole

Professor Alessandro Portelli, Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza”

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PREFACE

In the first chapter of Italo Calvino's *Palomar*, the story of an inquisitive mind experiencing the world around him, Mr. Palomar pauses to watch the sea's gyrations. He intends to "see" one wave, to delineate its beginning and ending. In studying the dynamics of this one wave, Palomar hopes "to perceive all its simultaneous components without overlooking any of them." From his "reading of a wave," he anticipates deriving patterns that will aid his understanding of the universe. Palomar, however, is distracted by the splitting of a wave into two, by the many angles of the cresting wave, and by the movement of the water at the point where the wave meets sand. When his vision shifts, the waves appear to be rolling backwards rather than thrusting forwards.

Concentrating the attention on one aspect makes it leap into the foreground and occupy the square, just as, with certain drawings, you have only to close your eyes and when you open them the perspective has changed. Now in the overlapping of the crests moving in various directions the general pattern seems broken down into sections that rise and vanish. In addition, the reflux of every wave also has a power of its own that hinders the oncoming waves. And if you concentrate your attention on these backward thrusts it seems that the true movement is the one that begins from the shore and goes out to sea.

The narrator asks if Palomar's underlying intention is to "overturn time"? Yet, Palomar walks away in frustration and disquiet.

This story nagged me as I researched, organized pages of documents and notes, and wrote this dissertation. Could I follow one story? One narrative? One argument? I began to see these cresting and crashing waves, and was distracted by their many angles. Is this indeterminacy a symptom of postmodern nausea? Then, I wondered, was Palomar's blunder that in attempting to see "one wave" he neglected its impact on the land beneath his feet? If one wave represented one

temporal trajectory, one push of time, as I saw it, was not the land *subject to the effects of historical time*? Each wave, in its multiple angles, pounded the shoreline, eroded embankments, and smoothed stone, churning up and depositing pieces of broken earth on other shores. In many ways, this dissertation is an attempt to study the multiple angles of one wave—indistinguishable at times from preceding and following waves—as it reshapes the shoreline. And thus to step out of postmodernity, into the presence of history.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
PREFACE	vi
LIST OF IMAGES	xi
LIST OF APPENDICES	xii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	xiii
ABSTRACT	xiv
INTRODUCTION	1
Historical absences	2
Community in Crisis	11
On Microhistory and non-synchronic time	17
Sources of the Stories	26
CHAPTER ONE	
Mediterranean Futures:	
Historical Time and the Departure of Italians from Egypt, 1919-1937	30
Arrivals	36
Extraterritorial Conditions of Possibility	44
Rebuilding a Future for Italians in Egypt	49
Fascist Imperial Futures and the Undermining of the Present	54
Dismantling the Past, Dismantling the Future	59
Conclusion	67

VIGNETTE ONE	
Communities, Politics, and Origins	71
CHAPTER TWO	
“The future does not belong to me”: The internment of Italian civilians in Fayed during the Second World War	93
Entering the War	98
No Waste of Time - Arrest and Isolation	108
“The continual vision of tents...” - Time as Frustration/Frustrated Time	120
“The right to life”	128
Agony and the Future	144
Conclusion	149
INTERMEZZO	
Nostalgia and the Perils of Historical Time	156
CHAPTER THREE	
Disjointed Histories: Political Representation and Uncertainty in Postwar Egypt, 1943-1953	164
Fascist Residues	170
Open Wounds and Unsettled Questions	175
Representing a Community Detached	184
Andarsene - Leaving Egypt	192
Broken Bridges	197
Conclusion: Twice Without a King	207
VIGNETTE TWO	
“When are you leaving?”: Political Transformation in Postwar Egypt	210
CHAPTER FOUR	
Emigrants, Repatriates, and Refugees: Leaving Egypt between Politics and the Past, 1954-1958	232

Taking Positions	238
A Place for the Italians of Egypt	244
Conflict Looms	254
Crisis, Repatriation, and Evacuation	261
Becoming Refugees	271
Conclusion	282
VIGNETTE THREE	
Arrival~Departure: Displaced from the Present	286
CONCLUSION	310
APPENDIX A	323
APPENDIX B	325
BIBLIOGRAPHY	327

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1: Easter postcard, 1941.	93
Image 2: Passaro's sketch.	93
Image 3: Administration of arrests and internment of Italians.	102
Image 4: Map drawn by Albino Caserta.	112
Image 5: Madonna of the Internees, Farina's sculpture depicted on a postcard.	130
Image 6: Caccioppo family visitation permit.	135-6
Image 7: Collection of Passaro's sketches and watercolors of the tents.	143
Image 8: La visite più brevi sono le più gradite.	143
Image 9: Il più forte sono io!	144
Image 10: The letters of Eugenio Farina.	156
Image 11: Longo, Farina, and Ras al Bar in the 1950s.	156
Image 12: Civiletti's repatriation ticket.	298
Image 13: The Casa di Riposo in the 1930s and in 2013.	311
Image 14: The entryway to the Casa di Riposo and the bust of Vittorio Emanuele III.	313
Image 15: Inside the Time Machine.	319

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interviews.	335
APPENDIX B: Archives and Sources.	337

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDE: Associazione Italiani d'Egitto (Association [of] Italians of Egypt)
ANPIE: Associazione Nazionale Profughi Italiani d'Egitto (National Association [of] Refugee Italians of Egypt)
CoNIE : Comitato Nazionale Italiani d'Egitto (National Committee [of] Italians of Egypt)
CRI: Croce Rossa Italiana (Italian Red Cross)
CRP: Centri di Raccolta Profughi (Refugee Sheltering Centers)
DGE: Direzione Generale di Emigrazione (General Direction of Emigration)
DGPA: Direzione Generale di Pubblica Assistenza (General Direction of Public Assistance)
ECA: Ente Comunale di Assistenza
EGP: Egyptian Pounds
ICC: Italian Chamber of Commerce
ICEM: International Committee of Emigration and Migration
IRC: International Red Cross
MAE: Ministero degli Affari Esteri (Italian Foreign Ministry)
MI: Ministero dell'Interno (Italian Interior Ministry)
MLI: Movimento Libera Italia (Italia Libera Movement)
MLPS: Ministero del Lavoro e Previdenza Sociale
MSI: Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement)
PCI: Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)
PCM: Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri
PNF: Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party)
SDA: Società Dante Alighieri (Dante Alighieri Society)
SIB: Società Italiana di Beneficenza (Italian Charity Society)
UDI: Unione Democratica Italiana (Italian Democratic Union)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the experiences of an Italian emigrant and colonial community in the shifting political regimes of the mid-twentieth century Mediterranean. It addresses the question of how the sense of community that emerged since the 1930s among “the Italians of Egypt” (gli italiani d’Egitto) positioned them within a constellation of competing geo-political domains. The community of over 60,000 Italian residents on the eve of the Second World War encompassed a wide range of national, ethnic, and religious identities that were brought closer together through their temporal and spatial displacement. Juxtaposing archival and oral-historical sources, *Out of Time* documents how the Italians of Egypt engaged national and imperial narratives by anticipating, experiencing, and remembering their departure from Egypt, processes which in turn constituted their sense of belonging to history.

The structure of this dissertation works against teleological readings of history. Chapters one and two address imagined futures of the Italians of Egypt in the context of the imperial aspirations of the Fascist regime in the early 1930s and during the Second World War. Chapters three and four cover the events and legal regimes in Egypt and Italy through which departing Italians became “repatriates” and “national refugees” after the Second World War and into the 1960s. These historiographical chapters are interwoven with oral-historical vignettes that illustrate how repatriated Italians of Egypt in today’s Italy revisit their lived experiences. The vignettes examine the community’s origins, the consequences of political transformation in postwar Egypt, and the experiences of departure from Egypt and arrival in Italy.

Italian communities in colonial settings in general, and those within the shifting borders of the Mediterranean in particular, remain marginal to scholarly work on colonial communities. This dissertation contributes to recent scholarship by providing a key example of the complex unraveling of the colonial Mediterranean. Demonstrating how departures and arrivals contoured the history of the Italians of Egypt, *Out of Time* underscores the importance of regional politics in shaping historical consciousness in the Mediterranean. In doing so, it challenges traditional periodization and studies that conceptually divide Europe from the Middle East and North Africa.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2012, during the annual gathering of the Association of the Italians of Egypt (Associazione degli Italiani d'Egitto, AIDE)--an organization working to “preserve the historical memory” of Italians whose families left Egypt since the 1940s after several generations of residence--general commentary followed presentations on the influence of Italian architecture and engineering in Egyptian cities. A man in his late 70s walked up to the podium to address the room full of around 65 individuals (all but two over the age of 60). He said: “I returned from Alexandria three days ago... how many here are Alexandrians? [half the hands were raised]. Forget! Forget what once was... it's now a skeleton... but let's return to something more serious, the fact that there are no more...” He was interrupted by the voice of a woman in the audience. “Leave us our memories as they are!” she shouted. And then another man, “please, don't do this to us!” The voices of the audience rose in a cacophony against him. The man at the podium fumbled to return to his train of thought, he continued:

anyways, I always go to the Latin Cemetery [where most Italians are buried] because I have my relatives there [he then lists different families in the audience who are also there] they're all our relatives... our cemetery, it's painful to see. Tombstones are broken... and another thing... Saint Catherine's Cathedral... on Sunday we're merely 15 or 16 for the Mass.¹

His lament slowly faded as the collective voice of the audience overcame him and he was ushered away for another individual to conclude the event. The woman's cry, “leave us our memories!” echoed through the duration of my research as I accumulated an extensive amount of materials on the departure of Italians from Egypt. Both figures in this story struggled with the

¹ AIDE meeting, Rome, 3 March 2012.

past, coming to terms in disparate ways with their departure from Egypt. In the case of the man's observations on contemporary Alexandria, he enjoined the audience--connected to him by means of a kinship of deceased relatives--to reduce the distance between past and present, to unite the memories of the Egypt they had departed with its present state. The audience collectively objected to his provocation. Consistent with the outspoken women who cried out, instead, "leave us our memories as they are!" some best inhabited the present by relegating the past to memory. For the latter, the past that had shaped their community had mutated, and the thought of reuniting it with the present only instilled anguish. For the former, on the contrary, there was great anguish in the dissolution of the past in the present. Both met in their sense of belonging to a community of the past, at risk of vanishing from the present. The friction between these two perspectives, and the struggle to reconcile past and present, is the tension which propels this project.

Historical absences

This dissertation is about a community's struggle to maintain its presence in history. It is a story about endings that never quite end, but are always in the process of ending. Between the end of the Second World War and 1961 over 40,000 Italians left Egypt. The vast majority "returned" to Italy as "repatriates" or "national refugees," while others dispersed throughout the world. Today, the Italians of Egypt (*italiani d'Egitto*)--as they have come to be known--reconstitute their community through various forms of sociality. Although the label "Italians of Egypt" suggests a unified group, it encompasses a range of genealogical origins and notions of national and regional belonging. Among them were emigrants fleeing Southern Italy after the 1908 Messina earthquake, Sephardic Jewish protégés from Ottoman territories, political exiles who fled the peninsula during the Risorgimento, and merchants who crisscrossed the

Mediterranean since the time of the Maritime Republics. In Egypt, they lived overwhelmingly in the urban centers of Cairo and Alexandria, with another large population dispersed in the Canal Zone, the area that comprises the cities of Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez. Within each city, smaller zones held larger concentrations of Italians; in no area did they supersede ten percent of the population. They lived in neighborhoods that could be distinguished by class rather than national origins. Shobra (Rod al Farag) in Cairo was middle-class, Bulaq was lower or working-class. Attarin in Alexandria was working-class, Camp Cesar and Ibrahimieh emergent middle-class neighborhoods, whereas elite Italians lived farther east in Roushdy or Bulkeley. Italian schools and institutions were equally dispersed. Hospitals in Alexandria (until 1967) and Cairo (still to this day); schools in Alexandria (until 1945) and Cairo (until this day); clubs in Cairo, Alexandria and Suez (all closed); cultural centers (still today in Cairo). A vast majority--around seventy-five percent--were tradesmen, but members of the community cut across all social classes (this is equally true with populations within the community, such as with the Italian Jews). Despite the prevalence of narratives that connect Italians to medieval or ancient origins in Egypt, the Italian community underwent unprecedented expansion following the British occupation in 1882. Among other factors, the imperial aspirations of the National Fascist Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF), the imprisonment of around 5,000 Italian civilians by Anglo-Egyptian authorities during the Second World War, and processes of decolonization all dismantled the conditions that had encouraged migration to Egypt. Today, fewer than 250 remain in Egypt. But this story is absent both from public historical consciousness in Italy and from historiography.

When the Italians of Egypt appear as subjects of scholarly memory, not surprisingly it is in the period prior to their departure.² They disappear from scholarly interest at the same moment they disappear from Egypt. Indeed, only in recent years has Italian historiography begun carefully to reexamine the communities of Italians that were dispersed in the colonial Mediterranean, most often focusing on Italy's former possessions.³ Marta Petricioli, for example, writes about the community in Egypt between 1917 and 1947, detailing the role of their institutions, their connections to both Italian and Egyptian politics, and the connections between Italian businesses in Egypt to the Italian peninsula. As an institutional history, her work is deeply engulfed in description of the specific characteristics of small-scale organizations in Alexandria, Cairo, and the Canal Zone.⁴ Accentuating the myth of the Italian "brava gente," other scholars narrate the "contributions" and "achievements" of Italians to the "modernization" of Egypt under and since Mehmet Ali.⁵ A similar body of literature was generated during the Fascist period.⁶

² Elizabeth H. Shlala, "Mediterranean migration, cosmopolitanism, and the law: A history of the Italian community of nineteenth-century Alexandria, Egypt," (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2009); Mercedes Volait, "La communauté italienne et ses édiles," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 46 (1987): 137-156.

³ Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, 2008); Donna Gabaccia *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London, 2000); Anna Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo: La ricerca di consenso in Egitto per l'impresa di Libia* (Roma, 1997), "Cittadinanza e comunità italiana nella Tunisia coloniale" in Federico Cresti (ed.) *Minoranze, pluralismo, stato nell'Africa mediterranea e nel Sahel* (Catania, 2015): 63-82; Daniela Melfa, *Migrando a Sud: Coloni italiani in Tunisia, 1881-1939* (Roma, 2008); Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare* (Bologna, 2002); Claudio G. Segre, *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago, 1974); Angelo del Boca *Italiani, brava gente?* (Neri Pozzi, 2005), *La nostra Africa: nel racconto di cinquanta italiani che l'hanno percorsa, esplorata e amata* (Neri Pozza, 2003), *Gli italiani in Africa orientale* (Milano, 1999); Patrizia Palumbo (ed.) *A place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley, 2003); Nicholas Doumanis, *Myth and Memory in the Mediterranean: Remembering Fascism's Empire* (London, 1997).

⁴ Marta Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito: l'Egitto degli Italiani, 1917-1947* (Milano, 2007).

⁵ F. Santorelli, *L'Italia in Egitto: Impressioni e Note* (Cairo, 1894); L.A. Balboni, *Gli Italiani nella Civiltà Egiziana del Secolo XIX* (Alessandria d'Egitto, 1906); Luigi Dori, "Italiani in Africa: Tipografi e giornalisti italiani in Egitto," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiani per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 14, 3 (1959): 146-148; Luca D.

Some recount the exile of Italians to Egypt during the Risorgimento period.⁷ In the historiography of modern Egypt, some scholars note the competitive presence (and at times political agitation) of Italians on labor markets in colonial Egypt.⁸ Others speak briefly and abstractly of “foreigners” in Egypt and their particular legal circumstances vis-à-vis Egyptian

Biolato, “Gli italiani fondatori delle moderne poste egiziane,” *Oriente Moderno* 88 (2008): 151-197; Paola Viviani, “L’Egitto di naturalisti, patrioti e religiosi italiani: Figari Bey, Balboni e Monsignor Dalfi,” *La rivista di Arablit* IV, 7-8 (2014): 117-133; Some do so simply by omitting the political structures that made these “achievements” possible. In this regard see Mariangela Turchiarulo, *Costruire in “Stile”: l’architettura italiana ad Alessandria d’Egitto. L’opera di Mario Rossi* (Gangemi, 2012); eds. Ezio Godoli & Milva Giacomelli, *Architetti e ingegneri italiani in Egitto dal diciannovesimo ventunesimo secolo/Italian Architects and Engineers in Egypt from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Firenze, 2008) and Cristina Pallini, “Architettura italiana ad Alessandria,” *Controspazio* 5 (2000): 22-30; For more on the myth of “brava gente,” see del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?*; Nicolas Doumanis, *Myth and Memory*; and Francesca Locatelli, “Migrating to the Colonies and Building the Myth of ‘Italiani brava gente’: The Rise, Demise and Legacy of Italian Settler Colonialism,” in (eds.) Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, *Italian Mobilities* (London, 2016).

⁶ Angelo Sammarco, *In Egitto* (Roma, 1939); Angelo Sammarco and Ernesto Verrucci Bey, eds., *Il contributo degli italiani ai progressi scientifici e pratici della medicina in Egitto sotto il regno di Mohammed Ali* (Cairo, 1928); Angelo Sammarco, ed., *Gli Italiani in Egitto: Il contributo italiano nella formazione dell’Egitto moderno* (Alessandria, 1937); Angelo Sammarco, *Egitto Moderno* (Roma, 1939); Le Monnier, *Il contributo italiano alla formazione dell’Egitto moderno* (Firenze, 1941). For a good summary of how this material emerged and for what reason, see Anthony Santilli, “Penser et analyser le cosmopolitisme. Le cas des Italiens d’Alexandrie au XIXe siècle,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome- Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines* (2013), <http://mefrim.revues.org/1516>

⁷ Michel Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto 1815-1861* (Pisa, 1958).

⁸ John T. Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863-1914* (New York, 2012); Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Princeton, 1987); Robert Tignor, “The Economic Activities of Foreigners in Egypt, 1920-1950: From Millet to Haute Bourgeoisie,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, 3 (1980): 416-449; Anthony P. Gorman, “Egypt’s Forgotten Communists: The Postwar Greek Left,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 20 1 (2002): 1-27; Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation* (Routledge, 2003); Alexander Kitroeff, *The Greeks in Egypt, 1919-1937* (London, 1989); Jacques Berque, *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution* (New York, 1972), 330, 475; Most recent in this genre is Najat Abdulhaq’s *Jewish and Greek Communities in Egypt: Entrepreneurship and Business before Nasser* (London, 2016).

claims to national sovereignty.⁹ Few studies explore the departure or dispersion of non-Egyptian communities; these often tangentially mention the Italians in Egypt.¹⁰

Literary allusions to the community appear in fragments.¹¹ Maurizio Maggiani's *Il coraggio del pettirosso* (The Robin's Courage) narrates the story of an idealized Italian anarchist poet, inspired by the early life of Giuseppe Ungaretti (and perhaps by the anarchist Enrico Pea's *Vita in Egitto*). In this genre there are also the works of Fausta Cialente, the antifascist author who spent around twenty years of her life in Alexandria after marrying one of the city's most prestigious and wealthiest Italians, Max Terni.¹² Less well known is Daniel Fishman's *Il chilometro d'oro* (The Golden Kilometer), a novel that recounts the (fictionalized) life of an Italian Jewish family in Downtown Cairo.

A number of memoirs concentrate on the "long 1950s"--from the far-reaching consequences of the 1948 war in Palestine to the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser into the 1960s--as an isolated period of change and transformation. These include *Out of Egypt*, by André Aciman, *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*, by Lucette Lagnado, and *The Sun at Midday: Tales of a Mediterranean Family*, by Gini Alhadeff. Aciman's work has come under harsh criticism by an independent scholar in Egypt, Samir Rifaat, who denounces the veracity of Aciman's text (*Out of Egypt* was awarded the Whiting Award for non-fiction in 1995) providing evidence from his

⁹ Will Hanley, "Foreignness and localness in Alexandria, 1880-1914" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2007); Ziad Fahmy, "Jurisdictional Borderlands: Extraterritoriality and 'Legal Chameleons' in Precolonial Alexandria, 1840-1870," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, 2 (2013): 305-329.

¹⁰ Joel Beinen, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry* (Berkeley, 1998); Angelos Dalachanis, "Leaving Egypt: Greeks and their Strategies: 1937-1967" (Ph.D. diss., European University Institute, 2011)

¹¹ Mathias Énard's *Zone* (Rochester, 2010), for example, draws attention to the changes in the postwar Mediterranean by denoting the departure of foreigners from Egypt, and--although its mention is brief--it is one of more accurate portrayals of the Italian presence in Egypt.

¹² Lucia Re, "Painting, Politics, and Eroticism in Fausta Cialente's Egyptian Narratives," in eds. Rudiger Ahrens and Klaus Stierstorfer, *Symbolism: An International Annual of Critical Aesthetics, Volume 8* (New York, 2008): 105-140.

own research that the characters in *Out of Egypt* are not in fact Aciman's relatives but instead are composites of eminent figures of mid-twentieth century colonial Egypt.¹³ With relative ease, a reader can pass from one narrative to another in this body of literature, finding little difference (apart from authorial styles) in the descriptive tropes used to color social life during the period. Almost ubiquitously, life in Egypt's cities is described as cosmopolitan, liberal, carefree, and abundant in wealth and social activity.¹⁴ This literature presents the "long 1950s" as a fissure in historical experience triggered by anti-European Arab nationalism (or by xenophobia, depending on its polemical slant) and the crumbling of a prior epoch of cosmopolitan utopia. The period is frequently portrayed as concluding one of the "brief lives" of a cosmopolitan Mediterranean in which a seemingly idyllic tolerance between religious, ethnic, and national groups thrived.¹⁵ Social harmony (among elite Europeans and Levantines) comes to an end with the "sudden" arrival of Egyptian nationalism, a platitude reinforced in broader works whose narratives detail a transition from cosmopolitanism to nationalism.¹⁶ Lagnado, for example, writes "[s]uddenly,

¹³ The lay historian Samir Refaat has written about this in 1996 and 1997: "Andre Aciman's *Out of Egypt*" (<http://www.egy.com/judaica/96-12-21.php>); "Aciman Encore: *Out of Egypt*, Great Uncle Vili Mystery Resolved at Last" (<http://www.egy.com/judaica/97-02-01.php>).

¹⁴ Two texts cover experiences living in Egypt before the massive departure of foreigners, but still dwell on the cosmopolitan aspects of Cairo and Alexandria. Enrico Pea, *Vita in Egitto* (Ponte alla Grazie, 1995[1949]) and Paolo Vittorelli, *L'età della tempesta: autobiografia romanzata di una generazione* (Milano, 1981).

¹⁵ Henk Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities: Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered," *History and Anthropology*, 16 1 (2005): 129-141, 137; Deborah A. Starr, *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Literature, culture, and empire* (London, 2009), and "Recuperating cosmopolitan Alexandria: Circulation of narratives and narratives of circulation," *Cities*, 22, 3 (2005): 217-228.

¹⁶ André Aciman, *Out of Egypt: a memoir* (New York, 2007); Lucette Lagnado, *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit: A Jewish Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World* (New York, 2008); Gini Alhadeff, *The Sun at Midday: Tales of a Mediterranean Family* (New York, 2004); Daniel Fishman, *Il chilometro d'oro: il mondo perduto degli italiani d'Egitto* (Milano, 2006); Carolina Delburgo, *Come ladri nella notte. La cacciata dall'Egitto* (Barletta, 2006); Francesco Guastamacchi, *Il profugo italiano: la storia di un italiano d'Egitto, dalla nascita fino alla costituzione del comitato di quartiere* (Milano, 2012); Piero Paoletti, *Storia di un italiano d'Egitto* (Pisa, 2007); Mario Rispoli and Jean-Charles Depaule, *Italien du Caire: Une autobiographie* (Marseille, 2010); For similar scholarly accounts, see the volume edited by

‘foreigners’ weren’t welcome in the very place where most of them had felt so profoundly at home.”¹⁷ Her “suddenly” refers to the early 1960s. Yet, by that time the vast majority of Italians had already departed, or planned to do so.

Within these literatures, little mention is made of incidents of violent encounters between members of communities, such as the conflict between small gangs of Italians and Greek boys on Alexandria’s central Rue Safia Zaghloul, which resulted in the death of one fourteen-year-old in 1948. An event whose implications traced from micro-events to macro-narratives of cultural and political belonging in postwar Egypt, it also brought to the surface debates about the relationship between political representation of the Italians and the populace themselves.¹⁸ Similarly, scant attention is given to the social inequalities revealed, for example, in Bairam al-Tunsi’s poem entitled “The Privileges” (*Al-Imtiyazat*, which refers to the Ottoman-era Capitulations, see Chapter One). He writes, “every affliction [is a] Sicilian / fearing the volcano / living here on the second floor / while we’re [living] in the lavatory.”¹⁹ Even less attention is given to the internal

Robert Ilbert and Ilios Yannakakis, *Alexandria 1860-1960: The brief life of a cosmopolitan community* (Alexandria, 1997) and the monumental work by Robert Ilbert, *Alexandrie 1830-1930, histoire d’une communauté citadine* (Cairo, 1996). One example of this narrative that works on a broader region is found in Philip Mansel, *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean* (London, 2010). See also Michael Haag’s books on Cairo and Alexandria.

¹⁷ Lagnado, *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*, 160.

¹⁸ ACGA, “Leone Alessandro,” “Un assassin de 14 ans,” *Le Journal d’Egypte*, February 13, 1948. NB: Preliminary exploration of the penal and civil consular court records from Alexandria and Cairo during the 1920s and 1930s has revealed that life in Egypt was rife with conflict between and within the Italian community. The frequency of cases that cross cultural boundaries, specifically Italian and Egyptian ones, and deal with insults and verbal abuse of Egyptians suggests that the relationship between Italians and Egyptians were not nearly as pacific as it is described in this genre of literature. We get a glimpse at this from earlier periods in Hanley, “Foreignness and Localness” and Will Hanley, “Cosmopolitan Cursing in Late-Nineteenth Century Alexandria,” in (eds.) Darryl N. MacLean & Sikeena Karmali Ahmed, *Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts: Perspectives from the Past* (Edinburgh, 2012): 92-104.

¹⁹ Bairam al-tunsi, *Diwan Bairam al-Tunsi* (Cairo ND). It is worth noting here that one of Alexandria’s native scholars referred to al-Tunsi as the “real poet of Alexandria,” contrary to the title popularly assigned to Constantine P. Cavafis. Reem Saad, “On the life of the late Robert Mabro (1934-2016),” *MadaMasr*, 20 August 2016.

dynamics of national communities. The absence of these contents enables an uncomplicated history of cosmopolitan harmony.

Although the “nostalgic” mourning of the worlds lost through departure that characterizes this genre has received considerable and due critique, scholars often frame their critiques within the same analytical categories employed in this body of literature--a generalized dialectic of cosmopolitanism and nationalism. For example, Anouchka Lazarev contends that after the Second World War, both Egypt and Italy “turned their backs on the Mediterranean,” abandoning the “ambiguity and vagueness” of Alexandria’s cosmopolitan identity.²⁰ Lazarev ignores the intense relations between Egypt and Italy that characterized the postwar period and built on the very foundations of these “cosmopolitan” worlds. Some propose placing the two analytical categories in the context of colonialism to resolve this tension, arguing that cosmopolitanism was simply a facade behind which hierarchical colonial relations thrived.²¹ Naor Ben-Yehoyada

²⁰ The full quote: “The war, the failure of fascism, a new partitioning of the globe, led both Egypt and Italy to turn their backs on the Mediterranean. After the second world war, Egypt embraced Arabism, and Italy looked fixedly towards Europe. Neither the one nor the other could integrate or absorb that intense frivolous Mediterranean ‘Italianity’ which juggled with symbols and wallowed in ambiguity and vagueness, that Alexandrian identity which was at one and the same time the origin and the guardian of a myth.” Anouchka Lazarev, “Italians, Italianity and fascism,” in (ed.) Robert Ilbert and Ilios Yannakakis, *Alexandria 1860-1960: The brief life of a cosmopolitan community* (Alexandria, 1997): 84.

²¹ Khaled Fahmy, “The Essence of Alexandria” *Manifesta Journal 14 & 16* (2012); Khaled Fahmy, “For Cavafy, With Love and Squalor: Some Critical Notes on the History and Historiography of Modern Alexandria,” in *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*, eds. Anthony Hirst & Michael Silk (London, 2004): 263-280; Will Hanley “Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies,” *History Compass* 6, 5 (2008): 1346-1367; Robert Mabro, “Nostalgic Literature on Alexandria,” in *Historians in Cairo: Essays in Honor of George Scanlan*, ed. Jill Edwards (Cairo 2002): 237-265; An exception to this is the recent dissertation by Angelos Dalachanis, which carefully looks at the historical processes surrounding the departure of Greeks from Egypt during the mid-twentieth century, Dalachanis, “Leaving Egypt.” Anthony Gorman’s study of the identity of “Egyptian Italians,” as he translates *italiani d’Egitto*, captures the community’s sense of its own history, but almost entirely neglects the larger socio-political impact of the 1930s. Anthony Gorman, “The Italians of Egypt: Return to Diaspora,” in *Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualising Community*, eds. Anthony Gorman and Sossie Kasbarian (Edinburgh 2015): 138-172.

observes how cosmopolitan narratives of the Mediterranean are frequently teleological in their structures, written in opposition to realities confronted in the present. Narratives detailing the loss of the “cosmopolitan sea” emerge not merely in relation to, but as explanations of, the contemporary geopolitical constellations that delimit the northern and southern shores of the sea.²² In doing so, they widen the rift between the past experiences they seek to describe and their own interpretive frameworks. If that is true, then scholars who employ the same analytical categories in their critiques of these narratives continue to elide what was behind such narrative facades. As a remedy, Ben-Yehoyada suggests that we look not to epistemological interpretive devices but rather to processes of region formation (and perhaps de-formation).²³ It is helpful to recall here that Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas have referred to the landscape of the modern Mediterranean as “a maritime space of colonial interactions and entanglements that transcended continental and national boundaries.”²⁴ I argue that in these interactions and entanglements we can better understand what makes or breaks analytical categories. Another goal of this dissertation, therefore, is to reach beyond epistemological interpretations of the colonial

²² Lucette Lagnado, “Anti-Israel Jews and the Vassar Blues,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 February 2014; “Almost the Last Jew in Egypt,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 April 2013. Another example is André Aciman’s response to Barak Obama’s address to the Islamic World in Cairo in 2013, André Aciman, “The Exodus Obama Forgot to Mention,” *The New York Times*, 8 June, 2009. By the same author, see “After Egypt’s Revolution, Christians Are Living in Fear...” *The New York Times*, 19 November 2013; Paola Caridi, “Mezzanotte al Cairo,” *L’Espresso*, March 23, 2006; Paola Caridi, “La fine degli italiani in Egitto,” *Dust* 41, October 18/24, 2002; Manera Livia, “Spie, amanti, ladri: la bella Alessandria prima della fine,” *Corriere della Sera*, May 15, 2009.

²³ Naor Ben-Yehoyada, “Mediterranean Modernity” in *A Companion to Mediterranean History*, eds. Peregrine Horden and Sharon Kinoshita, (London, 2014): 107-121, 117. See also Tabak, who astutely notes that what makes the “cosmopolitanism” of Mediterranean cities “haunting” is not its exceptionality, but rather “what came in its wake.” Faruk Tabak, “Imperial rivalry and port-cities: a view from above,” *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 24 2 (2009): 79-94.

²⁴ Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas, “A Colonial Sea: the Mediterranean, 1789-1956,” *European Review of History/Revue européenne d’histoire*, 19, 1 (2012): 1-13.

Mediterranean and to begin to ascertain how historical processes of decolonization unfolded and disentangled from the interwar period into the 1960s.

Community in crisis

Within the narrative of this population's struggle to maintain its presence in history is also a story about the formation of particular kind of community. Ann Laura Stoler suggests that colonial communities, rather than simply displaced communities of European origin, are "unique cultural configurations," based on "new constructions of European-ness."²⁵ Within the colonial milieu of late-nineteenth and twentieth-century Egypt, Italians in Egypt were uniquely positioned within political and imperial rivalries. Often, they were used by ruling Italian regimes as pawns in foreign political strategy (before, during, and after fascism). At other times, they were assimilated by Egyptian nationalists into a broad categories of "foreigners." Still, on other occasions their positioning placed them outside of these tensions. In turn, they evade facile dichotomies of colonizer-colonized.²⁶ Julia Clancy-Smith notes that surprisingly little is known of these "colonies within colonies" despite the important link between social identity and their varying degrees of marginality within colonial structures.²⁷ The key to understanding the social

²⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 1 (1989): 134-161, 136-7; echoes of this argument also appear in Federick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *The American Historical Review*, 99, 5 (1994): 1516-1545.

²⁶ Albert Memmi's classic study of the profile of the colonizer and colonized would have it that the Italians in Egypt--as members of the broader European community--are de facto colonizers, despite their arrivals as immigrants. Their eventual departure, and the early period in which departure becomes an essential part of the political discourse, however, raises numerous questions about how these categories function. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston, 1991).

²⁷ Julia Clancy-Smith, "Marginality and Migration: Europe's Social Outcasts in Pre-Colonial Tunisia, 1830-1881," in (ed.) Eugene Rogan, *Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East* (New York, 2002): 149-182, 152.

configurations of these communities lay not in their origins, but in the ways in which they inhabited a range of social, political, and economic margins.²⁸

The case of the Italians of Egypt adds several caveats to Stoler's definition of colonial communities. First, the Italians of Egypt and a wide range of political actors around them envisioned themselves as members of a unique Italian emigrant community. During the rise of fascism, the image of the "historic" role played by the Italians of Egypt as a bridge connecting the two shores of the Mediterranean became a central trope used to represent their exceptionality. As Claudio Fogu argues of the various functions of "historic/historical" (*storico*, in Italian), the designation as "historic" corresponds to the representation of an event that is "incommensurable to all other historical events."²⁹ In other words, contrary to signifying simply one among many "historical" events of the past, the semantic employment of "historic" implies that such an event was a necessary impetus for change or transformation within a historical narrative. Whereas Fogu illustrates how material culture was made to represent and affirm the imaginary of a Fascist revolution, this dissertation shows that the same processes were at play in narratives that encapsulated the Italians of Egypt within the framework of broader Italo-Egyptian relations. The "local practices" of some Italians *in* Egypt were made to "naturally" signify the value and import of later generations of the Italians of Egypt--and, importantly, to legitimate the actions of Italian authorities.³⁰ The practice of rendering the Italians of Egypt "historic" continued long after they

²⁸ Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North African and Europe in the Age of Migration, c.1800-1900* (Berkeley, 2012) and "Marginality and Migration"; David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 2004).

²⁹ Claudio Fogu, "Fascism and Historic Representation: The 1932 Garibaldian Celebrations," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31 2 (1996):317-345, 335. See also his, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto, 2003).

³⁰ I draw this point from the Daniel Boyarin & Jonathan Boyrain, "Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry*, 19 4 (1993): 693-725, 709.

ceased to exist as an “ethnographic” colony.³¹ The community carried with them this semantic marking.

The second caveat is that *departure* renders essential the cultural exceptionality of the Italians of Egypt. In similar cases scholars observe how, in experiences of departure, personal and collective narratives of belonging confront the political circumstances in which they were formed.³² In many of these cases, the individuals departing--whether *pieds noirs* from Algeria or ethnic Italians from Istria--assess their own subjectivity in relation to political regimes that no longer exist and, out of this friction, generate new meanings in the actual political systems. In this case, one of the overarching dilemmas in the study of the Italians of Egypt is that they have not been studied as migrant or mobile communities. Non-Egyptian minorities have frequently been studied under the rubric of “diaspora,” which tends to reproduce the problematic social categorization highlighted by Stoler. Indeed, this analytical step can be impeded when members of the community deny their own immigration. In the words of one Italian born in Egypt in the 1930s, “[in this case] an immigrant is not an immigrant.”³³ Nevertheless, the logics of immigration as a process have much to yield for our understanding of how, given the historical contingencies, one can claim that “an immigrant is not an immigrant.” Migrants depart with histories. And, as Abdelmalek Sayad notes, immigration itself folds into these histories.³⁴ It is a process based on a distance measured in terms of absence (the emigration part of the history) and

³¹ Mark Choate, “From territorial to ethnographic colonies and back again: The politics of Italian expansion, 1890-1912,” *Modern Italy*, 8 1 (2003): 65-75.

³² Andrea Smith (ed.), *Europe’s Invisible Migrants: Consequences of the Colonists’ Return* (Amsterdam, 2002); Andrea L. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington, 2006); Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton, 2002).

³³ Interview with Silvio Calabria, June 12, 2012, Rome.

³⁴ Abdelmalek Sayad, *La double absence: Des illusions de l’émigré aux souffrances de l’immigré* (Seuil, 1999), 16-18.

presence (the immigration part of the history).³⁵ In spatial terms, the immigrant is at once here and there, each identity being grounded in an iteration of spatial locality and origin. The progression of time within this sentimental landscape, however, begets a “double absence,” a sense of being neither here nor there.³⁶ Within this temporality of double absence the immigrant is further articulated by employing historical argumentation--such as the idea of being a “historic” community. In doing so, an immigrant community decreases the distance between here and there.³⁷ In departing from Egypt, the “double absence” is folded once again as the histories of “here” and “there” cease to conform to their prior structures.³⁸

Understanding these colonial communities, I contend, lay not in their origins (and not in the epistemological categories under which we classify them), but rather in the processes through which their members confront their pasts as they endeavor to come to terms with the present.³⁹

³⁵ Sayad, *La double absence*, 103-105.

³⁶ While this is coming from Sayad’s work, Andrew Shryock articulates a similar “double remoteness” in Andrew Shryock, “In the double remoteness of Arab Detroit: Reflections on Ethnography, Culture Work, and the Intimate Disciplines of Americanization,” in (ed.) Andrew Shryock *Off Stage/On Display: Intimacy and Ethnography in the Age of Public Culture* (Stanford, 2004): 279-314.

³⁷ Pierre Bourdieu makes a similar argument with regard to biography. In contrast to Bourdieu, however, I do not think it is fair to call this effect “illusion.” One cannot ignore the phenomenological realities that these constructions engender. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Biographical Illusion,” *Working Papers and Proceedings of the Center for Psychosocial Studies*, 14 (1987); see also Gérome Truc, “Narrative Identity against Biographical Illusion: The Shift in Sociology from Bourdieu to Ricoeur,” *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, 2 1 (2011):150-167.

³⁸ Similarly, Todd Shepard describes the unintended consequences of departure: “repatriate” was not meant to become a category of political and social identity, but through the departure from Algeria of *pieds noirs*--among others--as a result of decolonization political projects it indeed surfaced as a social category that positioned its subjects between France’s colonial past and the present. See Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, 2008), 155, 217, 220.

³⁹ The need for greater focus on process in the study of “colonial history in the era of decolonization” is emphasized, for example, in Federick Cooper, “Decolonizing Situations: the Rise, Fall, and Rise of Colonial Studies, 1951-2001,” *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 20, 2 (2002): 47-76. Generally, this framework contributes to broadening an understanding of decolonization studies by directly tackling the tendency among scholars towards teleological

Spatial approaches tend to emphasize a kind of locality that easily lends itself to fixed notions of territorial belonging and displacement. A great deal of work indeed has covered displacement and mobility across space. Throughout this dissertation, I ask: might something similar occur over time or on a temporal scale? Both are continuous: the movement in space cannot be conceived of without its relational distance; the movement in time, likewise. Spatial distance yields new kinds of relations between the “place left behind,” the new “placement” and, importantly, the perspectives of/from the “new place.” Being “displaced” in time also leads to a reconfigured relationship between the “past left behind,” the “present” and the perspectives of/from the “new present.” Can ideas of “here” and “there” be translated into the “now” and “then” of historical experience? In this dissertation, I argue that temporal processes bridge these gaps, and that the emergent histories used to navigate them are both subjects and objects of community formation.

While conducting research between 2009 and 2015 on the departure of the Italians of Egypt, I frequently witnessed episodes like those with which I began. They dramatize history’s vulnerability. By “history’s vulnerability,” I mean that “history,” a category of knowing oneself and one’s community in time, is subject to time’s passing and is always capable of cutting itself off from its past as it projects into the future.⁴⁰ Unable to integrate a narrative that follows the paths of time, history has the potential to unhinge an individual or community from a notion of who or what it is. This potential discloses the underlying structures of Sayad’s “double absence.” Such a dynamic is more likely when futures “close” in front of communities, calling into

analysis of colonial structures. In this regard, see Todd Shepard, “Making French and European Collide: Decolonization and the Politics of Comparative and Transnational Histories,” *Ab Imperio*, 2 (2007): 339-360.

⁴⁰ I mean the kind of time described by Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Events happen in time but time is not affected by them.” Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, 2000), 73.

question the very horizons that had contoured their social worlds.⁴¹ The same vulnerability is how the two-fold characterization of the Italians of Egypt (as carrying the myth of their “historic” presence in and as having departed from Egypt) sustains an important presence in the story they tell themselves.

I turn to Ernesto de Martino’s conception of “crisis of presence.”⁴² For de Martino, “presence” implies, but goes beyond, an existential “self.” Presence renders “culture,” or community, possible. Importantly, it entails “being-there in history” (*esserci nella storia*).⁴³ De Martino’s argument raises important considerations with regard to historical consciousness. In the “crisis of presence” the desire “to be present” in history confronts the “risk of not being present there.”⁴⁴ The possibility of “dehistoricization” accompanies the irreversibility of historical time (the time of *chronos*). As described by George Saunders, “[t]he crisis of presence... entails the possible loss of a place in history, since history is the work of thinking,

⁴¹ I draw this insight on futures “closing” from Vincent Crapanzano, *Waiting: The white of South Africa* (New York, 1986), 200.

⁴² Ernesto de Martino’s work as an anthropologist must be put in relation to that of his teacher, the historian Benedetto Croce, whose idea of historiography is founded on the notion that all history is “contemporary history,” a genealogy tracing to R.G. Collingwood’s philosophy of history. For Croce - like many of his Hegelian predecessors and contemporaries - there were societies whose “natural religions” precluded them from “history.” de Martino sought to restore historicity to the groups excluded from this narrative. He develops this theme throughout his oeuvre. See, for example, the first chapter of Ernesto de Martino, *Morte e pianto rituale del mondo antico: Dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria* (Torino, 1958) and the second chapter of *Il mondo magico* (Torino, 2007[1956]).

⁴³ Ernesto de Martino, “Crisi della presenza e reintegrazione religiosa,” *aut aut*, 31 (1956):17-31, 19. This has also been argued, for example, in George Saunders’s interpretation of de Martino’s work, which has otherwise been given little attention in anthropology. George Saunders, “The crisis of presence in Italian Pentecostal conversion,” *American Ethnologist*, 22 2 (1995): 324-40. More recently, see the translation of one of de Martino’s essays on the subject, Ernesto de Martino, “Crisis of Presence and Religious Reintegration,” trans. T. Farnetti and C. Sterwart, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2 2 (2012): 431-450 and Charles Stewart, “Dreaming and Historical Consciousness,” *Historically Speaking* (January 2013): 28-30.

⁴⁴ de Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 72.

acting, feeling, and, perhaps above all, ‘distinguishing’ human beings.”⁴⁵ Unhinged histories, on the other hand, alienate their subjects. Alienation generates suffering, an “anguish over not being-there in a human history.”⁴⁶ For de Martino, the “redemption” or “release” (*riscatto*) from this crisis comes through magic. By present-ing one’s self and community in history, this creative move restores time’s horizon. Throughout this dissertation, I ask: can the stories about the past that are shared, remembered, and forgotten provide that “redemption”? Can history-making (or making a place in history for one’s community) represent a kind of magic, a means to survive as a community in the present? How do the exigencies of time shape and mold, remake and rearticulate community? Can a crisis of presence succumb to time, bringing a community to its last breaths?

On microhistory and non-synchronic time

In the summer of 2013, deep in the archive of the Italian consular offices in Cairo, I was searching for information on a particularly prominent antifascist (a rarity in itself). Angelo Tartagni had been designated as “subversive” by the regime, and his name cited in documents from the diplomatic archives of the Italian Foreign Ministry in Rome. Reportedly, he had separated from his wife, converted to Islam and acquired Egyptian nationality, by default renouncing his Italian citizenship. After 1943 he published a small volume of essays that he had written during the Second World War condemning the politics of the Fascist regime (I discuss this in chapter three). Few details of his life remained in Cairo. His documents were stored in the file belonging to his wife, Ismene Brandani (divorce was not legal at the time in the Italian system so their separation was one of ambiguous legal status). Contrary to Tartagni, Brandani

⁴⁵ Saunders, “Crisis of presence,” 331.

⁴⁶ de Martino, “Crisi di presenza,” 25.

associated with the most well-known and active members of the PNF in Egypt. As I read through her file, Tartagni's name and associated documents disappeared and I followed Brandani's story. Some of the characters in Brandani's file were relatives of people I had interviewed in Italy. She did not leave Egypt. Into the late 1960s, she became ill and was cared for by a friend. Letters exchanged between Brandani's caretaker in Egypt and her sister in Italy concerning her well-being passed through the consulate. In the mid-1960s, the address changed on the letters. I paused on its familiarity: this was the address written on a scrap of paper handed to me over two years earlier when I left Milan to conduct an interview in Pisa. In Pisa, I had learned that the family's house served as a "stopping point" for many Italians arriving from Egypt. This movement through stories happened often throughout my research: characters and subjects passed the baton to others, often leaping from present to past and back again.

Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni define microhistory as the "science of lived experience" [scienza del vissuto].⁴⁷ As the rapprochement of anthropology and history, its dual purpose is to reconstitute "lived experience" in a way inconceivable in other forms of historiography and to investigate the "invisible structures within which that lived experience is articulated." While much of microhistory deals with historical persons or events belonging to distant pasts, its methodological foundations offer much in the way of our apprehension of more recent histories.⁴⁸ It has taught us that the stories concealed in archival documents abound in their own

⁴⁷ Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "Il nome e il come: scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico," *Quaderni Storici*, 40 (1979):181-90. NB: the same essay has been translated and included in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds.), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe: selections from Quaderni Storici*, (Baltimore, 1991), 8. In their text, "scienza del vissuto" is translated as "science of real life." I have chosen to go with my own translation of "vissuto" as lived experience in attempt to capture the micro application of the term for an *event* experienced or lived by historical characters, rather than the abstracted macro-scale analysis of a life (a whole life, that is).

⁴⁸ A helpful model for understanding how microhistory attempts to reveal or work through events to acquire an understanding of certain truths, see Giovanni Levi, "On microhistory," in

historical narratives, their own itineraries.⁴⁹ Passing from one story to another, through a variety of scales, determines the cartography of lived and shared experiences.⁵⁰ In doing so, microhistory works its magic. This dissertation is organized around the paths through which these stories leap across time--as in the jump from Angelo Tartagni's resistance against the Fascist regime to his estranged wife, and eventually to her sister's departure and residence with the family of one of my more recent interlocutors. In moving away from an approach to microhistory that emphasizes a synchronic imagination of culture over one that is diachronic and admits difference as relative, I suggest that the temporal dimensions of crossing scales of time stratifies this social cartography.⁵¹

My research methods included a mix of formal interviews, informal gatherings and conversations, and archival research. During interviews some individuals utilized my presence--

(ed.) Peter Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1991): 93-113, 109. For a good example of some of the ways in which microhistory crosses into the present, see (ed.) Jacques Revel, *Giochi di Scala: la microstoria alla prova dell'esperienza* (Roma, 2006).

⁴⁹ See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, 1987), *Tricksters Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York, 2007). There is a certain resonance here with the idea of archival "itineraries" described by Ann Laura Stoler in *Against the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2010). On a larger scale, the "revival of narrative" has also contributed to this body of knowledge. Paul Ricouer [trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer], *Time and Narrative* (Chicago, 1984-88); Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History," *Past & Present*, 85 (1979): 3-24.

⁵⁰ This observation comes from Jacques Revel, "Microanalisi e costruzione del sociale," in Jacques Revel (ed.), *Giochi di Scala: la microstoria alla prova dell'esperienza* (Roma, 2006): 19-44. In the same volume, see Bernardino Palumbo, "Scuola, scala, appartenenza. Problemi di identità tea storia e antropologia," in Jacques Revel (ed.), *Giochi di Scala: la microstoria alla prova dell'esperienza* (Roma, 2006): 251-300. With less analysis, this is what Amitav Ghosh does extremely well in his *In an Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveler's Tale* (New York, 1992).

⁵¹ I refer here specifically to the fact that many microhistorians drew anthropological inspiration from Clifford Geertz, including Ginzburg in his *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Baltimore, 1980), and replicated his tendency to focus on "flat" cultural models as if they were texts. These are, I contend, models of symbolic structures out of time and, in their stasis, they are unable to account for historical time (and thus change). For more on this, see Giovanni Levi, "I pericoli del geertzismo," [The Dangers of Geertzism] *Quaderni Storici*, 58 1 (1985): 269-276.

by means of comparison they saw in my person historical narratives juxtaposed in various ways to their own. Or, they saw in my historical training someone presumed to be partially informed: clearly, many felt, I neither knew nor understood the complexity of their histories and, as because of the biases inherited through my training as an historian, I would have to be retaught history.⁵² Others probed me for information regarding what I had found in the archives. The same lyrical complexity--the fragmented referencing of the past, juxtaposition to divergent presents, gazing towards future horizons--contoured archival documents as it did the narration of lived experiences.⁵³ Archival collections ranged from accumulations of personal documents and photographs to public libraries, from collections in municipal and institutional archives to the diplomatic records of the Italian Foreign Ministry. Moving between the interview and the archive, I touched on the material remains of the moments and events drawn upon vividly during some interviews and in others alluded to as fragmented memories parents or friends had recounted. In both cases, these events constituted the "lived experience" that evidenced the exceptionality of their social worlds, I was told. Both oral narrative and archived document contained pieces of the other, each was porous and permeated by the other.⁵⁴

If microhistory is a science of "lived experience," how can the social-scientifically inclined historian explore the temporal landscapes of a community whose story is founded on the struggle to maintain itself in history? How to study a community that is always on the verge of

⁵² These biases included the regular assumption that I positioned myself on the political left and therefore immediately read the act of moving to and living in Egypt as one of colonization. On a broader level, this also implicated the entire university system. Similar to the United States, many on the political right in Italy believe that the Italian university system is dominated by members of the left.

⁵³ This is especially the case in dealing with sources written at the time of events (as opposed to one written afterwards). Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop*, 12 (1981): 96-107, 103.

⁵⁴ Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It," *Critical Inquiry*, 20 1 (1993): 10-35.

its own exhaustion and whose members draw upon historical argumentation to confirm that this is the case? The trick, I believe, is hidden in one phrase. I owe to Alessandro Portelli the observation that any idea of time's "rupture" (a platitude in postmodern articulations of memory, pastness, and fragmentation) means little when someone says, "l'abbiamo vissuto," *we lived it*.⁵⁵ The claim, *to have lived something*, invites us to return to the past under question and to trace through the connections between seemingly disjointed stories that throw light upon the conditions of social worlds in which they were formed. Rather than metamorphosing microhistories into macro-scaled histories, this method conjoins multiple microhistories and seeks moments in which a variety of actors move "up" and "down" in scale.⁵⁶

From Bruno Latour's rendering of social aggregations, we have learned to comprehend the social not merely as an object of analysis composed of smaller parts, but as an object always constituted through connections and channels.⁵⁷ Like a constellation's dimensions, social configurations materialize by delimiting the conditions for their existence, not in their origins or at individual points along the way. This does not mean, however, that they exist solely in continuities. Contrary to the dichotomy of "rupture" and "continuity," throughout this dissertation I contend that the social fabrics of the Italians of Egypt adhere in the friction of these

⁵⁵ Alessandro Portelli, personal communication. September 2012.

⁵⁶ I refer specifically to arguments such as that put forth in Marshall Sahlins, "Structural work: How microhistories become macrohistories and vice versa," *Anthropological Theory*, 5 1 (2005): 5-30.

⁵⁷ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005). Latour is particularly helpful here with regard to his contrast to sociological -especially those inspired by Durkheim- theories of the past which place emphasis on the a priori existence of the social as a category which memory serves. Memory is always "for" in these conceptualizations of social memory. See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, 1992[1952]); Paul Connerton, *How societies remember* (New York, 1989); Pierre Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History," in (ed.) Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past. Vol. 1* (New York, 1996): 1-20.

leaps through and connections between distinct temporal scales of lived experience, of *il vissuto*.⁵⁸

A refrain I heard throughout my research equated the lived experience of being an Italian of Egypt with being “out of time” or off-key (*fuori tempo*). As noted, the same historical events that textured the pages of archival documents were used as evidence of their exceptionality in this regard. They conceived of their lived experiences in relation to terminated political and legal regimes, and around these conceptions defined what it meant to be “returning” to Italy, to be “repatriated,” or to be “refugees.” The challenge in seeing how the community emerged within this conjuncture was in trying to uncover the logic of their rendering of history juxtaposed with the unfolding of historical time. How were these microhistories of departure related to the sense of being out of time? My answer to this challenge is to propose a conception of time as multiple and layered.

In his now classic study of the uses and abuses of time in anthropology, Johannes Fabian railed against the tendency of anthropologists to place their subjects in a time distinct from their own. His threefold division of the “times” of anthropology--physical, mundane/typological, and intersubjective--is meant to characterize anthropologists’ use of “distancing devices” to separate themselves from their subjects. He calls this the “denial of coevalness,” which he defines as “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse.”⁵⁹ Fabian’s approach lacks the acknowledgement that the same devices he sees as problematic furnishings of the anthropologist’s toolkit are those often used by its subjects. He privileges a temporal equivalency

⁵⁸ The inability for certain configurations of the community to persist past the crumbling conditions that allowed their formation. See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, 2004).

⁵⁹ Johannes Fabian, *Time And The Other* (New York, 1983), 31.

whose validity can only exist in a reductive sense of time: if Fabian's critique of other anthropologists is that they banish their subjects from the present, one might propose that he instead imposes the present upon his subjects.⁶⁰ In other words, Fabian's post-structuralist critique flattens time. To imply an essential *presence* would be to ignore the "denial of coevalness" that was so fundamental to elaborating the dimensions connecting porous and permeable stories told by my interlocutors and those that emerged from archival documents.

Indeed, Fabian's formulation describes broader trends in the humanities and social sciences following the linguistic turn.⁶¹ Historian Berber Bevernage has recently revisited Fabian's argument.⁶² Bevernage calls for a more complex appreciation of how temporality factors into historical (and ethnographic) analyses. He suggests that scholars embrace non-coevalness "as a starting point for an analysis of the politics of time," asking how connections between distinct temporal periods are valued, measured, and approached.⁶³ Relations to time, in this sense, are not merely epiphenomenal aspects of social life that rest on a material substrate, but instead they index *actual* temporalities, ways of being in time (à la Heidegger) that shape an individual's or group's possibilities within the world (social or otherwise).⁶⁴ In this dissertation, I

⁶⁰ A similar approach underlies Alfred Gell's *Anthropology of Time* (London, 1992) wherein he insists on the ultimate materiality of chronological time and contemporaneity as overcoming any other configuration of possible temporalities.

⁶¹ Whether it is due to Fabian's critique is uncertain, but clearly Fabian's work speaks to a broader trend that, in many ways, runs parallel to the linguistic turn in poststructuralist studies. For a good summary and critique of these trends as they apply to the discipline of history, see François Hartog, "The Present of the Historian," *History of the Present*, 4 2 (2014): 203-219, and "Time and Heritage," *Museum International*, 57 3 (2005): 7-18.

<http://collectivememory.fsv.cuni.cz/CVKP-52-version1-Hartog.pdf>.

⁶² Berber Bevernage, "Against Coevalness: A belated critique of Johannes Fabian's project of radical contemporaneity and a plea for a new politics of time." (forthcoming in *Anthropological Theory*).

⁶³ Bevernage, "Against Coevalness," 21.

⁶⁴ In one expressive passage, Bevernage writes of Ernst Bloch's Marxist division of temporal belonging: "the simplistic Marxist notion of dialectics has to be replaced by a multi-layered or

follow Bevernage in taking non-coevalness “as a starting point” for analysis, hoping to unsettle ideas about the fixity of historical time in human experience.

Thus far we have only considered the past and the present, and how each permeates the other. But there is a final caveat to accepting the multiplicity of time: it incorporates a movement towards the future. At the root of this notion is Reinhart Koselleck’s suggestion that historical categories are not merely testimonial (or descriptive), but that the unfolding of historical time occurs in the balance between experience and expectation.⁶⁵ Koselleck’s claim is that experience and expectation “embody past and future” and are essential concepts through which historians can apprehend the concrete (empirical) processes of historical time.⁶⁶ As Koselleck argues, the future, although open and indeterminate, is not always new and surprising. Within “historical structures of experience,” futures are anticipated and a degree of prognosis signifies “metahistorical” durations.⁶⁷ In the archives, repatriation and departure appeared--as early as 1919--to many Italians of Egypt and to political actors around them as answers to the “enduring conditions” of a present that ceased to conform to past experiences. The disjuncture surfaced again in interviews, when my interlocutors emphasized the importance the future (futures now

polyrhythmic dialectics that recognizes the fact that aspects of the past can survive into the present.” Bevernage, “Against Coevalness,” 15.

⁶⁵ The two works on which I draw are: Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004 [1979]): 258-262 and, Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA, 2002): 111.

⁶⁶ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 258. For an insightful and recent engagement with Koselleck’s work see the *American Historical Review Forum* entitled “Histories of the Future” and specifically, David C. Engerman, “Introduction: Histories of the Future and the Futures of History,” *The American Historical Review* 117, 5 (2012): 1402-1410; Jenny Andersson, “The Great Future Debate and the Struggle for the World,” *The American Historical Review* 117, 5 (2012): 1411-1430; Matthew Connelly et al., “‘General, I have Fought Just as Many Nuclear Wars as You Have’: Forecasts, Future Scenarios, and the Politics of Armageddon,” *The American Historical Review*, 117, 5 (2012): 1431-1460; Manu Goswami, “Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms,” *The American Historical Review*, 117, 5 (2012): 1461-1485. For a similar approach see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton, NJ, 2005).

⁶⁷ Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 146.

past) had played in the decision for their families' departures. Or, when they reflected on the community's imminent disappearance. History's unfolding permeates each form of "evidence," shaping lived experience. Neglecting the scale of the past's propulsion into the future, historians risk inadvertently concealing the ways subjects anticipate "history" as well as how such expectations themselves determine historical events.⁶⁸ This danger is inherent in Fabian's flattened approach to time.

The capacity of stories to endure, to affect change, and to permeate one another assembles a social cartography out of multiple, layered histories. Michel Rolph Trouillot calls this "the power of the story": "[w]hat happened leaves traces, some of which are quite concrete-- buildings, dead bodies, censuses, monuments, diaries, political boundaries--that limit the range and significance of any historical narrative." This is one of the many reasons, he claims, why "not any fiction can pass for history."⁶⁹ Trouillot's point is that these are real processes that propel historical time. For example, while sorting through a box of personal artifacts that had been deposited in the house of an Italian in Egypt as family and friends departed, I stumbled upon a Mass card from the early 1940s celebrating a baptism. Upon the card was written the surname of a woman I had interviewed one year earlier. I wrote to her and her daughter, asking if by chance they knew to whom it belonged. First, the mother responded, "what an incredible surprise to see the card of Armando Pressel... my husband!" She confessed that it had moved her deeply (mi sono emozionata!) as her husband had died many years ago. And then, her daughter,

⁶⁸ Koselleck asserts that there are "enduring conditions within which what is new appears." These conditions - what he calls "structures of experience" - are what aid our "prognostic certainty," or our capacity to think the future. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 135, 146.

⁶⁹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995).

who had recorded the interview I conducted with her mother so that her own children would remember, responded by thanking me for helping them to keep this past “alive.”

Sources of the Stories

At its core this dissertation is about how these multiple and layered stories constitute the community of Italians of Egypt. As such, the dissertation attempts to illuminate the “restlessness of the event,” the vulnerable boundaries of historical experiences shaped between the past as recounted and the recounting past.⁷⁰ I attempt to capture that fluidity of time both in the larger narrative of the organization of chapters and in the internal dynamics of each chapter. I chose to arrange the narrative in such a way as to capture the conversation-like nature of interviews and the internal complexity of the historiographical conditions to which they make reference. I do not include large excerpts of life histories because, in the stories of the community’s departure, their narratives were as fragmented as archival documents. Each person had something to show me, to narrate, and each had someone else in mind who could tell me more, correcting, adapting, and adding insight into their past: I was directed to cousins, former schoolmates, business partners, or to elders in distant cities. Of the Italians of Egypt I met, most were in their late 60s or 70s, many in their 80s, and a few in their 90s. Some were from elite families, others were the sons and daughters of chronically unemployed laborers. Some left Egypt immediately following the Second World War, others lingered, adapting their lives long after the community had all but

⁷⁰ Robin Wagner-Pacifici, “Theorizing the Restlessness of Events,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 115 5 (2010): 1351-1386. For more reflections on the complex relations between time and event in historical memory, see Alessandro Portelli, “The death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event,” in Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York, 1991): 1-28; Biray Kolluoglu Kirli, “Forgetting the Smyrna Fire,” *History Workshop Journal*, 60 (2005): 25-44; Gary Minkley & Martin Legassick, “‘Not Telling’: Secrecy, Lies, and History,” *History & Theory*, 39, 4 (2000): 1-11; Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: the Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley, 1997).

ceased to exist. When possible, I also met with their children (in some cases their grandchildren) in order to understand how stories translated across generations, had been passed down, repeated, or--as was the case more often than naught--how they were relegated to some forgotten, mysterious, and unknown past of a father, grandfather, mother, or an aunt. In total, I conducted around 85 formal interviews (Appendix A).⁷¹ I have tried to capture this cumulative process within the narrative of the “vignettes.” Never was one *whole* story more illustrative of the past. Instead, each developed upon and permeated other stories. In this way, their stories were productive accounts of the past, demonstrating how history works as a social process.⁷²

Rather than reduce oral and documentary sources into a moral hierarchy, I treat archival materials in the same manner as I do oral sources.⁷³ I mold a narrative out of the voices written into the documents. Materials that fill these chapters originate in a wide variety of archives (Appendix B) and, even within single archives, represent a diverse array of points of view. Because of the central role of Italian institutions in the community, particularly from the 1930s onwards, I rely heavily on diplomatic and institutional archives. The narrators in the documents housed in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs offer vibrant descriptions of the challenges they face and often struggle to deal with the circumstances enveloping the Italians of Egypt. These documents are short and fragmentary because they are written in the moment (in other words, they are not simply reducible to complete iterations of political projects). While indeed there are larger reflections on political environs, I deal more with the day-to-day, and in some cases minute-by-minute, reflections of various actors. Not all documents in the diplomatic archives were diplomatic in nature, although many indeed drew connections between quotidian and the

⁷¹ These were all recorded. They range from 45 minutes to over six hours.

⁷² Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 22-23.

⁷³ Portelli, “The Peculiarities of Oral History,” 97.

state level realities.⁷⁴ I was surprised by the frequency with which I found letters from members of all social strata of the Italian community. Some of these were addressed to specific personnel of the consulate or government, others were general statements and commentaries on their lives and circumstances in Egypt. I try to highlight these throughout, as they signify how the institutional and diplomatic offices functioned as nodes between a variety of political-historical scales.

I was lucky to have gained access to the Italian consular archives in Alexandria and Cairo. I read over 300 personal files,⁷⁵ which included both official documents and a wide range of unofficial documents (personal letters, observations on a given official's role within the community, requests for assistance and intervention, and so forth). Covering the departure itself, particularly after the Italian government had been reestablished in Rome in the late 1940s, the archives of the Italian state were invaluable. One of the few benefits of the Italian bureaucracy is that, despite certain documents being "unavailable for consultation," the savvy historian can learn to trace copies of one document to the other offices to which it was (or would have been) addressed and locate it indirectly. Again, the frequency of letters from Italians of Egypt followed the unfolding of events, and I have tried to maintain this juxtaposition in my narrative. Often, in the midst of diplomatic correspondence or official exchanges regarding policies of accommodation or pecuniary relief, I found personal accounts of departure and arrival. In other words, from a variety of perspectives there were examples of moving up and down in scale.

⁷⁴ For recent commentary on the role of the state and state archives in historical research on decolonization, see Todd Shepard, "'History Is Past Politics'? Archives, 'Tainted Evidence,' and the Return of the State," *American Historical Review* (April 2010): 474-483. The entire *AHR Forum*, to which Shepard's article belongs, is relevant in the broader discussion about dilemmas that surface in the sources and archives used to study the historical processes of decolonization.

⁷⁵ While some of these were a few sheets of papers and others were several volumes of 1.5 inches of accumulated documentation, the vast majority were between half and one inch thick.

As Carlo Ginzburg writes, “context” may be “seen as a space of historical possibilities,” giving “the historian the possibility to integrate the evidence, often consisting only of scattered fragments, about an individual's life.”⁷⁶ By employing these widely divergent sources, in this dissertation I explore the possibility for reconstituting stories in non-synchronic or non-coeval contexts. Each vignette builds on the lived experiences remembered by Italians of Egypt. Each chapter uses these lived experiences to propel itself backwards in time and to examine iterations of the community’s formation through its ending. Each, in turn, makes the other possible. The friction between the remembering of the past and the historiographical chapters betrays the boundaries of what it means for an Italian of Egypt to be “out of time.” While the arch of the dissertation moves forward in time, iterations of the community’s ending are increasingly impregnated with a past that is always more past, more distant. In many ways, it could be said, this project itself is part of the community’s ending.

⁷⁶ Carlo Ginzburg, “Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian,” *Critical Inquiry*, 18 1 (1991): 79-92, 90

CHAPTER ONE

Mediterranean Futures: Historical Time and the Departure of Italians from Egypt, 1919-1937

This first chapter looks back to a period before most of the Italians of Egypt with whom I spoke lived. It does so with one goal: to study the tensions between experience and expectation that shaped the unfolding interwar worlds of the Italians of Egypt. We see these tensions surface, for example, with the arrival of King Vittorio Emanuele III in Alexandria for the inauguration of an Italian state school in 1933. The trip itself took place with great propagandistic ambition. The Italian King's visit to Egypt was to be the first of a foreign sovereign since Khedive Ismail hosted a delegation of European royalty for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. It evoked a long narrative upon which the Fascist regime drew to emphasize the particularity of the relation between Italy and Egypt, Italians and Egyptians. The journalist Mirko Ardemagni was assigned by the National Fascist Party (Partito Fascista Nazionale, PNF) to follow the King during his visit and, preceding the trip, published a series of articles in Mussolini's newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* attending to the relations between the two countries and peoples. The voyage was - wrote Ardemagni - "destined to exponentially strengthen the spiritual links between the two Mediterranean countries." He first wrote of the struggle of Egyptian peasants for independence and the hardships they faced living under British occupation. He then wrote of King Fuad's loyalty to Italy, noting that Fuad's closest confidants were Italians, notably architect Ernesto Verrucci Bey and historian Angelo Sammarco. Ardemagni depicted the royal families of Italy

and Egypt as characterized by an ageless “friendship.”¹ The same rhetoric was used in an article published by Sammarco in the widely-read Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram*.² In the Italian newspaper, *Il Giornale d’Oriente*, a product of the fascistization of Italian journalism in Egypt, a special volume was issued to celebrate the links between the regimes and peoples.³ The visit of Vittorio Emanuele III, which had been organized just at the moment in which Italy’s presence as a reputable power in the Mediterranean was beginning to be felt, intended to cement this political friendship and to provide an example of its purported “politics of peace.”⁴

The King’s visit served a second, related purpose. It was to represent the culmination of the reorganization of the Italian community in Egypt around the ideals of the PNF and, in doing so, to solder the binds that connected them to the political worlds of metropolitan Italy.

Ardemagni recounted the “heroic” origins of the Italians of Egypt that this trip intended to reinvigorate. Eliding years of immigration history, in one rhetorical sweep the journalist connected the Italian community in Egypt to the drawing up of Alexandria and Cairo and the development of Egyptian infrastructure under Mehmet Ali (1805-1848). Describing them as “sentimentalists,” he attributed to the Italians of Egypt unique characteristics with respect to other Italian emigrants and to the other foreign communities in Egypt. The journalist detailed the “feverish” preparations of the Italian residents in Egypt for the King’s arrival. In Alexandria, around 30,000 Italians awaited the King, who planned to inaugurate a newly constructed Italian school designed in the Fascist aesthetic.⁵ The school, wrote the journalist accompanying the King during his visit to Egypt, extended the sanctuary of the Italian State around its young

¹ Mirko Ardemagni, “L’evoluzione del popolo egiziano,” *Il popolo d’Italia* 11 February 1933; “Re Fuad (l’Egitto moderno)” *Il popolo d’Italia* 15 February 1933

² Angelo Sammarco, “al-tuliyyan fi misr,” *Al-Ahram*, 19 February 1933

³ Ladi Skakal Personal Collection, *Il Giornale d’Oriente*, February/March 1933.

⁴ *La civiltà cattolica*, 84 1 (1933): 608-614.

⁵ Mirko Ardemagni, “Febbrilli preparativi in Egitto,” *Il popolo d’Italia* 19 February 1933. For more on the school, see Biblioteca Sormani (Comune di Milano), Fondo Buzzi, 39/245.

subjects abroad, who: “far from the Patria... confused by the melting pot of humanity in an immense cosmopolitan city... meet every day beneath the ceiling of the Italian school with the same joy with which emigrants place their feet upon native soil after a long exile.”⁶ The school represented the beginning of a new Italy, at home and abroad.

Aside from the grandeur of propagandistic rhetoric, the King’s visit betrayed an underlying instability in the future of the Italians of Egypt. During his visit, he donated 100,000 Italian Lire to Italian youth collectives, schools, and welfare organizations in Egypt. This gesture was met by a surge of requests from community members. Letters from Italy’s emigrants poured into the consulates, expressing their need for assistance.⁷ One was from sixteen-year-old Antoinette Paonessa. Both she and her younger brother attended Italian schools. Their father, an unemployed carpenter, had emigrated from Calabria sometime between 1905 and 1912 and settled in the working-class district of Bacos, where European and Egyptian tradesmen, builders, and artisans intermingled. In the letter, Antoinette described her family’s poverty and the struggles her father met trying to procure employment. She complained of “despair [and] great misery,” and described her father as a “faithful” Italian and former combatant in the First World War. Her brother, she continued, was “an ambitious *avanguardista*,” a member of the Fascist youth organization for 14 to 18 year-old boys. He was among the 3,000 Italian youth who gathered to salute the monarch in what was an unprecedented rally of Italians in Egypt.⁸ Despite their loyalty to the Patria, recounted Antoinette, her family lacked adequate support from the Italian state, “neither for work, nor for the things we need [at home].” She closed the letter declaring; “I don’t say this out of pleasure, but hoping to relieve some of this misery... I’m a

⁶ Mirko Ardemagni, “I sovrani d'Italia pongono termine al soggiorno ufficiale nella capitale dell'Egitto,” *Il Popolo d'Italia*, February 24, 1933.

⁷ Archivio Diplomatico Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAE), Ambasciata Cairo (AC), b.270, fasc. “Visita reale.”

⁸ Marta Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito* (Milano, 2007), 230.

young girl and I turn to His Majesty as a daughter [so that] you might help us.”⁹ Her letter never reached the King, but it did arrive to the office of the Italian Consul, where its *mélange* of anguish and hope echoed trepidations about the future increasingly voiced among Italian residents.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how various historical actors articulated the tensions between experience and expectation and thereby perceived the horizon of possible futures long before the *de facto* departure of the Italians of Egypt. Whereas both propagandistic narratives of the community’s history and literary and personal reflections on the community’s past in the aftermath of departure give much attention to its origins, both narrations elide years in which the present “community” (the repatriates) took shape. These forms of remembering offer little insight into the conflicting conditions of nationalist hope and emigrant anguish that marked the interwar period, such as the trepidations of Italian emigrants like the young Paonessa. The generation prior to those with whom I spoke often struggled through a different set of uncertainties and from these circumstances derived a variety of ideas about the future, one of which included the increasingly real possibility of departure from Egypt precisely because the experience of living in Egypt was undergoing great transformation. The argument of this chapter is that the likelihood of the “departure” depended on the particular arrangement (or misalignment) between experience as Italian emigrants in Egypt and expectation within the context of Egypt’s changing political sphere.

The balance between experience and expectation, between anguish and hope, articulated in these futures past illustrates, to employ Reinhart Koselleck’s terminology, the “formal

⁹ Archivio del Consolato Generale d’Alessandria d’Egitto (ACGA), fasc. “Paonessa Beniamino - 1883” and “Paonessa Giuseppe - 1882.”

determinants that disclose [the concrete process of history].”¹⁰ Faruk Tabak calls the period from 1870 to the 1920s a “fleeting conjuncture” during which legal and political regimes favored the realization of distinct groups within late-Ottoman cities. As he shows, in this conjuncture the experiential categories of cosmopolitanism and nationalism were not mutually exclusive, but were instead co-dependent processes.¹¹ The extraterritorial legality preserved under the Ottoman-era Capitulations, which granted jurisdictional and economic privileges to some foreign nationals in Egypt later than anywhere else in the Mediterranean, conditioned what were and were not possible outcomes of the present. While it allowed Italian subjects to reside in Egypt without the burden of taxation and with relative impunity, it more importantly permitted the Italian State to act upon its own subjects without Egyptian (or British) interference.

The materials upon which this chapter draws illustrate how the aspirations of the Fascist regime transformed conditions of possibility into conditions of impossibility for the Italians of Egypt. The imbalance activated by these aspirations linked the past to the future, and yet it remains neglected in much historical analysis because of an overemphasis on later historical periods. Between 1919 and 1937, many individuals perceived interwar tensions between Italy, England and Egypt as responsible for ending the “fleeting conjuncture” described by Tabak.¹² A variety of historical actors realized, however, that the future would be distinct from the past; a realization that itself embodied the concrete processes of historical time. By the mid-1930s, the termination of extraterritoriality was imminent and with a majority of Italians living in

¹⁰ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 258.

¹¹ Tabak, “Imperial rivalry,” 81, 85. For a clear reading of how these categories also concurrently affected different classes see Edmund Burke III, “Toward a Comparative History of the Modern Mediterranean, 1750-1919,” *Journal of World History*, 23 4 (2012): 906-939, 929.

¹² On the case of Tunisia, see Mary D. Lewis, “Geographies of Power: The Tunisian Civic Order, Jurisdictional Politics, and Imperial Rivalry in the Mediterranean, 1881-1935,” *The Journal of Modern History* 80 (2008): 798-830; Terence Peterson, “The ‘Jewish Question’ and the ‘Italian Peril’: Vichy, Italy, and the Jews of Tunisia, 1940-2,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, 2 (2014): 1-25.

circumstances similar to those of the Paonessa family, Italian diplomats feared that “the conditions of [Italian] communities in Egypt will only continue to decline.”¹³ Important political actors expected that all Italians would be obliged to repatriate, regardless of their class or social status.¹⁴ Indeed, from this point forward, repatriation will inform a variety of discussions throughout the dissertation. Although “repatriation” is a legal and political process often associated with postwar narratives, it became a remedy to the discord between past and future. Repatriation was, consequently, neither an inevitable outcome to colonialism’s end nor a modest reaction to the antagonisms of cosmopolitanism and nationalism, as it is frequently portrayed. In the case of the Italians of Egypt, repatriation entered into historical process as a vital conduit through which futures could be envisioned. The fact that it only surfaces in scholarly analysis as distinctive of later periods, I argue, is indicative of the shaky foundations upon which rest the analytical categories that mark the colonial Mediterranean.¹⁵

¹³ MAE, AC, b.302, notes of Italian Legation, December 2, 1936. For an analysis of the “Egyptianization” of labor in Egypt, see Floresca Karanasou, “Egyptianisation: The 1947 Company Law and the Foreign Communities in Egypt,” (Ph.D. diss., St. Anthony’s College, Oxford, 1992).

¹⁴ Census data from 1936 note that of the Italians in Alexandria 73.3 percent were registered as clerks (*impiegati*, a very loosely defined term), workers, and artisans, 9.10 percent industrialists, commercialists, and bankers, 8.13 percent non-degree holding professionals or technicians, 3.2 percent degree-holding professionals, 3.64 percent religious figures, 1.58 percent landowners or retirees, and 1.05 percent artists. In Cairo proportions were similar: 61.7 percent laborers, artisans, and day laborers, 22.9 percent employees (*impiegati*), 9.1 percent small-business owners, commercialists, industrialists, and housing and street contractors, 3.4 percent professionals, 2.9 percent uncategorized. MAE, AC, b.301/ter., telesspresso 11/9/1936.

¹⁵ Andrea Smith, ed., *Europe’s Invisible Migrants* (Amsterdam, 2003); Pamela Ballinger, “Borders of the Nation, Borders of Citizenship: Italian Repatriation and the Redefinition of National Identity after World War II,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, 3 (2007): 713-741; Marie-Louise Karttunen, “Repatriates or Refugees? Narrating the Loss of Transnational Community,” *History and Anthropology* 25, 3 (2014): 375-394; Silvia Salvatici, “Between National and International Mandates: Displaced Persons and Refugees in Postwar Italy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, 3 (2014): 514-536; Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*.

I. Arrivals

In understanding the scale of Italian immigration to Egypt, one cannot underestimate the role played by the legal structures of the Capitulations in creating the conditions of possibility in which historical events unfolded. The Capitulations (from *capitula* in Latin) were a series of treaties between early Ottoman rulers and European city-states that granted commercial privileges to merchants. In 1154 a commercial treaty was signed between Pisa and Egypt granting special privileges to Pisan merchants.¹⁶ Terms of one treaty signed in 1290 between the city of Genoa and the Sultan Malak el 'Adel in Alexandria read: “[a]ll of the Genovese will be under the jurisdiction of their consul in Alexandria, who will (recognize) civil and penal affairs among Genovesi, and among Genovesi and Christians of other nations.”¹⁷ While such legal privileges originate around the 12th century, the treaties increased in number and complexity over the centuries. In 1534, French subjects were given commercial and residential rights under French jurisdiction in all Ottoman territories. With the consolidation of European nation-states into the nineteenth century, the 1534 treaty became the prototype for later ones between Western powers and the Sublime Porte. These later Capitulations extended extraterritorial rights to Europeans, who fell under the jurisdiction and protection of their respective consuls.¹⁸

¹⁶ John Yeates Brinton, *The Mixed Courts of Egypt* (New Haven, CT, 1968), 2.

¹⁷ “Tutti i genovesi saranno sotto la giurisdizione del loro console di Alessandria, che conoscerà negli affari civili e penali così fra genovesi soltanto, come fra genovesi e cristiani di altre nazioni.” F. Santorelli, *L'Italia in Egitto* (Cairo: Tipografia italiana, 1894), 20.

¹⁸ It should be noted that even with such privileges it was not until well into the nineteenth century, with the Ottoman Empire under great economic pressure, that the European communities affected significant influence in regional territorial politics. John T. Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863-1914* (New York, 2012), 16, 23-25. See also eds. Maurits H. van den Boogert and Kate Fleet, *The Ottoman Capitulations: Text and Context* (Rome, 2003); Isa Blumi, *Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World* (London, 2013); Isa Blumi, “Capitulations in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Shifting Parameters of Russian and Austrian Interests in Ottoman Albania, 1878-1912,” *Oriente Moderno* 22, 3 (2003): 635-647; G.D. Barakat, “Aliens and the End of the Transitional Period in Egypt,” *The International Law Quarterly* 3, 1 (1950): 112-115; Brinton,

Various attempts were made throughout the nineteenth century to modify the terms of the capitulations and to develop from them mixed venues of litigation.¹⁹ Egyptian nationalists perceived them as a hindrance to their own economic sovereignty, as foreign venture in Egyptian territory were subject only to the laws of the country from which they came. Under Egypt's semi-autonomy from the Porte, attempts at their modification culminated in 1876 with the establishment of the Mixed Courts, in the vision of Nubar Pasha, then Minister of Foreign Affairs. To Nubar the capitulations no longer existed de jure but had instead metamorphosed into anachronistic privileges:

They have been replaced by an arbitrary law of custom, varying with the character of each new diplomatic chief - a law based upon precedents frequently abusive, which has been permitted to take root in Egypt through force of circumstances and constant pressure and a desire to make easy the lot of the foreigner. It leaves the Government powerless in its relation to such foreigners and the people without any security that evenhanded justice will be done. Such a state of affairs ...impedes the country in the development of its resources; it prevents it from putting its true riches at the service of European enterprise and capital; it destroys its progress and brings moral and material ruin in its train.²⁰

Jasper Yeates Brinton, a former president of the Court of Appeals from 1943-48, in his historical study of the mixed courts, claims that Nubar's framing of the courts as "mixed" and not "international" was a designation intended to ensure that the courts represented a form of national sovereignty.²¹ Although their aim was to limit foreign domination in Egypt, in many instances - especially in their requirement of the Egyptian Government to enforce cases against itself if it lost a suit - the courts were used as arbiters in legal battles between foreign companies

The Mixed Courts, 3. For historical analysis of the evolution of the Capitulations and their eventual abolition in Turkey see Feroz Ahmad, "Ottoman Perceptions of the Capitulations, 1800-1914," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, 1 (2000): 1-20.

¹⁹ Angell, "Turkish Capitulations," 258; Brinton, *Mixed Courts*, 5-8.

²⁰ Report of Nubar quoted in Brinton, *Mixed Courts*, 8-9.

²¹ Brinton, *Mixed Courts*, 11.

and citizens and the Egyptian Government itself.²² Nubar made concessions to ensure foreign commercial investments - a vital part of the Egyptian economy - and European powers compromised some of their capitulatory powers to protect their own interests in Egypt. Still, the treaties remained.

Whereas many scholars have concentrated on the Capitulations' role in engendering a kind of cultural hybridity and conditioning "legal chameleons," I will illustrate some of their other effects, such as how they facilitated immigration and assisted in creating internally coherent communities.²³ Italians arrived to Egypt in various waves, some long before national unification in 1861. Pisan and Genovese merchants had established a presence there as early as the thirteenth century.²⁴ But most arrived much later. Starting in the early nineteenth century, Mehmed Ali and his successors recruited European technicians to develop Egypt's infrastructure and to assist in the centralization of state bureaucracy.²⁵ Although numbers from this period are unclear, an estimate from 1840 puts the "Italians" at around 2,000.²⁶ Over subsequent years, many Italians fled the political turmoil of the Risorgimento (the process that culminated in

²²Nathan Brown, "The Precarious Life and Slow Death of the Mixed Courts of Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, 1. (1993): 35.

²³ Ziad Fahmy, "Jurisdictional Borderlands: Extraterritoriality and 'Legal Chameleons' in Precolonial Alexandria, 1840-1870," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, 2 (2013): 305-329.

²⁴ F. Santorelli, *L'Italia in Egitto*, 20. In a piece that is as much political propaganda as it is historical narrative, the Italian historian Angelo Sammarco used these early instantiations of the Capitulations as evidence of a longstanding Italian and Egyptian partnership; he contrasted them to the British colonial presence in Egypt and the tendency of scholars to associate the Capitulations with French imperialism. See Angelo Sammarco, *In Egitto* (Roma, 1939).

²⁵ Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, his army and the making of modern Egypt* (Cairo, 2002); Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy* (London, 1981), 134.

²⁶ A.B. Clot-Bey, *Aperçu général sur l'Égypte* (Cairo, 1840).

national unification) and departed for Egypt, where they were attracted both by the prospect of work and by the protection of the capitulatory regime.²⁷

With the British occupation and designation of Egypt as a protectorate in 1882, however, Italian influence sharply declined.²⁸ Paradoxically, however, the population of Italians and other Europeans exploded under colonial rule. The immigration of working-class Italian migrants, seeking temporary or seasonal employment, increased from 18,665 in 1882 to 24,454 in 1897.²⁹ Egyptian nationalists attempted to modify the terms of the Capitulations and did in fact succeed in developing from them mixed venues of litigation during the late nineteenth century, but national debts and pressure from European Consuls helped to preserve privileges well into the twentieth century.³⁰ The mixed court system dealt mainly with multinational commercial

²⁷ Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies*, 39-40, 127. For a historical “insider” account of the some of the elite origins of the Italians in Egypt see the three-volume work of L.A. Balboni, *Gl’Italiani nella Civiltà Egiziana del Secolo XIX* (Alessandria d’Egitto, 1906), and the more recent, Michel Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto 1815-1861* (Pisa, 1958).

²⁸ Anna Baldinetti, “Gli italiani nella cultura egiziana (1900-1930),” *Levante* 49 (2002): 43-58; Paul Gran, “Egypt and Italy, 1760-1850: Toward a Comparative History,” in *Society and Economy in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, 1600-1900: Essays in Honor of André Raymond*, eds. Nelly Hanna and Ra’uf Abbas (Cairo, 2005): 11-40; Angelo Sammarco, *Egitto Moderno* (Roma, 1939), *Gli Italiani in Egitto: Il contributo italiano nella formazione dell’Egitto moderno* (Alessandria d’Egitto, 1937); Luigi Dori, “Italiani in Africa: Tipografi e giornalisti italiani in Egitto,” *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell’Istituto italiani per l’Africa e l’Oriente* 14, 3 (1959): 146-148; Luca D. Biolato, “Gli italiani fondatori delle moderne poste egiziane,” *Oriente Moderno* 88 (2008): 151-197; Saho Matsumoto-Best, “British and Italian Imperial Rivalry in the Mediterranean, 1912-14: The Case of Egypt,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 18, 2 (2007): 297-314. For a more detailed account on the significance of the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 for Italian foreign policy and imperial politics, see Lucien E. Roberts, “Italy and the Egyptian Question, 1878-1882,” *The Journal of Modern History* 18, 4 (1946): 314-332.

²⁹ Davide Amicucci, “La comunità italiana in Egitto attraverso i censimenti dal 1882 al 1947” in (ed.) Paolo Branca *Tradizione e modernizzazione in Egitto 1798-1998* (Milano, 2000): 81-94, 82.

³⁰ When the Egyptian Government proposed new taxes in 1931, the British used the Capitulations to substantiate their claim that such taxes would be a violation of their rights. Nathan J. Brown, “The Precarious Life and Slow Death of the Mixed Courts of Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, 1 (1993): 33-52. For more on this point, see Brinton, *Mixed Courts*, 5-8; John B. Angell, ‘The Turkish Capitulations,’ *The American Historical Review* 6, 2 (1901): 256, 258. For greater details on the commercial aspects of Italian

transactions. Nationalists failed to insert non-Egyptians into Egyptian jurisdiction and the consular courts remained the site of most litigation for members of the Italian community. Indeed, some Egyptian nationalists feared that abolishing the Capitulations altogether would transfer far too much power over Egypt's economy to the British (it was mostly in the hands of non-Egyptians). The case of Tunisia, where the French abolished the Capitulations to consolidate their colonial presence, seemed to prove them right.

In the framework of Italian foreign policy, the Capitulations also constituted one of the “citizenship tools” used by Italian governments between 1870 and 1914, aiming both to unite its national communities under the new Italian State and to “penetrate” Mediterranean port cities through its cultural and commercial presence. The liberal Italian government conferred what historian Sabina Donati calls “thin citizenship” (nationality, but not the full rights of citizenship) to many Sephardic Jewish subjects who had moved to the region during and after the time of the Italian maritime republics. By creating protected groups (protégés) whose commercial activities and mobility were secured by Italian authorities, the Italian state hoped to gain access to merchant networks that transcended both national and imperial boundaries.³¹ With the outbreak

life in Egypt under the Capitulations during the nineteenth century, see Elizabeth H. Shlala, “Mediterranean migration, cosmopolitanism, and the law: A history of the Italian community of nineteenth-century Alexandria, Egypt,” (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2009). For more on the terms of the Capitulations see Muhammad F. Hashish, *mu'ahdat 1936 wa atharuha fi al-'alaqat al masriyyah al britaniyyah hata nahayt il harb il 'alamiyyah ith-thaniyyah* (Cairo, 1994); Erwin Loewenfeld, “The Mixed Courts in Egypt as Part of the System of Capitulations after the Treaty of Montreux,” *Transactions of the Grotius Society* 26 (1940): 83-123; Robert Tignor, “The Economic Activities of Foreigners in Egypt, 1920-1950: From Millet to Haute Bourgeoisie,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, 3 (1980): 416-449.

³¹ Sabina Donati, *A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy 1861-1950* (Stanford, CA, 2013), 134-136. For a broader analysis of Italian Jews and Italian protégés in the Mediterranean from the late-nineteenth to the twentieth century, see Simonetta Della Seta, “Gli ebrei del Mediterraneo nella strategia politica fascista sino al 1938: il caso di Rodi,” *Storia contemporanea*, xvii, 6 (1986): 997-1032; Liana E. Funaro, “A Mediterranean Diaspora: Jews from Leghorn in the Second Half of the 19th Century,” in (ed.) Marta Petricoli, *L'Europe méditerranéenne/Mediterranean Europe* (Bruxelles, 2008): 95-110; Attilio Milano, *Storia degli*

of the Italo-Turkish war in 1911 and subsequent Greek-Turkish tensions, many of Italy's protégés fled to safer harbors in Alexandria, where they continued to live under the protection of the Italian state.³² The Italian protégés' financial donations to the construction of key institutions linked to the Italian state demonstrate the relative success of this project, at least into the late 1930s. The institutions that received exceptional support from Italian protégés during their incipient years included the consular courts, the Italian Chambers of Commerce, the Italian Hospital in Alexandria, and the Dante Alighieri Society, and several charity organizations (such as the Società Italiana di Beneficienza). The importance of these institutions as a structural safety-netting for much of the working-class Italian population in Egypt grew from the late-nineteenth century onwards.

Contrary to narratives that stress social harmony under the Capitulations, this influx of immigrants was not without its problems.³³ Almost immediately following British occupation in 1882, Anglo-Egyptian authorities attempted to limit immigration due to growing tensions between ethnic and national groups.³⁴ They particularly feared the consequences of the growth of an Italian "proletarian immigration" because it constituted a significant source of competition for

ebrei italiani nel Levante (Torino, 1949); Anna Scarantino, "La comunità ebraica in Egitto fra le due guerre mondiali," *Storia contemporanea*, 6 (1986): 1033-1082; Sara Stein, "Citizens of a Fictional Nation: Ottoman-Born Jews in France During the First World War," *Past and Present*, 226 (2015): 227-256.

³² Most of the Jewish protégés in Egypt arrived from Izmir. For more on these communities, see Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis, "Gli italiani a Smirne nei secoli XVIII e XIX," *Altretalia*, 6, 12 (1994): 39-69; L. Missir, "La collettività italiana di Smirne," *Storia contemporanea*, XXI, 1 (1990); C. Masi, *Italia e Italiani in Oriente vicino e lontano, 1800-1935* (Bologna, 1935).

³³ Similar circumstances have been highlighted elsewhere: Ethem Eldem, "The undesirables of Smyrna, 1926," *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 24, 2(2009): 223-227; Julia Clancy-Smith, "Marginality and Migration."

³⁴ Owen, *The Middle East*, 134. On the changes in the urban landscapes of Alexandria and Cairo during the period immediately preceding and following the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, see Michael Reimer, "Colonial Bridgehead: Social and Spatial Change in Alexandria, 1850-1882," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20, 4 (1988): 531-553; Michael Reimer, *Colonial Bridgehead: Government and Society in Alexandria, 1807-1882* (Cairo, 1997); Janet Abu-Lughod, *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton, NJ, 1971).

Egyptian workers.³⁵ As early as 1899 the Emigration Office in Italy (a division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) took measures to slow the pace of immigration by publicizing the destitute conditions encountered by Italian workers upon their arrival in Egypt.³⁶ British authorities cautioned the Italian police to enforce stricter controls on Italian ports of emigration. Despite this, by 1907, the population of Italian subjects had grown to 34,926. In accord with British efforts, the following year an Italian decree was passed to limit un-contracted labor migration to Egypt. It stated that for blacksmiths, carpenters, and street-pavers the release of visas for individuals intending to travel to Egypt was “suspended for reasons of public order” and would only be released if prospective emigrants were able to exhibit proof of contracted work or the presence of relatives able to financially support them; both needed to be certified by an Italian office in Egypt. Moreover, the decree stipulated that, if emigrants did indeed have employers or family members able to support them, they should also have means available to pay for their eventual “repatriation” (*rimpatrio*). While this use of repatriation sets the stage for what occurred much later, it also implies that the within these colonial entanglements, the terms of nationality importantly affected how migration, residency, and community-formation were mapped onto one another.

The Emigration Office in Rome sent a copy of the decree to the Police Headquarters in Naples. In a handwritten note accompanying the decree, someone had written: “the excessive

³⁵ Beth Hansen, “Wage Differentials in Italy and Egypt: The Incentive to Migrate before World War I,” *Journal of European Economic History* 14, 2 (1985): 347-360. See also, Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies*, 127. For an excellent discussion of competition between Egyptian and foreign workers in Egypt during this period see, Zachary Lockman, *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (New York, 1993), “Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899-1914,” *Poetics Today* 15, 2 (1994), 157-190; and Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Princeton, 1987).

³⁶ Ministero degli Affari Esteri, “Notizie concernenti l’emigrazione italiana - Emigrazione in Egitto,” *Bollettino del Ministero degli Affari Esteri* (August-September, 1899).

crowding in Egypt of temporary Italian workers unable to find work becomes disruptive to public order.”³⁷ A similar statement circulated in 1913, during the peak year of Italian emigration, reiterating the Foreign Minister’s request that the Emigration Office not release passports to men without contracts intending to travel to Egypt. It added that with the proliferation of unregulated prostitution, under no circumstances should passports be issued to women traveling alone.³⁸ In a series of telegrams from 1915, the British tried to overtly discipline working-class immigration by requiring potential emigrants to consult the British consulate in Naples prior to their departure. By 1917, Italians numbered 40,198 persons. Still, no unequivocal law regulated immigration to Egypt. A British decree passed in 1920 required individuals disembarking in Egypt to hold a British visa, but it was dissolved in 1922 with England’s unilateral declaration of Egypt’s independence and the establishment of the Kingdom of Egypt.³⁹ By 1927, Italian residents had grown to number 52,462. One decade later, when Italians constituted roughly 25 percent of the 186,515 non-Egyptians in Egypt (second only to Greeks), unemployment among them was widespread. A telegram from one British administrator in Egypt to the Prefect in Naples stated: “requests for manual workers are easily covered by the unemployed who are already present [here]... those intending to depart in search of work should

³⁷ Archivio di Stato Napoli (ASN), Questura di Napoli, Gabinetto-Seconda Serie (1902-1971), Massime, b.54, f.1080 “Egitto-Emigrazione (1898-1937),” *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*, October 7, 1908.

³⁸ For more on the role of foreign women in the history of prostitution in colonial Egypt, see Francesca Biancani, “‘Let Down the Curtains Around Us’ Sex Work in Colonial Cairo, 1882-1952,” (Ph.D. diss., London School of Economics, 2012) and Olimpia Gobbi, “Emigrazione femminile: balie e domestiche marchigiane in Egitto fra Otto e Novecento,” *Proposte e ricerche* XXXIV, 66 (2011): 7-24. Anthony Santilli also addresses Italian prostitution in Egypt in “Penser et analyser le cosmopolitisme.”

³⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 73.

be discouraged.” Indeed, he added, there were scant opportunities for the unemployed Italians already in Egypt, who shared among them uncertain futures.⁴⁰

II. Extraterritorial Conditions of Possibility

The conditions set by the Capitulations in Egypt marked an ambiguous temporal space. They were contemporaneously relics of a distant past and harbingers of change. Within the Italian community, fears about the future appear in archival documentation at least as early as 1919. After the revolts against British occupation that followed the exile of Saad Zaghloul, Egyptian nationalist and founder of the *Wafd* Party, Francesco Mazza, an Italian born in Cairo, addressed a letter to the Italian Consul in Alexandria from his “hometown” in Calabria.⁴¹ He was about to return to his wife and children in Egypt after completing military service in Italy during the First World War. Mazza wrote anxiously:

I was just about to depart [for Egypt, but] I have temporarily delayed my departure because I read in the papers that there was a rebellion in Egypt, and that the overall situation is quite troubling and the indigenous nation (*nazione indigena*) has revolted causing great damage, not only in the villages but even in the cities... even more troubling, letters from my acquaintances [in Egypt] inform me that at any moment all of the Italians [will] need to be repatriated (*tutti gl’Italiani devono essere rimpatriati*)... I turn to your Excellency to know the details... and if truly all [Italians will] need to be repatriated or if I can return to Alexandria without obstacle and difficulty... [If not] how should I safeguard my family...?⁴²

Mazza’s letter suggests that Italian residents deliberated over the prospect of an ominous future in Egypt. While the letter signals the rich socio-political landscape of Egypt’s struggle for independence, Mazza explicitly draws attention to circulating rumors of an imminent

“repatriation” of Italians. As the letter continues, Mazza does not appear surprised by this. He

⁴⁰ ASN, Questura di Napoli, Gabinetto-Seconda Serie (1902-1971), Massime, b.54, f.1080 “Egitto-Emigrazione (1898-1937).”

⁴¹ All Italians in national registers, even if born abroad, had an official “hometown” (*paese d’origine*) traced through the patrilineal line of the family.

⁴² ACGA, “Mazza Francesco Gaetano di Gaetano cl. 1885.”

instead anguishes about the possibility that he might need to rescue his family and belongings, including his mother's heirlooms, from Egypt. The Italian Consul responded two months later, informing him that the situation had returned to normalcy. Mazza, however, never returned to Egypt. He found work in Trieste, a city freshly claimed from another empire, where he observed a more promising future. His wife and children joined him there one year later.

Mazza and his acquaintances were not the only ones who found the situation in Egypt unsettling. On another level of analysis, Italian futures in Egypt were questioned by one of Fascism's most important historians, Gioacchino Volpe. In 1922, Volpe traveled to Egypt to write a series of essays for Mussolini's newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*.⁴³ Having recently reinvented himself as a contemporary historian and no longer solely an historian of the Middle Ages, Volpe collapsed his political commitment to the PNF into his historical work. An outspoken irredentist, he had an astute sense of the landscape of early twentieth-century Italian imperial histories. Nearly all of his works on modern Italy reflect on territories inhabited by large communities of Italian emigrants in and around the Mediterranean, which, following Francesco Crispi and Enrico Corradini, he viewed as key "assets" to Italy's "prestige" and economic expansion.⁴⁴ In this articulation, he drew on a rich narrative that harkened back to the

⁴³ For more on Volpe's considerable role in Italian historiography and specifically as an historian of the Fascist Government see Giovanni Belardelli, "L'adesione di Gioacchino Volpe al fascismo," *Storia Contemporanea* 4-5 (1985): 649-694; Martin Clark, "Gioacchino Volpe and fascist historiography in Italy," in *Writing National Histories: Western Europe Since 1880*, ed. Berger et al. (London, 1999): 189-201; G. Turi "Il Problema Volpe," *Studi Storici* 19, 1 (1978): 175-186; Margherita Angelini, "Clio among the *Camicie Nere*: Italian Historians and Their Allegiances to Fascism (1930-1940s)," in *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini's Italy*, eds. Giulia Albanese and Roberta Pergher (New York, 2012): 211-231; Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (New York, 1976), 18.

⁴⁴ Gioacchino Volpe, *Italia in Cammino* (Donzelli Editore, 2011 [1927]), *Italia moderna 1898/1910* (Sansoni 1973), *Francesco Crispi* (Roma, 1928), *Guerra dopoguerra, fascismo* (Roma, 1928).

populations of “Italians” throughout the Mediterranean during the time of the Italian Maritime Republics.

The essays on the Italians from Egypt that resulted from his trip were relegated to a small collection. Divergent in tone from much of his oeuvre, they are unique insofar as they represent the only speculation on the future of Italians in Egypt by an historian (in contrast to earlier publications regarding the community’s many colorful pasts).⁴⁵ Although one cannot be sure whether his visit was before or after the declaration of Egypt's independence by the British, his observations detail a waning future for Italians in Egypt. Briefly summarizing the “historic” presence of the Italians in Egypt, he spends more time focusing on their impending decline, noting: “our postwar...is not without dark clouds for the Italians in Egypt.”⁴⁶ We must not forget that what historian Erez Manela has called “the Wilsonian moment” was a moment during which the logic of self-determination (supported in various ways by Mussolini’s early regime while he concurrently occupied Libya and dreamed up a plan to render the Mediterranean an “Italian lake”) reconfigured what were seen as possible - and just - futures for much of the world. Volpe wrote that, following the 1919 uprisings, “One has the impression... looking at England in Egypt, of a liquidating company, or, better, a company that is changing hands, firing its old personnel [only] to hire anew.”⁴⁷ Among the nationalist movements contributing to what he saw as England's demise, he cited the rise of Islamic movements (the Muslim Brotherhood would be founded several years later in 1928), the struggles between Zionists and Arabs in Palestine (and between Zionists and local Palestinian Jews), and anti-European tensions on the fringe of these

⁴⁵ Balboni, *Gl’Italiani nella Civiltà Egiziana del Secolo XIX*.

⁴⁶ Gioacchino Volpe, *Fra Storia e Politica* (Roma, 1924), 377.

⁴⁷ Volpe, *Fra Storia e Politica*, 311-312.

other movements.⁴⁸ For nationalists like Volpe, the slow end of the British Empire signified the rise of Cairo as a potential intellectual center that could challenge British and French hegemony in the Mediterranean and provide an ally for Italy.⁴⁹

In contrast to the potential Volpe saw in Egypt's political emergence, he detected great anxiety among the Italian residents caught in this tumultuous historical conjunction. The "Italians of Egypt," he wrote, sensed a "looming threat" in a part of Africa that indirectly mapped onto Italian imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean. He described the Italian community in Egypt as constituted by "proletarian" emigrants who lacked the "imperialist sentiment" of French, English, and German subjects elsewhere.⁵⁰ This, he calculated, would be one source of their eventual demise. Projecting into the future, Volpe imagined that an independent Egypt would no longer consent to immigration: "Numerically... the Italian colony in Egypt can only decline."⁵¹ According to him, the question of Italian futures in Egypt was

⁴⁸ Volpe, *Fra Storia e Politica*, 291-294. This is long before Italy's shift on the Zionist question. Until the early 1930s, the official Italian policy favored the cause of early Zionism, yet once key figures in the Italian foreign office realized that this position would hinder Italy's ambitions in the Middle East, Rome's stance on Zionism became less pronounced. Renzo De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'oriente* (Bologna, 1988) and R.H. Rainero, *La politica araba di Mussolini nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Padova, 2004).

⁴⁹ Volpe, *Fra Storia e Politica*, 300.

⁵⁰ Volpe, *Fra Storia e Politica*, 355-356. He develops this theme years later in works written immediately before, during, and after the Second World War, Gioacchino Volpe, *Italia Moderna II 1898/1910* (Firenze, 1973). It was, in fact, just around the time that Volpe visited Egypt that the Fascist Party, recently in power in Rome, took a decidedly new and more aggressive approach to colonial rule and imperial expansion in Libya. Historian Anna Baldinetti has observed that efforts to build consensus for the Italian occupation of Libya at the beginning of the twentieth-century appealed to a few elite Italians and Egyptians, but failed to reach the majority of Italian residents in Egypt. See Anna Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e Colonialismo: La ricerca di consenso in Egitto per l'impresa di Libia* (Roma, 1997). Eileen Ryan, "Violence and the politics of prestige: the fascist turn in colonial Libya," *Modern Italy* 20, 2 (2015): 123-135. For a broader reading of Italian foreign policy and imperialism in the Mediterranean and its relation to the Italian populations living there, see Daniel J. Grange, *L'Italie et la Méditerranée (1896-1911): Les fondements d'une politique étrangère* (Rome, 1994) and R.J.B. Bosworth and Sergio Romano, eds., *La politica estera italiana 1860-1985* (Bologna, 1991).

⁵¹ Volpe, *Fra Storia e Politica*, 371.

inseparable from the jurisdictional conditions created by the capitulatory regime. Throughout the Mediterranean, the Capitulations had already been abolished: in Turkey, they were cancelled with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, one year after Volpe's visit to Egypt, and in Tunisia much earlier with the formation of the French Protectorate in 1881. He speculated that the breakdown of the antiquated privileges conferred by the Capitulations, which would be a probable result of Egyptian sovereignty, would diminish the service Italy's protégés delivered as cultural and commercial intermediaries. But it would be detrimental especially because of their financial backing to the institutions that supported the much larger working-class Italian community.

This concern for the internal coherence of the community that Volpe expressed was shared in the local Italian press. Following the declaration of Egypt's independence in 1922 the widely distributed Italian newspaper in Egypt, *L'Imparziale*, circulated what it claimed were "secret instructions" behind the Anglo-Egyptian talks. Among these "instructions," that "the Capitulations would be abolished and England alone would assume control over foreign interests in Egypt" (recalling yet again the Tunisian experience).⁵² Tensions rose between Italian and British subjects despite the lack of overt diplomatic conflict.⁵³

Volpe, however, suggested that the consolidation of the Egyptian Monarchy might provide Italy with the opportunity to negotiate a new partnership with the Egyptian government.

⁵² Centro Archeologico Italiano Cairo (CAI), "L'Egitto Stato sovrano e indipendente, la dichiarazione del Governo britannico," *L'Imparziale*, March 2, 1922. It should also be noted here that the Italian daily *L'imparziale* - the "mouthpiece for the Italian community" in the 1920s - frequently reproduced articles from Mussolini's *Il Popolo d'Italia*. By 1930, *L'Imparziale* was consolidated with an Alexandrian newspaper under the title *Il Giornale d'Oriente*, which itself was linked to the Fascist regime's propaganda office in Egypt. For more on the role of the Italian press in Egypt and its relationship to the Italian State see Alessandra Marchi, "La presse d'expression italienne en Égypte. De 1845 à 1950," *Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea* 5 (2010): 101-102 and Umberto Rizzitano, *Un secolo di giornalismo italiano in Egitto* (Edizioni ANPIE) - originally published in *Cahiers d'histoire égyptienne - Histoire - Ethnografie - Documents Série VIII*, Fasc. 2/3/Avril 1956: 129-154.

⁵³ MAE, AC (1922), b.184, fasc. "incidenti Suez: oltraggio alla bandiera italiana da parte di alcuni inglesi."

Weaving a narrative of a timeless friendship between Italian and Egyptian peoples and governments that took the early Capitulations as a base, and focusing on the importance of the Italian community in Egypt, he claimed that a continued alliance was possible because Italy had neither militarily occupied Egypt nor constituted a colonial presence there. With immigration at a point of closure and the prospect of reduced Italian influence through its protégés, Volpe positioned Egypt's growing independence from the English as the de facto triumph of Egyptian nationalism over British hegemony. This did not, he noted, solve the problems of the Italian residents whose hopes remained caught between the past and the future: "...one hears frequent words of lament [for times past]", he wrote, noting the decline of the community's importance in Egypt and worrying that, if circumstances went unchanged, fate will leave no option for them but an eventual "renouncement of one's [Italian] nationality." In accord with Volpe's observations, the Italian Government saw two possible solutions for this community "at risk": either expand Italy's reach over and around them or repatriate them.⁵⁴

III. Rebuilding a Future for Italians in Egypt

Seeking to extend Italy beyond its geographical borders, in 1927 Dino Grandi, then Undersecretary of the Italian Ministry of Interior, announced that there would no longer be Italian "emigrants," but only "Italians abroad." This rhetorical move was intended to link Italians living outside of the peninsula to the nationalist and imperialist projects of the PNF. In one act mutually constituting nation and empire, the complex entanglements of the colonial Mediterranean were made into material realities.⁵⁵ Emigrants were no longer seen as a loss in the

⁵⁴ Volpe, *Fra Storia e Politica*, 356, 379.

⁵⁵ Enzo Collotti, *Fascismo e politica di potenza: politica estera 1922-1939* (Milano, 2000), 140; Emilio Gentile, "La politica estera del partito fascista. Ideologia e organizzazione dei Fasci italiani all'estero," *Storia Contemporanea* 26, 6 (1995): 897-957; Emilio Gentile, *La Grande*

Italian national imaginary, but rather were portrayed by the regime as an untapped resource for its very regeneration. The *Fasci all'estero* (internationally based centers for the PNF) were organized by the late 1920s with three main goals: to link ideas and practices of *italianità* developed in the local histories of Italians already abroad to fascist ideals; to enact discriminatory policies towards Italians abroad, favoring those who were considered "true Italians" in their political sympathies; and to "inquadrare," or bring within a political framework, the masses of Italian emigrants.⁵⁶

In Egypt this move resonated profoundly. In other territories with large Italian communities, the *Fasci* (the local units of the PNF) and associated institutions were directly linked to the party headquarters in Rome, but Italians remained subject to local jurisdiction.⁵⁷ In Egypt, however, extraterritorial status helped the institutional life of the community to thrive within this political landscape precisely because it was outside of Anglo-Egyptian authority. Italian subjects, schools, consular courts, and institutions were free to operate under Italian law. Grandi's move, then, had greater pragmatic import in Egypt than elsewhere.⁵⁸

Major reforms were conducted in the Italian schools to ensure that they became edifices of Italianness (*italianità*) and Fascist ideology. Aided by the Capitulations, Italian state schools had been founded in Alexandria, Cairo, and Upper Egypt by the end of the nineteenth century, but the curriculum had gone unchanged since their establishment. An entirely new curriculum

Italia (Bari, 2006); Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford, UK, 2003); Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London, UK 2000).

⁵⁶ Gentile, "La politica estera," 906-911.

⁵⁷ One notable exception is in the Chinese port city, Tientsin. See Sabina Donati, "Citizenship and Identity Issues in the Italian Concession of Tientsin (1902-1922)," in Jaci Eisenberg & Davide Rodogno (eds.), *Ideas and Identities: A Festschrift for Andre Liebich* (Bern, 2014): 43-62.

⁵⁸ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 215-217. For more on the relations between Italian emigrants and the politics of nationalism, see Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 29 and Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare*, 70-72.

was devised in 1931-32 in Cairo and implemented the following year in Alexandria, which, observed Piero Parini, the General Director of Italians Abroad, would provide young Italians with the tools to survive in Egypt and to reinvigorate the “prestige of Italian communities.”⁵⁹ In the restructuring, contemporary Fascist policies renewed the post-unification ideas of Francesco Crispi, which envisioned communities of Italian emigrants as potential sites for nation-building and the expansion of Italian prestige and power abroad. The new curriculum emphasized both Fascism’s “revolutionary” role in the Italian peninsula and the contribution of the Italian community to the modernization of Egypt.⁶⁰

Fascism was framed as the new religion of the state, a revolution of modernity, and embassies and consulates were tasked with the perpetuation of this myth in their communities. It was by means of organizing youth and monitoring cultural institutions that this realization was imaginable.⁶¹ In February 1933, a prominent Alexandrian Italian lawyer, Stanislao Rocchi, cautioned the headquarters of the Dante Alighieri Society (Società Dante Alighieri, SDA) in Rome that their intervention was needed to link the local Dante with the Fascio - the current board having delayed compliance with the new Fascist ideas of organization and thus putting at risk the hegemony of local Italian authorities. The headquarters in Rome of the SDA, an Italian cultural institution whose goal was to reinforce nationalist ideals among Italians abroad (its

⁵⁹ Marta Petricioli, “Italian Schools in Egypt,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24, 2 (1997): 185-186; Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 225-229.

⁶⁰ See Santilli, “Penser e analyser,” and Angelo Sammarco and Ernesto Verrucci Bey, eds., *Il contributo degli italiani ai progressi scientifici e pratici della medicina in Egitto sotto il regno di Mohammed Ali* (Cairo, 1928); Angelo Sammarco, *La marina egiziana sotto Mohammed Ali: Il contributo italiano* (Cairo, 1931).

⁶¹ Carocci, *La politica estera*, 24; Emilio Gentile described: “I Fasci all'estero dovevano essere formati da avanguardie ristrette e selezionate di giovani che si impegnavano ad organizzare le colonie socialmente, culturalmente e economicamente, imponendo scuole e associazioni italiane, combattendo antifascisti italiani e stranieri, ed essere soprattutto centro di propaganda di italianità e di fascismo.” Gentile, “La politica estera,” 913; see also Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “Modernity is Just Over There,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 8 3 (2006).

branch in Egypt established in 1896), had been integrated into the PNF in 1931 and its propaganda officially linked to that of the regime.⁶² During his 1922 visit, Gioacchino Volpe had observed that the SDA better engendered a sense of *italianità* than the Italian state schools.⁶³ Once the restructuring of Italian state schools was complete, the SDA leadership in Egypt finally gave in to the local *Fascio*. The institution circulated Fascist publications and regime-produced *Luce* films, found by members of its administration to be the most “effective and diffuse” means to reach Italian residents.⁶⁴

In 1934, the Italian Consul in Cairo observed that “a natural tendency towards sympathy for the Fascist movement had developed” among Italian residents.⁶⁵ He attributed this to the efforts to homogenize the Italian institutions. During the *Giornata della Fede* (Day of Faith) campaign the following year, intended to symbolically wed Italians to the Fascist regime and to demonstrate popular support for the war effort in Ethiopia, the Italians of Alexandria donated an average of 3.5 grams of gold per person (often in the form of wedding bands), a total of 500,000 piasters, and 200,000 Italian lire of insurance policies. This was nearly double the average amount sent by Italians in Italy. An immensely significant move for a population experiencing a steady rise in unemployment, it is perhaps also an indication that members of the Italian community in Egypt sought a protected future in the arms of the Italian state.⁶⁶

⁶² Collotti, *Fascismo e politica*, 142.

⁶³ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 350. For an institutional history of the Dante Alighieri Society and its international scope in Italian nationalist projects see Patrizia Salvetti, *Immagine Nazionale ed Emigrazione nella Società Dante Alighieri* (Roma, 1995).

⁶⁴ Archivio Società Dante Alighieri (ASDA), Alessandria-Egitto, b.11 fasc. 18 “1933-1934.”

⁶⁵ ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare (MCP), Direzione Generale Propaganda, b.61, “Consolato di S.M. il Re d'Italia Cairo al Sottosegretariato per la Stampa e la Propaganda,” October 5, 1934.

⁶⁶ ACS, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario 1922-1943, b. 376, “appunto per la segreteria particolare,” 22 May 1936, see also Petra Terhoeven, *Oro alla Patria: Donne, Guerra e Propaganda nella Giornata della Fede Fascista* (Bologna, 2006).

The first half of this chapter has taken us back to the King's 1933 visit. As the foreign policy of the PNF utilized its communities abroad for the purpose of undermining British and French hegemony in the Mediterranean, their actions were amplified by the extraterritorial conditions of the capitulatory regime. The Capitulations allowed the PNF to utilize its émigrés as “assets” by linking them directly to the Italian peninsula in a manner that was effectively impossible elsewhere. This is but one example of how neither cosmopolitanism nor nationalism function as descriptive categories of the historical moment, but might be better understood as temporal processes. Institutions like the state schools and the SDA laid foundations for “nationalist” futures among Italians residents. Indeed, the shelter provided by the Italian state through its courts, schools, and cultural associations had conditioned the community's very existence.⁶⁷ Such was the case of the Paonessa family whose poverty could only be assuaged by “the Patria,” as Antoinette rooted her family in this imagined trans-Mediterranean kinship when she addressed the King as a “daughter.” As we saw in the case of Mazza, many had in fact already looked towards the Italian State aware (or suspecting) that their days in Egypt were numbered.

Historian James Sheehan argues that territorial claims facilitated the consolidation of national identities.⁶⁸ This colonial Mediterranean example provides a twist to his assertion by showing how the Italian state was able to extend itself over its subjects abroad through legal extraterritoriality, bringing them into the folds of both nationalist and imperialist projects. Among Italians in Egypt, this fortified the role of the nation as a source of protection, but also as the source of a future. The Capitulations allowed Italy to extend its nationalist project just at the moment Egyptian nationalists struggled to redefine the boundaries of their own sovereignty,

⁶⁷ Marc Choate, “From Territorial to Ethnographic Colonies.”

⁶⁸ James Sheehan, “The Problem of Sovereignty in European History,” *American Historical Review* 111, 1 (2006): 1-15.

setting up an untenable tension between possible futures. These trajectories, enacted in the theatre of the mid-twentieth century Mediterranean, do not necessarily tell us about the nature of historical categories. They do, however, provide examples of how interconnected temporal processes propel history.

IV. Fascist Imperial Futures and the Undermining of the Present

Notwithstanding the violent repression of the Senussi rebellion in Libya in 1930-31, the Italian Government had portrayed itself largely as a “peaceful” power that championed nationalist movements during much of the first decade of Fascist rule in Rome (1922-32).⁶⁹ Historians generally agree that this was a continuation of Liberal Italy’s foreign policy, which had promoted cultural and commercial “penetration” of the Mediterranean as a means to gain imperial power relative to the British and the French.⁷⁰ Parallel to the restructuring of Italian institutions and the King’s 1933 visit, however, the government in Rome began an aggressive propaganda campaign that emphasized Italy’s drive for territorial expansion, reviving the myth

⁶⁹ M. Tedeschi Lalli, “La propaganda araba del fascismo e l’Egitto,” *Storia Contemporanea* 7, 4 (1976): 717-749, 722. See also A. A. Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization and Resistance, 1830-1932* (Albany, 1994).

⁷⁰ Claudio Segré describes how Mussolini followed the traditions of liberal Italy in the years after the march on Rome in 1922, muted “anti-imperialist statements and supported the British. He outlined Italy’s own Imperial ambitions, but followed policies of peaceful economic and cultural penetration.” Segré and others have suggested that this may have been because the new government was preoccupied with domestic matters. Claudio Segré, “Liberal and Fascist Italy in the Middle East, 1919-1939: The Elusive White Stallion,” in *The Great Powers in the Middle East 1919-1939*, ed. Uriel Dann (London, 1988): 199-212; Dennis Mack Smith, *Mussolini’s Roman Empire* (New York, NY, 1976); Giampiero Carocci, “Appunti sull’imperialismo fascista negli anni ‘20,” *Studi Storici* 8, 1 (1967): 113-137; Manuela Williams, *Mussolini’s Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940* (London, UK, 2006); Massimiliano Fiore, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East, 1922-1940* (Burlington, 2010); Haggai Erlich, “Mussolini and the Middle East in the 1920s: The Restrained Imperialist,” in (ed.) Uriel Dann, *The Great Powers in the Middle East 1919-1939* (London, 1988): 213-221.

of the Roman *Mare Nostrum*. 1933 marked a "decisive shift" in Italian policy abroad.⁷¹ A policy of "annoyance" was pursued against the mandatory powers - France and England - as a reaction to unmet Italian expectations following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. In achieving this, Italy used the framework of the League of Nations to call for democratic rights for the populations living under French and British rule in the Middle East.⁷² By late 1934 and the beginning of the Ethiopia campaign, Italy played on the threat that it might follow the examples of Japan and Germany and withdraw from the League of Nations.⁷³ Some have noted that the distrust shown by Italy in the ability of international pacts to influence regional politics without compromising Italy's prestige marked a distinct break from the foreign policies of Liberal Italy. This distrust became, as historian Giorgio Rochat has described, a "cornerstone" of Fascist foreign policy.⁷⁴ When, in 1934, Mussolini declared Africa and Asia to be within the "historic objectives" of Italy's "natural expansion," Italian propaganda took on threatening undertones to Egyptian political figures and British officials. In doing so, Italian subjects in the Mediterranean became more susceptible to reactions from their "hosts" and from ruling colonial powers.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Giorgio Rochat. "Dal nazionalismo all'imperialismo: la politica estera italiana da Corfù alla guerra d'Abissinia e di Spagna (1923-38)," in (ed.) Aldo Alessandro Mola, *Dall'Italia giolittiana all'Italia repubblicana* (EDA, 1974): 199-211, 201.

⁷² It was thought that they would continue such a policy until acquiring themselves a mandate; see Giampiero Carocci, *La politica estera dell'Italia fascista (1925-1928)* (Bari: Laterza, 1969), 203. For the implications in the Middle East, see Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-1940* (Great Britain: Palgrave, 2010).

⁷³ Steven Morewood, "Anglo-Italian Rivalry in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940" in *Paths to War: New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War*, eds. Robert Bryce and Esmonde M. Robertson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 169.

⁷⁴ Rochat, "Dal nazionalismo," 200.

⁷⁵ MAE, Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segretaria Generale (II), 1059/B2, fasc. "Politica musulmana dell'Italia." Historian Steven Morewood describes 1935 as the beginning of a "collision course" between the Italian and the British authorities in Egypt, Steven Morewood, "Anglo-Italian Rivalry in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940" in *Paths to War:*

Italian efforts to mitigate opposition to its imperialist policies took advantage of Egypt's vast public sphere. The Italian Ministry of Press and Propaganda, formed with Galeazzo Ciano as its director in 1935 (renamed as the Ministry of Popular Culture in 1937), began a campaign of "Arab propaganda." Fascist authorities sought to convince Egyptian nationalists that Italy posed no territorial threat. They attempted to control information circulating on Italian colonies: Italian, Arabic, French, Greek, and English language journalists in Egypt were bribed directly from Rome and advised as to what should be published regarding Italian news.⁷⁶ Radio Bari, the first internationally broadcast Arabic-language radio station, was one of Italy's most powerful weapons in this endeavor. Its cultural programs presented Italy as a "friendly nation" to its Arabic-speaking audience by omitting news on the Italian colonies in Libya and Ethiopia.⁷⁷ Sixty percent of the broadcasts by Radio Bari were "cultural programs" that covered historical encounters between Italians and Muslims.⁷⁸ This was part of a broader project of mythologizing

New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War, eds. Robert Boyce & Esmonde M. Robertson (New York, 1989): 167-198.

⁷⁶ Revealing in terms of the transparency of Italian propaganda in Egypt are the memoirs/political essays reflecting on late-1930s Egypt that mention Ugo Dadone, the director of the Italian propaganda office in Cairo, and the bribes he and his office offered to local newspapers. George Martelli describes Italian bribes to French and Arabic newspapers going so far as to say that Ugo Dadone "owned" two Arabic newspapers. See George Martelli, *Whose Sea? A Mediterranean Journey* (London, UK, 1938), 172-4 and Elizabeth Monroe, *The Mediterranean in Politics* (Oxford, UK, 1938). The subsidized newspapers reported until 1936 were *al-Balagh* (Cairo), *al-Muqattam* (Cairo), *La Patrie* (Cairo), *Tachydromos* (Alexandria), *Partout* (Cairo), and *Le Phare Egyptien* (Alexandria). For greater insight into Italian propaganda in Egypt, see Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy*, 46; Laila Morsy, "Italy's Expansionist Policies on Anglo-Egyptian Relations in 1935," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 20, 2 (1984): 206-231, 222; Tedeschi Lalli, "La politica italiana in Egitto negli anni trenta e il movimento delle 'camicie verdi'," *Storia Contemporanea* 17, 6 (1986): 1177-1200, 1196; Nir Arielli, "Beyond Mare Nostrum: Ambitions and Limitations in Fascist Italy's Middle Eastern Policy," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37, 3 (2011): 385-407.

⁷⁷ Daniel Grange, "Structure et techniques d'une propagande: Les émissions arabes de Radio-Bari," *Relations Internationales* 2 (1974): 165-185, 171.

⁷⁸ Although the substance of these broadcasts is not readily available, one of the authors, Said Sciartuni, published a series of articles around the same time that reflect what was aired on Radio Bari. See, for example, Said Sciartuni, "Egitto e Italia nel Mare Mediterraneo," *La vita italiana*,

the timeless links between Italy and the Arab or Islamic World (an articulation that might be interpreted as yet another manifestation of a “cosmopolitan” Mediterranean). Rather than create sympathy for Italian policies, however, Radio Bari was measured successful in its capacity to incite Egyptian and Arab nationalists against British and French hegemony in the Mediterranean.⁷⁹ This became a recipe for later problems.

In the mid-1930s the Italian Government also began to support several Egyptian nationalists, most notably leaders of Young Egypt (*Misr al Fatat*) and their militant youth group, the Green Shirts, as well as a fringe group of the leading *Wafd* party.⁸⁰ Mussolini’s office in Rome furnished literature on Fascist political and social projects to these militant groups and closely monitored their activities. The organizations united youth through squadrons and sporting activities and adopted a salute similar to the one used by Italian Fascists. Italian diplomats in Egypt imagined that supporting these movements - which constituted a legitimate force against the ruling *Wafd* and the British - would position Italy and the Italians as a friendly nation to young Egyptians.⁸¹ Italian assistance was by no means covert. Indeed, after a series of anti-Italian publications in one of the leading English-language newspapers published in Egypt, the

LIII, January-June (1939) and “L’Italia e i suoi rapporti futuri con i paesi arabi,” *La vita italiana*, March (1937).

⁷⁹ Grange, “Structure et techniques,” 174, 185; It should also be noted that the Italian Minister in Egypt reported that British authorities expressed outright discontent regarding the broadcasts of Radio Bari. See MAE, Affari Politici (AP) (1931-45) Egitto, B.16, fasc. “Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto.”

⁸⁰ Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford, CA, 2010); James Jankowski, “The Egyptian Blue Shirts and the Egyptian Wafd, 1935-1938,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 6, 1 (1970): 77-95; James Jankowski, *Egypt’s Young Rebels: ‘Young Egypt’ 1933-1952* (Stanford, CA, 1975).

⁸¹ MAE, AP (1931-45) Egitto, B.16, fasc. “Associazione ‘Giovane Egitto’ (camicie verdi)” and “Partito Nazionalista Egiziano - Camicie Azzurre.”

leader of one militant group publicly declared his sympathy and support for the Italian government and people, including the community in Egypt.⁸²

During anti-British demonstrations between 1934-35, Makram Ebeid, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the struggling *Wafd* government, publicly condemned the PNF for its moral and material support of militant groups. The English-language press - read widely among Egypt's elite and foreign classes - warned that Italian support for these paramilitary movements obstructed a prompt resolution to the "question of the Capitulations" and, in doing so, exacerbated the disquiet of foreign communities in Egypt.⁸³ Paradoxically, the primary goal that united the militant groups was the cancellation of capitulatory privileges. The issue was of exceptional concern for European residents because it touched upon the institutions that legitimated their presence in Egypt, and it was in drawing attention to Italian support of the militant opposition that the British hoped to destabilize the Italian position.

The *Wafd* feared Egypt would become a theater of war for Anglo-Italian aggression. The 1935-36 invasion of Ethiopia revealed a violently imperialistic regime, which caused many Egyptian intellectuals who had shown sympathy - even slight - towards the Italian government to back away from their positions. It also stirred some Egyptians due to the affinities between themselves and Ethiopians.⁸⁴ Many were angered by Italy's unilateral declaration of the autonomy of the Ethiopian Coptic Church, splitting the church that had united Egyptian and Ethiopian Christians. Among Egyptian nationalists, fears also grew that Italian hands on the headwaters of the Nile would have disastrous implications for the life-blood of Egypt's

⁸² MAE, AP (1931-45) Egitto, B.16, fasc. "Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto." Letter from Ghigi to Mussolini, October 7, 1935.

⁸³ ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare (MCP), b.62, fasc. 23 "Egitto - 1936"; MAE, AP (1931-45) Egitto, B.16, fasc. "Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto." See also Jankowski, "The Egyptian Blue Shirts," 82-84, 87.

⁸⁴ Monroe, *The Mediterranean*, 202; H.A.R. Gibb, "The Situation in Egypt," *International Affairs* 15, 3 (1936): 351-373.

agriculture.⁸⁵ The Suez Canal was another growing factor in British anxieties. Italian ships constituted around fifty percent of the traffic passing through its waters in 1935 and, as Italian forces grew in Libya and Ethiopia, the potential for an attack from the Western Desert to protect its passage through the canal appeared at least a possibility.

The director of the Banco Italo-Egiziano, the Italian bank responsible for the accounts of elite Italians and Italian institutions in Egypt, observed that the events in Ethiopia influenced how Italians were treated by Greek and Coptic communities due to their shared Orthodox Christianity, but also by a broader community that feared any disruption of Egypt's status quo. He recognized that such growing tensions could undercut wealthy and poor Italian residents alike.⁸⁶ The director of the bank described "tendentious voices" agitating Egyptians and other European residents of Alexandria and Cairo: "one [hears] talk of an Italian threat from Tripolitania and of bombardment [on Egyptian cities]... it could [only] end with a reaction against the Italians resident here, who would naturally remain without any protection."⁸⁷ Italy's threat as an imperial power had out-paced its "Arab propaganda," and fear of its consequences rattled the foundations of the Italian community. As the Fascists mapped the Italians of Egypt into their policies as "historically" important, the imperialist aspirations projected from Rome began to isolate the Italians of Egypt from within the very legal and political system that had made their community possible.

V. Dismantling the Past, Dismantling the Future

⁸⁵ Hashish, *Mu'ahdat 1936*, 54.

⁸⁶ Archivio Banco di Roma (BR), XI/8/15/I B10 fasc.10, "conflitto italo-etiope atteggiamento della concorrenza 1935-38"; The Banco Italo-Egiziano--an affiliate of the Banco di Roma--played an important role in propagation and preservation of fascist economic interests in and beyond the Mediterranean. See Labanca, *Oltremare*, 158.

⁸⁷ BR, XI/8/15/I B10 fasc.31, Biagi to Executive Committee in Milan, 21 September 1935. See also Martelli, *Whose Sea*, 169.

In 1935, Mussolini sent Pellegrino Ghigi as the Minister of Italy in Egypt to devise a strategy to relieve the declining economic conditions of the Italian community.⁸⁸ In the meantime, however, the Egyptian Government had initiated negotiations for a Treaty of Alliance with the British, which augmented problems for Italian leadership. Signed in summer 1936, the Treaty acknowledged England's special interest in the Suez Canal, granted the British troops authority in the case of war, and, most importantly, set a date for a conference to abolish the Capitulations the following spring. It represented an alliance among British authorities, the *Wafd*, and the Egyptian Monarchy after several years of violent unrest.⁸⁹ Whereas rumors had spread that Italian politicians were on the verge of reaching a non-aggression pact with Egypt, British concessions, arguably made out of fear that Egypt would fall into alliance with Italy, helped to draw the "wind out of the Italian sails."⁹⁰ Some historians have argued that it was precisely the arrangement of Anglo-Italo-Egyptian relations that drove Mustafa al-Nahhas, the Egyptian Prime Minister, to come to terms with the British. According to one contemporary British commentator, the alliance was "brought about through the agency of a third party - Italy."⁹¹ The Fascist Government witnessed a major setback for its imperial interests.

In Egyptian historiography the 1936 Treaty is remembered as demarcating a new phase in political history.⁹² The desire to deal finally with the Capitulations was key to the 1936 Treaty.

⁸⁸ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 92.

⁸⁹ This followed the example of Turkey, under threat of an Italian attack at Adalia, on June 5, 1926 signed the Treaty of Ankara with Britain, thus giving Mosul (current Iraq) in exchange for British protection in the case of attack or aggression. Here too Italian communities paid a high price, Segré, "Liberal and Fascist Italy," 204. See also Albert Bourgeois, *La formation de l'Egypte Moderne: le traité Anglo-Egyptien du 26 Août 1936 et la convention de Montreux du 8 Mai 1937* (Paris, 1939) and Laila Morsy who notes that the "Fascist challenge to Britain" precipitated the signing of the 1936 Treaty, Morsy, "Italian Expansionist Policies," 206.

⁹⁰ Martelli, *Whose Sea*, 173; Laila Morsy, "Military Clauses of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, 1936," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, 1 (1984): 67-97.

⁹¹ Monroe, *The Mediterranean*, 35-37.

⁹² Asim Ahmad al-Dasuqi, *Misr fi al-harb al-'alamiyya al-thaniya, 1939-1945* (Cairo, 1976), 15.

Tax exemptions and legal privileges enjoyed by foreigners made it exceedingly difficult for an ascendant class of educated Egyptians (the *effendiya*) to participate in the country's economy.⁹³ Relief from the burden of foreign privilege had been long awaited. In one report, Ghigi himself acknowledged: "the aspiration of Egypt to free itself from the consular privileges and to [integrate] the foreigners (*gli stranieri*) residing in [its] territory into the sphere of common law... [has been] long anticipated." He claimed that since 1922 Egypt's political parties agreed most coherently on one singular point: an end to the capitulatory regime was paramount to "the struggle for the complete independence of the country."⁹⁴ Prior to the signing of the Treaty, Ghigi made a last-ditch effort to defend the Capitulations. With the repercussions the Italian community in mind, he wrote to the Egyptian government that reform was indeed fundamental to the "development" of the public and private lives of the Egyptian populace. But, he argued, the capitulatory regime encompassed "real agreements" that needed to be dealt with between the Egyptian Government and the individual powers with which they were signed. They were not abstract "privileges," as Ghigi asserted they were being framed in Egyptian political discourse, "[the Capitulations] are anything but an internal affair and their end or modification certainly cannot be derived by the will (*volontà*) of Egypt alone."⁹⁵

⁹³ Gibb, "Situation in Egypt," 368. For more detail on the struggles of the emerging class of unemployed, educated Egyptians see Lucie Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendiya': Social and Cultural Construction of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919-1952*, eds. Arthur Goldschmidt et al. (Cairo, 2005): 124-163 and Lockman, "Imagining the Working Class," 161.

⁹⁴ MAE, AC, b.301, "relazione sulla abolizione delle Capitolazioni in Egitto," Ghigi to Ministry of Foreign Affairs Rome.

⁹⁵ MAE, AP (1931-45) Egitto, b.16, fasc. "trattato Anglo-Egiziano," Pellegrino Ghigi August 20, 1936; A report given to Ghigi several months later cited the Belgian vice-president of the Court of Appeals, C. Van Ackere, as having stated: "La suppression pure et simple des Capitulations, sans garanties d'aucune espèce, est une chose impossible. Il est des faits qui sont le produit de l'évolution de l'histoire et de la marche du progrès, contre lesquels aucun raisonnement ne saurait tenir." MAE, AC, b.301/ter.

The Italian Minister had the full support of Ernesto Cucinotta, the consular judge, and an important figure connecting the lives of Italian residents to the conversations happening at the diplomatic level. Cucinotta had a first-hand sense of the extent to which jurisdictional extraterritoriality was integral to safeguarding Italian interests and institutions. The consular courts, he argued, permitted the Italian residents to maintain autonomy in the mix of nationalities living in Egypt. He claimed that without consular courts to oversee jurisdiction, Italian subjects would not be considered equal to other Europeans in the eyes of the authorities, institutions would collapse, and the community would lose the last vestiges of its “prestige” that had been carefully propped up through propaganda in recent years.

Cucinotta thought into the future. Because Italian institutions functioned with a great deal of internal coherency, he feared that dismantling their jurisdictional autonomy would turn the entire Italian community inside out. The size of the Italian population and the large amount of work that would need to be transferred away from the consular courts was the only argument he believed could persuade the Egyptian Government to allow for greater Italian involvement. At the time, Italians in Egypt numbered 52,462 (18,548 in Alexandria, 17,500 in Cairo, and the remainder spread between the cities in the Canal Zone and in Upper Egypt). Cucinotta brought attention to the fact that, in the Italian consular courts, around 1,100 penal and 200 civil proceedings were processed each year in Egypt. He suggested that the drastic increase in the volume of work that would be required of a transitional court could be used as a lobbying point for a larger Italian presence in the courts themselves. He advised the diplomats to raise this point in any negotiations for post-Capitulation settlements. This, he claimed, and this alone, would translate into greater protection of Italian subjects and institutions.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ MAE, AC, b.301/ter., Rapporto 9/11/1936; MAE, AC, b.301/ter., Cucinotta to Console Generale d'Italia Alessandria and Legazione italiana, August 10, 1936.

Questions surfaced once again regarding the future of the Italian community. In 1935, only a few years after having been linked to the PNF, the leadership of the SDA had expressed angst regarding the “likely” closure of non-Egyptian schools in Egypt.⁹⁷ Such anxieties worsened. Several months after the 1936 Treaty was signed, the Italian Consul in Alexandria wrote that Italian communities were ultimately in a state of “continual decline.” Fearing the end of their support networks, many had repatriated at their own expense and an additional 183 (and their families) at the expense of the consulate in Alexandria, a trend expected to accelerate due to the increasing number of requests.⁹⁸ Matched with rising unemployment, these uncertain futures drove Italians out of Egypt. Mario Vanni, for example, an engineer who had moved to Cairo in the early-1920s, sent his wife and daughter to Florence in 1935 and then, one year later, he too returned to Italy, selling off his belongings “because,” he wrote, “the tense relations [between Italy and England] portend the outbreak of war.”⁹⁹

The Italian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in Cairo - an institution that represented smaller artisanal businessmen as well as major industrial interests - told a similar story by 1937. Its members anticipated that the hardships already confronting Italian residents would be exacerbated by the abolition of the Capitulations. In one report, the ICC presented a “large-scale repatriation” as the only viable solution to the anticipated lack of employment opportunities and infrastructural support.¹⁰⁰ The institution’s leadership advised that in post-Capitulation negotiations, Italy should demand an explicit guarantee by the Egyptian Government that Italians residents would be free to depart and return. Without this assurance, which it seemed was quite

⁹⁷ ASDA, Alessandria d'Egitto, Stanislao Rocchi to Felice Felicioni.

⁹⁸ MAE, AC, b.301/ter., *Telespresso* September 11, 1936.

⁹⁹ ACS, MI, Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati, 1938, b.17, Prefettura di Firenze to Ministro dell'Interno DGPS, Roma May 18, 1938.

¹⁰⁰ MAE, AC, b.301/ter., “prevedibili ripercussioni dell'eventuale abolizione del regime capitolare” (anticipated repercussions of the eventual abolition of the capitulatory regime), January 1937.

unlikely, the divide between metropolitan Italy and the Italians in Egypt, caused by the latter's growing impoverishment, could become dangerously intensified.

Indeed, by the late 1930s, especially in the aftermath of the Ethiopia campaign, financial support provided to Italian institutions by the elite members of the community had diminished alongside a steep decline in investments made in Italy by Italian residents.¹⁰¹ Italians had lost ground in every category of professional life and their incomes rarely matched the rising cost-of-living. In one report, the ICC in Alexandria noted that the vast majority of Italians lived on a hand-to-mouth basis.¹⁰² Throughout the 1930s, Salvatore Caccioppo, an Italian resident from Attarin, Alexandria, a neighborhood in which Italians numbered roughly 10 percent of the non-Egyptian population, had requested pecuniary assistance from the consulate for his children's educational expenses at the Italian state school. In considering Caccioppo's circumstances, the Consul noted that "because of the work situation [confronting Italians], Mr. Caccioppo is absolutely unable to pay and occasionally his family lacks bread at home."¹⁰³ His circumstances, the Consul continued, were typical of Italian residents who would suffer the ramifications of an end to the Capitulations.

The Società Italiana di Beneficenza (Italian Charity Society, SIB), which had been the life-blood of the community, witnessed decreasing contributions from in-country donors.¹⁰⁴ Italian residents, however, needed every piaster they could get to maintain their livelihoods, and a majority had come to rely on the heavily subsidized resources provided by Italian

¹⁰¹ BR, XI/8/15/I B10 fasc.34, "regime capitolare in Egitto 1936-37."

¹⁰² MAE, AC, b.301/ter., notes prepared for Ghigi by the Camera di Commercio Italiana Alessandria d'Egitto (resided over by De Semo), February 1937. Elizabeth Monroe observes that most of the Italians considered "businessmen" were "small agents and shopkeepers living from hand to mouth, who are too poor to do more than support their large families, and who have not a piastre to spare for the hungry man of the Italian treasury." Monroe, *The Mediterranean*, 193.

¹⁰³ ACGA, "Caccioppo Salvatore di Giovanni - 1897."

¹⁰⁴ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 47-65, Morsy, "Italy's Expansionist Policies," 222.

institutions.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, many suspected that integration into Egyptian jurisdiction would entail new taxes and residency fees, increasing the cost of living.¹⁰⁶ A note from the ICC in Cairo read:

the Italian worker [*l'operaio italiano*], who for his survival requires moral support (schools, cultural and recreational associations) and material assistance (free education, books, refreshments, hospital services, subsidies, etc.), will not be assisted by his community... just at the moment in which he will most significantly be affected by the need for assistance; the biggest danger of the abolition of the Capitulations is to [workers], the most numerous of our community; without means to resist, and with moral and material assistance below its current level... [Italians] will be constrained to repatriate.¹⁰⁷

The ICC in Alexandria echoed these concerns:

Without a doubt, one cannot ignore the rights of the natives [*indigeni*]... to be protected and even favored, and therefore any attempt to resist this natural, legitimate postulate [the abolition of the Capitulations] might seem useless... [but] if it is inevitable that our communities... resign to a gradual - and we hope as slow as possible - retreat, it would be [unjust] that the possibility to work be limited or impeded, at least for the families already settled in Egypt, and in consequence they would find themselves required by necessity to abandon - in short time - the territory in which they have lived and worked for decades.¹⁰⁸

With the imminent abolition of the Capitulations the anticipated end of Italian futures in Egypt drew nearer.

Inadvertently highlighting the tensions between the past and the future, between experience and expectation, the PNF in Rome inflated the “historic” role played by the Italians of Egypt in constructing Egyptian modernity through a series of conferences and publications

¹⁰⁵ BR, XI/8/15/I B10 fasc.34 “regime capitolare in Egitto 1936-37,” Appunto 1 October 1936.

¹⁰⁶ MAE, AC, b.301/ter., notes attached to “relazione...” from Ghigi to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁰⁷ MAE, AC, b.301/ter., “prevedibili ripercussioni dell'eventuale abolizione del regime capitolare,” January 1937.

¹⁰⁸ MAE, AC, b.301/ter., notes prepared for Ghigi by the Camera di Commercio Italiana Alessandria d'Egitto, February 1937.

orchestrated by Italian intellectuals sent to Egypt from Rome in the late 1930s.¹⁰⁹ For them, the community's significance could only be measured through retrospection. Members of the Italian community itself, however, interpreted events as part of an irreversible process; emerging changes in the social and legal milieus became agents in the unfolding of historical time. Work opportunities quickly disappeared for the generalized "Italian worker," composed of a mosaic of families like those of Caccioppo, Mazza, and Paonessa mentioned in this article. Moreover, apprehensions about the weakening capacity of the consulates to provide shelter for Italian protégés led to the unraveling of "a patient work of education and gradual absorption [into Italian society]" among many of the largest donors to Italian institutions, just as the historian Volpe had imagined 15 years prior.¹¹⁰ A report written by Italian diplomats on the eve of negotiations for the abolition of the Capitulations despairingly concluded that the Italian communities that had grown "under the protection of the Capitulations" would, only after their abolition, "begin to truly live in Egypt."¹¹¹

Italian residents bombarded their consulates with complaints. One Italian worker dismissed from the Suez Canal Company in 1937 wrote, "you know, undoubtedly, that life in Egypt has become very difficult for our compatriots [*connazionali*]... when searching for employment, one hears nothing but 'you are Italian, sir, we regret that we can't employ you

¹⁰⁹ The publications that resulted from these specific conferences include Angelo Sammarco, ed., *Gli Italiani in Egitto: Il contributo italiano nella formazione dell'Egitto moderno* (Alessandria, 1937); Angelo Sammarco, *Egitto Moderno* (Roma, 1939); Le Monnier, *Il contributo italiano alla formazione dell'Egitto moderno* (Firenze, 1941).

¹¹⁰ MAE, AC, b.301/ter. "relazione sulla abolizione delle Capitolazioni in Egitto," Ghigi to Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, MAE, AC, b.301/ter. "atteggiamento dell'Italia nei confronti dell'ingresso dell'Egitto nella S[ocietà] D[elle] N[azioni] e nella soppressione del regime capitolare," Ghigi to Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome and to the Ministry of Press and Propaganda, January 8, 1937.

¹¹¹ MAE, AC, b.301/ter., secret report by MAE Direzione Generale Affari Generali, ufficio V, "L'abolizione delle Capitolazioni in Egitto (negoziati diplomatici e convenzione di Montreux)", rapporto n.483, 22 March 1937, 56.

(vous etes Italien, Monsieur, nous regrettons de ne pouvons vous engager) [sic].”¹¹² Italian foreign policy had generated an environment of hostility between different nationalities, resulting in discrimination against Italians because of their perceived ties to the Fascist regime.¹¹³ With the dwindling support of elite Italians and overall rise in unemployment, Italian institutions also suffered. The leadership of the SDA struggled to obtain payments from its roughly 200 associates and rumors spread widely among those most loyal to its mission that the Society was bound to disappear. Smaller clubs and organizations had already closed due to lack of funds; among these the Italian library in the heart of Attarin, one of the few local collections of Italian books, newspapers, and propaganda, built up during the 1920s and early 1930s for “[Italian] citizens who do not have the money to buy books.”¹¹⁴ Attempting to breathe life into the welfare coffers, the Consul in Alexandria appealed to past donors. He implored, “It is futile to illustrate for you, who know well the assistance needs of our community, [and] the need to help - today more than ever - the numerous families fallen into poverty who search for work in vain and for whom... repatriation is not possible.”¹¹⁵ At the moment from which Italian residents were to be integrated into Egyptian jurisdiction, imagining a future in Egypt became impossible.

Conclusion

The abolition of the capitulations signified the collapse of a structure that had made possible future horizons for Italian immigrants. The formation of the Italian community had been premised on an experience of exceptionality. Integration into Egyptian jurisdiction would

¹¹² ACGA, “Paoletti Enrico Rodolfo fu Albino.”

¹¹³ Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda*, 127.

¹¹⁴ ASDA, Alessandria-Egitto, b.11 fasc.18 “1933-1934,” Ruiz to Felicioni October 29, 1937; ASDA, Alessandria-Egitto, b.11 fasc. 18 ‘1933-1934,’ Rocchi to Felicioni January 26, 1939, Arcudi to Felicioni December 28, 1938.

¹¹⁵ ACGA, “Turrini Virgilio - 1897.”

effectively dismantle the boundaries through which Italians maintained a degree of autonomy. On 12 April 1937, the conference for the abolition of the capitulations convened in Montreux, Switzerland. In addition to conversations among the governments of Egypt and all of the Capitulatory Powers to determine the duration of the transition away from the capitulatory regime, bilateral settlements were negotiated between Italian and Egyptian delegates. In these meetings, Egyptian delegates stressed their desire for “complete liberation” from the legal regimes created by the Capitulations, drawing upon the example of the Treaty of Lausanne. Pelegrino Ghigi, who headed the Italian delegation, worriedly noted that the 1923 Treaty had destroyed Italian institutions and communities in Turkey, where they were much smaller than the communities in Egypt.¹¹⁶ The Italian delegation sought, instead, the protection of “current and future” interests of Italian residents in Egypt, emphasizing the important role state institutions had performed in engendering a coherent community and in “the maintenance of *italianità* (Italianness).” In initial discussions, Ghigi had been assured by Makram Ebeid, a member of the Egyptian delegation, that the Egyptian Government had “absolute intention” to secure Italian institutions.¹¹⁷ But such intentions extended only so far as the duration of the 12-year transitional period away from the Capitulations, at which point any agreements between the two parties would have to be renegotiated. This news, feared Ghigi, would have lasting “negative psychological effects” on the Italians of Egypt.

As negotiations were underway between Italian and Egyptian diplomats, fears grew among Italian residents. The pages of *Il Giornale d'Oriente*, which reported daily on the events

¹¹⁶ MAE, AC, b.301/ter., secret report by MAE Direzione Generale Affari Generali, ufficio V, "L'abolizione delle Capitolazioni in Egitto (negoziati diplomatici e convenzione di Montreux)", telespresso 13, Italian delegation to MAE, 17.4.1937.

¹¹⁷ MAE, AC, b.301/ter., Italian delegation to MAE, 17.4.1937, colloquio con Makram Ebeid Pascia (Ghigi), 14.4.1937, p.88, colloquio col Presidente del consiglio egiziano (Ghigi), 15.4.1937, p.90, , Ciano to Italian delegation at Montreux, 17.4.1937, p.95.

in Montreux, conveyed the apprehensions of the Italian community.¹¹⁸ Intending to quell unrest within the Italian communities, editors of the newspaper released the following statement making explicit that the future would be distinct from the past for the Italians in Egypt:

Foreigners in general and thus the Italians surely cannot think that all will continue as before. There will be various important things that will change; but any pessimism is futile and illegitimate. To live and work in Egypt for foreigners will no longer be easy and, if you will, as pleasant as today, but one will be able to live and work and even prosper well and in the best ways... An epoch finishes and another one begins in Egypt: and it certainly will not be the Italian, who are active, intelligent and adaptable by temperament, that will not know how to glean, even from the new situation, all the possible advantages... It's a gross error to want to believe in the fixity and immovability of certain situations of peoples and countries. The world goes on and woe unto those who regrets that it doesn't stand still. One wastes time... We open thus our hands to our Egyptian friends and we'll see to make the long and joyous new road together from peace and progress.¹¹⁹

Notwithstanding the newspaper's cautionary tone, letters from Italians residents flooded the diplomatic, administrative, and institutional offices in Egypt, just as they had on the occasion of the King's visit to Egypt in 1933.¹²⁰ The transformation set into motion by the abolition of the Capitulations, if not one of immediately significant transformation in the structures of everyday life, vastly reconfigured the capacity to imagine Italian futures in Egypt. Ironically, from the

¹¹⁸ CAI, *Giornale d'Oriente* 14 April 1937.

¹¹⁹ "Gli stranieri in genere e così gli italiani non possono certo pensare che tutto continuerà come prima. Vi saranno varie importanti cose che cambieranno; ma ogni pessimismo è inutile e non è neppure legittimo. Vivere e lavorare in Egitto per gli stranieri non sarà più cosa agevole e, se potete, così piacevole come oggi, ma si potrà vivere e lavorare ed anche prosperare benissimo e nel migliore dei modi.... Un'epoca finisce ed un'altra incomincia in Egitto: e non saranno certo gli italiani, che sono attivi, intelligenti ed adattabili per temperamento, che non sapranno trarre anche dalla nuova situazione tutti i possibili vantaggi.... E' un grossolano errore quello di voler credere alla fissità ed all'immovibilità di certe situazioni di popoli e di paesi. Il mondo cammina e guai a chi sta a rammaricarsi che non stia fermo. Si perde tempo... Apriamo dunque la mano ai nostri amici egiziani e vediamo di fare insieme la strada lunga ma gioiosa della pace e del progresso" *Giornale d'Oriente*, 16 April 1937.

¹²⁰ "Avviso," *Giornale d'Oriente*, 23 April 1937.

moment that Italians would “truly live in Egypt,” it was impossible to do so. Living in Egypt without the protection of extraterritoriality, in this way, meant resigning the social institutions that had instilled amongst Italians a sense of national coherency. Moreover, these very institutions provided the support for a community delicately balanced on the precipice of poverty.

Years after his speculations on Italian futures in Egypt, the historian Gioacchino Volpe wrote of the community only in the past tense.¹²¹ In following this story, this chapter has argued that the sense of historical time embedded in source materials from the interwar period provides insight on how futures affected the shape of the colonial and post-colonial Mediterranean. Attending to these temporal processes helps historians to better appreciate how time plays out in the lives of historical actors. Traditional approaches to the colonial Mediterranean continue to employ the analytical categories “cosmopolitanism” and “nationalism” to study shifts over time. As shown above, however, the characteristics of “cosmopolitan” or “nationalist” could be described as alternating, codependent or even indistinguishable and thus do little work for the historian. This is especially the case in the example of a “colonial community” like the Italians of Egypt. With regard to the Italians of Egypt, expectations came to embrace repatriation and the inevitability of departure from Egypt. These were, of course, expectations with consequences. So much so that when departure did indeed occur it had long been envisioned as a likely, and even predestined, outcome of historical experience.

¹²¹ Volpe *Italia Moderna*, 196.

VIGNETTE ONE

Communities, Politics, and Origins

B. Buccetti met with me outside of the hospital in San Donato, Milan.¹ At a small café, he arrived with an envelope containing several copies of a timeline prepared by a friend on the history of encounters between Italy and Egypt. The same timeline had been published in one of the conference proceedings of the Associazione Italiani d'Egitto (AIDE).² For Buccetti, the timeline, which marked events that were moments of encounter between Egypt and Italy, served as a map for understanding where his family's history fit into the history of the two nations. His wife, of Greek origin, was also from Egypt; after an introduction, she left us and went to conduct some paperwork in the hospital. Both are in their early 80s; Buccetti's health had deteriorated in the months preceding our meeting. Handing me the timeline, Buccetti told me that his grandfathers had moved to Egypt from Messina to work on the construction of a dam in Asyut in the late nineteenth century (he said 1870-80). At the time, he said, they would "come and go" but when they finished working on the project, they transferred their families to Cairo. "So they tell me, it was better than Europe... we were protected by laws which gave us possibility. Probably, many Europeans [today] don't understand this, we didn't have to change nationality or religion... we weren't obliged to change our habits (le nostre abitudini)."

"We had our own world," recalled Buccetti, "don't forget that we spoke Italian, the teachers [in schools] spoke Italian... for the most part, we were Europeans... we Italians of Egypt

¹ Interview with B. Buccetti, 23 March 2012.

² AIDE *L'eredità culturale della presenza degli Italiani in Egitto* (Roma 2010).

(noi italiani d'Egitto) didn't have Egyptian nationality, no one from my family, we lived by our own habits, protected by the laws of our country."³ Buccetti had initially approached me in Milan after the presentation of a memoir published by Carolina Delburgo, in which she details the experiences of a young girl arriving as a refugee in Italy during the Suez Crisis of 1956.⁴ While he told me his story, he referred to her book and told me, "there were the Jews, they were wealthy... I won't tell you this story because I don't want to enter politics... but for having defended Italy [in the First World War], Italy gave them nationality... they became Italians because Italy had helped them."⁵ In a later interview with Delburgo, she told me that until publishing her memoir, she had never known about the Italians of Egypt and in fact she had always wondered about her father's connection to Italy. But for Buccetti this was beside the point: what he wanted to tell me was outside of what he considered "politics." Instead, it regarded the specificity of a national community, formed through encounters between Italy and Egypt. Indeed, he said, many Italians in Italy do not understand that the Italians of Egypt were a key facet to these encounters, and not a community distant from the narrative of Italian history during their presence in Egypt. As he recounted his life story, his wife returned from the hospital. Almost as though she had been listening to our conversation and sought to provide an example, she described how the clerk at the hospital had looked at her documents and said, 'Ah, but you're an *extracomunitaria*?' because her birthplace was marked as Alexandria (*d'Egitto*). Buccetti spoke up: this, he said, is what he intended when he told me that people do not understand: "we've suffered [from] this... either you interrupt [them] immediately or you get fed up with

³ "vivevamo con il nostro abitudine... difesi della legge del nostro paese."

⁴ Carolina Delburgo, *Come ladri nella notte: la cacciata dall'Egitto* (Bologna 2008).

⁵ "non ti racconto questa storia, non entro in politica... per poterli difendere l'Italia li ha dati la nazionalità... sono diventati italiani perché l'Italia li ha aiutati."

recounting the whole story.” Over the years, he had learned to become silent in these interactions.

R. Berni, a 79-year-old born in Cairo and living in Milan since 1966, around the corner from Buccetti yet unknown to him, met with me in the lounge of a hotel on Via Buenos Aires while smoking an endless stream of cigarettes. A friend of his in Rome who claimed that Berni could recall more “facts” from the past sent me to speak with him. Berni’s friend was in a state of failing health and his memories escaped him. Like Buccetti, Berni described the social make up of early-twentieth century Egypt in terms of its national communities.⁶ “In Egypt, there were many different nationalities (nazionalità).” He listed Jews, Greeks, and Italians as the largest, claiming that the Italian residents peaked at around 120,000; and then there were the English, French, and Armenians. He seemed to search for a way to explain something to me, he paused, and then said, “it was a country (un paese) created by Europeans for Europeans.”⁷ Berni qualified this, saying “I’m sorry, but it’s the truth.”⁸ In many accounts of personal histories during interviews with Italians from Egypt, the “truthfulness” of one’s remembering was stressed, as though the substance of their memories should immediately contrast what I (was assumed to) know of Italian or Egyptian history.

Each community, he continued, had their own cinemas, clubs, restaurants, hospitals, schools, and so forth, “[because of the Capitulations] an Italian couldn’t be arrested by the Egyptian police!” Berni recalled that Egyptians “didn’t come to where we lived... that is, they would come to work, but at sunset (*maghrab*) they left, not because we chased them out, but rather because they felt... [he hesitated] humiliated to be amongst the Europeans... it was all

⁶ Interview with R. Berni 7 October 2011.

⁷ “era un paese creato dagli europei per gli europei”

⁸ “scusa, ma è la verità.”

European for Europeans.”⁹ This autonomy allowed the Italians to distinguish themselves from other communities, he claimed, and it was not until the full termination of the Capitulations, in 1949, that “Europeans no longer felt they had someone to defend them (*non si sentivano difesi*)... they weren’t protected (*protetti*) anymore.” In the same conversation, Berni described having stayed in Egypt without protection by the Italian state after 1949, in confrontation with his experiences in Italy after 1966. “You lived without protection... and then when they [representatives of the state/clerks at state offices] see you they say ‘ah, you’re Egyptian?’” He described the same confusion experienced by Buccetti’s wife. A series of expletives in Egyptian Arabic fell from his mouth, ending with “son of a bitch, *now* you tell me I’m Egyptian? I’m Italian!”¹⁰

It was as though the former presence of Italians in Egypt was directly linked to the Italian State, which had since shed any sense of responsibility for their circumstances and, more importantly, for their sense of identification. Buccetti had argued that residing in Egypt, even for generations, did not imply a separation from Italian history. The extension of Italian protection in Egypt prior to the cancellation of the Capitulations was interpreted by both as having conditioned a sense of coterminous belonging and identification that legitimated presence in both places; to lose that dual presence would be to lose one’s place in this history of encounters. The long list of interactions between the two nations provided by Buccetti legitimated the presence of the Italians of Egypt as Italians *of Egypt*, as members of a community born into a temporal narrative of historical encounters.

⁹ “mortificati di stare in mezzo agli europei... eran’tutt’europei per europei”

¹⁰ “yabn al-sharmûta ba’et t’ûli masri... ana itali!”

As briefly described in the Introduction, I was introduced to one family of Italians of Egypt in Pisa through a mutual contact in Milan. I met with P. Paoletti¹¹ in her house on the outskirts of the city, her husband, the late professor of medieval history at University of Pisa, Marco Tangheroni, had recently passed away. Although Paoletti was young when she left Egypt, she learned much of her family's past through her husband's interest in the family's history. He would spend hours, she described, talking to her parents about their lives in Egypt. When talking with Paoletti about the immigration of her grandfather to Egypt, she turned to me and said,

Your grandfather became American! We never became Egyptian, we always remained italiani d'Egitto... we were italiani d'Egitto, with our culture, through our friendship. Egypt was different from other countries of Italian immigration... Tunisia was nearly savage... pastoral Bedouins... Morocco and Algeria, we won't even talk about them! (non ne parliamo nemmeno) Cairo was a cosmopolitan city (paese)... those who arrived found... an easy world.¹² Yes, it's true that the Arabs were servants (servi), but they were (servi) of a certain level (di un certo livello)! Surely the immigrants' [experiences elsewhere] were different... there's no immigration comparable to the Italians of Egypt because the hosting country was absolutely different from the rest.¹³

To her, the legal histories that prohibited my grandfather (and other Italian emigrants) from maintaining Italian nationality meant that they had also lost their presence in Italian history.¹⁴

Citizenship functioned as an umbilical cord connecting the Italians of Egypt to metropolitan Italy. For others, with this loss of nationality, they became *of* other histories, ontologically separated from Italy. I asked Paoletti what characterized the specificity of their circumstances in Egypt, what conditions had made the Italians in Egypt unique. She mentioned the Capitulations,

¹¹ Interview with P. and A. Paoletti, 28 January 2012.

¹² "un mondo facile, non difficile, locale."

¹³ "non c'è un'immigrazione uguale a quella degli italiani d'Egitto perché il paese di accoglienza era assolutamente diverso da tutti gli altri"

¹⁴ Lilith Mahmoud discusses her own racial status being used in ethnographic encounters as a means to demonstrate something about the inclusiveness of the Massoneria but also revealing the precarious nature of that kind of inclusion (which reminds us more of a Derridian idea of difference as deference). Paoletti draws my own history as a descendent of Italian emigrants into the encounter to illustrate that the maintenance of nationality demonstrates the ontological notion of nationality that is in play. See Lilith Mahmoud, *The Brotherhood of Freemason Sisters* (Chicago, 2014).

not calling them by name but remembering that “certain” legal regimes had consented Italian residents to “act liberally” in Egypt and that these constituted a “structural situation” (situazione strutturale): “we are who we are and they are who they are, but we’re in our country.”¹⁵ The question of nationality went beyond the identity politics of nationalism and was instead tied to the notion that the Italians of Egypt, were still legally in Italy. She then jumped forward in time to the Suez Crisis and said “after ’56... we had to begin paying taxes and using the same courts.”¹⁶ To Paoletti, 1956 marked a transformation that reconfigured the “structural situation,” even though these legal conditions had been slowly transitioned out over a longer period.

As we sat together, Paoletti’s elder sister joined us. P. had invited her because she “remembered more” of their childhood in Egypt (P. left Egypt when she was only 13 years old, whereas her sister was in her late teens). While introducing me, P. told her sister where our conversation had left off. A. Paoletti intervened quickly, “but of course, before the war all of social life was managed (*gestita*) by the *Fasci*... and the schools too, but after the war [the Italian schools] were dilapidated (*scadenti*), they were dysfunctional.” Her sister described how Italian life in Egypt was homogenized under the fascist regime, but with the fall of the regime a divide remained between the Italian residents in Egypt and Italy. She recalled great tension within the community when the Italian state sent new diplomatic representatives after the Second World War. They were figures whose political affiliations were often unknown to the community. A. Paoletti said that Italian residents remained connected to an older system of organizing political and social life that had been eliminated in Italy, but remained ideologically strong among Italians in Egypt. “There was a lot of fear because one didn’t know if [the new representatives] were of

¹⁵ “noi siamo noi e loro sono loro, ma siamo nel nostro paese.”

¹⁶ This reference to structural conditions is interesting; she seems to have a model of socio-historical structuralism reminiscent of Marshall Sahlins’s work.

the right or the left... and the community was a little to the right...”¹⁷ - she was interrupted by her sister who, laughing, said “a little!?” emphasizing the community’s notorious sympathies for the PNF. I asked if there was - or if they remembered - much involvement or discussion of Italians in Egyptian politics. “It was *their* country (paese!)” said A., to which P. added, “It’s difficult, I tried to explain to you... that with respect to work... that’s what Italians cared about, but with regard to Egyptian politics, it wasn’t *their* problem. It was a problem of another part of *their* country (paese); they, the Arabs, dealt with their politics amongst themselves.” This conception of presence, legal histories, and politics, interwoven with diversely signifying uses of *paese*, begins to articulate the boundaries of the world within a world described above by Buccetti. Importantly, this world within a world is one whose boundedness is determined in a particular configuration of inherited and collective historical experience (it is the non-literal lived experience of “l’abbiamo vissuto”). History, in this sense, is what philosopher David Carr describes as a “limiting concept,” it positions what lies beyond experience.¹⁸

At his home in Pordenone, G. Liciardello showed me the medal acknowledging his parents’ contribution to the PNF during the Ethiopia campaign in 1935. I was told to meet with him by another contact in Milan, A. Civiletti (see below). Liciardello said,

one needs to recall that before 1940 there was a crisis in Italy (c’era la crisi in Italia)... there were the sanctions. Therefore, what did Italy do? Give gold to the Patria (date oro alla Patria)! All the families, especially abroad and especially in Egypt, which was quite strongly linked to the *Patria*... they gave [as gifts], they gave gold, money, to Italy to reconstitute the Treasury. The family was totally dry... many were... they had begun to sell everything. They had nothing.¹⁹

¹⁷ “la comunità era un po’ della destra”

¹⁸ David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington, 1986): 89.

¹⁹ “quindi tutte le famiglie, soprattutto all’estero e soprattutto in Egitto ch’era abbastanza [allegato alla Patria]... hanno regalato, hanno dato l’oro, i soldi, all’Italia per ricostituire l’Erario. La famiglia era completamente spezza... molti erano... cominciavano a vendere tutto. Non avevano niente.” Regarding the sanctions, Liciardello probably referred to the limited sanctions

This giving was a form of loyalty that tightly connected Italians subjects to the Italian State (or, at least, to the political regime of the PNF) which many had hoped would provide necessary resources or a solution to the growing problems of unemployment in Egypt, including the loss of autonomy as a national community. As I found in the archives of the Italian Consulates in Alexandria and Cairo, this feeding of state- and party-affiliated institutions was common. Just as Liciardello noted, Italian residents in Egypt had few resources, so it was also to the state that they turned looking for assistance and aid during the slow breakdown of the Italian institutions (see Chapter One). In 1935, hoping to profit from the prospect of new Italian endeavors in East Africa, Giuseppe Leone wrote to the Italian Consul requesting permission to travel to Eritrea, where he wanted to open a small café like the one he managed in Alexandria.²⁰ Several years later, Alberto Coen turned to the consulate after learning that the coffers of the *Fascio* and the *Opere Assistenziali* (local Italian charities linked to the PNF) had dried up. Coen had served as a translator (Arabic-Italian-English) for Rodolfo Graziani between 1935-36 in Ethiopia, but returned to Alexandria unemployed.²¹ Natale Buzzanga, in 1937, pleaded with the Italian Consul to send recommendations on his behalf. As a lawyer, Buzzanga had suffered the consequences of the professional isolation of the Italian community. Unable to find a solution, he wrote directly to Mussolini. He addressed Mussolini both as the “personification of the greatness of Fascist Italy” and the “protective father of Italians,” invoking the same kind of kinship found in other examples of letters to Italian rulers, Buzzanga noted that the only assistance he had taken from the consulate was to secure his children’s education at the Istituto Don Bosco (contrary to his own

placed on Italy by the League of Nations during the Ethiopia Campaign that lasted from October 1935 to May 1936, ending with the Italian occupation of Addis Ababa. Indeed the campaign to raise funds to support the Italian cause was concurrent with sanctions. For more on this see Chapter One.

²⁰ ACGA, “Leone Giuseppe di fu Enrico - cl.1892.”

²¹ ACGA, “Coen Alberto fu Giuseppe 1907.”

French education), and that he separated from his Greek wife, ensuring that he acquired control over his children so that they were not raised “differently from the nationality and religion to which they belong.”²² All of these families appear alongside Liciardello’s in the issue of *Il Giornale d’Oriente* that published an entire issue dedicated to the 7,632 donors from Cairo and the 9,120 donors from Alexandria.²³

I was invited to attend the annual assembly of the Association of Italians of Egypt (Associazione Italiani d’Egitto, AIDE) in Rome. The organization had split from its original incarnation, the National Association of Refugee Italians of Egypt (Associazione Nazionale Profughi Italiani d’Egitto, ANPIE) in the mid 1990s due to conflicts between its members. The organization publishes a small bulletin which includes short “memories” of its members, obituaries, and holds an annual meeting. They have published several volumes based on conferences in which their members present family histories of their relationship to or experiences in Egypt. For many members of AIDE, I represented a valuable resource as an historian affiliated with a university. Some saw themselves as the sole possessors of their history, or better as history’s product, and lacking recourse or means to transmit the import of their “historic” role in Italian and Egyptian histories. Their histories, it seemed, had no “natural” genealogy, moving onto their children and grandchildren, but instead they were intricately linked to the experiences of having been born in Egypt. At the meeting, mundane issues of voting a new advisory board and discussing plans for the forthcoming year dominated the agenda; but, after this business had finished, several of the

²² “che personifica oggi non soltanto l’orgoglio e la grandezza dell’Italia Fascista ma bensì il padre degl’Italiani che ha sempre protetti!”, “diversamente della nazionalità e della religione di quali appartenevano.” ACGA, “Buzzanga Natale.” Date of letter is 25 August 1938.

²³ ACS, SPD-CO 578, “Albo d’oro degli Italiani d’Egitto Donatori alla Patria,” *Il Giornale d’Oriente*, 21 April 1936.

organization's members presented short testimonies and enjoyed cocktails around a display of the publications resulting from the four small conferences they had organized in recent years.

After the meeting, G. de Stefano invited me to his home outside of Rome to introduce me to several of his schoolmates from the Istituto Don Bosco (Salesian school) in Cairo. He began to recount that his grandparents emigrated to Egypt, the men first, from Messina, having found work there as machinists. When the doorbell rang, he turned in my direction and said, “don't feel embarrassed when we greet one another!”²⁴ His friends il Dottore and M. Vitulli walked in and a loud “koss ommak!” (loosely translated as ‘fuck you!’ in colloquial Egyptian Arabic) emerged from all in unison. As de Stefano introduced me, Vitulli exclaimed, “ah, us... in Egypt... good times!”²⁵ Immediately, they sat down and began to debate their pasts in Egypt amongst themselves. Il Dottore said that things went well for the Italian residents only because Egyptians held them in high esteem in relation to the occupying British. Vitulli questioned him and asserted that the alliances were not so determinate. Instead, he argued that any Egyptian sympathy for Italians was a manifestation of awareness that the Italians were a threat to the British. It was a case of *the enemy of my enemy is my friend*. A debate ensued between the two regarding the closure of Italian state schools on the occasion of the Italian entry into the war in June 1940. Il Dottore, who continues to wear a black shirt to the AIDE meetings to honor what he feels is a misunderstood history, claimed that it was an “act of civility”²⁶ that the British allowed Italians to attend school during the war. Vitulli opined contrarily that it was inevitable, “they left the religious schools open because we were 4,000 Italian children, *they had to!*” And, he added, they had permitted *only* the religious schools to remain open because, although they were infused with Italian nationalist sentiment, they were religious missions. He referred specifically to the

²⁴ “non vergognarti quando ci salutiamo!”

²⁵ “ah, noi... in Egitto... era la pacchia!”

²⁶ “atto di civiltà.”

Salesian Don Bosco and Maria Ausiliatrice schools in Cairo and Alexandria, whose intense nationalist-religious education was designed to remediate the fact that, until the late nineteenth century, many Italian families, as noted in an early account by Monsignor Nuti, were “constrained... to turn to foreign religious schools.” Thus, the mission opened after a request by the Associazione Nazionale Italiana to offer an alternative to the secular Italian state schools. The schools, however, remained largely ineffective within the Italian community until the 1930s, when growing unemployment and poverty pushed Italians out of other schools and into the Salesian schools. After the war, when some of the secular schools remained closed, the Salesian schools took on a fundamental role in the education of Italians in Egypt.²⁷

Il Dottore began to tell me about the array of national communities, each with their own institutions, as others before him had done. In describing these, he depicted a relativist pluralism in which one national community barely overlapped with another and all lived their quotidian lives in ideal synergy. Vitulli interrupted him to clarify that opportunities were not equal for all, that on one occasion in the late 1940s, he applied for a job and was immediately turned down by a Greek shop owner because he was Italian. His point was that there was not a harmonious balance between communities; that they were not independent/autonomous, but rather were interconnected in complex hierarchies of power that changed and shifted between the pre- and postwar periods. Moreover, these hierarchies functioned within colonial economies under British influence and within a broader sphere of Mediterranean imperial politics, for him manifested in the alliance or association of Greek subjects with the British Authorities against Italian subjects.

²⁷ See Mons. Igino Nuti, O.F.M. (ed.), *Il Vicariato Apostolico d’Egitto e Le Sue Opere* (Milano 1924), 98, 192. For an excellent analysis of the role of the Istituto Don Bosco in the Italian community see the forthcoming work of Annalaura Turiano, “Le consul, le missionnaire et le migrant: Contrôler et encadrer la main œuvre italienne à Alexandrie à la fin XIX^e siècle.” Another major factor, I would argue, that drove many Italians into the Italian schools was anticipation of departure from Egypt. This will be dealt with in the following ethnographic section.

“Anyways,” he continued, “it wasn’t an act of civility (civiltà) because they [the British] turned the [Italian state schools] into concentration camps (campi di concentramento) for the Italian prisoners... my father was arrested, my mother was left alone with us... you know how much [the Swiss Legation] gave us [during the war]? 5 EGP per month!” The contrasting perspectives of Vitulli and il Dottore were important. The former worked for the Italian broadcast of Radio Cairo during the postwar period, witnessing firsthand the censorship enforced by emerging political regimes, and claimed to have understood the politics of the time as someone without political loyalty, whereas the latter, as noted, donned his black shirt for the AIDE meetings. Flipping through a stack of photographs from Egypt that il Dottore had brought to our meeting, he paused on a portrait of Mussolini and asked me to identify it. I began to say ‘Muss...,’ but was quickly cut off and corrected, “No! Il Duce!” These allegiances were not concrete boundaries. Il Dottore, the self-avowed loyal Fascist, was also employed by the British after the war and claimed that they were, in the end, bearers of civility. He remained attached to the colonial world that Egypt had offered during previous decades.

Having heard repeatedly that the Italian residents were notoriously committed to the Fascist regime or had strong ideological ties to the PNF, I asked, “what about the impact of fascism in the Italian community?” Vitulli responded first: “You see, in Egypt we had the same things as Italy... at school, free books, we had the great Vittorio Stadium, which they [undetermined] now have taken, therefore Italians were dressed as *ballila*, *avanguardisti*, *fascisti*... that’s how we were.”²⁸ He recalled that in every neighborhood, each with its own character, there was a place for the Italians to gather. For example, on his street in Bulaq, *Wabor al-Faransawi*, “they built a church in the Florentine style, which had behind it a club, a theater...

²⁸ “in Egitto avevamo le stesse cose come in Italia... alla scuola, i libri gratuiti, avevamo il grande stadio vittorio, che adesso hanno preso... quindi gli italiani, vestiti da ballila, fascisti, avanguardisti... eravamo così.”

for the Italians that lived there.”²⁹ Indeed, the church Vitulli spoke of provided language instruction in Italian, French, and English and night classes for workers.³⁰ Among the different neighborhoods he noted that Zamalek was “snobby,” while Bulaq/Bulacco was working-class (popolare). And de Stefano interrupted him saying that Shobra, where he had lived, was “more” working-class, and “therefore more Italian.” Il Dottore inserted his voice in the conversation. “When we were boys, there wasn’t an Egyptian technician... we were all Europeans... remember on *Shawarbi* [street in Downtown Cairo] there was Gila who did electrical work, and Fiat, and our firms... the father of [de Stefano] was an electro-technician, the father of [Vitulli] was a capocantiere, my father was an architect, what our parents did in Egypt was great, because Egypt completely lacked technicians... instead for them [the Egyptians] the [high positions] of aristocracy were doctors...”³¹ He then returned to the discourse on the Don Bosco schools, noting that all who had studied there had been successful. My initial question regarding the role of fascism in the Italian community had largely gone by the wayside; it had been subsumed instead in the narration of the “greatness” of the works of the Italian community (“è stato grandioso”), of the contribution to Egypt’s modernity by its members and by the generalized collective of an Italian presence. This “greatness,” however, was not a timeless one; instead it was relegated to a historical past that preceded the generation of Italians of Egypt with whom I met. Il Dottore explained that “the great work done in Egypt was done by the generations of our ancestors.” This work of exalting the contributions of the Italians of Egypt often harkened back to a generation

²⁹ “hanno costruito una chiesa nello stile fiorentino, poi dietro c’era un circolo, un teatro per gli italiani che stavano vicino.”

³⁰ Nuti, *Il Vicariato Apostolico*, 39.

³¹ “quando eravamo ragazzi, non c’era un tecnico egiziano... eravamo tutti europei... ricorda... Shawarby, c’era Gila che faceva lavoro elettrico, poi la Fiat, poi i *firm* nostri... il papa di P. era un tecnico di elettricista, il papa di M. era capocantiere, il mio era architetto, quello che han fatto i nostri genitori per l’Egitto è stato grandioso, perché in Egitto mancava completamente i tecnici, perché per loro, il top dell’aristocrazia erano i medici...”

prior to those with whom I spoke. Generally speaking, the “contributions” of the Italian community were the major infrastructural projects associated with the generation of Mehmet Ali’s reforms, long before the British occupation in 1882 and the large influx of Italian immigrants. There was considerable agreement that the “greatness” of the Italians of Egypt originated in this past. The publications of AIDE reflect this same temporal framework, when speaking of the “cultural heredity” of the Italians of Egypt they draw on the projects conducted by Italians in the mid-to-late nineteenth century and not to events in their own lifetimes.³² In this sense, even the most elderly of the Italians of Egypt considered that “historic” past central to apprehending the value of the Italian community.

L. Diodovic met with me in a quiet office in the State Archives in Rome, where she administers part of the collections. I learned of Diodovic during an interview with a member of AIDE who left Egypt in the mid 1950s when, upon hearing that I was working in the archives, noted that she had a friend there that comes from a family of Italians of Egypt. Diodovic asked me about my research in the archives, and I recounted finding documents regarding the Italian propaganda during the Fascist period (see chapter one). She recalled that her uncle had been arrested around the time of the Italian entry into the war for distributing leaflets (*volantini*) against the British. Diodovic was a child when her family left Egypt in 1957 and had a difficult time remembering details. As we sat together, she called her uncle to confirm what she had told me and described my research to him, at which point he offered to meet personally with me to share his own experiences. He lived in Montesacro, a neighborhood of Rome that filled quickly with Italians from Africa during the postwar years. S. Calabria was born in Alexandria in 1928, where his

³² See for example, AIDE, *L’eredità culturale della presenza degli Italiani in Egitto* (Roma, 2010).

father had also been born in 1891. His grandfather emigrated to Egypt from Castelnuovo, in northern Italy. Calabria said his grandfather left Italy:

as an emigrant (emigrante), he was a tailor (sarto)... I was born in Alexandria, where we lived until 1935 when we transferred to Cairo, where my grandfather lived, on Malaka Nazli street...³³ we lived there together [with another part of the family] until 1940, when the war broke out. They [undetermined] would come, enter the house, and take away [Italian men]... my brother was the youngest internee, 15 or 16 years old, they didn't touch my father because he was elderly and ill.

Calabria specifically concentrated on the shift in his schooling during the war. From 1935-40 he attended the 'Garibaldi' Italian state school, located on the same street as his home and just on the edge of Bulaq and Downtown Cairo, which was closed in June 1940, "[it was] placed under sequester (sotto sequestro) and we went to the Salesians in Rod el-Farag [Shobra, Cairo]." From the Italian entry into the war, Calabria recalled little. The anti-British leaflets he had distributed were written by hand, but he could not remember in what language they were penned. When it was discovered that he and his brother were responsible for distributing them, English soldiers arrived at their house and found the remainder of the leaflets under the boys' mattress. They arrested his brother. "We were all Fascists, the Arabs too... all of the Italians [were] *balilla*, *avanguardisti*... it's not that... [he hesitates] we were just that way, just like here in Italy."³⁴ In his hesitation, Calabria searched to separate "being fascist" from any political culpability. This was common during interviews, emphasizing fascism as a political affiliation that legitimated national identification among the Italians in Egypt and depreciating the history of the Fascist party's violence both in Italy and abroad. The antifascists, recalled Calabria, were in exile.³⁵

³³ today, sharia' gala'a.

³⁴ "non è che qualcuno... eravamo tutti così, come qui in Italia"

³⁵ "stavano in esilio" The historian Leila El Houssi has recently published on the activities of Italian antifascists in Tunisia between the two World Wars. Her work provides an interesting counter to the experiences of Italians in Egypt, where the antifascist movement was minimal. Indeed, during a presentation of her book, the Italian professor, Luigi Goglia, made a statement about how, over his years of working in Egypt and North Africa, he always remained

They had left Egypt, and it was not until the Italian entry into the war that *Libera Italia*, an antifascist organization modeled on Charles de Gaulle's anti-Vichy group *France Libre*, emerged as a presence within the community. He clarified that the individuals who hoped to exit from the camp were the majority of signees onto the movement: "they made an organization, *Libera Italia*... if one wanted out [of the camp], one could sign with them... but they were few, one could count them!"³⁶

Calabria claimed he did not think much about the past in Egypt. His wife passed away several years ago and his brother in 1980. His brother had been an active member of the community of Italians of Egypt living in Rome, helping to organize events and meetings of the precedent of AIDE, ANPIE (the emergence of this organization will be discussed in chapter four). As in Calabria's previous hesitation, he drew a distinction between his past in Egypt and his past in Italy: "it's a second life that we made here... I had to restart everything."³⁷ He paused for a moment, pondering the difference between the moments of the past he had just distinguished, and then said: "it's not that one can complain... it was another life (*un'altra vita*)... it was like a small country/town in a big city (*un paese piccolo in una città grande*)! Here, everything's the same. [In Egypt] there were Greeks, Armenians... the Greeks and Italians were the most numerous..." It was possible to have this kind of sociality, he noted, because there were "points of encounter" (*punti d'incontro*) like the schools and the churches that organized cultural life around national communities. Then, when he came to Italy, he witnessed the coherence that

dumbfounded by the political homogeneity of the Italian community in Egypt. Leila El Houssi, *L'urlo contro il regime: Gli antifascisti italiani in Tunisia tra le due guerre* (Roma 2014).

³⁶ "hanno fatto un'organizzazione, *Libera Italia*... se volevano uscire dal campo, potevano firmare con loro... ma c'erano pochi, si contavano proprio." Indeed, the Italian representatives often did count them and, well into the 1930s, their lists contained fewer than 100 individuals that were considered 'active' antifascists. The British Authorities in Egypt compiled similarly scant lists.

³⁷ "una seconda vita abbiamo fatta qui... ho dovuto ricominciare tutto."

was generated through these “points of encounter” dissolve. They had served to manage a kind of public plurality, at once instilling a sense of coherence within the national communities. He said that the past in Egypt stopped interesting him because he had to stabilize his life in Italy and, losing contact with the schools, churches, and clubs, he also lost contact with that sociality. While Calabria was making a place for himself in the present, what was difficult to come to terms with, he explained, was that in Italy his interlocutors failed to recognize him: “Being born abroad, it’s confusing for others, [they would ask] ‘but you’re Italian?’ Yes, I’m Italian, my grandfather is Italian, my great-grandfather is Italian, even though I’m born abroad... an immigrant is not an immigrant.”³⁸ The historical conditions of colonial Egypt were perceived to have created the possibilities for the Italians of Egypt to exist and to act as a national community.³⁹ As Calabria had it, one could not understand the past through the conceptual categories of the present: “an immigrant is not an immigrant.” Instead, one had to trace back through the past and move through historical time in order to understand what made their presence as Italians of Egypt possible. Without proceeding in this manner, the Italians of Egypt were unintelligible and would be excluded from history, and thus from the present.

L. Diodovic, Calabria’s niece, was born in the same building on Malaka Nazli Street in which he had lived. She recalled that they were the only Italian families in the building; the other families were also non-Egyptians (“eravamo tutti stranieri, non erano arabi”). Echoing the words of her uncle, she said that her family was composed of “cultivated people (*gente colta*)”:

they weren’t educated, they were simple people, emigrants, tailors, shoemakers (*emigranti, sarti, calzolai*)... that is, they were workers (*lavoratori*), they weren’t *of*

³⁸ “sì, sono italiano. Mio nonno è italiano, mio bisnonno è italiano, anche se nato all’estero... immigrato non è immigrato.”

³⁹ Whereas historian Will Hanley attempts to illustrate Alexandria’s “vulgar cosmopolitanism” (“low, unrefined, plain, ordinary (but not obscene) cosmopolitanism”) and thus display the “banality of the nation” and of “national citizenship”, the salient presence of nationalisms in their own vulgar form cannot be ignored. Will Hanley, “Foreignness and Localness,” 19-32.

culture... but they strived *to be cultured*... to maintain themselves... close to this Italian tradition... let's say, to keep themselves close to their roots, because if you mix with the tradition of the place, you lose your roots, you forget, instead they cared [about it].⁴⁰

She stressed that they were not of elite origins, that they held on to their “roots” as emigrants and workers; their sense of being “cultured” (*colti*), instead came from their attachment to or continuation of a national tradition (one whose very genealogy may have been created during their presence in Egypt). That is, being “cultured” meant being educated, and being educated relied on a notion of tradition that had been fostered through participation with other Italian residents in Italian institutions in Egypt. She remembered vaguely that after they arrived in Italy in 1957, each Sunday after Mass, a group of families and friends from Egypt would gather in a park. The parents sat together while the children played elsewhere. Diodovic recalled the sound of the men playing backgammon, but sketchily remembered who the others were. This, she said, was an attempt to maintain their traditions, tracing their genealogy as a particular “national” community through the shared experiences of having lived together in Egypt by creating new “points of encounter” in Italy. In doing so, it added a fold to the story of Italians of Egypt: not only did it attempt to reproduce their practices in Egypt, but it also served to produce a new sociality in Italy, distinguishing them from other Italians.

Diodovic confessed that most of her memories of Egypt were filtered through her father and other, older family members, like Calabria. Impressions of her family's past had accumulated as they sifted through her encounters with others. After learning that Diodovic had been politically active in the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI) during her university years in Rome and specifically with the occupation of public housing (case

⁴⁰ “erano gente colta la mia famiglia... non erano laureati, erano gente semplice, erano emigrati erano sarti calzolai, erano ... cioè gente lavoratori, non erano gente di una cultura... ma cercavano di essere colti... per mantenersi... stretti a questa tradizione italiana... diciamo tenersi stretti alla radice, perché se tu ti mischi con la tradizione del luogo tu perdi le tue radici, le dimentichi, invece, loro ci tenevano...”

popolari) in Garbatella, Rome, in 1968, I asked if the family's experiences in Egypt had entered into her own politics. She replied, "with my father, yes, it's that... he thought colonialism was a good idea..." She did not leave the explanation there, however, and continued, "by means of their [the Italians in Egypt] planning capacity, they were able to give a lot [to Egypt]... but he didn't think this way with bad intentions."⁴¹ Her father used to draw attention to the moment they departed Egypt and, referring to an image of the Egyptian domestic workers crying who had lived with the family, he would say that because of their "mentality" (mentalità) they would "go backwards" (torneranno indietro), "they hadn't learned, in industry and other sectors... the prosperity (benessere) when there were Europeans, it's not there... it was difficult to find a strong Arab business... it was the Europeans that directed (dirigevano)... [My father] would always say that they weren't learning (non imparavano)." The precise wording of "tornare indietro" was repeated during many interviews, always in reference to the effects of departure on Egyptians and most often involving the presence of domestic workers or doormen.⁴² During the late 1960s, Diodovic argued with father frequently, "but it's their land, you went for your interest, not for theirs..." Reflecting on her father's perspective and the position of other Italians of Egypt, she added, "for me it's always a master/ruler (un padrone)." This older generation, she noted, had a sense of nostalgia for "whatever I brought to Egypt,"⁴³ which was part of what she described as an "exaltation" of the *Patria* through the repetition of stories about "their" schools, churches, and "their work" in Egypt.

⁴¹ "attraverso la loro capacità progettuale loro potevano dare molto... ma lui non pensava così nel modo cattivo."

⁴² In the interview with C. Cherini, for example, he said: "quando finalmente... quando noi abbiamo lasciato poi il Cairo, quelle ragazze che lavoravano per mia mamma hanno pianto perché si rendevano conto della situazione, intanto perdevano lavoro intanto perdevano il contatto con l'Europa e si rendevano conto che sarà tornato in dietro..." Interview with L. Morpurgo and C. Cherini, 1 December 2011.

⁴³ "chissà cosa ho portato in Egitto"

The link to colonialism was key to her observations. For Diodovic it was not that life in Egypt was ideally “cosmopolitan,” but rather that the various European national communities were working to sustain their own communities. And this, for Diodovic, made the Fascism that her father knew in Egypt a central cultural form that looked toward a notion of the Italian “homeland” (*Patria*) from a distance; in their conflicts in late-1960s Rome, she described, her father “was attached to the Fascism he had known in Egypt.”⁴⁴ According to Diodovic’s understanding, the very ontology of the Italian presence in Egypt included its own justification, and fascist party propaganda reproduced this even if its *politics* were not seen to have direct or immediate consequences in Egypt. As Berni noted above, the Italians lived *in* and were *of* European communities, often with minimal interaction with Egyptians and saw themselves as outside of Egyptian politics. They brought things *to* Egypt. The fundamental distinction in this colonial logic was that for Egypt to be modern, it had to be European. And, in order for it to be European, the presence of Europeans was necessary. Thus, the national communities played a key role in this narrative, and the churches, institutions, and schools, all allowed by the legal conditions of the Capitulations, were seen as focal points - as “points of encounter” - around which a given community could gather and cultivate a collective identity.⁴⁵ This is not to mention the economic networks that supported these institutions; that Diodovic mentioned her father’s explicit reference to the lack of powerful Egyptian businesses only briefly touches upon the vast world of European domination over the Egyptian economy during the first half of the twentieth century. For Diodovic, instead, the “degradation” of the European sites that her father anticipated was a “testimony that they [Egyptians] *don’t* want them and maybe *didn’t* want them!” But it was also connected, she argued, to this “strong fascist sentiment.” Despite her

⁴⁴ “lui era allegato al fascismo che ha saputo in Egitto.”

⁴⁵ “sai che quando stai lontano dal tuo paese, tutto ciò ch’è dal tuo paese va esaltato... fare scuole cattoliche, scuole italiane... questa era la forza.”

arguments with her father and family members, she said, “when you live history it’s another thing... it’s a beautiful fable... they don’t want to analyze it, when the fascist archives in Rome were first opened, they didn’t want to do this type of analysis, because they had enjoyed its benefits... In my family, there was *this* fascist idea.”⁴⁶

Through this recounting of boundaries of collective belonging, there was a constant interplay between the past in Egypt as it was or had been remembered by individuals (or their relatives) with encounters with Italians (from Italy who, indeed, they commonly referred to using the tautological categorization ‘italiani d’Italia’) in postwar Italy, or with more recent pasts. Often, in conversations it seemed that my interlocutors anticipated responses from me, that they held assumptions that I -- as an Italian-American or as an historian/anthropologist or as someone with experience living in today’s Italy and Egypt -- would have a different idea of what fascism was in Egypt, or in general, and what it meant for these communities to identify as “national communities” during the Fascist period. Other possible trajectories for the historical narrative needed to be cancelled, diverted, or at least left by the wayside.⁴⁷ In other words, they seemed to anticipate responses based on the supposition that I was aware of *another* narrative arrangement of their history. They, instead, narrated their history playing contexts off one another; from a community that was a direct extension of the Italian state, to one whose “culture” was distinct from the State’s policy, to one less (or not at all) appreciated by the postwar state, to one refracted and unrecognized by others who were presumed to be members of the same “Patria”

⁴⁶ “Però quando vivi la storia, è un’altra cosa... una favola è bella... non volevano fare un’analisi... quando hanno cominciato a leggere gli archivi fascisti, non volevano all’inizio. loro non vogliono fare questo tipo di analisi, perché loro hanno avuto i benefici. In famiglia da me... l’idea era *quella* fascista.”

⁴⁷ In some sense, one might think of these as contexts, like Johannes Fabian’s reminder that ‘context’ is always a type of totality through which we interpret anthropology’s subject. Johannes Fabian, “Language, History and Anthropology,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1, 19 (1971): 19-47.

(the italiani d'Italia).⁴⁸ In doing so, the articulation of these refracted contexts amounted to a marked character for the collective, a series of events around which the relations between social actors changed, the end of the Capitulations, the Second World War, and so forth. *Politics* (like those of the PNF and its policies in Italy and abroad) were turned into *culture*, and *culture* was then used to read history and, more importantly, to place the community in history.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ For this reason, Anthony Gorman's recent translation of italiani d'Egitto as Egyptian Italians does not quite capture the complex historical experience narrated by this community. See Gorman, "The Italians of Egypt."

⁴⁹ One can think of Michael Herzfeld's politics of significance here... this idea that the Italians were 'mere' Fascists... also, the work done by the Italians from Egypt is almost indistinguishable from the accusation Herzfeld holds against Huntington and his clash argument. The flattening of temporal/historical processes allows for the production of cultural categories. Michael Herzfeld, "Anthropology and the Politics of Significance," *Social Analysis* 41, 3 (1997) 107-138.

CHAPTER TWO

“The future does not belong to me”: Vanishing horizons and the internment of Italian civilians in Fayed during the Second World War

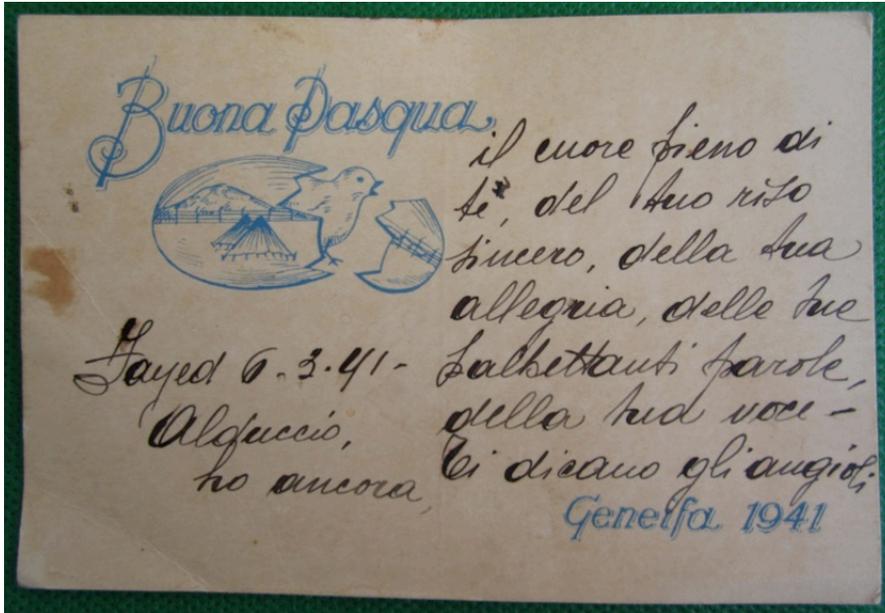


Image 1: Easter postcard, 1941. Personal collection, Loredana Farina.



Image 2: Passaro's sketch. Personal collection, Ladi Skakal.

In 1941, on the occasion of the first Easter holiday in the internment camps in Fayed, where around 5,000 Italian men were being held as “dangerous enemy aliens,” the internees designed a postcard. Postcards were one of the regulated means of communicating with family and friends outside of the camp, isolated in Egypt’s western desert far from Cairo and Alexandria, and they generally passed through the censors with greater ease than personal letters and packages. Under the Easter greeting on the card was the image of an egg, from which hatched a small chick (image 1). The egg itself was decorated with an image of several camp tents, the distinctive fencing that surrounded the camp, and the mountain in the background, a landscape that from late-1940 until 1944-45 was home to many Italian men. On 6 March 1941, Eugenio Farina, an Italian resident from Cairo who will follow us throughout this chapter, sent this postcard to his young wife, with a heart full “of [her] sincere smile [and] lightness.” As time in the camp accumulated, Farina lost this sense of lightness, his - and others’ - existence became heavy and troublesome, marred by the inability to envision a future. In a letter to his wife in 1943, he described feeling impotent in the face of a future. Over the course of four years in Fayed, the innocent chick, hatched from the Eastern egg, became the maddened chicken painted by another internee, Salvatore Passaro (image 2), also blemished with signs of the camp. Passaro’s depiction, done in the final years of internment and to which we will return at the end of this chapter, shows a maddened chicken being strangled by the chain-link fence and crying out against the blond-haired, blue-eyed androgynous personifications of 1941, 1942, and 1943.

The goal of this chapter is to examine the rupture in the lives of the Italians in Egypt that followed Italy's entry into the Second World War and its ensuing implications for the Italian residents in Egypt. Rather than provide a political chronology of the war, in this chapter I seek to understand how the internment was experienced as an event, with particular emphasis on the

contrast it took in relation to the preceding years. With the arrest and internment of the majority of Italian men of working age, this chapter will demonstrate, came the dissolution of any sense of a future. A "horizon of expectation" itself vanished and time was confined to an uncertain and immediate present, both in and outside of the internment camps.¹

The Italian communities were effectively brought to a halt during the Second World War. After the Italian Racial Decrees of 1938, much of the Italian Jewish community - the "Passport Italians" in particular - had withdrawn their support, thus striking one of the important sources of funding from within the community.² A small boycott of the Italian institutions was organized by the Italian Jews, many of whom were previously members of the PNF, and some of whom claimed that the new Racial Decrees should not affect their membership in the party nor their

¹ Camps have largely been dealt with in terms of their spatial characteristics. Most notable in this regard is the work of and inspired by Giorgio Agamben. The focus on space, although important for conceptualizing how the distance and isolation suffered by those within their boundaries (or within the more generalized "spaces of exception") influenced and shaped experiences of the worlds around them, concurrently limits the visibility of other emergent problems associated with this kind of isolation. Moreover, an emphasis on the spatial-theorization of camps has the potential to reify and replicate the "ethnographic present" by locating experience solely in the exceptionality of "the camp" and, in doing so, extracting subjects from their temporal contexts/extensions, which, for the larger purposes of this dissertation, I argue are essential to articulating historical narrative. Instead, I use of "horizon of expectation," derived from the temporal framework of Reinhart Koselleck, to draw attention to the temporal unfolding of experience, even in spaces of exceptionality. See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004).

² Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*; with the sequester on Italian goods following the entry into the war, the British still worried that the Italians might use connections with the Jewish community as means of subverting the restriction and thus wanted, by all means, to tighten the legislation as much as possible, FO371/24605 minutes 5 and 17 July 1940; at the same time, in 1938 Italy had reached a quiet peace with England, with the latter recognizing the Italian Empire in Ethiopia, as some have argued, to keep Europe quiet, weaken the Italian-German connection, and delay war. See Alberto Sbacchi 1975 "Anglo-Italian negotiations for the recognition of the Italian Empire: And Haile Selassie vs. the National Bank of Egypt and the Cable & Wireless Co., 1937-1938." *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, 30 4, 569, 573.

loyalty to the regime.³ Of course, it is unclear precisely what individuals' intentions were in this regard: were they seeking protection by emphasizing their loyalty to the regime or were their genuine sentiments of affinity with the nationalist cause?⁴ In autumn 1939, after further steps to "nationalize" (or, as it is called in Italian documents, to "Egyptianize") the Egyptian workforce, many Italians were laid-off from governmental/state jobs. There was a sense that, although the Montreux Conference set a timeline and transition period away from the Capitulations, the process of nationalization would occur at a quicker pace than previously anticipated.⁵ At the same time that Italians needed assistance through their consulate and the charity organizations, the sources of money were running dry. Many sought a way out of Egypt in the years prior to the Italian entry into the war, money was transferred out of the country, and property was sold.

When Mussolini declared the Italian entry into the war in the summer of 1940, the circumstances of the Italian community in Egypt were again vastly transformed. *Il Giornale d'Oriente* was briefly taken over by a small group of antifascists under the supervision (and

³ Joe Battino *Una famiglia di vagabondi del Mediterraneo* (unpublished manuscript), Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia "Ferruccio Parri" (INSMLI), Milano. Fondo "Joe Battino," 23; Paolo Bagnoli *Rosselli, Gobetti e la rivoluzione democratica: uomini e idee tra liberalismo e socialismo* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1996), 249 (accessed at INSMLI); One of the most vocal and prominent of the antifascists was Maurizio Boccara, who wrote several articles condemning the Italian Racial Decrees in 1938. *L'aurora*, "Italiens, Juifs et Chrétiens cet article est pour vous! Analysons le Racisme Fascist" 29 September 1938, ACCC Boccara Maurizio; ACAE, Silvio Pinto.

⁴ There is a good deal of work on this from the Italian metropole. Enzo Collotti, *Il Fascismo e gli ebrei. Le leggi razziali in Italia* (Bari, 2003), Ilaria Pavan & Guri Schwarz (eds.) *Gli ebrei in Italia tra persecuzione fascista e reintegrazione postbellica* (Firenze, 2001), Ilaria Pavan, *Il podestà ebreo. La storia di Renzo Ravenna tra fascismo e leggi razziali* (Bari, 2006). Still, much remains to be studied about life in the Italian "colonies."

⁵ Italians briefly protested, but to no avail. After losing jobs at the Association Internationale d'Assistance Publique du Cairo, 23 Italian employees filed a complaint about their dismissal, attributing it to Ali Maher's "violent nationalization": "dato che essa fu fondata da italiani in collaborazione con membri di altre nazionalità e che conformemente al Trattato di Montreux le Autorità Egiziane non possono nazionalizzare quest'Associazione che alla scadenza dell'epoca stabilita." MAE, AC 1939, B.321 s.f. associazioni di beneficenza, Consolato Cairo to Legazione Italiana Cairo 20 October 1939.

hesitancy) of the British Authorities. An article of anonymous authorship was published entitled "Italy and Egypt." The article, likely written or overseen by either Fausta Cialente or Angelo Tartagni, two of the few members of the antifascist movement organized only around the time immediately preceding the war,⁶ responded to two speeches given by "eminent Egyptian politicians," warning of the results of an Italian victory and an Italian occupation of Egypt, where "it would impose its regime, as it has done in other conquered countries, it would demolish the integrity of the people and it would deliver a fatal blow to their liberty and independence." The article proceeded to dissect the myths of Fascism, deployed -as it described- to oppress "Italians" and "Italian subjects" alike. An English victory, argued the author/s, would mean instead the protection and "maintenance of the liberty of the Egyptian people."⁷ Although this language may have been commonplace in prewar Egypt, it certainly was not common within the Italian community itself. The attempts of the antifascists to reissue *Il Giornale d'Oriente* with this different agenda were met with hostility and enflamed members of the Italian community, many

⁶ In regard to the antifascist movements in Egypt, there is little written. Most who appeared, during the war, to organize publications and activities of antifascists were coming from outside of Egypt. For example, the leaders of *Giustizia e Libertà* in Egypt, Stefano Terra and Enzo Sereni, were brought in to found an antifascist press. For the reasons described in Chapter One, it was nearly impossible for a solely Italian antifascist group to be organized and the few that did exist were international in nature; according to Cialente, they were majority Greek, French and Swiss. Many who declared themselves antifascists were previously members of the Fascist Party, thus rousing suspicion in the eyes of the British. Both Paolo Bagnoli and Fausta Cialente, whose house was a known "den" of antifascism, wrote about the opposition antifascists faced with the British in trying to broadcast. This included Cialente's and Laura Levi's antifascist broadcasts in Italian on Radio Cairo. For more on this see Guido Valabrega "Note sulla partecipazione di italiani ai movimenti antifascisti in Egitto negli anni trenta e quaranta" *Italia contemporanea* 203 (1996) 293-304 (accessed at INSMLI); Fausta Cialente "L'azione degli antifascisti italiani in Egitto" in Manlio Brigaglio (Ed.) (pp.85-88) *Resistenza, liberazione nazionale e prospettiva mediterranea* *L atti del seminario internazionale per il XXX anniversario della Liberazione* (Edizione Scientifiche Italiane, 1975); Bagnoli, "Roselli," 245; Battino, *Una famiglia*, 53-54.

⁷ "vi imporrebbe il suo regime, come ha fatto in tutti i paesi conquistati, demolirebbe l'integrità del popolo e porterebbe un colpo mortale alla sua libertà e alla sua indipendenza." CEA, "Italia e Egitto," *Il Giornale d'Oriente*, 18 August 1940.

of whom saw it as national betrayal.⁸ This shift in public discourse on Fascism marked a rupture in what had previously circulated in the Italian newspapers, enabled by the Capitulations and the strict control that the consulates and *Fasci* had enforced over the Italian press. To deepen this rupture, Anglo-Egyptian Authorities sequestered radios and limited movement for Italians, requiring them to carry a “red card” at all times; all means were taken by the British to ensure a divide between Rome and Egypt. That rupture - the subject of this chapter - affected every aspect of Italian lives in Egypt. While its attempt to dismantle the structures of feeling that Fascism promoted among its followers may have failed, it did stymie their ability to envision the future.

I. Entering the War

On 10 June 1940, when Mussolini announced the Italian entry into the Second World War against the allied forces, the Italian community in Egypt, under an Egyptian regime that had effectively capitulated to the British with the 1936 Treaty of Alliance, found itself on precarious grounds. Notwithstanding Mussolini’s assurances that Egypt would not be “drawn into the war,” the lives of the Italians of Egypt were vastly transformed in the coming months and years. Mussolini’s declaration was not an unanticipated event, and instead it confirmed rumors that had circulated in Egypt.⁹ For several months, Italians had been filtering money out of the country; the

⁸ Bagnoli, "Roselli," 246.

⁹ Some observations of this can be found in the diplomatic diaries of Serafino Mazzolini and Sir Miles Lampson; others in the documents of the Italian consular archives in Alexandria and Cairo. Mazzolini’s diaries can be considered especially useful because his death occurred before the end of the war, before he had a chance to review or edit them. See Gianni Scipione Rossi *Mussolini e il diplomatico: La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini, un monarchico a Salò* (Rubbettino, 2005); Miles L. Killearn *The Killearn Diaries (1934-1946)* (London: Sedgwick & Jackson, 1972) and M.E. Yapp *Politics and Diplomacy in Egypt: The Diaries of Sir Miles Lampson, 1935-1937* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); It seems that rumors had also circulated that stated that Italian and American residents in Egypt would be asked to repatriate en masse by their respective governments, and were widespread enough to be publicly dismissed in

Italian consulates were “buying” Egyptian currency from the Italians in Egypt and then crediting their Italian accounts with Italian lire. An accelerated rate of repatriation occurred simultaneously. The British feared that the accumulated funds of the Italian consulates could be used for Fifth Column activity.¹⁰ Moreover, land registers showed “very large sales of landed property in Egypt by Italians” and the British suspected that the Italians who owned land were transferring it to friends of other nationalities so as to avoid sequestration.¹¹ It was commonly known among Italian residents that, since the Ethiopia Campaign in 1935, the British had proposed an “internment en masse” of Italians in Egypt.¹² Between the 6th and the 8th of June, Italian consular staff had all prepared extensive lists of the institutions under their protection and administration. These included schools, the Fasci, dopolavori, hospitals, charity/assistance associations, the Dante Alighieri Society (and its offices in different cities), veterans’ associations, several large companies, and the Chambers of Commerce.¹³ In essence, the entire structure of the Italian community. This was likely in preparation for the imminent declaration of war, knowing that in the aftermath of the 1936 treaty, the British would enforce strict measures over the Italian community as “enemy subjects” (as they had already done with the much smaller German community).

Although Mussolini’s speech never arrived in Egypt, the declaration set into action a definitive shift in the lives of Italian residents, transforming the worlds they had come to know since the 1920s. It was quickly followed by a diplomatic break between Rome and Cairo.¹⁴ On

Il Giornale d’Oriente. CEA, “Gli italiani ed americani residenti in Egitto non sono stati invitati a rimpatriare,” *Il Giornale d’Oriente*, 21 May 1940.

¹⁰ FO 371/24605, Empson to Rasmy Bey 7 June 1940.

¹¹ FO 371/24605, Empson to Rasmy Bey 8 June 1940.

¹² Achille Vogliano, “l’Egitto e Noi,” *La lettura: rivista mensile del corriere della sera*, 40 10 (1939), 750-757.

¹³ MAE, AC 1940, b.335 6-8 June 1940

¹⁴ CEA, *Giornale d’Oriente*, 11 June 1940.

11 June, Serafino Mazzolini, then Minister of Italy in Egypt, wrote: “[o]ur situation here is one of the strangest. Relations are still normal but we’re isolated from the world. Deprived of communications, surveilled by the police. During the night, arrests of many Italian compatriots were carried out.”¹⁵ On the evening of the 10th, the Egyptian police, under the administration of the British authorities and following the state of siege enacted at the declaration of war, arrested at least 150 Italians in Alexandria.¹⁶ Arrests were made without distinction of race, as noted by Giuriati, the Italian Consul in Alexandria. Around 3am, Egyptian troops surrounded the consulate and occupied the Italian institutions, expelling Italian guards in the process. Telephone lines were cut and calls interrupted until the afternoon of the 11th. Overnight, between 550 and 630 arrests were made in Alexandria, Cairo, and in the Canal Zone, while an additional 411 Italians were rounded up in the provinces.¹⁷ Italian civilians rushed to the consulate to understand what was happening. It was rumored that the Italian schools were to be converted into holding camps for the prisoners; Italian bank accounts, pensions and assets were frozen and placed under sequester.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Mazzolini ordered the burning of the consular archives.¹⁹ Some of the most prominent members of the Italian community were being held in the Gabbari prison in Alexandria and arrests, it was noted, were conducted in a “violent and unprovoked”

¹⁵ “La nostra situazione qui è delle più strane. I rapporti sono ancora normali ma siamo isolati dal mondo. Privi di comunicazioni telegrafiche e telefoniche, sorvegliati dalla Polizia. Durante la notte sono stati eseguiti molti arresti di connazionali.” Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 276.

¹⁶ MAE, AC 1940, b.335 Consolato Generale Alessandria to Legazione Italiana Cairo 11 June 1940.

¹⁷ FO371/24605 Lampson to FO 11 June 1940.

¹⁸ MAE, AC 1940, b.335 Consolato Generale Alexandria to Legazione Italiana Cairo 11 June 1940, 12 June 1940.

¹⁹ “Ho dato ordine di bruciare gli archivi riservati,” Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 276. Unfortunately, we do not know the extent of destruction. However, there are notations in some folders within the consulate archives - both in Alexandria and in Cairo - that note certain files were “lost” or “destroyed” in 1940. These observations were likely made in the reordering of the archives and reopening of the consulates following the war, when families and individuals needed to recommence their interactions with the Italian authorities.

manner: “[i]n some cases the arrest happened violently and under the threat of arms by the police agents, even without provocation by compatriots, who always maintained proper behavior.”²⁰

The internment of Italians was the final stage of the British Tombak plan, which, since 1935, had as its eventual outcome the disarmament, arrest, and internment of Italians. Tombak had been impossible until 1936 due to the restrictions under the Capitulations.²¹ British fears were centered around the large number of organized, young Italians; they noted a clear difference between the general attitude of a “moderate” elder generation of Italians and Italian Jews and the aggressive mentality of the Italians in their twenties and thirties.²² The enactment of the Tombak Plan consisted of three steps: 1) the registration of all Italians; 2) the internment of Italians; and 3) the formation of an Anglo-Egyptian committee to manage the internment. The British had decided that around 12,500 Italians were to be interned indefinitely. Of these, 5,800 were members of the PNF while the remainder included males of military age (see Table 1, “others”) or loosely defined “suspects.”²³

Locality	Numbers	Place of internment	Arresting authority	Responsible for guard
Cairo	2500 Fascists 2000 others.	Bulaq School and Italian Stadium.	Egyptian police with Egyptian Army	Egyptian Army.

²⁰ “In alcuni casi l’arresto è avvenuto in forma violenta e con minaccia a mano armata da parte degli agenti della polizia, pur senza alcuna provocazione da parte dei connazionali, che hanno sempre mantenuto contegno corretto.” MAE, AC 1940, b.335 Consolato Generale Alexandria to Legazione d’Italia Cairo 12 June 1940; the names of those imprisoned - at least the more ‘important’ within the sphere of the Italian administration and institutions - include: Turini, Fiore Miraglia, Rufini, Rocchi, and members of the Italian Jewish community, Ezio Pinot, Silvio Pinto, Aldo Ambron, Roberto Almagià, Levi Emilio, Oscar Greco, and Ugo Dessberg. For more on this see Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 374-375.

²¹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 377.

²² Petricilio, *Oltre il Mito*, 374.

²³ For studies that represent other examples of these “shifts” wherein a population is deemed an enemy because of its national affiliation see Regina M. Delacor, “From Potential Friends to Potential Enemies: The Internment of ‘Hostile Foreigners’ in France at the Beginning of the Second World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35 3 (2000).

			assistance.	
Alexandria	2000 Fascists 3000 others.	Littorio School & tentage in grounds of same.	Egyptian Police with Egyptian Army assistance.	Egyptian Army.
Suez Canal Zone (Port Said, Ismailia, Suez)	800 Fascists 650 others.	Bulaq School and Italian Stadium, Cairo.	Egyptian Police with British Army assistance.	Egyptian Army (Cairo).
Provinces	500 Fascists 500 others.	Local arrangements.	Local Mudirs.	Local Mudirs & Egyptian Army where necessary.

Image 3: Administration of arrests and internment of Italians.²⁴

In 1938, Serafino Mazzolini had been sent to replace Ghigi as the Italian Minister in Egypt. Initial discussions to place Piero Parini in the same role failed due to British protest because of his influence and intense involvement in Italian emigrant communities and his powerful role in the Fascist government, as well as the hostile position he had taken towards the British during the Montreux Conference.²⁵ While Lampson had judged Ghigi pleasant and politically amenable, the sudden change and the rumors of his replacement with Parini led him to conclude that “Italian machinations in Egypt were greater than ever.”²⁶ With the help of British pressure, the Egyptian government rejected the proposal for Parini’s appointment and Ciano sent Mazzolini instead. Top among his priorities was to study the diplomatic and civilian possibilities in the case of war, for nothing had been set in stone regarding Egypt and the Italians residing there.²⁷

²⁴ This list was circulated immediately after the declaration of entrance into the war. WO201-2409, Wavell to Lampson, 12 June 1940.

²⁵ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 387. Specifically he occupied administrative positions of great authority such as the Secretario generale of the Fasci all’estero and the Direttore generale of the Italiani all’estero e scuole.

²⁶ Yapp, *Politics and Diplomacy*, 902.

²⁷ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 398; Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 91. See also the Ciano diaries which detail his reasoning for selecting Mazzolini and the duties that the latter would assume

Diplomatically, Fascist leadership in Rome anticipated that Mussolini would bring the anti-British opposition concretely on the side of the Italians.²⁸ Rome sought a compromise with the Egyptians on Article 7 of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, which stipulated that in the case of war, the Egyptian Government would aid the British.²⁹ These goals were to be met through the connections of the Italian community and the Egyptian Monarchy, especially at a moment when the delicate balance of power in Egypt may have favored an Italy that was becoming a more viable regional power.³⁰ For a period following the so-called Easter Accords of 1938, in which the British sought to eliminate the potential of an Italian-German alliance, the aggression of the Fascist regime's propaganda in Egypt diminished.³¹ Towards 1939, Italian attentions shifted towards Yemen and Iran for several months, bringing quiet on the Egyptian front. Shortly afterwards, however, propaganda resumed at full force. It continued to highlight the contradictions in Egypt's status as an "independent and sovereign nation" and its restrictions

once in his role in Egypt specifically related to Italy's possible entry in the war. Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937-1943* (Roma, 2014).

²⁸ De Felice, *Fascismo e l'Oriente*, 79.

²⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 392.

³⁰ For more on the historical link between the Italian Monarchy, Fascism, and the Egyptian Monarchy/Royal Family and its use in Italian propaganda see Anna Baldinetti *Orientalismo e Colonialismo: la ricerca di consenso in Egitto per l'impresa di Libia* (Istituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 1997); see also, for the politico-diplomatic intricacies of this moment, Laila Morsy, "The Military Clauses of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, 1936," *IJMES* 16, 1 (1984) and "Britain's Wartime Policy in Egypt, 1940-42," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, 1 (1989), 67.

³¹ De Felice describes this as Mussolini using Italian-Arab politics as "moneta in scambio" in order to reach some agreement with the British, De Felice, 21, 40; De Felice tends to depict the situation in a more haphazard way, arguing that Italian policy shifted from "instrumentality" to a central role in political-military strategy only with Mussolini's declaration of the entry in war, but I think Nir Arielli is closer to the point when he sees Italy's WWII ambitions as a "logical outcome" of the policies of the preceding years. Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy*, 163.

under the Anglo-Egypt Treaty.³² Above all, Italy wanted a break between the British and the Egyptian regimes.³³

After Mussolini's speech, Mazzolini's first action was to discuss matters with Ali Maher, Prime Minister of Egypt, who had proven a trusted ally of the Italian minister. On the evening of the 10th, Mazzolini met with Maher. Presumably, Maher expressed his support for the Italian cause and his desire to end the British military presence in Egypt. Mazzolini wrote privately that Maher had assured him that were Italian forces to attack the British troops at Abukir (east of Alexandria), "we won't move and we won't be moved (emotionally)"³⁴ A short time thereafter, Lampson met with Maher, who reported hesitantly that Mazzolini had inquired as to whether his expulsion was imminent, seemingly worried for his own well-being. Maher reiterated to both that Egypt would act in agreement with the 1936 treaty and proceeded with the implementation of the final phase of the Tombak plan. Lampson however was wary of Maher's stance; he wrote, "on the whole Aly Maher was not unresponsive, but I feel one has to watch him all the time."³⁵ Indeed, historians have suggested that from 1940 to 1941, at least, Maher may have had in the works an uprising against the British.³⁶

On June 12th, Maher forewarned Mazzolini of the impending rupture in diplomatic relations between Italy and Egypt. Accordingly, Italian offices in Cairo alerted the consulates in Port Said and Alexandria that it was expected "from one moment to another" and, when it was to

³² See, for example, the article published by Radio Bari's editor, Said Sciartuni "Egitto e Italia nel Mare Mediterraneo," *La vita italiana: rassegna politica pubblicazione mensile de 'il regime fascista'* 27, (1939); And, when Achille Vogliano, came to Egypt to interview the King, he wrote of the striking icons of this "friendship" adorning the walls of Abdine Palace. Achille Vogliano, "l'Egitto e Noi."

³³ Romain H. Rainero *La politica araba di Mussolini nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Padova: CEDAM, 2004) 72, 104;

³⁴ "noi non ci muoveremo e non ci commuoveremo!" Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 276.

³⁵ Killearn, *The Killearn Diaries*, 118-119.

³⁶ James Jankowski *Egypt's young rebels: "Young Egypt" 1933-1942* (Hoover Institution Press, 1975): 85.

occur, the representatives and officials were not to leave the premises until they received word from the foreign power that was to assume Italian interests in Egypt.³⁷ Each office was requested to submit lists of individuals (magistrates, teachers, bankers, employees of the insurance and navigational companies) who wished to be repatriated immediately. On the 10th, the Legazione d'Italia in Bern, Switzerland, officially appealed to the Swiss Federal Political Department (DPF), asking if, in the case of eventual conflict between Italy and Egypt, the Swiss authorities in Egypt would assume "the protection of Italian interests in Egypt."³⁸ The Swiss chargé d'affaires in Egypt, Alfred Brunner, visited Mazzolini, confirming that the Swiss Legation would assume - as requested - control and administration of Italian interests in Egypt.³⁹ While the repatriation of Mazzolini and other diplomats was anticipated, the minister insisted that a select group composed of prominent members of the Italian community accompany him, including some who had already been arrested, such as the directorship of propaganda in Egypt and *Il Giornale d'Oriente*.⁴⁰

Accordingly, the Egyptian government published proclamations 57 and 58, rendering trade with Italy and Italian citizens illegal and introducing the procedures for sequestration of Italian assets in Egypt.⁴¹ Maher made an important protest on behalf of the Italians, which outraged Lampson. He wrote:

The dangerous elements have already been interned and a strict organization has been established, and adequate measures taken against the Fifth Column. I believe that a massive internment of 12,000 people, mostly employees/clerks or artisans, whose absence would be felt national labor economy, cannot be recommended. If, however, it is

³⁷ MAE, AC 1940, b.335.

³⁸ SFA, E2001D 1000/1553 BD:103 [img_2190]

³⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 409; the Swiss also assumed the responsibility of Italian interests in Syria, Palestine and Turkey.

⁴⁰ Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 277.

⁴¹ FO371/24605, Proclamation n57, n58, Journal Official (Cairo).

established that the salvation of the country depends on the adoption of such a measure, I will not fail to examine the scope and modalities in a timely manner.⁴²

Maier brought attention to the fact that the internment of such a large number of Italians, most of whom were engaged in small enterprises and artisanal trades, could have a devastating outcome on the already fragile economy of the country. Maier gave a similar discourse to the Egyptian parliament when he urged that Cairo be designated an “open city,” thereby nullifying the British intentions to censor the Italian community.⁴³ In a meeting the following day, on the 17th, with King Faruk, Lampson made it clear that Maier “must go and must go quickly.”⁴⁴ He advised the king “not to get misled by the dangerous and tortuous advice” of the Prime Minister.⁴⁵ His veiled threats were enough to spark almost immediate controversy about Maier’s dismissal; it was said that either Hassan Sabri or Afifi Pasha would replace Maier, described by Mazzolini as “the one or the other English creatures.”⁴⁶

Awaiting news on his own departure from Brunner, Mazzolini and the others remained “imprisoned” in the Legation.⁴⁷ Early in the morning of June 23rd, Mazzolini and a number of the individuals indicated by him, including 33 who were already arrested, were granted permission to depart Egypt via rail through Palestine, Syria and Turkey.⁴⁸

⁴² “Les éléments dangereux ayant été déjà internés et une stricte organisation ayant été établie et des mesures adéquates prises contre la cinquième colonne, j’estime qu’un internement massif de 12,000 personnes, en grande partie des employés ou artisans, dont l’absence serait ressentie dans l’économie du travail national, ne saurait se recommander. Si, toutefois, il est établi que le salut du pays dépend de l’adoption d’une mesure de ce genre, je ne manquerai pas en temps opportun, d’en examiner l’étendue et les modalités.” WO201-2409, Maier to Lampson 16 June 1940.

⁴³ For more on Maier’s struggle with the Egyptian Parliament and the British Authorities, see Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 406-47.

⁴⁴ Killearn, *The Killearn Diaries*, 120.

⁴⁵ Killearn, *The Killearn Diaries*, 121; Morsy, “Britain’s Wartime Policy,” 66.

⁴⁶ “l’uno o l’altro creature inglesi” Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 278.

⁴⁷ Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 279.

⁴⁸ Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 276-278.

By the end of the month, Ali Maher's government and the Italian diplomats were out of the way of the British authorities, and the arrest and internment of Italians civilians continued. Ali Maher had been replaced with Hassan Sabri, held in high esteem by the British. By June 21st, over one thousand Italians were being held throughout Egypt. A process was initiated whereby the prisoners were transferred from Egyptian prisons and the Italian schools used as holding grounds, to camps in the desert along the Suez Canal; namely, in Fayed. A delegation from the International Red Cross was sent to visit the camps to ensure that they conformed to the 1929 Geneva Conventions. As a result of this visit and IRC intervention - which found, for example, in the Moascar holding camp, "intolerable and inhumane conditions"⁴⁹ - some were transferred to other camps. On a large scale, the Italian community was brought to an abrupt halt; a conservative sequester was applied to all Italian accounts and Italians were forbidden from signing contracts. Brunner, requesting the immediate release of 5,000 EGP from the sequestered Italian accounts, wrote:

several decrees prohibit a large part of commercial activity of Italian nationals and establish a sequester on Italian property... a large number of indigent Italians already existed in Egypt and those created by the new measures [make the question of] immediate assistance grave.⁵⁰

After being forwarded to Rome through the Italian Legation in Bern (Switzerland), the Italian government responded with noted anger:

the Fascist government has been informed that the Egyptian Government proceeded to intern around 1000 Italian citizens in concentration camps and that various decrees emanating from the E[gyptian] g[overnment] prohibit a large part of commercial activity of Italian citizens and establish a sequester on Italian goods/property in Egypt... These provisions, given that between Italy and Egypt there does not exist a state of war, are in absolute contrast to international rights and thus the Fascist government--while it presents

⁴⁹ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8 telegramme de la Legation Suisse de Cairo 16 July 1940.

⁵⁰ "plusieurs décrets interdisant grande partie activité commerciale des ressortissants italiens et établissent séquestre biens italiens Égypte...vu grand nombre indigents déjà existants et ceux créés par nouvelles mesures question assistance immédiate est aigue." SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8 subfolder "Italienische Interessen in Aegypten" 21 June 1940.

a formal protest for the applications that until now has been enacted of the aforementioned Egyptian provisions and formulate reserves for reparations of the consequent damages--requests the revocation of the provisions, pointing out that otherwise it would be forced to adopt retaliatory measures.⁵¹

II. No waste of time - Arrest and Isolation

Nearly one month after Mussolini's declaration, the new Egyptian Prime Minister, Hassan Sabri, and Lampson together organized an Anglo-Egyptian committee in accordance with the Tombak plan. The committee's aim was to: 1) recommend to the Egyptian government which categories of Italians were to be interned; 2) decide on how they will be arrested; 3) arrange the preparations of camps; 4) classify the arrested to facilitate distribution to the internment camps; 5) arrange guarding of the camps; and to 6) advise the Egyptian government on "the eventual repatriation, permanent detention or evacuation elsewhere of the internees."⁵² Lampson saw these as urgent matters. Aware that Fayed, where internees were being held temporarily, was deemed unfit for civilian internees, his fear that any delay could put the British at risk of subversion was greater.⁵³ Arrests continued, despite British complaints about the "drag" of the Egyptian police. Sabri, although closer to the British on most political matters than Ali Maher, hesitated about the establishment of the camp in Fayed. He was concerned about its distance from the families of the Italian prisoners. Lampson disagreed, as the British ambassador

⁵¹ "Il Governo Fascista è stato informato che il Governo Egiziano ha proceduto all'internamento di circa 1000 cittadini italiani in campi di concentramento e che vari decreti emanati dal Governo Egiziano proibiscono in gran parte l'attività commerciale dei cittadini italiani e stabiliscono il sequestro sui beni italiani in Egitto... Detti provvedimenti, atteso che fra l'Italia e l'Egitto non esiste stato di guerra, sono assolutamente in contrasto col diritto internazionale e pertanto il Governo fascista - mentre presenta formale protesta per l'applicazione che sinora è stata fatta dei predetti provvedimenti egiziani e formula riserve per il risarcimento dei conseguente danni - chiede la revoca dei provvedimenti stessi facendo presente che altrimenti si vedrebbe costretto ad adottare misure di rappresaglia." SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8 subfolder "Italienische Interessen in Aegypten" Legazione d'Italia Bern to Dipartimento politico federale Divisione degli interessi stranieri 12 July 1940.

⁵² WO201-2409 Lampson to Sabry 10 July 1940.

⁵³ WO201-2409 Lampson notes 5 July 1940, Lampson to Sabry 7 July 1940.

viewed the immediate internment of Italians as “a matter of extreme urgency for security reasons.”⁵⁴

Brunner saw the measures taken by the British as extreme, but found it difficult to argue his case. First and foremost, complained Brunner, there was almost complete lack of an international law upon which he could base claims for the internees: “In the absence of any legislation regarding civilian internees... I could get that they are in principle and in analogy placed under the benefits of the provisions of the conventions concerning prisoners of war signed at Geneva on 27 July 1929.”⁵⁵ While trying to relieve the pace of arrests in July 1940, he observed the complete paralysis of the Italian community. Most men of working age had already been arrested. The impossibility of finding work for those not interned and the toll the absence of income took on the community necessitated expansive efforts on behalf of the Swiss Legation to provide aid to the community of around 60,000 persons.⁵⁶

The reality of internment was one that would eventually affect all Italians, especially those whose lives were already unraveling as a result of the politico-economic shifts of the 1930s. Salvatore Caccioppo, a carpenter who lived with his wife, mother-in-law and children on Dardar Street⁵⁷ was provided assistance from the consulate throughout the 1930s for the schooling of his three daughters - he supported seven people. Caccioppo had a small carpentry shop with three or four workers, but was unable to secure work. The staff at the Italian consulate administering his request observed that he and his family lived in the “the most squalid misery.”

⁵⁴ WO201-2409, Lampson to Sabry 7 July 1940.

⁵⁵ “En l’absence de toute législation concernant les internés civils...j’ai pu obtenir que ceux-ci soient en principe et par analogie mis au bénéfice des dispositions de la Convention relative aux prisonniers de guerre, signée à Genève le 27 juillet 1929.” SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8, Brunner to Minister of Division des Interests etrangers DPF 20 September 1940.

⁵⁶ SFA, E2001D 1000/1553 BD:13, confidential report from Brunner to La Division des Affaires Etrangères du Département Politique Federal 10 July 1940.

⁵⁷ Also known as darda’a in Arabic. The street was highly populated by working-class Italians in the neighborhood of Attarin.

On the 13th, Caccioppo was arrested and then sent to Fayed where he remained until 1944.⁵⁸

Within a month of his departure from Alexandria, his last son was born. Aware of the devastating repercussions of internment and the disregard for age and condition, some individuals pleaded to the Swiss Legation to have their particular cases exempted.⁵⁹ Umberto Russo, 45 years old, supported his wife, children and in-laws - nine people total - onto which was added his own parents after his two younger brothers, Giuseppe and Armando, had been interned at Fayed. He wrote to the Swiss charge d'affaires:

With intent to adjust his business affairs, the undersigned obtained a permit to travel to Cairo from October 6 to 16 before being interned.... the undersigned asserts to be of... impeccable conduct, from all points of view [and] has never belonged to any political party nor was occupied with politics... regarding his special situation, Mr. Consul General, the undersigned asks immediate support in being exonerated from internment in order to continue to provide the necessary support of five children, his wife, and his elderly parents.

Russo's small shop, in the square in front of St. Catherine's Church in Alexandria, just around the corner from his home, was his main source of income, from which he contributed around 50 piastres on a yearly basis to the official Italian welfare fund, *Ente Opere Assistenziali*, money that was redistributed into the community and provided assistance for other families such as the Caccioppo's.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ ACAE, Caccioppo Salvatore - classe 1897.

⁵⁹ Undoubtedly, there were more protests than there are records of. The few that I have found come from the personal registries in the Italian consular archives in Alexandria and Cairo. It is unknown how they - addressed to the Swiss Legation - made their way to these files, but they are irreplaceable. Traces of that moment of limbo, of anticipation and fear of the potential effects of internment could have on a community already suffering great economic hardship.

⁶⁰ "A fin de pouvoir ajuster un peu ses affaires le soussigné obtenu un permis de se rendre au Caire depuis le 6 au 16 Octobre avant d'être interné... le soussigné peut affirmer de la façon la plus absolue d'être de conduite, irréprochable sous tous les ponts de vue. Il n'appartient ni a jamais appartenu à aucun parti politique, et ne s'est jamais occupé de politique.... Vous ayant exposé sa situation speciale, monsieur le Consul General, le soussigné vous prie instamment de bien vouloir l'appuyer afin qu'il puisse, étant exonoré de l'internement, continuer à assurer le soutien indispensable de ses 5 enfants de sa femme et de ses vieux parents [sic]" ACAE, Russo Umberto - classe 1896.

Others sought repatriation, fearing the looming repercussions of the war. One might imagine too that the reporting in *Il Giornale d'Oriente* of Mussolini's and Ciano's formation of the "permanent commission" for the return of the Italians abroad in the late autumn of 1938 stirred those who, for economic reasons, had already begun to reorient their lives towards an eventual "return." The newspaper's portrayal of the 20 years of Fascism as culminating in the closing of the "sad book" of emigration and welcoming Italian workers to develop the "internal potential" of the Patria coincided with the increasing impossibility for Italians to remain in Egypt.⁶¹ Although many did in fact return,⁶² the process was not so easy. Unable to find work for several years and with the war in Europe escalating, in spring 1939, Virgilio Santoro's multiple requests for repatriation went unanswered. Within eight months of Italy's entry into the war, Santoro was arrested from his home on Saba'a Banat Street (Rue des Soeurs) and interned in Fayed.⁶³

⁶¹ CEA, *Giornale d'Oriente* "l'Italia imperiale accoglierà tutti gli Italiani all'estero che desiderino rimpatriare" 20 November 1938, "Il richiamo" 3 December 1938. In many of the articles, emigration was portrayed as a "condemnation" of the regimes that preceded Mussolini and the great return or "rimpatrio" as the successful reconstruction of the Italian subject (in the cult of the Duce style). One article teleologically rewrote the objectives of the PNF: "istruire i fratelli lontani nel nuovo credo della Patria; fondere le loro volontà in una compattezza morale e politica; offrire ad essi protezione, solidarietà, amore; trasformarli tutti in uomini nuovi, in Italiani di Mussolini, solidi, sani nel corpo e nello spirito, generosi, ardenti." *Giornale d'Oriente* "Il rimpatrio degli italiani: una bonifica compiuta" 13 December 1938; for more on the "richiamo" of Italians abroad from the emigrant communities see Annunziata Nobile "Politica migratoria e vicende dell'emigrazione durante il fascismo" *Il Ponte* 30 11-12 (1974), 1333.

⁶² Agatone interview 18 March 2012.

⁶³ ACAE, Virgilio Santoro.

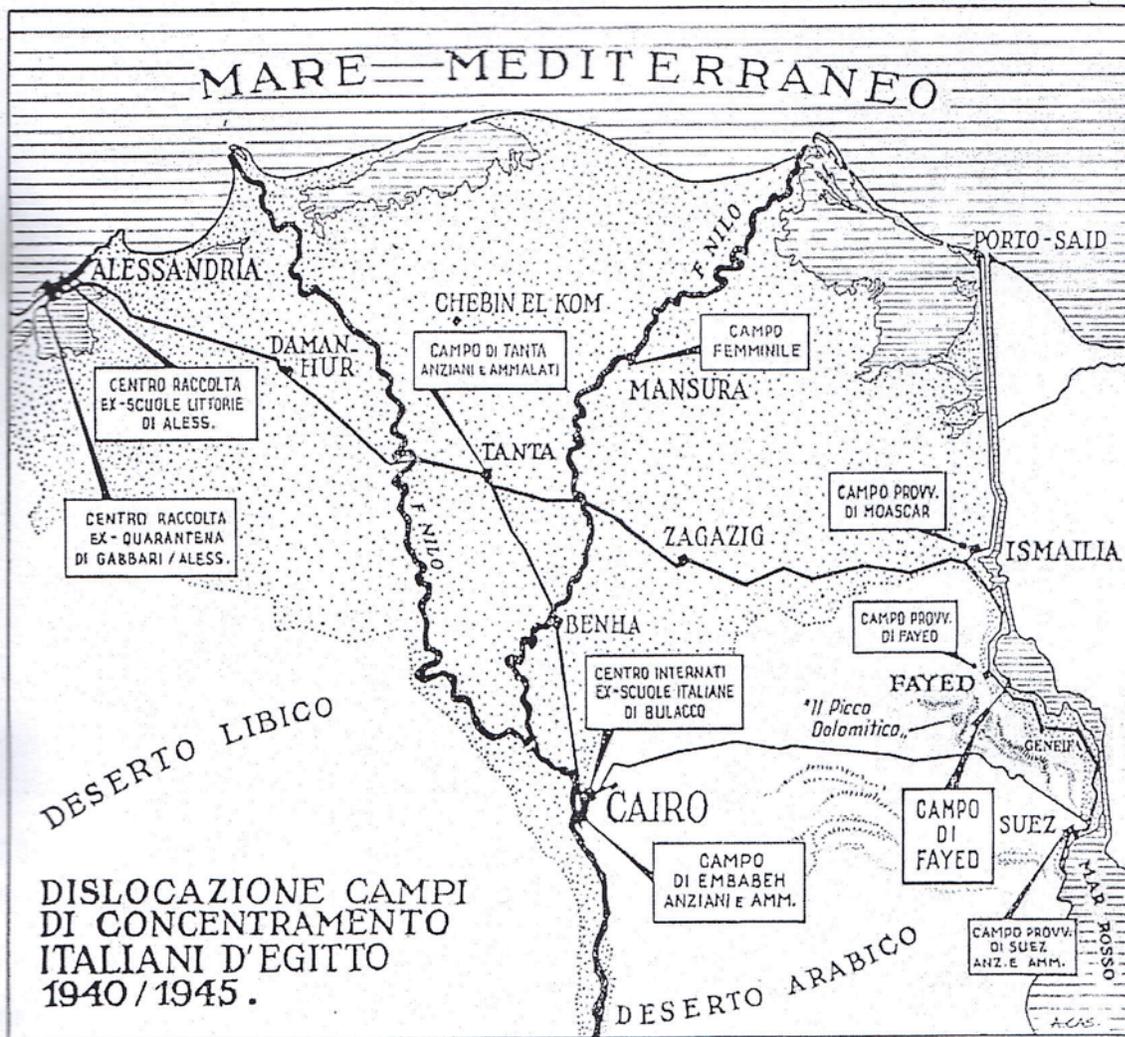


Image 4: Map drawn by Albino Caserta (source: ANPIE, 28).

The Fayed camp, on the edge of the Bitter Lake west of the Suez Canal, was to become the home for most civilian internees for the duration of the war (image 3). Following the protest of the International Red Cross with regard to prisoners being held at the nearby Moascar camp, dangerously close to a British airstrip and thus a potential target for attack (in contradiction with the 1929 Geneva Conventions), internees were relocated to Fayed, where preparations had only

recently begun to turn the grounds into a viable camp.⁶⁴ The Moascar camp had housed around 470 persons, despite that its maximum holding capacity was around 160.⁶⁵ Most of the internees there came from Suez, where - presumably because of its proximity to the Canal - arrests were immediate and all-encompassing. Only two days after the declaration of war, 60 percent of the males had been arrested, “taking into account neither [the] advanced age nor [the] unstable health conditions of compatriots.”⁶⁶

British authorities were aware that Fayed could hold around 2400 internees, but the Anglo-Egyptian committee hoped to double the population within months of Mussolini’s declaration.⁶⁷ The committee agreed to arrest all males in “good health” from ages 18 to 45 and all official members of the PNF from ages 18 to 60.⁶⁸ They were determined to be “potentially dangerous Fifth Columnists.” By mid August, with only around 1,334 arrested, Lampson wrote with noted disappointment “...that although more than two months have elapsed since Italy entered the war, such a relatively small number of Italians have been interned.”⁶⁹ Decisively, as events unfolded in the Mediterranean, Lampson expressed, “the necessity for this action [the

⁶⁴ Albino Caserta *Italians of Egypt During the Second World War* (ANPIE, 2009): 27.

⁶⁵ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8, Brunner to Minister of Division des Interets etrangers DPF 20 September 1940.

⁶⁶ “senza tener conto né dell’avanzata età né delle malferme condizioni di salute di alcuni connazionali“ MAE, AC 1940, b.335 Vice Consolato Suez to Legazione Cairo and Consolato PS 12 June 1940 “situazione collettività Italiana di Suez”; a list of names, birthdates, and professions shows that on the first night of arrests the group of internees was perhaps one of the least stratified (as compared to the arrests in Alexandria, for example). These include 37 mechanics, 27 employees, 6 ship captains, 6 electricians, 6 marittimo, 6 retirees, 2 merchants, 2 guards, 2 carpenters, and one driver, banker, barber, welder, fuochista, engineer, naval machinist, marinaio, palombaro, and saldatore (totaling 106).

⁶⁷ WO201-2409 Tomlyn notes 4 July 1940.

⁶⁸ Exceptions were made in the case of known Fascists. However, these lists seem to number very few. Attempts to discern who and how many individuals were included in these lists have been rather difficult. The Italian State kept track of prominent antifascists (or those who were ambiguously labeled as contrary to the regime), but at the most these numbers hardly amounted to 100 individuals. See MAE, AP Egitto (1931-45) b.33. Similar lists, with the recurrent names, appear in British archives, FO/371/24634/1947.

⁶⁹ WO201-2409 Aide Memoire 15 August 1940.

arrest of all Italian males] has now become even more imperative in view of the imminent possibility of an attack on Egypt by the Italians.”⁷⁰

Fayed was to hold the younger, unmarried Italians, while those married and with children/families were to be maintained in camps closer to the urban centers (this however was never put into practice). Exceptions to these categories were only made in the case of “known” anti-fascists. While several categories were excluded altogether - Italian Jews, Dodecanese, Albanians, Ethiopians and Libyans - any one of these exceptions was quickly cancelled if the individual was perceived to be a “committed” member of the PNF. The British military urgently accelerated the arrest rate to around 200 per week, quickening the pace at which Fayed filled:

It was agreed that it was not only unnecessary but [a] waste of time, for the Committee to consider the case of each individual Italian. The Egyptian authorities would proceed with the internment of Italians on agreed lines and according to agreed categories, with the proviso that any case could be examined by the Committee at the request of any one of its members. The general idea is to keep the older Italians with family ties in the camps at Cairo and Alexandria, and for the younger men to be sent to Fayid, which would, in fact, be the camp for the Canal Zone and provinces.⁷¹

Protests were quite insignificant in the larger framework of British efforts. In fact, Lampson worried that an arrest rate of 200 per week was insufficient: “Even at this rate, a month will elapse before the potentially dangerous elements are interned; and even this delay, in present circumstances, is a serious matter.”⁷² As the 200 to 280 individuals in the holding stations were transferred to Fayed, new rounds of arrests took place.⁷³

⁷⁰ WO201-2409 Lampson to Russel Pasha 13 September 1940.

⁷¹ WO201-2409 Tomlyn notes 14 July 1940.

⁷² WO201-2409 Aide Memoire 15 August 1940.

⁷³ Published sources on this are few - one can hear these stories either in the oral histories of surviving internees or in the Albino Caserta’s account of the internment published by ANPIE and in the diary (which circulates among Italians) of the Maltese priest, Castaldi, who was arrested and interned for professing pro Fascist propaganda.

By September, Alexandrian police were bringing in roughly 500 Italians per week. In Cairo, however, the police were “hesitant” and arrests were proceeding at a much slower rate.⁷⁴ Fayed’s population had grown to around 3,138 by the end of the month.⁷⁵ By mid-October, the camp population reached capacity.⁷⁶ It became clear that even with extensive preparation, the capacity of the camps would not meet British needs. To address this, British authorities proposed transferring between 12-15,000 Italians (interned men and their families) to India. When Egyptian authorities opposed “turning over” 15,000 Italians to the British authorities to have them sent to India, Lampson attributed this to the Egyptian authorities’ “amour propre” and the persisting problems of an Egypt that sought its own autonomy within this triad. According to the Egyptian regime, the reasoning rested on the fact that Egypt and Italy were not at war with one another.⁷⁷ The Egyptian police grew more restrained in their arrests as they worried about the conditions of “destitute [Italian] women and children” within the cities.

Any sympathies from within the Egyptian government seem to have been lost when, in November, Italian air raids struck Alexandria. On 13 and 18 November, Italian bombs destroyed 80 houses, 72 were left seriously damaged and around 200 persons were injured in Alexandria (this included parts of the Italian consulate -mostly broken windows and some damage to the outside walls- which raised questions as to whether the attack was intentional so as to destroy documents). Around 50 people were fatally wounded.⁷⁸ While giving a speech to parliament in which Sabri had planned to address the raids, he suddenly died. Rumors of Ali Maher being his

⁷⁴ WO201-2409 Lampson to Russel Pasha 13 September 1940.

⁷⁵ WO201-2409 unnamed 29 September 1940.

⁷⁶ WO201-2409 Lampson to Mansell 15 October 1940.

⁷⁷ WO201-2409 Lampson to Halifax 5 November 1940.

⁷⁸ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:10, s.f. “Bombardement de villes égyptiennes par les italiens. Utilisation des biens sequestres italiens pour dedommager les victimes,” Brunner to DPF 2 December 1940.

replacement animated the British to read the riot act to Faruk. They were quite pleased, then, when Hussein Sirry became the new Prime Minister.⁷⁹

After meeting with Sirry, Lampson wrote that he was “not disposed to let things go at that and [was] going to make Italians pay for [the bombardment].”⁸⁰ The Egyptian Government decided to withdraw from the sequestered Italian funds to aid those affected by the air raids, a move the Italian Government in Rome vehemently protested, noting that their targets were all “objectives of military use.” While the Palace seemed to have accepted this and thought an Axis victory imminent, Sirry’s government would not let this go unchecked as the act provoked indignation from the Egyptian population.⁸¹ The Foreign Ministry in Rome warned that if such actions would be taken, the Italian Government would utilize frozen Egyptian assets in Italy, but this never came to fruition.⁸² By 5 December the Egyptian Government had already withdrawn 15,000 EGP from the sequestered Italian funds.⁸³ Acknowledging that the Italian assets were not sufficient to support the expense of internment and now with the Egyptian authorities drawing from the sequestered funds to aid those affected by the air raids, the British offered to pay the cost of the internment as a means of “inducing a sensitive Egyptian Government to agree to [more firm British control over the internees].”⁸⁴ Arrests accelerated following the air raids.

⁷⁹ Morsy, *Britain’s Wartime Policy*, 77-79; see also Albert Viton “Britain and the Axis in the Near East,” *Foreign Affairs* 19 2 (1941): 370-384.

⁸⁰ FO371/24605, Lampson notes 23 November 1940

⁸¹ For more on the balance of power between the Egyptian Government and the Palace in relation to Axis military advances, see Morsy, “Britain’s Wartime Policy,” 73, 76.

⁸² SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:10, s.f. “Bombardement de villes egyptiennes par les italiens. Utilisation des biens sequestres italiens pour dedommager les victimes,” Legazione d’Italia (Bern) to DPF 9 December 1940.

⁸³ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:10, s.f. “Bombardement de villes egyptiennes par les italiens. Utilisation des biens sequestres italiens pour dedommager les victimes,” DPF to Legazione d’Italia (Bern) 17 December 1940.

⁸⁴ FO371/24605, Lampson 25 November 1940, 26 December 1940.

During the consolidation of the smaller holding camps in early September, Fayed's population went from 450 to 2,510, producing serious administrative problems for the Swiss charge d'affaires.⁸⁵ By the end of the month, 3,500 to 4,000 men were in Fayed while arrests of Italians continued.⁸⁶ Brunner vocalized his concerns about the frequency of arrests, observing that the conditions of the immediate arrest did not represent the same "threat" spoken of by the British - including men of ages 70 and older and the ill.⁸⁷ As Fayed filled, Brunner questioned the efficacy and the long-term implications of the internment.

The arrest and internment, for Italians, was a confounding experience, especially as many Egyptian guards and police were perceived to have sympathized with Italy and its anti-British position.⁸⁸ Reports that the Italians mocked British troops when they were nearby, jeering and catcalling were matched with a growing frustration by the lack of authority shown by the Egyptians guards in the camp. During the first days of Sunday visitation, the British authorities observed almost total disregard for control. Camp headquarters suggested, "I know it is not our responsibility but perhaps we ought to ginger up the Egyptian army authorities."⁸⁹ Lampson blamed the first death in the camp - an internee who died as a result of a heart attack - on the carelessness of the Egyptian guards. Although members of the Egyptian Government did initially express concern regarding Fayed's distance from the cities and the families of internees, Lampson warned about the possible circulation of information "about which should not be in the possession of enemy aliens" during the camp visits. In November, he went so far as to prohibit

⁸⁵ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8, Brunner to DPF 20 September 1940.

⁸⁶ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8, télégramme (Brunner) 27 September 1940.

⁸⁷ E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8, Brunner to DPF 15 January 1942

⁸⁸ For more on the relations between the internees and the Egyptian guards during the initial months of internment, see: AIDE *La vita degli Italiani in Egitto durante il periodo bellico 1940-1945* (Roma: Genestampa s.r.l. 2010); Caserta *Italians of Egypt*.

⁸⁹ WO201-2409 GHQ (Foster) 6 October 1940.

visitors until the camp was under “strict control.”⁹⁰ A crucial part of this entailed blocking the information arriving in Egypt through radio and other means; both in and out of the camps radios were forbidden in Italian homes. Visits to the camps were also forbidden, until January 1941 when the Anglo-Egyptian committee decided that each internee would be allowed visitors every five weeks. This would keep the flow of visitors to around 300 persons every three days.⁹¹ It was also a compromise of the internees’ demand of *at least* one visit per month. Isolation was enforced - the internees were detached from the worlds of the cities and from the events and news of the war.

To alleviate the insufficient space in and management of the camps, and after the discussions of transferring the internees to India fell through, the British began to push for the repatriation of Italians. Brunner also saw this as an ideal solution, however arrangements never got off the ground as none of the parties involved could agree on the nature of the repatriation (questions such as, who would provide the ship, who would provide the protection, and would internees/citizens be exchanged and where, hindered the process). In November, this “probable repatriation” of the internees was discussed among internees. Rumors circulated throughout Fayed, and internees, with excitement, anticipated repatriation with their families. Many indeed had longed for repatriation in the years preceding the war but were unable to afford it. After the Civil Command discussed the idea in early November, however, and talks on the diplomatic level had disintegrated, repatriation was never again addressed by the authorities. As Piero Castaldi, an internee at Fayed, described it: “a new/another delusion” (*una nuova delusione*) struck the internees and compelled many to begin planning “another type of liberation... escape!” (*un’altra specie di liberazione... la fuga!*).

⁹⁰ WO201-2409 Lampson to Sirry 23 November 1940.

⁹¹ WO201-2409 Lampson to Eden 20 January 1941.

For Lampson, it did not matter where the Italians were held, he wrote when responding to attempts but the Egyptian authorities to find a less conspicuously flawed location, only that “they were interned and interned quickly.” Discussions of finding another location also faltered and dissolved.⁹² Arrests continued in spite of the fact that Fayed was determined unfit for long-term internment of civilians by the Egyptian Government, the International Red Cross, the Swiss Legation, and by the internees themselves.⁹³ In autumn 1940, Eugenio Farina, among the first arrested, described the camp to his wife for the first time, writing: “the air I breath seems arid and solemn... an indefinable oppression like a malaise that leaves a knot in the throat, and I am nearly possessed by the irreducible will to cry.”⁹⁴ Nearly 20 percent of the internees were considered “non-suitable” for the conditions of Fayed and prone to medical risk, and as winter approached new needs and financial means were required to ensure the internees’ well being.

By the winter, Fayed was more organized. It was divided into 21 smaller camps - called “cages” by the British and housing between 250 and 280 internees - each of which was headed by a civil commander that was voted in by his fellow internees and then approved by the British military office.⁹⁵ His job was to “maintain order and discipline” within the smaller camp; and each local camp commander was overseen by the Civil Commandant for the entire Fayed camp, Ubaldo Musso. Internees, however, were told that they all were under the sole authority of British officials and personnel, Egyptian officials, and the guards and sentries around the camp. Disobedience was to be punished with a 28-day detention in a “prison/surveillance” camp within

⁹² See the work of Erik Schewe for more on the administrative struggled between the Egyptian and British authorities during the Second World War. Eric A. Schewe, “State of Siege: The Development of the Security State in Egypt during the Second World War.” Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Michigan (2014).

⁹³ WO201-2409 notes from conversation with Ahmed Bey Seddik 25 November 1940.

⁹⁴ “l’aria che respiro mi pare arida e grave... Un’oppressione indefinibile come un malessere fà groppo con un nodo alla gola e quasi una volontà di piangere mi possiede, irreducibile.”

⁹⁵ Caserta, *Italians of Egypt*, 32.

Fayed. A strict schedule dictated life: 6:30 am wake-up; 8:30 am breakfast; 9:00 am roll call and reordering of the tents; 12:30 pm lunch; 4:30 pm tea; and at 10:15 pm all were to be silent for the night, apart from an occasional (“if necessary”) nightly roll call. Camps were inspected daily by the local civil command at 10:00 am following the reordering of the tents. The camp regulations, signed in late November 1940, covered all aspects of camp life. Regulating the lone method internees had to communicate with the outside world, Regulation 27 explicated “that which can and cannot be written”⁹⁶ in correspondences that internees were allowed to receive and send (through a censor). They were permitted to refer only to “affari privati” or commercial interests in which they were directly involved; pieces of books or other publications/documents were to be neither “suggested” nor “referred to”; use of code and stenographic symbols was forbidden; and the correspondence was not to include any illustrations, designs, or photographs.⁹⁷

III. “The continual vision of tents...” - Time as Frustration/Frustrated Time

Until now, this chapter has looked into the camps from outside. This is in part a question of sources and in part an outcome of that which has been presented/unfolded above. As noted, the break was one that severely unhinged networks of communication and disrupted the flow of information that had flourished throughout the 1930s. After the Italian diplomatic staff left Egypt, Cairo was detached from Rome and the only correspondence with Rome was through the Italian Legation in Bern. Archival documents from this period are also limited; the filtration of information from the Swiss Legation in Cairo, to the DPF in Bern, to the Italian Legation in Bern, to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, and back again, has left only hints of what the initial period of internment was like. Brunner’s small team struggled to manage the

⁹⁶ “Cio che può e non può essere scritto.”

⁹⁷ The details of the regulations come from a document reprinted in AIDE, *La vita degli Italiani*, 92-98.

massive and impoverished Italian community, especially as it became clear that Fayed was taking on a quasi-permanent form and an end to the war was not near. Capturing a view from inside, during the years of internment, and a sense of the isolation from the outside world (and of the Italians in Egypt from Italy) requires first and foremost a sense of historical imagination, the difficult scaffolding of its reconstruction symptomatic of the transforming circumstances experienced by the Italian subjects in this period. Using the reports prepared by the Civil Command, Brunner's correspondence and reportage with the DPF in Bern, the diary of Pietro Castaldi, the letters of Eugenio Farina to his wife, Isabella, in Cairo, and the paintings and sketches of Salvatore Passaro, the remainder of this chapter will attempt to flesh out that historical experience. These traces thread together the narrative of the fading horizons over the duration of the Second World War.

Following the Italian air raids, the British severely limited family visits to the camps. Over the first months in Fayed, Eugenio Farina wrote regularly to his wife in a small notebook (one that he would eventually give her during one of his three escapes). His letters were written in rough pencil, the date always followed with the fascist notation ("7.10.1940 A[nno] XVIII E[poca] F[ascista]"). In October 1940, Farina described the continual flow of "new internees" coming from Cairo and Alexandria. He wrote that some of them thought life at Fayed to be like camping, there was a sense that the internment would not endure long (albeit he and others had no clear indication of what would end it): "to some, this life isn't unpleasant."⁹⁸ There was no news coming into the camps and, because the letters were censored and examined, it was difficult to understand what was happening outside. Newspapers and periodicals were strictly prohibited and any discovered in the packages and letters sent to the internees (including

⁹⁸ "Ad alcuni questa vita sembra non dispiace."

clippings) were confiscated.⁹⁹ Both Farina and Castaldi wrote of the British spreading rumors about the war to confuse the internees, insinuating that the information that did circulate was always marred with uncertainty.

Perhaps one of the few opportunities to acquire greater insight, before winter 1941, was through fleeing the camp. Attempts to flee Fayed were frequent and many successful - often ending with the internee simply being arrested again and sent back to the camp. Castaldi recorded in his diary that until around December 1940 many of the Egyptian guards were complicit in these incidents, allowing or even assisting the internees to flee by, for a few Egyptian pounds, turning a blind eye. In December, a mass escape was organized with the Egyptian guards: “the Christmas festivities were approaching, they were days of nostalgia, in which one felt the more stirring need for freedom, the need to have one’s loved ones close, and the continued vision of tents, posts, chain-link, became more nightmarish than ever.”¹⁰⁰

Between 8 and 9am on 3 February 1941, once the routine of the day had already begun, a taxi driven by a Greek driver arrived at Fayed carrying two fugitive Italian prisoners. Believing there was an accord between the driver and the British Authorities - and perhaps responding to provocation by the driver himself, as Castaldi recorded that he had “cursed Italy, its King, Mussolini, and the internees in general” an insult that was presumably added to by an Egyptian guard standing at a distance observing the occurrence¹⁰¹ - a dispute began. Internees from the adjacent camp joined the altercation. The dispute unfolded around the Military office in camp 11, during the morning hours when internees were allowed free movement within the larger structure

⁹⁹ AIDE, *La vita degli Italiani*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ “Le feste natalizie si avvicinavano, erano giorni di nostalgia, in cui più vivo si sentiva il bisogno di libertà, il bisogno di aver vicino i propri cari, e la continua visione di tende, pali, reticolati, diventava più ossessionante che mai.”

¹⁰¹ This claim is made in the diary of Castaldi, who recorded that the driver, on his way from the head office, had insulted and cursed at a group of on looking internees.

of Fayed. Egyptian sentries were out of sight, while the internees took turns insulting the driver. In the midst of the growing crowd, an unidentified internee smashed the window of the Greek's taxi, stirring the confrontation, and the car was overturned and set ablaze. Around 200 internees were estimated to have participated in the incident.¹⁰² The British Commander along with some of the Civil Command (from other sources it seems that only the main civil commander, Ubaldo Musso, was present) ran to the scene and ordered all internees to return to their "cages." Egyptian guards were doubled around the camps.

Accounts of the incident diverge at this point. Ritter, the member of the Swiss Legation assigned by Brunner to monitor the camps and sent to investigate the incident wrote that by 10:30am, the camp "returned to a relative calm although some nervousness, noises, and cries could be heard."¹⁰³ Both Castaldi's and the British authorities' accounts noted that in the immediate aftermath, tempers remained agitated. The increased concentration of Egyptian sentries had little effect and some internees continued to circulate, insult the lingering guards and authorities, and demolish parts of the chain-linked fencing, ignoring orders and warnings from the guards. Around 11am, the British Colonel was discussing the morning incident with Musso, when several shots were fired. British reports claimed that attempts were made to disarm an Egyptian sentry, and that the shots were fired as warnings to disperse the internees.¹⁰⁴ Castaldi, instead, described that the first shot, fired not into the air but towards a group of internees, struck Guglielmo Falorni and, upon hearing the discharge, the Egyptian trumpeter signaled to fire, thus

¹⁰² E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. "Italie en Egypte," Brunner to DPF (attached report by Ritter) 5 February 1941.

¹⁰³ "rentrenerent dans un calme relatif bien qu'une certaine nervosité et des bruits et des cris pouvaient être entendus." E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. "Italie en Egypte," Brunner to DPF (attached report by Ritter) 5 February 1941.

¹⁰⁴ FO371-27406 Lampson 20 February 1941.

initiating what was around 10 minutes of “general and savage shooting.”¹⁰⁵ Two were killed. Falorni died from a shot that penetrated his heart; the second, Angelo Caruso, suffered a fatal wound to his cranium. Official reports and Castaldi’s account described that Caruso, on kitchen duty that morning, had come to see what was happening after hearing the first shot. Approaching the group, he was struck and collapsed to the ground, where, despite his attempts to stand up, he was shot repeatedly, even after he was visibly dead. This took place in full sight of many internees.¹⁰⁶ During those 10 minutes, seven others were critically wounded and four suffered minor injuries. Unable to determine who gave the order to fire, Ritter had the impression that a general sense of panic among the Egyptian guards had provoked the shooting spree.

More telling of the different perspectives on internment than the incident itself are some of its interpretations. British Authorities concluded - in an inquiry conducted by a team of British and Egyptian sources and described in Castaldi’s diary as “theatrical” and “staged,” a point of view likely shared by other internees - that the cause of the incident was the regularity by which internees disobeyed and ignored Egyptian sentries. The “court of inquiry” judged that repeated subversion had left the internees with “complete contempt for their guards.”¹⁰⁷ They considered the events of 3 February “... the immediate and direct outcome of disorderly and insubordinate conduct on the part of the internees and that the Egyptian troops involved were subjected to deliberate provocation by elements among the internees.”¹⁰⁸ The Swiss report, prepared with the assistance of Musso and other camp representatives, concluded that the threat may have been exaggerated by all parties, but that a culprit was not to be found. Similarly, Castaldi, after

¹⁰⁵ “sparatoria generale e selvaggia.”

¹⁰⁶ ACAE “Caruso Giuseppe du Arcangelo - cl. 1876.”

¹⁰⁷ FO371-27406 Lampson 20 February 1941.

¹⁰⁸ FO371-27406 Lampson 20 February 1941.

concluding that the “court of inquiry” had failed to address any of the real causes of the day’s events, noted the impossibility of placing blame:

...from the tragedy of 3 February, the English put the blame on the Egyptians, the Egyptians on the English, the internees on one or another, but no one of those internees wanted to put his hand on his own conscience and ask himself: if in our camps there were fewer hotheads, lousy heroes, violent and thoughtless ones, would that tragedy have happened?¹⁰⁹

Brunner visited the camp later that month, where he was given a clandestine letter from some of the internees - two lawyers - which brought attention to their isolation, the brutal conditions of the camp, and the strict measures taken following 3 February. They formulated their petition for Brunner’s intervention on two articles of the Geneva Conventions of 1929: article 9 on the circulation of prisoners within the camp, which had been forbidden; and article 46 on collective punishment for individual acts.¹¹⁰ In his own account, Castaldi wrote that he had inquired about the regulations of the camp in relation to the Geneva Conventions after the incident, but that the two documents (one on the regulations and the other on the Geneva Conventions), which had been available in the camp’s small library, had both suspiciously disappeared. According to Castaldi, these regulations were subject to debate between the Egyptian and British Authorities - as is steadily confirmed in Brunner’s own tribulations on the problems of managing the internment from outside.¹¹¹

Both Brunner’s and Ritter’s reports were forwarded to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome. The “isolation” of prisoners mentioned above was the greatest point of

¹⁰⁹ “Della tragedia del 3 febbraio gli inglesi facevano cadere la responsabilità sugli egiziani, gli egiziani sugli inglesi, gli internati sugli uni e gli altri, ma nessuno di tali internati volle mettersi la mano sulla coscienza e chiedere a se stesso: se nei nostri campi vi fossero meno teste calde, eroi da strapazzo, dei violenti e degli incoscienti, tale tragedia sarebbe avvenuta?”

¹¹⁰ E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. “Italie en Egypte,” report given to Brunner by the Civil Command of the Geneifa Camp (Musso, Arabia, Benassi) 21 February 1941.

¹¹¹ E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. “Italie en Egypte,” Brunner to DPF 15 January 1942; E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. “Italienische Interessen in Aegypten,” Brunner to DPR 20 September 1940.

contention. The lack - or initially limited number - of visits seems to have been foreseen to some degree. Eugenio Farina wrote to his wife on 1 January 1941, complaining of the distance, and mentioned that rumors in the camps circulated that visits will no longer be conceded: “a distance that resembles a landscape of the worst bitterness invades my soul... I fear that they won’t allow us to see one another. It would kill me.”¹¹² Farina described the internees’ sense of “abandonment” in the camps. Despite its anticipation, it seems that the experience of distance and isolation from families was among the most harrowing affective elements of internment. The seclusion was said to have pushed many internees to both physical and psychological limits.¹¹³

Italian authorities in Rome called on Brunner to continue pushing the Egyptian Government:

...the draconian and inhuman provisions that limit to only one visit every six months by the internees’ families resident in Egypt, the inadequate facilities of Fayed, certainly not prepared to hold such an imposing number of internees etcetera... *could produce special climates/moods and it would take only one simple word, a simple gesture, a simple glance to provoke incidents perhaps even more severe than what has already occurred on 3 February.*¹¹⁴

The events of 3 February 1941 did not fundamentally change anything - the British finally won their battle with the Egyptian Authorities¹¹⁵ over the control of the camps, Egyptian sentries were replaced with Indians, talk of repatriation was silenced and life for the internees continued at its hopelessly stagnant pace. Visits remained limited, repeated protests were made to Brunner from

¹¹² “una distanza come un paesaggio di amarezze peggiori invade l’anima mia... Temo che non ci concedano (di vedere). Mi farebbe morire.”

¹¹³ ASDMEA, AP Egitto (1931-45) B33, “Organizzazione politico-militare dell’Egitto.” 1942.

¹¹⁴ “Il draconiano e inumano provvedimento che limita a una sola volta ogni sei mesi le visite agli internati da parte dei loro familiari residenti in Egitto, l’inadeguata attrezzatura del campo di Fayed, non certo sistemato per raccogliere un numero così imponente di internati ecc., *possono determinare speciali stati d’animo e basta una semplice parola, un semplice gesto, un semplice sguardo per provocare incidenti forse anche più gravi di quello già avvenuto il 3 febbraio* [emphasis mine].” E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. “Italie en Egypte,” MAE via Legazione d’Italia (Bern) to DPF 17 March 1941.

¹¹⁵ For more on this see Eric Schewe, “State of Siege.”

within the camps leading Brunner to make an urgent plea to Sirry in May 1941, in which a complete cessation of visitation since December 1940 was implied.¹¹⁶

In early May 1941, the camp structure was modified; Ubaldo Musso was replaced with Francesco Buccianti. At the same time, camp life underwent another crackdown following a small incident that resulted in the death of one Italian by an Indian guard. On 23 May, without notification, internees were made to wait outside while a team of British soldiers searched the camp, recovering six cameras, binoculars and electric lamps. Internees complained that personal items were stolen. A report by Buccianti noted that “different personal objects and certain sums of money were also seized.”¹¹⁷ These objects included watches, a compass, and a lighter - Buccianti added, however, that complaints were exaggerated and the belongings had already been returned.¹¹⁸ It was this “moderation” that made him a favorable interlocutor for the Swiss and, presumably, the British.¹¹⁹

Buccianti himself noted suspicion within the camp regarding his position; his every “gesture [was] misinterpreted.” This, he believed, was because he had worked for the British before the war and was well known in British circles. Despite being a member of the PNF, early in his “administration” of the camps, internees saw him as an opportunist. Notwithstanding any suspicions about Buccianti’s fidelity among internees, Ritter, in autumn 1941, reported a considerable improvement in the morale of the camp following Buccianti’s appointment as representative.¹²⁰ Buccianti organized Fayed with a military-like discipline that was not

¹¹⁶ E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. “Italie en Egypte,” Legation Suisse 7 May 1941.

¹¹⁷ “Différents objets personnels et des sommes d’argent furent aussi saisis.”

¹¹⁸ E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. “Italie en Egypte,” Brunner to DPF 23 June 1941.

¹¹⁹ E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. “Italie en Egypte,” Brunner to DPF 9 August 1941.

¹²⁰ E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. “Italie en Egypte,” Brunner to DPF 23 October 1941; Buccianti was later ostracized from the Italian community of Alexandria after the end of the internment, he and his family relocated to Cairo and took Egyptian nationality in 1948, leaving behind their Italian citizenship; Alexandre Buccianti interview 13 June 2013.

uncommon to the protocols of the PNF, which had guided much of Italian social life in the decade preceding the war. Summarizing the changes in the camp, Buccianti drew upon the incident of 3 February, criticizing the actions of the former representatives (Musso, Arabia, Benassi): “Italian leaders do not and have not believed in the need to work against the tendency towards disorganization, obtaining instead an extension of disorder and indiscipline.”¹²¹ The outbursts of 3 February, according to Buccianti, were caused by the internees reacting in their own way to the frustration that had persisted in the camp. His “primary goal,” therefore, was the prevention of a recurrence of such an event, and “discipline” was the tool he employed to achieve this.

IV. “The right to life”

Castaldi wrote of the time after 3 February: “life regained its rhythm, the days added up to months, years.”¹²² Yet, for Brunner, the situation became increasingly difficult. In 1942, when the population of interned Italians reached its apex, he wrote: “it’s practically impossible to maintain contact with 7000 internees.”¹²³ Farina’s wife, Isabella, petitioned Brunner repeatedly to have her husband released, but all attempts were futile. Towards the end of one letter, Farina seems to have addressed the censors, complaining first of the limit of three letters per week, and then imploring them to feel themselves responsible and to “to consider our horrible situation...” He wrote, “there are husbands and fathers here.”¹²⁴ As a psychological release to the growing isolation of internment and distrust of Brunner and other figures outside of the camp, Farina

¹²¹ E2001-02 1000/11 BD:8 s.f. “Italie en Egypte,” Buccianti confidential report to Brunner 21 October 1941.

¹²² “E intanto la vita aveva ripreso il suo ritmo, i giorni si assommavano ai giorni, e ai mesi e agli anni.”

¹²³ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8 “Italie en Egypte: Camps d’Internés civils en Egypte. Rappports. Camp FAYED”, Brunner to DPF 15 January 1942.

¹²⁴ “...considerare l’orribile situazione nostra... ci sono uomini sposi e padri [in Fayed].”

began to practice sculpting to pass time. His third sculpture was the “Madonna degli internati” that would occupy its place at the Fayed Chapel where internees held Sunday Mass. This sculpture also became the subject to another Fayed postcard (Image 5).



Image 5: Madonna of the Internees, Farina's sculpture depicted on a postcard. Personal collection, Giovanni Liciardello.

Like Farina, the majority of internees were “heads of families,” calling attention to the significant absence of income among Italians in Egypt. The Swiss Legation supported around 17,200 families while some 1,500 children received subsidized education or other assistance for schooling.¹²⁵ Brunner was bombarded with requests from the internees, their families, and from Bern arriving indirectly from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome. Medicine in the camps was insufficient, clothing lacking, and movement for Italians both in and outside of Fayed strictly circumscribed. In his indirect correspondence with Rome, Brunner agreed that the conditions of the camps were in opposition to the 1929 Geneva Conventions, but there was little that could be done. The families of internees grew increasingly incapable of providing clothing, food supplies, and medicine to their interned relatives as life outside of the camps became more expensive due to the war and the sequester on Italian assets.¹²⁶ When they did send medicine and supplies in packages, the contents often did not arrive to the internees. Farina’s letters included requests for consumable goods such as sugar, mint, chamomile, butter, cheese, oil, and coffee; and supplies for his sculpting like pliers, a hammer, small chisels, files and a saw.

In one report, Brunner quoted at length from a particularly moving clandestine letter that reached him after an International Red Cross visit to the camp. The letter, signed anonymously by “a group of civilian internees” (un groupe d’internés civils), claimed that the internees had not committed any crime nor had they been particularly loyal to the Fascist political project. Instead,

¹²⁵ Over the course of the year, the number of assisted families in Cairo increased from 4940 to 7045, in Alexandria from 6384 to 8345 and in the Canal Zone stayed around 1900: SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2”, rapport sur l’oeuvre d’assistance aux colonies italiennes d’Egypte pendant l’annee 1941.

¹²⁶ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8 “Italie en Egypte: Camps d’Internés civils en Egypte. Rapports. Camp FAYED”, Brunner to DPF 15 January 1942.

they described themselves as guarding their “patriotic sentiments” while always respecting Egyptian laws. They protested:

we never had the intention of *doing politics*, our motto is that of the strictest discipline and most rigorous respect for the law of the country in which we live. With the same discipline we jealously guarded in our hearts our patriotic sentiments and we have suffocated both in the silence we suffer and in our physical and moral pains. But, this silence that we have imposed on ourselves, we internees, deprived of all civil rights... [the suffocation drives us to] request the right, to life, for us, our children, our families. We demand the RIGHT TO LIFE with all our energies.¹²⁷

Internees had limited options for relief and little perspective of a future. The “right to life” demanded by this “group of civilian internees” was the kind of life they had lived before the war.

Farina, whose years of correspondence with his wife present occasional and personal glimpses into the effects of internment on his sentimental life, described the “suffocating pain of isolation.” In 1942, when ill, he was sent to the “hospital camp” in Embabeh (on the periphery of Cairo). It was his only chance at receiving medicine, as nothing arrived in Fayed. Even the packaged medicines sent by his wife, if arriving at all, were always delayed. Yet, he preferred to stay in Fayed, in the company of his tent-mates: “it’s evident that here in the camp I would be physically worse-off than in the hospital, but I prefer my body to suffer rather than my heart.” This, he described, was the first degree of isolation; the second, was between himself and the outside world. Farina felt a growing doubt regarding the fidelity of his wife as rumors about Italian involvement in prostitution intensified and news about the destitute conditions of the families of the internees spread (like many others, Farina was aware that the financial situation

¹²⁷ “Nous n’avons jamais eu l’intention de faire de la politique, notre devise étant celle de la discipline la plus stricte et du respect le plus rigoureux des Lois du Pays où nous vivons. Nous avons su avec la même discipline garder jalousement dans nos coeurs nos sentiments patriotiques et nous avons suffoqué dans le silence nos souffrances et nos peines physiques et morales. Mais, ce silence que nous nous sommes imposés, nous internés, privés de tout droit civil, deviendrait criminel pour des milliers d’innocents, si nous le poussions jusqu’à suffoquer la demande du droit, à la vie, pour nous, nos enfants, nos familles. Ce DROIT A LA VIE nous le demandons de toutes nos énergies.” SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8 “Italie en Egypte: Camps d’Internés civils en Egypte. Rapports. Camp FAYED”, Brunner to DPF 15 January 1942.

outside of the camp worsened - in November 1940, he had already suggested his preoccupations in a letter to his wife). Farina wrote that the doubt he felt caused great moral trepidation, “I have nostalgia in my soul... while we await our liberation with inquietude, destiny may have already decided our fates.”¹²⁸

Talk of repatriation briefly resurfaced. Brunner noted in a report that all attempts to close the camp - which he pursued until spring of 1942 - were fruitless.¹²⁹ Castaldi’s diary reveals that in the same month, when Brunner visited the civil command, he announced that the funds arriving from Rome were no longer sufficient to sustain the internees and their families, the Swiss were tapping into their own accounts, and that the only solution would be the “blessed repatriation“ of around 2,000 persons. Any repatriation would be unconditional: in other words, internees would cede their rights to future residency in Egypt. Within a few days, the list of internees requesting repatriation rose to 3,550. In May, updates to list were made, but no action was taken. Brunner talked of repatriation until June 1942, but again such talk dissipated and never reappeared.¹³⁰

By spring 1942, visitation resumed, now facilitated by a bus that departed from Cairo to Fayed three times per week, several days per week free circulation in the camp was allowed, and bathing trips to the Bitter Lake were recommenced for the internees.¹³¹ An announcement in newspapers noted that at the train station, the bus departed in the morning around 8:25 am, arrived in Fayed at 11:40 am, and returned to Cairo at 3:30 pm. The trip by private vehicle was

¹²⁸ “ho la nostalgia nell’anima,” “mentre noi aspettiamo la nostra liberazione con inquietudine, il destino può aver già deciso della nostra sorte.”

¹²⁹ “n’avoire aucune chance d’être réalisée.” SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2”, Brunner to DPF 16 April 1942.

¹³⁰ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2”, Brunner to DPF 23 June 1942.

¹³¹ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2”, Brunner to DPF 16 April 1942.

forbidden.¹³² Despite the official resumption of visitation, permits were frequently delayed. This was particularly the case in Cairo; it may have been partially a result of the influx of some “thousands” (at least 2,000 Italian families) of Alexandrian residents who relocated to Cairo to avoid the threat of bombardment and to access the internment camps.¹³³ Among them was the Caccioppo family (see chapter one), who stayed with relatives in Cairo during the war. After acquiring the required permit to visit the camps (image 6), the journey from Cairo to Fayed ended with brief, fretted visits.¹³⁴ For many children, like Caccioppo’s youngest, this would become the first memory of their father; and for many fathers, like Farina, they would see their children only a few times during the first years. In November 1942, Farina had seen his youngest twice; he wrote later “I like that Robertino recognizes me by photo...”¹³⁵

¹³² AIDE, *La vita degli Italiani*, 165.

¹³³ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2”, rapport sur l’oeuvre d’assistance aux colonies italiennes d’Egypte pendant l’annee 1941; Brunner to DPF 22 May 1942.

¹³⁴ AIDE, *La vita degli Italiani*, 25-27.

¹³⁵ “mi piace che Robertino mi conosca per foto.”

ROYAL GOVERNMENT
PERMIT TO TRAVEL & VISIT
Caccioppo Carolina & 6 others
Italian
Permit for 2 (two) days
Caccioppo Carolina
Sunday, 7th December 1941
Raghuwari
M.A.

مشارة السفر
بوليس الممتلكات
ببنغازي

- 7 DEC 1941

ROYAL GOVERNMENT
MILITARY GOVERNMENT OFFICE
PERMIT TO TRAVEL & VISIT
Caccioppo Carolina & 6 others
of Italian
Permit for 2 (two) days
Caccioppo Carolina
Sunday, 11th January 1942
Raghuwari
M.A.

مشارة السفر
بوليس الممتلكات
ببنغازي

- 4 JAN 1942

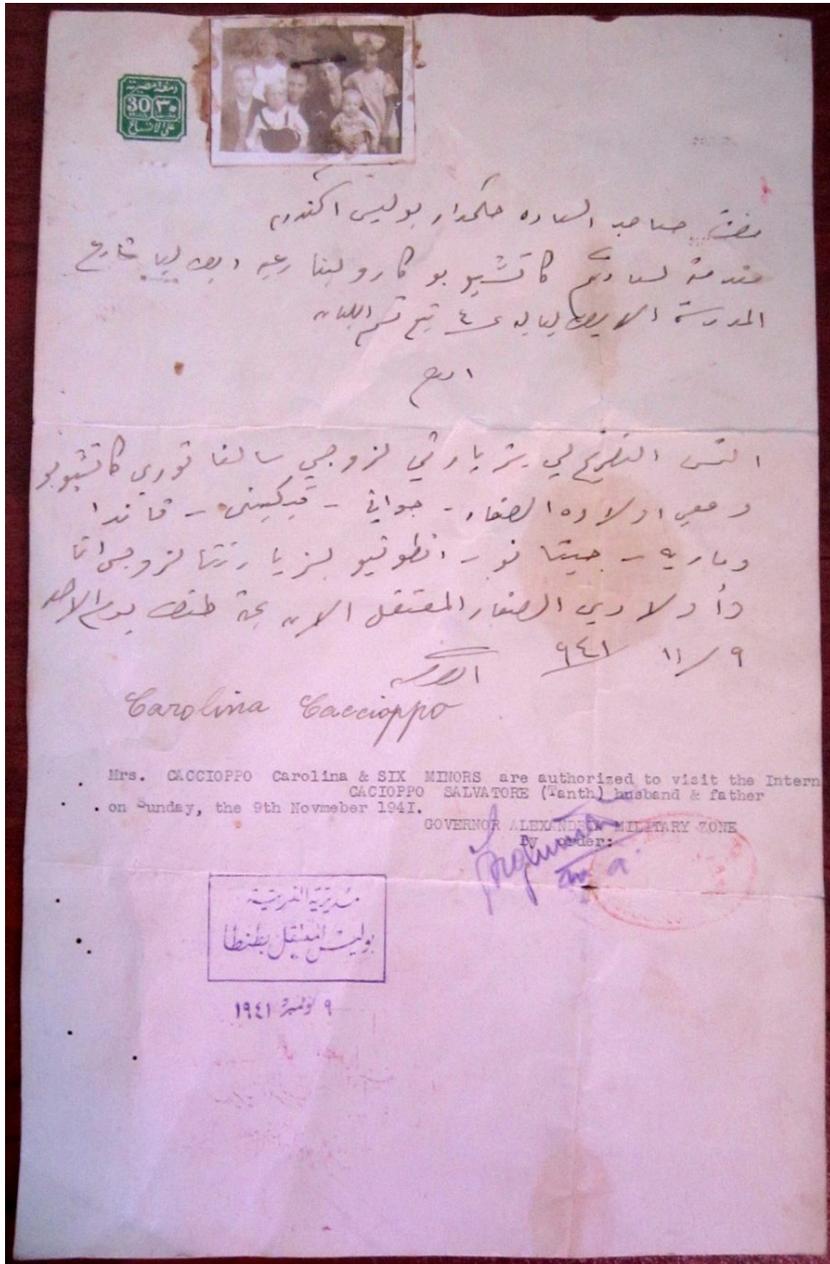


Image 6: Caccioppo family visitation permit (front and back). Personal collection, Francis Amin.

The routine of quotidian life was broken with games and other activities, but they were vain distractions from the thought of life outside of the camps. Farina wrote: “I destroy my solitude with games of chess or cards, or mostly by looking at your photographs... it’s this maybe

which makes me think of you [pl.] with an acute melancholia.”¹³⁶ His letters often dwell on the photographs, on how the different individuals appear in them (“I see mother looks well, but you’re not so natural”),¹³⁷ they are his only links to visualize the outside world. They are the only means by which his son will come to recognize him. He wrote how badly he envied his cousin who was staying in Italy as a student - “happy-go-lucky” (spensierato) - completely unaware of Eugenio’s conditions in internment. Dwelling on the distance and separation he felt from life outside of Fayed, in November 1942, Farina wrote: “the years pass slowly, inexorably... the sense of rebellion that invaded us earlier; when hope appeared with the cover of a sweet illusion, it suddenly undressed and a cruel delusion substituted [our] caressed dreams with abandonment.”¹³⁸

Inside the camps, internees played sports and organized concerts and theatrical performances. A creative life blossomed from the frustration of boredom and inactivity. Buccianti wrote in one report that the camp held some of the “best musicians in Egypt.”¹³⁹ Salvatore Passaro, one of the first arrested, was among these musicians. Passaro was born in 1907 in Istanbul and transferred to Alexandria as a child with his family in 1912. His father, Pasquale (born 1868 in Naples), was a violin teacher who taught private lessons in Mansoura. Salvatore had begun performing in clubs in Suez in the 1930s and later in Cairo.¹⁴⁰ He was an amateur artist, who left a vivid depiction of the camps in his sketches and watercolors of Fayed’s

¹³⁶ “la mia solitudine distruggo un po’ col gioco di scacchi o carte e massimamente con il guardare le fotografie tue... è forse questo che mi fa pensare a voi con una malinconia acuta.”

¹³⁷ “trovo mamma abbastanza riuscita... tu non sei troppo naturale.”

¹³⁸ “Gli anni passano lenti, inesorabili... il senso di ribellione che ci ha invasa in primo tempo; quando la speranza apparsa con i veli di una dolce illusione si è improvvisamente discinta ed una crudele delusione ha sostituito i sogni accarezzati con tanto abbandono.” Less than one month later, “...di questa guerra non vedo la fine.”

¹³⁹ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2”, Buccianti to Brunner 22 May 1942.

¹⁴⁰ ACAE “Passaro Salvatore di Pasquale - cl. 1907” and “Passaro Pasquale fu Vitale cl. 1868”; ACCC “Passaro Pasquale di Vitale (5178).”

scenery (image 7). Perhaps indicative of the importance of camp visits, one of Passaro's sketches of a small dining area/studio space includes a small plaque on the wall upon which are written the words "brief visits are the most appreciated" (image 8).

Unsurprisingly, as Italian and German forces drew closer to Alexandria in the summer of 1942, visitation again was suspended and the camps were placed on a tight lockdown. Unrest stirred in Passaro's and Farina's shared home, Camp 3 (image 9). Castaldi wrote that on 25 June 1942 two brothers had fought and were reported to the civil command because the nature of their argument was political. They approached Buccianti about why the report had been exaggerated and "filled with lies," and a dispute ensued between the three, with many others becoming involved. As the dispute escalated, one of the brothers assaulted Buccianti. The brothers were taken away.

Later, a group of internees opposing Buccianti's hold on the camp, and attempting to generate a reaction from the British authorities in order to bring about a change of command, flew a makeshift Italian flag ("il Tricolore") while some 48 internees gathered around it. When Buccianti intervened - after the local camp commander had reported the unrest - and ordered that the flag be taken down (it was forbidden to have the flag according to the rules laid down by Anglo-Egyptian authorities), a small altercation ensued between Buccianti and one of the internees. When an announcement by the British Captain McComb was made, calling forth those who had disobeyed the camp commander and at the same time insulting the Italian forces approaching Egypt ("Chi combatte sono i tedeschi e non gli italiani, che come soldati non valgono proprio nulla... vi consiglio... d'esser calmi e a non farvi montare il cervello in speranze inutili e assurde" as it was recorded by Castaldi). After one internee refused to translate the announcement, Buccianti translated and two British soldiers took another seven internees to the

camp prison. According to Castaldi, Buccianti asked others to “collaborate” in Camps 9 and 10, but they refused, leaving Buccianti and the British outraged. The British authorities asked Buccianti to provide them with a list of names of the so-called “third party” that had risen in the camps and told him they would open “camp 21,” the prison/surveillance camp where internees were sent for punishment.¹⁴¹

Rapprochement came that night, when the internees were awakened around 11:30pm by soldiers entering the tents, insulting and beating the internees. Castaldi’s camp was among the raided. He wrote of the soldiers’ cries: “Alexandrians, you’re all Alexandrians, ruffians, sons of bitches... the filthiest scum cursed by God... sons of bitches... you’re all the same... all assassins”¹⁴² The soldiers castigated the internees for having “beaten a good man,” referring to Buccianti. The internees attributed the night’s violence - resulting in around 50 wounded internees - to Buccianti’s complicity with the British. Writing of the events of 25/26 June 1942 and of 3 February 1941 as the “darkest days,” Castaldi noted: “everything could be forgotten by the internees, whether good or bad, but those days, certainly not.”¹⁴³

Visiting the camp to inquire about the unrest, Ritter did not have the sense that that a majority of internees were opposed to Buccianti, but rather that an influential group of internees had become progressively hostile to him and denounced his authority. According to Ritter, the situation had reached an impasse; those in opposition did not want to take on leadership of the Civil Command, as they condemned the very existence of its institution, and the British authorities refused to permit free movement fearing a violent uprising. In contrast, Castaldi wrote

¹⁴¹ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2”, exchange of letters between Colonel Sim, Buccianti, Brunner July/August 1942.

¹⁴² “Alessandrini, già voi tutti siete degli alessandrini, tutti ruffiani figli de cani... gentagli maledetta da Dio e della peggiore specie... figli di cani... siete tutti uguali... tutti assassini...”

¹⁴³ “Tutto potranno dimenticare gli internati di [Fayed], sia di bello come di brutto, ma quelle giornate certamente di no.”

of Bucciante, describing him in his “khaki shirt,” and remarking that “[he] was indistinctly hated by everyone” and that his “dictatorship” was “a regime of insecurity and nearly terrorism.”¹⁴⁴ It was Bucciante who, after others had declined, that evening, read the Italian translation that warned the internees of any further unrest given that Rommel was at the doorstep of Egypt. According to Castaldi, the announcement read by Bucciante stated: “but, you (pl.), don’t deceive yourselves, you won’t see your soldiers for sure.”¹⁴⁵ Bucciante, seen as a collaborator, was excommunicated by the Italian community after the war, forced to transfer himself and his family from Alexandria to Cairo because of harassment and threats from the community and, eventually, he opted for Egyptian nationality in 1948 (thus losing his Italian one).¹⁴⁶

While one of the more influential internees of Camp 3, Giuseppe Torchia, agreed to assist Bucciante and perhaps quell further unrest, the failure of the Italian invasion at El-’Alamein in the following months and the repression in the camps smothered any fermenting agitation. Fearing subversion, the British Authorities brought to a halt visitation, exchange of packages and correspondence, sports, concerts and other events, and they were not to resume until the following autumn.¹⁴⁷ Around this time, Farina recorded: “the days pass monotonously, but quickly: two years have passed and we’re still not at a conclusion or epilogue - but these two years I think have been sufficient to make us understand the importance of our well-being and the futility of every misunderstanding.”¹⁴⁸ Of small hopes that appeared throughout the time in the camp, hopes of release, of receiving long-awaited letters or correspondence, perhaps also

¹⁴⁴ “era odiato da tutti indistantamente [sic],” “un regime d’insicurezza e quasi di terrorismo.”

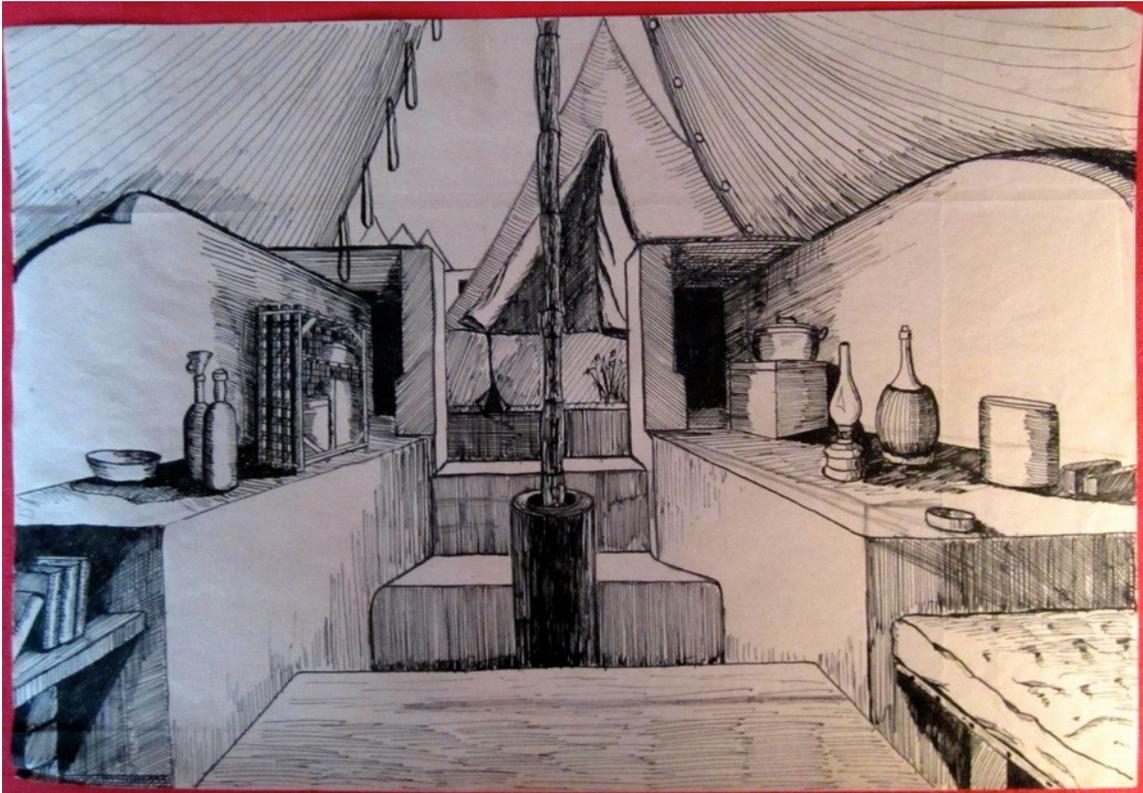
¹⁴⁵ “ma voi è inutile che v’illudete, i vostri soldati qui non li vedrete di sicuro.”

¹⁴⁶ Alexandre Bucciante interview 13 June 2013.

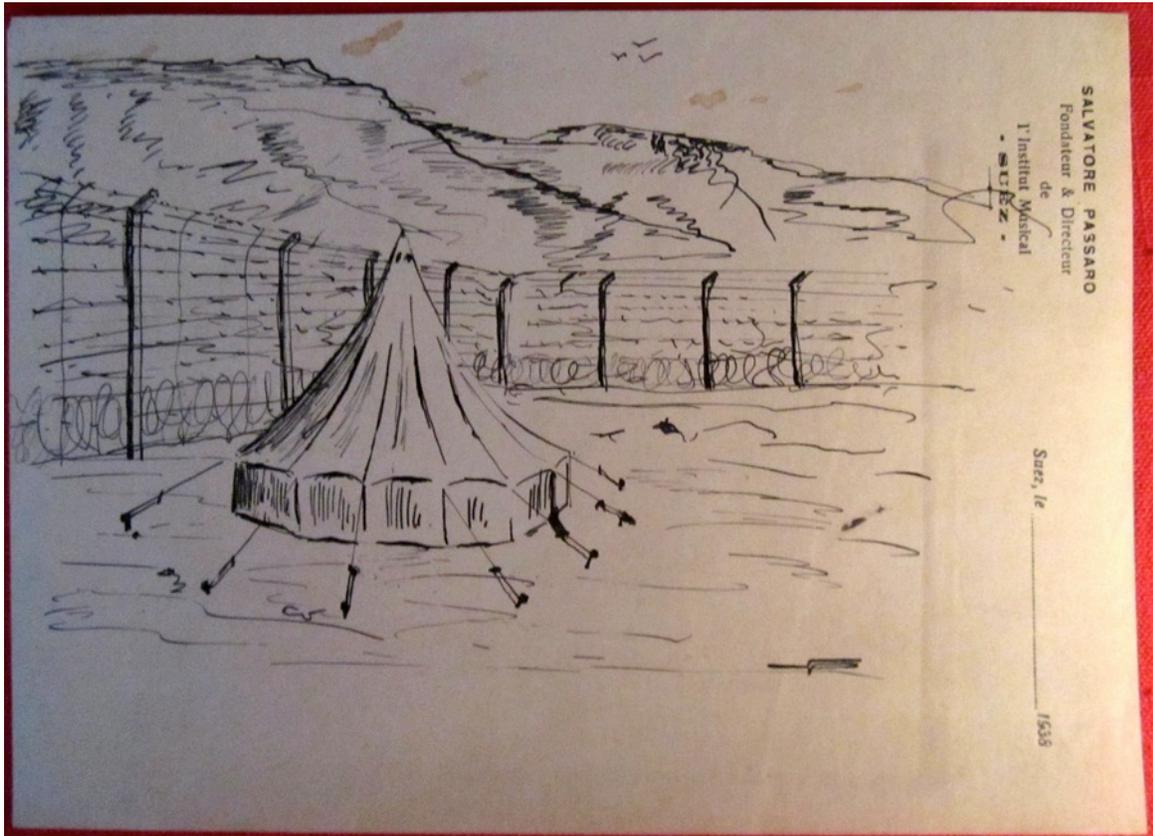
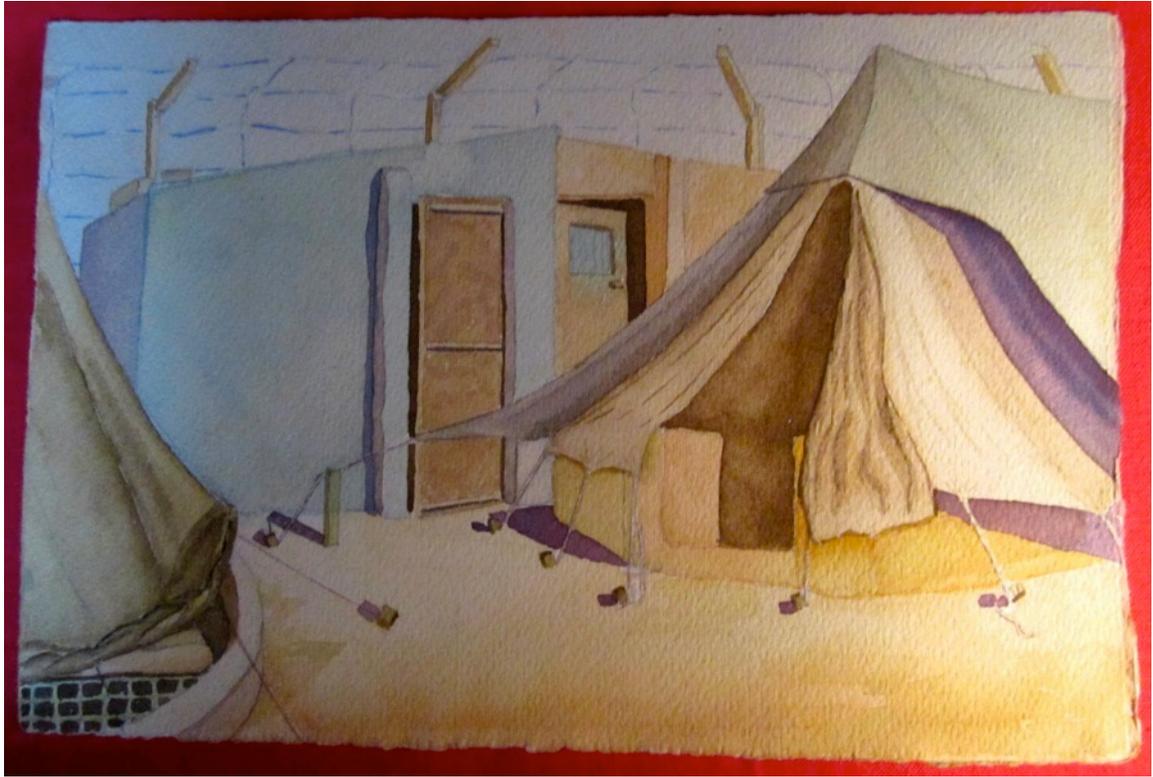
¹⁴⁷ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2”, visité au camp des internés civils italiens de Fayed (Ritter) 29 July 1942.

¹⁴⁸ “Le giornate trascorrono monotone ma veloci: sono passati già più di due anni e non siamo ancora a nessuna conclusione o epilogo - ma questi due anni penso saranno stati sufficienti a farci capire l’importanza del nostro bene e l’inutilità di ogni stupido malinteso...”

alluding to the news of military progress earlier in the summer, Farina wrote: “all of these small, secret hopes do nothing but augment our sadness when we are forced to consider [ourselves] impotent... the delusion of reality.”¹⁴⁹



¹⁴⁹ “tutte queste piccole segrete speranze non fanno che aumentare la nostra tristezza quando siamo costretti a considerare impotenti... la delusione della realtà. [sic]”



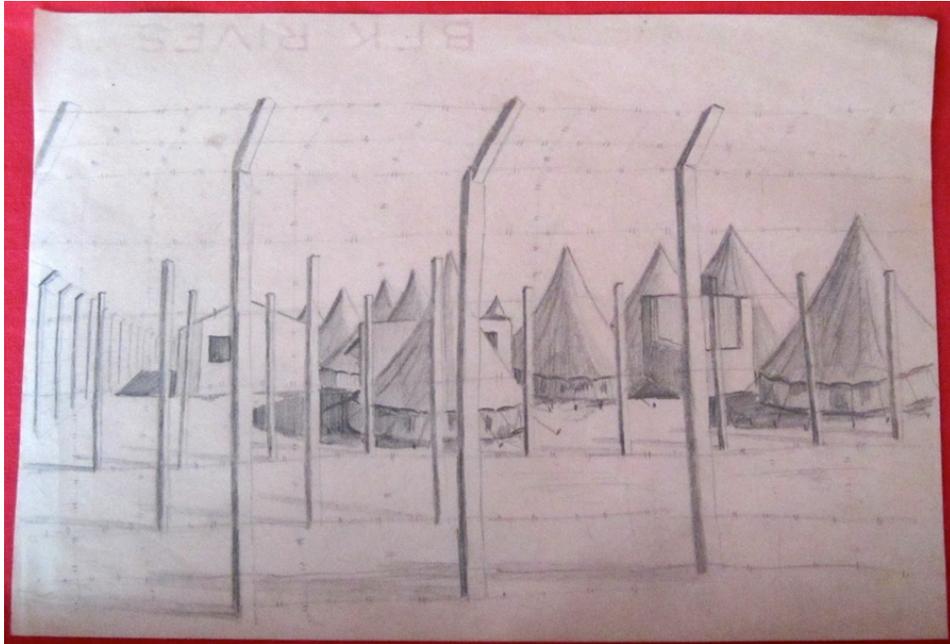


Image 7: Collection of Passaro's sketches and watercolors of the tents. Personal collection, Ladi Skakal.

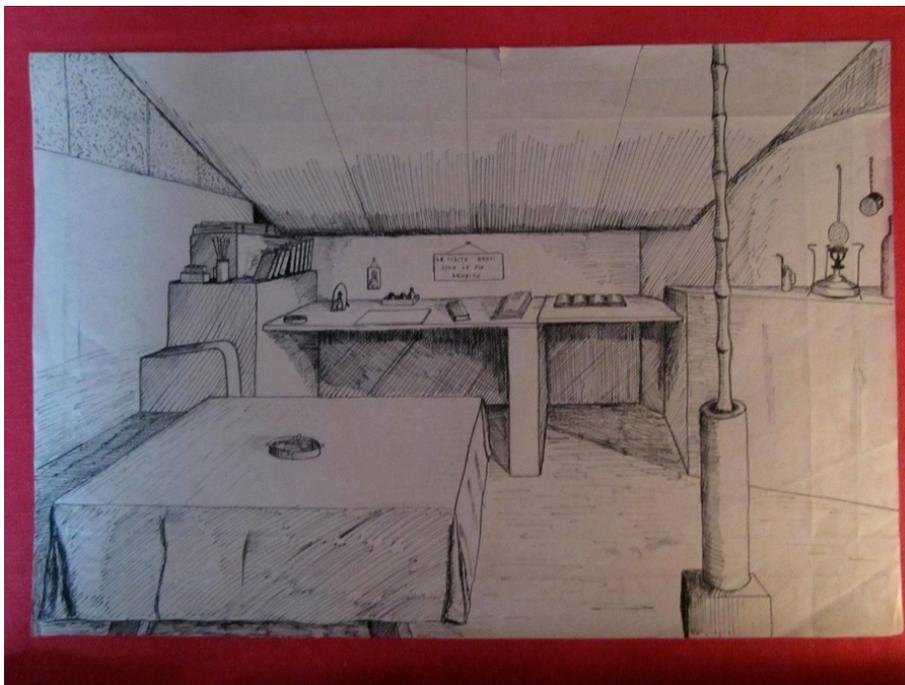


Image 8: le visite più brevi sono le più gradite (Passaro). Personal collection, Ladi Skakal.

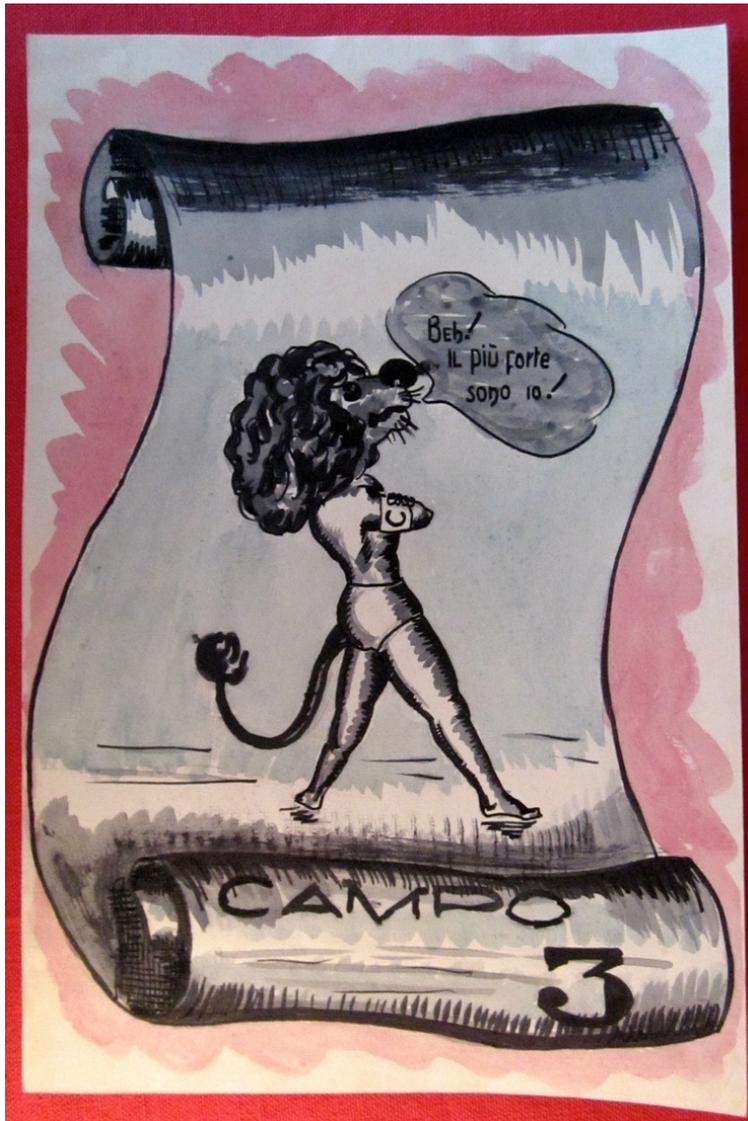


Image 9: Il più forte sono io! (Passaro). Personal collection, Ladi Skakal.

IV. Agony and the Future

During the summer, food rations were severely cut (reducing internees' daily regimen to tea, lentil soup and a salad). In early autumn, when an IRC doctor, G. Vaucher, visited the camp, he observed an exorbitant number of untreated cases; cases like those of Azzarelli, who suffered

damage to his eyes as a result of continued exposure. Others included dysentery and malaria.¹⁵⁰

A follow-up visit in October revealed to Vaucher the effects of long-term internment in the desert. He found severe debilitation in the internees' health and, in his report, suggested, "the majority of internees should be evacuated from Fayed." He noted that the long internment would have been harsh on military prisoners of war, but that it was excessive to subject civilians to such tests of endurance.¹⁵¹ Roughly 400 internees were transferred from Fayed to Embabeh (and some from Embabeh to the Italian hospital in Cairo).¹⁵² In response to these reports, and his prolonged frustration, Brunner pushed Rome to provide pecuniary support. The Ministry continued to protest that the Egyptian Government - as the detaining power - should cover the cost of internment, including the assistance of the families of the internees, in accord with the Geneva Conventions. Over the course of 1942, 584 internees - mostly ill or elderly - were released, while 840 arrests were made.¹⁵³

Brunner feared that, at the current rate, funds would have been insufficient - the Swiss Legation spent around 2,600 Franks per month on the Italian community alone.¹⁵⁴ Discussions of repatriation had fizzled, but Brunner saw it as the *only* foreseeable solution to the community's growing woes. Little is available about life outside Fayed during the years of the war, it must be deduced from other historical sources. What little information there is about life within the camps, the references to life outside, among the non-interned Italians are gleaned from rumors, suspicions, and the rare observations made by those who escaped during the initial years.

Without income and with a nearly two hundred percent increase in the cost of living, both

¹⁵⁰ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 "Italie en Egypte 2", visité par le Dr. G. Vaucher 18 September 1942.

¹⁵¹ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 "Italie en Egypte 2", visité par le Dr. G. Vaucher 10 October 1942.

¹⁵² SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 "Italie en Egypte 2", Brunner to DPF 23 June 1942.

¹⁵³ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 "Italie en Egypte 2", Brunner to DPF 26 January 1943.

¹⁵⁴ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 "Italie en Egypte 2", Legazione d'Italia (Bern) to DPF.

morally and materially the community suffered, wrote Brunner. By 1942, over 21,000 Italians received aid from the Swiss Legation.¹⁵⁵

The Embabeh camp for the ill had grown overcrowded and no longer a clear alternative for Fayed. Fayed itself had begun to resemble a small town by 1943. Some internees built mud (or white) brick homes to replace the weathered tents. Letters and correspondence had recommenced, but were frequently delayed - an IRC report from spring 1943 expressed the internees desire to work for compensation, to resume their lives outside of the camp. Within the camps, “many internees show signs of all degrees of psychoasthenia.”¹⁵⁶ Farina wrote that he had spent months on the construction of a “casetta,” but that his and other internees’ efforts to do anything in the camp were waning by the sheer inexistent vision of a future, of an end to internment: “I awake at night taken by agonizing nightmares... they give me the impressions that I will die... with the inquietude of this uncertain tomorrow, at the mercy of a destiny until now hostile and living with the weight of existence made so much more unjust by these circumstances... can one possibly be light?”¹⁵⁷ On New Years Day 1943, Farina complained that “I lack will, I have no strength, I don’t know what has happened, I have no desire...”¹⁵⁸ questioning the utility of the artistic sensibility he had developed in the camp through his sculpting.

Here, an important intervention must be made. Reports and documents from the camps in 1943 became increasingly rare, archival sources are sparse. The resources of the Swiss Legation

¹⁵⁵ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2,” Rapport sur l’oeuvre d’assistance aux colonies italiennes d’Egypte durant l’annee 1942 (Legation de Suisse en Egypte).

¹⁵⁶ SFA, E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 1943,” IRC report Camp d’internement du Fayed (Descoedres) 20 April 1943.

¹⁵⁷ “Mi alzo di notte preso da angosci incubi... mi danno l’impressione che debba morire... con l’inquietudine di quest’incerto domani, in balia di un destino sinora ostile e vivere sentendo il peso dell’esistenza resa tanto più iniqua dalle circostanze... Si può essere allegri?”

¹⁵⁸ “Mi manca la volontà, non ho forza, non so cosa mi capita non ho voglia...”

had thinned and the Italian Government was no longer able to provide the assistance that it had provided in earlier periods. The consequences of continual imprisonment in Fayed reveal that severe attrition had stifled any hope in the future. Passaro's sketches and watercolors were generally done in the fascist aesthetic of futurism. His artistic representations of the camp provide one of the few visual glimpses into Fayed, and into the arrangement of quotidian objects touched by and surrounding the internees (image 6). However, one sketch stands apart (image 2). Here, he drew the fence-post that encircled the camp, wrapped in barbed wire, in the same style of his earlier sketches and paintings. A thread of barbed wire, however, then forms a noose that wraps around the neck of a chicken who is glaring angrily (perhaps even defensively) towards three blue-eyed androgynous figures lined up one next to the other. The three figures stoically stare back at the chicken. Upon the belly of each figure is written a year: 1940, 1941, 1942, and 1943. Could Passaro have suffered from the same temporal anxieties that Farina detailed in the letters to his wife? Was Passaro's mental state disturbed by the same sense of uncertainty that plagued Farina as the years passed in the camps without any foreseeable future? Perhaps the symptoms of this disillusionment were even more acute because of the intense future-gazing that had developed in the 1930s as a result of the Fascist regime's propaganda in Egypt? The Easter postcard of 1941, with which this chapter began, had been adorned with the image of the chick hatching from an egg painted with a tent from the camp (image 1). Had that chick matured into Passaro's maddened chicken-beast?

Castaldi's diary also provides a vantage point from which one can see this sense of time weathering the internees' aspirations, draining them of hope in the restorative possibility of the future. On the first anniversary of the 3 February incident, commemorative ceremonies were held in honor of Caruso and Falorni. Another ceremony was held on the second anniversary, in 1943,

yet when the priest came to bless the commemorative stone for the two fallen, few attended. One internee, as Castaldi described, perhaps struck by the indifference of his fellow internees, called an appeal to the “Fascist” Angelo Caruso, to which several others responded “present!” annoying the camp 11 commandant, Gino Dangeri (part of Buccianti’s administrative structure). The following year, Castaldi wrote, “it’s best not to speak of it... we were five persons, also in Campo 3.” Projecting forward, Castaldi noted, “I’m certain that had the internment endured several years more, the few rational thinkers would have ended with the demand to destroy the two stones commemorating Caruso and Falorni. They would have said, ‘it’s water under the bridge’ (acqua passata non macina più).”¹⁵⁹

The separation from life outside Fayed and the sense of time’s passage within Fayed made it such that the past no longer turned the wheels of the present. Farina wrote to his wife: “like you, I count the days and minutes that separate us... if you only knew how long the days seem to me.”¹⁶⁰ During the last three years he had ceased to write the Fascist date on his letters. However, in early 1943, he began to write the time adjacent to the date. Whereas Castaldi observed the platitude among internees that the past ceased to affect the present, Farina and Passaro seem to intimate something more compelling. In a letter from January 1943, Farina wrote, “the future no longer belongs to me... I’m nothing to the dominion of dark desires.”¹⁶¹ Years of internment had suffocated the lives of the prisoners, taking from them not only their pasts (and all it anticipated), but the future itself.

¹⁵⁹ “è meglio non parlarne...eravamo in 5 persone, altrettanto in campo 3,” “Sono sicuro che se l’internamento si sarebbe prolungato ancora di qualche anno, i soliti ben pensanti avrebbero finito con l’esigere la distruzione dei due cippi commemoranti Caruso e Falorni. Tanto - essi avrebbero detto - acqua passata non macina più!”

¹⁶⁰ “Come te, anch’io conto i giorni e i minuti che ci separano... sapessi quanto mi sembrano lunghe le giornate.”

¹⁶¹ “l’avvenire non mi appartiene... Sono un nulla al dominio di oscure volontà.”

V. Conclusion

Serafino Mazzolini, the former Italian Minister, had hoped to return to Egypt on two occasions during the war. After leaving Cairo in June 1940, Mussolini assigned him to head the Egypt Office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where his main task was to secure covert diplomatic relations with Egyptian militias and the Royal Family in Egypt.¹⁶² At the time, the Fascist regime aspired to see an independent Egypt allied with Italy and, alongside this alliance, a complete end to any “British presence” in the country. Leadership within the regime saw Egypt as a point of “strategic security” in the Mediterranean and North Africa, but not a prospect for territorial occupation (as they had indeed hoped for Tunisia).¹⁶³ Months before the first Italian air raids in Egypt, which were not as extensive as the British had anticipated,¹⁶⁴ the Italian state announced through Radio Bari, in Arabic, that should Italian forces arrive in Egypt, it would only be to rid Egypt of the British.¹⁶⁵ With Axis advances in 1941 it seemed possible that the British could lose Egypt. This was presumably believed by many in Egypt, including King Faruk himself.¹⁶⁶

In June 1942, the question of providing aid to the Italian communities in Egypt, urgently raised by both the IRC and the Swiss Legation, seems to have resonated very little in Rome.¹⁶⁷ At the time, plans were being finalized for the invasion of Egypt after much debate between the

¹⁶² De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, 79.

¹⁶³ Rainero, *La politica araba*, 77, 175-176.

¹⁶⁴ Italian forces substantially bombed Haifa in Palestine in 1940 and were expected by the British to be strong in this sector. Nir Arielli, “‘Haifa is still burning’: Italian, German and French air raids on Palestine during the Second World War” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, 3 (2010): 331-47; Morsy, 73.

¹⁶⁵ Rainero, *La politica araba*, 104.

¹⁶⁶ Morsy, “Britain’s Wartime Policy,” 76.

¹⁶⁷ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 2” DPF to Service des Intérêts étrangers Légation du Suisse à Roma 26 June 1942.

German and Italian governments.¹⁶⁸ Mazzolini expected to return to a “liberated” Egypt as the Italian ambassador. Later that summer, however, while he awaited the invasion’s completion from Libya, he was reassigned roles by higher authorities and he was to enter instead as the Civil Administrator to an Egypt that would be occupied by Rommel’s military forces.¹⁶⁹ Mazzolini waited three months in Libya and then, after a brief pause in Italy, returned to Libya in November, but the final defeat at El-‘Alamein robbed him of any hope he had of ever “setting foot [again] in Egypt.” He was shuffled around within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, and, after the armistice in 1943, he played a prominent part in Mussolini’s Republic of Salò. He died fleeing allied forces in Switzerland in March 1945.¹⁷⁰

Following the failure of the invasion, the antifascist Angelo Tartagni published a series of short articles in the *Libera Italia* bulletin, modeled on the *France Libre* (Free France) movement based in Egypt. He attacked the fascist hierarchy in Egypt and its appropriation of the cultural and institutional life of the Italian community. Tartagni specifically called out *Il Giornale d’Oriente* for having been the “right arm” of the PNF, listing the names of its administrators and denouncing the most vocal advocates for the regime as opportunists--Catraro, the former editor of the *Giornale*, and Cignolini, the director of Cairo’s *Fascio*, were listed among them. Drawing attention to the trinity of the Italian Legation, the *Fasci*, and the Italian press, Tartagni argued that while Italian Fascism had been proclaimed a “revolutionary and constructive” movement, “it has shown itself to be the greatest destroyer that history remembers.” He continued, “what value are monuments and palaces when every spirit of bounty, initiative, and the liberty to create

¹⁶⁸ Rainero, *La politica araba*, 180-185, 213.

¹⁶⁹ Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 93.

¹⁷⁰ Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico*, 96-97, 120-123, 188.

political and social institutions is taken from a people?”¹⁷¹ The propaganda of the PNF had shaped the horizons of Italians in Egypt during the interwar years. During the Second World War, these horizons vanished, leaving few alternatives in their wake.

Between late 1942 and 1943 at least 250 internees had signed on to *Libera Italia* (described by the Swiss charge d'affaires as a “pro-monarchy antifascist movement”) and were thus due to be released from Fayed. Moreover, authorities had granted the liberation of internees over 60 years of age (although the process itself took time). The total number of internees in summer 1943 was 6,200, reduced by 800 from the previous year. Brunner continued to urge the Egyptian authorities to relax restrictions. In August, he wrote, “the recent events have completely crippled the internees and the Italian colony.”¹⁷² By December, the number of internees was down to around 5,000 total. By then, over 2,000 individuals had signed on to *Libera Italia*:

Internees' morale is very low. The collapse of the ideal that helped them bear many sacrifices for more than three years has meant that the internees today are completely disinterested in political matters. They want only one thing: their freedom (leur libération).¹⁷³

In June 1944, the camp remained relatively full, with around 3,000 internees at Fayed. Although some had been released following the armistice, the British and Egyptian authorities, whose “attitudes” towards the Italians in Egypt remained unchanged by the political events, slowed the

¹⁷¹ “si è dimostrato il più grande demolitore che la storia ricordi, poichè a che valgono monumenti e palazzi, quando si è tolto ad un popolo ogni spirito di bontà, di iniziativa, di libera creazione di istituzioni politiche e sociali?” MAE, AP, Egitto, b.7, s.f. “Tartagni Angelo - giornalista.”

¹⁷² “Il est un fait que les derniers évènements ont complètement déseparé les internés et la colonie italienne.” SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 1943” rapport sur les camps des internes civils italiens en egypte 16 August 1943.

¹⁷³ “Le moral des internés est très bas. L’effondrement de l’idéal qui leur a fait supporter tant de sacrifices pendant plus de trois années a eu pour conséquence que les internés se désintéressent aujourd’hui complètement de toutes questions politiques. Ils ne désirent plus qu’une chose: leur libération.” SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 “Italie en Egypte 1944” Brunner to DPF 31 December 1943.

process.¹⁷⁴ Around 2,000 internees were employed by the British authorities, while the Swiss Legation struggled to have Fayed liquidated. Mass release began in July and, by October, only around 310 internees remained in Embabeh, Tantah, and at the Italian hospital (some presumably remained until martial law was lifted the following year, although even then a clause was enacted permitting the Egyptian government to retain those deemed politically dangerous).¹⁷⁵

Outside the camps, talk of betrayal--both political and personal-- was widespread and the internees began to realize the extent to which the news they had received about the war in Europe, North Africa, and elsewhere had been filtered through the British. Many women had worked as prostitutes in Egypt's regulated and unregulated wartime brothels.¹⁷⁶ Italian jobs were taken by Egyptians or members of other foreign communities, many of whom (especially within the Greek community) continued to express hostility to the Italians in the aftermath of the war. Some observers noted that nearly 80 percent of the community was in a situation of absolute "desperation."¹⁷⁷ The cost of living had risen 300 percent from prewar conditions. In terms of aid, 28,791EGP of the total 41,0889EGP over the course of 1943 went to supporting the roughly 2,000 Italian families whose lives were entirely dependent on the Swiss Legation subsidies (most of these were families who had suffered damage to their buildings during the air raids in Alexandria and were forced to evacuate or were evicted by landlords because they did not have

¹⁷⁴ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:7 memoire sur la situation de la colonie italienne en Egypte en juin 1944.

¹⁷⁵ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:9 "Italie en Egypte 1944" Brunner to DPF 26 October 1944, 11 October 1945.

¹⁷⁶ See Francesca Biancani, "'Let Down the Curtains Around Us'."

¹⁷⁷ For more on the conditions observed in several reports by Italians sent to the MAE, see Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 446.

sufficient means to pay rent).¹⁷⁸ After years of internment, internees were thrust into a context where little resembled what they had left behind in 1940.

Some 14,868 families received support from the Swiss Legation in 1943.¹⁷⁹ None of the authorities showed the urgency desired by members of the communities; despite the armistice, the Swiss Legation reported that eight months later the Italian community felt “duped,” abandoned by the changing Italian regime.¹⁸⁰ The sense of betrayal seems to have been pervasive. All archival traces point to bitterness, confusion, and a sense of disorientation. Internees and their families felt that Brunner’s efforts during the war had been insufficient, that he had been the one to abandon them.¹⁸¹ Tartagni claimed that the Swiss Legation was, in fact, itself full of sympathy for the PNF and that anyone claiming to be antifascist during the war had been discriminated against by its staff.¹⁸² Brunner wrote that Buccianti had given the sum of 2,000EGP that was garnished from supplies remaining in the camps to Lady Killearn (Lampson’s wife) as a gift to be donated to the charity of her choice. After the war, Buccianti was despised by the internees and their families so much that he and his family relocated from Alexandria to Cairo, where they could be more anonymous.¹⁸³ Brunner suspected that Buccianti’s “gift” was a bribe aimed to put Buccianti in a favorable position for high-level

¹⁷⁸ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:10 “Italie en Egypte: Assistance et Pension” rapport sur l’oeuvre d’assistance aux colonies italiennes d’Egypte durant l’annee 1943.

¹⁷⁹ 6055 in Cairo, 7291 in Alexandria and 1502 in the Canal Zone.

¹⁸⁰ Brunner wrote: “Enfin, à la misère est venue s’ajouter une profonde démoralisation. Par l’armistice, la Colonie Italienne avait espéré être arrivée au terme de ses souffrances qu’elle avait jusque-là vaillamment supportées. Les événements militaires et politiques en Italie, et surtout l’attitude adoptée depuis par les Autorités Britanniques et Egyptiennes à l’égard de la Colonie Italienne ont très vite dissipé ces espoirs. Le fait que, malgré l’armistice intervenu il y a huit mois déjà, ces Autorités n’ont apporté aucun allègement aux sévères mesures prises, l’ont découragée et ont crée l’impression qu’elle a été dupée.” SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:10 “Italie en Egypte: Assistance et Pensions” rapport sur l’oeuvre d’assistance aux colonies italiennes d’Egypte durant l’annee 1943.

¹⁸¹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 448.

¹⁸² MAE, AP, Egitto, b.7 “Tartagni Angelo - giornalista.”

¹⁸³ Alexandre Buccianti interview 13 June 2013.

employment by the British. He argued that the money should have been redistributed to the community.¹⁸⁴ Tartagni concurrently published a harsh condemnation of Bucciante for his preservation of the “fascistic” organization in the camps. He argued that the camps could have served as sites of reform and reeducation, but with Bucciante’s fascist-style hierarchical system and military-like authoritarianism, Bucciante himself was to blame for the perseverance of fascist “tendencies” in the Italian community. Perhaps Tartagni was trying to expose Bucciante as an opportunist to the internees who may have seen him as a traitor to the regime or an antifascist. Tartagni observed that while the internees lived in the desert, Bucciante, during his brief trips to Cairo to discuss matters of the camp with Anglo-Egyptian authorities, was seen driving his car around the city conducting personal business.¹⁸⁵ Everyone seemed willing to blame another, but few placed responsibility on the fallen regime in Rome.

This was the world to which most internees returned. Families had grown quiet. Fear permeated apartments and people were afraid to speak of politics, of the war, and of what happened during the war. Insults and provocations towards Italians became part of immediate post-internment life.¹⁸⁶ With the economic life of the community frozen, the number of assisted families rose in 1944 to around 15,827.¹⁸⁷ The incessant problems of aid could no longer be dealt with by the Swiss Legation and, with the exhaustion of sequestered funds, many families were left without assistance. The health of many former internees had severely deteriorated, and efforts were underway to repatriate individuals in need of urgent medical attention. Mostly, a “resumption” in relations between Egypt and Italy was awaited “with great impatience (avec

¹⁸⁴ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8 “Italie en Egypte: mesures contre les ressortissants italiens en Egypte” Brunner to DPF 26 October 1944.

¹⁸⁵ MAE, AP, Egitto, b.7 “Tartagni Angelo - giornalista.”

¹⁸⁶ AIDE, *La vita degli Italiani*, 28-29.

¹⁸⁷ 6942 in Cairo, 7266 in Alexandria and 1619 in the Canal Zone. SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:10 “Italie en Egypte: Assistance et Pensions” rapport sur l’oeuvre d’assistance aux colonies italiennes d’Egypte durant l’annee 1944.

grande impatience).”¹⁸⁸ With little progress in restoring diplomatic relations by the spring of 1945, Brunner hoped that the Swiss Legation would at least get permission to issue new passports to meet the frequent requests by Italians seeking, in the face of uncertainty, departure from Egypt.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ SFA E2001-02 1000/111 BD:8 “Repatriement” Brunner to DPF 28 April 1945.

INTERMEZZO

Nostalgia and the Perils of Historical Time



Image 10: The letters of Eugenio Farina.



Image 11: Longo, Farina, and Ras al Bar in the 1950s.

G. Longo took me to meet a close friend, L. Farina. They had met years after departing Egypt, through shared acquaintances among the Italians of Egypt working in the airline and tourist companies in Rome in the 1970s. Farina's family was from Cairo, Longo's from Alexandria. Today both lived on the stretch of coastline that runs west of Rome and south of Ostia, where many Italians of Egypt have settled since their arrival in Italy. After a brief introduction, Longo and I sat down while Farina vanished upstairs. She returned, holding an aged cardboard briefcase. Her son, she complained (who was roughly my own age), was attached to his computer following the latest news of the new political "movement," *Movimento Cinque Stelle*, inspired by comedian Beppe Grillo, and was uninterested in participating in any conversation about her and her family's past in Egypt. She opened the briefcase. Enclosed within were stacks of family photographs. Some from vacations to Egypt's north coast in the 1950s, to Ras al Bar (where Cairenes preferred to vacation); others of family members around Cairo. As she flipped through the photographs, she passed them to Longo, who glanced at them, remarking occasionally about the differences between Italians from Cairo and Alexandria. Farina's father, Eugenio, was one of 12 brothers. They lived in Downtown Cairo, on Sherif Street, in an area that was not marked by one particular European community, but was instead a distinctly "cosmopolitan"--and elite--commercial center. It is from this apartment that Eugenio was arrested and taken to Fayed at the outbreak of the Second World War. Underneath the stack of photographs, Farina unveiled a bundle of faded and weathered letters. Some were written in pencil, others in pen. Some were written on scraps of paper, others carefully penned on folded paper. In total there were 330 pages of letters that Farina's mother had preserved, written over the course of her husband's internment from 1940 to 1944 (image 10). The bundle of letters in hand, Farina spoke to me without looking at me: "these letters... [she paused] How did he do it,

in the concentration camp (in campo di concentramento)... I don't know, I'm in love with these letters... this one from '42, when my brother was born!"

It would be several weeks before I returned to photograph the letters in order to carefully read through them at a later date. Although I imagined they contained hints of the past, I was unaware of the profoundly intimate spaces of Farina's life in Fayed and the vast social landscapes of the Second World War in Egypt that filled the pages of the letters. Interestingly, neither did Farina, for she had only read a few pages from the dense stack. Although she recognized my anticipation about their potential as historical sources, she did not see the letters as containers of historical "data." When I asked her about this, she described that, to her, the stack of weathered letters were material artifacts, traces of her and her family's past in Egypt that served to keep this past alive in her present. From across the room, Longo interrupted, laughing in resignation, "eh, they are the good times past" (sono i bei tempi passati, image 11).

What occupied the space between Longo's "good times past," Farina's love for the handwritten letters her father had sent to his wife from Fayed, and the evocative uncertainties--those imagined and real--that propelled the prose of the letters? How were the expectations of the interwar years that had so profoundly shaped the historical circumstances of the Italians of Egypt, and with which the letters were pregnant, elided in the remembering of the community's relation to and origin in Italian fascism? At first glance, the relation appears to be one of backward-gazing nostalgia. One might easily read the grounding of the community in a notion of "culturalized" politics expressed by many Italians of Egypt as an attempt to establish innocence while addressing the worlds whose destruction they themselves brought on as members of colonial communities.¹ Indeed, the very description of "worlds within worlds" contains an

¹ To "culturalized politics," I would oppose a depoliticized notion of cultural form. In this case there is a rather explicit linkage of the origins of the community in the cultural institutions of

implicit innocence and protection from the broader structures that characterized the colonial Mediterranean. Renato Rosaldo calls this act of exoneration through nostalgic lament “imperialist nostalgia.”² What is revealed in these episodes, I argue, is more complex. It provides a blueprint for apprehending the ways in which repatriated Italians of Egypt navigate the distance between historical experience and historical consciousness.

The acts of remembering the community’s origins and formation within the framework of fascist politics make available for analysis wide temporal separations.³ The sense of belonging to an irretrievable past world that materializes in nostalgic lamentation reveals instances of the slippage in time’s continuity. This slippage, in turn, points to the irreversibility of historical time. But it is not “memory” that is at stake here. In recent years, an overemphasis (or “overextension”) of memory in scholarly analysis has hindered our capacity to understand the temporal functions of recollection.⁴ Analysis tending to focus on memory as “representational,” and thereby separating past and present into simplistic dialectic relations, has persistently reproduced the past as something no longer alive, no longer vital for and in the present.⁵ In these models, the past is only relevant (or active) insofar as it is *re*-presented, thus centralizing the

Italian fascism, but that politics is argued to be firmly rooted in a national culture (and not primordial itself).

² Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Representations*, 26 (1989): 107-122.

³ Paul Ricoeur makes this point in talking about the difference between “beginnings” and “origins.” Whereas the former suggests a “constellation of dated events,” it is the latter that “designates the upsurge of the act of taking a distance that makes possible the whole enterprise and therefore also its beginning in time.” He continues, “History continues to be born from this taking of a distance which consists in the recourse to the exteriority of the archival trace.” This is the distance that I think is important in the drawing out of origins among the Italians of Egypt; this leads to the generation of history. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, 2004), 139.

⁴ See David Berliner, “The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 78 1 (2005): 197-211. For a perspective from historical studies, see Jay Winter, “The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the ‘Memory Boom’ in Contemporary Historical Studies,” *Canadian Military History* 10, 3 (2001):57-66.

⁵ Dariusz Gafijczuk, “Dwelling Within: The Inhabited Ruins of History,” *History and Theory* 52 (2013): 149-170.

present at the expense of an awareness of continuities or extensions in time. In short, the gap remains. This mode of interpretation fails to step into the realm of historical consciousness. It is, rather, illustrative of a kind of “retrospective absurdity”--to borrow from Henri Bergson--that comes with reading the past as a series of static moments (or memories) *brought into* distinct presents and not as processes extending into (and beyond) and constituting the present. It does not help us understand the workings of historical time. Part of the dilemma here may be that “process” is often taken to imply mere accumulation, whereas any temporal extension can just as well lead to the weathering or erosion of lived experience, as is the case of Farina’s disinterest in the experiences narrated in her father’s letters.⁶ Herein lies history’s vulnerability, the widening crevasse between past and present that propels de Martino’s notion of the crisis of presence. It entails the forgetting not just of “events” or facts of the past--of images and details, in other words--but the forgetting of the connectivity of history’s multiple times, of the horizons of “shared possibilities” that give dimension to historical events.⁷

As I moved among archives and historical documents and continued to meet with repatriated Italians of Egypt, the relief between the unfolding events of the past and the practice of recounting historical moments as complete episodes understood incompletely (as events analyzed as static within a given narrative) became more visible. I am not claiming that the relation between the remembering of the past and the historical events that shaped the past is one of false consciousness or “misrepresentation.” Instead, both past and present are part of the same duration, contemporaneously untangled from the other. Each contains traces of the other, but the

⁶ It is useful here to point to the literature on “ruin” and “ruination,” which does show how the processes of erosion or yielding to the trials of historical time are active. Among these I highlight Georg Simmel’s short essay, “The Ruin” in (ed.) Kurt H. Wolff *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics* (New York, 1965). See also Ann Laura Stoler, “Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, 2 (2008): 191-219.

⁷ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, 1997): 88.

trace is different than the event/s to which it refers. As Emmanuel Levinas writes, “In the trace there has passed a past which is absolutely fulfilled...[and] within the trace the irreversible revolution is sealed.” In other words, as the Italians of Egypt articulate a presence out of fragments of a past, they are also attesting to its pastness, its distance from the present. These traces help to provide the tissues of the multiple layers of history (Koselleck has called this a “postdialectical” concept of nonsynchronicity).⁸ Past and present are joined in this duality of separation and extension, of absence and presence. Farina gazes lovingly at the handwritten letters of her father *because* they are living embodiments of the past, and Longo sighs nostalgically that they are the residues of “the good times past.” Neither one draws upon the vast and painful prose articulated by her father in the sea of uncertainty that marked the unfolding *presents* from the interwar period into the Second World War, and well into later decades (as we will see the second part of this dissertation). It is possible that this hints at the silence that marked the transition to life outside Fayed after the war. The worlds (within worlds) of the Italians of Egypt, through which they derive their sense of community, are not retrieved and yet concurrently they continue to function as limiting conditions for the community. Although part and parcel of the larger workings of Italian fascism (by means of its hold over Italian institutions in Egypt) and the lingering structures of imperialism in the Mediterranean, these pasts endure in what the Italians of Egypt refer to as their “culture.”⁹ They have lost much of the indeterminacy they had as historical experiences, despite being products of that very indeterminacy, and become the stuff of definition. The substance of layered histories, they are also “unfinished

⁸ Kerstin Barndt, “Layers of Time: Industrial Ruins and Exhibitionary Temporalities,” *PMLA: theories and methodologies* (2010): 1-15, 2.

⁹ By “culture” I refer here not to a category of analysis, but rather to the way community is comprehended by the Italians of Egypt themselves. It is that substrate of national culture upon which politics was mapped.

histories.”¹⁰ As philosopher Edward Casey reminds us, the past, being absent, is “always more... layered than we can contain in a single set of representations.” Contradiction in this multiplicity, then, circumscribes what can and cannot be activated in historical consciousness.¹¹

The articulation of the community’s origins (or the search for its originality) bridges these gaps. Svetlana Boym notes that the nostalgic “desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition.”¹² This occurs through the embodiment or materialization of the past. Farina’s “love” is one example wherein the boundaries between human and historical relic are blurred and her “being in love” with the letters indexes the vast histories of which they are traces. But this goes beyond the realm of embodiment. Objects as traces “obliterate history” through their endurance; we saw this, for example, in Liciardello’s medal acknowledging his parents’ contribution to the PNF during the Ethiopia campaign in 1935 or in the photographs held by il Dottore. In each case, these relics embodied and materialized the past, dismantling historical time that extended to their origin. I would take this argument one step further to contend that the *stories* told about personal and shared pasts--legitimated, for example, in the case of Buccetti’s chronology of encounters between Italy and Egypt--are also instantiations of these embodiments. Each of these traces seals the past as past while at once *containing* its presence, as described by Levinas. The narrators dwell in these objects and memories, which elaborate worlds past, engaging absence and presence in a DNA-like helix, each twisted around the other. It is not enough to say that they are dialectic, that one precedes the other; instead, they are mutually generative of the pace and rhythm of historical time. They generate the original past of the community by reducing the “historical possibilities” from which

¹⁰ Stoler, “Imperial Debris,” 195.

¹¹ Edward Casey, “The world of nostalgia,” *Man and World*, 20 (1987): 361-384, 377-379.

¹² Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2001), xv .

they emerged, to employ Carlo Ginzburg's definition of context. Possible futures of the past are elided (such as those that exhibited anxiety and uncertainty about futures in Egypt during the interwar period) and histories are neglected (such as the great influx of Italians into Egypt long *after* the "grandiose" deeds of the Italians of Egypt during the early nineteenth century). The key here to understanding the importance of history's vulnerability is a kind of anti-dialectic--a magic, to return to de Martino's "release" from the crisis of presence and the fear of dehistoricization--that navigates the contradiction that arises from the passage of time as the resonance of the worlds to which its material remains refer thins.¹³ In dismantling historical time (the time of process and duration), these assemblages of embodied pasts place the community in history, and restore time's horizon to their cultural presence. In doing so, the community maintains itself as present. If these are the processes which help to illustrate how Italians of Egypt utilize the past to insert themselves in the present, the second part of this dissertation will consider how they become--and remain--a community through the unfolding politics of departure and repatriation after the Second World War and into the 1960s.

¹³ Gafijczuk notes that as the distance between present and past increases, "contact" loses its resonance, and the realities of the past "fall into disrepair," "Dwelling Within," 159.

CHAPTER THREE

Disjointed Histories: Political Representation and Uncertainty in Postwar Egypt, 1943-1953

The relief that came with the end of the Second World War and the release of the internees from Fayed was only briefly celebrated. It quickly became apparent within and around the Italian community in Egypt how little postwar Egypt—and the larger realm of postwar Mediterranean politics—resembled its former incarnation. Although the red card required by the Anglo-Egyptian authorities of all Italians had been abolished and freedom of movement was restored to them, their juridical rights and financial accounts remained blocked.¹ After over four years of internment and unemployment, freed Italians were, as described by an English delegate from the Holy See, “living in complete destitution.” The delegate, who had exhibited “humanitarian interest” in the circumstances of the Italian community described, “in the [Italian] colony, poverty has provoked a flooding of moral degradation and prostitution in tandem with a troubling confusion of spirits.”² The isolation and detachment imposed by the internment tore some families apart. Around 500 cases of marriage annulment were brought to the local religious

¹ From 1940 to 1946, Italians in Egypt remained without juridical rights, which meant they could not “firmare neanche un contratto di affitto od una semplice fattura.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B1, “situazione politica interna” 22 February 1946.

² “Nella colonia l’indigenza ha provocato un dilagare della digradazione morale e della prostituzione insieme con una penosa confusione di spiriti.” MAE AP Egitto 1931-45 B33, “interessi italiani in Egitto” 1944.

authorities in the months after release and the delegate noted that, accompanying the low morale, individuals refused to make confession in church.³

As early as 1944, the Italian government, still temporarily based in Salerno, expressed concern over the situation in Egypt. The unremitting arrival of news of the deplorable conditions in which the Italians in Egypt lived caused great alarm. Prostitution and poverty were rumored to be widespread. The captain of an Italian ship passing through Egyptian ports observed, “a collectivity that just yesterday resonated with admirable and prosperous patriotism... is today taken as undesirable and lives precariously, in a state of [lethargy], on the boundaries of destitution.”⁴

The implications of the community’s declining conditions went far beyond the familial; they generated an array of unsettling political questions for the Italian state. Without formal diplomatic ties, it was difficult for Renato Prunas, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Badoglio government, to make any intervention with the Anglo-Egyptian authorities on behalf of the Italians. The Egyptian government delayed taking action, which was attributed to their desire to first renegotiate the terms of the 1936 treaty with the British, “indirectly provoking a sense of disinterest towards any other question of foreign policy.”⁵ Several requests to send a delegation of Italians to reconnect with the Italians of Egypt and

³ “Dans les familles où les hommes avaient été internés, les femmes se sont trouvées dans la nécessité de pouvoir au besoin du foyer, ce qui a démembré un grand nombre de ceux-ci. Dans le domaine spirituel aussi, on peut percevoir du laisser-aller, ce qui a entre autre permis au Délégué Apostolique de constater que les fidèles Italiens répugnaient à se soumettre à la discipline de la confession.” SFA E2001-02#1000/111 BD:7, Memoire June 1944 ; see also MAE AP Egitto 1931-45 B33, “interessi italiani in Egitto” 1944.

⁴ “una collettività pur ieri vibrante di patriottismo stimata e prospera... è oggi tenuta per indesiderabile e vive precariamente, in istato di abulia, ai confini dell’indigenza” [sic]. ACS, PCM 1944-47 15-3/11222, “notizie sulla collettività italiana d’Egitto” 21 December 1944.

⁵ “provocando indirettamente un senso di disinteresse verso qualsiasi altra questione di politica estera.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50, B2, rappresentanza italiana in Egitto to MAE 4 September 1946.

attempt to resolve some of the growing problems went unanswered.⁶ Finally, in 1945, Prunas obtained permission to send a small mission to Egypt with the scope of reconnecting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by that point reestablished in Rome, to the Italian community in Egypt. Leading the trip, Giovanni de Astis arrived in Egypt on 23 September 1945, where he stayed until December. No attempts, however, to reinvigorate diplomatic ties between Italy and Egypt were made; this would be reserved for the Paris talks in the autumn of 1946.⁷

An article critical of the Italian government for its perceived disinterest in the community in Egypt appeared in the national newspaper, *Il Giornale della Sera*. It described the situation after de Astis's brief visit: "it is as though the Italians of Egypt are stateless, even below the beneficiaries of the Nansen International Office [for Refugees], reserved for those without nationality and protected by international conventions."⁸ The funds of the Swiss Legation had been exhausted and the community was without political representation. This description is especially telling of the political configurations which would shape the postwar landscape of the Italian community in Egypt. Identified as a national community by themselves and those around them, the Italians of Egypt were now isolated from the political bodies which had invested heavily in their community's foundations.

Many Italians became hostile towards the postwar Italian regime. That de Astis had arrived in Egypt merely to "explore the situation" only deepened the fissure; a community that had been convinced of its central role in Italy's fascist empire and as an essential organ in Italy's

⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1931-45 B33, Memorandum 30 November 1943 (Brindisi); Memorandum 12 February 1944 (Salerno).

⁷ Matteo Pizzigallo, *La diplomazia italiana e i paesi arabi dell'oriente mediterraneo* (1946-1952) (Milano, 2008), 13-14.

⁸ "È come se gli italiani d'Egitto fossero degli apolidi al disotto dei beneficiari del passaporto dell'Ufficio Internazionale Nansen, riservato a quanti sono privi di nazionalità i quali peraltro sono tutelati da convenzioni internazionali." "Dannoso disinteresse del Governo per gli italiani d'Egitto," *Il Giornale della Sera* 26 July 1946.

relationship with Egypt, found itself without any polity.⁹ This imbalance put the new Italian Republic at risk. As *Il Giornale della Sera*'s anonymous writer observed, it was as though the Italians of Egypt were stateless, marked as a marginal colonial community. Their "statelessness" was one defined by the irreconcilability between the recent past and the emergent present. By the time de Astis left the community, the lack of employment opportunities and the sense of uncertainty reignited prewar talk of departure from Egypt. Terms shifted, however, from repatriation to emigration.

This chapter addresses the emergent and competing frames of national and political belonging that shaped the Italian community in the immediate postwar years. The projection of fascist national imaginaries (Chapter One) and the foreseen impermanence of the communities in Egypt had mutated into the horizon-less time of internment (Chapter Two). This chapter, in contrast, addresses the uncertain politics of the present. Although there is ample evidence that Italians of Egypt foresaw an ending to the conditions that had previously existed, in this chapter I contend that the postwar period effectively made "uncertainty" a defining condition of their political worlds. The collapse of the fascist regime left Italian residents in Egypt without the shelter of the *Patria* to which they had previously turned in times of uncertainty and need. Indeed, the very notion of *Patria*--built up since Italy's unification--came under question, leaving the Italians of Egypt in a state of political orphanage. Differing from the general precariousness of the postwar period in Italy and Europe, the case of the Italians in Egypt is unique because this instance of uncertainty regarded both their political role for the Italian state and the conditions of their remaining in Egypt.

⁹ In line with this Labanca suggests that much of the work on "consensus" in the colonial context, and to which I would add especially during the years of overlapping extraterritoriality and Fascist propaganda in Egypt, turns out "inappropriate" because the hegemony of nationalist discourses in many of these communities stifled any chance for a viable antifascist opposition (without appearing "antinationalist" to other Italians). Labanca, *Oltremare*, 129-130.

One goal of this chapter, and of this second part of the dissertation, is to capture the overlapping durations of the events that shaped the postwar years and to illustrate how their accumulating effects reached different actors at different moments. Diplomatic correspondence, newspaper articles, and reports from various institutions in Egypt make clear how, frequently, before an “event” took place (before it had actualized on the ground), it was anticipated in a variety of ways, circulating as rumor or as leaked information in newspaper articles, and individuals or groups reacted to its foreseen implications. This, for example, was the case when the former editor of *Il Giornale d’Oriente*, Athanos Catraro, struggled to reinstate the project of an Italian newspaper as a “mouthpiece” for the Italians in Egypt. Prominent members of the Italian community, who assumed it was the Italian diplomats blocking Catraro’s attempts, inferred that the new Italian Government opposed the community’s recovery, and acted hostile to new representatives. In fact, it appears that Catraro’s attempts to reestablish the newspaper were blocked by Egyptian—rather than Italian—authorities, but this was revealed only once he was given permission to publish after 1950. After an event took place, actors reacted in a different mode. This, for example, was the case when Italian residents accused the Italian administration of having neglected them after the accumulation of events between 1948 and 1953. In both circumstances subjects responded to an event, whether it had been actualized or not.

These coinciding temporalities betray the challenge in delineating the boundaries of an “event,” or what Anders Shinkel refers to as the “two sides of... experiential units” that demonstrate how events might be seen as durations that cut through the actors and objects of history.¹⁰ Events unfold in a series of diachronic turns based on assumptions about other actors’

¹⁰ Anders Shinkel, “History and Historiography in Process.” *History and Theory*, 43 1 (2004): 39-56, 40; in other words, for an historical fact to have been realized, to cross into the realm of experience, some aspect of the event’s ontogeny—that which gives it its factual nature—must have settled. Shinkel’s, and my own, take on “events” and the durations of a becoming present in

pasts, their actions in the present, and judgments regarding what recourse might be taken in the future. In other words, the processing of an event itself sheds light upon the non-synchronic and multiple timings of history. Sociologist Richard Madsen calls this “the messy flow of concrete events.”¹¹ This is the point of departure for this chapter: to highlight the constant disruption to the sense of historicity that had substantiated political narratives of the Italian community in Egypt. This disruption rendered the community “anachronistic,” making the Italians of Egypt appear inevitably “nostalgic,” or out of time.¹² Events in this chapter accumulate quickly and have ephemeral consequences. Few documentary sources are available and, therefore, much of this chapter (and the next) grasps at the circumstances of the Italians in Egypt through the eyes of individuals diversely attached to the community itself: Italian diplomats, political organizers in Egypt, prominent members of the community, among others. It is worth noting that, after the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, Italian offices in Egypt became increasingly central to the lives of Italians as they were one of the sole conduits through which residents could seek resolution to the growing sense of uncertainty. Consular offices functioned as intermediaries between the policies emanating from Rome and Cairo and the concerns of Italian residents. Drawing on these sources, I focus on how the actions and lives of the Italian residents influence, shape, and unsettle postwar geopolitics. Here, I argue that these immediate postwar conditions, and the absence of an easily identifiable “event” that set the stage for what would become the

relation to the past are predominately borrowed from Alfred Whitehead’s, *Process and Reality* (New York, 1979); see an earlier, albeit less thorough, attempt to integrate Whitehead’s philosophy into the historical craft Dale H. Porter, “History as Process.” *History and Theory*, 14 3 (1975): 297-313.

¹¹ Richard Madsen, *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village* (Berkeley, 1984), 26.

¹² Building on Adorno’s notion of negative dialectics, Butler notes that an anachronistic ethos is one that “refuses to become past, and violence is the way in which it imposes itself upon the present, but also seeks to eclipse the present.” Here, I imply something similar, yet in terms of an embodied socio-politics that, in its imposition, introduces into the historical narrative new potentialities. It has its own duration and continuity. Judith Butler *Giving an account of oneself*. Fordham University Press: NY (2005), 5.

massive emigration and repatriation of Italians over the following decades. And, that the political configurations of these years were fundamental in solidifying a nostalgic sense of political identity.

I. Fascist Residues

The collapse of Fascism (the implications of which were largely unknown in Egypt), the loss of territories that symbolized Italy's "greatness" in and around the Mediterranean, and an Egypt accelerating towards its independence from foreign domination marked the eventfulness of the postwar.¹³ Moreover, the "interruption" in ties between Italy and Egypt left a profound gap, demonstrated in both the Italian government's lack of awareness regarding the reality of the Italians in Egypt and the dearth of information for the Italian residents concerning occurrences in Italy over the course of the Second World War. Before the war had ended, one diplomat described the Italians of Egypt as "fuori tempo (out of time)."¹⁴ The Second World War had introduced a disjuncture that, according to the new Italian regime, needed to be sutured.¹⁵

Nearly all reports reaching the Foreign Ministry mentioned the reluctance of the Italian community to break from the ideological and political structures of fascism, a theme that continued well into the 1950s. Before the allied occupation of Italy in 1943, a report arrived in Rome via German counter-spy networks in Cairo. It described antifascist activities in Egypt. At

¹³ Christopher Seton-Watson refers to this period (1945 to 1953) as Italy's "imperial hangover." Although Italian administration of territory in Egypt never quite took place, his analysis does provide insight into the ambivalence in relating to the "Patria" facing the Italians of Egypt, who were and remained pervious to nationalist sentiments. Christopher Seton-Watson "Italy's Imperial Hangover," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15 1 (1980). pp. 169-179.

¹⁴ ACS, PCM 1944-47 15-3/11222, "notizie sulla collettività italiana d'Egitto" 21 December 1944.

¹⁵ It was potentially volatile, not necessarily because the community expressed political opposition but because it placed the community outside of the new political configurations being developed, outside of the boundaries of (any) state control.

the time, the *Centro d'azione del movimento italiani liberi* was a combined effort of the *Azione antifascista* (Antifascist Movement) and *Italiani liberi* (Free Italians), the former a Jewish antifascist organization, the latter defined simply as an Italian “democratic” movement. The central headquarters of the *Centro d’Azione* was in Washington DC, under the authority of Carlo Sforza.¹⁶ This was the only group officially recognized by the Anglo-Egyptian authorities (it morphed later into the *Movimento Libera Italia*, MLI). However, it had little support from within the Italian community.

Stefano Terra, a founding member of the *Giustizia e Libertà* group in Cairo (active in Egypt since 1940-41), noted that the other groups were poorly organized and at risk of “losing” the Italian community in its entirety. He wrote ironically, “the four antifascist Italians of Egypt (i quattro antifascisti italiani d’Egitto)” were making the mistake of concerning themselves with the abstract politics of Turin, Milan, Naples, and:

of the committee of liberation, and of this and that party, of Sforza and the son of Sforza, of Croce, and of the King and the nephew of the King, disregarding their own patriots born and raised in Egypt like them.¹⁷

A call to fight on the Italian front in 1944 by one of the antifascist groups was met with only 20 responses.¹⁸ Another report described that there were at most “one hundred or so” antifascists.¹⁹

¹⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1931-45 B33, Vidau to Ministero Interno 22 March 1943.

¹⁷ “Torino, Milano, Napoli e del comitato di liberazione, e di questo e di quel partito, di Sforza e del figlio di Sforza, di Croce e del Re e del nipote del Re, trascurando i propri patrioti nati e vissuti come loro in Egitto.” MAE AP Egitto 1931-45 B33, Cuppari Annibale 2 February 1944, Stefano Terra article published in the G&L “edizione per l’Italia” in 1943.

¹⁸ MAE AP Egitto 1931-45 B.33, Radio Tevere August 1944; While Petricioli notes that the antifascist movement was rather strong by the end of the war (specifically during 1944 and 1945) there seems to be considerable evidence that it by no means was hegemonic and, perhaps once the real threat of war was gone, was seen as a mere opportunity to escape from the hardships of the war. In a similar way as the commitment to the PNF is portrayed in reports produced by antifascists at the time, joining the *Libera Italia* movement seems to have been a largely pragmatic decision. The brief life of antifascism in the community may have been stymied by its lack of success in 1) representing the interests of the community itself (or the majority of its workers) and 2) its collusion - or the appearance thereof - with regimes and movements that were

Similar numbers appeared in British reports.²⁰ The antifascist groups were frequently seen as having been led by individuals who had never shown themselves to be “patriotic” or “nationalist.”²¹ Rumors that the antifascist groups struggling for power sought the eventual “denationalization” of the Italian communities circulated into the late 1940s.²² In other words, many Italian residents feared that the antifascists sought a dissolution of the very links to metropolitan Italy that they claimed to have enjoyed during the Fascist period.

A visit from a delegate of the Italian Red Cross found that the constant change of names and leadership of the antifascist groups had caused many to find their role ineffective and irrelevant. Instead, the failure of fascism in Italy was often attributed by Italians in Egypt to the “cowardliness” (*vigliaccheria*) of metropolitan Italians and the sabotage of antifascists.²³ During

hostile or opposed to ideologies it seemed to hold close to heart. See Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 450.

¹⁹ MAE AP Egitto 1931-45 B33, Appunto 28 July 1944.

²⁰ BNA, FO371-24634 Lampson. September 18, 1940.

²¹ ACS 1944-47 15-3/11222 segreto 23 July 1944.

²² The case of Maurizio Boccara is interesting. As an active antifascist, he organized a large donation of winter goods to be sent to Italy in 1945 and continued to publish apologetic articles in French language Jewish newspapers (*l'Aurore* and *La Menorah*) into the 1950s arguing that the Italians were innocent and should not be blamed for the racist policies enacted during Fascism. A controversial interview he gave for *La Bourse Egyptienne* in late 1946, in which he claimed to be a leader of *Nuova Italia*, regarding the possibility of an eventual “purging” of the Italian communities in Egypt drew harsh criticism from members of the community, who claimed that this rumor was being spread so that the antifascist groups could quickly consolidate their hold. ACCC, Maurizio Boccara Armando.

²³ ACS, CRI servizi affari internazionali, B144, “situazione collettività italiane in Egitto” 1944; this same observation is made several years later, in 1948, by Paolo Caccia Dominioni, an Italian who was raised around the Mediterranean (including Tunisia and Egypt), as his father was a notable diplomat. He served in various military posts until moving back to Egypt in 1924, while distancing himself from the fascist regime. He was called back to service during the Second World War and participated in the battle of el-‘Alamein. As a survivor--and a well-respected resident among members of the Italian community in Egypt--he devoted himself to the memorialization of the battle of el-‘Alamein and the construction of the memorial monument for the Italian soldiers that died in the desert. In his incredibly detailed account of the battle and its connection to Italian politics on the borders of Libya and Egypt--which interestingly extends chronologically from 1933-1962--he writes from Cairo, in an entry dated July 1948: “Gli italiani d’Egitto non si sono ancora riavuti dopo che il loro paese, nel mondo intero, sazio di frequentare

a break from navy service with the allied forces,²⁴ Annibale Cuppari visited family in Egypt where he observed “great contempt by the entire colony, which classified me as a traitor of the patria and a mercenary of the English.” He goes on to say that he was suspected to have come solely “to propagandize... in the service of the enemy.”²⁵ The frequent arrival of such reports likely led Rome to hesitate in responding to the numerous requests sent by the MLI to undertake guardianship over the Italian communities in Egypt.²⁶ For the same reasons, Brunner, the Swiss chargé d’affaires, had refused to work with the antifascists during the Second World War: according to him, they lacked “impartiality and objectivity.”²⁷ By 1949, however, events in Egypt would bring about the complete dissolution and expulsion of the antifascist groups.

What alarmed the new Italian government the most was the deepening cleft between the past and the emergent present of the Italian community in Egypt. A report from the summer of 1944 described the once “prosperous” community--the institutions, schools, hospitals, *Il Giornale d’Oriente*--and noted that “to this recent past (passato prossimo) corresponds quite a miserable present, of which the absence of precise news allows only a tracing.”²⁸ Institutions and schools remained closed, the hospitals were occupied by the Anglo-Egyptian forces, *Il Giornale*

gli atrî trionfali, si accontenta delle scale di servizio: e ne accusano l’esercito antifascista, ‘colpevole di aver sabotato una vittoria tedesca’ ad Alamein.” Paolo Caccia Dominioni, *Alamein: 1933-1962* (Milano, 1966): 269.

²⁴ It should be added that the Italian fleet was among the first to join the Allied Forces. See David W. Ellwood *Italy, 1943-45* (Leicester, 1985), 41-43.

²⁵ “molto disprezzo da parte dell’intera colonia, la quale mi ha classificato da traditore della patria e prezzolato dagli inglesi... a far propaganda... al servizio del nemico.” MAE AP Egitto 1931-45 B.33, Cuppari Annibale 2 February 1944.

²⁶ SFA E2001-02#1000/111 BD:7, Brunner to DPF, 3 August 1945, 8 July 1945, 18 April 1944.

²⁷ “impartialité et objectivité.” SFA E2001-02#1000/111 BD:7, Notice 3 August 1945.

²⁸ “a questo ‘passato prossimo’ corrisponde un ben misero ‘presente’, che la mancanza di precise notizie permette solo di tratteggiare.” MAE AP Egitto 1931-45, B33, “interessi italiani in Egitto” 1944.

had been shut down since 1940 and replaced with a publication by the antifascists that was boycotted by most Italians.²⁹ Nothing of the present resembled that of the recent past.

The postwar Italian government had to deal with the residues of Fascist propaganda in the community: “the [Italian] colony of Egypt had known, of Fascism, only the phenomena that could have made the Italians abroad proud; from Fascism it received enormous material subsidies for the realization of its activities...”³⁰ Before the fascist consolidation of the community, the community had been largely absent of strong political ties to Rome, the report stated, however they had been characteristically “nationalist.” After the war, “remembering the antique abandonment and neglect of the prefascist governments, [the Italian community] generally looked favorably upon the Fascist Party which cared for it and, ultimately, gave it quite a few advantages.” Their refusal to listen to other sources of news during the war, including the boycott of the antifascist publications, had meant they remained “completely in the dark regarding what was happening in Italy.”³¹ For this reason, Prunas, attempting to reconnect the community to Rome suggested the need for a systematic “reeducation.”³² Ideally, this was supposed to represent the suture that the new regime thought the Italians of Egypt needed. It

²⁹ Marchi, “La presse d’expression,” 119.

³⁰ “La colonia d’Egitto aveva conosciuto, del fascismo, solo quei fenomeni che potevano inorgoglire l’italiano all’estero; dal fascismo aveva ricevuto ingenti sovvenzioni materiali per la realizzazione delle sue attività....” MAE AP Egitto 1931-45, B.33, Appunto Salerno 23 June 1944.

³¹ “ricordando l’antico abbandono e trascuranza dei Governi prefascisti, era generalmente favorevole al Partito Fascista che si occupava di essa e gli aveva dato, in definitiva, non pochi vantaggi.” MAE AP Egitto 1931-45, B33, “interessi italiani in Egitto” 1944; another report noted “...la propaganda fascista cominciò a sostenere che la disfatta era dovuta non alla mancanza di preparazione, ai piani strategici sbagliati ecc. ecc. ma esclusivamente al sabotaggio e al tradimento degli antifascisti... In seguito a questo stato e più di tutto alla completa ignoranza della verità ed allo sbandamento delle molte correnti la gente non sa più cosa pensare.... illustrando un po’ gli avvenimenti reali ed attuali la stragrande maggioranza dei fascistizzanti capirebbe benissimo l’orrore nel quale incorre.... Bisogna trovare il modo di fare questa propaganda.” Appunto 28 July 1944.

³² MAE AP Egitto 1931-45, B33 Prunas to Bounous 17 February 1944.

would be a re-historicization that would bring the recent past into harmony with the emerging present (or at least alleviate the otherwise drastic breakage between the two).

II. Open Wounds and Unsettled Questions

Italian residents had hoped de Astis's visit would close some of the wounds left by the internment, but its inconclusiveness led to a general sense of abandonment. In January 1946, Ugo Fiorentino, one of the leaders of the MLI and one of the few intermediaries between the new administration in Rome and the community in Egypt, wrote to De Gasperi, the Italian Prime Minister:

The abrupt interruption of these treaties [settlement treaties between the two governments], precisely when one hoped that agreements were about to be obtained, threw the Italian colony in a state of discouragement bordering on desperation. The fact of still being without civil and economic rights after nearly six years—after more than two years of Italy siding with the Allies and without [any] national authority to defend its interests—has put the Italian residents in an intolerable situation.³³

Fiorentino was likely also concerned about the potential of the MLI to become the representative body for the Italian communities in Egypt, already the only point of reference between Italy and Egypt. British authorities hesitated in their support of the MLI, due to the suspicion that several of its members were also involved in communist organizing in Cairo and Alexandria.³⁴ Another report described the community following de Astis's visit:

The hopes of the Italians of Egypt were aimed at the de Astis mission, which unfortunately failed, and [now] they're eagerly awaiting the prompt return of a representative from our government who can conclude the interrupted treaties...

³³ “La brusca interruzione di queste trattative, proprio quando si sperava che risultati concreti stessero per essere ottenuti, [hanno] gettato la colonia italiana in uno stato di sconforto tale che rasenta la disperazione. Il fatto di essere ancora privi dei diritti civili ed economici dopo quasi sei anni e dopo più di due anni da che l'Italia si è schierata a fianco degli Alleati e di non aver nessuna Autorità nazionale che ne tuteli gli interessi, ha posto gli Italiani qui residenti in una situazione intollerabile.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, Fiorentino to De Gasperi 13 January 1946.

³⁴ FO 371/24634/1947 “Anti Fascist Italians in Egypt.”

politically, the Italians of Egypt are isolated... literally parched for precise news on the internal situation in Italy.³⁵

By March, Italy and Egypt had agreed on the reopening of respective “offices” (agence) in each country. Despite the profuse doubt about the Egyptian Government’s desire to return to the prewar conditions, especially given its intention to hasten the end of the terms of 1936 treaty and the transitory period of the Montreux Convention due to expire in 1949, discussions for postwar settlements were indeed underway between the two countries. Italian schools remained closed (except for the religious schools which has been left untouched during the war) and rumors circulated that the school inaugurated during Vittorio Emmanuele III’s 1933 visit to Alexandria—occupied by the British Military and used as a field hospital since the summer of 1940—was to be turned into an Egyptian school.³⁶

The question nagging both the Italian state and the residents in Egypt, however, was whether it was possible to transition from a community whose lifeline was assistance—as it had been in the years immediately preceding the war—to an employed community. Unemployment was widespread and, when work was procured, it was often on a provisory or temporary basis.³⁷ Many of Cairo’s largest companies had fired their Italian employees just before Italy’s entry into the war.³⁸ After the war, some of these same companies refused to rehire or provide assistance to

³⁵ “Tutte le speranze degli Italiani d’Egitto erano puntate sulla missione de Astis, purtroppo fallita, ed essi auspicano un sollecito, immediato ritorno di un rappresentante del nostro Governo che possa riprendere a condurre a termine le trattative interrotte... Politicamente gli Italiani d’Egitto sono sbandati...sono letteralmente assetati di notizie precise sulla situazione interna dell’Italia.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B1, “situazione politica interna” 22 February 1946.

³⁶ *ibid.*; “Una requisizione inutile e vessatoria?” *Il Mattino della Domenica* 14 July 1946.

³⁷ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B9 Luigi Carbone to Ivanoe Bonomi 1 June 1947.

³⁸ Le Sucreries d’Egypte fired between 50 and 60; Crédit Foncier around 20; Egyptian Hotels around 100; Groppi around 30; Société Anonyme des Eaux du Caire around 200; National Bank of Egypt around 100. MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B5, Ufficio Consolare Cairo to MAE 19 February 1947.

its former employees.³⁹ In the Canal Zone, following the closure of the Fayed camps, the majority of workers were unemployed, their positions at the Suez Canal Company filled by Egyptian, Greek, and Maltese workers.⁴⁰ The hiring anew of Italians appeared unlikely, especially given the increasing tendency to “Egyptianize” the workplace, as it was called by the media and in both official and unofficial documents. Maurizio Basso, the new Italian Consul in Port Said, estimated that the Egyptian employees were projected to be around 80 percent of the total workforce.⁴¹ The lone opportunity for employment in the Canal Zone was provided by the new British military headquarters, located on the site of the former internment camp. Apart from this, Basso argued, their rehiring by the Canal Company would provoke unfavorable responses from the other communities as the political sentiments of the war did not vanish with its ending. Basso claimed that the British military employed almost 100 percent of the Italians from Ismailia, but their employment was only temporary.⁴² He added, as though to qualify the realities facing the workers:

NB. It is not excluded, in closing, that [behind] the difficulties confronting the Italians there are concealed motives linked to the Egyptian Authorities’ desire to abolish the Montreux Convention and then to be free to expel undesirables. Today, an unemployed foreigner is always an undesirable one.⁴³

³⁹ MAE AP Egitto 1931-45 B33, interessi italiani in Egitto 1944.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, Ntalachanis points to evidence that the jobs Greeks took during the Second World War were then returned to Italians. More than anything, these contradictory reports demonstrate that the jobs available to members of both communities were quite restrictive and most likely subject to competition within small social spheres. See Angelos Ntalachanis, “The Emigration of Greeks from Egypt during the Early Post-War Years,” *Journal of Hellenistic Diaspora* 25, 2 (2009), pp. 35-44.

⁴¹ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, Basso to De Astis 6 November 1946; see also Dalachanis, “Leaving Egypt,” 119-121, 123.

⁴² MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, Basso to De Astis 7 November 1946.

⁴³ “N.B. Non si esclude infine che nelle difficoltà opposte agli Italiani, non entrino motivi inconfessabili, collegati al desiderio delle autorità egiziane di abolire la convenzione di Montreux nei nostri riguardi, e quindi di avere mano libera nella espulsione degli indesiderabili. Ora un disoccupato straniero è sempre un indesiderabile.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, Basso to De Astis 6 November 1946.

The possibility to continue living in Egypt necessitated employment and, without opportunities for employment, Italians would be unable to secure their futures in Egypt.

Although juridical capacity had been restored in March 1946, the block on banks, bank accounts, and properties continued to hinder many from returning to their prewar lives. Radios that had been sequestered from Italians during the war were being sold back. One member of the community wrote to the Consul, “one doesn’t even talk of restitution of the [objects] sequestered.”⁴⁴ Others lost property. Beniamino Paonessa, a veteran from the First World War resident in Alexandria, wrote to the Consul in 1947 describing the challenge he faced in finding work because, previously employed as a maintenance worker by the Italian schools, his tools were lost with the sequestration of the schools. They included “personal clothing” and what Paonessa described as an “even more serious loss... cabinetry tools.”⁴⁵ The personal tools of Michele Ardizzone, a mechanic based in Port Said, remained under sequester until after 1949.⁴⁶ Some cases were more muddled, such as that of Guido Fiore Miraglia. Fiore Miraglia ran a small chemistry laboratory and was founder and partial owner of Chemical Import-Export Company of Egypt, which maintained two pharmacies (Farmacia Galetti and Joannides) in Alexandria. All were placed under sequester with Italy’s entry into the war. While Fiore Miraglia was interned, his part of the company was sold off, effectively expunging him from any ownership. With continual changes in the political and legal situation, Fiore Miraglia’s case stretched unresolved into the 1960s.⁴⁷ His experience proved formative when Fiore Miraglia became an active voice in the call for the recognition of refugee status for Italians of Egypt in the 1950s when he became

⁴⁴ “non si parla neanche di restituzione di quelle sequestrate.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B1, “collettività italiana in Egitto.”

⁴⁵ ACAE, “Paonessa Beniamino - cl.1883.”

⁴⁶ ACAE/PS, “Ardizzone Michele fu Francesco - 1886.”

⁴⁷ ACAE, “Fiore Miraglia Guido.”

a founding member of the *Associazione Nazionale Profughi Italiani d'Egitto* (National Association of Refugee Italians of Egypt, ANPIE)

Still others sought reparations for the damage to their homes caused by the Italian air raids on Alexandria. After four years and four months of internment, Francesco Bagnara, a sailor, discovered that his wife and four children were no longer living in their house on *promenade de la reine* (part of the Alexandrian corniche), which had been severely damaged by air raids during the war. Bagnara's family relocated to the district of Attarin (*rue farahda*) where he was unemployed until 1949.⁴⁸

With the continued sequester, the *Società italiana di Beneficenza* (SIB)—“[once] one of the most prosperous organizations of the Italian colony” and the main source of assistance that was relatively independent from the consulate—was unable to resume its payments of impoverished Italians.⁴⁹ Its members meeting without access to their accounts, the SIB could not find solutions for the families it had supported prior to the war. In this moment, the consulates began to assume even greater material responsibility as they were the only conduit through which Italians could request relief. Requests flowed into consular offices, yet most went unanswered. The overwhelming demand led officials to estimate that nearly all of the roughly

⁴⁸ Bagnara opened a claim for reparations after the reestablishment of diplomatic ties that went unanswered; he resubmitted the claim in 1956 asking for compensation for the damage suffered to his house and *biancheria*. A note is written in pencil on the bottom of the claim that accuses Bagnara of exaggeration: “Secondo notizie assente presso il Banco Italo-Egiziano, il cambio della Lira italiana era - nel maggio 1940 - di Lit. 100= Pt.164.25. Stando a onesto cambio, il Bagnara avrebbe possedute e lasciato in Egitto, all'inizio alla guerra, 40 paia di mutande al prezzo di Pt. 328.5 il paio!!” [sic]. ACAE, “Bagnara Francesco fu Leonardo.”

⁴⁹ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, MAE to Legazione d'Italia Bern, “beni italiani in Egitto - assistenza” 23 May 1946.

30,000 Italians of Alexandria suffered damages as a consequence of the actions taken against Italians during the war.⁵⁰

Consular offices were unable to respond to individual claims because it was unclear whether or not sequestered properties would eventually be returned. Noting the gravity of the problem at hand, an article entitled “Solidarity not Charity” appeared in the pages of *Il Mattino della Domenica*, the only Italian newspaper published in Egypt at the time, published by members of the MLI. It read:

Although assistance is an immediate necessity, let’s not forget that this cannot resolve the problems of Italian families. The colony cannot and should not live by charity: it needs to live by work. The essential problem is to create possibilities for work in order to absorb the energies of our workers...either giving them life through artisanal cooperatives or creating employment agencies [for them].⁵¹

Amid the growing distance between the Egyptian political sphere and the European communities in its territory rumors circulated regarding “massive expulsions” of non-Egyptians. Because these rumors could not be outright dispelled, concern over unemployed Italians becoming “undesirables” only fueled fears of expulsion.⁵²

With diplomatic ties still unresolved completely between the two countries, much of the information that found its way into the halls of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome arrived in the form of letters from and interactions with concerned Italians of Egypt. Moreover, due to the informal nature of political representation, lines were blurred between official representatives

⁵⁰ “Ritiene...doveroso segnalare sin da ora a codesto Ministero che questo Consolato Generale, rispetto alla entità della Collettività italiana da esso amministrata - costituita da circa 30000 connazionali, i quali, nella gran maggioranza, hanno tutti subito danni in seguito agli avvenimenti bellici.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B4, Ufficio di Alessandria to Legazione d’Italia Cairo 25 April 1947.

⁵¹ “Se l’assistenza è immediatamente necessaria, non dimentichiamo però che essa non può risolvere i problemi delle famiglie italiane. La colonia non può e non deve vivere di carità: deve vivere di lavoro. Il problema essenziale è di creare possibilità di lavoro per assorbire le energie dei nostri lavoratori, oggi disoccupati, sia dando vita a cooperative artigiane, sia creando uffici di collocamento.” “Solidarietà non carità,” *Il Mattino della Domenica* 10 November 1946.

⁵² MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, MAE to DGIE 12 June 1946.

of the Italian state, prominent members of the community, and individuals seeking solutions to their everyday problems. *Il Mattino della Domenica* dismissed rumors of an expulsion “before the end of the transitory period.” Instead, the newspaper stated that these were the hopes only of an extreme group of politicians within the Egyptian government. Indirectly, however, the writers at *Il Mattino* implored the Egyptian administration to specify the overall threat of expulsion to foreigners that accompanied the approaching end of the transitory period.⁵³

The rupture in diplomatic ties had legally cancelled Italians from the rights of the Montreux Convention, meaning that they now were required to renew residency visas annually and that an absence from Egypt for a period of more than four months would annul an otherwise automatic reentry visa. The new reentry visa could only be re-administered by the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior. The Montreux Convention stipulated that residents of more than five years in Egypt could not be expelled (except in rare cases) and could maintain a visa that lasted until 14 October 1949, the expiration date of the Convention, at which point an entirely new policy towards non-Egyptian residents would be negotiated between Egypt and the respective countries. Although talks were underway to modify this, the Egyptian press suggested that all foreigners would soon be required to apply for annual visas.⁵⁴

With such uncertainties in mind, the Italian Consul in London forwarded a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressing the circumstances in Egypt. He alerted them of the arrival from Argentina of a Salesian priest who was to serve as the Plenipotentiary Minister of Emigration. Argentina solicited around four million Italian immigrants and the Consul suggested

⁵³ “Le voci di espulsione degli italiani dall’Egitto non hanno carattere ufficiale,” *Il Mattino della Domenica* 28 July 1946.

⁵⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B6, de Astis to MAE DGAP “trattamento degli stranieri in Egitto” 4 February 1947; de Astis 31 January 1947.

that this might relieve the urgent question of “displaced persons” in Italy.⁵⁵ It was also a subtle reminder that Italy was not prepared to receive a large number of Italian repatriates—from Egypt and elsewhere in North and East Africa.⁵⁶ Concurrently, *Il Mattino* began to publish advertisements and articles about the possibilities for Italian emigrants in Belgium, France, Switzerland and Venezuela.⁵⁷ The newspaper made various attempts to organize and expedite large numbers of requests for repatriation, noting that groups would be handled collectively and would be filing for “definitive repatriation,” thus relinquishing future residential rights in Egypt.⁵⁸ Passport renewals motivated by the desire for “repatriation” and “emigration” streamed into the consulate. On individual cases, the consulate covered expenses of repatriation but did so requiring that the departees renounce both their residency in Egypt and any future claim to assistance from the Italian government.⁵⁹

At the Paris peace talks in late 1946, diplomatic ties were finally restored.⁶⁰ However, the delay of the talks had worn on the community and practical relief from the sequester was far from the horizon. Hinting at that frustration, a letter signed by a group of “sequestered Italians of Egypt (italiani sequestrati d’Egitto)” was sent to Rome with a newspaper clipping of a

⁵⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B1, Con.Gen.d’Italia London to MAE “Argentina-Emigrazione” 3 December 1946.

⁵⁶ Romain H. Rainero, *Le navi bianche: Profughi e rimpatriati dall’estero e dalle colonie dopo la seconda guerra mondiale: una storia italiana dimenticata (1939-1991)* (Milano 2015).

⁵⁷ “I nostri lavoratori e le possibilità d’emigrazione,” *Il Mattino della Domenica* 7 July 1946; “L’emigrazione nel Venezuela è aperta agli Italiani,” *Il Mattino della Domenica* 14 July 1946.

⁵⁸ “Il rimpatrio dei connazionali,” *Il Mattino della Domenica* 10 November 1946.

⁵⁹ This is not something I found documented often and seemed an illusive point for many departees during these years. Occasionally, in the archives of the Italian consular offices in Alexandria and Cairo, I did find traces of these requests, such as that of Domenico Santoro, who, in 1950, implored the consular offices in Alexandria to grant him, his wife and their small child a consular repatriation. In 1952, he wrote, “they don’t give work to Europeans any longer.” He was added removed from the list of prospective repatriates shortly thereafter, however, because he procured temporary employment. Finally, in 1954, he was granted permission for a consular repatriation and a brief stay upon arrival in temporary housing, but they were asked to “renounce any other form of assistance” in accepting the repatriation. ACGA, Santoro Domenico.

⁶⁰ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 466-467; Pizzigallo, *La diplomazia italiana*, 11-32.

photograph from the *Journal d’Egypte* depicting de Astis, in the company of his wife and several foreign and Egyptian elite, at an opera performance in Cairo. The note read:

While your representatives enjoy their trip in Egypt between banquets and orgies and theaters, here, for six years we sequestered Italians suffer *la miseria* and hunger, and all of this for maintaining our Italian citizenship... We ask you to push for the return of our properties (beni), under sequester, made with our blood, for the common interest. If, after the peace treaty, you do not liquidate the sequester, we warn you that hunger gives way to terrible thoughts.⁶¹

Terms were finally set for the restitution of sequestered properties and the payment of 4.5 million EGP to the Egyptian Government for expenses during the war (damages suffered as a result of the air raids), including the 2,172,735 EGP spent on the Italian community during their internment. During the peace talks, when issues had been raised by the Italian representatives regarding the irregularity of the sequester—namely liquidated property and accounts, but also their very legitimacy as the two governments had not officially declared war against one another—the threat of expulsion had indeed been levied against the Italian Government.⁶² Both sides received criticism for the outcomes of the Paris talks. The Wafdist newspaper, *al-Misri*, widely read among Egyptian nationalists, attacked the Egyptian government for having agreed to the accords in the first place; while the Italian community in Egypt saw itself as having been sold out by the postwar Italian government.⁶³ *Il Globo* estimated the Italian losses in Egypt during the war at between 70 to 100 million EGP, dismissed by the Italian Government as an exaggeration based on Swiss estimates.⁶⁴ As articulated in the letter above, some Italian residents had

⁶¹ “Mentre i vostri rappresentanti godono del loro soggiorno in Egitto tra banchetti e orgie e teatri qui noi italiani sequestrati soffriamo la miseria e la fame da sei anni, e tutto cio per mantenere la sudditanza italiana... Vi preghiamo di sollecitare il ritorno dei nostri beni fatti col nostro sangue e che sono sotto sequestro; per l’interesse comune. Se dopo il trattativo di pace non liquidate il sequestro vi avvertiamo che la fame da brutti pensieri. [sic]” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B4, “grande reception a l’opera” and attached letter 26 January 1947.

⁶² MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, de Astis to Cattani 23 December 1946.

⁶³ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, Legazione Cairo to MAE 28 June 1947.

⁶⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B4, de Astis to MAE 29 April 1947.

suspected that they themselves would bear the cost of the liquidation of sequestered properties. In fact, in the final rendering of the law, one million Italian lire of the funds due to the Egyptian Government was to be drawn directly from sequestered accounts in Egypt, tapping into key assets used to support the community.⁶⁵

III. Representing a Community Detached

In this uncertain present, political representation and image became important both for members of the Italian community in Egypt and for the new diplomats in Egypt (without a plan for their own future ties with Egypt). The Italian administration in Rome and de Astis in Cairo viewed the invitation of around 20 “prominent Italians of Egypt” to a ceremony in Port Said in February 1947 celebrating the anniversary of Faruk as promising. The invitation was the first of its kind since the war. MLI leadership, however, responded negatively. The invited had all been active in Italian institutions prior to the war and were known loyalists to the PNF. The MLI leadership feared the reliance on the “old guard” in reestablishing Italy’s place in Egypt would only reify the fascist ideology already present in the community, rather than lead to a “re-education” of the Italian residents.⁶⁶ Contrarily, the new Italian diplomats saw the invitation as a step forward in rebuilding relations between the two countries and as relief for the community’s dwindling sense of its own importance. With the terms of the Paris talks approved in April 1947, threats of expulsion subsided and there was talk of new economic initiatives between the two countries. At

⁶⁵ Atti parlamentari - Assemblea Costituente N.17 (http://www.camera.it/_dati/Costituente/lavori/DDL/17A.pdf).

⁶⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B4, rappresentanza italiana in Egitto PS to Legazione Cairo 12 February 1947; MAE AP Egitto 46-50 B6 MLI to Nenni 25 February 1947.

the completion of his term in Egypt, de Astis even announced the birth of a “new Mediterranean politics,” hoping to signal a split from Mussolini’s fascist empire.⁶⁷

Members of the Italian diplomatic and business community who had been consulted by offices in Rome claimed that among Egyptians—politicians and populace alike—there existed great sympathy for the Italian community in Egypt and for Italy. They sought to profit from this. Postwar relations with the large Greek community remained tense, in part due to the Italian occupation of the Greek Islands and in part from competition within the Egyptian labor market.⁶⁸ However, an early report noted that Egyptians generally expressed positive opinions about Italians and still held Mussolini “in high regard.”⁶⁹ Some placed blame on the Italian King for “having led Mussolini astray.” The Egyptian newspaper, *el-Moqattam* described Mussolini’s imperial drive as a brief interruption of the “old friendship” between the two nations and as one encouraged by foreign competition.⁷⁰ Similar articles favorable to Italy continued to appear in the Egyptian press, to the great relief of Italian authorities, especially when framed against the prevalent nationalist discourse in the Egyptian public sphere (referred to as “xenophobic” almost universally in diplomatic correspondence). In light of discussions about the hastening end to the Montreux Convention and proposals to nationalize education (eventually put into action in 1949), rendering Egyptian history and geography and Arabic language instruction obligatory for all schools (not only public, as was previously the case), *any* sympathy was interpreted as a move in the right direction.

The “friendly” view of Italy took a more public role over the course of the year, particularly as the diplomats reinvigorated old under-the-table relations to Egyptian journalists.

⁶⁷ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B5, de Astis to MAE 15 May 1947.

⁶⁸ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B1, “collettività italiana d’Egitto” 28 January 1946; Dalachanis, “Leaving Egypt.”

⁶⁹ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B1, “situazione politica interna” 22 February 1946.

⁷⁰ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, de Astis to MAE 6 November 1946.

In response to an article on tourism in Italy published in the fall of 1947 in *La Bourse*

Egyptienne, de Astis commented:

it shouldn't be forgotten that the Italians, considered here as real enemies, not so long ago were reduced to the point of not hearing their language spoken in public... [now] the comparisons being made by Egyptians between Italy and other European countries are all in our favor.⁷¹

In fact, both the increasing hostility towards the British and a prospective boycott against Jewish goods given the fermenting question of Palestine's destiny were seen as economic opportunities by the Italian administration.⁷²

In summer 1947, the new Italian Minister in Egypt, Cristoforo Fracassi, during his first meeting with Faruk, spoke of the importance of developing "a Mediterranean politics." It was a political sphere, he argued, at risk of "exploding" in the ascendant tensions between West and East. But it was also a pathway for Italy and Egypt to become closer as jointly "neutral" powers.⁷³ Finally, Fracassi highlighted his plan to dismantle and remove "all vestiges" of Italy's colonial past. Italy had renounced its claim to its colonies at the Paris negotiations, which gave them an advantage over the French and the British in the Middle East.⁷⁴ The press, drawing on these exchanges, noted that Italy was quickly rising to the second place in the Egyptian economy. Despite the diplomatic employment of the community's image as a symbol of

⁷¹ "Non è infatti da dimenticarsi che gli italiani, considerati qui come veri e propri nemici, erano ridotti fino a qualche tempo fa al punto di non osare di parlare in pubblico la loro lingua... i confronti che si sentono fare da costoro [the Egyptians] tra l'Italia e molti altri paesi europei sono tutti a vantaggio del nostro." MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B5, de Astis to MAE 11 September 1947; "Lettre d'Italie" *La Bourse Egyptienne* 3 September 1947.

⁷² "Le possibilità dell'Italia nel commercio con l'Egitto," *Giornale del Mattino* 1 February 1946.

⁷³ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B4, Fracassi to Sforza 3 July 1947.

⁷⁴ Seton-Watson, "Italy's Imperial Hangover"; for more on Italian "decolonization" as a means to garner more prominence in the Mediterranean see Alessandro Brogi, "Competing Missions: France, Italy, and the Rise of American Hegemony in the Mediterranean" *Diplomatic History* 30, 4 (2006): 741-770, 742-3 and Alessandro Brogi, *A Question of Self-Esteem: The United States and the Cold War Choices in France and Italy, 1944-1958* (Connecticut, 2002).

historical affinity between Italy and Egypt, the Italian residents were absent from this story of foreign policy.

The fragile “morale” of the Italians had been severely damaged, described Ugo Fiorentino of the MLI. Both the failure to reconnect the community to metropolitan Italy and the common perception of the antifascist groups as opportunist and communist-leaning led to a boycott among Italians of Egypt of *Fronte Unito* and its later incarnation *Il Mattino della Domenica* published from 1943 to 1946.⁷⁵ Both published articles that spoke optimistically of an alliance with Russia, an unfavorable view in an Egypt where many individuals had profited from the structures of the colonial Mediterranean, and a view that would have irreparable consequences for the newspaper.⁷⁶ The newspaper declined despite editor Fausta Cialente’s repeated attempts to garner support for its publication from Rome and from the British Authorities in Egypt. British Authorities viewed its anti-colonialist stance unfavorably and made several bids to shut it down. According to Cialente, it was “the only democratic newspaper in the Middle East.” Although she hoped that it would become “the newspaper of the [Italian] colony” she acknowledged the difficulties from within the community: “it needs to be taken into consideration that the Italian colony of Egypt is still gravely infected by fascism and therefore the work of penetration [of antifascist ideology] has been slow, drawn out, and difficult.”⁷⁷

Around the same time, Athanasio Catraro, the former editor of *Il Giornale d’Oriente*, expressed his intention to publish a new Italian newspaper. Following his internment (Catraro was among the first arrested in 1940 and released in November 1944), he worked as a

⁷⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B1, “collettività italiana d’Egitto” 28 January 1946.

⁷⁶ Fondazione Antonio Gramsci, *Fronte Unito* 23 March 1944.

⁷⁷ “Bisogna tener presente che la colonia italiana d’Egitto è ancora gravemente infetta di fascismo e quindi l’opera di penetrazione è stata lenta, lunga e difficile.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B2, Cialente to Giolitti 15 October 1946; for an excellent analysis of Cialente’s political activism, attitudes towards Fascism and colonialism, and their expression through her writing, see Lucia Re “Painting, Politics, and Eroticism in Fausta Cialente’s Egyptian Narratives.”

correspondent in Rome for the Egyptian daily *La Reforme*. Several months prior to Fracassi's arrival, Marcello Fiorentino—a member of the *Unione democratica italiana* (Italian Democratic Union, UDI), a group that had split from the MLI—wrote to de Astis and to the Italian diplomats in Alexandria warning that Catraro intended to publish a paper “with evident antidemocratic objectives.”⁷⁸ Egyptian authorities had in fact denied Catraro permission to publish in what was, at the time, a decision condoned by de Astis, who wrote: “[Egyptian authorities] take perfect account of the fact that the publication of any Italian daily that's not inspired by sound democratic criteria would locally harm our collectivity and wouldn't be appreciated by us.”⁷⁹ The utility of depicting the Italians of Egypt as lodged in the past provided for the antifascist organizations an impetus for seeking greater control over information, whereas for the representatives of the Italian State it served (again) as an historical reference on which a new Mediterranean politics could be established.

Repercussions from the Egyptian authorities inspired great caution in the Italian diplomats. Rumors of changing residency laws⁸⁰ compounded the transforming circumstances in Palestine. In fact, with the growing tensions, Cialente—and many others on the political left—abandoned the country. *Il Mattino della Domenica* became *Il Gazette*, under the editorship of a member of *Giustizia e Libertà*, but it did not complete one year of publication. The UDI, maintaining a marginal following and yet the unique Italian organ with “political character” in Egypt, issued a statement supporting the Egyptian cause against the British in the summer of 1947. The statement was met with outcry among other Italians of Egypt. With the sequester still

⁷⁸ ACGA, Catraro Athanasio/Catraro Demetrio.

⁷⁹ “Queste autorità si rendono perfettamente conto che la pubblicazione di qualsiasi quotidiano italiano che non sia ispirato a criteri di sana democrazia nuocerebbe localmente alla nostra collettività e non sarebbe a noi gradito.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B6, de Astis to MAE 28 February 1947.

⁸⁰ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B6, de Astis 31 January 1947.

only resolved on the official level (it was not fully lifted until 1950) and unemployment rising, many found it “inopportune” to intervene in a “cause” that, according to Italian sources, concerned only England and Egypt. Ironically, Italian residents had come to rely more than ever on British protection in a context in which the logics of the anti-colonialist movement turned against all foreigners in Egypt. As discontented Italians visited consular offices in Alexandria and in Cairo, Fracassi was unable to respond, knowing that siding with the residents would, in turn, compromise his position with Egyptian Authorities. Silence was his best option.⁸¹

Catrarò grew frustrated with the continued opposition he faced from the UDI. He wrote that the accusation of having “undemocratic intentions based on [his] past” would hinder *anyone* in the community from moving forward. Instead, he argued that the UDI and the MLI were trying to monopolize the community, but that they in fact “had never represented the opinion of [the] Italian colony.”⁸² These debates were brought to a sudden halt when Resolution 181, the UN partition plan for Palestine, was adopted on 29 November 1947.

The events that ensued over the following months determined the outcome of this struggle to be the “mouthpiece” of the community in Egypt. The majority of the UDI and MLI leadership were associated with communist organizing in Egypt. Many were arrested, expelled, or intimidated on the basis on the conflation of Zionist and communist movements.⁸³ Members of the Italian community themselves participated in this provocation. One case was that of Umberto Terni (the separated husband of Fausta Cialente), who reported continuous harassment

⁸¹ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B6, Fracassi to MAE 30 August 1947; see also the article itself “Les Italiens et la cause égyptienne” *La Bourse Egyptienne* 22 August 1947; During this period, Fracassi was constantly working to balance Italy’s emergent Arab-oriented politics with the news that many Jews were illegally departing from Italy to Palestine. See Maria Grazie Enardu, “L’immigrazione illegale ebraica verso la Palestina e la politica estera italiana, 1945--1948.” *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, 2 (1986): 147-166.

⁸² ACGA, Catrarò Athanasio/Catrarò Demetrio.

⁸³ For more on the politics behind this conflation, see Joel Beinen, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*.

outside of his house when other Italians, provoking the arrival of Egyptian police, shouted, “he isn’t Italian, he’s Jewish!”⁸⁴

In April, a large-scale police strike in Alexandria and Cairo accompanied by demonstrations and looting damaged the shops and houses of several Italians and resulted in one death (a total of 24 deaths, 300 wounded; 30 automobiles, seven cinemas, and several hundred small shops and public spaces burned). Similar disturbances continued throughout the summer, materializing the schisms between the Monarchy, the Wafd, the Muslim Brotherhood, communist organizers, the police, and various opposition groups.⁸⁵ Tensions between political parties were aggravated as the Egyptian military built its forces in preparation for conflict in Palestine.

Fracassi closely monitored events as arrests began; he felt it an important and ominous fact that, although many communists supported total Egyptian independence and release from the Anglo-dominated economy, few had supported the war for Arab Palestine.⁸⁶ Indeed, in Italy the influx of Jewish refugees from Europe was becoming an overwhelming concern for the police. The Italian administration saw the formation of a Jewish state as a remedy to the growing population of displaced persons in Italy and the perceived threat of communist propaganda it brought with it. They did not, however, want to compromise their relations with the Arab world and thus exercised caution in taking any official positions on the conflict. In Egypt, this strategy

⁸⁴ ACGA, Terni Umberto - Cialente fu Michelangelo 1879.

⁸⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B7, Fracassi to MAE 16 April 1948. For more on the Muslim Brotherhood’s involvement in this political moment, see Richard Mitchell’s now classic study, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford, 1969).

⁸⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B7, Fracassi to MAE 29 January 1948.

of neutrality translated to the Italian representatives' avoidance of collaboration with the UDI and MLI.⁸⁷

When war in Palestine broke out in May and martial law was declared in Egypt, arrests of individuals with suspected communist or Zionist affiliation increased in frequency.⁸⁸ Of the roughly 1,300 arrests, around 100 were foreigners (the vast majority, around 1,000, of those arrested for suspicions of antigovernment activity, while only around 300 were arrested for their connections with Zionism). Twenty-seven of the arrested were Italians, mostly members of UDI and MLI. They were released after the intervention of Italian authorities, but under the condition that they leave Egypt definitively. With attacks aimed at Jewish quarters (and often areas generally occupied by foreigners) increasing, Pio Archi, a clerk in the Italian Legation in Cairo, cautioned that, although the restrictions and sequesters classified under Proclamation N26 of 30 May 1948 were targeted at Jewish enterprises, they threatened to harm all foreign communities.⁸⁹

Many sensed that Mahmoud al-Nukrashi, the Egyptian Prime Minister, was trying to push

⁸⁷ The Italian government was in fact well aware of the growing illegal immigration and the economic stress it was causing, namely in coastal towns/cities on the Adriatic Sea. While trying to limit the emigration, none of the facilities were prepared to hold refugees and assistance from the UNRRA was insufficient. Pressure from the American based Jewish Agency to welcome 25,000 refugees in transit to Palestine provoked a strong opposition from the fragile postwar Italian administration. ACS, PCM 44-47 "espatrio clandestino di ebrei"; see also MAE AP Egitto 46-50 B8, *el-masri* 17 August 1948; Enardu, "L'immigrazione illegale," 157, 163. For more on Italy's ambivalent relationship with Jews in the postwar context see (eds.) Ilaria Pavan and Guri Schwarz, *Gli ebrei in Italia tra persecuzione fascista e reintegrazione postbellica* (Firenze, 2001) and Guri Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi: Gli ebrei nell'Italia postfascista* (Bari, 2012).

⁸⁸ Communist activity in Egypt was extremely limited during the 1920s and 1930s, only to emerge during the Second World War, in part due to the Wafd's declining popularity in the labor movement, general disillusionment with liberalism, and for foreign and indigenous Jews the hope for a political alternative to the Wafd that would protect their interests. Trade unions were legalized and regulated from 1942. Beinun and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, 310-314; for an earlier study on the growth of trade unions and their connections to nationalist causes over the course of the 1940s (not only communism) see William J. Handley, "The Labor Movement in Egypt" *Middle East Journal* 3, 3 (1949): 277-292.

⁸⁹ Laskier, "Egyptian Jewry," 575-576; for more on the subject see Gundrun Kramer *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914-1952*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989 and Joel Beinun *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, Berkeley: UC Press, 1998.

through laws to further “nationalize” the country. To avoid the persecution of Italian residents, Archi advised that the Italian government refrain from recognizing the State of Israel—a position aided by Italy’s non-member status in the UN.⁹⁰ He warned that doing so would make the already marginalized community susceptible to acts of violence. Fracassi met with Ahmed Khashaba, Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, with Archi’s comments in hand, and expressed his concern that the Italians, “live in a state of true agitation after recent events, especially due to the lack of protection by local authorities.”⁹¹

IV. Andarsene - Leaving Egypt

In the midst of these struggles, many practical concerns of the Italian residents were left unresolved. The place of the Italians of Egypt in the postwar Mediterranean remained uncertain. One resident, Luigi Carbone, addressed a letter to Ivanoe Bonomi, then President of the Italian Senate, complaining of the abandonment of Italians in Egypt. He echoed the sentiments of the author who had described the community as “stateless.” Carbone wrote: “reports, memorandums, articles in various journals, etc. have been written by authoritative people... but all seems to finish in nothing... no one moves to meet this people [the Italians of Egypt] that awaits anxiously an effective rescue.”⁹² The closing line of Carbone’s letter begs that one consider the shift from a politics of hierarchy under Fascism to the “statelessness” characteristic of the search for a place in the present. He wrote, “this brief exposé is addressed to the new Italian government so that it

⁹⁰ MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B7, Archi to MAE 1 June 1948; Italy did, however, recognize the state of Israel in 1949. Enardu, “l’immigrazione illegale,” 166.

⁹¹ “vive ormai in uno stato di vero orgasmo per gli incidenti che si sono verificati e, soprattutto, per la mancanza di protezione da parte delle autorità locali.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B9, Fracassi to MAE 21 July 1948.

⁹² “Sono state scritte relazioni da persone autorevoli, pro-memoria, articoli su vari giornali ecc. ma tutto sembra vada a finire nel vuoto... nessuno si muove per andare incontro a questa gente che attende ansiosamente un efficace soccorso.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B9, Carbone to Bonomi 1 June 1948.

sees to it, demonstrating that the Patria is a concrete reality in which one can replace [his] faith without being deceived.”⁹³ Carbone’s letter spoke for a large number of Italians writing from Egypt. Fracassi, when asked to respond by Bonomi—who himself worried about the inundation of such letters in government offices in Rome—attributed Carbone’s tone to ignorance: “to his excuse, he probably doesn’t realize the extremely scarce resources available to our authorities for assistance to [Italian] *connazionali* and he completely ignores actions taken for more than two years to protect their interests.”⁹⁴ If such efforts were indeed being made, why were they unknown to the community? The repetition of similar interactions sheds much light on the diplomatic actions taken behind the scenes and their perception by a disconnected public, and on the general messiness of events in postwar Egypt.

Fracassi navigated difficult waters. A report by the Stato Maggiore della Marina that attempted to portray the state of affairs in Egypt after the tensions of spring 1948 described the Italians of Egypt as “entrapped” by fascism (an estimated 99 percent) and noted a shared sense that the new government had initially leaned on Jewish Italians that had been exempt from the internment during the war and “for that reason the [Italian] colony has distanced itself from our authorities.”⁹⁵ Indeed, much of the leadership of the MLI was of Jewish origin. The same report suggested that Pulli Bey, an Italian electrician who had earned elite status in the royal palace and the confidence of King Faruk, be used to rebuild ties between the two peoples. This was in marked contrast to the position taken by the MLI, which asserted that the new administration

⁹³ “Questo breve esposto è rivolto al nuovo governo italiano affinché Egli provveda dimostrando che la Patria è veramente una realtà concreta e che in Essa ripone la sua fiducia non s’inganna.”

⁹⁴ “a sua scusa può valere il fatto ch’egli probabilmente non ha notizia di quali scarsissimi mezzi dispongono le nostre autorità per l’assistenza ai connazionali ed ignora del tutto l’attività da esse svolta, da oltre un biennio, per la protezione dei loro interessi.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B9, Fracassi to MAE and DG Emigrazione 30 July 1948.

⁹⁵ It is unclear precisely why this report was done and how it was done without informing the Italian diplomats in Egypt. MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B7, Appunto - Stato Maggiore della Marina 17 June 1948.

leaned too heavily on the old guard. Fracassi responded again in frustration, calling the Stato Maggiore report “ridiculous” and reiterating that for two years negotiations had been underway to realize the lifting of the sequester and the restitution of properties. However, Fracassi understood the force of the past the he was up against:

it’s natural that the Italian colony in Egypt gratifies itself with unfortunate comparisons to the Fascist epoch, in which enormous sums were squandered each year for propaganda in the various colonial institutions, while the [then] current balances did not permit more than limited donations.⁹⁶

A return to this past, he wrote, was “inconceivable.” He explained their frustration as resulting from comparison to the rhetorical role they had occupied in fascist propaganda. Fracassi neglected, perhaps, that this attribution to political identity was only further distancing the community from the contemporary regime.

Months later, Vittorio Zoppi, the Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote to Fracassi asking his opinion about the steady flow of Italians leaving Egypt and arriving at governmental offices in Italy with requests for support and assistance, “demonstrating angst over the future of our collectivity.” Zoppi feared that the labor market in Egypt had entirely closed for Italians and the only way to reintegrate would be to request specific privileges, but, only a year from the full cancellation of the Capitulations:

this would appear to [Egyptians] as a new capitular regime and an intolerable discrimination, for which the times have passed... I hear that the mood of the Italians is rather low, that the workers feel unprotected, and that many employees (impiegati) will be fired even from Italian institutions, and that even at a higher level... there are fears for the future, so much that one notes a diffuse desire to... ‘get out’ (andarsene).⁹⁷

⁹⁶ “Ciò malgrado è naturale che la colonia italiana in Egitto si compiaccia di paragoni sfavorevoli con l’epoca fascista, in cui somme enormi venivano profuse ogni anno a scopo propagandistico tra le varie istituzioni coloniali, mentre le attuali condizioni di bilancio non consentono che assai limitate elargizioni.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B7, Fracassi to MAE 4 August 1948.

⁹⁷ “apparirebbe loro come un nuovo regime capitolare per il quale i tempi sono passati e come una discriminazione insopportabile... Mi si dice che lo stato d’animo degli italiani sia alquanto depresso, che i lavorati si sentono poco protetti, che molti impiegati debbono venire licenziati anche da istituti italiani, e che pure ad un livello più elevato... vi sono timore per l’avvenire, tanto

It is worth pausing on this. Zoppi implied that “get out” (*andarsene*) was being used regularly by Italians of Egypt arriving in Italy. In this case, “get out” meant to leave definitively, to save oneself and one’s family from both an uncertain present and an uncertain future.

Although limited archival evidence remains to tell us precisely how individuals were reacting to the events of these years, the letters and reports reaching the offices of Italian ministries do exhibit a high degree of regularity both in terms of observations on a general sense of dismay and in terms of Italian residents’ frustration with the lack of resonance between their experiences living under the fascist regime abroad and their contemporary circumstances in postwar Egypt. In other words, the flight from Egypt evoked ideas about belonging to a community that had participated in the broader architecture (and rhetoric) of the Italian state and empire, but they were ideas that were no longer tenable—and perhaps never were.

Indeed, examining briefly the changing demographics of the Italian population between 1937 and 1947, one sees how vastly the makeup of the communities transformed. In 1937, Italians represented a quarter of all foreigners in Egypt, numbering 47,706 registered persons. In 1947, the population was reduced to 19 percent (having decreased in size more than any other community), numbering 27,958. Broken down further, around 17,200 Catholic Italians and 2,400 Jewish Italians appear absent from Egyptian census data. These data are probably imprecise, however their inaccuracy is revelatory: while the decrease in the population was most likely sizable and quite visible (doubtfully as high as 20,000), they might indicate a hesitancy in participating in such a survey given the unstable circumstances of a community already looking elsewhere for its future. Still, of the population that remained accounted for in 1947, roughly

che si note un diffuso desiderio di... ‘*andarsene*’.” MAE AP Egitto 1946-50 B7, Zoppi to Fracassi 9 December 1948.

18.2 percent was unemployed.⁹⁸ At the time, as the Italian representative of Port Said noted, the future of an unemployed foreigner was bleak.

Adding to this uncertainty, the Company Law of 1947 stipulated that all joint-stock companies in Egypt be composed of a 75:25 percent ratio of Egyptian to non-Egyptian employees and a 90:10 percent ratio of Egyptian to non-Egyptian laborers.⁹⁹ To quell growing unrest, the law addressed a tendency of foreign companies to avoid hiring Egyptians and sought to resolve the divide between unemployed Egyptian graduates and foreigners.¹⁰⁰ To ensure that hiring of Egyptians was effective in redistributing wealth, the new regulations also required that the salaries for Egyptian employees equal 65 percent and for laborers 80 percent of the total. This entailed radical reconfigurations in the labor force.

On 10 June 1948, the Banco Italo-Egiziano held its first meeting since being placed under sequester nearly eight years earlier.¹⁰¹ Internally, even before the bank's reopening, its administration was reconsidering its role within the Italian community. In one report, an Italian member of the bank's board noted, "the war distanced (aside from few exceptions) all the young and capable personnel" and the current employees (while the bank was under sequester, it still functioned internally) were searching for work elsewhere or for a second job due to the fact that "nothing [in Egypt] has much promise."¹⁰² At the time, Italian employees of the bank made up over 80 percent and Egyptian employees only received 37.5 percent of the total salaries. Over the course of the following years, the bank had to undergo considerable change, reshaping itself to

⁹⁸ Davide Amicucci, "La comunità italiana," 82-84.

⁹⁹ For an insightful analysis of the company law, see Floresca Karanasou *Egyptianisation: the 1947 Company Law and the Foreign Communities in Egypt*. Unpublished PhD thesis. St. Anthony's College, Oxford (1992).

¹⁰⁰ Handley, "Labor Movement in Egypt, 289-291"; Tignor, "Economic activities," 448-449.

¹⁰¹ Gabriele de Rosa *Storia del Banco di Roma: Volume III*. (Roma, 1984), 170-171, 251, 273.

¹⁰² "la guerra ha allontanato (fatte poche eccezioni) tutto il personale giovane e capace" BR, XI/8/15/II B.7 f.7 Memoria no.4 25 July 1947.

fit a new Egypt. It could no longer present itself as a bank for the integration of Italian accounts in Egypt, nor as an intermediary between the Italians in Egypt and metropolitan Italy. It ceased to serve the economic “penetration and expansion” of the Mediterranean for which it had been founded in the early twentieth century.¹⁰³ Instead, it had to adapt its role into a bank that could contribute to the local economy. When the director of the bank, Aldo Vitale, was preparing for retirement, noting the difficulty in finding Egyptian partners, the decrease in the Italian population, and the struggles to meet the qualifications of the Company Law, he anticipated the bank’s eventual closure. Symbolic of this tendency to “get out,” between 1948 and 1950, the Banco Italo-Egiziano began to sell off Italian land holdings in Egypt.¹⁰⁴

V. Broken Bridges

Unresolved antagonism between dominant political factions in Egypt—the Wafd, the Royal Family, and the military—and the British Authorities’ forceful attempts to maintain a foothold in the Suez Canal yielded strong criticism from opposition groups from 1948 to 1952.¹⁰⁵ Attempts to renegotiate the 1936 treaty dragged on and apprehension among non-Egyptian communities simmered as the stalemate between nationalists and the British brought the economy to a halt. Questions regarding the role foreigners would play in Egypt’s future went unanswered. In 1948, anticipating the end of the transitional period, English diplomats called a meeting of former

¹⁰³ Luigi de Rosa *Storia del Banco di Roma: Volume I.* (Roma, 1982), 175; Luigi de Rosa *Storia del Banco di Roma: Volume II.* (Roma, 1983), 176-178; while the bank went through a brief optimistic moment in the early 1950s, discussing the news of Taviani’s “politica araba” and citing the *Fiera per il Levante* as an opportunity to redefine itself as an intermediary between the Italian and Egyptian regimes, by the mid 1960s its administrators were preparing for its liquidation.

¹⁰⁴ BR, XI/8/15/II B.7 f.7 Promemoria per il Ministero degli Esteri 2 December 1949.

¹⁰⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1952 B870, Tarchiani to De Gasperi 9 November 1951 - although this is cited rather extensively in historiography (see for example Tignor, Berques, and others, it was also something rather explicit in the documents and correspondence between the Italian diplomats, their interlocutors in Egypt, and the Ministries in Rome.

capitulatory powers to discuss the possibility of stabilizing new accords. The Egyptian government and press vehemently protested England's neocolonialist action. Although France, the United States, Belgium, Denmark, Holland and Sweden accepted, Italy, Greece, Switzerland, South Africa, Pakistan and the Holy See declined.¹⁰⁶ At the time, Fracassi had been cautioned by the undersecretary of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the British were living in an "imperial and capítular fog" and that the Italians and Greeks (the countries with the largest communities in Egypt) would only arrive at settlements through bilateral talks with the Egyptian government.¹⁰⁷

When the Wafd took power in 1950 they turned sharply against the British and abrogated the 1936 treaty in October 1951.¹⁰⁸ The party, however, struggled to maintain popularity as it was plagued with corruption and a general lack of efficacy in dealing with the British. Within one month, British troops in the Canal Zone met a forceful resistance from guerrilla groups. Conflict persisted over the autumn as the British expanded their base, while reducing Egyptian labor from 58,000 to 2,300 persons.¹⁰⁹ Victor Mallet, British Ambassador to Italy, suggested to the Italian government the possibility of hiring Italian contractual labor in the Canal Zone to replace the Egyptians, noting the history of "[Italian] migratory exigencies." They did not want to hire from the Italians of Egypt. Zoppi responded that, although Italy would happily send "several thousand" unemployed Italians to work, the Italians currently in the Canal Zone were "abandoning the zone for fear of reprisals against themselves and their families and other Italians

¹⁰⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1951 B703, Fracassi to MAE 21 April 1948.

¹⁰⁷ MAE AP Egitto 1951 B703, Fracassi to MAE 23 April 1948; Robert L. Tignor, "Decolonization and Business: The Case of Egypt," *The Journal of Modern History* 59, 3 (1987): 479-505, 488.

¹⁰⁸ Tignor, "Decolonization and Business," 491; Joel Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution* (Oxford, 1992), 21.

¹⁰⁹ Tignor, "Decolonization and Business," 492.

in Egypt...”¹¹⁰ This was not to mention the strain that it would cause on Italian and Egyptian relations. Zoppi continued, emphasizing that many Italians “request even to be included in the emigration quotas for... Australia!”¹¹¹

Reports published in the postwar magazine *Italiani nel Mondo* estimated that around 6,000 Italians had left Egypt since the end of the war, searching in “other locales the security of a future more prosperous and serene.”¹¹² The same magazine began to talk of an “exodus” from Port Said: “those who can get out (andarsene), do.”¹¹³

The stipulations of the company law of 1947 were being strictly enforced and, notwithstanding that the Egyptian government passed laws to grant Egyptian citizenship to non-Egyptians, their application was left to the discretion of individual clerks.¹¹⁴ Of the roughly 800 foreigners who submitted applications (including Italians among others, no precise numbers exist), less than half were accepted and these included either individuals with advanced technical training or wealthy industrialists, whereas the cases of laborers, artisans, and the unemployed often went unanswered or were outright denied.¹¹⁵ A project for stabilizing the rights of Italian residents in Egypt had already been initiated, but both Egyptian and Italian proposals received severe criticism from within the Italian community. Among the most outspoken opponents was Ernesto Cucinotta, the director of the Italian Chamber of Commerce (see Chapter One), who remained an important intermediary between the Italians of Egypt, the diplomatic team, and the

¹¹⁰ “stanno abbandonando la zona per timore di rappresaglie nei loro confronti e in quelli delle loro famiglie e dei loro connazionali in Egitto...”

¹¹¹ “chiedono addirittura di essere inclusi nelle quote di emigrazione... l’Australia!” [elipsis included in the letter]. MAE AP Egitto 1952 B788 Zoppi to Theodoli ND.

¹¹² G.P.d.F “Il passato e il presente degli italiani in Egitto,” *Italiani nel Mondo* 25 February 1951.

¹¹³ Raniero Giani, “Declino a Porto Said della collettività italiana” *Italiani nel Mondo*, 25 January 1951.

¹¹⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1951 B703 Prunas to MAE 26 December 1950; see also Handley, “Labor Movement in Egypt,” 291.

¹¹⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1951 B703 Appunto acquisto della cittadinanza egiziana 30 October 1950.

ministries in Rome since the 1930s. He argued that the proposals did not address actual circumstances. Cucinotta contended that both the Egyptian laws and the Italian proposal ignored the diverse composition of foreign communities and that the ten percent quota for foreign laborers (*operai/omal*) would gravely affect the possibility of Italians to secure work.¹¹⁶ Any “establishment treaty (*trattato di stabilimento*),” he averred, would have to account for the minimal “assimilation” of Italians in Egypt:

With the passing of years, strong groups of national minorities (*allogeni*) were created in these colonies, either due to new migrations or for the natural growth of residents; they enjoyed the accrued privileges of the capitular regime, and were considered by the local authorities as autonomous groups that, even having their residence (*domicilio*) in Egypt, they were under the disposition of the legislative norms of their respective countries. From another point of view, the foreigner that enjoyed those privileges did not have any interest to ask for naturalization or to await assimilation... At this point, we must ask ourselves if the individuals who have lived and worked for a country that had never asked of them to naturalize, and in consequence maintained their own nationalities, will be considered as foreigners.

In other words, the legal conditions of the capitular regime had rendered concrete national identities in such a way that assimilation into a new Egypt was interpreted as an impossibility. Cucinotta advised that a settlement between the countries ensure that protection be extended to Italian subjects—similar to pre-1937 terms—and, because of the increasing tendency to emigrate, Italians should be given the unconditional permission to transfer their properties (*beni*) to Italy at the moment of “definitively” leaving Egypt. Additionally, he argued that while in Egypt they should be allowed to transfer a portion or the totality of their income to Italy in the case that they would leave Egypt without liquidating their [business] activity in Egypt. Cucinotta’s proposal was an attempt to suture the gaps that had separated not Italy and Egypt, but the Italians of Egypt and metropolitan Italy. It acknowledged the disruption of continuity for

¹¹⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1951 B703 Appunto 31 October 1949; the Italian proposal, however, was seen as highly effective by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome precisely because it allowed space for the ambiguous circumstances in Egypt.

the Italians of Egypt and mapped out a plan to maintain the “protective embrace of the Patria” to which the community had grown accustomed under fascism.¹¹⁷

Meanwhile, Italy’s cautious position (or its strategic neutrality) sought to bring the two countries closer in a myriad of ways. The Wafd’s failure to build promised arms and munitions factories and England’s reneged agreement to furnish more than “light arms” to the Egyptian military was Italy’s ideal entryway into new economic and industrial relations.¹¹⁸ Profiting from the deepening rift between the Wafd and the Egyptian military, proposals and discussions began in the spring of 1951 for an Egyptian military visit to Italy to study Italian military and police infrastructure and receive instruction from military technicians.¹¹⁹ This was to play a key role in Italy’s emergent “Mediterranean vocation”—its supposed ability to navigate the waters between the West and the Middle East.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ “Con l’andare degli anni si venivano così a costituire dei forti gruppi di allogeni sia per nuove immigrazioni sia per il naturale aumento dei residenti queste colonie che godevano dei privilegi decorrenti dal regime capitolare allora vigente, venivano considerate dalle autorità locali stesse come gruppi autonomi che, pur aventi il loro domicilio in Egitto, erano sottoposti alle norme legislative dei loro rispettivi paesi. D’altra parte lo straniero che godeva di tali privilegi non aveva nessun interesse a chiedere la naturalizzazione o attendere verso l’assimilazione.... A questo punto è da domandarsi se vanno considerati come stranieri degli individui che da parecchie generazioni vivono, lavorano per un paese che non ha mai domandato loro di naturalizzarsi e che in conseguenza hanno conservato la loro nazionalità...” MAE AP Egitto 1951 B703 “Trattato di Stabilimento - Camera di Commercio italiana Cairo” October 1950.

¹¹⁸ MAE AP Egitto 1951 B698, Prunas to MAE 21 May 1951.

¹¹⁹ MAE AP Egitto 1951 B698 Appunto per DGAP 25 May 1951, “visita in Italia Ministro Commercio Egiziano” 15 May 1951.

¹²⁰ MAE AP Egitto 1952 B787, Janelli to MAE 29 November 1951. It should be noted here that Italy’s presence as a recipient of aid under the Marshall Plan and then, after 1949, its central role in NATO placed it importantly under the realm of the growing United States interest in the Middle East. Despite that much attention is focused on Italy’s changing relationship vis-a-vis European countries and steps taken towards European unification in these postwar years—particularly from the immediate end of the war until 1953—American interests in Italy cannot be neglected in this broader sphere of international politics. Gregorio Consiglio, “Il piano Pella e l’Africa,” *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell’Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente*, 13 3 (1958): 119-120; Alessandro Brogi, “Orizzonti della politica estera italiana: Stati Uniti, Europa e Mediterraneo (1945-1960),” *Passato e Presente* 22, n.62 (2004); Alessandro Brogi, “‘Competing Missions’: France, Italy, and the Rise of American Hegemony in

When the British attempted to disarm the Egyptian police in Ismailia in 1952, anti-British and anti-European demonstrations culminated on Saturday, 26 January, in the destruction of symbols of the European presence in Cairo.¹²¹ Approximately 300 thousand EGP worth of damage to Italian property was suffered, but the more visible effect was the rapid increase in unemployment and the accelerated flight of Italian (and foreign) capital.¹²² Interestingly, we recall that the earlier Stato Maggiore report had suggested Pulli Bey—the Italian electrician-cum-officer of Faruk’s private affairs—as a viable line into Egyptian politics. On the 26th of January, Pulli, who had forfeited his Italian citizenship to remain employed by the King during the Second World War, wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome seeking protection stating that he suspected he was the subject of a British assassination plot.¹²³ If Pulli’s desperation reveals anything, it is that the symbols of the old genealogy that connected Egypt and Italy were crumbling.

In the weeks following the Free Officers’ seizure of power on 23 July 1952, the military regime quickly passed laws to settle the residency issues. They increased the terms of residency for foreign residents, especially those whose economic and technical skills could benefit the faltering Egyptian economy. Rather than being viewed as a solution to the unresolved preoccupations of foreign communities, however, these new regulations were interpreted as a

the Mediterranean” *Diplomatic History* 30, 4 (2006): 741-770; see also Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London, 2003), 157-160.

¹²¹ Tignor, “Decolonization and Business,” 492-493; Nancy Reynolds, *A City Consumed: Urban commerce, the Cairo fire, and the politics of decolonization in Egypt*. (Stanford, 2012); Anne-Claire Kerboeuf “The Cairo Fire of 26th January 1952 and the Interpretations of History” in Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson, Barak A. Salmoni (eds.) *Re-envisioning Egypt, 1919-1952*. (Cairo, 2005):194-216.

¹²² MAE AP Egitto 1952 B787 “Gli Stranieri in Egitto” 24 March 1952; MAE AP Egitto (1953) B871 Appunto - Direzione Generale dell’emigrazione 9 January 1953.

¹²³ MAE AP Egitto 1952 B788 Appunto 26 January 1952.

“political measure” to contain the flight of foreign capital.¹²⁴ Without clear answers to confusing policies regarding residency, rumors of expulsion, and after the events of January, sudden attempts to resolve issues, wrote one Italian clerk, “will not eliminate the sense of growing unease, because it has deep roots and depends, by now, on the uncertainty of the political and economic future of the country.”¹²⁵ The possibility that an abrupt political decision would offer security, the previous years had taught, seemed absurd. Instead, a sense of uncertainty was merely highlighted by a hasty legal resolution to increasingly pressing issues.

Meanwhile, talks had begun between the Italian regime and the Free Officers for the expulsion of King Faruk. In September 1952, Faruk revealed to the Italian diplomats that the abolition of the monarchy was inevitable. In fact, in accord with the young officials, and given the refuge provided to Vittorio Emanuele III in Alexandria in 1946, the Italian government went against what it considered its own internal interests (aware of Faruk’s tendency to create scandal) and agreed to host the King. He was to be provided a “dignified and honorable” welcoming at the port of Naples.¹²⁶ Pulli Bey, too, was exiled. Zoppi assured the Egyptian police that a “tight informative network” surrounded Faruk, his movements would be closely followed. Under careful surveillance the dethroned King was cautioned to respect the “obligations of hospitality and to not embarrass the Italian government.”¹²⁷ Pasquale Janelli, the new chargé d’affaires in

¹²⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1952 B788 Ferrero to MAE 8 August 1952.

¹²⁵ “non varranno ad eliminarlo [senso di crescente disagio] perchè esso ha radici più profonde e dipende ormai dall’incertezza dell’avvenire politico ed economico del paese.” MAE AP Egitto 1952 B788 Ferrero to MAE 6 June 1952.

¹²⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1952 B788 Appunto arrivo in Italia reali Egitto 29 July 1952.

¹²⁷ MAE AP Egitto 1952 B788 Appunto 21 November 1952; see also ACS MI Gabinetto 1957-60 B419 fasc. 15382/09, where the comings and goings and meetings of the former king are carefully documented. These include a suspect meeting with a guest from Egypt at the famous Giolitti ice-cream shop as well as his frequent encounters with Italians from Egypt who had left the country in recent years.

Cairo, suggested that Faruk be housed away from Rome, due to likely encounters with new Egyptian representatives in Italy.¹²⁸

Following the events of January 1952, the Italian government had agreed to furnish two large police squadrons to the Egyptian military, justifying the deal to the international community as “non belligerent” since public security was also in the interest of foreign communities in Egypt.¹²⁹ The Egyptian military arranged for further study of the Italian police structure. Under Naguib, Italian diplomats and officials in Rome hoped that a purging of the Wafd might stabilize “extremist” activities that had caused much tension in recent years:

the growing xenophobia these last years has depended largely on the ‘one-upmanship’ (surenchère) of political parties in order to win over the masses... regarding Italy, our position will be reinforced by the new situation since we represent a power to which Egypt looks with less distrust and without fear.¹³⁰

Italian politicians and Egyptian military leaders considerably tightened their relations, as we will see unfold over the following decade.

In January 1953, just after the Free Officers declared a three-year transitional period of martial law, it was announced that the Italian Ministry of Defence, Randolfo Pacciardi, would visit Naguib in Egypt. The revelation brought contempt from the British.¹³¹ The visit intended to solidify these ties and unite the two countries in a new politics aligned on the “defense of the Mediterranean.” However, its purpose was broader, as Pacciardi was to inquire as to Naguib’s

¹²⁸ MAE AP Egitto 1952 B788 Appunto 19 September 1952; see also ACS MI PS H2 1952 B220, on the presence of three “extremist” Egyptian officers who had organized to assassinate Faruk upon his arrival, but were foiled by the Italian authorities.

¹²⁹ MAE AP Egitto 1952 B789 Appunto 22 February 1952, materials included 12 armored cars, 21 jeeps with radio, 21 camions for transporting people, 900 nightsticks, 150 submachine guns, 50 shotguns and tear-gas guns, 20 motorcycles and a group of around 20 technicians for training.

¹³⁰ “Infatti la xenofobia accentuatasi in questi ultimi anni dipendeva in massima parte dalla ‘surenchère’ che i partiti si facevano l’uno sull’altro al fine di accoppiarsi il favore delle masse... Quanto all’Italia, la nostra posizione verrebbe rafforzata con la nuova situazione in quanto noi rappresentiamo una Potenza alla quale l’Egitto guarda con minore diffidenza e senza preoccupazioni.” MAE AP Egitto 1952 B787 Nota per gli atti 10 September 1952.

¹³¹ MAE AP Egitto 1953 B871 Appunto 30 January 1953.

personal insights on the internal situation and the military's plans for the future (it is important to note here that during these years Pacciardi was a major proponent of Italy's participation in NATO). This, importantly, was to be done under the guise of "refreshing the numerous Italian colony... [which had been] subject to the vicissitudes of war and internal affairs."¹³² The choice of sending Pacciardi, a tried veteran, was strategic. With this in mind, he needed to be briefed on the conditions of the Italian community.

The damage caused by the riots one year earlier affected around 20 Italians out of the 600 total cases, but unemployment had increased in its wake and, as noted, as the infrastructural supports of the community deteriorated with the departure of Italians.¹³³ The professional class had thinned, partially a response to vanishing clientele and partially a result of the restrictions imposed by the 1947 company law. The community lost much of the network of the wealthy Italians whose contributions to the SIB and other enterprises sustained the laborers and artisans.¹³⁴ Importantly, in a draft of Pacciardi's speech for the Italians of Egypt, the diplomats in Egypt responsible for its editing removed "prosperous" from his description of the community. An additional word of caution to Pacciardi regarded the growth of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement, MSI), a neo-fascist political party that absorbed many members of the former PNF, and the vibrant presence of monarchists. Faith to each movement, it was claimed, was founded on "nostalgia for a past that seemed to open more rosy colored

¹³² "rinfrancare la numerosa colonia italiana... soggetta alle vicitudini della guerra e degli avvenimenti interni."

¹³³ MAE AP Egitto 1953 B871 Appunto relazioni italo-egiziane 10 January 1953; a report from the same month, "relazione di un funzionario del Ministero degli affari esteri reduce dall'Egitto" 7 January 1953, noted the neglect shown in the repair of the damage done on 26 January 1952: "Se è vero, per dirla con i francesi che 'lorsque le bâtiment va, tout va', la lentezza con la quale si ricostruiscono al Cairo gli edifici incendiati durante la sommossa del 23 gennaio scorso è forse la più tangibile documentazione del senso di provvisorietà che domina l'attuale situazione egiziana" [sic].

¹³⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1953 B871 Appunto relazioni italo-egiziane 10 January 1953.

prospects to their existence.”¹³⁵ From Rome, the Italians of Egypt were viewed as though they were ruins of a lost time, disjointed from the present. According to this logic, the community looked to the past because its horizons were more hopeful than those of the present. By articulating the Italians of Egypt as anachronistic in this way, the Italian state reified the community’s shared sense of abandonment, distance, and disillusion. Unable to integrate into postwar Egypt, Italian futures in Italy also appeared precarious due to the political identities to which they were assigned.

When Pacciardi left Egypt, he assured the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Naguib was united in the fight against communism in the Mediterranean, but would only join Italy once Egypt’s “national aspirations” were fulfilled.¹³⁶ Aside from a toast to the Italians, who, he said in his speech, signified “the most solid wedding band uniting our two peoples,” little mention was made of the community (only that they “enjoyed” his visit).¹³⁷ The Italians of Egypt surfaced merely as an index to a vast historical narrative of national kinship, emptied of its present significance for them. Shortly thereafter, the Free Officers declared Egypt a Republic. Janelli wrote, “thus proclaimed a Republic, every bridge with the past is definitively broken.”¹³⁸ He continued, with doubt, “the storm that the black clouds presaged has effectively been let loose... but one can’t say that the sky, after the hurricane, has cleared: the air is still oppressive and not all of the clouds have dispersed.”¹³⁹ Paths were paved for Italy to serve as a “bridge” between the Middle East and Europe.¹⁴⁰ The ties between the two countries had been repaired in new terms,

¹³⁵ “rimpianto di un passato che sembrava aprire più rosee prospettive alla loro esistenza.”

¹³⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1953 B871 Ferrero to MAE 5 February 1953.

¹³⁷ “il più saldo anello di congiunzione tra i nostri due popoli.”

¹³⁸ “proclamata la Repubblica è rotto così definitivamente ogni ponte con il passato.”

¹³⁹ “la tempesta che le nuvole nere facevano presagire si è effettivamente scatenata... ma non si può dire che il cielo, dopo l’uragano, si sia schiarito: l’aria è tuttora greve e non tutte le nuvole si sono disperse.” MAE AP Egitto 1953 B870 Janelli to PCM 21 November 1953.

¹⁴⁰ MAE AP Egitto 1952 B788 Appunto de Strobel 1953.

into which the Italians of Egypt figured little. An eventual mass repatriation was anticipated by the offices in Rome, it was only a matter of time.

Conclusion: Twice Without a King

In the spring of 1952, while residency laws were open to discussion, the Egyptian General Director of Passports and Nationality, Ali Darwich, stated “it’s necessary that the foreigners convince themselves that they are guests, with all the significance carried in this word, especially for Orientals [sic].”¹⁴¹ This language was echoed in Naguib’s early speeches to the foreign communities after the Free Officer’s coup. The company law of 1947, new residency laws, the tightening of Egypt’s control over the Suez Canal, the overthrow and exile of Faruk were all defining Egypt’s new boundaries. The concept of extraterritorial protection—and its associated sense of always being at home under the authority of the Italian state—had long vanished. Confusion penetrated non-Egyptian communities.¹⁴² The replacement of the autonomy granted under the Capitulations with the temporality of “hosting” also represented a new sense of belonging (or not quite belonging) at a moment when the emerging political configurations no longer conformed to the structures that had once defined the colonial Mediterranean.

Indeed, when the publication of Italian newspapers resumed in 1950, Catraro was granted permission to publish *Cronaca* under the condition that the newspaper excluded “political nostalgia.” But the past crept in.¹⁴³ Concurrently, Max Terni founded *Oriente*. The former was staunchly anticommunist and monarchist-leaning, while the latter was directly in line with the MSI. In Egypt, both papers engaged with the present through the past: each issue included full

¹⁴¹ “Bisogna che gli stranieri si convincano che sono ospiti, con tutto il significato che questa parola ha, soprattutto per gli orientali.” MAE AP Egitto 1952 B787 15 April 1952.

¹⁴² MAE AP Egitto 1952 B787 “La giustizia in Egitto dopo il 1949” Prunas 18 December 1951.

¹⁴³ ACGA, Catraro Athanasio/Catraro Demetrio.

pages devoted to “times past” (“Il tempo che fu” in the case of *Cronaca*) comprised of stories and photographs from the years of internment.¹⁴⁴ *Oriente* reported the rhetoric of “Italians abroad (italiani all’estero)” being “the most dear to Italy’s heart” and championed the MSI’s campaign to include them—for the first time—in the national vote.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, Terni criticized Italy’s postwar emigration policy and De Gasperi’s call for young Italians to emigrate, citing the continual loss of potential destinations and even going so far as to use “refugees” (profughi) to talk about the Italian emigrants returning from Tunisia, Libya, the Greek Islands, and Yugoslavia, territories seeking to “liberate themselves from the Italians.”¹⁴⁶ Perhaps he echoed local fears. Catraro’s *Cronaca*, on the other hand, portrayed the proposal to give Italians abroad the right to vote as an indication of the disintegrating unity of “the Patria”:

These [Italians abroad] want to continue to love Italy as they love it, as they always loved it. Italy; not whatever Italian [political] party. They want to continue to see in the compatriot (connazionale) who works beside them, or whom they meet in the evening at the hangout or in the street, a brother: not a political adversary. They also want their relations with the countries hosting them to go undisturbed.¹⁴⁷

The new papers struggled to reinvigorate prewar notions of Italians abroad as natural extensions of the Italian state, ideas that still resonated with the Italians of Egypt but found no grounding in the present.

¹⁴⁴ Some even drew attention already to the migration of those who spent four years together in the camps and now found themselves “dispersed in the world,” “Ricordi di un tempo che fu,” *Oriente* 13 April 1950.

¹⁴⁵ “MSI agli Italiani all’estero,” *Oriente* 15 January 1953, “Il voto agli Italiani all’Estero - non sono stranieri gli Italiani fuori d’Italia” *Oriente* 18 January 1953.

¹⁴⁶ “liberarsi degli italiani... ripulsa del lavoro italiano.”

¹⁴⁷ “Essi [italiani all’estero] vogliono continuare ad amare l’Italia come l’amano, come l’hanno sempre amata. L’Italia: non un qualsiasi partito italiano. Essi vogliono continuare a vedere nel connazionale che lavora al loro fianco, o che incontrano la sera nel ritrovo, o per la via, il fratello: non l’avversario politico. Essi vogliono anche che i loro rapporti con i Paesi che li ospitano non vengano turbati.” Leonide Felletti, “A chi giova il voto degli italiani all’estero?” *Cronaca* December 1952 (reprint from *Italiani nel Mondo*).

When Vittorio Emanuele III had left Italy for Egypt in 1946, he benefitted from the history of exchange between the House of Savoy and the Mohamed Ali dynasty. In Alexandria, he had been welcomed by those who still held strongly to this affinity, those for whom the historical narrative employed in political discourse was imagined to be a reality. They were the generation that had lived through the Fascist consolidation in Egypt, which promulgated the ideology that Italians abroad had been an essential “asset” for the “Patria.” The majority remained loyal to the Italian King and he was, in a sense, *recognized* in his exile—both by King Faruk and the Italians in Egypt. Vittorio Emanuele III lived in Alexandria until his last days, when on 31 December 1947 he passed away (where his remains are buried to this day). Flags at the Italian Legation in Cairo and the Consulate in Alexandria were flown at half-staff and a full military funeral was given at Faruk’s order.¹⁴⁸ However, with the exile of Faruk several years later, the Italians of Egypt were twice without a king, guests without a home in two emergent regimes. The end of a political era, these political transformations redefined the terms of their belonging. Although the same past was alluded to in the attempts of the Italian state to solidify its relations with the new Egyptian regime, as this chapter has demonstrated, the state’s actors interpreted and viewed the Italian community in Egypt as an anachronism and a threat to political stability. In search of a new orientation, it was unclear to whom or in which direction Italians should and would turn. The disjuncture between past expectations and the emergent present offered little direction for the future. In this statelessness, while “bridges” were being built between the new Republics, as remarked the new Italian ambassador in Egypt, the Italians of Egypt suffered from chronic “uncertainty and disquiet.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ ACGA Vittorio Emanuele di Savoia, telegramma n.39 Fracassi.

¹⁴⁹ “[hanno] ricominciato... a soffrire d’incertezza, e d’inquietudine.” MAE AP Egitto 1952 B870 Janelli to PCM 21 November 1953.

VIGNETTE TWO

“When are you leaving?”: Political Transformation in Postwar Egypt

When I met with B. Buccetti,¹ he introduced his story by emphasizing that not one member of his family had acquired Egyptian nationality. Almost as a side thought, he said, “until 1952, I think, not one Italian even thought to leave (di andar via) Egypt.” Although Buccetti said that no one thought to leave Egypt before 1952, one of his elder brothers had, in fact, departed for Argentina immediately after the Second World War.² His use of “andar via” could have meant to leave suddenly, to escape or flee, or it could have meant to leave definitively. He paused, as though there was something strange about what he said, “it’s very peculiar, this thing.” He continued, remembering the mumbled conversations at the time,

so and so is going to work in Brazil, so and so is going to work in Australia... that’s how it began, you know, someone leaves Egypt... this initiated a movement (questa porta un movimento)...to think... everyone’s leaving... it circulated, people were leaving.³

In the biographical essay published by a journalist with whom Buccetti had grown close during the organization of a neighborhood committee in Milan, he recounted the destruction of Downtown Cairo in January 1952. To him, the event was an indication that an “anti-British and anti-Western” antipathy had expanded beyond the realm of cultural and political rhetoric and into violent action. What stood out to Buccetti was, first and foremost, the destruction of the cinemas. During interviews, Italians of Egypt repeatedly described to me the importance of the

¹ B. Buccetti interview, 23 March 2012.

² Guastamacchio, *Il Profugo Italiano*, 83.

³ “questa porta un movimento, l’idea di pensare... stanno andando via tutti... comincia a propagarsi, la gente andava.”

cinemas as loci of cosmopolitanism, especially for the youth of his generation; if the film was in English, there were Arabic and French subtitles, if it was in French or Italian, they were subtitled in English and Arabic, and so on. Some contended that their frequent viewing of films helped them learn to move between languages that marked the public spaces of Alexandria and Cairo.⁴ The second, and more jarring mark left by the Cairo Fire—he described it to me as it was narrated also in the book—was the interaction he had with his father on the occasion. They had been out together in Downtown Cairo and witnessed the initial stages of demonstrations. His father worriedly contacted Buccetti’s brothers at work and advised them to return home, and then rushed through the city with his son. In the essay, Buccetti recounts his father’s tearful words that evening, “my sons, Egypt will not return as it was, for us Europeans there will no longer be an easy and tranquil life... for me, there are no more possibilities to leave Egypt, but you (voi), who are young, think about it!”⁵ Buccetti’s biographer-friend frames this encounter as an event that had transferred a father’s fears to his sons. In my own conversations with Buccetti, he implied that, rather than being a catalyst for radical change or sudden transformation, the events of 1952 brought ongoing political processes to bear on public life, giving them a more distinct presence in the experiences of Italians in Egypt.

With his characteristically sardonic humor, Berni said, “unfortunately, it’s a nasty page of history, but it’s true!”⁶ He stated that the first “exodus” (esodo) of Italians from Egypt occurred after the events of 1948. Repeating a phrase that he had used before in relation to the Italian

⁴ Many noted that, although they could not afford to see films as children, they would often sneak into the theaters or pay for one film and stay inside for an entire day.

⁵ “cari figlioli, l’Egitto non ritornerà più come prima, per noi europei non ci sarà più una vita facile e tranquilla... per me non ci sono più molte possibilità di lasciare l’Egitto, ma voi, che siete giovani, pensateci!” Guastamacchio, *Il Profugo Italiano*, 55.

⁶ “purtroppo, è una brutta pagina di storia!” Interview with R. Berni, 16 March 2012.

state's failure to support the Italians of Egypt, he said: "we no longer felt defended, protected." This time, however, Berni elaborated: "it became obligatory to write in Arabic... Many Europeans didn't know the language because they had never learned it, they always spoke their own languages... people were leaving (la gente andava via)." The instruction of Arabic-language and Egyptian history in all foreign schools in Egypt was made compulsory in 1949 as part of broader policies to integrate non-Egyptian residents into national life. Years later, some would even cite this among their reasons for departure. This was the case, for example, when one Italian of Egypt, Berta Massoni, wrote to the consul in 1957, requested to be repatriated due to the fact that: "I won't have work here because I don't know the Arabic language and now they want (vogliono) everything in Arabic."⁷

Berni spoke more of abstracted processes than of explicit regulations or events that marked change. He claimed to vividly remember that the expiration of the 12-year transition away from the Capitulations and the growing resentment exhibited by the Egyptian Military towards the English— especially since their loss in the 1948 war in Palestine—set into motion the initial years of political transformation. Although Mohamed Naguib took power for nearly two years after the coup d'état in 1952, Berni concluded that the Free Officer's Movement heralded a new style of Egyptian politics guided by Gamal Abdel Nasser, which sought quickly to "nationalize social and economic life" and to place the military at the forefront of Egyptian society.

Nasser arrived, and it was right (giusto), liberty for [his] people... now they [the Europeans] weren't protected anymore... one talks of around, more than one million, one million and a half, I don't know the numbers. Everyday you encountered someone the first question was no longer 'how are you'... it was 'when are you leaving?' and 'where are you going?' ... This one was going to South American, Venezuela, Uruguay,

⁷ "...non avrò più lavoro qui essendo che non conosco la lingua araba ed ora vogliono che sia tutto in arabo..." ACGA, Massoni Maurizio fu Michele.

Argentina, Brazil... or there were those who went to Europe, and those who returned (tornava) to Italy, 'I'm going to Rome, to Milan, to Naples,' the question was *when*.⁸

In the years following 1952, Berni recalled feeling afraid in the streets: he remembered groups of Egyptian youth, having discovered a new sense of national pride, that provoked and harassed foreigners.⁹ More than the literal defense of foreign (and colonial) bodies confronting the actors of Egyptian nationalism, the parallels drawn in Berni's accounts implied the emergence of an imperative to defend the very presence of Italians and Europeans in Egypt. The counterpoint to defense, however, was departure.

Berni summarized the period between 1952 and 1956 as the transition between the first phase (1948-52) and the second phase (1956 and on) of departure. It was during these four years, according to Berni, that most Italians decided that leaving Egypt was necessary. "By then it was certain that you needed to get out (andar via)... and that is the story of the Italians of Egypt, all of them!"¹⁰ He spoke more of his own family's emigration to Venezuela—his mother, brother, and three sisters who left during the first phase while he stayed in Egypt trying to sell off (svendere) their belongings.¹¹ He repeated, "it's a nasty page of history, but it's right that it happened this way, the country (il paese) was theirs, we were born there, but so what? Unfortunately, that's the story..."¹² The four years he delineated as "transitional" are those during which decisions to leave, he claimed, were taken by many individuals and families. Although circumstances had already influenced the decisions during this first period, most departures came during the second phase, after 1956, argued Berni. He did not end his story on a personal note,

⁸ "arrivò Nasser, giustamente, la libertà per il popolo..."

⁹ "ti istigavano a fare cazzotti e ti dovevi difendere. Poi non era fair play, one against one, no, dieci venti contro uno."

¹⁰ "Ormai era talmente sicuro, certo che devi andar via... e questa è la storia degli italiani d'Egitto e gli italiani tutti quanti..."

¹¹ "Non comprava nessuno, abbiám dovuto... svendere."

¹² "È una brutta pagina di storia... Però è giusto che si è stato così, il paese era il loro. Noi siamo nati lì, che c'entra? Purtroppo questa è la storia..."

but rather slipped into a critique of the political changes enacted by Nasser's regime. He applauded Nasser's intentions, but also charged Nasser with the destruction of Egypt: "the revolution was just, Gamal Abdel Nasser was a nationalist, [but he] destroyed the country (kan ragal watani, kharrab al balad), it needs to be recognized.... he practically decapitated the Egyptian economy..." He argued that these changes brought ruin upon Egypt.

he committed the worst error. Socialism (eshtakiyyah), but that wasn't socialism, it was communism (sho'aiyyah). You could have a shop, could handle as much as 5,000 EGP per year, if you went beyond that, it would be nationalized, sequestered. This is communism. You had a company, five soldiers arrive, 'what are you doing?' (ta'mel eih) 'Where is the safe?' (el khaznah fayn) 'It's there, what do you want with it?' 'The safe is the people's!' (khaznat el sh'ab) 'No, it's mine'... money from the bank? [slurping sound]... this is where he erred.¹³

Berni ended as he had begun: "it's an ugly page of history, but it's true!" His lived experiences, according to him, could be attributed to these macrohistorical processes, which in turn extracted the Italians of Egypt from the worlds they had known.

I had known G. Longo for several months--his former classmate G. Liciardello introduced me to him--when he took me to meet two of his acquaintances, A. Piperno and B. Salerno, both in their nineties. Their families had been neighbors in Alexandria. Because they were 15-20 years older than Longo, he insisted that they would have a different perspective on the Italian community in Egypt. We met in their home near Piazza Bologna, Rome (a neighborhood that became widely popular among repatriates from Egypt and former Italian colonies during postwar years). While I began to describe my research and my interest in hearing stories about the events I was following

¹³ "ha commesso il più grav'errore...Estrakiyah, ma quello non era estrakiyah, quell'era sho'aiyyah... Tu potevi aver un negozio, potevi trattare sino a 5 mille lire egiziane all'anno, se andavi oltre veniva nazionalizzato, sequestrato. E questo il comunismo. Tu avevi una società, cinque soldati arrivano, ta'mel eih? El khaznah fayn? Henak. 3ayz eih min al khaznah, Khaznet al sh'ab! la' al khazna bet3ty. ... Falos el bank [slurping sound]... ecco dove ha sbagliato lui."

in archival sources, Longo said, “let’s say that everything began to change in ’52...” But he barely finished uttering “fifty-two” when he was interrupted by Piperno, who exclaimed,

no, it was ’48! With the declaration of the State of Israel everything began! That’s when it began. Then, after the war of 1948, they [undetermined] began to (agitarsi)... and *then* in 1952 there was the revolution in Cairo... the king left (il re è andato via).”

Longo intervened, “that’s the problem, they got rid of the King, who was himself against the English and so the English didn’t help him stay.” Longo responded as though the presence of the monarchy naturally implied greater possibilities for minority communities. In fact, he continued by explaining that, throughout history, when there was a king or an emperor, “there [was] always tolerance... when there was the Ottoman Empire, there was tolerance, and then Ataturk made a revolution... and afterwards came the youth (i giovani) and they massacred the Armenians, that’s where it began to go wrong.”¹⁴ Longo’s vague and imprecise mention of “the youth” moved the conversation from the (inferred, on my part) Young Turks and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire to the Muslim Brotherhood and the disintegration of the Egyptian Monarchy.

Longo remembered, trying to situate his own experiences in this timeline, “it was either in ’48 or ’52... we were going to the beach and a group of Arabs (arabi) tried to be tough-guys because they thought we were Jews... I insisted that I wasn’t.” Piperno used this occasion to interrupt and to address the contemporary situation—mention of the Muslim Brotherhood and generalized “youth” allowed her to make this leap from Longo’s encounter in the past to the present (at the time of the interview, the Muslim Brotherhood was in power in the Egyptian Government under the recently elected president Muhammad Morsi). As though attempting to correct or adjust my understanding of the Muslim Brotherhood, she described that, in the past, the Muslim Brotherhood was the *most* extreme among opposition groups. Piperno added that

¹⁴ “c’è sempre tolleranza... quando c’era l’impero ottomano, c’era molto tolleranza, poi Ataturk ha fatto la rivoluzione... dopo sono venuti i giovani e hanno cominciato a massacrare gli armeni ... è lì che è cominciato il male.”

today there are much larger fundamentalist (integralisti) groups that span continents. After telling me this, she turned to Longo, as she did not agree with his logic. Drawing from her own family's Sephardic Jewish history, she said, "look at Spain during the reign of Isabella the Catholic, she was a queen but..." Longo gently dismissed this and instead placed the blame for the 1492 expulsions from Spain on "the religious (i religiosi)." He returned to talking about Egypt, "as soon as there was the Republic, things began to go wrong."¹⁵ Piperno piped up again. It was not a question of deterministic forms of government to her, but rather a matter of settling political injustice. She interjected, "but he [Faruk] was a king who didn't matter (non valeva niente), he was a king who satisfied his own comforts and showed no interest in the people (il popolo)." Piperno suggested that the possibilities of the revolution could have been otherwise. Unlike Longo's understanding of the republic as a *naturally* totalitarian space, she claimed, the 1952 revolution was motivated by the disregard for the Egyptian populace shown by the monarchy. In reorienting Longo's narrative in this way and by stressing 1948 as the decisive date of change, she cancelled the post-1952 regime's culpability in transforming the lives of non-Egyptians, and placed it within a larger and more structural narrative of political inequalities in the colonial Mediterranean.

C. Cherini and L. Morpurgo were both born in 1940s Egypt, but they met and married in Italy, years after having departed with their respective families. Cherini spent his childhood just around the corner from Talaat Harb Square (known to him as Suleiman Basha Square) in Downtown Cairo.

Of politics, I knew nothing, I was young, [politics] didn't interest me. But I can tell you of my personal experiences in a beautiful cosmopolitan environment (un ambiente

¹⁵ "hanno dato la mano ai religiosi e c'era l'inquisizione... in Egitto appena c'è stata la repubblica, da qualche parte è andato male."

cosmopolita bellissimo)... in those years, remember, let's say, to a certain point, Cairo was the city, if we want, between brackets, 'ideal' from the point of view of the amalgam of peoples and religions... Reconsidering it (ripensandoci) at this moment, one didn't take account of things, because one lived normally (non se ne accorgeva perché viveva normalmente).

Cherini's utterances were punctuated with subtle dismissals and a hesitancy that skirted around the incongruity between his current knowledge of the past and his past experiences. In his retrospective gaze, he recognized aspects of the circumstances under which he and others had lived "normally" that had been unavailable to him at the time of his youth. He explained that, from the point of view of his experiences *after* he left Egypt and continuing to this day, he had lived in context evacuated of "politics." He and many others described this as "a carefree life" (una vita spensierata), "it was a paradise from *this* point of view." "This point of view," for Cherini, was the position of reflection, which collapsed past and present into one another and erased the politics of the past.

His father had passed away while he was young and he and his mother had little money, but they were able to "get by," said Cherini. He went out, played football with the neighborhood youth, and frequented Cairo's cinemas. He vividly recalled the interior decorating of each cinema. As Buccetti had described, the cinemas were sites that facilitated the existence of a "cosmopolitan youth." Cherini remembered that he learned English in the cinema, watching and listening to the films while following the French subtitles. Then, he paused in the middle of this story, and said, "from the political point of view, yes, we lived... [He hesitated] the burning of Cairo was really nasty."¹⁶ The destruction of Downtown Cairo touched the places that he saw as essential to the style of life he had known as a child: the cinemas, *Groppi* (a popular café in Talaat Harb Square owned by a Swiss family), large department stores. The Cairo Fire

¹⁶ "Dal punto di vista politico poi, sì, abbiamo vissuto... l'incendio del Cairo è stato veramente brutto."

transformed the urban landscape of possibilities that had enabled a carefree and youthful freedom. Few suffered personal attacks, and few homes were damaged. The destruction of the public, collective spaces that formed the center of Cairo as a “European” city contemporaneously destroyed the perceived separation between “Egyptian” and “European” politics.¹⁷ Indeed, it appears to have done so in a more visceral-affective manner than the dismantling of the legal regimes which had perpetuated such divides over previous generations.¹⁸

Cherini and Morpurgo drew the conversation away from the destruction of Downtown Cairo and towards the departure of Italians from Egypt.

You know... the famous exodus wasn't, contrary to how it may be thought, macroscopic, it was something that, yes, one heard in talk, but one didn't *live* it... every once in a while one heard that 'that family over there' had to leave, and [then they] left... therefore, it wasn't a climate of terror or of... one knew that people were 'invited'—quote unquote—to leave.¹⁹

Morpurgo remembered discussions within her family about leaving Egypt; her parents had decided to go to Venezuela. Unlike Cherini's family, which was hesitant to accept the change, Morpurgo's family treated it as an adventure. She recalled that her parents made a game out of their departure and began to study Spanish together around the dinner table.

Cherini interrupted, “it's not that it was something forced [upon us] in the manner of... a deportation.”

“Exactly,” agreed Morpurgo.

¹⁷ In a similar way, Kirli describes how the Smyrna Fire of 1922 created national spaces out of Ottoman spaces. Kirli, “Forgetting the Smyrna Fire,” 27.

¹⁸ See also Amr Kamal, “Empires and Emporia: Fictions of the Department Store in the Modern Mediterranean,” Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Michigan (2013), 279-281. For more on the Cairo Fire, see Nancy Y. Reynolds, *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt* (Stanford, 2012), especially pp. 1-46.

¹⁹ “Una cosa che volevo dire, l'esodo famoso, non è stata contrariamente a quello che si può pensare una cosa macroscopica, è stata una cosa di cui si si sentiva parlare ma non si viveva perché ogni tanto si sentiva che quella famiglia lì ha dovuto lasciare e se n'era andata... quindi non c'era un clima di terrore o di... si sapeva che la gente veniva invitata - tra virgolette - ad andarsene.”

Cherini continued, “it was about *taking spaces away* from people... for example, they wouldn’t renew residence (permits) and then you couldn’t do anything, you couldn’t work... And if you needed to close up (*chiuderla*.)” No direct threat was held against the Italians, he recalled, “but in the end, you understood, you understood *de facto* that you couldn’t live any more in that country (*paese*) because you couldn’t work.”²⁰

Cherini and Morpurgo spoke mostly amongst themselves as I listened. This transformation, they explained, was not physically traumatic, nor was it specific (“*non è che sia stata una cosa...*”). Cherini clarified that the process of transformation could be defined as “morally traumatic” precisely because it was not attributable to a specific event or action.²¹ To demonstrate this, he returned to his experiences in the schools. As a child, he attended French schools—as did many of the children in Downtown Cairo, he explained—until around 1952, when his mother transferred him to the Italian school.

Already, one began to understand that things were changing, and my mother began to say ‘you’re going to the Italian school’... for me that was traumatic because I knew Italian only from home, I had never studied it... my mother understood that for me there wasn’t a future in Egypt.”²²

When he asked her the reason for this change, he noted, she responded: “because one day, we’ll need to return to Italy.”²³

²⁰ “Era il togliere gli spazi dalla gente nel senso non rinnovavano il permesso di residenza e in questo punto qui, non potevi fare più niente, non potevi lavorare, e così dovevi chiuderla... sotto la minaccia delle armi, devi andare fuori, no! ma... però alla fine capivi che, capivi di fatto che non potevi più vivere in quel paese lì perché non potevi più lavorare, non potevi più...”

²¹ “ma proprio del punto di vista morale.”

²² “Già si cominciava a capire che lì le cose stavano cambiando, e inizia mia mamma, ‘ci vai alla scuola italiana’ che per me era un trauma perché io, l’italiano, non l’ho mai sutdiato... mia mamma capiva che per me non c’era futuro in Egitto.”

²³ “perché un giorno dovremo tornare in Italia.”

Vitulli was about 10 years older than Cherini. He saw the destruction of Downtown Cairo in January 1952 as key to understanding the following decade. Having finished school in 1951, Vitulli planned to go to Italy. He had recently begun performing in local theater groups, however, and a theater acquaintance helped him find work in the French schools in Bulaq (the Cairo neighborhood in which he lived) in order to pursue this newfound interest.

Then, in January 1952, there was a moment, a police strike, which created a possibility for the Muslim Brotherhood... who burnt all of the city... the cinemas, the large Jewish department stores, Chemla, Salon Vert, Cicurel, the bars... there was a Greek who made brandy below my home, they came to burn his shop, but the doorman (bowwab), who was known by all said ‘what do you want to burn? I also have a café here!’²⁴

Vitulli explained that the demonstrations incited Faruk to call on the army to regain control over the city. “Let’s not forget that they lost the war in 1948.” This was important, he said, because the action prepared the army for the occupation of a city, tactics that they would use later that year when overthrowing the King. What is more, he claimed, it concretized the bonds of a young group of officers—the Free Officers—who had “formed this friendship and ideology”²⁵ when they suffered losses on account of poor preparation and outdated equipment acquired from the British in the 1948 war. Vitulli drew on the history of British colonialism in Egypt to illustrate how different processes affected the unfolding events of the Cairo Fire, which he imagined as a catalyst for the following decade.

I met L. Mieli at a dinner organized by the Milan chapter of the *Amicale Alessandrie Hier et Aujourdui* (Alexandria Yesterday and Today Club, AAHA). She traveled from Pavia to join the

²⁴ “in gennaio 52... c’era stato un momento, uno sciopero generale della polizia, ha creato una possibilità per i fratelli mussulmani... chi hanno bruciato tutta la città. i cinema... grandi negozi degli ebrei... chemla, salon verde, cicurel, tutti i bar... c’era un greco che faceva un brandy, sotto casa, sono venuti per bruciare lui, però il mio portanaio era conosciuto da tutti, diceva ‘che volete bruciare?’ lui ha detto ‘ma ho un caffè’”

²⁵ “hanno stretto questa amicizia e anche ideologia.”

group twice each year. AAHA was created with the intention of reuniting former residents of Alexandria, but the extension of social and familial networks in Egypt made it appealing to former residents of most cities in Egypt.²⁶ Although most individuals delineated between Alexandrian, Cairene (Cairoiti), and Port Saidian (Port Saidini) Italians, many of these same families had relatives in or had themselves lived in more than one city. Mieli invited me to interview her at her home where, as we spoke, her daughter recorded the interview for her own memory.²⁷

Mieli's father was from a Livornese Jewish family that arrived in Egypt in the mid-nineteenth century. Initially having settled in Suez, the family moved to Cairo, where she was born. Her mother was from a family of Italian protégés from Istanbul who moved to Alexandria in the early-twentieth century. As an Italian Jew, Mieli said, contrary to the experience of most Italian families, her father was not interned during the Second World War.²⁸ After having distinguished her family's experience from others, however, she connected her history to that of other Italians through the Cairo Fire. The event, for her, was the beginning of the revolution. She said,

but I remember the revolution well... I was 14 or 15 years old. The center (il cuore) of the demonstrations departed from Piazza dell'Opera and I was precisely 100 meters from Midan Opera, I had gone into a music store... Papazian...²⁹ to purchase a harmonica. I exit [the store] and a man, very cordially, in French, asks me, 'what are you doing here?' I told him I was out to buy something. And he told me to run home... I turned around and saw the crowd (la folla) behind me. Immediately afterwards was the real demonstration (c'è stata la vera manifestazione), they burned Cairo for three days... it was '52... if someone tells you it wasn't true, I was there, and *this* was the revolution.³⁰

²⁶ [more here about Sandro Manzoni and AAHA, the organization based in Manzoni's home in Cologne, Switzerland].

²⁷ L. Mieli Pressel interview, 21 April 2012.

²⁸ Although Italian Jews were officially excluded from the internment, those who showed sympathies to the regime were interned nevertheless. I have been unable to find statistics on this number of Jews interned, perhaps in part because of the arbitrary nature of the arrest process.

²⁹ An Armenian musical instruments store on the corner of Midan Opera.

³⁰ "era il '52... se qualcuno ti dice che non è vero, io c'ero, e questa era la rivoluzione."

She explained that it was “hard to watch” (ti faceva male vedere). Mieli remembered the burning of the cinemas, stressing that only Downtown Cairo was touched, “they did nothing to Shobra... they went to the *European* neighborhoods, they were against the English and French, not the Italians... and that’s where they did damage, where there was the European neighborhood in the center.”³¹ Here she made a further distinction. By mentioning Shobra, Mieli isolated a neighborhood whose Italian population was comparatively significant: Shobra included nearly one quarter of all the Italian residents in Cairo in 1947 (around 35 percent of the neighborhood’s population were non-Egyptians residents).³² It was also middle-class, much like the neighborhoods on the periphery of Downtown Cairo such as Daher, Abdin, or Bulaq, each of which contained a large Italian population. Mieli clarified that the sites destroyed during the Cairo Fire—while affecting all who witnessed them—were chosen because of their signification with regard to a specific “European” (and not Italian) landscape within the city. Her daughter interrupted and said, “tell him the story about the *bwabo*,” mispronouncing the word for doorman in Arabic (bowāb), nevertheless making it clear that Mieli had told the story many times. As in Vitulli’s account, an Egyptian doorman chased away the demonstrators when they arrived at the threshold of the apartment building in which they lived.

At that time, Mieli claimed, Italians were not involved in political activity or discussion. Hearsay of the Muslim Brotherhood commenced after the events of 1952, she described, as though the Cairo Fire itself propelled Egyptian politics into Italian circles. “I can’t forget that date, 26 January 1952... then in July they sent away the King... there was one general, Naguib, but it was Nasser that led (guidava) and after a year he took power, that’s when it became really

³¹ “non sono andati a shobra, sono andati nei quartieri europei... erano contro gli inglesi, francesi... e hanno fatto i danni li, dove c’era... il quartiere europeo era li nel centro...”

³² Amicucci, “La comunità italiana,” 87-88.

difficult to live in Egypt.”³³ She explained that, notwithstanding the damage done to buildings owned or operated by members of different communities, “the Egyptians” (always ambiguously signified and generalized by use of “loro”) were against the English—“they’d had it with the English (ce l’avevano contro gli inglesi)!” These events convinced her father that their presence in Egypt was no longer welcome. He had understood, she said, that it was time to depart, but did not do so until 1956.³⁴

P. Paoletti insisted that “the problem” in Egypt was that neither Italy nor Egypt had favored “integration” (integrazione). “Our country (paese) was there,”³⁵ she said, “we could have been recognized [in Egypt] as an ethnic minority (una minoranza etnica)... it could have been, it could have saved the whole community.” According to her experience, she said, the change was sudden and drastic, “[after 1956] one had to pay the same taxes [and use] the same courts, we didn’t have this perception the year before!” Ironically, it was the “integration” into Egyptian economic life that cancelled the possibility of Italians to claim their “paese” as Egypt (or as located on Egyptian territory, but abstracted from it politically) whilst maintaining a sense of national belonging. As such, the “integration” sought by Paoletti was one of exception in which socio-political life would mirror capitular Egypt.

As if confessing a secret realized in the telling of this story, Paoletti said, “[the Italians] didn’t buy Egyptian newspapers... In effect, there was also this, this underestimation (sotto valutazione) of Egyptian life.” She elaborated,

from a sociological point of view... this was an antique people. Yes, the Italian was wealthier, but equal, only richer... not more advanced... therefore there wasn’t this [type

³³ “e lì è cominciato a diventare molto brutto vivere in Egitto.”

³⁴ “non era più tempo di stare lì... ha detto che è meglio che andiamo via”

³⁵ “il nostro paese era lì”

of] distinction... this could have been (poteva essere) an element that could have (poteva) favored integration... but there was always an alterity (alterità).

To Paoletti “paying the same taxes and using the same courts” did not signify integration. Her model of integration, instead, drew from a font of antiquity. She articulated a notion of historicity that united Egyptians and Italians as members of an antique Mediterranean kinship. And it was on this claim that she perceived integration as a possible course in historical time, yet it was a course in which an alterity pervaded, keeping the two communities arranged in a hierarchy. The fact of having been “of” Egypt—she always used “italiani d’Egitto” to describe the abstracted Italian community and also interrupted her speech with the phrase “il nostro paese era lì” (our country was there)—generated a timeless difference and evaded questions about the historical conjunctures that had permitted the Italian community to emerge there, such as the Capitulations or British colonialism.

The rupture of this imbalance through the insertion of Egyptian “politics” disturbed the atemporal sociological equivalence that Paoletti saw between Italy and Egypt, Italians and Egyptians. Referring to a memoir of her father’s life published by her elder sister, she said, “you’ve read my father’s book, it was sudden (è stato un improvviso).” Despite her claim that change came suddenly, Paoletti’s father had left around six months prior to the 1956 Suez Crisis to search for housing and employment in Italy. Once having procured work in Pisa, his wife and two daughters joined him in Italy, in the midst of the conflict.

Here, generational cracks appear in the temporal sense of departure from Egypt (similar to Buccetti’s note that, prior to 1952, not one Italian had thought about the possibility of leaving Egypt despite that his brother had left immediately after the war). In these narratives, social hierarchies are presented in such a way that they appear stable until what was defined as an

essentially “Egyptian” politics tore apart the fabric that constituted the lives of Italian residents in Egypt. For Paoletti, this rupture happened in 1956.

Her sister sat quietly as we talked. I asked when or if there was an event that caused people to leave or that stoked dormant fears, trying to navigate around this notion that the change was “sudden.” Paoletti’s sister answered, “when Naguib took power *some* people left.” She paused, “*many* left.” She then clarified: “When *Nasser* arrived the people (la gente) began to depart... seeing as we had nothing in particular to do (siccome non avevamo da fare).” Paoletti then opined, “that’s what I was saying [before], Nasser lost the occasion to integrate... [instead] they nationalized! (nazionalizzavano)!” The “nationalization” referred to the processes set into action with the transition away from the Capitulations, including the Company Law of 1947, and further accelerated during Nasser’s regime (1956-1970). The incorporation of Italian subjects into Egyptian jurisdiction, another side of the same process of nationalization according to Paoletti, was responsible for dismantling the conditions that permitted the existence of the Italians of Egypt as an exceptional community.

One individual who experienced the nationalization was A. Ades. I met him through an individual in attendance at Caroline Delburgo’s book presentation in Milan, R. Cohen, who in turn had received my contact from an anonymous source. He insisted that the valuable stories of Italian experiences in Egypt were those of the Italian Jews. The rest, he said, were “mere immigrants.” Thus—after meeting with him—he put me in touch with Ades, who invited me to his home to talk more.

Ades’s father had arrived in Egypt from Syria, where he already held Italian nationality in the 1920s. Ades, however, could not pinpoint the family’s original connection to Italy. He

presumed that his father's family members were Italian protégés. His mother was from a town on the outskirts of Izmir (then known as Casaba, Turkey).³⁶ They married in 1926 and A. was born soon thereafter, while his father—after having worked for some years as a representative for an Italian fabric firm—opened a small factory in the desert near the al-Maza airport, then on the periphery of Cairo. The factory, which employed workers from two nearby villages, expanded until the late 1950s. While detailing the many successes of the factory, Ades remembered a story his father had told him, one that took place in the early 1930s. A Jewish merchant from Palestine came to Egypt to study his father's factory as he had planned to open a similar one outside of the young city of Tel Aviv. Upon seeing his land, the visitor asked his father, "you are planting trees here in Egypt?" to which his father, confused, responded, "yes." The visitor asked, "you think you'll finish your days in Egypt?" to which his father, again confused, responded, "yes." The visitor said, "you will *not* finish your days in Egypt!" This anecdote was the preface for Ades's story. Indeed, he added, although his father had confidently stabilized the factory, the family never rooted themselves in Egypt and changed homes frequently in Cairo. First, they lived in Daher, and then during the Second World War in Downtown Cairo, and finally in Garden City: "no one *bought* apartments at that time."³⁷

Ades remembered that tensions and antagonism between Egyptians and foreigners became overt around the time of the declaration of the state of Israel, but then subsided for some years after the war. He recalled the years 1948-52 with great pleasure. Even the Cairo Fire, he said, affected only those who lived and worked in Downtown and left his home in Garden City

³⁶ For more on the importance of this area during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries see Sevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820-1913: Trade, Investment and Production* (Cambridge, 1987).

³⁷ "nessuno acquistava appartamenti in Egitto in questo tempo." Although no one explicitly mentioned it, this constant movement may also indicate the lack of an idea of permanence in Egypt. Angelos Dalachanis has made a similar claim with regard to the Greek community. Dalachanis, "Leaving Egypt."

and factory on Cairo's periphery untouched.³⁸ "Around '53 or '54 they [undefined, Egyptian Military] got rid of the King and installed Muhammad Naguib... the first thing he said to the foreigners (stranieri) [was] 'don't worry.'"³⁹ Ades saw this reflected in the life of his family's factory, which, marking the passage of time, remained untouched until 1956. During the Suez Crisis, it was "temporarily" sequestered, permitted to run under the supervision of a high-level Egyptian officer who, knowing nothing of the industry, confided in Ades's father. At this moment, Ades recalled, the family understood the changes at play in Egypt would result in a fundamental restructuring of social and economic life: his father transferred the company to his sons and moved to Switzerland with a large portion of the company's wealth (where it had been safeguarded in Swiss banks since the founding of the company). Within two years, Ades and his brother also left Egypt and joined their father in Switzerland where they searched for work in European capitals (London, Paris, and Rome). Within six months his brother found work in Milan and soon thereafter so did Ades. "It wasn't too difficult because we had money... therefore we began [the transfer away from Egypt] smoothly... but it wasn't easy, because from one world you arrived in another... you felt a little uneasy, a little foreign (un po' straniero)."⁴⁰

I asked him to elaborate on how he experienced the departure from Egypt. He responded, moving away from the affective and towards a political framing: "look, the English exaggerated with the Egyptians," he said, and then he described how the Capitulations and Mixed Court system had perpetuated social imbalance under British control.

³⁸ The larger Ades department stores, in fact, suffered great damages during the Cairo Fire. A. Ades—part of a large family involved in running the enterprise—supplied goods to the Ades department stores through his factory. See Reynolds, *A City Consumed*, 187-188.

³⁹ "'54 o '53 hanno tirato il re e hanno messo Muhammad Naguib il quale la prima cosa ha detto agli stranieri 'non vi preoccupate'"

⁴⁰ "non è stato molto duro perché avevamo soldi... quindi abbiamo iniziato in un modo abbastanza rilassato... ma non è stato facile, perché da un mondo arrivi a un altro mondo... ti senti un po' a disagio, un po' straniero"

It wasn't right! I think they were cancelled after the war... it finished there... if a foreigner beat an Egyptian, the Egyptian couldn't do anything... there was a word 'hemāya' (protection)... 'I'm protected by the Italian consulate, I'm protected by the French consulate'... as long as there was the King...[it was that way].⁴¹

The ease with which he recalled the usage of “protection” is telling of the knowledge of structural divisions that existed under the capitular regime and of the perceived implications of their abolishment—even if precise details of their cancellation were often ambiguous. Ades could not remember when these privileges were abolished, but he remembered vividly how they were employed by individuals. He implied fluency in people's engagement with the capitular legal regime by jumping into various personalities protected by the Italian or French consulates.

More than a legal concept denoting a state of exception, *hemāya* was a social practice or strategy used among members of the groups protected under the capitulatory regime to exempt themselves from culpability in Egyptian life.⁴² Certainty and precision do not follow the temporality of legal and political histories, which extend beyond the confines of their sanctioned validity.⁴³ The archival records reveal that the variety of legal changes enacted to “integrate” foreign nationals into Egyptian politico-economic life were unclear and vaguely interpreted by the very individuals under whose authority the Italian subjects fell. The application and knowledge of procedures that reconfigured the possible worlds of Italians residents in Egypt between 1948 and 1956 (and into the 1960s in some cases) are similarly imprecise and confounding, just as they often appear in narratives of change and transformation. By 1961, Ades's factory had been nationalized and its control ceded to the Egyptian officer who had

⁴¹ “una cosa esagerata, non era giusto! mi sa che sono stati cancellati dopo la guerra... la cosa era finita lì... se un straniero picchiava un egiziano, l'egiziano non poteva fare niente... c'era una parola che si chiamava hemāya... sono protetto dal consolato italiano, sono protetto dal consolato francese... finché c'era il re...così.”

⁴² I mean this in the sense of Bourdieu's notion of strategy in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (London, 1977).

⁴³ Jane F. Collier, Bill Maurer, & Liliana Suárez-Navaz “Sanctioned Identities: Legal Constructions of Modern Personhood” *Identities*, 2 2-1 (1996): 1-27.

worked with him and his father since its sequester in 1956. Ades exhibited little remorse. His only critique of the political changes that occurred during 1950s regarded Nasser's failure "to do enough" for the Egyptian populace. The events that contoured Ades's life were the political transformations that affected the functioning of the factory. To close, he returned to the warning his father had received in the early 1930s and exclaimed, "the end of colonialism arrived, and goodnight!"⁴⁴ His father did not, in fact, finish his days in Egypt.

Few experienced the political transformations with the ease recounted in Ades's story. B. d'Alba, born in the first year of his father's internment, remembered a difficult exit from the Second World War.

Those who left the concentration camp (campo di concentramento) found a horrible situation [on the outside]... those who had a small [business] activity that was closed didn't have the opportunity to open the same activity... this is how it was for my family.

D'Alba's grandfather arrived in Egypt from Trani (Puglia) between 1860-74 and settled in Alexandria. His father—the first child born in Alexandria—ran a construction firm, which grew throughout the interwar period, but lost all of its business due to its closure during his internment from 1940-45. After the war, d'Abla's father found occasional work as an independent contractor. Unable to support his family on temporary employment, around 1952 he began to search for work outside of Egypt. Having understood that "overall, things needed to change," his father transferred to a construction firm based in Saudi Arabia.⁴⁵

D'Alba recalled hostile encounters between groups of Egyptians and foreigners that instilled a sense of unease among his peers. But this was not, he claimed, the cause of departure. He finished his studies in 1958 and traveled to Italy. "By then things had worsened in Egypt... I

⁴⁴ "è arrivata la fine di colonialismo e buona notte!"

⁴⁵ "le cose dovevano cambiare in totale"

was in Italy, my mother and brother joined me in Italy, and then even my father came to Italy.” D’Alba specified that, in contrast to French and British subjects, who were explicitly targeted by Egyptian nationalists due to their affiliation with colonialist regimes, Italians in Egypt suffered primarily from a lack of work.⁴⁶

They began to make laws... my father, luckily, always anticipated [them]... he avoided [departure] for some time with work... many had problems of this nature, therefore in some way, they were constrained (costretti) to take to the idea of leaving...[but] there wasn’t a threat.⁴⁷

D’Alba’s narrative here is important. The “laws” to which he refers are undefined, but they concerned at least the limiting of employment opportunities (probably the Company Law of 1947, blended into the nationalization laws of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which brought an end to large foreign industries like Ades’s). D’Alba focused not on causal or determinant factors that led to transformation in and departure from Egypt, but rather on the processes through which possibilities to remain in Egypt closed. In many cases, Italians of Egypt used “costretti” (compelled) in describing the impetus for departure. No direct “threat” (minaccia) was made to Italians, I was told repeatedly—perhaps this rendered one’s ability to point to specific historical events as catalysts for departure even more challenging—instead, macro-scale political transformations were argued to have reconfigured the futures of the Italians in Egypt. One of the most striking patterns pronounced in this regard is the intervention of “Egyptian” politics into the lives of Italians (and, more broadly, Europeans) as an effective force of change, dissolving perceived boundaries between the communities that were described as essential. It was the destruction of the public “points of encounter” that had rendered the space of Downtown Cairo

⁴⁶ “per quello che riguardava agli italiani era soprattutto legato al lavoro.”

⁴⁷ “cominciavano a mettere leggi... mio padre per fortuna ha sempre anticipato... mio padre l’ha evitata per il lavoro... ma questo è quello che succede e molti hanno avuto problemi di questa natura quindi in qualche modo sono stati costretti a prendere in modo l’idea di andarsene. ... non c’era una minaccia”

“European” and that had excluded Egyptian *politics*--as well as the Egyptian populace, who appear in these narrations only in terms of certain kinds of labor, such as doormen (*bowabin/portieri*), domestic workers (*servi*). Speculation on what “could have been” (*poteva essere*) introduced into this narration a sense of unrealized potential which restored possibility to futures past.⁴⁸ It is not that Nasser was wrong, I was told—although a link was made to emergence of the Free Officers, interviewees were hesitant to place blame on the policies of one political leader—but it was that he missed the opportunity to “integrate” Italians. Where agency was placed in these explanations illustrates how notions of national and regional belonging were imagined to have factored into (or to have been excluded from) geopolitical conditions as *possibile* trajectories of the unfolding of history. In being “compelled” to depart, the Italians of Egypt were objects acted upon by historical forces from which they perceived themselves to be absent.

⁴⁸ Alessandro Portelli has called a similar phenomenon “uchronic dreams”--replacing topos with chronos, “utopia is a nowhere place, uchronia is a nowhen event.” Alessandro Portelli, “Uchronic Dreams: Working Class Memory and Possible Worlds,” *Oral History Journal*, 16, 2 (1988): 46-56.

CHAPTER FOUR

Repatriates, Emigrants, and Refugees: Leaving Egypt between Politics and the Past, 1954-1958

On 15 August 1956, Edoardo Giorgianni arrived in Naples, probably aboard the *Enotria* or *Esperia*, two of the most popular passenger ships that connected Egypt to Italy. Giorgianni, born in Alexandria, was 65 years old at the time and had been living in Port Said after he was “dismissed” from the Mixed Courts in Cairo in 1940, when Italy entered into the Second World War. He and his wife lived on a small pension and support from two of their children, both of whom remained in Port Said. His daughter worked for a passenger line, and his son for an Italian dredging company in Suez. He, his wife, and his youngest son left Egypt on account of Giorgianni’s “own will [and] excessive precaution.” He left his apartment to his children, and had no other belongings in Egypt. He arrived in Italy with around 40,000 Italian lire.

Upon his arrival, Giorgianni went directly to the *Questura* (central police station) in Naples, where he left a declaration regarding his family’s circumstances and a plea for assistance from the local authorities.¹ He described, “honestly, I have nothing and no one to lean on, aside from a few distant maternal relatives that I have yet to track down.”² He claimed to have escaped the increasing tension between foreigners and Egyptians and the fear that his home, and Port Said generally, would become the center of an international conflict. He wrote, “I was struck, indeed, by the bellicose tension that each day grows more acute in Egyptian cities, and which is

¹ MAE AP Egitto 1956, B1049 DG Pubblica Sicurezza to MAE, 24 September 1956.

² “in verità non ho alcun punto di appoggio, ad eccezione di alcuni lontani parenti di mia madre, che mi riservo ancora di rintracciare.”

described without exaggeration even in the Italian newspapers that I've had the chance to read these days.”³

According to Giorgianni--information that he thought pertinent for the Italian government--the Egyptian government had ordered some kind of mobilization (“una specie di mobilitazione generale”) of troops. War equipment and arms were being moved into the Canal Zone at a steady rate and there was a growing presence of Soviet technicians among Egyptian military personnel. He noted that, personally, he had not suffered “any persecution... and not even by Egyptian Authorities.” Interestingly, the Questura sent Giorgianni’s declaration to the Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza (General Directorate of Public Security) of the Ministry of Interior, highlighting, aside from his request for assistance, his “impressions” that Egypt leaned on Russia for military intensification and that an international conflict was looming.

Before the Ministry could respond, more families left Egypt in similar circumstances. The consulate in Alexandria paid for the voyage of several families that arrived in Bari (Puglia) on the same day Giorgianni disembarked in Naples. Upon arrival in Bari, Virgilio Santoro took his family directly to Naples, despite being forewarned that there were no active protocols regarding assistance for Italians departing Egypt. After having turned over their belongings in Alexandria to a family friend, and with a definitive departure in mind, the Santoro family waited for one week outside of the *Comune* in Naples where they received neither monetary aid nor temporary housing. Furious, Santoro traveled back to Alexandria and left a letter for the Italian Consul describing that the only advice he had received was that he request aid from *Egyptian*

³ “Sono stato, infatti, impressionato dalla tensione bellica, che ogni giorno va sempre più acuendosi nelle città egiziane e che efficacemente viene descritta, senza alcun carattere di esagerazione, anche dai giornali italiani, che in questi giorni ho avuto occasione di leggere.”

authorities. Clearly, he noted, the Italian officials did not realize that he was an “Italian” from Egypt.⁴

It was not until late September that the Ministry responded to the Questura regarding Giorgianni’s case. They reiterated the same message that had been relayed to Santoro prior to his departure: that if “these Italians... need to repatriate... they do not benefit from any legal entitlements to special treatment.”⁵ An undefined “initial assistance” could be dispersed by local offices upon their arrival. Afterwards, they were to be directed to their Municipality of Origin (*comune di origine*, their legal residency in Italy) or, if they did not have one, to that of their father or paternal grandfather, where they were to benefit from the same assistance provided to locals by Municipal Assistance Offices (*Enti Comunali di Assistenza*, ECA), an organ of the *Direzione Generale di Pubblica Assistenza* (DGPA).⁶

This chapter takes the dynamic of departure~arrival of Italians from Egypt as an entryway into the events through which the social and legal conditions of the community shaped contingent identities as emigrants, repatriates, and refugees. None of these terms is exclusive of the other, but each one—in its employment—signifies a fluctuation in the scale of possible courses of action. Each represents a layered history. During the events of the mid 1950s, the conjunction of political circumstances placed Giorgianni and other Italians of Egypt on the precipice of redefining where they fit in relation to the “Patria,” its history, and its territorial boundaries. Giorgianni’s case—and many of the stories that appear in this chapter—points to the importance of international politics in the lives of the Italians of Egypt. That he drew attention to

⁴ ACGA, Virgilio Santoro.

⁵ “dovessero rimpatriare... non rivestono alcuna qualifica per fruire di speciali provvedimenti di leggi...”

⁶ AdSN - Questura Gabinetto - disposizioni di massima, B158, fasc.3171 “Egitto - connazionali rimpatrio” Ministero dell’Interno/DGAP to Questure di Napoli 29 September 1956.

the ongoing changes in Egypt's military suggests that he saw himself as, in some form, an actor for the state (and not just a subject of it). In the midst of recounting his own departure and requesting assistance, Giorganni "scaled-up," refusing to let the meaning of his arrival stop at its micro-level effects. Indeed, this sense of macro-scale political belonging is what resonated with many Italians of Egypt in the aftermath of the long 1930s, and that which inflected "repatriation" with the hope of "returning" to the *Patria*. Frustration and anger filled Santoro when this went unseen by Italian Authorities upon his arrival in Naples. If Italians had become "immigrants" only with the end of extraterritoriality in Egypt, by utilizing an idealized form of the community's history the Italian government tried to create conditions that would help them to remain immigrants. However, without pushing for the very privileges the Montreux conference had abolished, Italian residents could not stay in Egypt. The historical and legal conjunctures no longer endorsed the exceptionality that had made the Italians of Egypt a possible community. Devoid of such privileges, the community endured in a state of precariousness, on the precipice of its own redefinition. Emigration, repatriation, and refuge served as conduits through which these historical circumstances could be rerouted.

Two processes combine at this historical moment. The first regarded Italy's foreign policy in Egypt. As Nasser's regime sought to render Egypt a sovereign state, free of foreign dominance, between 1954 and 1956, the decisions made by representatives of the Italian state necessarily affected the conditions of possibility for Italian residents and institutions in Egypt. If Italians of Egypt "scaled-up" in their framing of departure and arrival, Italian diplomats and politicians often "scaled-down," drawing on the historical presence of Italians in Egypt to solidify their ties with the Egyptian administration amidst these changes. This practice was intertwined with Italy's developing neo-Atlanticist policies—particularly after 1955—as its

leaders sought to secure industrial and oil interests in Egypt and recuperate the country's role as a "mediatory" power in a constellation of American, European, Egyptian, and Middle Eastern relations.⁷ The second process regarded Italy's internal political dynamics. The Italian administration recognized that the means to deal with Italian residents leaving Egypt in impoverished conditions could not be met on a large scale--in both political and economic terms. This process pointed to an awareness that the Italian state lacked the resources to properly address the growing crisis of population displacement.⁸ The conjoining of these processes put the definitions of the community in flux.

Many of the Italians of Egypt requested collective repatriation, which they perceived as a recognition of their "historic community" because it placed them within a nationalist narrative. Similar to the *pieds-noirs* of Algeria, the Italians of Egypt imagined Italy from a distance and within a different assemblage of socio-political realities.⁹ Initially, they did not portray

⁷ "Neo-Atlanticist" refers to Italy's repositioning of its link to NATO and the United States that followed the Second World War. While initially towing the line on many of Washington's policies and interests in the Mediterranean, after 1955, Italy took a more active role in redefining its own interests. One of the main tools used to negotiate this role was the Italian-Egyptian connection. For more on this see, Federica Onelli, "L'Italie et la crise de Suez" *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 1, 245 (2012): 21-40; Federica Onelli *All'Alba del Neoatlantismo: La politica egiziana dell'Italia (1951-1956)* (FrancoAngeli: 2013); Alberto Tonini "L'Italie la naissance de l'état d'Israël et le premier conflit israélo-arabe, 1948-1950" *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 1, 245 (2012): 7-20; Giovanni Fornari ad Amintore Fanfani, il Cairo, li 15 gennaio 1959 Riservato alla persona del presidente Fanfani. *Ventesimo Secolo*, 6, 14 (2007): 177-184; Francesco Perfetti "Il Mediterraneo e Medio Oriente nella politica estera italiana," *La Comunità Internazionale*, 2 (2001): 185-202; D.W. Ellwood, "Italy, Europe and the Cold War" the politics and economics of limited sovereignty," in (eds.) Chris Duggan and Chris Wagstaff, *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture and Society, 1948-1958* (London, 1995); Antonio Varsori, "Italy's policy towards European integration (1947-1958)," in (eds.) Chris Duggan and Chris Wagstaff, *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture and Society, 1948-1958* (London, 1995).

⁸ Matteo Sanfilippo "Per una storia dei profughi stranieri e dei campi di accoglienza e di reclusione nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra" *Studi Emigrazione/Migration Studies*, XLIII, 164 (2006): 835-; Silvia Salvativi *Senza Casa, Senza Paese* (Mulino: 2008).

⁹ Andrea Smith "Europe's invisible migrants" in Andrea Smith (ed.) *Europe's Invisible Migrants* (University of Amsterdam Press: 2003) 9-3; Andrea Smith *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial*

themselves as “refugees (rifugiati)” fleeing their home in Egypt per se, but rather as Italians “returning” (or hoping to be collectively returned) to the home which they had “served” and represented from abroad.¹⁰ The policy of the Italian administration was to avoid collective repatriation as late as possible. Instead, they encouraged Italian residents to repatriate independently. By sponsoring slow, individual repatriation, the Italian State attempted to forestall the blossoming of new collective (political) identities based on displacement. This only underscored the disjunction between social and legal categories of belonging.¹¹ The events of the Suez Crisis, however, rendered a slow repatriation impossible and the community departed Egypt en masse. In the Refugee Sheltering Centers (Centri di Raccolta Profughi, CRP), Italians leaving Egypt became “refugees” de facto when the collective circumstances of their departure appeared to go unacknowledged.

Only a few months after Giorgianni and Santoro had arrived in Naples, *Italiani nel Mondo* published an article titled “Why the Italians [are leaving] Egypt” which detailed the situation of some 3-4,000 families that had departed since late 1956. The author described the Suez Crisis and its effect on the already scant labor market, noting that Italians continue to leave Egypt, “searching in Patria, or in emigration destinations, work that permits each one to live and bring life to, even modestly, one’s family.”¹² It took several years for the procedures to grant

Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France (Indiana University Press: 2006); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 89.

¹⁰ For more on the linguistic distinctions between these terms see Pier Luigi Zamporlini *La Tutela del Profugo Italiano nell’Ordinamento Interno*. Università degli studi “La Sapienza” Roma: PhD Thesis (2008).

¹¹ Pamela Ballinger, “Borders and the Rhythms of Displacement, Emplacement and Mobility” in Thomas M. Wilson & Hastings Donnan (eds.) *A Companion to Border Studies* (Blackwell: 2012): 395; Liisa H. Malkki “Refugees and Exile: From ‘Refugee Studies’ to the National Order of Things,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 515.

¹² “per cercare in Patria, o nei contingenti di emigrazione, un lavoro che permetta ad ognuno di vivere e di far vivere, sia pur modestamente, la propria famiglia.” A.C. “Perchè gli italiani lasciano l’Egitto” *Italiani nel Mondo*, XIII 7 (10 April 1957).

status as “national refugees” to the Italians of Egypt to be finally concluded. At the time, the category of “refugee” was especially unclear in the Italian context given the country’s history of ambiguous policy with regard to immigrants and refugees since unification.¹³ The legal category itself had only recently emerged on the European scene.¹⁴ This new form of legal belonging for the Italians of Egypt cemented a sense of the historical collectivity to which Italians of Egypt claimed to belong, while also entitling them to an unique relation to contemporary Italian society. In a sense, granting the legal status of “national refugee” was one way to incorporate non-contemporaneous layers of history into the present. It created from the unfolding of historical events—at a nexus of histories of migration and decolonization in the postwar Mediterranean—a particular set of relations among the Italians of Egypt, the Italian state, the Italians in Italy, and the past.

I. Taking Positions

The Italian ambassador in Cairo, Pasquale Janelli, described an attempt on the life of Nasser in October 1954 as a key moment for the latter to consolidate power: particularly in dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest opposition, which had been rendered illegal since the 1952 military coup.¹⁵ Janelli saw the Muslim Brotherhood as Nasser’s greatest obstacle

¹³ Marij Leenders “From Inclusion to Exclusion: Refugees and Immigrants in Italy Between 1861 and 1943,” *Immigrants and Minorities*, 14 2 (1995): 115-138; see also Sabina Donati *A Political History*.

¹⁴ Malkki discusses the emergence of the historicized refugee, the “knowable, nameable figure and... object of social-scientific knowledge.” Malkki “Refugees and Exile,” 498; see also Marie-Louise Karttunen “Repatriates of Refugees? Narrating the Loss of Transnational Community,” *History and Anthropology* 25 3 (2014):376.

¹⁵ Giuseppe Galassi, a former editor and director of *Il Giornale d’Oriente* at the height of Fascist propaganda efforts in the 1930s, had been brought in to write an article earlier on the occasion of the Revolutionary Council’s consolidation by *Il Tempo*. Giuseppe Galassi, “Prima inchiesta in Egitto dopo la fine della monarchia” *Il Tempo* 25 June 1953.

in his dealings with Europe and the United States.¹⁶ Studying carefully the changing political environment in Egypt—as he had been sent to Cairo to do—Janelli witnessed Nasser’s propaganda campaign which portrayed the young figure as the de facto “president” of the country. The scant attention given to international political events, such as the visit of Italian defense minister Randolfo Pacciardi in 1953 which we saw in the last chapter, seemed to prove that. The visit had not yielded the results anticipated by the Italian administration. Janelli expected that international political allegiances would take on new forms in the coming years, and part of his goal in Cairo was to find a strategy that would benefit the Italian state in these emergent configurations.

Janelli met with Nasser in May 1954, and, although impressed with his physical presence, he noted condescendingly in one report that Nasser lacked the sophisticated “cultural” background of the former Egyptian royal family. Like his predecessors, Janelli stressed a “Mediterranean affinity, commonality of customs and mentalities, [and] reciprocal economic interests,” observing that, for Nasser, “the concept ‘Italy’ evoked only the thought that the Italian community approaches and sometimes mixes more willingly with Egyptians than the other foreign communities.”¹⁷ Earlier that month the two countries had settled contracts on around 600 million EGP worth of public works projects.¹⁸ By stressing the collaboration and the shared “heredity” of the Mediterranean, Janelli attempted to convince Nasser of the “historic and geographical necessity” to organize a common defense against a “threat that looms so close.” That attempt, however, was largely unsuccessful.¹⁹ Janelli described Nasser as “cold, if not

¹⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1954, B934 Janelli to MAE 9 November 1954.

¹⁷ “[il] concetto ‘Italia’ ha evocato soltanto... il pensiero che la comunità italiana si avvicina e qualche volta si mischia più volentieri delle altre Comunità straniere alla popolazione egiziana.”

¹⁸ MAE AP 1954 B935 Janelli to MAE 14 May 1954; MAE AP 1954 B935 Janelli to MAE 17 May 1954.

¹⁹ “difesa contro una minaccia che incombe così vicina.”

negative.” The Italian diplomat understood that if there was a conduit through which he could connect with Nasser, it was the Italian community in Egypt.²⁰

The framework used by the Italian diplomats mimicked the cultural propaganda of the Fascist period. Cognizant of the ongoing “exodus” of Italians from Egypt since the end of the Second World War, Janelli addressed the Italian press office in 1954 as journalists prepared to write about the anniversary of the military coup to assure them that a “period of uncertainty (periodo di incertezza)” had passed and that “the Italians of Egypt” continued their activities “just as they had in the past.”²¹ For the occasion, Janelli also requested that Nasser publicly address the Italians of Egypt. The content of the speech—which was to be read in Italian by Nasser—was written by members of the diplomatic team. It contained, “a recognition of the Italian contribution to the construction of modern Egypt and precise guarantees for the protection of our interests and communities (collettività) in Egypt.” Nasser read the following:

No one better than the Italian people, who fought hard for their independence, can understand and appreciate these efforts [for the liberation of the territory from foreign troops]... the centuries-old friendship between Italy and Egypt, their common interests in the Mediterranean and their historic affinities, are more than tokens of growing future collaboration between the countries... The politics of the new Egypt aim to intensify cultural and economic exchanges with Italy. I wouldn't want to conclude this message without mentioning the thousands of Italians who for several generations live in Egypt and collaborate in the affluence of the country with their work and industriousness in all sectors. To these Italians, the Revolution ensures that their work, their initiatives and activities will be protected and valorized because we believe in loyal collaboration of all men of good will.²²

²⁰ MAE AP 1954 B935 Janelli to MAE 14 May 1954.

²¹ MAE AP 1954 B935 Appunto Ufficio Stamp 20 May 1954.

²² “Nessuno meglio del popolo Italiano, che tanto ha lottato per la sua indipendenza, è in grado di comprendere ed apprezzare questi sforzi [per la liberazione del Territorio dalle truppe straniere]... La secolare amicizia tra l'Italia e l'Egitto, i loro interessi comuni nel Mediterraneo e le loro affinità storiche, sono altrettanti pegni di crescente collaborazione futura fra i due Paesi... La politica del nuovo Egitto mira ad intensificare ulteriormente gli scambi culturali e commerciali con l'Italia. Non vorrei concludere questo messaggio senza accennare alle migliaia di Italiani che da parecchie generazioni vivono in Egitto e collaborano al benessere del Paese con il loro lavoro e la loro operosità in tutti i settori. A questi Italiani, la Rivoluzione assicura che il

The speech was broadcast in Egypt and aired simultaneously on Radio Roma, in Italy. It was envisioned as a continuation of the propaganda emphasizing the role of the Italians of Egypt in Egypt's modernization. Keeping with the emergent Italian policy in the Mediterranean, which sought to strengthen ties between Italy and unaligned Egypt, the Italian diplomats sought to maintain an image of the Italians as prestigious contributors to Egypt's modernization and its march towards independence; in other words, as agents in Egyptian history.

Around this time, an elite Italian insurance broker in Egypt, Vittorio Giannotti, was publicly accused of making irregular financial transactions. It was another example of the way foreign subjects were exploiting their privilege in the Egyptian economy. Vittorio Zoppi, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, cautioned Janelli to avoid taking a position on the case so as not to spoil the image of the community's "prestige." Any slight on the Italian community, he believed, would harm the potential "to boost Italy's economic penetration of Egypt." The new Italian policy was to explicitly avoid taking any positions with regard to the political present, while continuing to emphasize the community's historic presence in Egypt. These political projects--contemporaneously economic and social--were inseparable: so long as the Italian residents were seen in good light by the Egyptian regime, the Italian diplomats felt that they had an advantage over other foreign powers and thus greater economic maneuverability.

But it was not so easy. The Egyptian administration harbored suspicions that foreign residents were responsible for carrying out communist and Zionist activity. Many of these same suspicions carried over into the public, and the image of the "foreigner" often assimilated all non-Egyptian national communities into one collective Other. Italian diplomats worked against

loro lavoro, le loro iniziative [e] la loro attività saranno protetti e valorizzati perché noi crediamo nella leale collaborazione di tutti gli uomini di buona volontà."

this current, highlighting the differences between the Italians and other foreign communities. These suspicions were also behind the desire of the Italian diplomats to keep the Italian residents as far removed from (Egyptian) national politics as possible. To remain detached from ongoing political changes in Egypt, the position of the Italian state needed to carefully generalize its own national community as one concerned solely with its own coherency.

In preparation for the commemoration of the military coup, Egyptian Authorities held a meeting in Bulaq, the Cairene district where Italians made up over half of the foreign residents.²³ Nasser and other members of the Revolutionary Council were present, as well as local journalists and the Italian Consul De Michelis. During the meeting, Giuseppe Cattaneo, an Italian from the district, stood up to address the Egyptian officers. The following day, the *Le Progrès Egyptien* reported that Cattaneo had spoken in the name of the Italian community, declaring “in perfect Arabic... that it was natural for the Italian community to support the Liberation Movement.” *Al-Ahrām* inflated the incident, claiming that “the Italian community (al-gāliya al-īталиyyah), which represents a large part of the foreigners [in Egypt], announced its support for the revolution and its leaders and puts the lives and goods of its children at Egypt’s service for the realization of its national claims.”

The Italian Consul present later claimed that Cattaneo had spoken only for himself and, without clarification, maligned “the enemies of Egypt and its independence,” therefore not taking a clear stance with respect to national alliances (in relation to the Anglo-Egyptian tensions,

²³ In the 1947 census one sees that, although the number of Italians was high in relation to other foreigners (54.3%) and this area is often referred to by Italians of Egypt as an “Italian district” (the Italians from Bulaq called “bulacchini”), the ratio of Italians to the total population was a mere 0.7%. These numbers are a constant reminder that the Egypt described by the diplomats and by many of the Italians of Egypt themselves was one which left invisible the large majority of Egyptian residents. In the Cairo neighborhood in which Italians had their largest population in relation to total population, in al-Ezbakiyya, the percentage was still only 2.1%. Amicucci, “La comunità italiana,” 88.

Italian politicians were always wary of taking a stance against the British). Janelli considered “any collective manifestation that could give the impression of participation in the political life of this country [Egypt] by our community” too risky, yet taking a position on this—as in the Giannotti case—would appear to be taking a stance *against* the authority of the Revolutionary Council, even more so because of Cattaneo’s outright declaration of support. Since Cattaneo vocalized a favorable opinion of Nasser’s movement, Italian Authorities decided not to challenge the attention the incident was receiving in the press.²⁴

The only damning public reaction came from Catraro’s *Cronaca*—which was rather important given its circulation within the Italian community. Since its founding in 1950, *Cronaca* had become the most popular newspaper among Italian residents and its sponsors were among the largest contributors to the Società di Beneficenza Italiana (SIB).²⁵ Due to the role the *Cronaca* played in shaping the opinions of the Italians of Egypt, the Italian government subsidized its publication.²⁶ In an opinion piece, Catraro cautioned Italian residents about making statements in the name of the larger community. Referring to Cattaneo’s comments (and their reprinting in various newspapers), Catraro noted that Cattaneo’s statement had indeed been made “for a good cause.” The sympathy expressed by Cattaneo was echoed by the current Italian administration and by Italian residents in Cairo, wrote Catraro, but Italians should avoid any public input on “Egyptian politics.” He asked rhetorically what might happen if someone else spoke, “believing to be authorized to speak in the name of the Italians”: “are we sure that things would go well and there wouldn’t be errors? Are we sure that [these statements of partnership] will be favorable criteria for Italo-Egyptian friendship? And if someone, irresponsible, were to

²⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1954 B935 Janelli to MAE 2 June 1954.

²⁵ CEA, *Cronaca* 2 July 1955.

²⁶ Catraro observed that “la povertà di mezzi della gran massa dei connazionali che trovano più comodo di passarsi il giornali di mano in mano anziché di comprarlo” had left the paper in dire straights. MAE AP Egitto 1955 B1006 “Rapporto Consolare 1954” Alexandria 30 June 1955.

err?”²⁷ Catraro saw that, on this occasion, Cattaneo’s statement had been in line with the politics of the Egyptian regime. Yet, he also knew that, given the quickly changing nature of the political context and the growing precariousness of the Italian community, vocalization of political sympathy risked being misinterpreted. Here, Catraro underlined the attention given to defining the position of Italians as extraneous to Egyptian political life--and thus friends rather than foes.

II. A Place for the Italians of Egypt?

The Italians residents’ historical narrative had been formed around the idea that the community was foundational to Italy’s national history abroad--and not only to Egypt’s modernization. Yet, the community’s “prestige” remained a source of concern for the Italian state only insofar as it provided an important tool in negotiating new political-economic arrangements with the Egyptian regime. The Italian government profited from these ties, for example, when it began to negotiate large-scale projects—technical training and public-works contracts such as the oil pipeline in Suez, business promised to the Italian companies Dalmine and Snam (Società Nazionale Metanodotti).²⁸ The response to Nasser’s broadcast in July had indeed helped to boost the community’s perceived prestige relative to other foreign communities.²⁹ But it did not affect the pace at which the political-economic circumstances in Egypt were changing. In observing that the economic activities of Italian residents were “tightly linked to the economy and, in general, to all of life in Egypt,” Janelli highlighted—perhaps unintentionally—that the Italian residents had few resources outside of Egypt. Being an “asset”

²⁷ “Siamo noi sicuri che le cose andrebbero ancora bene e che non sarebbero sommessi degli errori? Siamo noi sicuri che ‘tratto’ e ‘sempre’ sarà fatto con criteri favorevoli all’amicizia italo-egiziana? E se qualcuno, irresponsabile, sbagliasse?”

²⁸ CEA, “La costruzione dell’oleodotto Suez-Cairo affidata al gruppo Dalmine-SNAM” *Cronaca*, May 29, 1954.

²⁹ MAE AP Egitto 1954 B935 Janelli to MAE 3 August 1954.

linking Italy to Egypt, the burgeoning political friendship that employed the rhetoric of their historic “prestige” strongly contrasted their everyday prospects. Many wondered whether the Italian community could find a place in this present constituted on residues of the past.

A critique was levied against the Italian administration in the pages of *Cronaca*. It noted a disinterest on the part of the administration in rebuilding the institutions that were, during the interwar period, so fundamental to the quotidian lives of the Italian residents.³⁰ The newspaper published a short article—authored by its editor, Catraro—that reported rumors of the Italian government’s plan to allocate 120,000 EGP to the Alexandrian community and 30,000 EGP to the one in Cairo, out of the total 150,000 EGP given to the Italian state from the sale of the Alexandrian school and the Italian stadium in Cairo as part of the postwar settlement. Few families could afford private schooling and subsidized education was necessary.

If the government was serious about its interest in the future of Italian residents, Catraro argued in the article, any commission formed to determine the use of the available funds should include “eminent and competent” members of the community who understood its troubles.³¹ The importance of the *Cronaca* lent urgency to the issue. The Foreign Ministry organized a meeting between Janelli and Pellegrino Ghigi, who had served as the Italian Minister in Egypt during the Fascist consolidation in the 1930s, to discuss plans for the funds. No community members were invited. The Ministry had in fact proposed to use 120000 EGP to purchase a new building in Alexandria to use as a state school and to split the remainder between schools run by the Salesian missionaries in Alexandria and the Italian hospital in Cairo. The two diplomats, however, believed that the most pressing concerns to be addressed for the future included: first, the need for institutions that would foster cultural exchange between Italians and Egyptians and not serve

³⁰ MAE AP Egitto 1955 B1006 Janelli to MAE 25 April 1954.

³¹ CEA, Athos Catraro, “I problemi della collettività... le scuole gratuite” *Cronaca*, June 23, 1954.

exclusively Italian residents; and, second, the quickly declining welfare conditions of the Italian residents. Young Italians had been abandoning Egypt since the end of the war in large numbers, leaving behind their parents and elders, who could survive on lesser funds, subsidies, or remittances from relatives abroad. The diplomats warned that the “aging and impoverishment” of the community meant a continual increase in assistance services would be required by the State. If something was not done, the SIB (the locally-based Italian charity organization), already burdened with the task of subsidizing unemployed Italians, would have to liquidate its accounts to make available resources for the aging community.³² The repercussions of such an event, “in the heart of a community well aware of a fund of substantial size that is derived directly from their own properties,”³³ were dangerous, argued Janelli—both for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome and for the Italian residents in Egypt.

Janelli saw cultural institutions as having the potential to reinvigorate the timeless “friendship” between Italy and Egypt. Less than a year later, he would write of his frustration about how the Italian schools were managed: these schools were “almost exclusively for the Italian community, the diffusion of Italian language and thought are held up only by private and commercial initiatives.”³⁴ The events of the Società Dante Alighieri were neither well-attended nor publicized in Egyptian spheres and his attempts to introduce Italian language education into Egyptian middle schools failed due to a shortage of willing and trained instructors.³⁵ Funding for a new school, in the end, was thus rejected because it did nothing to bring together Italian and Egyptian communities. Janelli and Ghigi instead agreed on putting 60,000 EGP towards a center

³² MAE AP Egitto 1955 B1006 Cairo Appunto 20 October 1954.

³³ “in seno ad una collettività cui è ben nota l’esistenza di un fondo di notevole entità che deriva da beni delle collettività stessa.”

³⁴ “quasi esclusivamente verso la comunità italiana, la diffusione della lingua e del pensiero italiani sono additati in Egitto solo alle iniziative private e commerciali.”

³⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1955 B1005 Janelli to Martino 3 August 1955.

for “cultural gatherings” part of which could be rented out for private use; 30,000 for the constitution of a similar locale in Cairo; 15,000 each for the Italian hospitals in Alexandria and Cairo; and the remaining 3,000 to the Salesian schools.³⁶

These changes underlined other trends, such as a steady decline in attendance of Italian schools by Italian children. The consul in Alexandria explained this to be a result of both the decrease in births due to the internment and the “exodus” of Italians who no longer found work in Egypt. The consul, in his 1954 annual report, cautioned that investing in new schools would be “useless, even damaging” to the community. He suggested investing more energies in the Salesian schools, which were also seen as the solution to the “flooding” of communism in Egypt, and would thus help bring Italian and Egyptian regimes closer to one another.³⁷ The introduction of new schools, he argued, would divide the community into smaller factions and could only weaken its homogeneity, risking manipulation by oppositional political parties just at the moment when many Italians had turned their attention to the Italian state in seeking an answer to the question of departure.

With departure always on the agenda of the Italians of Egypt, Catraro’s newspaper closely followed debates regarding quotas and possible destinations for Italian emigrants (as well as the recent constitution of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, ICEM).³⁸

An anonymous writer to the *Cronaca* petitioned for the inclusion of the Italians of Egypt in a

³⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1955 B1006 Appunto 20 October 1954.

³⁷ MAE AP Egitto 1955 B1006 “Rapporto Consolare 1954” Alexandria 30 June 1955.

³⁸ ICEM, the forerunner to the IOM, was constituted in the early 1950s to address the challenges posed by refugees and “surplus” populations in Europe. Although working with refugees was not in its mandate, it was not beyond its scope and, after 1952, relocating refugees became a key aspect of its practices. For more on the history of ICEM and its position in postwar assistance of refugees, see Jérôme Elie “The Historical Roots of Cooperation Between the UN High Commission for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration,” *Global Governance*, 16 (2010): 345-360.

national emigration quota: “even a modest one... for obvious reasons.” Another article noted that, given the high numbers of Italian residents in Egypt who had participated in the First World War and their service to “the *Patria*... it’s logical that today in light of the new living conditions resulting from the laws of the country that hosts us, our compatriots (*connazionali*) have the right to work, as do their brothers in the Peninsula.”³⁹ Italian residents in Egypt claimed to be entitled to the same opportunities as Italians in Italy, even more so—many argued—because of their “service” and “sacrifice” from abroad.⁴⁰

Around the same time, in Spring 1955, an article in *Le Reforme* (a French-language newspaper in Egypt), penned by Antonio Lovato, the newspaper’s correspondent in Rome, responded to the *Cronaca* asserting that the Italian administration in fact had no intention to address the interests of the Italian community in Egypt. The article blamed Catraro for creating a false sense of hope among unemployed Italians. Lovato, instead, suggested individualized migration as a solution: “the free emigrant is preferred, well-received, makes a fortune and doesn’t return. The assisted emigrant, protected, for obvious reasons is less well-received in the countries where he goes.”⁴¹ What was at stake here were two competing visions of how the Italian residents in Egypt figured into a national imaginary: Catraro’s—and that commonly expressed in the pages of *Cronaca*—portrayed the Italians of Egypt as an essential appendage of the Italian state, and thus active in/for it wherever they migrate; and Lovato’s, which saw Italians as independent emigrants, detached from the state, in search of fortune and a future.

³⁹ “*Patria*... è logico che, oggi, dinanzi alle nuove condizioni di vita risultanti dalle leggi del Paese che ci ospita, i *connazionali* abbiano il diritto di lavorare, come gli altri loro fratelli della Penisola.”

⁴⁰ CEA, “I nostri problemi: una quota di emigrazione anche per gli italiani residenti in Egitto,” *Cronaca*, April 16, 1955.

⁴¹ “l’emigrante libero in generale è preferito, bene accolto, fa fortuna e non ritorna. L’emigrante assistito... protetto... e per ovvie ragioni è meno ben visto nei paesi dove si reca.” CEA, *Cronaca* “Un altro scettico articolo del corrispondente romano di ‘La Reforme’”

Lovato—picking up on what seemed a contradiction but instead signaled a shift in Italo-Egyptian relations—questioned how it was possible that the Egyptian Minister of Economy and Industry requested “men and work” from Italy, but that nevertheless “the Italians of Egypt ask to emigrate.” Catraro responded harshly to Lovato’s call to abandon hope in the administration. He averred that Lovato failed to grasp the severity of the “total unemployment” looming over the community. Catraro estimated that within six years, young Italians would be unable to find work due to the nationalization of the work force—even those trained and specialized in the trades requested by the Egyptian Government—and that this entailed a large-scale departure from Egypt that could not be dealt with on an individual basis. He argued instead that departure needed to be envisioned as part of the broader political exchanges between the two countries.

The 1954 annual report prepared by the staff of the Alexandrian consulate described the “end of immigration” in Egypt, not merely referring to the actual flow of people, but to the conditions that permitted the Italian residents to live in Egypt *as* immigrants. It was estimated that the decline in the population was around “20 to 25 percent.” Although official statistics showed that some 1,086 families had left Egypt since 1949, the numbers were likely much higher.⁴² Only 655 “definitive departures” were registered between 1946 and 1951. However, during this period, many left without registering precisely because a definitive departure signified abandoning one’s rights to residency if circumstances proved unavailable elsewhere. This was something, many hoped, a sponsored emigration would alleviate, despite Lovato’s claim that fewer independent emigrants returned. Over thirty percent of the population was officially unemployed. Apart from the hundreds of laid-off workers as a result of the new

⁴² The departures of part of a family or temporary departures of individuals who did not register their departure so as not to relinquish residency are likely excluded from these estimates. Instead, these numbers should reflect only the number of “official” departures, which means those that were somehow arranged or conducted through the consulates.

company laws, the 1954 report noted the impending problem of the hundreds of unemployed youth seeking their first jobs. 1,053 families received welfare support. Subsidies took the form of monthly or biweekly distributions of half to two EGP per family, depending on need.⁴³ A total of 1,373,710 EGP in aid was distributed over the course of 1954. Once the elite structure on which much of the community relied, so many of the “passport Italians”—the definition of their citizenship status still ambiguous, especially with the end of a model of imperialism that sought to profit from their presence in the Levant—requested passport renewals for departure that the Italian Foreign Ministry, the consulates in Egypt, and Italian authorities in Turkey compiled a partial list of the families that had arrived as protégés from Ottoman territories at the beginning of the century to determine whether the Italian Government was legally responsible for them.⁴⁴ This is one of the first reports to include details about the ambiguous status of Italian protégés, in what became known as the “Ankara List” of “former protégés of Ottoman origin (ex-protetti di origine ottomana).” Only afterwards was a process initiated to concede to them full Italian citizenship, but only to those exhibiting signs of “spiritual and political” relations with the Italian state.⁴⁵

The Egyptian government concurrently enacted new regulations to control the outflow of people and capital. One of these changes required an exit visa of all departees, temporary and

⁴³ This data comes from the consultation of the registri archives at the now defunct Consolato Generale in Alexandria and the current Cancelleria Consolare in Cairo, where each receipt of received payment is placed in the individual family folders.

⁴⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1955 B1006 “Rapporto Consolare 1954” Alexandria 30 June 1955.

⁴⁵ For example, in July 1956, when Riccardo Cardoso requested a renewal of his Italian passport, the Consul noted that the reasoning was “evidently opportunistic”—in other words, he was seeking a passport so that he could depart from Egypt and the Italian one had been what he carried since the interwar period. The Consul further declared that Cardoso was absent of the “continuata esistenza di quei rapporti spirituali e politici con lo Stato italiano che, anche all'estero, concretizzano la qualità d'Italia” See ACGA, Cardoso Riccardo fu Giuseppe 1897, see also ACGA, Roditi fu Abramo cl. 1877 (lista di Ankara).

permanent.⁴⁶ These measures confirmed the pessimistic outlook of the consular report, which took its perspective beyond Alexandria. The report's conclusion spoke on two levels. First, it described the Italian community as firmly cemented at an impasse. Second, it offered the Italian Consul's interpretation of what this impasse looked like from the position of the Italian state. The consul concluded that the combined effects of the Second World War and the tighter restrictions on foreigners in Egypt precluded any possibility for "placement (sistemazione)" in Egypt for the unemployed Italians. Moreover, he refuted the remedial potential of repatriation en masse. The influx of Italians from Egypt, he claimed, would only "swell" the "already long lines of unemployed [in Italy]," and the expenses of repatriation would cost far more than the subsidies that were provided to the Italians in Egypt at the time. However, in the report, the consul draws attention to one other factor which, he claimed, provided exemplary evidence that the Italians of Egypt would be unable to integrate into metropolitan Italy:

Without family ties, which are especially important for the reinsertion in the national life of those individuals who repatriate even after a few years' absence, accustomed to living conditions totally different from those in Italy, speaking a language deformed by the long presence in the Near East to the point to make it sensibly different from what we speak, these compatriots (connazionali), once repatriated, would end up feeling foreign in the country of which they have nationality, and might even regret what they had left [behind] notwithstanding the life of restrictions and humiliation that they were constrained to live.⁴⁷

This "abnormal" situation, however, could not be prolonged, argued the consul. The enduring circumstances had forced the Italian residences to "panhandle" (elemosinare) from the consular

⁴⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1955 B1006 Appunto 25 June 1955, Cerimoniale to Ambasciata Cairo 30 July 1955.

⁴⁷ "Privi dei legami familiari, che pur si rivelano così importanti ai fini del reinserimento nella vita nazionale di chi rimpatria soltanto dopo pochi anni di assenza, abituati a condizioni di vita del tutto diverse da quelle esistenti in Italia, parlando una lingua che la lunga permanenza nel vicino Oriente ha deformata al punto dal farla apparire sensibilmente diversa da quella che parliamo noi, questi connazionali, una volta rimpatriati, finirebbero per sentirsi stranieri nel Paese di cui hanno la nazionalità, e forse anche per rimpiangere quello che hanno lasciato nonostante la vita di ristrettezze e di umiliazioni che erano costretti a condurvi."

offices and the SIB. Many awaited “any initiative” that might bring stability to their lives—even confronting the risks of another emigration. In the report, the consul interestingly added that if there had been a moment to encourage naturalization, it had long passed, and thus action needed to be taken:

to exit from this paralysis that could be dangerous to the morale of our nationals, who naturally associate the memory of a period of exceptional prosperity at the time of the Capitulations with the particular prestige promised to Italian communities abroad by the authoritarian regime of the Ventennio.⁴⁸

Until that moment, departures had been largely independent choices of individuals and families who were finally able to settle elsewhere—the model encouraged in Lovato’s article. The consul, however, following Catraro’s advice, wrote: “I see no other alternative than massive repatriation unless *a series of windfalls opens new employment possibilities in other countries for the chronically unemployed of Alexandria.*”⁴⁹ The limitations that had grown to characterize the collective life of the community put the entire population at risk of impoverishment. In response to this, the consul excluded both the integration of the Italians of Egypt into Italy and the subsistence of the community in Egypt. Within this framework, emigration was the only solution.

Days before the consular report was published, Italian residents in Alexandria gathered to celebrate the “Day of Solidarity (Giornata della Solidarietà).” The event commemorated the roughly 5,000 Italian residents in Egypt who participated in the First World War. It was widely attended by members of the Italian community. For the occasion, Camillo Giuriati, the Consul to

⁴⁸ “di uscire da un immobilismo che può rivelarsi pericoloso per il morale di questi nostri connazionali, i quali sono naturalmente portati ad associare il ricordo del periodo di eccezionale benessere goduto al tempo delle Capitolazioni a quello del particolare prestigio assicurato alle collettività italiane all’estero dal Regime autoritario del Ventennio.”

⁴⁹ “non vedo quale altra alternativa possa contrapporsi al rimpatrio in massa, se non un complesso di *provvidenze particolari che aprano ai disoccupati cronici di Alessandria nuove possibilità di lavoro in altri Paesi disposti ad accoglierli,*” MAE AP Egitto 1955 B1006 “Rapporto Consolare 1954” Alexandria 30 June 1955.

Alexandria during the Fascist period who had been repatriated with other diplomats in June 1940, made his first return to the city. In the presence of the current and former Italian Consul and the Alexandrian Governor, members of the veterans association (Associazione Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra) raised the flags of the different Italian military divisions and, in the afternoon, aired documentaries on the war in the main hall of the Don Bosco Institute. Beyond commemorating the First World War, the event took on an exceptional importance in the heart of the community, it was dedicated to “the pioneers who, also in the field of their work abroad, gave their blood so that the Patria would become greater and more beautiful.”⁵⁰ Through reenacting the community’s participation in the national narrative, the event also redistributed its wealth in a moment during which the flow of capital had been severely reduced.⁵¹ It generated donations ranging from one to 32,280 EGP made by individuals and Italian companies operating in Egypt.⁵²

As though to confirm the current consul’s assertion that the Italians of Egypt only looked backwards to find the prestige they purported to have known during the “Ventennio,” the former consul was celebrated with great appreciation for his “actions taken, many years ago, in favor of our community.”⁵³ While the current administration attempted to reformulate its political and economic ties in relation to the new Egyptian regime, it also reinforced a notion of the Italian community as one that was extraneous to state interests. Integration in neither Egypt nor Italy seemed possible to the administration that portrayed the Italian community as locked in a nostalgic gaze towards the “prestige” garnered from a political moment that no longer resonated

⁵⁰ “...anche a tutti i pionieri che, anche sul campo di lavoro all’estero, diedero il proprio sangue perché la Patria fosse sempre più grande e più bella.”

⁵¹ CEA, “La ‘Giornata degli Italiani di Alessandria’,” *Cronaca*, May 2 1955.

⁵² CEA, “L’elenco totale delle donazioni per la ‘Giornata della Solidarietà Italiana’,” *Cronaca*, July 2, 1955.

⁵³ CEA, “Il Ministro Giuriati in Alessandria” *Cronaca*, May 21, 1955.

with the present. If the community was irreconcilable with both Italy and Egypt, however, the question of departure and emigration remained: where were these Italians to find a place?

III. Conflict Looms

When Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal on 26 July 1956, Italy's position within the constellation of Atlantic, European, and Middle Eastern politics was further obfuscated.⁵⁴ England, however, who had large investments in the Canal Company, and France, who owned the company for another ten years, saw the removal of Nasser as the only means to secure their interests in the region (their hostility towards Nasser predated the nationalization but became more pressing at that moment).⁵⁵ In Rome, Amintore Fanfani—secretary of the Christian-Democrats and protagonist of the emergent “friendship politics” centered around Nasser—thought that the nationalization of the canal posed two major challenges for Italy: assuring free navigation for Italian ships; and maintaining international control while concurrently recognizing Egypt's right to sovereignty. Other powerful figures in the Italian political hierarchy sympathized with Nasser, such as Gronchi, Taviani and Tambroni, and even members of the philo-Atlantic circles of Segni and Saragat. To this group of politicians, Nasser's professed neutrality in growing Cold War tensions rendered him an ally and provided hope for an alternative political alliance. Janelli, the only politician vehemently opposed to Nasser's

⁵⁴ Robert Tignor, “The economic activities,” 449; see also the short article published by Nasser himself in English in which he articulates the rationale behind the massive industrial projects of the mid 1950s. Gamal Abdel Nasser “The Egyptian Revolution” *Foreign Affairs*, 33 2 (1955): 199-211. For a more complete analysis of the events of 1956, see the volume by Wm. Roger Louis & Roger Owen (eds.), *Suez 1956: The crisis and its consequences* (London, 1989).

⁵⁵ Ralph Dietl “Suez 1956: A European Intervention?” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43 2 (2008): 259-278.

actions, had since been replaced in Cairo with Giovanni Fornari. Fornari was assigned to Cairo specifically because of his experience in the “decolonization” of Somalia.⁵⁶

Following the military coup, the build up of military forces in Egypt had given the impression of an impending conflict. As early as April 1956, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided it would not take a position in the event of a conflict unless it was backed by the United Nations.⁵⁷ Surveillance of the flow of arms from “beyond the curtain (oltre cortina)” into Egypt revealed that fighter jets and light bombers were arriving in Egypt from Czechoslovakia.⁵⁸ A secret NATO report cautioned that the contracts of several major development projects—such as the construction of a military and merchant port in Alexandria—would go to Soviet companies, despite the Egyptian regime’s preferences for a private firm.⁵⁹ NATO forces interpreted this as an occasion for the entry of Soviet-trained “experts,” who could then establish commercial relations and serve as valuable conduits of pro-Soviet propaganda.⁶⁰ As we have seen, the growing presence of Soviet propaganda was not lost on the Italians of Egypt, as was the case when Edoardo Giorgianni reported on these trends upon his arrival to Naples in 1956.

As tensions over Suez grew, the Italian State tried to affirm its role as an unaligned party. In May, Fornari was interviewed by *Al-Tahrir*, the newspaper run by the Egyptian military, as part of a campaign to reach out to the Egyptian public and secure Italy’s preferential status in

⁵⁶ Giuseppe Vedovato, “La Crisi di Suez del 1956,” *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, 77 4 (2010): 547-571, 550; Onelli *All’Alba del Neoatlantismo*, 34-36, 119; It should be noted here that Fornari’s role in Egypt was, perhaps, rather important. He had previously been sent to Somalia under the auspices of the United Nations to prepare the country for its independence. In 1952, talk of sending him to Egypt stirred much debate among Egyptian (and presumably British) politicians, aware that discontent was brewing from within the Egyptian Government and Military. See, MAE AP Egitto 1952 B787.

⁵⁷ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1048 “situazione interna ed internazionale dell’Egitto” 28 April 1956.

⁵⁸ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1048 Appunto 17 May 1956.

⁵⁹ The reasoning behind this was, reportedly, the better credit ratings offered by the Soviet companies.

⁶⁰ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1048 secret NATO report “comité sur la politique économique Sovietique” 13 July 1956.

relation to other powers.⁶¹ Despite Nasser's hostility to the ways Western media covered the situation—including the Italian press—he met with the Italian ambassador and assured him of his commitment to Italo-Egyptian partnership, offering even to encourage the Ministry of Education to explore possibilities for cultural exchange between the two countries.⁶² Only a short time before the nationalization of the canal, agreements had been made between Enrico Mattei of ENI (the Italian oil tycoon), and the Egyptian regime, a partnership envisioned as a continuation of the “traditional spirit of friendship” between the countries and marking a victory for the Italian company, which had seen previous efforts to procure accords stifled by Americans in Iran.⁶³ Importantly, ENI was also representative of the new kind of partnership between the countries, one built on high-level industrial agreements that did not mirror the interests of the on-the-ground realities of Italian residents.

The more immediate antagonism was between London and Cairo. Vittorio Zoppi, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs who had been sent to London as an ambassador in 1955, wrote of the relations between Cairo and London: “I can't possibly avoid noting how these oscillations of hope and delusion, smile and offense, openings and closures, recall so closely the Anglo-Italian skirmishes between 1936 and 1939.”⁶⁴ The reference to the shifting dynamics of Anglo-Italian-Egyptian relations perhaps implied that the Italians could take advantage of the tensions between Britain and Egypt in similar ways as the British had capitalized in the 1930s on the tensions between Italy and Egypt (see Chapter One).

⁶¹ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1049 Fornari to MAE 18 March 1956.

⁶² MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1049 Fornari “colloquio col Presidente Nasser” 3 May 1956.

⁶³ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1048 “oleodotto Suez-Cairo” 25 July 1956, CEA, *Cronaca* 28 July 1956; Onelli, *All'albe del Neatlantismo*, 76, 86. See also Claudio Corduas, *Impresa e cultura: l'utopia di ENI* (Milano, 2006); Dow Votaw, *Six Legged Dog, Mattei and ENI: A Study in Power* (Berkeley, 1964); Paul H. Frankel, *Mattei: Oil and power politics* (London, 1966).

⁶⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1049 Zoppi “rapporti anglo-egiziani” 21 June 1956.

The London conference, called by the British and co-organized by American and French Governments, left the Italian administration in an ambiguous position. They were hesitant to participate and preferred to mediate. In a meeting between Fornari and the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Mahmoud Fawzi, Fornari tried to convince the latter to participate in the conference. However, Fawzi noted, Egypt did not intend to participate in a conference that was organized solely on European terms, with a premise of military threat, that dealt with an issue of Egyptian sovereignty. On another attempt to convince the Egyptian administration to participate (after the failed Mensies mission to deliver a note from Dulles to Nasser), Fornari acknowledged that the note sent to Nasser from Dulles was a poor starting point for any negotiation, yet alerted Nasser that his denial would bring a grave response from Western countries, even if this was contrary to the Italian position of neutrality.⁶⁵ Nasser told Fornari that he had nothing to compromise.⁶⁶

These unsuccessful attempts to mediate the frictions that arose after the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company led Italian diplomats to outline the implications for the Italian residents in the case of conflict. They sought to prepare centers of protection where Italians might gather “under the authority of the Italian flag” and a decision--one that quickly became controversial--was made to “authorize our diplomatic authorities to facilitate the repatriation of Italians who wish to leave Egypt.”⁶⁷ Italy may have secured its political and economic relations with Egypt, but it had not mitigated the possibility of conflict. Moreover, the neutrality shown by the government left much to be desired for the Italian residents, who did not gain from the deals Mattei and other economic leaders brokered and who felt slighted by the Italian authorities’ hesitant intimations to “repatriate.”

⁶⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1051 Appunto 8 August 1956.

⁶⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1051 Appunto 20 September 1956.

⁶⁷ “...autorizzare le nostre autorità diplomatiche e consolari a facilitare il rimpatrio dei connazionali che desiderassero lasciare l’Egitto.” MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1051 Appunto 20 September 1956.

On 14 September, one Italian resident, S. Bellamare, angrily penned a letter to Italian president Giovanni Gronchi. Bellamare rebuked the president for his apparent disinterest in the community of Italians and his catering to French and English interests. He wrote:

In Egypt there are, and you know it well, 50,000 Italians for whom Egypt has been a second mother, better than the original. You who govern our *Patria* seem to care more about the capitalist interests of England and France than [the interests] of our compatriots (*connazionali*). We have just recovered from the internment and now your behavior rejects us--I hope that you understand that it's our interest to remain neutral and estranged from everything.⁶⁸

The possibility of conflict had very real consequences for the Italians of Egypt. More than that, the turn in Italian politics towards England and France (two countries against which the Fascist regime had been particularly aggressive in its Mediterranean propaganda), shortly after the Italian community had suffered the consequences of its policies, appeared to be an inconvenient alliance from the perspective of the Italians in Egypt. Following the experiences of 1948 and January 1952, there was a general fear among Italians of reprisals against foreign residents for the actions of their respective governments against Egypt's burgeoning regime.⁶⁹ Many wanted to depart, sensing the looming conflict. As in Bellamare's letter, the "rejection" came from the Italian State appearing to seek its own interests at the expense of the Italians in Egypt. Its attempts to distinguish Italians from other foreign subjects was not enough.

Only one day before the arrival in Naples of Giorgianni and Santoro, with which this chapter began, and the same day Bellamare mailed his letter to Gronchi, the *Cronaca* published

⁶⁸ "Esistono in Egitto, e lei lo sa molto bene, 50000 italiani per i quali l'Egitto è stata una seconda Madre, più buona di quella originale. Voi che dirigete la nostra Patria sembra che avete [sic] più a cuore gli interessi dei capitalisti Inglesi e Francesi che quella dei nostri connazionali. Ci siamo appena ricoverati dall'ultimo internamento ed ora il vostro agire ci rispinge [sic] di nuovo - spero che comprendete che il nostro interesse è quello di restare neutri ed estraniarsi di tutto." ACS, PCM (1951-1953) 15/3 36039. Letter from S. Bellamare 14 September 1956.

⁶⁹ ACS MI Gabinetto (53-56) B19 f. 1295/3 "questione di Suez" Appunto 8 September 1956: "...appare difficile che la folla egiziana, fanatica xenofoba e antiebraica, eccitata ancor più dagli avvenimenti attuali, sarebbe in grado di distinguere fra francesi, inglesi, ebrei ed italiani."

an advisory by the Italian Authorities. The short statement denied rumors that the increasing departures of Italians occurring at the time were “organized and encouraged by the Italian Authorities.” Rather, it specified that these departures did not have a political character, that they were neither recommended nor encouraged by the Italian consulates, and that they should not be associated with the evacuations of other communities by their respective consulates. The departures, it alerted, were “a continuation of the departures (begun long ago) of Italian citizens, most of whom are unemployed.” Reiterating Italy’s commitment to Egypt’s “rights and interests,” the advisory was clearly aimed more at the Egyptian Government than at the Italian community.⁷⁰ The announcement hints at the careful work that was being done to create a distinction between the Italian community and other foreign residents; and yet it also helps us to understand the gap between the rhetoric of the Italian diplomats (and the administration in Rome) and its actions on the ground with respect to the fears and anxieties expressed by Italians of Egypt.

Only a few years earlier, the consul had disavowed collective repatriation on the basis that the Italians of Egypt would be unable to integrate into metropolitan Italy. It seemed that this was a second occasion in which collective repatriation was blocked. The third point of the announcement clearly warned against equating the Italians’ departure to the evacuations of other foreigners at the behest of their respective consulates and embassies. For this reason, Italian authorities decided to facilitate a temporary and voluntary repatriation of women and children. They were, indeed, *invited* to temporarily repatriate aboard Italian ships passing in transit through Egyptian harbors.⁷¹ But this intended to mark repatriations as individual decisions rather than collective measures administered by the Italian government. As we saw in the case of

⁷⁰ CEA “Necessaria chiarificazione per gli italiani d’Egitto,” *Cronaca*, September 14, 1956.

⁷¹ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 Riunione preliminare presieduta dal Ministro Straneo.

Santoro, those who repatriated would be doing so at their own risk and were informed that they would relinquish claims to assistance from the Italian state.⁷²

The Italian Navy decided to move several Italian ships closer to Egypt when conflict appeared imminent in September, after the London conference had failed to reach any conclusion.⁷³ Because the journey to and from Egypt took around three days, ships were to be sent to Crete, whence they would be able to quickly reach Port Said and Alexandria in the case of an eventual need to evacuate Italian residents.⁷⁴ Part of the risk of a collective repatriation by the Italian authorities was the perceived damage it would cause to the deals diplomats had brokered between Nasser and the Italian industrialists. Italian authorities worried that collective repatriation would appear as a sign of mistrust, detrimental to the continuation of friendly relations. Attempting to dilute any tensions, as a seemingly last-minute decision, one of these ships, an Italian naval-school ship—the *Palinuro*—was sent for a brief visit to Alexandria. Italian naval officers held a ceremony during which they conferred honors to Egyptian military officials marking the continued exchange between the two countries. The intent of the trip went beyond these performances: it was to “distract” the public from the looming conflict. The ploy was deemed largely successful, and the visit occupied the front pages of many Egyptian newspapers as well as the *Cronaca*.⁷⁵ Yet, the trip served a second purpose. Surveillance conducted during the trip brought to light the constant unloading of war materials in the heavily secured port, confirming that the observations made by Giorgianni—an otherwise inconspicuous Italian of Egypt--were of actual importance to the Italian regime.⁷⁶

⁷² MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1051 Appunto 20 September 1956.

⁷³ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 Appunto Presidenza del Consiglio 1 September 1956.

⁷⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1051 Appunto 20 September 1956.

⁷⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1049 Consolato Generale Alessandria to MAE 10 September 1956.

⁷⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1049 Rapporto di permanenza ad Alessandria.

IV. Crisis, Repatriation, and Evacuation

While the first half of this chapter centered on the changes in Italo-Egyptian relations with particular emphasis on the conditions of departure, departure and arrival became increasingly inseparable phenomena as the numbers of repatriates grew. The latter also implicated a constellation of internal dynamics in postwar Italy, which will become the focus of the remainder of this chapter. Around 800 requests were made to be admitted on board the *Argentina*, one of the Italian ships requisitioned for the possible evacuation. By mid October, many women and children who had already left Egypt were temporarily being hosted in the Emigration Center in Naples, even though it had been discounted as a destination for those fleeing Egypt on legal grounds because was established to host individuals and families awaiting emigration.

The policy of the Italian Ministry of Interior was to discourage the establishment of additional Refugee Sheltering Centers (Centri di Raccolta Profughi, CRP). The Ministry of the Interior requested supplemental aid for repatriates from the Vatican Assistance Commission, but the Interior's unofficial policy was to maintain a state of emergency so as to "expedite" the integration of repatriates in Italy's national fabric.⁷⁷ In September, during a meeting regarding the influx of Italians from Egypt, the Ministry cautioned that extended presence in the CRP would "create in the repatriated Italians maladjustments to work and the tendency to live on public welfare." Therefore, following prior strategies, initial assistance would be provided to poor Italians upon their arrival at local police stations, and then only the "most needy" would be

⁷⁷ ACS PCM 59-61, cat. 2.3/59993/4, 24 November 1956. I owe this observation Giacomo Canepa's ongoing research on the emergence of welfare in postwar Italy.

directed to Enti Comunali di Assistenza (ECA) for additional aid.⁷⁸ The women and children temporarily housed at the Emigration Center, against regulations, had been awaiting their reentry in Egypt, but this prospect changed with the intensifying conflict: “now that their reentry [in Egypt] is no longer possible, these families should be reunited with their family-heads who will arrive on the *Argentina*, and be placed in housing that is not the Emigration Center.”⁷⁹

Conditions at the center were difficult. Individuals housed there complained about the paucity of resources available to them and questioned why they were unable to enjoy the same benefits bestowed on people on their way out of Italy. The General Directorate of Emigration (Direzione Generale di Emigrazione, DGE), in charge of the center’s management, warned that the influx of families would exacerbate problems and suggested that a modification of their legal status was imperative to their contentment and integration into Italian society. Having left most of their belongings in Egypt and having arrived with little money, the Italians of Egypt in the camp were seen as *de facto* refugees, but not as refugees *de jure*. The distinctions in status between the different “guests” at the center, described in a memorandum from the DGE, restricted its capacity to help the Italians of Egypt, especially considering that:

the refugees from Egypt had to abandon all of their belongings... in that respect, it is necessary to confront the problem not on the base of normal assistance, which is obviously insufficient, especially for people who repatriate from abroad and don’t have even the minimum of housing and adjustment period that the normal assisted have, but with exceptional means.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ “creare nei connazionali rimpatriati disadattamento al lavoro e la tendenza a vivere a carico della pubblica beneficenza.” ACS MI Gabinetto (53-56) B19 f. 1295/3 “questione di Suez” Appunto 8 September 1956.

⁷⁹ “Ora che tale rientro non è più possibile, dovrà essere provveduto a che questi familiari si ricongiungano con i capi-famiglia che arriveranno con l’ *Argentina*, per essere sistemati in alloggiamenti che non siano quelli del Centro di Emigrazione.” MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 DGE promemoria 11 October 1956.

⁸⁰ “...i profughi dall’Egitto hanno dovuto abbandonare ogni loro avere... A tale riguardo, si rende necessario affrontare il problema non sulla base della normale assistenza, che è ovviamente insufficiente, soprattutto per gente che rimpatria dall’estero e non ha quindi nemmeno quel

The DGE pushed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to reconsider its legal definition of the repatriated Italians--taking into account the “cultural” specificity of the community described in the consular report several years prior--and to recognize the status of “refugee” for the Italians “that needed to repatriate from Egypt following a very real situation of emergency.”⁸¹ The existing definition of “refugee” was defined by Law 137 of 4 March 1952 (also known as the Scelba Law), which granted refugee status to those forced to depart Italy’s former possessions, and either foreign or “national territories,” struck by war. The same law entitled refugees to 18 months of housing and small subsidies.⁸²

When British Authorities announced that British and French troops planned to occupy the Canal Zone in early November, following the Israeli attack on Sinai, already over 1,000 Italian residents had prepared for evacuation. British and French naval officers, however, warned the

minimo di sistemazione e di ambientamento che hanno i normali assistiti, ma con mezzi eccezionali.”

⁸¹ It is worth mentioning here that there was considerable discord between the different institutions involved in settling the issue of the refugees and repatriates, and this added to the confusion of the issue. The DGE was run by the Ministry of Labor, whereas the DGAP was controlled by the Ministries of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs. The DGE was solely concerned with matters of emigration, and its resources were overstretched in housing repatriates who were unable to emigrate, for one reason or another. Giacomo Canepa, personal communication; “la qualifica di ‘profughi’ agli italiani che hanno dovuto rimpatriare dall’Egitto a seguito di una vera e propria situazione di emergenza.” MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 DGE promemoria 11 October 1956.

⁸² The terms of the Scelba Law--named after Mario Scelba of the Ministry of Interior--are incredibly ambiguous. Its original iteration declares that housing of refugees should not go beyond 30 June 1953 and that all of the CRP should be dismantled by the summer of 1955, at which point those still housed in them would be transferred to public housing (*case popolari*). When funding for said public housing did not work out (in July 1954), the law was extended to the summer of 1957. In 1956, however, in a state of juridical limbo, the law had officially expired and parliament had not yet passed a new version, until 1958, when the law was extended until 1960. Giacomo Canepa, “Rifare gli italiani: Profughi e progetti per il welfare (1944-1947),” *Meridiana* XXIX, 2 (2016) and “L’amministrazione come pedagogia: il Ministero per l’assistenza post-bellica e la costruzione della democrazia,” *Forthcoming*; ACS MLPS - DG Collocamento della manodopera - divisione VIII emigrazione verso paesi extracomunitari B457, MI 30 June 1952.

Italian passenger lines to avoid Egyptian and Israeli waters.⁸³ On 4 November, several bombs fell in Alexandria—reportedly from British ships—as the coalition moved into the Canal Zone. One bomb struck the post office in central Alexandria. Although the Italian Consul in Alexandria reported that only military objectives had been hit,⁸⁴ Umberto Russo went to the consulate to report that his daughter’s husband (who was stateless) had been killed, and his son and daughter had been injured by the explosion and were recovering in the Italian hospital. His apartment, in the building adjacent to the post office, was severely damaged by the fire caused by the bomb.⁸⁵ The Egyptian Government stepped up measures against English and French subjects, as well as anyone suspected to have connections with Israel, thereby justifying measures against the Jewish community. Accounts and businesses of 50 prominent Italian Jews were blocked and 46 were arrested and held without formal charges, as the 1954 State of Siege permitted.⁸⁶ Anxious members of Italian families from Egypt who had immigrated to Brazil in the years after the Second World War flooded the consulate in Rio de Janeiro demanding news of their family members.⁸⁷

Life in the Canal Zone was brought to a standstill. As the conflict escalated, many requested an official collective repatriation.⁸⁸ Italian newspapers described an “exodus” from

⁸³ ACS MI Gabinetto (53-56) B19 f. 1295/3 “questione di Suez” DGE to Ministero Marina Mercantile 1 November 1956, DG Navigazione Traffico Marittimo to Ministero Difesa-Marina 2 November 1956.

⁸⁴ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 telegramma 25784 5 November 1956.

⁸⁵ ACGA, Umberto Russo.

⁸⁶ ACGA, Silvio Pinto; MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465 “tutela dei connazionali” (Fornari) 11 January 1957; MAE AP1956 B1059 telegramma 25562 3 November 1956; for a more thorough dealing with the situation of Egyptian and foreign Jews in Egypt during the 1956 conflict see Michel Laskier “Egyptian Jewry Under Nasser, 1956-70” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31 3 (1995): 573-619.

⁸⁷ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 telegramma 25562 3 November 1956.

⁸⁸ MAE APEgitto1956 B1059 telegramma Fornari 13 November 1956, B1067 appunto 16 November 1956.

Egypt.⁸⁹ Concurrent with the British and French air invasion of Port Said, the *Corriere della Sera*, whose position aligned with the other European powers, reported that traffic of Italian passenger lines in the Eastern Mediterranean had risen twenty-five percent to accommodate the heavy outflow of foreigners from Egypt.⁹⁰ Some simply noted that with the departure of other Italians, they could not carry on even basic services within the community. Such was the case with Giuseppe Patanè, who watched as his barbershop continuously lost money since the nationalization of the canal. He implored that the consulate repatriate him along with his family.⁹¹

Responding to the chaotic exchange of telegrams communicating the desire to evacuate Italian residents from the Canal Zone, Dino Del Bo, director of the DGE, noted “it seems that now a real exodus from Egypt has begun.”⁹² The DGE signed agreements with the *Adriatica* shipping and passenger lines to address the overwhelming number of requests for consular repatriation; the Italian state covered expenses and authorized an increase in the passenger capacity of their main ships, the *Esperia* and *Enotria*.⁹³ Several Swissair flights were rerouted and commissioned for Italians able to pay for their repatriation. While some ENI workers and their families were evacuated, individuals with important leadership roles in the company, including its founder Enrico Mattei, were asked by Italian Authorities to remain in Egypt so as not to put in doubt Italy’s commitment to the Egyptian regime.⁹⁴ Some of those families were

⁸⁹ *Corriere della Sera* “Paura in Oriente: l’esodo degli Europei dal Nord-Africa e dei Paesi Arabi...” 8 November 1956.

⁹⁰ *Corriere della Sera*, “Disposizioni per la tutela degli italiani in Egitto” 6 November 1956.

⁹¹ ACGA, PS, Patanè Giuseppe fu Alfio 1897.

⁹² “mi sembra di capire che ora comincia un certo esodo dall’Egitto.” MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 Appunto 12 November 1956.

⁹³ MAE AP Egitto1956 B1059 Appunto Del Bo ND.

⁹⁴ MAE AP Egitto1956 B1059 telegramma 26173 7 November 1956.

among the roughly 40 Italians bused by the consul in Alexandria to board a ship in Tobruk that had been blocked from entry in Alexandria by the British navy.⁹⁵

Arrangements were made to have the Italian naval-hospital, the *Ascania*, sent into Port Said. Although the objective was to assist and evacuate Italian residents in the Canal Zone, the message relayed by the Italian Authorities to the Egyptian Government was that the ship would provide medical assistance to wounded Egyptian soldiers. Its officers offered to carry wounded Egyptians to Alexandria where they could receive medical attention and where the Italian diplomats would encourage some of the Italians from the Canal Zone to stay (and not to be repatriated).⁹⁶ They hoped that this would diminish the overall number of Italians arriving in Italy during the conflict. The Egyptian government, however, rejected the proposal on the grounds that an equal ratio of Egyptians to Italians would have to board the ship; they wanted to be sure that the Italians *were not*, in fact, evacuating the area of their citizens. The plan to return to Alexandria was aborted. Instead, the *Ascania* “temporarily” evacuated women and children to Messina and Naples where they were housed in the crowded Emigration Centers. The officers distributed rations to the Italians who remained in the blocked city and delivered rations to Egyptian troops, much to the chagrin of the occupying British troops.⁹⁷

Eager to emphasize the special status of the Italians of Egypt compared to other foreign subjects, Fornari asked the press to exercise restraint in reporting about the events unfolding in

⁹⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 telegramma 27020 14 November 1956.

⁹⁶ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1067 telegramma 13385 11 November 1956.

⁹⁷ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1067 Appunto 15 November 1956; 16 November 1956; “Porto Said - situazione.” The message relayed about the response from the British read: “La cosa [the approach of the *Ascania* to Port Said] non è piaciuta alle autorità di occupazione britanniche. Un alto ufficiale inglese ha, infatti, dichiarato in proposito: per qualche inesplicabile ragione gli italiani stanno cercando di far giungere a Porto Said una nave carica di viveri. Non sappiamo il perché. Fra gli italiani non si annoverano perdite e i feriti di Porto Said vengono curati negli ospedali.”

the Canal Zone.⁹⁸ Indeed, when *Corriere della Sera* published an article on the mission of the *Ascania*, there was no mention of the 255 passengers that were taken out of Port Said.⁹⁹ When the *Ascania* arrived in the port of Naples on 22 November, 215 Italians and 41 foreigners disembarked. Of the Italians, 40 planned to go directly to their legal residences (paesi di origine)—as was the policy of aid provisions—14 were hosted by relatives in Naples, while the remaining 160 were temporarily lodged in the crowded Emigration Center, as they arrived with neither pecuniary resources nor family connections in Italy. There, they were provided with two meals per day.¹⁰⁰ Ships large and small continued to bring Italian residents out of Egypt.

In early November, during a parliamentary session, one of the founders of the Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano, MSI), Arturo Michelini, raised the issue of granting the status of “refugee” to the Italians of Egypt. He noted that, although the events taking place in Egypt did not directly implicate the Italian State, Italian residents had been encouraged to depart by their own diplomatic authorities and thus the Italian Government was conclusively involved:

[these events reveal] the deficiency of [Italian] authorities who, after insistent requests [by Italian residents], negate any form of assistance, forgetting that it was the [Italian] diplomatic authorities and consulates in Egypt that pushed them to repatriate.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1067 Appunto 6 November 1956.

⁹⁹ Arrigo Levi, “La nave-ospedale ‘Ascania’ ha gettato l’ancora a Porto Said” *Corriere della Sera* 16 November 1956.

¹⁰⁰ ACS Ministero dell’Interno - Gabinetto 1953-56 B446 fasc.7271/98.

¹⁰¹ “si fa rilevare, oltre allo stato di miseria nel quale tali cittadini versano attualmente, la carenza delle autorità che, alle loro insistenti richieste, negano qualsiasi aiuto, dimenticando che a spingerli al rimpatrio sono state le autorità diplomatiche e consolari di Egitto.” MAE AP1956 B1059 DGE Appunto 9 November 1956; earlier in the month a similar point had been raised in Parliament by a representative of the Monarchists, Caroleo, regarding the measures that would be taken for the Italian students from Egypt whose families’ accounts were blocked in Egypt as part of the measures taken by Nasser’s government, leaving them without means to pay tuition and support themselves. MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 Appunto 3 November 1956.

A rebuttal from the DGE clarified that “legally” Italian authorities in Egypt had only “communicated” the existence of “special subsidies for the trip... in order to encourage the spontaneous exodus from Egypt.” Repatriated Italians, therefore, could not depend on organized assistance and were required to sign a declaration acknowledging this before departing Egypt.¹⁰² When Italians had departed Egypt several years earlier and were hosted in CRP, their circumstances were deemed exceptional (in other words, these cases were not to be used as precedents). For example, in 1952 Domenico Santoro, along with 51 other Italian residents from Alexandria, were hosted in the Termini Imenese (Palermo) CRP because they had neither relatives nor work in their legal residences. In these earlier cases, these repatriates had officially given up other forms of assistance by accepting the temporary housing. The aforementioned law regarding assistance to refugees (Law 137) did not apply to them because they were characterized as “citizens repatriating for reasons of political character not concerning Italy.”¹⁰³ This was the point Michelini sought to challenge by questioning the impetus for “individual” repatriation.

During the events of the 1956, the burden placed on the many ECAs demanded a heavy increase in state funding. This included expenses required to host and provide food rations and small welfare payments. The funds were not released until several years later.¹⁰⁴ Finding little relief at ports of entry, several groups of repatriated Italians went directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome demanding attention.¹⁰⁵ Others traveled between cities seeking

¹⁰² “particolari agevolazioni di viaggio... per favorire l’esodo spontaneo dall’Egitto.” MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 DGE Appunto 26 November 1956.

¹⁰³ “connazionali che rimpatriano per motivo di carattere politico non concernenti il nostro paese.” ACGA, Santoro Domenico fu Andrea cl.1892.

¹⁰⁴ ACS PCM 1959-61 15.3/57749.

¹⁰⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 DGE to PCM, DGAP 15 December 1956.

assistance and work. In early December 1956, the Ministry of the Interior warned the Prefecture in Milan:

the gathering of compatriots [from Egypt] in this city should be avoided and they should be sent, where possible, to their respective legal residences or at least to other municipalities... of their choice, giving them the necessary means for travel.¹⁰⁶

In addition to the financial strain that would be caused by the amassing of unemployed Italians, they also feared political instability caused by groups of Italians from Egypt largely sympathetic to the MSI.

At the end of November, British and French citizens and around 500 Egyptian and stateless Jews were expelled from Egypt. Most of the expelled were heads of families, thus prompting their dependents to follow.¹⁰⁷ The Italian press highly exaggerated the number of expulsions (from 30,000 to around 50,000). Nevertheless, over the following months departures cut the Jewish community in half. Alongside the expelled subjects, lack of employment compelled other nationals to flee at their own will. The *Adriatica* lines carried thousands of passengers in repeated trips between Alexandria and Venice. The passenger capacities of the *Enotria* and *Esperia*, were raised to the limits, 670 and 444 respectively.¹⁰⁸ News that European troops were to withdraw following the UN negotiated cease-fire, which gave Nasser and his supporters a sense of victory, caused great distress. Around 400 requests for “immediate and definitive” repatriation and 300 for temporary repatriation from the Canal Zone were made to the

¹⁰⁶ “che dovrà evitarsi il raggruppamento di detti connazionali [d’Egitto] in questa città e curare che essi siano avviati, ove possibile, ai rispettivi paesi d’origine o quanto meno in altri Comuni della Repubblica di loro scelta, munendoli dei necessari mezzi di viaggio.”

ALPE archivio assistenziale, atti 948/56, Prefettura di Milano 17 December 1956. For more on this archive and a general history of the ECA in Milan, see Massimiliano Paniga, *Welfare ambrosiano: Storia, cultura e politiche dell’ECA di Milano (1937-1978)* (Milano, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed analysis of the relationship between expelled subjects and departures that occurred during the conflict among Jews of various nationalities see Laskier, “Egyptian Jewry,” 581-582.

¹⁰⁸ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 telegramma 29376 7 December 1956.

Italian consulates. The Consul in Port Said, who had supported the government's negative stance on repatriation en masse, rescinded his previous statements and made repeated appeals to evacuate Italian residents.¹⁰⁹

As the Italian diplomats had feared—and despite their various attempts to distinguish Italian residents from other national communities—Italians were being equated to other foreign residents and subjected to rising hostility. One report described:

the mood... of our communities in Port Said, Alexandria, and Cairo is such that one prefers to abandon the country, [their] belongings and positions of employment, to put oneself in safety... our consulates in Alexandria and Cairo are invaded daily by families requesting repatriation despite assurances—to them seen as falsehoods—given officially by the Egyptian Authorities; and consular repatriations are given with more liberality than the norm. Many complain that the Italian Government welcomed the Hungarian refugees neglecting instead the Italian refugees... These are the declarations of the representatives of the refugees.¹¹⁰

Another ship, the *Argentina*, was sent to Port Said. Many hoped to depart before the British and French troops evacuated the zone.¹¹¹ The ship departed after several days in port, leaving on its return around 200 Italians in Messina, and 167 in Naples. In both cities, newspapers published announcements about the “refugees from Egypt (profughi dall’Egitto)” in search of extended family members, as they were housed in the Emigration Center (in Naples) and Casa Pia CRP (in Messina).¹¹² At the national level, the *Corriere della Sera* made a point of mentioning that just as

¹⁰⁹ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1067 Appunto 6 December 1956.

¹¹⁰ “lo stato d’animo... delle nostre comunità di Porto Said, Alessandria e Cairo è tale che si preferisce abbandonare il Paese, i beni e le posizioni o posti di lavoro, pur di mettersi al sicuro... I nostri consolati ad Alessandria ed al Cairo sono giornalmente invasi da famiglie che chiedono il rimpatrio malgrado le assicurazioni - a loro dire non veritiere - date ufficialmente dalle autorità egiziane; ed i rimpatri consolari sono concessi con maggiore liberalità del normale. Molti si sono lamentati che il Governo Italiano provvedesse ad accogliere ed assistere i rifugiati ungheresi trascurando invece i profughi italiani.... Queste le dichiarazioni dei rappresentanti dei profughi.” MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 DGE promemoria 10 December 1956.

¹¹¹ *Corriere della Sera*, “Argentina arriverà a Porto Said” 11 December 1956.

¹¹² Pietro Bruno, *Messina e La Sua Provincia Attraverso La Stampa: Diario Dei Principali Avvenimenti* (Gran Mirci a Missina: 1956): 27, 56, 307.

the *Argentina* left Port Said on 12 December, the *Enotria* entered the harbor.¹¹³ With the increasing outflow of Italians from Egypt, discourse shifted from one framed in terms of “emigrants” and “repatriates” to one that incorporated the idea that the Italians of Egypt were becoming “national refugees.”

V. Becoming Refugees

In the absence of clear policies of assistance and accommodation—and alongside the slow incorporation of the Italians of Egypt into the folds of legal provisions for “national refugee”—the identity of the Italian community of Egypt became one framed on historical contingencies that unsettled political narratives. The terms used both by its members and by the political actors surrounding it to define the community amidst these changes fluctuated between social and legal categories of belonging. Each of these—the social and the legal—centered on the physical displacement of the Italians of Egypt. But they defined the Italians of Egypt as members of a national community entitled to certain rights based on the relevance of their historical experiences in the present. In this sense, they also denote a temporal displacement. These social and legal categories, when married to the conditions in which Italians of Egypt found themselves to be displaced national subjects, projected courses of possible action.

Over 3,000 refugees from Hungary entered Italy over the course of the first eight months of 1956.¹¹⁴ As noted, many Italians knew of the large expenditure in housing and aid provided to Hungarians, estimated to be about four times as large as that spent on repatriated Italians (excluding the cost of transport from Egypt). Italians arriving from Egypt--unable to benefit from the qualification of “refugees”--were classified under state procedures as “impoverished

¹¹³ *Corriere della Sera* 12 Dicembre 1956.

¹¹⁴ ACS MLPS - DG Collocamento della manodopera - divisione VIII emigrazione verso paesi extracomunitari B457 “verbale della riunione...” 10 September 1956.

(indigenti).” Therefore, they could receive the same aid as any Italian recipient of welfare.¹¹⁵

This did not account for the circumstances of their displacement. This perceived inequity became a point of political contention. In February 1957, when Edoardo Costa, the representative of the MSI responsible for foreign affairs, made a trip to try to distance Nasser from Soviet influence, he addressed a gathering of Italians, stirring them against the contemporary Italian administration.¹¹⁶ He claimed that the Italian government revealed its disinterest in the Italians of Egypt by neglecting to acknowledge that repatriated Italians of Egypt were not simply “impoverished,” but were the victims of international politics. Costa portrayed the ambiguous “welcoming” practices of the Italian state as a disavowal of the “historic role” of the Italian residents who, he repeated, had “developed Italy’s prestige” abroad.¹¹⁷

Just after the first day of 1957, Carmelo De Lorenzo, a foreign-language teacher born in Cairo, wrote to Antonio Segni, then Italy’s Prime Minister. He had arrived in Genoa nearly one month earlier. De Lorenzo was dismissed from his job in Egypt in November. His son, a designer working with the *el-Moqattam* newspaper, was also dismissed at the beginning of hostilities. De Lorenzo identified himself as an Italian “without political affiliation (senza colore politico)” and advised Segni that a similar letter had been sent to all Genoese newspapers, without political distinction. The only paper that had agreed to publish his letter was (an unspecified) one on the political left; and he asserted that other papers (namely, *Secolo XIX* and *Nuovo Cittadino*) had promised publication but then declined, stating that the letter expressed strongly worded anti-governmental sentiments.

¹¹⁵ MAE AP Egitto 1956 B1059 telegramma 28647 2 December 1956.

¹¹⁶ Gianni Rossi *La Destra e gli Ebrei: Una Storia Italiana* (Rubbettino: 2003), 109-110.

¹¹⁷ MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465 comunità italiane in Egitto, *telespresso* n.787/317 Fornari 22 February 1957.

In his letter, De Lorenzo explained that, being unemployed and “in danger for our lives, I sold all of my belongings and objects...” thus he bought five tickets for his family and they departed for Italy. He had already been accepted to emigrate to Brazil through the *Giunta Cattolica d’Egitto* (Catholic Relief Services), and awaited departure in Genoa, where he was hosted in the ICEM regional center.¹¹⁸ “Despite that I made clear my family’s grave state of poverty, especially with this cold and freezing weather that has invaded Genoa,” he wrote, the ICEM center had notified him that they could no longer host him.¹¹⁹ After the Prefecture provided an initial welfare payment, they advised De Lorenzo to go to his legal residence, Reggio Calabria. De Lorenzo refused to do so on account of the anticipated paperwork for his emigration to Brazil. He reported having been told by a representative of the Italian Red Cross that regarding “Italian refugees from Egypt he didn’t have any directions and he couldn’t help us, they had only been ordered to help Hungarian refugees.”¹²⁰ Steeped in nationalist rhetoric, he proclaimed once again before closing the letter that as a “lover (amante) of the Patria” he implored Segni to concede the title “refugee from Egypt” to him and others in his situation, so that they too could benefit from the assistance provided to non-national refugees.¹²¹

As the influx of Italians from Egypt continued, political parties pressured the administration to take action. Rumors about the circumstances under which Italian departed spread quickly. In December 1956, *Il Tempo* published a letter from one Italian of Egypt who

¹¹⁸ “in pericolo per la nostra vita ho pensato di vendere tutti i miei mobili ed oggetti...” It seems that Giunta Cattolica d’Egitto was linked to the Catholic Relief Services, whose office in Cairo functioned as an office for the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (known as CIME in Italian) helping to transfer Italians in other countries. MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465 comunità italiane in Egitto, telegramma 7952 9 March 1957.

¹¹⁹ “Malgrado che ho fatto presente lo stato grave di indigenza della mia famiglia specie con questo freddo e gelo che ha invaso Genova.”

¹²⁰ “profughi italiani dall’Egitto non aveva nessuna direttiva e non poteva aiutarci. Avevano solo l’ordine di aiutare i profughi ungheresi.”

¹²¹ ACS PCM 1955-58 15/3 B336 fasc. 57749 Carmelo De Lorenzo to Segni 2 January 1957.

criticized the Italian press for its portrayal of the conflict. In the letter, Italo Milano claimed that the Italians expelled from Egypt were only those who had signed against the Fascist regime at the outbreak of the Second World War and thus had left a “trace” of their “political affiliations” in Egyptian archives. He referred to individuals who had signed in support of the *Libera Italia* movement (MLI) and were thus seen as sympathetic to British, French, or Israeli interests. He wrote, “it doesn’t appear that one single Cristian Italian (un solo italiano cristiano) was asked by the Government in Cairo to leave the country.” The presumption that Italians of Egypt “are being chased away (vengono cacciati via), mistreated or worse...” was false, he claimed. Although the conflict had not been advantageous to European residents, Milano concluded that to call Nasser’s actions in favor of Egyptians “unjust” for the foreigners living in its territory—as many Italian newspapers were doing—was incorrect and ignored the long Egyptian struggle against the British.¹²²

By early 1957, over 3,000 Italian repatriates had requested assistance from the Italian state or from its regional offices. In Livorno, the ECA rented four villas to house 71 families (237 persons in total); over the course of the 1957, at least 89 individuals left in search of work in other cities and abroad.¹²³ Some went to centers like Milano where, between August 1956 and February 1957, over 400 families arrived requesting assistance from the Prefecture.¹²⁴ This urgency made it impossible to see the “exodus” as a series of individual decisions, requests, and movements, and instead signified a community in need of legislative protection upon arrival. This concurrently entailed acknowledging the factors that had brought the Italians out of Egypt.

¹²² MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, Italo Milano “Gli Italiani d’Egitto” *Il Tempo* 15 December 1956.

¹²³ ACL Archivio ECA N.713 Profughi dall’Egitto 1957-1962, Pro-Memoria Prefettura di Livorno 1957.

¹²⁴ ALPE Archivio Assistenziale, Profughi Egitto 1956-57.

Around this time, the news of the “exodus” of Italians from Egypt sparked controversy in sessions of the Italian parliament. Two representatives demanded to know precisely how “voluntary” were the departures, citing the restrictions placed on foreigners leaving Egypt.¹²⁵ Randolfo Pacciardi—a political centrist who had visited the Italian community and met with Egyptian military officials several years prior—spoke angrily to members of the Italian parliament, pleading them to act and noting that Nasser’s government was “appropriating” the earnings of thousands of Italians “sending Italian citizens back to their country with the money for cigarettes!”¹²⁶ He wanted to know why “thousands of Italians” were being “induced” to repatriate.¹²⁷ In February, members of the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI) intervened several times to inquire as to whether similar procedures as those available to Hungarian refugees would be extended to the Italians. The PCI representatives demanded a guarantee of employment to ensure “adequate financial resources for a life in Italy.”¹²⁸ Members of the ruling Christian Democrat Party intervened, warning that the growing population of repatriated Italians risked attracting the attention of “subversive” parties, given the “miserable” conditions of the camps and the lack of employment opportunities available to them.¹²⁹ Parliament decided to extend the title of “refugee,” according to Law 137, to the Italians of Egypt, but it would be several years before legal status would be conferred, holding many in a state of limbo.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, Appunto per la DGAP 15 December 1956.

¹²⁶ MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, *Il Resto del Carlino* 29 January 1957.

¹²⁷ MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, Appunto 23 January 1957.

¹²⁸ MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, Appunto 4 February 1957, 15 February 1957; “Interrogazione alla Camera dei deputati di Luciana Viviani,” *Atti parlamentari* (1957), 30557.

¹²⁹ MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, Appunto 8 March 1957.

¹³⁰ ACS PCM 1959-61 15/3/57749(3) Tambroni to Ministero del Tesoro, delle Finanze, del Bilancio and PCM 6 February 1957; Officially, the law which granted legal status as “national refugees” to the Italians of Egypt was Law 1306 of 25 October 1960, a sort of addendum to the Scelba Law. The law gave Italian repatriates from Egypt the option of receiving temporary

In response to these inquiries, the Ministry of Interior responded that it had assumed financial responsibility for the assistance of 2,500 Italians from Egypt, housed in CRP throughout the country, and that efforts were being made by the Ministry of Work and Social Welfare (Ministero del Lavoro e Previdenza Sociale, MLPS) to procure employment for them. Stress was placed on the interpretation of the departures as voluntary “precisely because [the Italians of Egypt] were without work.”¹³¹ To resolve the problem of employment, the MLPS planned to profit on the fact that many Italians arriving from Egypt spoke several languages. They would seek out work environments such as translators and interpreters, capitalizing on the very history that the Italian Consul in Alexandria had described as problematic for their integration into Italian society in the aforementioned 1954 report.

Within one month the situation worsened and the pace of departures accelerated:

[repatriations] continue with a rhythm of hundreds of persons on each ship arriving from Alexandria, despite that our diplomatic and consular authorities ... are clarifying for the repatriates the objective difficulties of the situation in Italy, both with regard to the possibility of employment and of adequate assistance.

The MLPS worked with ICEM to relocate repatriates to Brazil, Australia, Rhodesia, Argentina, and Uruguay.¹³² Notwithstanding harsh criticism levied against its practices, this cooperation was seen as one of the few answers to the growing economic and financial strain caused by

housing (initially in one of three refugee camps in Puglia) or a small subsidy. (*Gazzetta Ufficiale*, n.279, 15 November 1960).

¹³¹ “proprio perché rimasti senza lavoro” It should be noted here that the number of 2,500 was a small portion of the total number of Italians being housed throughout the peninsula, which hovered around 25,000 since the end of the Second World War. Giacomo Canepa, personal communication.

¹³² “non cessano ma continua anzi con un ritmo di un centinaio di persone per ogni nave di linea proveniente di Alessandria nonostante che le nostre Autorità diplomatiche e consolari... non manchino di rendere noto ai rimpatrianti le difficoltà oggettive della situazione in Italia sia per quel che riguarda le possibilità di lavoro che di assistenza adeguata.” MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, “elementi di risposta alla interrogazione n/3209 degli Onorevoli Roberti e Gray...” 8 March 1957.

repatriation. Emigration was portrayed as a way to alleviate “moral and economic poverty.”¹³³

Both the political right and left depicted the government’s practice of sending Italians abroad through ICEM as a failure of the Italian state itself.¹³⁴

Despite the Italian government’s various petitions, however, only limited numbers could emigrate from Italy.¹³⁵ The administration of the State Treasury feared that the financial strain of housing and welfare would topple the fragile national budget. By summer 1957, the financial situation in Livorno was at a breaking point and the Prefecture encouraged the ECA to push refugees out. As elsewhere, many individuals lacked resources to facilitate travel, even in the case where emigration had already been approved.¹³⁶ The cost of travel was above and beyond the budget for many families.¹³⁷

Moreover, many were unable to access accounts in Egypt due to border restrictions enforced by the Egyptian government. One group of Italians in Egypt preparing to repatriate wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs inquiring about the possibility to transfer money in Italy, noting that the “nationalization of the economy” had caused many to leave, and “others will soon be obliged to follow them,” but some refused to do the same simply hoping to preserve their

¹³³ ACS MLPS - DG Collocamento della manodopera - divisione VIII accordi verso paesi comunitari B383, Ministero del Tesoro to MI 6 February 1957; MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465 comunità italiane in Egitto, MLPS to Centri di Emigrazione 22 October 1957; According to Jérôme Elie, the position of ICEM generally was that migration was not the solution to the challenges of postwar Europe posed by the large population of displaced persons and refugees. Elie, “The Roots of Cooperation,” 352.

¹³⁴ ACS MLPS - DG Collocamento della manodopera - divisione VIII accordi verso paesi comunitari B383, fasc. “propaganda contro l’emigrazione.”

¹³⁵ MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, DGE Appunto (Del Bo) 11 May 1957.

¹³⁶ NB: It is worth mentioning here that in Livorno, the situation was not as dire as other locations between the community of Italian repatriates from Egypt included a large number of Jewish Italians who were also helped by the various Jewish Assistance agencies based in Livorno (and run from Israel and the United States). Many of these organizations relocated Italian Jewish families--or at least encouraged their relocation--to Israel. ACL Archivio ECA N.713 Profughi dall’Egitto 1957-1962, Prefettura to ECA & Questura 4 June 1957.

¹³⁷ ACL Archivio ECA N.713 Profughi dall’Egitto 1957-1962, Appunto 16 October 1957.

accounts.¹³⁸ By March, around 380,000 EGP had been deposited in the Italian offices in Cairo: nearly 10 percent by departed individuals and the remainder by those safeguarding their accounts from nationalization policies in preparation for departure.¹³⁹

The restriction on exports of more than 20 pounds sterling per family and the strict limitations on the belongings that could be taken out of the country led to the impoverishment even of those Italians who had managed to find work in the postwar years.¹⁴⁰ In August 1957, the Italian Red Cross (Croce Rossa Italiana, CRI), which participated in the bureaucratic infrastructure of the CRP, noted that funds were nearly exhausted and the continuous support of repatriated Italians was impossible. The CRI advised that emigration should be expedited when possible, drawing from typical situations to illustrate the weight of the problems facing repatriates.¹⁴¹ Angelo Fantuzzi, born in 1915 in Zagazig, an electro-technician who had worked for Fiat in Egypt, was recommended by the CRI to work for *Air France* at Ciampino Airport, where he carried luggage. He was unable to support his family on the income. Although he had family in Australia, he could not afford the cost of travel. Arturo Bajo stayed with his wife and four children in the station for two nights before being sent by the Questura to the La Marmora Barracks in Rome, where they were placed in a small room without windows. The La Marmora Barracks refugee camp, which was a reused military barracks from the First World War, had been officially closed to refugees since the late 1940s. Its reappearance in the late 1950s is

¹³⁸ MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, letter to MAE 17 May 1957.

¹³⁹ MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, Amb Cairo to MAE 8 March 1957.

¹⁴⁰ ACS CRI Ufficio Madrinato B83 fasc. varie s.fasc. profughi dall'Egitto "Padre Governanti" ND.

¹⁴¹ In the same fall, the circumstances at large were troubling for the Ministry of Interior, as some 26,000 refugees were in camps in Italy (mostly from Istria, Dalmazia, Fiume, and Pola) and another 20,000 were subsidized by the government outside of the camps. Italy was described as having become a "bridge" for refugees. ACS - Ufficio del consigliere diplomatico B24 fasc. 3 "profughi" memorandum of conversation (Mascia) 19 October 1957; see also Sanfilippo, "Per una storia," 848.

undocumented, implying that the local police illegally used the quarters to house refugees when other options were not available.¹⁴² Between September 1956 and August 1957, Bajo was unable to find work. Michele Azzellini was a driver in Alexandria for a Jewish commercialist who fled at the outbreak of war, leaving Azzellini without work and unable to find a replacement job. When he arrived in Italy, he was could not procure employment. His daughter was hired as a nanny, but the rest of the family ate only once every 48 hours. The 20 pounds sterling he took out of Egypt lost much value after the exchange and quickly vanished. The CRI managed to get around 100 families approved for emigration, but material assistance was still urgently needed.¹⁴³ In the following months, around 350 families were sent to South America (mainly to Brazil) through ICEM, which continued to pressure Australia to raise its quota to accommodate the Italians of Egypt.¹⁴⁴

In Italy, for individuals in the camps, conditions deteriorated and small collectives began to form, appealing to politicians to intervene on their behalf. A group of repatriated Italians in Genoa, the same city from which De Lorenzo had written, formed the National Committee of Italians of Egypt (Comitato Nazionale Italiani d'Egitto, CoNIE). The mission of CoNIE was to represent, stabilize, and secure the perceived interests of the Italians of Egypt, "those who, with much sacrifice, worked and [continue to] work in Africa."¹⁴⁵ The organization connected the interests of repatriated Italians with Italian residents remaining in Egypt, thus subverting state

¹⁴² Giacomo Canepa, personal communication.

¹⁴³ ACS CRI - Servizio Affari Internazionali B32 f. conflitto di Suez, Corvini to Nonis 3 August 1957.

¹⁴⁴ Australian authorities had approved 22 workers, 52 families based on invitations, 19 of whom Italian authorities in Australia offered to cover the voyage. MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, Appunto 4 October 1957.

¹⁴⁵ "quelli che con tanto sacrificio hanno lavorato e lavorano in Africa." MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, Dott. Albano Gennaro to Pres. Istituto Italiano dell'Africa 24 October 1957.

efforts to distinguish the two communities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately responded offering neither support nor financial backing to CoNIE, and warned regional political offices to do the same, hoping to avoid the constitution of analogous “associations and committees.” Apart from providing a political threat through their mobilization by opposition parties (which might have come from either the right or left), associations and committees like CoNIE were thought to cement a sense of shared hostility among the Italians of Egypt towards the state, rendering the community itself an autonomous political force.¹⁴⁶ This autonomy threatened both domestic and foreign political spheres.

One group of repatriates who had arrived on the *Argentina* and *Ascania* remained in the CRP in Messina for over one year. 89 family heads signed a petition calling attention to the “lack of possibilities to be absorbed in Patria”—not due to the socio-cultural rationale expressed by the Italian Consul in 1954, but rather they claimed, because they were excluded from being recognized as legal refugees and therefore deprived of the “entitlements” that characterized their circumstances. Again, they wondered how the Italian state could accommodate Hungarian refugees but not its own national subjects. Moreover, they blamed the London Conference for the hostility they faced in Egypt, arguing that the ambiguous Italian position had caused the “assimilation” of Italians to other foreign communities and created conditions that forced Italians to “suddenly leave their belongings, houses, positions, and interests in Egypt.” Adding that means to travel were not easily accessible, even to those who had obtained permission to emigrate to Australia, the signees demanded “immediate accommodation.” This argument was framed on a specific iteration of their history, referring directly to episodes from the Fascist

¹⁴⁶ “per non costituire precedenti per Associazioni e Comitati analoghi.” MAE DGAP 1948-60 Uff.III B148 fasc.465, MAE (Straneo) to PCM 30 November 1957.

period when Italians donated large amounts of gold to the regime during the Ethiopia campaign and the “54 month internment” during the Second World War:

we suffered oppression, hunger, threats and murders by our enemies at the time for holding high our faith as Italians, without any protection... we ask if it is our right to have a settlement (liquidazione), which was given to all prisoners of war, deported politicians, and civilian internees, upon their return in Italy. Notwithstanding the parenthesis of us Italians of Egypt who, in each calamity experienced in Italy each one [of us] always contributed in blood and gold.¹⁴⁷

Within one year, the refugees in Messina were brought under the umbrella of CoNIE, which by then had established committees among groups of repatriates in Rome, Genoa, Milan, Livorno, Naples, Brindisi, and Messina. They estimated that nearly half of the Italian community had left Egypt. In Rome, around 600 individuals were in need of employment or assistance. Attilio Morini, the director of the Roman branch of CoNIE, wrote: “days pass [without resolution] and the majority of refugee Italians of Egypt become more oppressed by harsh daily realities.”¹⁴⁸

Overcrowding in the regional CRP grew as the concentration of refugees in urban centers like Roma and Milan was discouraged.¹⁴⁹ Instead, both the General Directorate of Public Assistance and the local ECAs attempted to relocate refugees, redistributing them into smaller camps, in cities such as Arezzo, Brindisi, Bari, Brescia, and Frosinone.¹⁵⁰ Jewish families were encouraged

¹⁴⁷ “subimmo soprusi, fame, minacce ed uccisioni da parte dei nostri nemici di allora, per tenere alta la nostra sola fede di Italiani, senza alcuna protezione... chiediamo se è nel nostro diritto avere una liquidazione che fu data a tutti i prigionieri di guerra, deportati politici ed internati civili, al loro ritorno in Patria. Non trascurando la parentesi di noi Italiani di Egitto che in ogni calamità avvenuta in Italia ognuno ha sempre dato il proprio contributo in sangue ed in oro.” ACS PCM 1959-61 15.3/57749.3 “I connazionali tutti, dicono e chiedono” 11 December 1957.

¹⁴⁸ “i giorni passano e la maggior parte dei profughi italiani d’Egitto è sempre più stretta dalle dure realtà quotidiane.” ACS, PCM 1959-61 15.3/57749.3, CoNIE (Attilio Morini) to Gronchi 22 May 1958.

¹⁴⁹ ACS PCM 1959-61 15.3/57749.3, MI to PCM 1 June 1958.

¹⁵⁰ ACL Archivio ECA N.713 Profughi dall’Egitto 1957-62, Prefettura di Livorno 14 February 1961; Sanfilippo, “Per una storia,” 851.

by Italian, American, and Israeli Jewish organizations to emigrate to Israel (at least 11 of 41 families in Livorno had in fact already left Italy for Israel by late 1957).¹⁵¹

As repatriates moved between locales, precise details concerning the types of assistance available to them were often unclear. A group of 22 families in a CRP in Bari wrote to Fanfani (then Minister of Foreign Affairs), demonstrating this confusion: “we haven’t been informed about the subsidies (sovvenzione) made available to each family.” In Bari, each family was housed in a one-room unit without furniture. They were encouraged to leave the camp by local authorities, but insisted that they were in no condition to do so.¹⁵² How, wrote the “group of refugees”--as they collectively signed the letter--were they supposed to “make a home (formar una casa)” when as soon as someone found a job, even temporary, “[the ECA] instantly cuts the minimum support... [where are the] so-called public houses (case popolari)?”¹⁵³

Conclusion

Little time had passed since the arrival of Giorgianni and Santoro in the autumn of 1956, with which this chapter began. Giovanni Wian, a journalist and lawyer who had spent over 30 years living in Egypt, penned an essay speculating on the “dramatic forecasts” of the Italians in Egypt. Echoing Catraro’s prediction that the “traditional friendship” between Italy and Egypt would be no more than a memory if a “revolutionary” change in policy did not occur first, Wian wrote: “the Italian community will be reduced to a meager, inconsistent minority, numerically

¹⁵¹ ACS CRI - Servizio Affari Internazionali B32 f. conflitto di Suez, Parlato to Schlatter 14 January 1957; ACL Archivio ECA N.713 Profughi dall’Egitto 1957-62, Prefettura 7 December 1957.

¹⁵² In Livorno, when the rented villas no longer became manageable, the ECA offered 50,000 Italian lire per family to leave and renounce future assistance. ACL Archivio ECA N.713 Profughi dall’Egitto 1957-62, Prefettura 4 December 1959.

¹⁵³ “toglie istantaneamente quel minimo sussidio?... [dove sono le] così chiamate case popolari?” ACS, PCM 1959-61 15.3/57749.3, italiani profughi d’Egitto to Fanfani 3 September 1958.

irrelevant, economically nothing, or almost...” The only certainty, observed Wian, was that “the Italians are leaving.”¹⁵⁴

Born in Alexandria in 1929, Aldo Fiorentino’s family received support from the *Fascio* in the 1930s to send him and his siblings to the Italian schools. And then, during the postwar years, Fiorentino himself received welfare from the consulate, unable to find work. He applied repeatedly to emigrate to Brazil and Australia beginning in 1951 and remained unemployed or held temporary employment during those years. In November 1957, he requested repatriation, after all other options proved futile. Apart from listing his arduous efforts at procuring work and the hardship of living on welfare, he asserted: “being in Egypt is no longer our future.” He was granted a consular repatriation on the condition that his elderly mother stays in the *Casa di Riposo* (Italian elderly home) in Alexandria, rather than repatriate with him. Finally, in 1958, his request was accepted by ICEM and he traveled to Italy to prepare for his emigration to Australia.¹⁵⁵

That same year, Virgilio Lilli, correspondent for the *Corriere della Sera*, who had frequently written on Italian politics in Egypt during the 1950s, traveled to Egypt to write a story on the Italian residents. In his article, “Agony more than life for the Italians in Egypt,” he drew attention to the incongruities in the language used by Italian officials and by the Italians of Egypt to estimate the community’s changing demographics. The consulates responded to his inquiries: “the Italians residing (che si trovano a risiedere) in Egypt amount to...”; whereas the Italian residents in Egypt responded, “the Italians still remaining in Egypt amount to... (gli italiani finora rimasti in Egitto ammontano a...)” The difference between the former (those residing in

¹⁵⁴ “la collettività italiana verrà ridotta ad una sparuta, inconsistente minoranza, numericamente irrilevante, economicamente nulla, o quasi...”; “gli italiani se ne stanno andando.” Giovanni Wian “Drammatiche previsioni in Egitto per la Nostra Collettività,” *Concretezza* 15 May 1957.

¹⁵⁵ “essendo in Egitto non è più il nostro avvenire.” ACGA Fiorentino Francesco - 1866.

Egypt) and the latter (those remaining in Egypt), to Lilli, expressed the sentiments of a community that had transformed from immigrants to emigrants, and to refugees through the processes of repatriation. Many of the remaining Italians, noted Lilli, were elderly left behind by their children who had gone elsewhere in search of a future—as in the case of Aldo Fiorentino.¹⁵⁶

With the nationalization of the Egyptian economy, options to live and work in Egypt thinned. In Italy, many continued to move between cities, request emigration, and seek work. The Ministry of Interior implemented laws that made obligatory the employment of a quota of “refugees from Egypt (profughi d’Egitto)” in various sectors.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Fanfani worked with Nasser to secure economic ties between the two countries. Large-scale projects, however, involved cooperation between metropolitan Italian companies and the Egyptian military regime. At the cusp of the 1960s, even the Banco Italo-Egiziano complained that while the political relationship between Italy and Egypt had been ironed out since 1957, politicians did nothing to protect the institutions and individuals already present in the territory.¹⁵⁸ Banks, insurances agencies, and big industries were all nationalized under Nasser’s authority between 1957 and 1963, in a final blow to the structures of privilege that had been sustaining many of the Italian residents.¹⁵⁹

Whereas many Italians from Egypt had hoped that a collective repatriation would incorporate them into the national body, the Italian state had worked to keep their departure individualized and voluntary in legal terms. This exonerated the state of responsibility, at the

¹⁵⁶ Virgilio Lilli, “Agonia più che vita per gli italiani in Egitto,” *Corriere della Sera*, ND July 1958.

¹⁵⁷ ACS, MI Gabinetto 1961-63 B390, MI Circolare P.E.L. n5/62 3 September 1962.

¹⁵⁸ BR XI/8/15/11 B14 fasc.39 Appunto 30 December 1959.

¹⁵⁹ Alessia Melcangi “La collettività italiana nell’Egitto di Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser. Alcune note a proposito dei documenti diplomatici italiani sulla visita di Fanfani al Cairo” *PoloSud: Semestrare di Studi Storici*, 3 (2013): 55-79.

moment at which Italians turned to the state for assistance. Nevertheless, repatriation became a collective experience. This was in part the result of pressure and influence of political parties like the neo-fascist MSI, as well as the political isolation of the community in the aftermath of the Second World War. Denied the official “welcome” as “repatriates (*rimpatriati*),” the Italians of Egypt adapted to the new environment as “refugees,” in spite of the fact that they initially were excluded from the legal definition of the term. Finally, with the granting of refugee status, the Italians of Egypt were entitled to obtain work and seek new lives in Italy, notwithstanding that behind the new label was the desire on the part of the government to lessen the load on its budget and send as many refugees as possible on to other destinations through ICEM and other intergovernmental bodies. Emigration from Italy came to be desired by many, after brief experiences in CRP, a shared sense of being neglected and marginalized from Italian society. At the same time, new organizations, such as CoNIE, emerged to represent their interests and link the community across shores, signifying the materialization of collective (political) identities based on their spatial displacement and historical emplacements. The 1960 Egyptian census counted the Italian population at 14,089—a decline of at least 13,000 from 1947.¹⁶⁰ More than half of the Italians of Egypt had left: both Wian and Lilli noted that the only certainty was that the Italians were leaving, and the perception on the ground was of a community defined by what it had been, and by those who “still remained.”

¹⁶⁰ Amicucci, “La comunità italiana,” 82.

VIGNETTE THREE

Arrival~Departure: Displaced from the Present

The apparent contradictions in the positions taken by the Italian administration and its diplomats in Egypt, who appeared to move closer to the Egyptian regime precisely at the moment that Italian residents faced great difficulty in finding a place in the postwar Mediterranean, played a central role in memories of departure from Egypt. M. Ardizzone recalled that on the “third day of the war” in the autumn of 1956 (he was not certain of the timeline of the conflict itself, but he did remember that this event occurred on the third day), “the Italian Consul in Port Said went around to all of the Italian homes announcing the arrival of a ship that, within 24 hours, would depart for Italy.” His father was not prepared to leave, he said, noting that the family’s modest finances were blocked in an account at the Banco Italo-Egiziano, but when an Egyptian soldier knocked on the door asking if they had hosted a British officer in preceding days (his father had indeed worked closely with the British military after his release from Fayed and knew many of the British officers based in Port Said), he “resigned himself” to departure, sensing that the risks of staying outweighed the financial loss. “In those days almost all of the Port Saidians (port-saidini) were trying to get out, [before the conflict, most] were preparing paperwork to go to Australia.” The ship, the *Argentina*, he recalled, had 2,000 Italians aboard—when I questioned him about this number he remarked that this was the memory of a child (himself) too small to take account of the reality of the situation (the scale of evacuation aboard the *Argentina*, as we saw in the previous chapter, was much smaller). The family arrived in Brindisi (Puglia), where

they were hosted for several days in a refugee camp, which had served as a temporary holding grounds for Jewish refugees fleeing Europe after the Second World War.¹ Shortly thereafter, they were relocated to Naples by the administration of the camp, where they were placed in the overcrowded Emigration Center. The conditions of the camp and the Emigration Center, Ardizzone recalled, “embarrassed us... we were treated like refugees!”²

By the winter of 1956-1957, when departure became a large-scale event, the administrative procedures that had been used prior to the conflict in Suez were by all practical means obsolete. Debates in the halls of the Italian Ministries in Rome regarding the granting of refugee status to Italians entering the country from Egypt took place on a consistent basis following the Suez Conflict, as we saw in the previous chapter. Departure had become a social fact for Italian residents by the late 1950s. Official accounts describe the rate of return by 1958 at around 16 families per month.³ The gap between the functional application of legal categories-- such as repatriates and refugees--and the social meanings given to those same categories is filled with a variety of experiences that define, in their own way, the departure and arrival of the

¹ The camp in which he and his family were held was likely that of Restinco, which had hosted Jews who, with tacit consent of Italian authorities in the mid and late 1940s, fled to Palestine. For most of the 1950s, this camp was then used for “foreign refugees” (profughi stranieri) until 1959, when it was officially designated as a camp for Italian repatriates, most of whom were from Tunisia. Giacomo Canepa, personal communication. For more on the presence of Jews in these transitional camps see MAE, AP Egitto (1946-1950), B8; see also Enardu, “l’immigrazione illegale,” Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, Eric Salerno, *Mossad base Italia: Le azioni, gli intrighi, le verità nascoste* (Milano, 2010), Ada Sereni, *I clandestini del mare: L’emigrazione ebraica in terra d’Israele dal 1945 al 1948* (Milano, 2006).

² “ci ha imbarazzati... [siamo stati] trattati da profughi.”

³ By 1958, the massive collective departures that were associated with the events of the Suez Conflict had declined. According to official statistics, over 5,000 Italians departed definitively and the Italian Embassy estimated that the overall Italian community had been reduced to around 35,000 persons. Despite the reduction in scale, however, the rate of repatriation remained steady at around 16 families per month. MAE, Direzione Generale Affari Politici Uff. III, 1948-61, B309, “Comunità Italiana in Egitto” *Telespresso* 916/440, 20 March 1958.

Italians of Egypt from the 1950s into the 1960s. It is these experiences which draw departure and arrival into an inseparable relation.

After attending several meetings held by the Associazione Italiani d'Egitto (AIDE), I met with G. Santoro, the son of Virgilio, who we met at the beginning of the previous chapter. G. Santoro is the editor of the small bulletin published by AIDE and distributed among its members. He invited me to his home where he had arranged two books for my viewing: one the photocopied “diary” of Castaldi detailing his internment during the Second World War (see Chapter Two), and the other a “directory” of the Italians of Egypt—a “who’s who” of the community—published in 1933. Before I turned on my recorder, and without being prompted, he began to recount his family’s departure from Egypt. “The consulate advised us to repatriate in 1956... [and] with a consular form that said we would be received by the local administrative office [in Naples]... we departed for Italy.”⁴ It was thus, according to Santoro, that his family left the keys of their house to a family friend—an Egyptian businessman with whom Santoro’s father had worked—and boarded the *Esperia* on 15 September 1956. When the family disembarked in Naples, no one was waiting for them, as they were told would be the case. There was no indication as to where they were to present themselves. Santoro recalled:

in Italy they had no news for us, no documentation, there had been no communication [between Alexandria and Naples], they knew nothing of these Italians who came from Egypt!...without any possibility [of assistance] from the local administrative office, my father, quite angry by this point, stops at the [train] station, opens our luggage, and we remain there for several days... gazed at strangely by the Neapolitans who walked by...⁵

⁴ “[Nel 1956] il consolato italiano ci consiglia di rimpatriare... con un foglio del consolato che diceva che saremmo stati ricevuti alla prefettura... partiamo per l’Italia.”

⁵ “venammo in Italia e in Italia non hanno notizia per noi, non ci sono documentazioni, non ci sono comunicazioni, dalla parte dell’ambasciata, questi in Italia non sanno *nulla* di quest’italiani che venivano dall’Egitto.”

At this point, tears formed in his eyes and his voice cracked, moved by his own memory of the event. He exclaimed, continuing, “[they stared as though] we were wretched!”⁶ Santoro remembered that several local journalists came to interview the family, but he had never had the courage to search for the articles. Police intervened after several days and relocated the family to a nearby hotel, where they remained for one week before Santoro’s father, frustrated by the lack of help, decided to return to Egypt with his family.

After several years of unemployment in Egypt and despite numerous requests to emigrate to Brazil, Argentina, and Australia, the senior Santoro returned to Italy with his family in 1960. “The situation had worsened... there were no longer Italian youth (*ragazzi italiani*) and parents were thinking about their children’s futures.”⁷ Again, their experience of arrival was marked by suffering and hostility. Santoro explained,

to disembark one had to show their passport... my father displayed his to the security officer at the port, an officer with dark skin (*pelle scura*) said ‘but you are Egyptians?’ to which my father, an Italian, *one of the real ones* (*di quelli veri*) who took it seriously (*e ci teneva moltissimo*), said ‘no, I’m Italian!’

Santoro described how his father argued with the official, who did not understand that his father was an Italian born and raised in Egypt and had maintained Italian nationality, and was not an Egyptian who had obtained Italian nationality. The argument resulted in Santoro senior telling the officer (impolitely) that the officer in fact *looked* more “Arab” than Santoro. This racial marking was common—“Arab” often stood in place of “Egyptian” when contrasting the communities.⁸ Albert Memmi calls this depersonalization the “mark of the plural” and notes that it is central to the colonizer’s oppression of the colonized. What is interesting in this case is that the Italians of Egypt use the same structures of rendering “anonymous” the collectivities of many

⁶ “come da miserabili!”

⁷ G. Santoro interview, 7 June 2012.

⁸ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston, 1991[1957]), 85.

of the social actors around them, including Italians (of Italy), Italian repatriates from other countries, and, in a sense, of themselves. The latter point signifies, beyond the coherency of their community, an internalization of the fascist iteration of their own role in the nationalist narrative (and thus a kind of colonization of the Italians of Egypt).

This time, the Santoro family was sent to the Canzanella CRP, on the periphery of Naples (Fuorigrotta). The camp was originally used to hold prisoners of war between 1944-1945, after allied occupation of the Italian south. Between 1946 and 1950, it was transformed into a holding camp for the sorting of Italian war veterans, housed “national refugees” from Istria, and eventually was used as a refugee camp--supported by international funds--for foreign refugees (profughi stranieri). Only after 1960 was it officially sanctioned as a camp to house repatriates and refugees from Tunisia and Egypt.⁹

Santoro reminded me,

you need to understand that Canzanella was one of those camps used for the Dalmatians (i dalmati) when they were expelled, the shacks (barracche) were unchanged since the early 1950s... we were one of 1,500 families housed there, some [were] Italians from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia... who spoke a language that sounded like Berber... and they weren't the best people (migliori persone)!

The camp, he recalled, was locked at night, guarded by two military guards, and one could only exit and reenter during prescribed hours.¹⁰ On several occasions, when the young Santoro left the camp to search for work and returned after the permitted hours of entry, he was forced to sleep outside of the camp's walls, whistling to his mother inside to throw a blanket over the walls. The

⁹ Giacomo Canepa, personal communication. Accounts of these camps are difficult to find. Only occasionally are they mentioned in short articles or memoir essays. See for example, online forums such as: <http://www.editfiume.com/lavoce/esuli/3840-da-napoli-al-collegio> and http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/parola.asp?id_parola=19.

¹⁰ The militarization of the camps--in Italy and, more broadly, on a European scale--occurred during the 1950s, after the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) encountered great difficulty in trying to maintain refugee camps as open areas. For more on this see, Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford, 2011).

family stayed in a small room crowded with six beds and ceilings open to the sky. It was cold in the Italian autumn, recalled Santoro. “I don’t say all of this with shame (*vergogna*), but instead with regret (*dispiacere*) for those who mistreated us in this way...”¹¹ Santoro saw this reception as an example of the postwar Italian state’s inability to acknowledge the role the Italian residents in Egypt had played as purveyors of Italian “prestige” abroad during prior epochs.

The policy of housing the Italians of Egypt in refugee camps seemed, to Santoro, out of place with respect to what the community had represented historically. Searching for work outside of the camp often proved as difficult as it had been in Egypt. During interviews, many commented on having experienced hostility from the Italians “of Italy” (*italiani d’Italia*). In this regard, Santoro found himself competing in a limited market, encountering contempt at every angle.

We weren’t seen well down there. It was said that we had arrived to steal work [from them], above and beyond all the hardships [we faced]... but then... it was true that we were searching for work, and yet there wasn’t any in Naples.¹²

Although Italy was undergoing the so-called “economic miracle” (1958-1963), the “miracle” of the period had not trickled down into the lives of workers, and was not equally distributed between the Italian north and south. Many unemployed Italians, therefore, felt the arrivals of Italians from Egypt diminished their own opportunities.¹³

¹¹ “*ci ha maltrattati così.*”

¹² “*non eravamo molto ben visti laggiù perché si diceva che eravamo arrivati per togliere il lavoro, oltre tutti i guai... che poi ... era realtà perché noi cercavamo lavoro e lavoro non c’era a Napoli...*”

¹³ Although it is beyond the scope of this section, by the late 1960s, when many Italians from Egypt found employment with airlines and tourism companies based in Fiumicino, many reported that an official complaint had been filed through the union by “Italians of Italy” about the preferential status given to Italians of Egypt, favored in part because of their linguistic ability and in part because, as refugees, they were entitled to an employment quota in various sectors. European repatriates from Egypt indeed occupied similar positions throughout Europe—most notably I heard stories about Paris, Athens, and Rome—during the late 1950s and into the 1970s, utilizing the networks they had formed in Egypt for this emergent industry.

Soon thereafter Santoro left the camp and moved to Rome, where several of his schoolmates from Alexandria were living, to search for work and a means to get his family out of Canzanella. These experiences upon arrival, explained Santoro, inspired repatriated Italians to call Italy “la matrigna” (the evil step-mother), echoing the language of the letter written by Bellamare in the heat of conflict in 1956, which we saw in the last chapter. Santoro’s critique quickly jumped from his arrival to the political present. He compared the conditions in which he and other Italians of Egypt were received to the perceived reception and “welcoming” (accoglienza) of immigrants and refugees in contemporary Italy: a common myth among some members of the anti-immigration political right is that refugees and immigrants are housed in hotels and new apartments, and are provided with substantial welfare payments by the Italian State. Likewise, one Italian from Egypt—a close acquaintance of Santoro’s who did not stay in Canzanella but, in the early 1960s, frequently went to visit friends from Alexandria housed there—described the camp:

it was really disgusting how and where [the Italians of Egypt] were received in Patria... [they were] Italian citizens much more Italian than those Italians resident [in Italy]... it certainly wasn’t the way in which we are now welcoming wretched populations (popolazioni disgraziate) and even thieves, bandits, and murderers, and so on, in hotels of three, four, and five stars!¹⁴

When I met with G. Longo and his elder acquaintances, A. Piperno and B. Salerno, each reflected on their departures from Egypt. Longo asked how they chose Rome, to which Piperno responded, “his [her husband’s] brother and sisters were already here... it was supposed to be our reference point (punto di riferimento).” Situating their story within the timeline of his own, and perhaps in the broader sequence of events, Longo inquired pensively, “ah, but when you arrived

¹⁴ “cittadini italiani molto più italiani di quelli residenti... non era certamente il modo in cui stiamo accogliendo popolazioni disgraziate ma anche ladri, banditi, assassini ecc. ecc. in alberghi da 3-4-5 Stars.”

there wasn't the [legal] designation of refugee, right?" Longo continued, revealing that the official designation of refugee status had distinguished one collective experience of arrival from another. Salerno then added, "we arrived *early*... I searched for work as an accountant, because it was what I was doing in Egypt. First, I went to Florence [his official "hometown"], but I learned that, for work, one either went to Milan or Rome." His wife interrupted him, "we chose Rome because of his family and the presence of other friends from Egypt [who had left in 1953]... then he found work in a car-rental company."

Longo was surprised to learn that, upon his arrival in 1962, six years after Salerno, he had worked at the same company. This realization prompted Longo to describe his own arrival. He repatriated with a friend from Messina (Sicily), his official "hometown." His friend had advised him to go to Rome, where his brother worked "illegally" (in nero). His contact was employed at the same car-rental company as Salerno, who vaguely remembered the brother of Longo's friend. Longo recalled of his colleague,

[he] was a little jealous of me... he used to say 'ah, but when you (voi) arrived [in Italy] there were refugee camps, [the government] helped you, they helped you'... and he was right, they gave us a small compensation.¹⁵

Piperno nodded in agreement, adding that for the Italians who had arrived earlier, it was only after the laws were modified that they were able to claim refugee status and collect a modest welfare payment from the ECA in Rome. Before that moment, she noted, they faced continuous struggles in procuring steady employment and many lived precariously, working illegally for short periods and frequently changing jobs. What sustained them and facilitated these movements, however, was the tight network of relatives, friends, and acquaintances who had arrived from Egypt.

¹⁵ "era un po' geloso di me... diceva 'o ma quando voi siete venuti c'era il campo profughi, [il governo] vi ha aiutato vi ha aiutato'... e infatti ci ha dato un piccolo indennizzo."

Many encountered difficulties in procuring employment due to existing restrictions intended to limit urbanization that had been enacted by the Fascist regime in 1939. These restrictions required residency in order to obtain legal work, but concurrently made employment a prerequisite to obtaining residency. Politicians who thought to cancel these restrictions in the postwar period also had to face the fact that this would grant the right to vote to Italy's vast number of internal migrants—mostly Southern Italians working in northern cities who had come to be known as *Marocchini* or *Napuli*. This, it was feared, would give these migrants an opportunity to challenge the exploitation that fueled the ongoing industrial boom.¹⁶ The massive movement of refugees after 1945 to urban centers (both from outside of Italy and from rural areas destroyed during the second war) in part facilitated the end to this legal ambiguity. The Ministry of Interior favored ending these restrictions after 1951 and the original law was finally abolished in 1961.¹⁷ This dilemma was resolved in the case of the Italians of Egypt by granting them refugee status, which entitled them to forms of social welfare similar to disabled persons or war veterans (“invalidi” and “mutilati di guerra”) and thus to an employment quota in certain sectors. As Longo described, this preferential status created a divide within the community of repatriated Italians of Egypt between those who had arrived before, and therefore had struggled to integrate into Italian society without support, and those who arrived afterwards and had received assistance from the Italian state.

¹⁶ See Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto 2005), 144-145, and also Miriam Mafai, *Il sorpasso: Gli straordinari anni del miracolo economico, 1958-1963* (Milano 1997), 23. For more on the relation between the “economic miracle,” migration, and the legacies of fascism, see Chris Duggan, “Italy in the Cold War years and the legacy of fascism,” in (eds.) Chris Duggan and Chris Wagstaff, *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture and Society, 1948-1958* (London, 1995).

¹⁷ Giacomo Canepa, personal communication.

Questions of work and employment often factored into stories about departure. A. Sinigaglia recalled that while the subjects of France and England were expelled from Egypt in 1956, “we Italians never had those problems, our problem was always [finding] work!”¹⁸ The restrictions on employment enacted with the Company Law of 1947 in Egypt affected many of the young Italians seeking employment. On one of the many afternoons I passed with Longo, walking along the *lungomare* in Ostia—he often said that it reminded him of Alexandria’s *corniche*—he began to reflect on the circumstances of his departure. Having finished secondary school in the late 1950s, Longo remained unemployed for nearly four years. Finally, he was hired “under the table” at the Italian Hospital in Alexandria. After six months, however, he was required to formalize his employment to assure that neither he nor the hospital would suffer legal consequences, which could place the institution at risk of being taken over by Egyptian Authorities. He went to the Municipal Employment Office to register his employment, he remembered, “and the officials [working there] said to me, ‘ah, they’re searching for employees!?’ and then they denied me the position... instead sending one of them, an Arab (mandavano uno di loro, degli arabi).”¹⁹

Longo’s elder brother had departed the previous year, in 1962. On his request for repatriation (*domanda di rimpatrio*)—the form required of all Italian residents requesting a consular repatriation, which fill the folders of the Italian consular archives in Egypt—his brother responded to the question regarding the motivation for departure with “reduction of personnel” (*diminuzione del personale*).²⁰ There were no longer companies willing to hire Italians. The structure of the colonial economy was being dismantled. Longo himself left one year later.

¹⁸ A. Sinigaglia interview, 13 March 2012.

¹⁹ P. Longo interview, 10 May 2012.

²⁰ ACGA, “Antonio Longo”; To give a sense of the scale, of the nearly 250 personal files that I looked at in the Italian consular archives in Alexandria, Cairo (and a small number from Port

Longo's father remained employed at the time because he was in charge of around 800 Egyptian workers in the restoration of cotton magazines in Alexandria. Egyptian Authorities denied his father an exit visa when he attempted to depart, deeming his presence necessary for the training of workers and continual functioning of the restoration. Once Longo and his brother had found work in Italy, they set aside money to bribe Egyptian officers to grant his father permission to depart. Longo's brother had to request special permission to reenter Egypt, however, because he had renounced his Egyptian residency in order to claim refugee status in Italy. Once he acquired the necessary paperwork, in 1964, he put his mother and father on a flight out of Egypt. In Rome, his father immediately fell ill, spending one week in a hospital before passing away.²¹ Many of the young who departed in search of work left their parents in Egypt, hoping to stabilize their situations in Italy before bringing their parents, who could survive in Egypt on little income or on the remittances of family members.²² Often, for those that could afford to do so, one member of the family would go to Italy in search of work and housing before bringing the rest of the family to Italy. This was the case in the Paoletti family, for example, when the father left Egypt in early 1956 to find work in Italy, settled in Pisa, and then sent for his family who arrived in Italy aboard the *Achilleous*, as one of the few paying families amidst several hundred expelled French, English, and Jewish residents during the Suez Crisis in November 1956.²³

Said), only a small minority *did not* contain at least one “domanda di rimpatrio.” In other words, nearly every Italian family living in Egypt, had at least one of its members request a repatriation at some time between the early 1950s and the early 1960s.

²¹ ACGA, “Longo Antonio fu Santi.”

²² Several of the newspaper articles published in later years mention the fact that the community of Italians remaining in Egypt is constituted by elderly and those who can manage to live on the moderate welfare checks provided by the consulates and the SIB. Giuseppe dall’Ongaro, “Gli Italiani in Egitto,” *Il Giornale d’Italia* (1 October 1964); Francesco Piccione, “Appunti sulla collettività italiana in Egitto” *Affari sociali internazionali*, 3 (1989): 133-135.

²³ P. Paoletti interview, 28 January 2012.

Longo often reflected on how departure became a necessity for the Italians of Egypt. Addressing the events of the 1950s and early 1960s, and the collective experience of departure, he paused and said ponderously, “it’s not that they [Egyptians] kicked us out... it’s just that they left nothing for us to do, one couldn’t go forward.” He even exonerated “the Egyptians of Alexandria,” stating that the pressure to leave came from the newly empowered authorities and officials. “During that period, Nasser enflamed the spirits [of Egyptians] against foreigners (infuocava le anime contra gli stranieri)...” In Cairo, he explained, the results were more dramatic because the populations were less integrated within the urban space, whereas in Alexandria close proximity helped to dissolve potentially violent demonstrations.

But, it’s true that the authorities, employment offices, for example, would refuse you services, saying ‘there isn’t this or that for you, you’re Italian, there isn’t anything for you, what are you doing here?’ Italians were never attacked, but they were *pushed* (spinti) to leave (andarsene), *pushed* to leave.²⁴

On this occasion, two of Longo’s neighbors—siblings who had left Egypt in 1962 and 1963 respectively—had passed by for an afternoon coffee, unaware of my presence. After Longo said that Italians were “pushed” by the circumstances to depart, one of his neighbors added, “there was no longer a future (non c’era più avvenire), there wasn’t work, there were only more difficulties.” Longo quietly agreed—it had been the absence of a future and the inability to insert themselves in the present that “pushed” them out of Egypt.

²⁴ “Ma sta di fatto che l’autorità, gli uffici di lavoro che ti rifiutavano... [dicendo] ‘non c’è questo per te, non c’è questo per te, tu sei italiano non c’è niente, cosa stai a fare qui?’ Gli italiani non sono mai stati attaccati, ma *spinti* di andarsene, *spinti* di andarsene...”



Image 12: Civiletti's repatriation ticket (source O. Civiletti).

O. Civiletti invited me to the fur shop (pellicceria) his father had opened in Rome several years after arriving from Egypt in the early 1960s. Civiletti's grandfather, Salvatore Civiletti, a noted sculptor and artist from Sicily, emigrated to Alexandria from Palermo in the late 1800s with his wife and six sons, fleeing intimidation as an atheist. Before the Second World War, Civiletti's father had been employed in various forms of cinematographic work. After being released from Fayed, however, he was unable to find similar jobs. Through a friend he had met in the camp, he began to work as a furrier (pellicciaio), eventually inheriting the shop when his friend departed Egypt for South America in the late 1940s. By the mid 1950s, Civiletti remembered, the trade had become impossible: with the departure of Europeans, his father lost clientele. Frequent complaints were sent to the Italian consular offices in Alexandria and Cairo about the

disappearance of clientele in the 1960s as companies were nationalized and the wealthy families who ran and controlled businesses departed—hinting at the distinct economies that separated European and elite communities from the majority of Alexandria’s Egyptian inhabitants.²⁵

In 1957, Civiletti’s father requested a consular repatriation, citing “continued unemployment” as his motivation. Later that year, not having received a response, he implored that the consulate cover the expenses of his repatriation so that he could submit the necessary paperwork for emigration to Brazil.²⁶ Civiletti recalled that his father was “in love with the idea of going to Brazil, he didn’t want to come to Italy.”²⁷ During the same period, Civiletti’s paternal uncle also wrote several pleas to the consulate. In 1958, observing that 21 years of continual employment had been interrupted only by four years of internment in Fayed, he wrote,

given the crisis and the impossibility to continue my work, having lost almost all of my clients [to departure]... and given the impossibility to build a future for my family [in Egypt], I would like to emigrate to Argentina... if that isn’t possible, I am also willing to be repatriated... it’s an urgent matter.²⁸

Like the vast majority of these requests, they initially went unanswered. The queue for departure was long and the Italian offices in Egypt were instructed to confer consular repatriation only to the most destitute, leaving final judgment to the discretion of consular authorities. The remainder were encouraged to repatriate at their own expense. This was all part of the broader policy to avoid dependency on state resources. Repatriation was more readily facilitated by the consulates only after the Suez Conflict. These circumstances narrowed Civiletti’s sense of choice. Feeling obliged to depart, he no longer expressed a preference for his destination. He wrote to the Italian

²⁵ Tignor, “The Economic Activities of Foreigners in Egypt.”

²⁶ ACGA, “Civiletti Claudio di Salvatore 1909.”

²⁷ O Civiletti interview, 23 May 2012.

²⁸ “concretare per la mia famiglia un avvenire... la questione ha carattere di urgenza.” ACGA, “Civiletti Oscar di Salvatore 1913.”

Consul in Alexandria, “I would like to go to Genoa in order to perform my [trade]... or Rome, or Milan.”

In 1961 the family was granted a consular repatriation. O. Civiletti was 16 years old. His uncle took his family to Milan, where he was able to procure work with a friend from Alexandria, and Civiletti’s family went to Naples, where they were given the option either to stay in the Canzanella camp—by then infamous among Italian repatriates for its crowded and destitute conditions—or the less known CRP in Gaeta. Of the 15 families that arrived aboard the *Esperia*, only the Civilettis and one other family chose the Gaeta camp. Gaeta was populated mostly by repatriated Italians from Tunisia, who, Civiletti recalled, were “a bit... a bit more crude (rozzi), they were almost all farmers (agricoltori)... [they were] a bit rude, and quite angry with us because they said we were favored.” When I asked about the difference between the two communities, he recounted a story from their arrival in the camp:

The guard looked at us, he knew that we were from Egypt, and said ‘ah, but you’re Fascists, right!?’ [My father responded, saying] ‘we *were* Fascists when the [Italian] government was Fascist, but we aren’t anymore.’ Anyways, the guards laughed and said ‘some of your friends are here,’ referring to two German soldiers still imprisoned in the camp.

As in other cases, Civiletti described the perception of the Italians of Egypt upon arrival as being politically anachronistic or out of sync with other communities. The refugee camps provided the perfect backdrop upon which such dynamics came into relief, confronting the Italians of Egypt with the institutions of the Italian state, with other Italian repatriates, and with the Italians of Italy. These encounters reified distinction. Here, many expressed a violent rupture in their experience of historical belonging. It was not only with longing for the past community that so many Italians arrived in Italy, but also it was in search of a future community. Yet, the present challenged this continuity. One of Civiletti’s few material reminders from his childhood in Egypt

is the ticket from the *Esperia*, dated 11 November 1961 (image 12). On the ticket, a small, otherwise innocuous stamp reads: “consular repatriation.” Looking at this ticket, and thinking about his father’s resignation to leave Egypt, Civiletti stated, “my father wouldn’t have gone if it wasn’t for my sister and me... he was thinking of us, our future... he didn’t see a future there.”

I met with O. Civiletti’s cousin in Milan—a meeting that had been arranged through a mutual contact unrelated to the family. She lives in a quiet neighborhood on the edge of the city. Her most vivid memory from childhood, she said, was the family’s arrival aboard the *Esperia* in 1961:

we took a train [from Venice] to Milan, which we found black, dark, and I don’t know what my father did... but we found a small room (pensione) on via Buenos Aires... after six months, my father found a job with an Italian Jew from Alexandria, an antique dealer, who died six months later and my father helped to keep the business going.”

Her husband added, “one brother [of her father] went to Australia, one to Rome, her father to Milan, another to Genoa.” Civiletti left the room for a moment to check on the coffee she was preparing. As soon as she was gone, her husband turned to me and said, “you know, they don’t say it, but life changed for them [the Italians of Egypt]... adjusting to Italy was not easy.”

The Civiletti cousins narrated their departures in a similar way. Each family had told the Egyptian Authorities that they were going away for three months’ vacation, but they had all of their belongings with them. O. Civiletti remembered preparing the three large trunks—containing mostly kitchen and housewares—into which his family packed away their lives. He recalled that they were forbidden to take anything other than essentials. “We weren’t escaping, at least we didn’t want it to seem that way.” Both Civiletti and his cousin recalled departing officially as “tourists,” without the exit visa required in the case of permanent departure. Perhaps their parents

had hoped to return or to keep the possibility of return open, or perhaps they did so out of unwillingness to acknowledge the realities of the departure, for it was indeed a definitive one.²⁹

They [the Egyptian customs officers] knew we were leaving... they looked at our money and pointed to all our belongings and said ‘all this for a vacation?!’ It was just to make it clear to us that they weren’t stupid, they knew we were escaping (*sapevano che noi stavamo scappando*).

In order to conform to new regulations on the belongings taken outside of the Egypt in the late 1940s, repatriates were required by the Egyptian Authorities to present lists of their possessions upon departure. These lists were then approved by the consulates, and printed in Italian and either French or Arabic, for administrative purposes.³⁰ Departees were permitted to carry with them only “used” possessions. The lists were titled “used personal belongings” and often included a statement that the Italian resident intended to depart with his/her family. They always included the qualification that the departure was “definitive.”³¹

While reading the personal registry files of the Italian consulates in Alexandria and Cairo, I found these documents useful for understanding what departure meant in material terms for many of the families, particularly for individuals and families who had few connections in Italy. In one case, Beniamino Paonessa, a carpenter born in Port Said who then worked in Alexandria

²⁹ In his work on the departure of Greeks from Egypt during the same period, Angelos Dalachanis found that individuals often left without obtaining the exit visa in case circumstances in Greece did not prove adequate to their needs. For the Italians it seems like this may also have been a possibility. However, it is also possible that, because many of the elderly or retired remained in Egypt, departing without an exit visa was also a means to remain connected to the members of the community who stayed in Egypt during the years of departure. See Dalachanis, “Leaving Egypt.”

³⁰ It remains unclear to what extent these lists were regulated. They may have been prepared simply in order to facilitate departure (for packing purposes on the ships, for example). They are included amongst the documents of the personal files (*registri nazionali*) of the Italian consulates in Alexandria and Cairo (following the 1956 conflict, the consulate in Port Said, remained closed and the Alexandrian consulate instead handled Italian residents from the Canal Zone) and often—but not always—have official stamps from municipal offices in Egypt.

³¹ In Arabic they were titled, “*khashafa bi-bayan al-milabis al-mosta’mila li-l-mudhkor...*” and in Italian “*Oggetti Personali Usati.*”

during much of the interwar period (whom we met when he filed a complaint about his work tools lost due to the sequester in Chapter Three), went unemployed for long periods after the war. By the mid 1950s, his son was in Rome where he had been hired by *Italcable*. Beniamino completed the form for his departure (*foglia di via*) in 1953, accompanied by his list of belongings, which described the possessions “belonging to the family [of] Beniamino Paonessa departing Egypt definitively for Italy.”³² The short list included: housewares, a bicycle, two house-clocks, a camera, a tapestry, carpentry tools, one radio, a set of books on “radio technology,” elementary-school textbooks, and the classic works of Cicerone, Apuleius, and Quintilian. He boarded the *Enotria* on 3 August 1953.³³ Carlo Grasso, a mechanic born in 1907 in Alexandria, repatriated in late 1956 with his wife and children. On his request for consular repatriation he wrote that he left no family in Egypt and arrived in Italy where he had no family waiting for him. His departure, he wrote, was “due to unemployment and the difficulty to find new housing given the current situation.”³⁴ Grasso’s family brought with them four trunks. Inside the trunks were tools for mechanical work, a sewing machine, housewares (covers/sheets for bed, towels), and kitchenware (plates, cups, mugs, pots and pans). From 4 December 1956 until, at least, May 1958, the family (four children aged 9, 17, 19, and 21) lived in the Cibali CRP in Catania (Sicily). The Caccioppo family (whom we met intermittently in Chapters One and Two) departed Egypt with two small trunks of housewares on 24 November 1962. Aboard the ship were 12 other families destined for the crowded Canzanella camp.³⁵

³² “appartenenti alla famiglia Beniamino Paonessa che lascia l’Egitto definitivamente per recarsi in Italia.”

³³ ACGA, “Paonessa Beniamino - 1883”

³⁴ “per disoccupazione e per la difficoltà trovare una nuova sistemazione data l’attuale situazione.”

³⁵ ACGA, “Caccioppo Salvatore.”

L. Mieli remembered the customs control upon exiting Egypt as a terrifying encounter. Her family sent a package of photographs to the censure. After the events of the 1956-57, Egyptian authorities feared the leakage of strategic information through photographs taken out of the country. People had hidden money and valuables in every way imaginable. More than once, I was told of the woman (or women) whose doctor covered a leg (or arm) in a cast, between the layers of which were hidden bills. Or, the story of the man who nonchalantly slipped paper bills between the pages of the newspaper that he casually—and innocently—carried in his arms as he walked through customs. Or, the family who had their clothes specially tailored so that money was inside two layers of fabric. “They [the customs guards] would root through everything,” recalled Mieli,

... they put their fingers everywhere... but with me they didn't do anything because I had this idea... I was 19 years old and I had never done anything like this, but I jumped on top of the counter [where they were opening suitcases and trunks] and I told them I would help them sort through our belongings. They were all shocked to see a young woman do that, I was flirting with them saying ‘look, nothing here, *mafish haga*’ [she winks] and they were all cheering me on... they were distracted by the *mazmazelle*. That's how I helped get our 11 packages through...

She added, as an afterthought, “it's not that we were sent away (mandati via), but, in the end, it wasn't our time to live there anymore... we boarded the [ship] *Nefertiti*... we left everything there, money, the apartment, we left with 100 EGP and our bags...”

On our second meeting, R. Berni recalled:

We had to sell (our belongings and property), but no one was buying, we had to close out (svendere)... we were going to Venezuela, but when we finally managed to sell everything off (svendere), I took the little money (quattro soldi) I had to buy tickets... [and then] Venezuela closed the door to immigration.

Berni described a situation in which the circumstances of his departure were determined solely by external factors. To him departure was like being caught in a labyrinth. Emigration from Egypt was only possible under a strictly regulated regime by the 1960s. Due to restrictions

placed on the exportation of money and material goods out of Egypt, many had to sell their belongings at low prices. Others, knowing the market was overflowing with used goods, left their belongings with family members or friends who stayed in Egypt and they, in turn, used the goods as a form of supplementary income, slowly selling them off. Berni talked of the shame that marked his arrival in Italy. He recalled:

I was 34 years old when I arrived [in Italy] with my wife and two children, 22 dollars in my pocket, thankfully my mother [and sister's family] were already in Milan and hosted us. It was my first experience of great shame (*vergogna*), total humiliation... when the children went to school in the morning, I was ashamed, and I would pretend to sleep... I didn't want my daughter to see me at home without work, it was the greatest shame on earth... we had become a breed (*razza*) of workers (*lavoratori*) because we had no one to protect us since 1945, not even the consulates, we had no unions and no institutions, one lived without protection. We learned we couldn't count on the Italian State, only on ourselves, we needed to know how to protect ourselves (*saper difendersi da soli*).

Berni's case was similar to others who did not stay in a CRP and instead were housed for a period with family or friends who had previously arrived and stabilized themselves in Italy. Some houses became "points of encounter," like the Paoletti home in Pisa, where Italians arriving from Egypt would come and go between the late 1950s to the 1960s.

The departure~arrival relation—signifying the definitive spatial displacement from Egypt to Italy—compelled the Italians of Egypt to confront a variety of realities in Italy. After describing himself as "a strong Italian (*un italiano forte*)," G. Augeri, who had driven from the Veneto region in Northern Italy to attend the AIDE meeting in Rome, remembered his initial impressions of Italy. He said,

the Italians [of Italy] had another input... other ideologies... after the war they took that *other one*... and... they said to us, 'but *you* Italians colonized,' to which I responded, 'go read your history!' and you see that's what we're doing here with AIDE... yeah, it's true, someone (*qualcuno*) among us brought over a relative [to Egypt], but we went there invited (*noi siamo andati lí chiamati*).

To Augeri, the Italians of Egypt, when they were in Egypt, did not represent a community of Italian immigrants. They did not arrive “with a suitcase in hand,” he continued, but instead were “invited” to assist in Egypt’s development since the mid-nineteenth century. This exceptionality, he claimed, went unrecognized upon arrival in Italy—and was interpreted in “other” ways, as Augeri alluded to the anticolonialist sentiments of the Italian left during the postwar years. Italians of Egypt, he recalled, were received as colonizers. “[Italians of Italy] did not understand *our history*,” he argued. Due to similar encounters, many years passed before Augeri made friends among Italians (of Italy). Today, he admitted, almost apologetically, “we’re a little more Italianized (*siamo un po’ più italianizzati*).”

Once in Italy, the Italians of Egypt reconfigured new lives (and new futures). Repatriates often sought to distinguish their own experiences from those of the other migrants—internal migrants from the Italian South, Italian emigrants elsewhere, and immigrants in today’s Italy. Regarding a political speech in which the current Prime Minister Matteo Renzi reminded his audience of the country’s history of emigration--in light of xenophobic responses to the ongoing influx of migrants and refugees in Italy--one Italian of Egypt denounced,

What permits him to assimilate today’s immigrants to our emigrant descendants?... They worked hard, some earned more than others, sure, but they all contributed to the growth (*hanno contribuito a far crescere*) of the countries to which they arrived...shame on him!

She condemned the comparison, arguing that the “arrogance of clandestine migrants” was unlike the work ethic of Italian emigrants, especially those who had lived in Egypt.

As another interview began to wind down, Santoro searched for a way to conclude his story. He compared his experience and that of other Italians of Egypt to an Italian (of Italy) of his own generation. He noted that—notwithstanding the technical education he and his peers received at the Don Bosco Institute—the Italians of Italy were “three levels lower” (*tre livelli più*

giù) than them. On Italian emigrants elsewhere, he thought aloud, “in Canada? in Brazil? what did the Italians do? in America... there they did more damage than good... while we... we did (mentre noi... *abbiamo fatto*)!” As a final punctuation, Santoro added, “I’m proud to be Italian, but I’m *prouder* to be an Italian of Egypt.”³⁶

Narrating departure from Egypt concurrently sketched a story of arrival in a country that had long been imagined as the *Patria*, the same *Patria* that had extended legally (through its protection under the Capitulations) until the late 1930s and socially until decades later (through the large-scale institutional restructuring of the community as part of the Fascist regime’s propaganda among Italians abroad and even into the late 1950s as the Italian administration used the idea of the community to frame a political “friendship” with Nasser). Yet, these ideas were dissonant with the initial impressions of the repatriated Italians. The relation of arrival~departure as a final page in the history of the Italians of Egypt conjures up networks that conjoin the Italians of Egypt, an abstracted Egyptian populace (and political body), the Italians of Italy, and the Italian State. The threads connecting each of these social and political bodies were interpreted on the basis of assumptions about the “historic” role played by the Italians of Egypt as a community of national subjects and political agents abroad. With unmet expectations upon their arrival and reception in Italy, a wrinkle in the narrative that defines the community of Italians of Egypt further articulated their sense of collective identity. In turn, the arrival~departure relation is central to understanding how legal, political, and social categories were shaped through the experiences of leaving Egypt over the course of the 1950s and 1960s.

The arrival~departure relation can be understood in terms of its markedness. What is marked, argues linguist Linda Waugh, is less articulated in speech and is characterized by a minus-interpretation. The minus-interpretation at play here could be read as “not remaining

³⁶ “sono fiero di essere italiano, ma sono più fiero di essere italiano d’Egitto!”

Italians of Egypt” or, in other words, losing coherency as a national community. “Departure,” then, is used as the “carrier of the whole category” of being *of* Egypt and of being *of* the history of Italian imperialism in the Mediterranean, which structured the conditions of possibility that permitted the emergence of this community. “Arrival,” on the other hand, is specialized or, as Waugh would have it, it is “included” in the generalized structure of “departure” and therefore suggests a break from the broader meaning of departure. This relation, then, signifies a necessary node in the historical consciousness of the Italians of Egypt.³⁷ For this reason, arrival is always characterized by distinction, by separation from other communities. If the arrival~departure relation did not exist in such terms, the community itself would cease to be present in history. But the arrival~departure relation also encapsulates a period of historical time that expands beyond the temporal boundaries of the spatial displacement from Egypt to Italy. It includes the entire “ending” of the community as a condition for its existence. The changes implied by arrival (the marked term) represent a semiotic hierarchy in which values are attributed to the specific qualities and conditions of departure. Thus, when the Italians of Egypt talk of arrival~departure in terms of their exceptionality and their unmet expectations upon arrival, they narrate their shared historical experience. All of this, in turn, structures the value of the community itself, endowing it with meaning. As Victor Turner reminds us,

meaning always involves retrospection and reflexivity, a past, a history. Meaning is the only category which grasps the full relation of the part to the whole in life, for value, being dominantly affective, belongs essentially to an experience in a conscious present.³⁸

The stories that constitute these values are multiple. At the end of one of our meetings, just before walking away, O. Civiletti stepped forward and exclaimed, “you know, the history of the

³⁷ Linda R. Waugh “Marked and unmarked: A choice between unequals in semiotic structure,” *Semiotics*, 38 3/4 (1982): 299-318, 305, 313.

³⁸ Victor Turner, “Social Dramas and Stories We Tell About Them,” *Critical Inquiry*, 7 1 (1980): 141-168, 152.

Italians of Egypt is *before* the Second World War, *that's where the decline (scesa) begins!*" As I have attempted to show throughout this dissertation, however, it is this decline that renders the Italians of Egypt present in history.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began with the cry, “leave us our memories as they are!” in response to the man’s intervention at the AIDE conference regarding the deteriorating conditions of the Italian community in today’s Alexandria. While he recounted the slow degradation of the symbols of the past, the woman--and the audience that echoed her cry--wished to keep this present silent. Both participants, however, made the past present; one by relegating it to the domain of memory, the other by attempting to reconcile the breakage in historical time. The former generated two distinct temporalities, that of historical past and that of the detached present, which utilizes the past as memory. The latter, in trying to raise concern about the conditions of the present, wedded past and present into one continuous trajectory, notwithstanding its many disjunctures. This dissertation has attempted to move through the mechanisms conjoining the multiple and layered stories that make a community present in history. It has been concerned with the tensions articulated in the space between these two characterizations of the past. In this case, the stories—and their histories of departure—that fill this space constitute a community. To conclude, I revisit that call to return to the conditions of the Italian community in today’s Alexandria. It is in his concern for the present that the challenge underlying the narrative of this dissertation lay: the vulnerability of history.



Image 13: The Casa di Riposo in the 1930s and in 2013.

Today, only around 250 members of the “historic” Italian community remain.¹ Of the Italian institutions, little remains.² When I read in the archives of the Italian consulate in Alexandria from 2012 to 2013, I stopped to visit the inhabitants of the Casa di Riposo several times each week, where I shared tea and conversation on the past, present, and future. I was asked to recount stories from the archives and the elderly residents narrated intimate details of the political landscapes of twentieth-century Italy and Egypt. In this space, I came to understand many of the complexities of this project. Their home, the Casa di Riposo, was designed and built

¹ This number is unofficial and comes from estimates of members of the community itself and from the staff of the former consulate in Alexandria and the consular offices in Cairo. The total population of Italians living in Egypt is much higher (roughly 5,550 according to pre-2015 data), but this number includes a variety of recent arrivals and now a significant population of Egyptian immigrants who have also acquired Italian nationality.

² Remo Brenna, “La Casa di riposo ‘Vittorio Emanuele,’” *Bollettino degli Italiani d’Egitto*, July 1981.

on a piece of land gifted to the Italian community for 99 years by King Fuad in 1928.³ It once stood at the center of a vast and growing Italian community. Its location in Mazarita marked the divide between the crowded working-class quarters inhabited by earlier émigrés and the emerging districts on Alexandria’s eastern coastline. Its architect, Ernesto Verrucci Bey, was an acquaintance of the Egyptian Royal Family. He was part of the small, elite population within the Italian community, upon which rested the myth of the abstracted community and its role in building Egypt’s modernity—his circle included the historian Angelo Sammarco and the noted Pulli Bey. Verrucci Bey was part of a generation that bridged the gap between the decentralized Italian subjects that resided in Egypt since the English occupation in 1882, and the tightly organized community that emerged through the “fascistization” of Italian schools, institutions, and daily life from late 1920s into the 1930s.

³ The land was conceded by the former king on 19 July 1928, given legal officiality through Law 57 of 1929. Its construction was funded by members of the SIB. MAE, AP Egitto 1955 B1006, “rapporto consolare 1954 - Alessandria” 30 June 1955.



Image 14: The entryway to the Casa di Riposo and the bust of Vittorio Emanuele III.

The Casa di Riposo was constructed just at the moment the PNF enacted a major reform on the curriculum of Italian schools in Egypt which sought to bring Italian emigrants into the folds of the fascist nationalist and imperialist project. In 1932, it was dedicated to the Italian king, Vittorio Emanuele III, whose bust greeted visitors in the main lobby.⁴ A celebration of Mussolini and the leaders of the PNF in Egypt is carved into marble plaques that hang on the wall adjacent to the entryway. But this entryway is not in use and the bust of Vittorio Emanuele III stands facing a closed door.

On the ground floor, where the current entryway is situated, there is a small office for the nurses that care for the residents. From its opening until 1999, care at the Casa di Riposo was

⁴ Text of the dedication: “Anno X Dell’Era Fascista / Capo del Governo / Benito Mussolini / La colonia di Alessandria d’Egitto / Istituiva nel nome augusto del suo re / Vittorio Emanuele III / Questa casa di riposo ...”

administered by the Suore missionarie pie madri della Nigrizia (a Combonian missionary congregation). Yet, with the waning presence of Italians in Egypt, the Italian nuns also thinned, eventually withdrawing from their role as caretakers and leaving the home without supervision for over one year. During that period, nearly one person passed away each week as its inhabitants struggled to find the attention they needed. Several members of the Casa di Riposo took authority at this moment and brought the Italian Charity Organization (Società italiana di beneficenza, SIB) into a more prominent role than it had previously played in the institution (its earlier function, part of its larger project since its founding in 1850, had been to provide financial support and assistance to the elderly). The SIB assumed full control of the Casa di Riposo, and found a group of Egyptian nurses to care for its residents.

This moment was one in which many thought the Casa di Riposo had fallen into complete indigence. It was just one episode among many through which the SIB has taken a greater role in the Italian community. While in the years before and immediately after the Second World War, the SIB had served solely as a charity organization to provide pecuniary support for impoverished Italians of Egypt, after the 1960s it took on responsibility for managing the Italian community.⁵ For example, the SIB attempted to convince the consulate to protect the Italian tombs in the freemason cemetery (also known as the “civil cemetery”) in the 1970s, where the faded stone of one of A. and O. Civiletti’s uncles erodes among the others. Leadership within the organization figured the small monetary request would be fulfilled, but rather the consulate

⁵ Among its main tasks after its reconstitution in 1947, the SIB listed:

- 1) to procure work for the unemployed;
- 2) to foresee the institutionalization of impoverished children and the recovery of the elderly;
- 3) to grant subventions—in money or material—to those who merit;
- 4) to propose to consular authorities necessary [cases for repatriation];
- 5) to assist the sick at home or in hospitals.

ACGA, Belleli Alberto fu Vittorio cl. 1883, “notizia sulla Società Italiana di Beneficenza di Alessandria- La casa di Riposo Vittorio Emanuele III,” 8 March 1952.

refused to provide any assistance. O. Laterza, then treasurer of the SIB, insisted that this was due to disinterest and fear of intervening in a matter that was not of political nature. Today, the cemetery is slowly being taken over by the Coptic church.⁶ Many worry—as did the recent visitor to Alexandria—that the Latin Cemetery will share the same fate.

One office on the ground floor belongs to A. Rollo, who is in charge of the quotidian activities of the Casa di Riposo. Another small room houses the office of the SIB, currently managed by F. Monaco, who carries the name of his paternal grandfather, founder in Alexandria of a pork production industry that lasted for three generations. Once a household name in the Italian community, Monaco closed its 100-year-old stores in 2012, after being required to import pork following the massive slaughter of pigs, ordered by then president Hosni Mubarak, during the swine flu scare of 2009. Over the years of research for this dissertation, I met numerous times with Monaco in Rome and Alexandria. We discussed my archival findings and the conversations with repatriated Italians of Egypt. Frequently, however, the dialogue meandered into the politics of the contemporary Mediterranean. Monaco drew my attention to what he considered an interesting dilemma. He said, “look at Italy today, Egyptian migrants number in the tens of thousands... they say that Italy doesn’t treat them well, doesn’t give them their institutions and allow for their cultural differences...” Then, he paused and said, “but look at our history, look at the Casa di Riposo.” What I came to learn was that Monaco perceived a great disjuncture in the fact that, in Egypt, the Italian community has increasingly undergone restrictions on its autonomy, being ever more constrained to live according to Egyptian national norms, while in the broader Mediterranean claims to pluralism beg the preservation—and not assimilation—of migrant identities. Absent from his comparison is the political economy of colonialism and decolonization. His goal, he confessed, is to maintain the Casa di Riposo as an island of

⁶ Interview with Osvaldo Laterza, 22 February 2013.

italianità within this changing sea. But, he acknowledges, the institution likely shares the same fate as the Italian state schools and the hospital in Alexandria, and will either be sold or ceded to the Egyptian state.

Across the hall from Monaco's office is the small library of F. Greco, who has accumulated a collection of documents, books and narratives that tell the story of Alexandria's past.⁷ Greco himself departed from Egypt in the late 1950s, in his youth, only to return after his retirement. In 1970, along with several members of the disbanded CoNIE, he helped to constitute the Associazione Nazionale Profughi Italiani d'Egitto (National Association for Refugee Italians of Egypt, ANPIE). The organization published a small bulletin, which he had hoped would unite dispersed members of the community. It was distributed amongst repatriated Italians of Egypt.⁸ ANPIE also worked to attain legal rights and representation for them, specifically due to their internment during the Second World War and experiences as repatriates and refugees after the war.⁹ Once, on the corner of the old Fuad Street—as it is still called by Italians in Egypt, despite

⁷ Greco often claims that his name itself encompasses Alexandria's past. Francesco Greco—he is French (Francesco), Greek (Greco), but an Italian, born in Alexandria, Egypt. Dalia 'Essam, "Francesco Greco... al-itali al-akher fi al-iskandiriyyah," *Al-sharq al-awsat*, 6 December 2010.

⁸ Mario Ranno, "Perché gli italiani d'Egitto trovano difficoltà ad incontrarsi?" *Bolletino degli Italiani d'Egitto*, June 1972.

⁹ He wrote prolifically about the regulations regarding the status of Italians of Egypt in the *Bolletino degli Italiani d'Egitto*. He was also responsible for drafting several forms through which Italians of Egypt were able to apply for benefits from the state:

ANPIE, Greco requests 'certificato contestuale' Legge 40.4.1969 n°153

Certificato Contestuale

(art. 11 legge 4/1 1968, n°15)

Il Consolato Generale d'Italia in Alessandria d'Egitto certifica dall'esame dei propri registri di stato civile e dalla documentazione in suo possesso risulta quanto segue:

- a) che il _____ è nato in _____ ed ha il proprio domicilio di origine in _____ atto di nascita n. _____ (con le generalità complete ai sensi art. 3 D.P. 2/5 1957, n.432).
- b) che la suddetta persona, già iscritta in questi registri dei nazionali sub n. _____ ha resieduto ininterrottamente in Egitto dall'anno _____ all'anno _____

that it was renamed *shari'a horriyya* during Nasser's reign—Greco turned to me and said, “you know, it's not right... as an Italian in Egypt, I shouldn't be subject to the same laws as Egyptians, but to Italian ones!” Greco invoked the Capitulations as though that kind of legal extraterritoriality offered a horizon for the present. He commonly remarked on how the Italians that remained in Egypt—like Monaco—were too resigned to the present. A member of the SIB's directing committee told me that Greco interrupts when its members discuss the protocols of the Egyptian legal system. He insists that the SIB should only concern itself with Italian laws, as Italians should be living in the shadow of the consulate's authority and protection. Greco maintains that the Italians of Egypt that remained in Egypt are destined to recede from the “historic” community because they do not resolutely defend their pasts. He claims, instead, that they have capitulated to the Egyptian legal and political system. They will be forever lost to de-historicization.

On the second floor of the Casa di Riposo are rooms for Italians too impoverished to pay for their own housing in Alexandria. There are also several inhabitants whose health does not permit them to live alone. Since the late 1960s, the community has grown increasingly elderly with the departure of its younger members.¹⁰ The SIB provides for these inhabitants. Around the corner are several large abandoned rooms, which once housed residents in dormitory style. In the 1990s, one of these rooms was converted into a museum by two French architects. The museum

c) che il sopracitato connazionale è stato internato, perché cittadino italiano e per causa di guerra, nei campi di concentramento per internati civili italiani in Egitto dal ____ al ____

d) che alla data del suo rimpatrio definitivo, avvenuto ____ il Sig. ____ era cittadino italiano

Si rilascia il presente certificato a richiesta dell'interessato i benefici previsti dalla legge 30/4/1969, n.153 e per gli usi consentiti dalle altre norme legislative.....

¹⁰ Archives of the Società Italiana di Beneficenza, Alexandria, Egypt. See also Francesco Piccione, “Appunti sulla collettività italiana in Egitto” *Affari sociali internazionali*, 3 (1989): 133-135.

is aptly named "the Time Machine (La Macchina del Tempo)" and is full of items of departed Italians of Egypt. I walked into the vast, dusty room. On the right is a stack of old, cardboard suitcases that reaches the ceiling. Their tags recount the names of Italians who traveled back and forth on the *Esperia*, between Italy and Egypt, others who left occasionally for Cairo, and still others who arrived from Italy and never had the opportunity--or desire--to return. A long table is covered with household items. There are antique cameras, photographs, a blender, kitchenware, glasses and plates, bathroom toiletries, a late-nineteenth century end table, two small chairs from the 1930s. The walls are covered with photographs and pages torn from photo albums. Some from after the war, others much older, from the late 1800s, taken in Italy of hopeful emigrants prior to their departure. An empty frame is stocked with old keys rather than photos. The keys opened doors in neighborhoods around Alexandria. In the corner is the last "exhibit" of the museum. A small dark room created out of the obsolete oven, which was once used to prepare meals for the population of Italians housed at the Casa di Riposo. It has been gutted. I entered the small chamber, eerily opened the oven doors, peeked through, and found an old hospital bed with photos strewn on top of it. A rack of canes, some old jackets and ties. It is dark, dusty and faded. Leaving this room, and leaving the museum, I returned to the empty, silent hallway of the second floor. There is nothing to narrate one's visit of the museum aside from a photocopy of the designer's original proposal, taped to the outside wall. The museum has gone unvisited for at least one decade. It is locked with one key, kept with the secretary of the SIB.



Image 15: Inside the Time Machine.

The third floor was added shortly after the Casa di Riposo's initial construction in the early 1930s. It has small rooms for paying inhabitants. On this floor, there is Osvaldo Laterza, the "memory" of the Italian community, as he is called by others, whose small fishing-net industry (which employed mainly Egyptians) kept him active in Egypt until late in his life. There is also his cousin, Liliane, whose loud staccato Sicilian accent echoes throughout the floor. There is the quiet Rosa, who sits with her softened paperbacks, and Maurice, who says no more than a few words (in French) only when he plays backgammon with Rollo. They have tea together each day around a small table. Only two have relatives younger than 50 still living in Egypt.

Each corner of the Casa di Riposo contains multiple and layered histories, immense narratives of the lives that crossed the sea, settled abroad, and departed once again. They mark the passage of time through fascism and the construction of institutions in which the Italians could congregate and through which regime propaganda conveyed an image of itself as the harbinger of change, as the revolutionary political movement that would restore “prestige” to Italian emigrants. But the walls of the Casa di Riposo also enclose the failure of fascism and the end of colonialism. They demonstrate, as historian Todd Shepard notes, how colonialism and decolonization “still inform world history.” They are shadows of a past. Yet, in order to be shadows, the object blocking light must stand, must cast upon the present the weight of something still vital. When the Casa di Riposo was dedicated to Vittorio Emanuele III in 1932, little did the community anticipate that the dethroned king would depart Italy in 1946 to spend his last days in Alexandria and remain entombed in St. Catherine’s Church until today (each year, a small group of loyalists to the monarchy visit the tomb and place a wreath at its foot). Nor did they imagine that Fuad’s son would abdicate to Italy in 1953. These multiple and layered histories--their experiences and expectations--are present in this way and, as Michel Rolph Trouillot reminds us, they are the traces that help us to comprehend why not any “fiction can pass for history.”

Walls close tightly around the Casa di Riposo. Since the uprisings against Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the walls around the grounds have grown several meters in height, sheltering this small island from the changing world outside. But it is not enclosed from time. It is not excluded from the present. The Casa di Riposo is not a time capsule, demarcating temporal boundaries between that which has passed and which continues to become. This is why this dissertation is not about memory. I have not told the story of pasts and presents separately arranged in a temporal

hierarchy, but rather in this dissertation I have attempted to recount the jointed paths of time through which histories are generated. The community inside the Casa di Riposo is living its end across the shores from the repatriated Italians of Egypt; living out the non-synchronic rhythms of the Mediterranean's decolonization.

While the community of repatriated Italians of Egypt is dispersed and fragmented throughout contemporary Italy, the social and material architecture of the Casa di Riposo embodies the indissolubility of space and time, as in Bakhtin's chronotope. The spatial configurations implied by terms like "metropole" and "colony," "immigrant" and "emigrant" are blurred in the temporalities of the Casa di Riposo.¹¹ It was in these halls—in their echoes and silences, their absences and presence—that I understood the confluence of the past and present worlds which I have compiled into this dissertation. Here, in the Casa di Riposo, the past becomes identity through its disappearance, through its absence, as much as its presence. In drawing out this project, I have argued that the work of colonialist and imperialist politics of earlier epochs lives within the historical consciousness of a community in contemporary Italy. On a much broader scale, however, I have argued that the process of departure has created this community *out of time*--it is a community whose semantic marking as "historic" has rendered it Other. These processes, I contend, help us to see how most communities are constituted of layered and non-synchronic histories. Rarely are communities formed through isolated events. Rather, the slow yet persistent waves of historical time generate meaning and assign values to community. In this case, departure from Egypt extends into the present of the Italians of Egypt. Overlapping scales of lived experience in the political gyrations of the twentieth-century Mediterranean coalesce into this community. The Casa di Riposo is densely permeated by these histories. The presence of affective remembering in conjunction with rigorous archival

¹¹ Stoler, "Imperial Debris," 200.

exploration permits us to reveal the networks, assemblages, and accumulations that enable being-in-history (*esserci nella storia*). De Martino's "crisis of presence" is a struggle against historical time. And thus, I return to my initial question: can a crisis of presence succumb to historical time? This is the vulnerability of history, the possibility that release from the "crisis of presence" does not happen and a community becomes incommensurable with the present and, slowly, erodes the sand away from its own shore.

As I narrate this story, the Italian consulate in Alexandria closed in 2013, less than one year after I finished archival work there, because it was deemed an inefficient use of funds by Italy's Foreign Ministry. The community that once justified its presence is no longer present. Some of the documents were transferred to Cairo, others vanished into Alexandria's waste, and still others were sold onto Egypt's black market of documents. In 2014, Antonio, who managed the daily activities of the Casa di Riposo, suddenly passed away from a cancer that thrust itself into the future faster than his own will to life. Osvaldo, on the third floor, and Lilian, on the second, both passed away within months of Antonio. The SIB struggles to maintain the community with its limited funds, while Monaco and Greco conflict over competing visions of the future for a community of the past. The museum remains locked and unvisited.

APPENDIX A

Interviews

IN ITALY

Renato Berni – October 7 2011 [Milano]
Loredana and Claudio – December 1 2011 [Olgiate]
Patrizia and Anna Paoletti and Loredana – January 28 2012 [Pisa]
Patrizia and Anna Paoletti – February 10 2012 [Pisa]
Convegno di AIDE – March 3 2012 [Roma]
Presentazione del libro di Carolina Delburgo – March 6 2012 [Milano]
Alfredo Sinagaglia – March 13 2012 [Milano]
Roland Cohen – March 15 2012 [Milano]
Renato Berni – March 16 2012 [Milano]
Agatone family – March 18 2012 [Paderno Dugnano]
Alberto Ades - March 21 2012 [Milano]
Bruno Buccetti - March 23 2012 [Milano]
Renato Toscano - March 28 2012 [Bologna]
Carolina Delburgo - March 29 2012 [Bologna]
Guido Migliorini & Francesco Pizzi - April 3 2012 [Milano]
Egizia Agatone & Alessandro (suo marito) – April 4 2012 [Milano]
Mimi (moglie di Alfredo) & Alfredo Sinigaglia – April 5 2012 [Milano]
Sandro Manzoni – April 9-10 2012 [Ginevra (Switzerland)]
Giovanna Penino – April 16 2012 [Milano]
Ada Civiletti – April 18 2012 (Giuseppe de Gobbi il suo marito) [Cusano Milanino]
Nino Liciardello April 19-20 2012 [Pordenone]
Lydia Mieli Pressel Aprile 21 2012 [Pavia]
Deborah Cotich – April 23 2012 (la nipote di Giovanna Penino) [Bergamo]
Francesco Monaco – April 27 2012 [Roma]
AIDE assemblea a Roma – april 28 2012 [Roma]
Giulio Augerio – april 28 2012 [Roma]
Graziela Callery – May 9 2012 [Roma]
Giuseppe Longo, Jacqueline & Carlo Gerasimo – May 10 2012 [Ostia]
Giuseppe Longo e Loredana Farina – May 15 2012 [Ostia]
Giuseppe De Stefano, Michele Vitulli, e il dottore – May 17 2012 [Ostia]
Oscar Civiletti – May 23 2012 [Montesacro]
Anna Moscatelli – May 25 2012 [Ostia]
Michele Vitulli – May 30 2012 [Ostia]
Giuseppe Longo, Loredana Farina, and Michele Ardizzone – 1 June 2012 [Ostia]
Bruno Cristodoro (& Ivano, il figlio) – 3 June 2012 [Bracciano]
Amalia Romanelli – 4 June 2012 [Roma, Eur]
Leda Diodovich – 5 June 2012 [Roma, Eur]

Loredana Farina & Giuseppe Longo – 6 June 2012 [Ostia]
Gaetano Santoro – 7 June 2012 [Roma]
Silvio Calabria – 12 June 2012 [Roma]
Bruno d’Alba & Marcello Paolini – 27 June 2012 [Casal Palocco]
Francesco Monaco – 1 July 2012 [Parco Leonardo]
Gaetano Santoro – 5 July 2012 [Roma]
Alessandro Paraschevas – 8 July 2012 [Roma]
Fernando Salvatori – 10 September 2012 [Roma]
Adriana Piperno and Giuseppe Salerno (Giuseppe Longo) - 10 Ottobre 2012 [Roma]
Edmondo Massone – 20 October 2012 [Bel poggio Tennis Club, Roma]
Arnaldo Torrasi, Gaetano Santoro, Roberto Ruberti, & unknown – 25 October 2012 [Roma]
Federico Salvatori – 26 October 2012 [Roma, but from Milano]
Roberto Ruberti – 29 October 2012 [Roma]

IN EGYPT

Ladi Skakal (Cioni) – 9 November 2012 [Cairo/Heliopolis]
Edda Tedeschi – 13 November 2012 [Cairo/Zamalek]
Elide Dello Strologo (Sherif, Ladi, il maestro) – 13 November 2012 [Cairo/Helio]
Ladi Skakal (Cioni) – 13 November 2012 [Cairo, going through boxes]
Annie and Patrizia Bercovitch – 15 November 2012 [Cairo/Zamalek]
Luciano Petro Paraskevas (Patrick) – 23 November 2012 [Alexandria]
Marisa Abdelmessih (Cristafulli) & Sig.a Amadeo – 25 November 2012 [Alex.-Sprt.]
Maria Giovanna Nadali – 26 November 2012 [Alex-Casa di Riposo]
Carmelo Bottaro – 26 November 2012 [Alex-Casa di Riposo]
Mario Schragher (mother Graziella di Novi) – 9 December 2012 [Casa di Riposa]
Franco Monaco – 9 December 2012 [CR- Italians, class and neighborhoods]
Anita Russo – 10 December 2012 [Alex]
Mirella Morsi – 12 December 2012 [Alex]
Giovanna Vennucci – 16 December 2012 [Alex-Roushdy]
Osvaldo and Massimo Laterza – 20 December 2012 [Casa di Riposo]
Mirella Morsi – 8 January 2013 [Alex]
Liliana Lenzi and Maria Nadali – 16 January 2013 [Alex-Casa di Riposo]
Antonio Rollo – 24 January 2013 [Alex - Casa di Riposo]
Biagio Azzarelli – 9 February 2013 [Alex – negozio Manshieh]
Lanzi e Nadali - 13 February 2013 [Casa]
Osvaldo and Massimo Laterza - 20 February 2013 [Casa]
Osvaldo Laterza – 3 April 2013 [Casa]
Antonio De Ferrari – 7 April 2013 [Alex – Cleopatra]
Osvaldo Laterza and Yolanda – 13 April 2013 [Casa]
Osvaldo and Massimo Laterza - 19 April 2013 [Casa]
Gildio Sampieri - 20 April 2013 [Alex - v. farahda]
Alexandre Buccianti – 13 June 2013 [Cairo]
Astorino – 19 June 2013 [Cairo]

APPENDIX B

Archives and Sources

IN ITALY

Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS)

Ministero dell'Interno

- a) Gabinetto (1953-74)¹
- b) Dir. Gen. Demografia e razza, affari diversi (1938-1945)
- c) Dir. Gen. Pubblica Sicurezza

Ministero di Lavoro e Previdenza Sociale (MLPS)

- a) D.G. collocamento della manodopera
 - i) Div. VIII accordi di emigrazione verso paesi comunitari
 - ii) Div. Emigrazione verso paesi extracomunitari
- b) ufficio lavoro e della massima occupazione

Croce Rossa Italiana

- a) Ufficio Madrinato
- b) Servizio Affari Internazionali

Presidenza del consiglio dei Ministri (PCM)

- a) Ufficio del consigliere diplomatico

Casellario Politico Centrale

Segreteria Particolare del Duce

Ministero della Cultura Popolare

- a) Gabinetto
- b) Reports
- c) Propaganda

Real Casa – Viaggi (1931-1933)

Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAE)

Direzione Generale Affari Politici (AP)

- a) Egitto (1931-1956)
- b) Israel (1951)

Ambasciata al Cairo (1923-1940)

Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale (II)

Direzione Generale Affari Politici Ufficio III (1948-1961)

Direzione Generale Italiani all'estero Ufficio I (1924-1946)

Serie “Z” Contenzioso

Archivio Storico dell'unione delle comunità ebraiche italiane (UCEI)

Fondo Moisé Pontremoli

AUCII 1965-1968

Archivio della Società Dante Alighieri (SDA)

¹ All dates in parantheses are the dates of documents consulted, in cases where the archives are further divided by years.

Cairo [1896-1960]
Alessandria [1933-1952]
Archivio dello Stato Napoli (ASN)
Questure – Gabinetto
 a) disposizioni di massima
 b) seconda serie (1902-1971), massime
Centro di Emigrazione
 a) I versamento (prospetti di lavoratori espatriati e rimpatriati e relazione al ministero)
Prefettura di Napoli – Gabinetto III versamento
Archivio Storico di Comune di Livorno
Ente Comunale di Assistenza
Archivio dei Luoghi Pii Elemosinieri (Azienda di Servizi alla Persona “Golgi-Redaelli”), Milano (ALPE)
 archivio assistenziale, atti
 archivio assistenziale, profughi egitto
Archivio dello Stato Brindisi
Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia “Ferruccio Parri” (INSMLI) – fondo “Joe Battino” and fondo Guido Valabrega
Archivio Sonoro “Franco Coggiola” del Circolo Gianni Bosio, Roma, Fondo Pantera 039, int. Alessandro Portelli
Fondazione Antonio Gramsci
 Fronte Unito (1943-1945)

IN EGYPT

Archivio/Registri del Consolato Generale d’Italia in Alessandria d’Egitto (ACGA)
Archivio/Registri del Cancelleria Consolare/Ambasciata d’Italia al Cairo (CCAC)
Biblioteca/Archivio di Santa Caterina in Alessandria d’Egitto
Archives of the Società italiana di Beneficenza
Centre d’Études Alexandrines (CEA)
 Il Giornale d’Oriente
 Cronaca
 Oriente
Centro Archeologico Italiano al Cairo, Champollion (CAI)
 Il Giornale d’Oriente
 L’imparziale
Francis Amin Collections
Ladi Skakal Personal/Family Documents

IN SWITZERLAND

Swiss Federal Archives (SFA)

IN ENGLAND

British National Archives (BNA)
 Foreign Office (FO)
 War Office (WO)

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