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Pontremoli's cry: Personhood, scale, and history in the Eastern Mediterranean*

Joseph John Viscomi

ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between personhood and participation in wider political worlds that encompass (and dismantle) national, transnational and regional scales. It does so through a microhistorical study of Moise Pontremoli, an Italian Sephardic Jew displaced from Izmir to Alexandria and finally to Rome between the 1920s and the 1960s. After having returned to Egypt from the First World War as a 'wounded Italian veteran', Pontremoli purchased a plot of desert land from local Bedouin. This land became home to his experimental farm. He wrote expressively on his greening of the desert landscape during the interwar years, until he was cut off from it by the Second World War. Between 1952 and 1956 local authorities destroyed his crops and sequestered his land. He petitioned the Egyptian Sequester and received minor compensation; then, in a much longer and unanswered battle, he pursued Italian diplomatic authorities for what he saw as their abandon in favour of state interests and a diplomacy of political 'friendship' with Egypt's emergent nationalist regime. He wrote obsessively to journalists, politicians, lawyers, human rights activists, and to anyone who might listen to his case. With great frustration, Pontremoli repatriated in 1963 and settled in Rome to continue his campaign. His letters gained attention only in the turbulent years of late-1960s Italy, just before his death in 1968. This article argues that Pontremoli's articulation of personhood through his wounded body and lost land knotted histories of migration, empire, war, and decolonization into one tale of twentieth-century Mediterranean discontent.

KEYWORDS

Mediterranean; personhood; microhistory; historical anthropology; scale

On 25 September 1969, Moise Pontremoli went in for surgery in Rome. The 73-year-old, born in Izmir, displaced to Alexandria and finally to Rome, quickly wrote a final testament in case the procedure did not end well. He noted that his only wealth was a 'compensation' (*indennizzo*) from the roughly 900 *feddans* (400 hectares) of garden, agricultural land, a small house, and large agricultural installations in Egypt's northwestern desert, which 'the Egyptian authorities pillaged [from me] in an act of racial exploitation and genocide against Jewish Italian citizens in violation of international conventions, accords, and laws'. The roughly 816,000 EGP¹ he anticipated, however, came from indictments he had raised

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against both Egyptian and Italian governments, which had not yet – and never would – come to fruition. The large sum was to be split five ways between the children and widows of his deceased siblings in London, Israel, and Brazil.² By the mid 1960s, the extended Pontremoli families had all departed from Egypt. Moise's final testament was as indeterminate as his life. Between his birth in 1896, in Izmir, his 54 years of residence in Egypt, and his death in Rome, he saw himself as a pioneer, a wounded patriot, and a persecuted Jew—none excluding the others. In his final, notarized testament, he described himself, one last time, as a 'refugee from Egypt' (*un profugo d'Egitto*) employing legal discourse which aimed to recognize the conditions of departure of over 40,000 Italian residents from Egypt after the Second World War (*Image 1*).

Anthropology has much to gain by attending to historical 'knots' (Green 2014) that constitute personhood, particularly in the transimperial and transnational worlds of the twentieth-century Mediterranean. In this article, I argue that the life and death of Moise Pontremoli demonstrate how historical knots that encompass (and sometimes attempt to dismantle) regional geopolitics constitute personhood. It is this scalar movement from micro to macro and back again, I contend, that lends 'palpability' to the Eastern Mediterranean worlds of which Pontremoli was a part (Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot, and Silverstein, this volume). This article therefore oscillates between different scales, all of which can be brought back to Pontremoli's socio-historical encounters. The materials I use to recount his life and death together unravel scales of history that are folded into one individual; it is precisely Pontremoli's antagonistic engagement with his surroundings that reveals the complexity of these changing worlds.³ Many of the materials guiding this article come from one archive, a collection of documents given to the *Unione Comunità Ebraiche Italiane* (Union of Italian Jewish Communities) in Rome by the daughter of



Image 1. Press Card with Photo of Moise Pontremoli.

Pontremoli's deceased lawyer. The stories culled from these documents – from carefully scripted letters, notes, and reminders to hastily scribbled ideas for future projects – work against statically synchronic or deterministically diachronic articulations of historical belonging. They counter a narrative of Pontremoli as a subject positioned in history and suggest that his person can be read, instead, as a vehicle for historical time. Here, I contend that the threading together and knotting of these stories illuminates the limits of context and description and demonstrates how personhood can help us rethink socio-historical experience as layered and multiple processes.

Pontremoli anchored his personhood both to his body, wounded in the First World War, and to the desert landscape of el-Gharbaniyat, Egypt. Notwithstanding his status as a wounded veteran (*mutilato di guerra*), he struggled to transform arid land into what he called his 'paradise' and 'the forest of the desert'. He fastidiously narrated his sense of personhood through suffering, as though he sought affirmation of where and how he was located within political constellations. Indeed, his personhood was at stake as these constellations engendered diverse legal consequences. This recalls what Jane Collier, Bill Maurer, and Liliana Suárez-Navaz (1996, 5, 10) denote as the product of 'bourgeois law', which constitutes its subjects as both abstract individuals 'equal to and indistinguishable from other abstract individuals' and yet as 'the bearer of a unique and natural self'. As a result of this bifurcation, the authors argue, bourgeois law 'compels those who come before it to have "potentialities" they want the freedom to express'. I read these 'potentialities' as claims about the future measured by the structural configuration of experienced and valued pasts. Pontremoli, who emerged from a waning Mediterranean world of extra-territorial privilege, often based claims about his body and the land on past configurations of national and regional belonging and, frequently with great discord, he attached them to changing political presents.⁴

This dynamic relation of synchrony and diachrony illustrates how movement through historical time contorts personhood, and vice versa. In Marcel Mauss's classic inquiry into the development of the notion of the self from a masked performance to 'a fundamental form of *thought and action* [emphasis mine]', Mauss draws attention to the concrete paths by which the self moves through the social worlds it inhabits (Mauss 1985, 22). Along this grain, Pontremoli's personhood facilitated his navigation of past, present, and future. In other words, it was not an outcome of movement through temporally situated contexts. As he sought to intervene in shifting geo-political worlds, I suggest, we can apprehend how Pontremoli's claims – specifically those entangled with his wounded body and the desert landscape of el-Gharbaniyat – allude to indeterminate historical worlds of socio-political belonging. Pontremoli saw his life, until its final moment, as one of (unfulfilled) potentiality, or 'the possibility of becoming', always mediated through body and desert.⁵ The stories that shaped this potential point in myriad directions. Their details are properties of the social worlds of the characters involved, threads woven into and through the character of Pontremoli. Here, I refer to notions of fractal and partial personhood described in the work of Roy Wagner (1991) and Marilyn Strathern (1991). As such, one story touches upon and tangles with others to give shape to personhood. At these points of contact, we can understand the commensurability of temporal scales and, moving between them, play what Jacques Revel has called 'games of scale'.⁶ Pushing this argument further, I contend that the vast entanglements recounted in this essay are inconspicuously present on a street that leads away from the now famous Tahrir Square in



Image 2. Pontremoli store in Cairo, today (photo credit: Aya Sabry).

Downtown Cairo. There, a furniture store once owned by Moise Pontremoli's cousin bears the appellation 'Pontrimoli [sic]' on its signage (the store was sequestered in 1956 and nationalized in 1961) (Shawky 2013). Inside, the portrait of his cousin who carries the name of the Pontremoli family patriarch still adorns the wall. (Images 2 and 3).

As this article will show, Pontremoli's continual articulation of his person in relation to political and legal regimes of the Mediterranean moves among familial, national, and regional scales of socio-historical processes. It is a 'social drama' (Turner 1980, 151). Placing himself in his body, in the desert landscape, and into the pages of his final testament, Pontremoli draws attention to the limits of law and the perceived failure of his contemporaries to compensate him for what he suffered as a *historical* subject. Indeed, he often claimed that his contemporaries were complicit in the machinations, and failures, of history. His interpretations of these failures is what permits us to bear witness to the movement of historical time; it is what renders visible the entangled processes that compound past and present, and projects them into the future (Caruth 2002, 436). Embracing this game of scales, this article will develop by first describing the worlds in which Pontremoli's story begins. It will then look at how his encounter with, and isolation from, the desert landscape shaped his experiences. The following sections will examine how Pontremoli sought to reconcile these pasts with the changing constellations of the postwar Mediterranean, ultimately departing from Egypt but continuing his struggle until his final days in Rome.

Origins

Moise Pontremoli, born in 1896, was the son of Celebi, born in 1858, himself the grandson of the patriarch of the family, Raffaele, of whom few traces remain. At least during the late-nineteenth century, the extended Pontremoli family resided in a small town outside Izmir. The earliest record of the family is a 'declaration [made by] a consular agent from Manisa



Image 3. Portrait of Moise Pontremoli's cousin.

(Magnesia)' in 1871.⁷ What is known from the declaration is that the consular agent attested the family's claim to Italian nationality and that the head of the family, Raffaele, was provided with Italian passports. This was common practice at the time; and the story of the 'declaration' itself is a historical knot of both nationalist and imperialist origin.

By the nineteenth century, a series of bilateral treaties known as the capitulations connected Ottoman rulers to European powers (from *capitula* in Latin, they were also known in Arabic as *al-imtiyāzāt* and in Turkish as *ahdname*). Some of the earliest forms of these treaties date to the sixteenth century when, under such treaties, Ottoman authorities permitted merchants (initially from Genoa, Venice, and Marseilles) to travel and trade under the jurisdiction of their respective consular authorities in Ottoman territories. Merchants were thus exempted from local courts. Both sides held that, by permitting greater mobility, wealth would flow into their imperial domains. The treaties increased in complexity through the centuries, but never completely disappeared (Barakat 1950; Brinton 1968, 3).⁸ In 1534, French subjects were given commercial and residential rights under French jurisdiction in Ottoman territories (Angell 1901, 256). With the further consolidation of European nation-states into the nineteenth century, the 1534 treaty became the prototype for later capitulations between Western powers and the Sublime Porte, granting 'extraterritorial' privileges to European subjects. Initially intended to protect European consuls and

merchants, the treaties' protective powers spread to larger 'national' communities residing in Ottoman territories under the authority of their consuls.

After Italy's unification in 1861, the capitulations constituted one of the 'citizenship tools' used in Italian foreign policy between 1870 and 1914, which aimed at the cultural and commercial penetration of Mediterranean port cities. The Italian state practiced 'small naturalization' (*la piccola naturalizzazione*) by granting protected status to many Sephardic Jewish subjects – such as the Pontremolis – who had moved to the region during and after the time of the maritime republics. By creating 'protected groups' (*protetti*) whose commercial activities and mobility was secured by Italian authorities, the Italian state hoped to gain access to broad merchant networks that transcended national and imperial boundaries (Donati 2013, 134–136). The idea was that these protections would cultivate national enclaves in the corners of a vast territory largely held by Italy's imperial rivals.

When declaring one's status as protected, a claim to Italian origin – even a specious one – was required. Pontremoli's legal residence was registered as Torino. He and other members of his extended family would later use this genealogical origin as evidence of their Italian-ness (*italianità*) and as a feature distinguishing their own lineage from other Italian *protetti* holding legal residence in Livorno (and even from another branch of the Pontremoli family residing in Egypt). Many Italian *protetti* had been automatically registered as originally from Livorno, a city that was home to historically significant Sephardic and Italian Jewish communities (Trivellato 2009). This was often the case whether or not evidence could be provided to support the claim that distant relations connected the families to the city – this thread will weave back into the story during the 1950s.⁹

With the outbreak of the Italo-Turkish war in 1911, many *protetti* fled Izmir and Istanbul to safer harbours in Alexandria, where they contributed abundantly to Italian cultural institutions, charity organizations, and economic centres. The relative success of this 'citizenship tool' for the Italian state is revealed in the many donations provided by *protetti* to the construction and development of Italian national institutions in Egypt. These included the Italian hospital in Alexandria, the Dante Alighieri Society, and several state-run primary and secondary schools. The importance of their large and regular donations to locally-based charity organizations, such as the Società italiana di beneficenza (Italian charity association, established in 1850), supporting unemployed and impoverished Italian emigrants, cannot be underestimated, as these organizations sustained much of the working-class Italian population in Egypt. *Protetti* were also widely active in the networks of the Italian Chambers of Commerce in Alexandria and Cairo and in Italian Freemasonry in Egypt.¹⁰

The Pontremoli family was registered in the Italian national records in Alexandria in 1912, an important step in guaranteeing their continued protection under the capitulations.¹¹ In Egypt, the family practiced the same vocations it had in Izmir – trading in carpets and tapestries, and the manufacture of luxury furniture. In most Mediterranean territories the capitulations had been abolished (within the Turkish context, they were cancelled with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, in Tunisia much earlier with the formation of the French Protectorate in 1881, and in Libya they were cancelled by the Italian colonial administration in 1912). However, in part due to limited sovereignty from the Porte since Mehmet Ali's reorganization of the Egyptian state in the 1830s, and in part due to the struggles between Egyptian nationalists and British authorities, the capitulations continued to exist, creating a complex web of antiquated privileges, exceptions, and jurisdictional protections for foreign subjects residing in Egyptian territory (Fahmy 2013).

The existence of the capitulations, though, also created conditions of possibility for the flowering of Italian national-imperialism. And, when Italy entered the First World War in 1915, along with some 5,000 military-age men of the roughly 40,000 Italians resident in Egypt at the time, the 18-year-old Moise Pontremoli left as a combatant for Italy.¹² Historiographical traditions in the 1930s remember the First World War as a constitutive moment in the history of Italian residents in Egypt. It was the first event during which Italian residents, despite their range of national, religious, and ethnic origins, participated collectively in a *national* cause that required them to leave Egypt. For many scholars, participation in the First World War signified the culmination of nationalist propaganda abroad advanced by Francesco Crispi, Enrico Corradini, and others, which aimed to instil a shared sense of *italianità* and reverence for the homeland (Patria) among Italian emigrants. This propaganda, which sought to unify a national community out of diverse waves of immigration, had informed the organization of Italian state schools in Egypt and the Dante Alighieri Society (active in Egypt since 1896, just seven years after its founding in Rome), and shaped the work of the Salesian missionary schools (Turiano and Viscomi 2018).

Indeed, the First World War left a lasting mark on Pontremoli. This extended history of mobility and displacement folded into the nationalist cause of the First World War, and again into Pontremoli's physical body. Somewhere on Italy's borders, he lost the toes of his right foot, marrying national sacrifice to his own body.¹³ In 1922, the same year Mussolini marched on Rome and Egypt was unilaterally declared an independent state by the British government, Pontremoli co-founded the Alexandrian section of the Association of Wounded Veterans (Associazione di Mutilati di Guerra), which provided monthly pensions to the 43 Italians from Egypt who were wounded during the war.¹⁴ At its very inception, the group was accused of threatening to draw funds away from other Italian charitable associations. They distributed around 100 copies of a libel against the Italian consul, entitled 'il Grido dei Mutilati' (the cry of the wounded), which denounced the consul for attempting to monopolize the Italian community through control over propaganda and resources. Pontremoli was purported to have organized the campaign, already known by authorities as an instigator and condescendingly referred to by the consul as 'the famous nutcase' (*il noto pazzoide*).¹⁵ (Image 4). After a brief investigation, the consul determined that only one of the 18 signees was in financial difficulty and thus the state's resources could be better spent elsewhere. This entanglement in Pontremoli's story threaded together histories of competing empires and nascent nationalist movements, and his body became a channel which rendered visible historical processes of displacement in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was a moment of frenzied political activity, Egypt had just been declared sovereign by the British government and the recently consolidated National Fascist Party (Partito nazionale fascista) in Rome was looking to solidify its relations with the Egyptian Monarchy: it spent few resources on causes or individuals that would not directly serve to reposition the Italian state as a regional power.

The forest in the desert

In 1923, Moise travelled to the desert of el-Gharbaniyat, 60 km west of Alexandria. At the time, only semi-nomadic Bedouin families populated the desert landscape just south of Lake Mariout. Perhaps here Pontremoli began to formulate a new sense of his personhood, his body marred by the war and his cause marginalized by the very state for which he



Image 4. Pontremoli’s libel against the Italian consul. ASDMAE, AC 1923 B133 fasc. ‘Associazione Mutilati di Alessandria d’Egitto’.

considered himself a combatant. Perhaps he anticipated that the transformation of the desert would reshape his relation to the socio-historical boundaries of the Mediterranean in worlds in which he lived. With financial support from his extended family, Pontremoli bought pieces of land in subsequent years from the West Delta Farming and Trading Company – an English firm that had been commissioned by the last Khedive, Abbas Hilmi Pasha, to convert desert into agricultural land, but that had failed to do so. (Image 5)

He sold off most of the land by 1933 and lived on its profits. Pontremoli began to develop a small piece of the remaining land for himself. He disappeared into the desert during the interwar period. Later, in his many letters, Pontremoli would only denote the number of years spent learning, labouring, and experimenting on the land, but he would never provide details about how he acquired deep knowledge of desert agriculture.¹⁶ His plot of land was roughly 340 by 510 m.¹⁷ First, he developed an irrigation system, building a large cistern and network of tubes to gather, store, and distribute rainwater. He purchased a defunct German airplane and converted it into a windmill to irrigate the land. Then, he built a small villa, and an elegantly painted pool and pool-house, decorated with a fountain shaped as a lion’s head. (Image 6) Pontremoli’s most prized accomplishment was what he called the ‘forest of the desert’. There, he grew hundreds of trees: peaches, plums, olives, cypress, casuarina, tamarisk, and orange. He was proudest of his peach crop. The fruit itself seemed to represent Pontremoli’s conquering of the desert. He gave away baskets of fruit from his land as gifts. Indeed, the British consul in 1938 wrote to thank Pontremoli for the sampling of his peaches, ‘His excellency [the British Consul] finds the peaches delicious and compliments you on being able to grow them in the Western Desert’.¹⁸



Image 5. Pontremoli's photographs of the land from 1923. UCEI, fondo Moise Pontremoli.

At el-Gharbaniyat, Pontremoli entertained family and friends and spoke openly of politics, the war, and the desert.¹⁹ (Image 7) But this experience would come to an abrupt end. Anticipating military reinforcement of the region in the case of an Italian invasion from the west, in 1939 Anglo-Egyptian authorities conducted a survey of Egypt's northwestern desert. Pontremoli's installations were significant enough to occupy space on their survey. 'Villa Morice' stands beside Villa Tortillia (owned by a French Jewish family that would later host Charles De Gaulle during the Second World War).²⁰ Only a gypsum factory and several small lodges mark the landscape. Over the course of the 1930s, Pontremoli developed the land into his own paradise. Just before his death, far removed from the desert landscape, he would refer to the efforts he invested in this 'paradise' as symbolic of his enterprise '... as a pioneer in the arid and desolate lands of the desert, which I transformed into luxurious gardens'. These efforts, he wrote, were examples of his 'honorable' servitude to 'the Patria' (Italy) in search of 'peace abroad'.²¹ Here, this articulation of his efforts brought the scale of the nation-empire (and the imperial rivalries in which it was embedded on the cusp of the Second World War) to the micro-encounters between Pontremoli, his land, and the fleeting sociality this landscape fostered. His struggle to bring 'affluence and



Image 6. Pontremoli posing with the lion fountain. UCEI, fondo Moise Pontremoli.

progress' (*benessere e progresso*) to the Egyptian desert entangled his own sense of personhood to a vast landscape of faltering imperial worlds.

War

Italy's entry into the Second World War would place Pontremoli's affiliations at the centre of his struggle. The methodological challenge here, however, is to avoid simply locating Pontremoli within national-imperial categories at play, and rather to see how pivotal this historical conjuncture becomes for his articulation of changing Mediterranean constellations. Pontremoli's invocation of belonging is not an idealized cosmopolitanism that puts value in synchronic cultural categories, but rather one that points to the agonistic geopolitics of the interwar (and late postwar) Mediterranean. Events in the 1930s nurtured increasing hostility between Italian residents and British authorities in an Egypt that, although declared independent in 1922, lingered under British military occupation. The Fascist regime in Rome funded several Egyptian nationalist movements, sponsored foreign-language and Arabic newspapers, and brought Italian schools, cultural centres, and mutual aid and charity societies (which sustained much of the community) under the authority of its offices in Egypt. A contemporary British observer, despite her hostility towards the Italian regime, noted the pervasiveness of Fascism among Italians in Egypt, and the regime's largely successful efforts to create a new generation, 'radiating not only national loyalty but self-respect' (Monroe 1938, 196–197).²² Italian residents were immersed in Fascist propaganda to such an extent that British authorities in Egypt did not distinguish between an Italian in civilian clothing and one in a 'black shirt' (Williams 2006, 127). Indeed, it would not be until 1943 that an organized antifascist movement emerged from within the community of Italian residents, even then led by a small



Image 7. A page from Pontremoli's albums showing the forest of the desert. UCEI, fondo Moise Pontremoli.

group of individuals who were quickly ostracized from the community after the Second World War due to their presumed connections to communism.²³

In the years preceding the Ethiopia Campaign, and alongside Mussolini's aggressive discourses on the Italian Mediterranean empire, growing fears of an attack on Egyptian soil influenced the political environment in Egypt. Many Egyptian nationalists perceived the possibility of an Italian invasion. In part due to this fear, the Wafd, the largest nationalist party in Egypt, signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Alliance in 1936, which conceded military authority to Britain in the case of war. Importantly, it also set a timeline for the final abolition of the capitulations definitively signaling the final unravelling of the extraterritorial jurisdiction that had permitted non-Egyptian communities to live as 'national' enclaves.²⁴

In the eyes of British authorities, the community of over 55,000 Italian residents represented a fifth-column community. When Mussolini announced Italy's entry into the

war on 10 June 1940, Anglo-Egyptian authorities froze Italian assets, repatriated diplomats, occupied Italian cultural institutions, and began arresting Italian males aged 18 to 55. Arrested Italians were temporarily held in the occupied Italian schools and in Egyptian prisons, and then sent to Fayed, a civilian internment camp in the eastern desert, where many would remain until 1945. Some 5,000 males would be eventually arrested. Initially sent to the same 'concentration camp' (*campo di concentramento*) as others, Pontremoli pleaded to be released on account of his status as a wounded veteran and was eventually placed on house arrest. Given the option to sign a declaration against Italy, however, which would have granted him freedom from the measures against Italian residents, he refused. In an especially revealing letter, Pontremoli insisted that because neither Italy nor Egypt had declared war against the other the arrest and internment of Italians was in violation of international law, and '*all Italians should be released*'. He wrote, '... while Italy maintains friendly and normal relations with Egypt ... an Italian citizen, wounded from the war ... could suffer such injustices? NO! This is immoral and contrary to international rights and should stop!'²⁵ The terms of the 1936 Treaty superseded in the case of war, and Egypt fell under British military control. This detail escaped Pontremoli and his understandings of the laws that governed national subjects in Egypt; he attributed sole responsibility to the Egyptian government for having ruined him both in 'work and health'. Pontremoli was forbidden from travelling to el-Gharbaniyat and, around 1942, the area became home to a large relief centre for allied troops during the battle of el-Alamein (Rock 1956). He would not return to his 'forest of the desert' until 1945.²⁶ In his engagement with an abstracted law, Pontremoli's body and land coupled the shifting national and imperial conflicts of mid-twentieth century and the socio-political worlds of the colonial Mediterranean.

Departures

When Pontremoli returned to his 'desert paradise' after the war, he did so in an Egypt accelerating towards national sovereignty. At this juncture, Pontremoli does not appear as a subject of history, but rather as an historical subject: to make a case for his personhood he draws upon a repertoire of processes that cut across time and which, in his engagement with these processes, contemporaneously render him a channel for historical time. For many Italian residents in Egypt, the postwar was also characterized by great uncertainty due to the disjuncture between the cultural and political propaganda that had emphasized the community's relevance to the national-imperial project in the interwar Mediterranean and the collapse of the Fascist regime during and after the war. The sequester on Italian accounts was not officially lifted until 1948 and the few resources of the community, already impoverished and demoralized from the internment, quickly dwindled. Opportunities for work declined in part due to the Company Law of 1947, which had set quotas on non-Egyptian hiring and required foreign-run companies to engage Egyptian partners and employ Egyptian workers.²⁷ The transition period away from the capitulations expired in 1949, entailing the complete integration of Italians (and other non-Egyptian subjects) into the Egyptian legal system. Unlike other postwar colonial situations, most of the foreign subjects in Egypt who had benefitted from the colonial hierarchy had been protected under their own consular authorities. The breakdown of these structures portended the emergence of new alliances and

new regimes of belonging, but the terms on which they would be settled were undetermined.

Several months after the Cairo Fire on 26 January 1952 – when Pontremoli’s cousin’s furniture store that carries the family name was among the many stores burned and looted (Reynolds 2012) – the faltering monarchy headed by King Faruk was toppled by a group of military officers in the July 1952 coup d’état. The coup hastened processes of nationalization long underway, but its effects also manifested in encounters between local actors. Pontremoli’s ‘desert paradise’ attracted the attention of the local sheriff. Among the priorities of the military regime was a massive reform in land-ownership. When the Agrarian Reform Law 178 declared that no single entity could possess more than 200 feddans, authorities in el-Gharbaniyat seized Pontremoli’s lands, justifying themselves both with the legal restrictions of the Agrarian Reform itself and with additional laws that had been created to limit privileges of foreign residents.²⁸ These actions set physical boundaries on Pontremoli’s experience of his body’s placement within, and exclusion from, the desert landscape. As in other instances, Pontremoli was not slow to move. He brought his case to the administrative board of the Agrarian Reform, which determined that his land did not, in fact, qualify as agricultural land and he was compensated and renewed access to it. In el-Gharbaniyat, however, the campaign against him continued.

The world transformed quickly around Pontremoli. Foreigners began to depart en masse from Egypt. Attempting to gain control over its borders, the Egyptian government regulated the number of foreigners in Egypt by issuing new residency policies. In this increasingly bureaucratic and politicized environment, passport renewal requests were carefully scrutinized by diplomatic authorities.²⁹ At this juncture, the citizenship status of many *protetti* came under question, including that of the Pontremolis. For the Italian government, the destruction of the Italian consular archives in Izmir in 1922 left the status of many *protetti* families ambiguous. Few traces of the documents attesting to their nationality had survived. Provisional nationality was granted to some, and a passport released with the caveat that only Italian authorities in Egypt could renew it. Several prerequisites should be met: ‘that the subject fluently speaks our language, demonstrated genuine sentiments of *italianità*, and could be assimilated to the national [metropolitan] environment.’³⁰ Pamela Ballinger (2007) has called the Italian state’s postwar use of these ‘citizenship practices’ to construct socio-political belonging ‘linguistic nationalism’. Many of the *protetti* who had obtained the so-called ‘small nationality’ were seen as valuable assets in a struggling postwar economy, thus reviving Italian citizenship policies from the liberal period (Donati 2013, 134–136). By 1954, procedures were underway to grant full nationality to 34 families of *protetti* from Alexandria.³¹ Most would emigrate to Brazil. Calling into question this genealogy of citizenship in such a moment illustrates the flexibility with which political regimes defined the boundaries of national belonging. While the postwar government distinguished itself from a past to which many Italian residents in Egypt saw themselves as integral, it also ruptured continuities in experience that had connected northern, southern, and eastern shores of the Mediterranean.

That same year, questions regarding the ‘national’ culture of Italian residents in Egypt – Catholics and Jews alike – had caused Italian diplomats to discourage repatriation.³² The problem of unemployment in metropolitan Italy was only exacerbated by fear of political instability brought by the influx of Italians from former colonial territories (Ballinger 2020; Salvatici 2014), a question that extended across the postwar decades in Europe (Baikhan

2012; Buettner 2016). Italian diplomats argued that Italian residents, many having lived in Egypt for several generations, lacked the potential to integrate into metropolitan economic and social life. For example, the consul of Alexandria wrote, 'these *connazionali* (compatriots), once repatriated, would find themselves feeling strangers in the country of which they hold the nationality, and even regret that which they left [behind], notwithstanding the restrictions and humiliations they were forced to experience'. Indeed, at this point, the Italian government reduced the number of repatriates it admitted, suggesting that it was easier on the national budget to support 'all the impoverished Italians in Egypt' than to repatriate them. But the consul in Alexandria acknowledged that lack of action could be 'dangerous to the morale of our *connazionali*, who are naturally predisposed to [recall] the ... exceptional well-being and prosperity under the Capitulations', referring contemporaneously to the recently abolished legal regime and also to the role played by Fascist institutions in Egypt.³³ The vast majority of Italians in Egypt remained sympathetic to political fascism and the monarchy (the Italian king, who left Italy in 1946, relocated to Alexandria where he died one year later). Italian politicians feared that an influx of Italians from Egypt would sway political influence in favour of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement, an incarnation of the dissolved National Fascist Party). Their solution was to internationalize departure and they thus supported various initiatives to propagate information about possible destinations for departees from Egypt.

When discussions on emigration filled the pages of *Cronaca*, the only Italian-language newspaper in Egypt (subsidized by the Italian state), Pontremoli insisted on the right to remain in Egypt. As the geopolitical configuration of the Eastern Mediterranean changed and the campaign to repossess his land continued, he presented himself as a 'patriot', wounded in the 'nationalist' war that built Italy, and therefore entitled to 'diagnose' the challenges and anticipate the future of Italians in Egypt. On 6 February 1953, he sent a letter to *Cronaca's* editor, Athos Catraro including a threat that should Catraro not publish his appeal, Pontremoli would bring it to French and Arabic papers, 'which would only aggravate the [situation]' because it would open questions internal to the Italian community to wider communities in Egypt. Here, he continued to draw upon the tensions of competing imperial powers amidst Egypt's emerging nationalist regime. Italian diplomats, with whom Catraro was regularly in touch, sought to avoid any controversy that could assimilate Italian residents to the residents of other powers, especially to British and French citizens, and therefore compromise emergent political ties between Italy and the military officers founded on a discourse of neutrality. In what seemed a repeat of his 1923 libel, Pontremoli claimed that Italian diplomats acting in Egypt sought to monopolize the Italian community. They denied Italian residents their rights, he argued, which included subsidized living. He noted that while Catraro received payments from the government for his newspaper, many others 'made sacrifices for the dear Patria, and [did so] in silence'. He likened his case to that of 'artisans, [and] poor [Italian] workers' who made up the majority of Italians in Egypt.³⁴ Embodying the extraterritorial worlds of the capitulations, Pontremoli saw Italian residents in Egypt as actors of and for – and inevitably connected to – the Italian state.

Pontremoli's articulation of the past was not characterized by backwards-facing nostalgia; he envisioned, instead, a future that adjusted relations between past and present. In this way, his employment of categories that otherwise seem straightforward demonstrates that alliances and affinities were very much at play in this postwar constellation.

Pontremoli accused Catraro of colluding with the Egyptian government, operating under the same premises with which he had worked during fascist rule (when Catraro was editor of the Italian newspaper, *Il Giornale d'Oriente*, that functioned as the mouthpiece of the National Fascist Party in Egypt), and ignoring the rights conferred to Italian citizens under the new constitution. While Egypt's 'poor Italians' were forced 'to sell their properties, belongings, and [to] depart', Pontremoli sought to act as a 'national' subject and to affirm his own belonging in a socio-political context that he viewed as antiquated and uncompromisingly structured on the relationships established during the fascist period. At the same time, however, he relied on an idea of extraterritoriality that no longer carried legal weight. In response to Pontremoli, Catraro claimed that the paper's intention was to 'safeguard the harmony and prestige of our compatriots [in Egypt]' and that he could only publish the sections of Pontremoli's complaint that would not stir controversy.

Two years later, after the Egyptian government again modified residency laws, Pontremoli responded angrily to a statement published by Italian diplomats in *Cronaca*. The statement announced that, contrary to circulating rumours, the consulate would not provide assistance for new residency renewal fees required by Egyptian authorities. Aware that a fund of 150,000 EGP was available from the sale of the Italian state schools in the postwar settlement between Italy and Egypt, Pontremoli asserted that this money could be used to stabilize the precarious status of Italian residents in Egypt.³⁵ He warned that should the Italian government not resolve the question of residency, 'the damage would weigh, with enormous consequences, on the expenses of repatriation and the responsibility of [finding] new housing in a country [Italy] already overpopulated'.³⁶ Pontremoli alluded to the possibility of a massive departure, and his anticipation figured as a warning. To Italian diplomats, on the other hand, a future in Egypt was impossible without reverting to the abolished capitular privileges.³⁷ Long before any announcement was made, the Italian ambassador had decided against investing in a new Italian school and, signaling an emerging Mediterranean partnership, directed a majority of the funds towards the development of a site for 'cultural gatherings' between Italian and Egyptian businessmen intended as a bridge to transnational cooperation.

The future of Italians in Egypt was increasingly limited by conditions of impossibility that in turn made figures like Pontremoli seem increasingly anachronistic. Throughout the early 1950s, Pontremoli and other land-owners in el-Gharbaniyat faced continual intimidation by local authorities. He claimed that Italian state interests in Egypt 'suffocated' his case, that diplomats ignored his complaints because they were busy concluding business deals, such as those between Enrico Mattei (the director of the Italian petroleum company, ENI) and Nasser's regime. Several years later he would angrily recall, 'in 1956, to ensure Egyptian oil concessions, ENI imposed on the Italian government a philo-Nasser politics, to which [the government] acquiesced ... Italian diplomatic authorities in Egypt, MORE THAN ITALIAN POLITICS, ENACTED THE POLITICS OF ENI' [emphasis his].³⁸ In a memorandum written to himself which would be incorporated in his many future letters, Pontremoli argued that the methods employed by the Italian diplomats were in contrast to 'constitutional principles ... [and] they are excluding me, unjustifiably, from my inalienable right[s] to justice and protection by my Patria ...'³⁹ In a letter to the Italian ambassador he questioned, 'while Italy maintains peaceful and normalized relations with Egypt, [how could] a wounded [veteran and] Italian citizen (cittadino) possibly suffer so many

injustices?’ His letters often went unanswered or received a standardized response informing him that his case was being looked into (in at least one instance, diplomats explicitly noted that Pontremoli had not in fact suffered any legal infraction and therefore his case did not merit further consideration).

The events of the Suez War in 1956 would drastically transform on-the-ground realities for Pontremoli, tightening the knot of geopolitical configurations around his articulation of placement in the world. Using the decrees emanated against English and French citizens, local authorities falsified Pontremoli’s nationality as French and repossessed his land. It was vandalized by a group of Bedouin he claimed were supported by the sheriff that had attempted to dispossess him in 1952. The forest was burnt to the ground, the villa looted, and the lion-headed statue in the pool smashed to pieces. It was a paradise no more. Years of work and struggle against the desert landscape were reduced to ruin. (Image 8) He appealed again to Italian authorities, but to no avail. Indeed, his name and situation do not figure in any official documents while there is ample record of the roughly 40



Image 8. Pontremoli documents the damage in 1956. UCEI, fondo Moise Pontremoli.

Italian Jews who were arrested and others who had property and accounts sequestered following the attack on Sinai. Italian diplomats ensured the release of those arrested, accused of threatening state security, on the condition that they leave Egypt within a short period.

Pontremoli was renewed access to his land in 1957, but the destruction remained. Unfulfilled by the lack of action by Italian authorities, he wrote directly to the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs. They responded that the issue should be brought to the attention of authorities in el-Gharbaniyat. He then sent a letter to the Egyptian Minister of Interior describing his impression that Italian authorities, having intervened, probably overlooked the gravity of his case. He wrote, 'my life is in danger!' and maintained that he suffered 14 attempts on his life since the autumn of 1956.⁴⁰ When he hired an Egyptian defense lawyer to bring his case against local authorities in the Military Courts in Markaz el-Hammam (jurisdiction of el-Gharbaniyat), his lawyer, maligned for helping a Jewish foreigner and 'turning away from Egyptians', was pressured to dismiss the case. Both the lawyer and Pontremoli were fined 50 EGP.⁴¹ The Eastern Mediterranean had transformed; as the present no longer resonated with Pontremoli's experience he was constrained to rely on the increasingly distant past to articulate a future that became ever more elusive. At this point, his writing mutated dramatically.

Out of the desert

Pontremoli continued to write reports and letters, restating his case and reassessing the value of his losses. When Egyptian authorities ceded to his many claims in 1958 and agreed to send a team of agricultural experts to appraise the damage to his land, he immediately contested their estimation of value at 5,626 EGP. According to his diligent calculations, and excluding the 'incalculable 30 years' he had invested in creating his desert 'paradise', he claimed to have lost 52,097 EGP.⁴² Legal and diplomatic routes had failed Pontremoli, so he turned again to the press. Virgilio Lilli, a correspondent for *Corriere della Sera* who had covered Egypt for many years, travelled to Egypt to write a series on the Italian community in light of the new regional alliance between the Italian and Egyptian governments. Pontremoli requested to meet with him. The consul in Alexandria, however, blocked his presence at the official gatherings; by this point he was infamous for aggravation. He went directly to the Cecil Hotel in Alexandria where Lilli was staying. Unable to access the journalist there, Pontremoli left a copy of one of his petitions and a letter personally addressed to Lilli. When Lilli's article was finally published, Pontremoli called it an 'unsettling' perspective on the community narrated through the eyes of a generalized 'emigrant elder' who bemoaned the bygone privileges foreigners had enjoyed under the capitulations. Pontremoli charged the 'emigrant elder' of being a 'gestapo' who mimicked the discourse of the Egyptian press, and suggested that the 'invented' character was aligned with Nasser's regime and did not, therefore, truly represent a member of the Italian community.

This language and framing progressively appeared in Pontremoli's writing: in his countless drafts, he referred to 'Nasserian Hitlerism' (*l'hitlerismo nasseriano*) and alluded to rumours that German military exiles were guiding the Egyptian military to persecute Italian Jews. Presenting himself as a wounded Italian patriot, Pontremoli described 'the Italians of Egypt' (*gli italiani d'Egitto*) through a trope largely inherited from fascist-era historiography, one that had been used as propaganda to subvert British dominance by connecting Italian emigrants to Egyptians and to instil in the Italian community a sense

of their 'historic' role modernizing Egypt.⁴³ This perspective imagined the community through an isolated (and partially contrived) thread of its history. Pontremoli claimed that Italian residents had never been privileged, nor had they needed legal protection. Instead, he claimed, '[Italians were] honest workers who built ports, streets, bridges, houses, canals, offices, schools, mosques, hospitals ... etc'.⁴⁴

Pontremoli's efforts to find recompense were fruitless and, in 1963, after over 40,000 Italian residents had departed Egypt, he too arrived in Italy as a 'refugee from Egypt'. Many Italian residents demanded collective repatriation, hoping the Italian state would recognize their place in Italy's Mediterranean history. Feeling abandoned by state-level politics, Italian 'repatriates' (*rimpatriati*) organized associations to safeguard their interests.⁴⁵ By force of events and pressure from political opposition (from both the right and left, the Movimento Sociale Italiano and Partito Comunista Italiano), the status of national 'refugee' (created in 1952 to incorporate Italians returning from colonial possessions lost in the postwar settlement) was expanded to include Italian citizens who arrived from Egypt. Upon their 'definitive' departure from Egypt, they were required to renounce future residency there. The 67-year-old Pontremoli continued his campaign from Rome. In contrast to previous iterations, he identified now as a pioneer who had tamed the desert, a patriot wounded in the war, *and* a refugee persecuted for his status 'as an Italian Jew'. He alluded to the 'thousands' (*migliaia*) in similar circumstances in his many appeals, but never provided details or comparative examples. He often concluded that his own case demonstrated most dramatically the intersecting histories of suffering and loss in the disentangling of the colonial Mediterranean.

From his small apartment at Piazza Imerio, Pontremoli filed a case against the former ambassador in Egypt, Giuseppe Fornari, for negligence and violation of constitutional rights. Fornari had overseen the beginning of then Italian prime minister, Amintore Fanfani's 'political friendship' with Nasser, which resulted in industrial agreements that are still in effect today (Melcangi 2013; Onelli 2012, 2013; Perfetti 2001; Tonini 2007, 2012). Pontremoli viewed Fornari, among others in the Fanfani government, as 'diplomatic functionaries of the Fascist dictatorship, who remained in their positions ... drunk with the principles that sent 42,000 Italians to the Nazi extermination camps ...' In framing his claim, he drew upon the terms of the 1937 Montreux Convention that abolished the capitulations and upon postwar human rights law. Pontremoli sought answers in a past obscured by emergent geopolitical realities, a past no longer contiguous with the present. He learned from his lawyer that Italian diplomats had not intentionally targeted him. Rather, given the national, regional, and international conditions of the moment, they circumvented controversial matters so as to safeguard the Italian community, 'thus any decisive action [by Fornari] would have probably been irrelevant for Pontremoli and even counterproductive for the general interests of the Italian communities'.⁴⁶

It was only in the turbulent years of the late-1960s that Pontremoli's case found an audience in magazines and newspapers critical of the Italian government (*Il Borghese*, *La Folla*, *Il Globo*). In 1968, he wrote in *Lo Specchio*, 'I created a paradise in the desert and hoped to finish my days there, when I lost everything, and it was all destroyed, I returned to Italy to die here'.⁴⁷ The same month the article appeared, he was invited to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with 14 others to discuss a secret accord between Italy and Egypt that would provide reparations for properties lost in the 1952 Agrarian Reform. He was outraged by the presence of others who, according to his own hierarchy of suffering, did not *truly* suffer

under Nasser's regime. Moreover, he was angered by the meeting's secrecy and that the reparations would cover a sum, he claimed, meant to appease and silence those who had endured misfortune. As the historical constellation of the Mediterranean from which Pontremoli emerged changed, so too did its possibility to hold together a narrative. In returning to Italy 'to die', Pontremoli contemporaneously perceived that the connections, movements, and relatedness that once rendered his Mediterranean palpable no longer resonated.

I end with fragments of Pontremoli's writings that fill loose pieces of paper, absent of dates, and strewn amongst his final testament, legal documents, reports, photographs, and endless copies of his letters to politicians. Perhaps in these words he attempted to provide closure to his story, which he himself appears to have seen as indeterminate. In a piece Pontremoli entitled 'the desert and its dangers', an anonymous narrator asks a nameless doctor 'what purpose does the desert serve?' to which the doctor responds, 'to test human valor ... a courageous challenge to nature, an intelligent and resolved wager on the future'.⁴⁸ In another fragment, he wrote:

the present ... is an SOS that addresses the civilized people ... a poignant tale of suffering ... this [wounded] man who confidently befriends the righteousness of the Western world and the democratic system risks losing all that trust and turning towards other movements ... because of the severity of injustices he suffered.⁴⁹

Moise Pontremoli's personhood entangled his participation in the First World War, his labours in the Egyptian desert, and his status as an Italian Jewish refugee in post-war Italy. In its capacity to knot events and processes, the micro-details of Pontremoli's person was implicated in the transformation of Eastern Mediterranean socio-political worlds. Reading his life and death as layered and multiple temporal scales helps us to rethink overdetermined narratives of social drama in modern Mediterranean history and anthropology. He died in 1969, leaving inconclusive compensations in his will. At the moment of his death, Pontremoli remained committed to an elusive future that adjusted the meaning of past and present. His life of suffering did not come from a hopeless struggle against his wounded body or the unyielding desert, but by living through each of these, by knotting them to his person. His suffering was an endeavour of *poiesis*.⁵⁰

Notes

1. It is worth noting that between 1914 and 1962, the Egyptian Pound was pegged to the British pound sterling.
2. Unione Comunità Ebraiche Italiane (UCEI), Fondo Moise Pontremoli (MP), 'successione'.
3. In a sense, Pontremoli resembles Menocchio in Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980). Although debates about 'cosmopolitanism' are beyond the scope of this article, Nora Lessersohn (2015) has made a similar methodological claim for articulating what she calls the 'provincial cosmopolitanism' of late Ottoman Anatolia through the writings of an Armenian shoemaker.
4. I emphasize this point to bring the focus away from reductive claims about Mediterranean 'cosmopolitanism' that pervade analyses of Mediterranean port cities. Instead, I aim to highlight the more complex processes that transformed geopolitical configurations of the late-nineteenth and twentieth century Eastern Mediterranean. See Tabak (2007) for a thorough discussion of the political economic changes that influenced dynamics in and between Mediterranean port cities and in which regimes of legal pluralism formed and from which they eventually disappeared.

5. I do not intend to develop a phenomenology of the self here, but rather to show that personhood can be understood as a vehicle for historical time, a coming together of multiple, layered histories. Victor Turner (1980; 158) contends that indeterminacy embraces ‘the possibility of becoming’, and I accept this for Pontremoli insofar as that ‘possibility of becoming’ is placed in dialogue with historical processes that originate (and terminate) outside of Pontremoli’s perception and individuated experience.
6. For an anthropological understanding of how these categorical identities can work at the temporal scale of the moment, see Katherine Ewing (1990); important ideas regarding the question of continuity and narrative identity instead are discussed in Pierre Bourdieu (1987); see also Gérome Truc (2011). For the idea of ‘games of scale’, I refer to the collection of essays carrying the same title, specifically to the introductory chapter, in which Jacques Revel (2006) argues that the variations of scales between social actors and collective events permits the microhistorian to pass from one story to another.
7. Archivio Cancelleria Consolare del Cairo (ACCC), Nessim Pontremoli di Behor - 1914.
8. For further historical analysis of the capitulations and their increasingly complexity—and in Turkey eventual abolition—see Ahmad (2002).
9. Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASDMAE), Contenzioso diplomatico 1857–1937, Pacco 4, ‘Protetti e cittadini italiani in Turchia’.
10. Evidence of this is amply recorded in the archives of the Italian diplomatic representation in Cairo. ASDMAE, Ambasciata Cairo (AC). See also Petricioli (2007).
11. ACCC Ralph Pontremoli (167); UCEI, MP, D.S. ‘Nasser mi ha tolto 50 anni di vita’ Moise Pontremoli, *Lo Specchio*, 17 March 1968.
12. Census information for 1907 counts Italian residents at 34,926, while in 1917 the population had grown to 40,198 (Amicucci 2000, 82).
13. Personal communication, Rosina Roscioli 7 October 2012.
14. Archivio Central dello Stato (ACS), Presidenza dei consigli ministri (PCM), 15/3 68251 Guido Fiore Miraglia to Pella 3 December 1953.
15. ASDMAE, AC 1923 B133, fasc. ‘Associazione Mutilati di Alessandria d’Egitto’.
16. This is something that the surviving members of his extended family fail to explain. They too do not know how he gained such intimate knowledge of desert agriculture. Dario Israel and Sarina Roscioli (née Pontremoli), personal communication.
17. The engineer who drew up the map of Pontremoli’s land was Carlo Tortelotti, one among the founders of the Dante Alighieri Society in Izmir, who had also been displaced by the events of Italo-Turkish war. See <http://www.giustiniani.info/italianiasmirne.pdf>.
18. That this exchange happened in 1938 is important. It was the same year that the Fascist regime enacted the racial law decrees, one of the first explicit acts of state-sanctioned racial policy and a sign of the regime’s acquiescence to German Nazism. The implications of this act may suggest that Pontremoli was ‘taking sides’ in the broader political spheres and imperial rivalries. UCEI, MP, Il scatalone.
19. Personal communication, Dario Israel 28 March 2015.
20. CEALex (Centre d’Études Alexandrines), extrait 1939 Survey of Egypt.
21. ‘anni di lavoro di pioniere nelle terre aride e desolate del Deserto, che ho trasformato in giardini lusse [sic]’. UCEI, MP, ‘Busta 3’.
22. For more on the role of political fascism in Egypt, see Gershoni and Jankowski (2010) and on the specific case of Italian fascist interests in Egypt.
23. It should be added that this is reflected in both Italian sources, which closely observed any movement of individuals or groups hostile to the regime in Egypt, and British sources, where the search for antifascist Italians who could serve as potential informants and allies for British authorities continued to prove fruitless.
24. Angelos Dalachanis illustrates that, from within, the abolition of the Capitulations was seen as the beginning of the end for the community of Greek residents in Egypt. Indeed, Dalachanis’s narration of the ‘exodus’ of Greeks from Egypt chronologically begins in 1937 (2017, 17). Elsewhere I have argued that the departure of Italian residents from Egypt encompasses a longer

- durée history, which includes an anticipation of the consequences of an end to extraterritorial jurisdiction (Viscomi 2019). See also Hashish 1994 and Morsy 1984a, 1984b.
25. UCEI, MP BXIV; see also BI, 'certificat d'internement' 24 June 1940, which does not - in contrast to most internees - contain a date of release.
 26. UCEI, MP, BXIV, permission to travel for a two-month long stay granted on 11 October 1945 from the Military Governor's Office.
 27. For a comprehensive analysis of the Company Law, see Karanasou (1992).
 28. UCEI, MP, BXVI Le Progres Egyptien ND on Law 37 of 1951 forbidding the ownership of agricultural lands by foreigners.
 29. Archivio Consolato Generale Alessandria d'Egitto (ACGA), Sidi Mosè di Daniele 1906.
 30. '... il medesimo parli correntemente la nostra lingua, abbia dimostrato sinceri sentimenti d'italianità e possa ritenersi assimilato all'ambiente nazionale'. ACCC, Pontremoli Nessim di Behor - classe 1914.
 31. ASDMAE, AP Egitto 1956 B1006 rapporto consolare 1954 30 June 1955.
 32. The French government faced similar dilemmas in developing policy around repatriation in the decolonization of Algeria. See Shepard (2008) and Mandel (2014).
 33. MAE AP1955 Egitto B1006 'Rapporto Consolare 1954' Alexandria 30 June 1955.
 34. 'di sacrifici per Patria carità ne abbiamo fatti molti e in silenzio' UCEI, MP, 2° scatalone; ACS, PCM 15/3 68251, Guido Fiore-Miraglia to Giuseppe Pella 3 December 1953, Guido Fiore-Miraglia to Janelli 17 March 1953.
 35. A similar letter had been sent from the president of the Associazione Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra, Guido Fiore-Miraglia in 1952, noting that neglecting to abruptly and properly distribute the 150 thousand LE, Italian institutions and services were left in a state of disarray and disorder and 'l'Autorità Consolare ha favorito la divisione del patrimonio comune'. ACS, PCM 15/3 68251, Guido Fiore-Miraglia 14 March 1952.
 36. 'il danno verrebbe a pesare con conseguenze enormemente superiori, sulle spese di rimpatrio e nella responsabilità di nuove sistemazioni in un Paese [Italia] già troppo intensamente popolato'. UCEI, MP, 2° scatalone.
 37. ASDMAE, AP Egitto 1955 B1006 Appunto 20 October 1954.
 38. UCEI, B.3.

Nel 1956, per assicurarsi le concessioni petrolifere Egiziane che appartenevano "alla Shell" nel Sinai, L'ENI ha imposto una politica filonasseriana al governo, che lo ha docilmente secondato ... Le autorità diplomatiche italiane d'Egitto PIU CHE LA POLITICA DELL'ITALIA, HANNO FATTO QUELLO DELL'ENI.
 39. UCEI, B.10.
 40. UCEI, MP, BXVI 3 May 1956.
 41. UCEI, MP, BX processo 3 September 1957.
 42. UCEI, MP, BX, Judgement of experts 16 October 1958, note opposition ND.
 43. I use 'historic' in the sense described by historian Claudio Fogu (2003).
 44. UCEI, MP, BIII, Moise Pontremoli to Virgilio Lilli, and Virgilio Lilli 'Il vecchio emigrato rimpiange l'Egitto "paradiso degli occidentali"', *Corriere della Sera* 14 June 1958.
 45. Their initial organizations aimed to procure legal and representative rights for members of this 'displaced' community, and was quite unlike the later form of associational life that surfaced among repatriates and refugees from formerly colonial territories. See Borutta and Jansen (2016) and Karttunen (2013).
 46. UCEI, MP, BX 'Promemoria'.
 47. 'Avevo creato un paradiso nel deserto, e speravo di finirci i miei giorni. Quando ho perduto tutto, e tutto è stato distrutto, sono tornato in Italia per morire qui'. UCEI, MP, D.S. 'Nasser mi ha tolto 50 anni di vita' Moise Pontremoli, *Lo Specchio*, 17 March 1968.
 48. UCEI, MP, B.III 'Il deserto e i suoi pericoli'.
 49. UCEI, B.X 'A l'ombre des pyramides'. ND.
 50. Turner, 'Social Drama', 168.

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