

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

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In March 1933, the Italian king Vittorio Emanuele III arrived in Alexandria, Egypt, to inaugurate the Scuole Littorie Italiane, an Italian state school designed to manifest the ideals of the fascist renaissance. The school invested in the future of the roughly 55,000 Italian residents in Egypt, and the king's visit was intended to represent the community's important role in building the fascist empire.¹ The National Fascist Party (Partito nazionale fascista, or PNF) in Rome assigned the journalist Mirko Ardemagni to accompany the king and to write a series of articles detailing the significance of the visit and of the Italian community in Egypt. The school, wrote Ardemagni, epitomized the sanctuary that the Italian state provided for its young citizens abroad, who, "far from the *Patria* . . . [and] confused by the melting pot of humanity in an immense cosmopolitan city . . . meet every day under the roof of the Italian school with the same joy with which emigrants set their feet upon native soil after a long exile."² In this context, he continued, the new school relieved Italian pupils from the malaise of their cosmopolitan present and promised a "national" future in its place. The inauguration of the Scuole Littorie Italiane also signaled the culmination of the structural reorganization of the Italian community in Egypt around the PNF—in other words, the fascistization (*fascistizzazione*) of the community—connecting Italian émigrés to the political worlds of metropolitan Italy.

The king's visit was the first of a foreign sovereign since Khedive Ismail hosted a delegation of European royalty for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Through the Italian community, the regime in Rome hoped to reinforce the "spir-

* I would like to thank Pamela Ballinger, Francesca Biancani, Naor Ben-Yehoyada, Angelos Dalachanis, Dario Gaggio, Steven C. Hughes, James A. Palmer, Maria Robles Gila, Eric Schewe, and the journal's four anonymous reviewers for comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this article.

¹ Milva Giacomelli, "Clemente Busiri Vici e il rinnovato volto dell'architettura italiana in Egitto negli anni trenta," in *Architetti e ingegneri italiani in Egitto dal diciannovesimo al ventesimo secolo*, ed. Ezio Godoli and Milva Giacomelli (Florence, 2008), 161–83. See also Biblioteca Sormani (Milan), Fondo Buzzi, 39/245.

² Mirko Ardemagni, "I sovrani d'Italia pongono termine al soggiorno ufficiale nella capitale dell'Egitto," *Il popolo d'Italia*, February 24, 1933.

The Journal of Modern History 91 (June 2019): 341–379
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itual links between the two Mediterranean countries.”³ The only Italian daily newspaper in Egypt at the time, *Il giornale d'Oriente*, published under the authority of the PNF, issued a special glossy magazine to celebrate the history of interactions between the two countries. The magazine focused on prominent figures and institutions in the Italian community. At the same time, the historian Angelo Sammarco—a party loyalist who would later be commissioned to translate anti-British propaganda into Arabic—published an article emphasizing the same affinities in Egypt’s widely read Arabic-language newspaper, *Al-Ahram*.⁴

On the trip, Vittorio Emanuele III donated 100,000 Italian lire to Italian youth organizations, schools, and welfare associations in Egypt. Letters from Italian residents poured into the consulates expressing their appreciation for the king’s gesture, but also underlining the community’s acute need of financial assistance.⁵ One such letter came from sixteen-year-old Antoinette Paonessa. She and her brother attended Italian state schools in Alexandria. Their father, Giuseppe, an unemployed carpenter, had emigrated from Calabria between 1905 and 1912. In the letter, the young Paonessa described her family’s “great despair and misery.” Her father, who she described as a “faithful Italian” and a former combatant in the First World War, had made numerous unsuccessful attempts to procure gainful employment in Egypt. Her brother, she continued, was “an ambitious *avanguardista*,” a member of the fascist youth organization for fourteen- to seventeen-year-old boys. He was among the 3,000 Italian youth gathered to salute the king upon his arrival in Alexandria in what was an unprecedented rally of Italians in Egypt.⁶ Despite their loyalty to the “homeland” (*Patria*), Paonessa recounted, her family lacked sufficient support from the Italian state, “for work [and] for our needs [at home].” She concluded, “I don’t say this out of pleasure, but hoping to relieve some of this misery. . . . I’m a young girl and I turn to His Majesty as a daughter [so that] you might help us.”⁷ Although her letter never

³ Mirko Ardemagni, “L’evoluzione del popolo egiziano,” *Il popolo d’Italia*, February 11, 1933; “Re Fuad (l’Egitto moderno),” *Il popolo d’Italia*, February 15, 1933. See also *La civiltà cattolica* 84, no. 1 (1933): 608–14.

⁴ Angelo Sammarco, “Al-tuliyyan fi misr,” *Al-Ahram*, February 19, 1933. For more on Sammarco and his role in Egyptian historiography, see Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation* (London, 2002).

⁵ Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASDMAE, Rome), Ambasciata Cairo (AC), b. 270, fasc. “Visita reale.”

⁶ Marta Petricoli, *Oltre il mito: L’Egitto degli italiani (1917–1947)* (Milan, 2007), 230; Mirko Ardemagni, “Febbrilli preparativi in Egitto,” *Il popolo d’Italia*, February 19, 1933. British authorities described the event as resembling a “football” cup in its “excitement and animation,” accompanied with black shirts and fascist salutes. The royal visit, they concluded, was an “unqualified success from the point of view of Italo-Egyptian relations.” The National Archives (TNA, London), FO141/699/2, draft letter from The Residency, Cairo, to Secretary of State, March 13, 1933.

⁷ Archivio del Consolato Generale d’Alessandria d’Egitto (CGAE, Alexandria), fasc. “Paonessa Beniamino–1883” and “Paonessa Giuseppe–1882.”

reached the king, it did arrive in the office of the Italian consul, where its *mélange* of experience and expectation echoed the trepidation about the future that was increasingly expressed among Italian residents.

The tensions to which Paonessa's letter refers point to a number of historical conjunctures. Key among them are Italy's intensifying imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean and Egypt's slow decolonization. During the interwar period, and especially after 1933, the Italian community in Egypt became a conduit through which the fascist regime extended itself politically without direct territorial occupation. At the same time, seeking to undermine British authority in Egypt and, more broadly, in the Mediterranean, the regime stimulated processes of decolonization. In doing so they hastened the unraveling of the very conditions that had permitted Italians to reside in Egypt. In this article, I will show that while the fascist regime's rhetoric embraced Italian "ethnographic colonies" in its expanded notion of empire, Italian residents in Egypt were haunted by uncertain futures.⁸ This expatriate community, as we will see, became more "national" in its orientation precisely when it was being threatened with imminent demise.

After the occupation of Ethiopia in 1935, at a time when around 18 percent of Italians in Egypt were officially unemployed, the Italian government planned to relocate some unemployed workers from Egypt to the newly denominated Italian East Africa (Africa Orientale Italiana, AOI). This scheme, they expected, would quell growing demand among Italian residents for collective "repatriation."⁹ The relocation plan was unsuccessful, however: bureaucratic procedures stalled and opportunities for employment in Ethiopia proved fleeting.¹⁰ By 1936, 324 Italian families in Egypt relied entirely on the consulate for financial support, and many others leaned on locally based Italian charities, such as the Società Italiana di Beneficenza (Italian Charity Organization, established in 1850).¹¹ With the strategic incorporation of Egyptian workers into the national labor force since 1922 (a process known as "Egyptianization" in documents from the period), Italian diplomats—who served as intermediaries between the Italian state and the community in Egypt—worried that "the conditions of our communities [in Egypt] will only continue to decline."¹² They anticipated that

⁸ On the idea of "ethnographic colonies" in Italian nationalist and imperialist imaginaries, see Mark I. Choate, "From Territorial to Ethnographic Colonies and Back Again: The Politics of Italian Expansion, 1890–1912," *Modern Italy* 8, no. 1 (2010): 65–75, and Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁹ ASDMAE, AC, b. 302, "disoccupazione in Egitto ed eventuale utilizzazione dei disoccupati italiani in Etiopia."

¹⁰ Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 89–90.

¹¹ CGAE, Belleli Alberto fu Vittorio (cl. 1883), "Notizia sulla Società Italiana di Beneficenza di Alessandria—La Casa di Riposo Vittorio Emanuele III."

¹² ASDMAE, AC, b. 302, Italian Legation, December 2, 1936. For an in-depth analysis of the Egyptianization of labor in Egypt, see Francesca Karanasou, "Egyptianisation:

all Italian residents would be obliged to “repatriate,” interpreting declining conditions as manifestations of an irreversible historical process.¹³

In 1937, Giuseppe Paonessa was still among the unemployed when he applied for relocation to Ethiopia. Two years later, his application had yet to be processed, and he found work as a janitor at the Scuole Littorie Italiane. With Italy’s entry into the Second World War in June 1940 and the subsequent arrest and imprisonment of over 5,000 Italian civilians, Giuseppe was dismissed from his position and remained unemployed. In 1939, his son—the young *avanguardista* who had greeted the king six years prior—left to find work in Italy, never to return to Egypt. The remainder of the family departed Egypt definitively in 1953.¹⁴ Between 1945 and the early 1960s, over 40,000 Italians left Egypt. The vast majority arrived in Italy as “repatriates” (*rimpatriati*), their voyages paid for by consular offices; after 1960, they were legally categorized by the Italian state as “national refugees” (*profughi nazionali*).

The materials upon which this article draws reveal how the aspirations of the fascist regime entangled transregional processes and local realities, and thus transformed the conditions of possibility for Italian futures in Egypt. I use “conditions of possibility” to draw attention to what Reinhart Koselleck calls “the conditions of possible events”—in other words, historical processes and structures that transcend particular events.¹⁵ The postwar event of departure, I argue, should be seen in light of this interwar conjuncture of fascist imperial expansion and Egypt’s decolonization. Different historical actors understood the fears that compelled Italian residents to call for repatriation during the 1930s as processes that would, and eventually did, lead to en masse departure. The history of Italian departures from Egypt, however, has been interpreted solely in terms of post-

The 1947 Company Law and the Foreign Communities in Egypt” (PhD diss., St. Anthony’s College, Oxford, 1992).

¹³ 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, while 9.10 percent were industrialists, businessmen, and bankers, 8.13 percent non-degree-holding professionals or technicians, 3.2 percent degree-holding professionals, 3.64 percent ecclesiastics, 1.58 percent landowners or retirees, and 1.05 percent artists. In Cairo the proportions were similar: 61.7 percent laborers, artisans, and day laborers; 22.9 percent employees (*impiegati*); 9.1 percent small-business owners, businessmen, industrialists, and housing and street contractors; 3.4 percent professionals; 2.9 percent uncategorized. ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., telesspresso 11/9/1936.

¹⁴ CGAE, Paonessa Beniamino (cl. 1883), Foglio di via, April 1953.

¹⁵ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004 [1979]), 150. For more developed analysis of this aspect of Koselleck’s thought, see the editors’ introduction to Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories* (Stanford, CA, 2018), and Helge Jordheim, “Against Periodization: Koselleck’s Theory of Multiple Temporalities,” *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 151–71.

Second World War decolonization.¹⁶ This temporal framing runs through much of the broader scholarship on decolonization in and beyond the Mediterranean.¹⁷ Likewise, Italian historiography has almost entirely neglected the departures of Italians from North Africa, whether they resided in Italian territorial colonies or elsewhere under British or French control.¹⁸

Accounts of Italian departures from Egypt that do exist depict departure as causally inseparable from events that demarcate the “long 1950s,” from the far-reaching consequences of the 1948 war in Palestine to the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser into the 1960s. In this body of literature, the long 1950s appear as a rupture in the historical experience of the modern Mediterranean triggered by Arab nationalism (or by anti-European xenophobia, depending on its polemical slant) and the crumbling of a prior epoch of cosmopolitan utopia.¹⁹ Here, departures are

¹⁶ Tignor connects decolonization to the flight of foreign capital from Egypt between 1945 and 1954. Robert Tignor, “Decolonization and Business: The Case of Egypt,” *Journal of Modern History* 59, no. 3 (1987): 479–505. For a broader analysis, see Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire: State and Business in Decolonizing Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ, 1997).

¹⁷ Jordanna Bailkan, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley, 2012), 11–12. For a comprehensive study of how decolonization surfaces in French historiography and, in particular, its emergence as a means to absolve France of responsibility for the changes caused by the separation of Algeria from France, see Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY, 2008). For a more comprehensive study of France and French Africa, see Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, NJ, 2014). This Italian example is markedly different from these cases insofar as it approaches decolonization as a historical process, rather than as a state-led integrative policy.

¹⁸ For an account of how Italian decolonization has been understood by scholars, see Pamela Ballinger, “Colonial Twilight: Italian Settlers and the Long Decolonization of Libya,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 4 (2015): 813–38. For studies that address the legacies of Italian colonialism, see Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, “Memories and Legacies of Italian Colonialism,” in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (London, 2005), 9–27; Alessandro Triulzi, “Premessa: La colonia, Italiani in Eritrea,” *Quaderni storici* 109, no. 1 (2002): 3–19; Ennio Di Nolfo, “La persistenza del sentimento coloniale nel secondo dopoguerra,” in *Fonti e problemi della politica coloniale italiana, atti del Convegno Taormina-Messina* (October 1989), 1259–71.

¹⁹ 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* (Milan, 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* (Milan, 2012); Piero Paoletti, *Storia di un italiano d'Egitto* (Pisa, 2007); Paola Caridi, “Mezzanotte al Cairo,” *L'Espresso*, March 23, 2006; Caridi, “La fine degli Italiani in Egitto,” *Dust* 41

frequently portrayed as endings to one of the “brief lives” of the cosmopolitan Mediterranean, a frame some scholars have used to understand this period.²⁰ Anouchka Lazarev, for example, characterizes the “long 1950s” by noting that both Italy and Egypt turned their backs on the Mediterranean: Italy toward Europe, and Egypt toward the Arab world.²¹ These perspectives have received ample critique;²² they produce an image of the past that glosses over the complexities of what Will Hanley has aptly called “vulgar cosmopolitanism.”²³ What is more, they are founded on teleological renderings of the past that dichotomize history into before/after and therefore preclude a historiography that charts trajectories across time and space. Studies addressing colonial communities often preserve this temporal logic, locking analyses within tightly delimited historical periods. Although this follows conventions of twentieth-century periodization, the

(October 18/24, 2002); Manera Livia, “Spie, amanti, ladri: La bella Alessandria prima della fine,” *Corriere della Sera*, May 15, 2009.

²⁰ Robert Ilbert, Illios Yannakakis, and Jacques Hassoun, *Alexandria 1860–1960: The Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community* (Alexandria, 1997); Robert Ilbert, *Alexandrie 1830–1930: Histoire d’une communauté citadine* (Cairo, 1996). For a regional example of this narrative, see Philip Mansel, *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean* (London, 2010). For an analysis of these perspectives, see Henk Driessen, “Mediterranean Port Cities: Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered,” *History and Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (2005): 129–41.

²¹ Anouchka Lazarev, “Italians, Italianity, and Fascism,” in *Alexandria 1860–1960: The Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, ed. Robert Ilbert, Illios Yannakakis, and Jacques Hassoun (Alexandria, 1997), 84.

²² Khaled Fahmy, “The Essence of Alexandria,” *Manifesta Journal 14 and 16* (2012); Fahmy, “For Cavafy, with Love and Squalor: Some Critical Notes on the History and Historiography of Modern Alexandria,” in *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*, ed. Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk (London, 2004), 263–80; Will Hanley, “Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies,” *History Compass* 6, no. 5 (2008): 1346–67; Robert Mabro, “Nostalgic Literature on Alexandria,” in *Historians in Cairo: Essays in Honor of George Scanlan*, ed. Jill Edwards (Cairo, 2002), 237–65; 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>. For an exception to see the nuanced study of the departure of Greeks from Egypt during the mid-twentieth century, Angelos Dalachanis, *The Greek Exodus from Egypt: Diaspora Politics and Emigration, 1937–1962* (New York, 2017). Anthony Gorman’s study of the identity of “Egyptian Italians,” as he translates “*italiani d’Egitto*,” captures one iteration of the history of the Italian communities in Egypt. His analysis, however, almost entirely neglects the sociopolitical developments of fascist expansion during the late 1920s and 1930s. Anthony Gorman, “The Italians of Egypt: Return to Diaspora,” in *Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualising Community*, ed. Anthony Gorman and Sossie Kasbarian (Edinburgh, 2015), 138–72.

²³ Will Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans, and Egyptians in Alexandria* (New York, 2017).

anticipation of Italian departures from Egypt from 1919 to 1937 shows how conditions of possibility influence events across temporal periods.²⁴

I suggest that the analytical challenge in studying connections among departure, repatriation, and decolonization is rooted not in our epistemological approaches, but rather in our hermeneutics. In other words, rather than focusing on each of these terms as historical categories, we should rethink the methods used to interpret their significance in history. Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas refer to the landscape of the modern Mediterranean as “a maritime space of colonial interactions and entanglements that transcended continental and national boundaries.”²⁵ Much of the available scholarship seeks to describe colonial communities contextually within such interactions and entanglements—“nationalist” and “cosmopolitan” being the descriptive categories into which these communities are commonly situated.²⁶ Yet, within these contexts, definitions of nation, empire, territory, and subjecthood changed and conjured new horizons.²⁷ The fact that “repatriation” emerged as redress to the friction between experience and expectation for Italians in Egypt is not characteristic of categorical tensions. Its appearance, instead, is indicative of a prognostic disentangling of colonial Mediterranean networks.

To understand the imminence of departure of Italians from Egypt in the interwar period, I propose that we turn to recent efforts to examine histories of the future. Underlying this approach is Reinhart Koselleck’s suggestion that we should not see historical concepts as merely testimonial (or descriptive). He directs our

²⁴ Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 6. Pamela Ballinger argues that decolonization extends forward in time, long after it has been declared a finished “event.” Ballinger, “Colonial Twilight.”

²⁵ Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas, “A Colonial Sea: The Mediterranean, 1789–1956,” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 19, no. 1 (2012): 1–13; 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 Ottoman cities. As he shows, in this conjuncture cosmopolitanism and nationalism were not mutually exclusive categories, but rather were codependent processes. Faruk Tabak, “Imperial Rivalry and Port-Cities: A View from Above,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 79–94, 81, 85. For a reading of how these categories concurrently affected different classes, see Edmund Burke III, “Toward a Comparative History of the Modern Mediterranean, 1750–1919,” *Journal of World History* 23, no. 4 (2012): 906–39, 929.

²⁶ This holds true for many of the studies that focus on legal pluralism as indicative of a complex constellation of ethnolinguistic and political identities. See, for example, Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in the Age of Migration, c. 1800–1900* (Berkeley, 2010), and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 2016).

²⁷ For more on the entanglement of law, empire, and territory, see Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge, 2009).

attention instead toward the unfolding of historical time in the balance between experience and expectation.²⁸ For Koselleck, experience and expectation “embody past and future” and thus enable historians to apprehend concrete, empirical processes of historical time.²⁹ Reaching beyond descriptive chronologies of history, then, the tensions and harmonies between experience and expectation comprise engines for the unfolding of historical time. Paonessa’s experience of “misery” and the promise of a national future embodied in the new state school, at a juncture when Italian futures were closing in Egypt, together demonstrate the significance of “repatriation” as a possible outcome. As Koselleck argues, the future is open and indeterminate, but it is not always surprising: “there are gradations of greater or lesser probability with which future reality can be predicted.”³⁰ For Italian residents, remaining in Egypt became an improbable future as the layered conditions that had fostered its possibility dissolved; meanwhile, national futures appeared to open on the horizon of the *Patria*.³¹

In focusing exclusively on events that mark the “long 1950s” and ignoring this longer temporal frame, historians inadvertently conceal the ways subjects anticipate history as well as how such expectations themselves shape outcomes. The jurisdictional extraterritoriality preserved under the Ottoman-era capitulations, which granted residential and economic privileges to some foreign nationals in Egypt, conditioned possible outcomes of the present.³² The capitulations allowed Italian subjects to reside in Egypt without the burden of taxation and

²⁸ The two works on which I am drawing are Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past*, and Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA, 2002).

²⁹ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 258. For a compelling engagement with Koselleck’s work, see the *American Historical Review Forum* entitled “Histories of the Future” in *American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012), and, specifically, David C. Engerman, “Introduction: Histories of the Future and the Futures of History” (1402–10); Jenny Andersson, “The Great Future Debate and the Struggle for the World” (1411–30); Matthew Connelly et al., “‘General, I have fought just as many nuclear wars as you have’: Forecasts, Future Scenarios, and the Politics of Armageddon” (1431–60); and Manu Goswami, “Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms” (1461–85). For a similar approach, see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton, NJ, 2005).

³⁰ Koselleck claims there are “enduring conditions within which what is new appears.” These conditions, which he calls “structures of experience,” influence our “prognostic certainty,” or our capacity to imagine the future. Koselleck, *Practice of Conceptual History*, 134–35, 146.

³¹ In line with Koselleck, I use “layered” to denote the distinct ways by which historical conditions move through time at different rhythms. Koselleck, *Practice of Conceptual History*, 135.

³² In her extensive analysis of extraterritorial regimes in the Ottoman Mediterranean, Stein argues that the endurance of the capitulations in Egypt was exceptional in North Africa. See Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams*, 143.

with relative immunity from local prosecution until the late 1930s. More importantly, they permitted the Italian state to act upon its own subjects without Egyptian or British meddling. Yet, between 1919 and 1936, many individuals perceived interwar conflict between Italy, Britain, and Egypt as responsible for ending what Tabak calls the “fleeting conjuncture” during which legal and political regimes favored the establishment of distinct national groups within late-Ottoman cities.³³ A variety of historical actors expected that the future would diverge from the past, even if they were uncertain what that future would yield; this anticipation entered the concrete processes of historical time.

This article is organized around the past futures of Italian residents in Egypt. The first section considers the conditions under which the Italian community in Egypt took shape. The second section looks at early evidence of anticipated endings alongside debates regarding the importance of legal extraterritoriality. It does so from the perspective of Italian residents and contemporary historians writing about them. The next two sections argue that the fascist regime’s aggressive imperialist propaganda in the 1930s, both in Italian institutional contexts and in Egyptian political spheres, unsettled regional allegiances. The final section examines the dismantling of the capitulations and its anticipated repercussions for Italian futures in Egypt.

I. ARRIVALS

The capitulations played a central role in fostering the conditions that made Italian immigration in Egypt possible. The capitulations (*capitula* in Latin, *ahdnames* in Turkish, and *al-Imtiyāzāt* in Arabic, which translates as “the privileges”) were commercial and diplomatic treaties between early Ottoman rulers and European city-states that granted privileges to merchants in order to encourage commercial exchange. While they had precedents between the tenth and twelfth centuries, their modern incarnation originates around the fifteenth century between the Genovese city-state and Ottoman rulers. The treaties continually increased in number and complexity. In 1535, French subjects were conceded commercial and residential rights under French jurisdiction in all Ottoman territories. With the consolidation of European nation-states, the 1535 treaty became the prototype for later agreements between Western powers and the Porte. These later capitulations extended extraterritorial rights to many European subjects, who would fall under the jurisdiction of their respective consuls and were often exempted

³³ Tabak, “Imperial Rivalry.” On Tunisia, see Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley, 2013); Terence Peterson, “The ‘Jewish Question’ and the ‘Italian Peril’: Vichy, Italy, and the Jews of Tunisia, 1940–2,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 2 (2014): 1–25.

from local taxes.³⁴ Whereas scholars have frequently concentrated on the capitulations' role in generating cultural hybridity or legal pluralism within a broad social context, here I focus on other consequences, such as how they facilitated immigration and aided the creation of internally coherent expatriate communities.³⁵

Italians arrived in Egypt in various waves, some long before Italy's national unification in 1861.³⁶ Pisan and Genovese merchants had established a presence as early as the thirteenth century.³⁷ Most, however, arrived much later. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, Mehmed Ali and his successors recruited European technicians to construct Egypt's infrastructure and to assist in the centralization of state bureaucracy.³⁸ Although numbers from this period are un-

³⁴ John T. Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863–1914* (New York, 2012), 16, 23–25; Nathan Brown, "The Precarious Life and Slow Death of the Mixed Courts of Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 1 (1993): 35; Gaston Zeller, "Une légende qui a la vie dure: Les Capitulations de 1535," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 2, no. 2 (1955): 127–32; John Yeates Brinton, *The Mixed Courts of Egypt* (New Haven, CT, 1968). For more on the capitulations, see Fariba Zarinebaf, *Mediterranean Encounters: Trade and Pluralism in Early Modern Galata* (Berkeley, 2018); Joshua M. White, *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Stanford, CA, 2017); Maurits H. van den Boogert and Kate Fleet, eds., *The Ottoman Capitulations: Text and Context* (Rome, 2003); G. D. Barakat, "Aliens and the End of the Transitional Period in Egypt," *International Law Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1950): 112–15. For more on the evolution of the capitulations during the nineteenth century, see Feroz Ahmad, "Ottoman Perceptions of the Capitulations, 1800–1914," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2000): 1–20.

³⁵ Ziad Fahmy, "Jurisdictional Borderlands: Extraterritoriality and 'Legal Chameleons' in Precolonial Alexandria, 1840–1870," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 2 (2013): 305–29.

³⁶ 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*, ed. Nelly Hanna and Ra'uf Abbas (Cairo, 2005), 11–40.

³⁷ F. Santorelli, *L'Italia in Egitto: Impressioni e note* (Cairo, 1894), 20.

³⁸ Angelo Sammarco, *Egitto moderno* (Rome, 1939), and Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto: Il contributo italiano nella formazione dell'Egitto moderno* (Alexandria, 1937); Luigi Dori, "Italiani in Africa: Tipografi e giornalisti italiani in Egitto," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 14, no. 3 (1959): 146–48; Luca D. Biolato, "Gli italiani fondatori delle moderne poste egiziane," *Oriente moderno* 88 (2008): 151–97; G. Valle, *Origini del servizio postale in Egitto* (Cairo, 1906); Paola Viviani, "L'Egitto di naturalisti, patrioti e religiosi italiani: Figari Bey, Balboni e Monsignor Dalfi," *La rivista di Arablit* 4, nos. 7–8 (2014): 117–33. For a historical "insider" account of the elite origins of the Italians in Egypt, see L. A. Balboni, *Gli Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX* (Alexandria, 1906). Much of this historiography embraces the notion that Italians in Egypt were "constructors of empires," even if not their own, and purveyors of Mediterranean modernity. Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna, 2002), 25.

clear, an 1840 estimate counted “Italians” at around 2,000.³⁹ In subsequent years, many émigrés—particularly of elite and professional classes—fled the political turmoil of the Italian Risorgimento for Egypt, where they were attracted by the prospect of employment and the protection of the capitulatory regime.⁴⁰ Following the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the political influence of the Italian elite and professional classes began to decline.⁴¹ Paradoxically, the population of Italian residents expanded rapidly under British rule. An influx of working-class migrants in search of temporary or seasonal employment drove numbers from 18,665 in 1882 to 24,454 in 1897.⁴²

Parallel to these arrivals, Egyptian nationalists sought to reduce the protections granted to foreign workers. Their main objective was the modification—or full abolition—of the capitulations. Although they succeeded in developing mixed venues of litigation in the late nineteenth century, a combination of national debts and pressure from European consuls preserved the majority of privileges enjoyed by foreigners well into the twentieth century. The mixed courts were used mainly to settle multinational commercial transactions and disputes. Attempts by nationalists to insert non-Egyptians into local jurisdiction had proven unsuccessful and consular courts remained the effective site of civil and penal litigation for Italian residents. Some Egyptian nationalists deduced that abolishing the capitulatory regime altogether would grant British authorities unmitigated

³⁹ A. B. Clot-Bey, *Aperçu général sur l’Égypte* (Cairo, 1840). Part of this confusion is that “Italy” as a nation was not yet formed. Individuals from the Italian peninsula occupied a variety of roles under the authority of their respective consuls, but these relationships were neither strictly regulated nor necessarily based on any identitarian claims. For more on this problem, see Angelo Iacovella, “La presenza italiana in Egitto: Problemi storici e demografici,” *Altretalia* 6, no. 12 (1994): 60–69, and Claudio Zanier, “I fondi non inventariati delle legazioni e dei consolati degli stati pre-unitari all’archivio storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri: La rappresentanza di Sardegna ad Alessandria d’Egitto (1825–1861),” *Oriente moderno* 1–2 (1985): 49–57. This is part of a historiographical problem of a larger scale. For more on nineteenth-century census registers in Egypt, see Kenneth M. Cuno and Michael J. Reimer, “The Census Registers of Nineteenth-Century Egypt: A New Source for Social Historians,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 2 (1997): 193–216.

⁴⁰ Ersilio Michel, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto (1815–1861)* (Pisa, 1958); Chalcraft, *Striking Cabbies*, 39–40, 127.

⁴¹ Anna Baldinetti, “Gli Italiani nella cultura egiziana (1900–1930),” *Levante* 49 (2002): 43–58; Saho Matsumoto-Best, “British and Italian Imperial Rivalry in the Mediterranean, 1912–14: The Case of Egypt,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 18, no. 2 (2007): 297–314; Lucien E. Roberts, “Italy and the Egyptian Question, 1878–1882,” *Journal of Modern History* 18, no. 4 (1946): 314–32.

⁴² Davide Amicucci, “La comunità italiana in Egitto attraverso i censimenti dal 1882 al 1947,” in *Tradizione e modernizzazione in Egitto 1798–1998*, ed. Paolo Branca (Milan, 2000), 81–94, 82; *Annuario statistico dell’emigrazione italiana dal 1876 al 1925 con notizie sull’emigrazione negli anni 1869–1975* (Rome, 1926).

power over Egypt's economy (at the time, it was largely in the hands of non-Egyptians, but it was distributed among them).⁴³

The capitulations constituted one of the "citizenship tools" used by liberal Italian governments between 1870 and 1914 to unite its national communities under the new state and to "penetrate" port cities in the Mediterranean through cultural and commercial presence.⁴⁴ Through its consular offices, the Italian government conferred protected status specifically on Ottoman Jews who had settled in the region around the time of the Italian maritime republics and who claimed to have historical connections to metropolitan Italy. By creating groups of "protected persons" (*protetti*) 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.⁴⁵

Between the outbreak of the Italo-Turkish war in 1911 (which saw Italian residents expelled from Beirut, Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem⁴⁶) and later Greek-

⁴³ By the mid-nineteenth century, Egyptian nationalists perceived the capitulations as a hindrance to economic sovereignty. Under Egypt's semi-autonomy from the Porte, they were modified in 1876 through the establishment of the Mixed Court system. Brinton, *Mixed Courts*, 8–9, 11; David Todd, "Beneath Sovereignty: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *Law and History Review* 36, no. 1 (2018): 105–37; Omar Youssef Cheta, "A Prehistory of the Modern Legal Profession in Egypt, 1840s–1870s," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50 (2018): 649–68; John B. Angell, "The Turkish Capitulations," *American Historical Review* 6, no. 2 (1901): 256, 258; 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, no. 3 (1980): 416–49. For a detailed study of nineteenth-century Italian commercial life under the capitulations, see Elizabeth H. Shlala, "Mediterranean Migration, Cosmopolitanism, and the Law: A History of the Italian Community of Nineteenth-Century Alexandria, Egypt" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2009).

⁴⁴ Sabina Donati, *A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy, 1861–1950* (Stanford, CA, 2013), 134–36. For more on the practice of Italy using its emigrants as political "assets" during the liberal period, see Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, and Daniel J. Grange, "Émigration et colonies: Un grand débat de l'Italie libérale," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 30 (July–September 1983): 337–65.

⁴⁵ For a broader analysis on the role of Ottoman Jews in Italian foreign policy during and after the liberal period, see Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933–40* (New York, 2010), 15–16; Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis, "Gli Italiani a Smirne nei secoli XVIII e XIX," *Attreitalia* 6, no. 12 (1994): 39–59; Simonetta Della Seta, "Gli ebrei del Mediterraneo nella strategia politica fascista sino al 1938: Il caso di Rodi," *Storia contemporanea* 17, no. 6 (1986): 997–1032.

⁴⁶ When the war broke out, Italian subjects were threatened with expulsion and the Italian state with the prospect of having to assist a large community of refugees. Although many returned to these cities, others took the departure as a sign of continued hardship and settled elsewhere. Timothy Winston Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya: 1911–1912* (Leiden, 1997), 84–85.

Turkish conflicts, many of Italy's *protetti* (who were not considered fully nationalized) departed for safer harbors in Alexandria, where they would continue to live under the protection of the Italian consul. Although their precise numbers are not easily discernible, Egyptian censuses shows that the population of Italian Jews in Egypt grew from 4,348 in 1897 to 6,629 in 1917; it is likely that this growth resulted in part from the arrival of Italian *protetti*.⁴⁷ Having entered Egypt on Italian passports, they were inscribed in the national registries and thus considered Italian citizens. The large financial contributions they made to institutions linked to the Italian state well into the late 1930s is one measure of the relative success of penetration through the "citizenship tool" of the capitulations.⁴⁸ Institutions that received vital support from Italy's *protetti* included the consular courts, the Italian Chambers of Commerce (established in Alexandria in 1911 and in Cairo in 1920), the Italian Hospital in Alexandria, the retirement home for Italians (est. 1928), the Dante Alighieri Society (est. 1896), and several locally based charity organizations. Such institutions became indispensable safety nets for the Italian population.⁴⁹

Contrary to narratives that stress social harmony under the capitulations, the influx of Italians was not without its problems.⁵⁰ Almost immediately following British occupation in 1882, Anglo-Egyptian authorities attempted to limit immigration due to rising antagonism between ethnic and national groups.⁵¹ They especially feared the consequences of the growth of an Italian "proletarian immigration" because these immigrants competed with Egyptian laborers and tradesmen.⁵² As early as 1899 the Emigration Office in Italy (a division of the Ministry

⁴⁷ Amicucci, "La comunità italiana," 84.

⁴⁸ Kramer and Morabia observe that the Sephardic—or Levantine—population constituted a major portion of a new social and political elite. Gudrun Kramer and Alfred Morabia, "Face a la modernite: Les juifs d'Egypte aux XIXe et XXe siecles," in *Juifs du Nil*, ed. Jacques Hassoun (Paris, 1981), 83–103. For more on how "Italian Jews" were situated within Jewish communities in twentieth-century Egypt, see Gudrun Kramer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914–1952* (Seattle, 1989), 17–18, 36, 157–58. For the liberal Italian context, see Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Making Italian Jews: Family, Gender, Religion and the Nation, 1861–1918* (London, 2017).

⁴⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 33. For a more detailed analysis of David Prato's role in Egypt, see Dario Miccoli, *Histories of the Jews of Egypt: An Imagined Bourgeoisie, 1880s–1950s* (London, 2015), 120–27.

⁵⁰ Similar circumstances have been highlighted elsewhere. For Izmir, see Edhem Eldem, "The Undesirables of Smyrna, 1926," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 223–27; and, for Tunisia, see Julia Clancy-Smith, "Marginality and Migration: Europe's Social Outcasts in Pre-colonial Tunisia, 1830–81," in *Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East*, ed. Eugene Rogan (London, 2002), 126–48.

⁵¹ Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy* (London, 1981), 134.

⁵² Beth Hansen, "Wage Differentials in Italy and Egypt: The Incentive to Migrate before World War I," *Journal of European Economic History* 14, no. 2 (1985): 347–60. See also, Chalcraft, *Striking Cabbies*, 127. For an excellent discussion of competition be-

of Foreign Affairs) took measures to impede the pace of immigration by publicizing the “destitute conditions” encountered by Italian workers upon their arrival in Egypt.⁵³ British authorities advised Italian police to enforce stricter controls on Italian ports of emigration. Yet despite such attempts to limit immigration, by 1907 the population of Italian residents had grown to 34,926. The financial crisis that same year collapsed the construction and building market in Alexandria and Cairo and thus left many Italians unemployed.⁵⁴

In accordance with British efforts, in 1908 an Italian decree limited uncontracted 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 be resumed only if prospective emigrants were able to exhibit proof of contracted work or of relatives in Egypt able to support them financially; both needed to be certified by an Italian office in Egypt. The decree stipulated that even if emigrants did indeed have employers or family members able to support them, they should also have adequate funds available to pay for their eventual “repatriation” (*rimpatrio*). This prospect of “repatriation” deliberately obscured the horizons of hopeful migrants, and it appears to set the stage for what would occur much later.

The Emigration Office in Rome sent a copy of the 1908 decree to the Police Headquarters in Naples. A handwritten note accompanying the decree read: “the excessive crowding in Egypt of temporary Italian workers unable to find work becomes disruptive to public order.”⁵⁵ “Public order” had been the rallying cry during previous attempts to control emigration at the port of Naples. In 1905 and 1906, the Italian consul in Port Said sent several complaints to Rome decrying the continuous arrival of uncontracted workers and female prostitutes, especially from the Italian south, who “only increase the already large numbers of unemployed Italians, damaging public order and bringing dishonor [*disdoro*] to the Italian name.”⁵⁶ A similar statement circulated in 1913, during the peak year of Italian emigration, reiterating the foreign minister’s request that the Emigration

tween Egyptian and foreign workers during this period, see Zachary Lockman, *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (New York, 1993), and Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton, NJ, 1987).

⁵³ Ministero degli Affari Esteri, “Notizie concernenti l’emigrazione italiana—Emigrazione in Egitto,” *Bollettino del Ministero degli Affari Esteri* (August–September, 1899).

⁵⁴ Hansen, “Wage Differentials,” 356.

⁵⁵ Archivio di Stato Napoli (ASN, Naples), Questura di Napoli, Gabinetto–Seconda Serie (1902–71), Massime, b. 54, f. 1080 “Egitto-Emigrazione (1898–1937),” *Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d’Italia*, October 7, 1908.

⁵⁶ ASN, Questura di Napoli, Gabinetto–Seconda Serie (1902–71), Massime, b. 54, f. 1080 “Egitto-Emigrazione (1898–1937),” handwritten notes anonymously signed by *Consolato italiano a P. S.*, 1905 and 1906.

Office not release passports to men intending to travel to Egypt without contracts.⁵⁷ Describing economic activity in Alexandria and Cairo as “paralyzed,” the statement added that with the proliferation of unregulated prostitution, under no circumstances should passports be issued to women traveling alone.⁵⁸ In a series of telegrams from 1915, British authorities tried to restrict working-class immigration by requesting that potential emigrants consult the British consulate in Naples prior to departure. In 1917, Italians in Egypt numbered 40,198. Still, no law explicitly regulated immigration to Egypt. A British decree passed in 1920 required individuals disembarking in Egypt to hold a British visa, but that decree was promptly dissolved with Britain’s unilateral declaration of Egypt’s independence in 1922.⁵⁹ By 1927, Italian residents numbered 52,462. One decade later, when Italians constituted roughly 25 percent of the 186,515 foreign residents in Egypt (a community second in size only to Greeks), unemployment among them was widespread. A telegram from a British administrator in Egypt to the prefect in Naples stated: “requests for manual workers are easily covered by the unemployed who are already [here]. . . . Those intending to depart in search of work should be discouraged.”⁶⁰ He added that there were insufficient opportunities for the unemployed Italians already residing in Egypt. The promise of migration was clouded by an inauspicious present.

II. EXTRATERRITORIAL CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY

The conditions set by the capitulations marked ambiguous horizons for non-Egyptian residents in colonial Egypt: they were both relics of a distant past and harbingers of change. At that intersection, fears concerning the future of Italians in Egypt appear as early as 1919, after violent protests against British occupation in the wake of the arrest and exile of Saad Zaghloul, founder of the nationalist Wafd Party.⁶¹ Francesco Mazza, an Italian born in Cairo, penned a letter to the Italian consul in Alexandria. He wrote from his “hometown” (*paese di origine*)

⁵⁷ Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 26.

⁵⁸ ASN, Questura di Napoli, Gabinetto–Seconda Serie (1902–71), Massime, b. 54, f. 1080 “Egitto–Emigrazione (1898–1937),” Ufficio dell’emigrazione per i confini di terra, February 13, 1913. For more, see Francesca Biancani, *Sex Work in Colonial Egypt: Women, Modernity, and the Global Economy* (London, 2018), and Olimpia Gobbi, “Emigrazione femminile: Balie e domestiche marchigiane in Egitto fra Otto e Novecento,” *Proposte e ricerche* 34, no. 66 (2011): 7–24.

⁵⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 73.

⁶⁰ ASN, Questura di Napoli, Gabinetto–Seconda Serie (1902–71), Massime, b. 54, f. 1080 “Egitto–Emigrazione (1898–1937).”

⁶¹ For an analysis of the revolts in Egypt, see Ellis Goldberg, “Peasants in Revolt—Egypt 1919,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 261–80. See also Jacques Berque, *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution* (New York, 1972), 305–7.

in Calabria,⁶² hoping to return to his wife and children in Egypt after serving in the Italian military in the First World War. The events of the war have been described as “decisive” in actualizing the “national myth” in the generation that witnessed national unification.⁶³ Over 5,000 Italian men in Egypt responded to the call to arms. Although many were exempted from service—especially those employed by the Anglo-Egyptian government—at least 2,940 left Egypt to join Italian forces.⁶⁴ In lieu of military service, many others donated large sums to the Italian state.⁶⁵ 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, and that the whole situation is quite troubling as the indigenous nation [*nazione indigena*] revolted and caused great damage, not only in the villages but even in the cities. . . . More disconcerting, however, is that letters from my acquaintances [in Egypt] inform me that all Italians [will] need to be repatriated [*tutti gl'Italiani devono essere rimpatriati*]. . . . I turn to your Excellency to learn . . . if it is true that all [Italians will] need to be repatriated or if I can return to Alexandria without worry. . . . [If not,] how should I safeguard my family and belongings?⁶⁶

Italian residents deliberated over their futures in Egypt. In his letter, Mazza drew attention to rumors circulating among Italians of an imminent “repatriation.” He does not appear surprised by this. His description of the encroachment of the revolts on “the cities,” on the other hand, signals a shift in the perception of protected spaces for foreigners. Indeed, he laments the prospect 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 Mazza that the revolts had subsided. Mazza’s doubts, however, overcame him and he never returned to Egypt. He found work in recently annexed Trieste, where he foresaw a more promising future for Italians. His wife and children joined him there one year later.

Mazza and his acquaintances were not alone in finding the situation in Egypt unsettling. The prominent fascist intellectual Gioacchino Volpe also questioned Italian futures there. Following the British declaration of Egypt as an independent and sovereign nation in 1922, Volpe was commissioned to travel to Egypt to write a series of essays for Mussolini’s newspaper, *Il popolo d’Italia*.⁶⁷ Hav-

⁶² All Italians in national registers, including individuals born abroad, had a legal “hometown” (*paese d’origine*), which was determined by the paternal line of the family.

⁶³ Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: Il mito della nazione nel XX secolo* (Bari, 2006), 78–91.

⁶⁴ Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 8; Choate *Emigrant Nation*, 211.

⁶⁵ Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 43.

⁶⁶ CGAE, “Mazza Francesco Gaetano di Gaetano cl. 1885.”

⁶⁷ For more on Volpe’s considerable role in Italian historiography and specifically as a historian of the fascist regime, see Giovanni Belardelli, “L’adesione di Gioacchino Volpe

ing recently reinvented himself as a contemporary historian (he was a medievalist by training and throughout his early career), Volpe conflated his political commitment to the fascist party and his historical work. As a fervent irredentist, he claimed to have a keen sense of Italian histories in the Mediterranean. He placed large and diverse “settlements” (*colonie*) of Italian emigrants in the region at the center of his writing on modern Italian history. Following nationalist intellectuals such as Francesco Crispi and Enrico Corradini, Volpe viewed these settlements as key “assets” to Italy’s “prestige” and economic expansion abroad.⁶⁸

The essays on the Italians in Egypt were compiled into a small collection of Volpe’s writings, *Fra storia e politica* (1924), after they appeared in *Il popolo d’Italia*. In describing the importance of Italians in the Mediterranean, Volpe drew upon a narrative that harkened back to the “Italian” merchants that had settled along its shores during the time of the maritime republics. Divergent in tone from much of his oeuvre, these writings represent the only speculation on the future of Italians in Egypt by a historian. His projections built on the tension of experience and expectation at this juncture of competing nationalist and imperialist visions of the Mediterranean. Volpe envisioned a waning future for Italians in Egypt at the intersection of an increasingly organized struggle against French and British empires in the region and an anticipated cancellation of the capitulations.⁶⁹ Like Mazza, Volpe described how the rise of nationalist sentiment since 1919 had brought the countryside into the city and thereby collapsed barriers that had separated “European” and “native” spaces.⁷⁰ These separations, he claimed, had aided the formation of autonomous national institutions and communities, ones that were destined to disappear.⁷¹ Within the folds of these shifting concep-

al fascismo,” *Storia contemporanea* 4–5 (1985): 649–94; Martin Clark, “Giacchino Volpe and Fascist Historiography in Italy,” in *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1880*, ed. Stefan Berger et al. (London, 1999), 189–201; G. Turi, “Il problema Volpe,” *Studi storici* 19, no. 1 (1978): 175–86; Margherita Angelini, “Clio among the *Camicie Nere*: Italian Historians and Their Allegiances to Fascism (1930s–1940s),” in *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini’s Italy*, ed. Giulia Albanese and Roberta Pergher (New York, 2012), 211–31; Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini’s Roman Empire* (New York, 1976), 18.

⁶⁸ Giacchino Volpe, *L’Italia in cammino* (Rome, 2011 [1927]), *Italia moderna: 1898–1910* (Florence, 1949), *Francesco Crispi* (Venice, 1928), and *Guerra, dopoguerra, fascismo* (Venice, 1928). For a broader reading of Italian imperialism in the Mediterranean, 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).

⁶⁹ Giacchino Volpe, *Fra storia e politica* (Rome, 1924), 288–93.

⁷⁰ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 317–19.

⁷¹ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 348–50.

tions of territory, nation, and sovereignty, Volpe observed that Italians in Egypt “[felt] an obscure, looming danger.”⁷²

Volpe fixated on the community’s imminent demise: “our postwar . . . is not cheerful and without dark clouds, even for the Italians in Egypt.”⁷³ Indeed, what Manela has called “the Wilsonian moment” was a time during which the logic of self-determination (supported in various ways by Mussolini’s early regime, even while it violently reconquered Libya and dreamed up a plan to render the Mediterranean an “Italian sea”) reconfigured conceptions of possible—and just—futures.⁷⁴ As an outcome of the 1919 uprisings, Volpe wrote, “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.”⁷⁵ While it was inevitable, he claimed, that Egyptian nationalists would borrow “ideologies” from Europeans residing in Egyptian territory, he also stated that the march toward independence was part of Egypt’s irreversible national progress. Among the movements contributing to what Volpe saw as Britain’s gradual withdrawal from direct administration in Egypt, he cited the rise of Islamic movements (the Muslim Brotherhood would be founded several years later in 1928), struggles between Zionists and Arabs in Palestine (and between Zionists and local Palestinian Jews), and anti-European tensions on the fringe of these movements.⁷⁶ For nationalist intellectuals like Volpe, the slow ending of British hegemony in Egypt signified Cairo’s emergence as an intellectual center that would unravel existing geopolitical networks in the Mediterranean and provide an ally for fascist Italy.⁷⁷ Within this projection, however, there was little space for the Italian community.

In contrast to the potential Volpe saw in Egypt’s political evolution, he detected great anxiety among the Italian residents caught in this historical conjuncture. The “Italians of Egypt,” he wrote, sensed a “looming threat” in a part of Africa that strategically mapped onto Italian imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean. He described the Italian community in Egypt as comprising “proletarian” emi-

⁷² Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 335.

⁷³ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 377.

⁷⁴ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2009).

⁷⁵ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 311–12.

⁷⁶ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 291–94. 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 when 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: Arabi, ebrei e indiani nella politica di Mussolini* (Bologna, 1988), and R. H. Rainero, *La politica araba di Mussolini nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Padua, 2004).

⁷⁷ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 300.

grants who lacked the “imperialist sentiment” of French, English, and German subjects elsewhere.⁷⁸ This, he suggested, would be one source of their eventual downfall. Projecting into the future, Volpe also imagined that an independent Egypt would no longer consent to the growth of foreign communities: “numerically . . . the Italian colony in Egypt will diminish rather than grow.”⁷⁹

According to Volpe, the question of Italian futures in Egypt was inseparable from the conditions set by the capitulatory regime. Throughout the Mediterranean, most jurisdictional privileges associated with the capitulations had already been abolished: in Tunisia with the establishment of the French Protectorate in 1881, in Libya with Italian occupation in 1912, and in Turkey by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Although their cancellation in Tunisia did not completely dismantle the system of consular protection, it did create hurdles for Italian authorities attempting to administer their own communities.⁸⁰ Given the “precedent of Tunisia,” Volpe anticipated that the annulment of the capitulations in Egypt would lead to Italy “resigning the protection of our community to British hands.” Additionally, he claimed, it would force all Italians to choose between becoming British “protégés” [*protetti*] or repatriation.⁸¹ He speculated that the breakdown of privileges—already underway when the British declared martial law during the First World War—would diminish any influence that Italy’s *protetti* might offer as cultural and commercial intermediaries. This would have a devastating impact, he noted, because they delivered the financial buttressing of the institutions that supported the much larger working-class Italian community.

Volpe’s concern was shared by the local Italian press. Following Britain’s unilateral declaration of Egypt’s independence in 1922, the local Italian newspaper, *L’Imparziale*, circulated what it claimed were “secret instructions” behind the Anglo-Egyptian talks. Among these “instructions” was that “the capitulations

⁷⁸ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 355–56. 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* (Florence, 1973). 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; Anna Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo: La ricerca di consenso in Egitto per l’impresa di Libia* (Rome, 1997). For more on this, see Eileen Ryan, “Violence and the Politics of Prestige: The Fascist Turn in Colonial Libya,” *Modern Italy* 20, no. 2 (2015): 123–35.

⁷⁹ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 371.

⁸⁰ On this, see Lewis, *Divided Rule*, 55, 75, 111, and Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 82–86.

⁸¹ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 373–76. An example of how the legal circumstances of colonial Tunisia affected some of the Italian communities can be found in Daniela Melfa, *Migrando a sud: Coloni italiani in Tunisia (1881–1939)* (Rome, 2008). For a comprehensive study of fascist interests in Tunisia, see Juliette Bessis, *La Méditerranée fasciste: L’Italie mussolinienne et la Tunisie* (Paris, 2000).

would be abolished and England alone would assume control over foreign interests in Egypt” (drawing yet again on the Tunisian experience).⁸² Indeed, British authorities noted that these discussions caused Italian residents to grow increasingly “apprehensive” about the future.⁸³ Tensions rose between Italian and British subjects despite the lack of overt diplomatic conflict.⁸⁴ At the time, Volpe imagined that the consolidation of the Egyptian monarchy would present an opportunity for Italy to negotiate a new partnership with the Egyptian government and thus to undermine the British from within. In a narrative that recounted a timeless friendship between the Italian and Egyptian peoples, Volpe claimed that political alliance would be possible because Italy had never constituted a “colonial presence” in Egypt. Yet, he positioned Egypt’s independence as a *de facto* triumph of nationalism and a sign that “everything has changed and everything is changing” in the Mediterranean balance of power.⁸⁵ This promise of new alliances, however, did not settle the anxieties of Italian residents caught between experience and expectation: “one hears frequent words of lament [for times past],” Volpe commented, explaining that if circumstances went unchanged, then the only possibility of remaining in Egypt would entail the “renouncement of one’s [Italian] nationality.” In accord with Volpe’s observations, the Italian government saw two paths of action for this community “at risk”: either expand Italy’s reach over and around them, or repatriate them.⁸⁶

III. BUILDING A FUTURE FOR THE ITALIANS IN EGYPT

In 1927, Dino Grandi, undersecretary of the Italian Ministry of Interior, announced that the Italian government would no longer refer to Italian “emigrants,” as previous governments had done, but would instead refer only to “Italians

⁸² Centro Archeologico Italiano (CAI, Cairo), “L’Egitto Stato sovrano e indipendente, la dichiarazione del Governo britannico,” *L’Imparziale*, March 2, 1922. It should also be noted that the Italian daily newspaper *L’Imparziale*—the so-called “mouthpiece for the Italian community” in the 1920s—frequently reprinted articles from Mussolini’s *Il popolo d’Italia*. By 1930, *L’Imparziale* was consolidated 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 state politics, see Alessandra Marchi, “La presse d’expression italienne en Égypte: De 1845 à 1950,” *Rivista dell’Istituto di Storia dell’Europa Mediterranea* 5 (2010): 101–2, and Umberto Rizzitano, *Un secolo di giornalismo italiano in Egitto* (Edizioni ANPIE)—originally published in *Cahiers d’histoire égyptienne-Histoire-Ethnographie-Documents Série VIII*, fasc. 2/3/April 1956: 129–54.

⁸³ TNA, FO141/686/3, “Italy and the Capitulations,” Amos to Selby, April 6, 1921.

⁸⁴ ASDMAE, AC (1922), b. 184, fasc. “Incidenti Suez: Oltraggio alla bandiera italiana da parte di alcuni inglesi.”

⁸⁵ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 358.

⁸⁶ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 356, 379.

abroad.” This rhetorical move—largely devoid of substantive changes—intended to link Italians outside metropolitan Italy to the nationalist and imperialist projects of the fascist regime, thus extending Italy beyond its geographical borders.⁸⁷ In Egypt, this resonated profoundly within the Italian community. In other emigrant destinations, the *Fasci italiani all’Estero* (Associations of the PNF Abroad) and their associated institutions were linked to party headquarters in Rome, but Italian nationals remained subject to local jurisdiction or to the authority of other colonial powers. In Egypt, on the contrary, extraterritoriality had preserved institutional autonomy by keeping the Italian community out of the reach of Anglo-Egyptian authority. Grandi’s move, then, had great pragmatic import in Egypt.⁸⁸ From Rome, the regime saw Egypt as a crucial location through which it could affirm its power in the region. Italian residents, schools, consular courts, and other institutions became the focal points of this strategy.⁸⁹

Major reforms were carried out to ensure that Italian schools became promulgators of *italianità* (Italianness), an older nationalist project that had become entangled with fascist ideology.⁹⁰ Italian state schools had been established in Alexandria, Cairo, and Upper Egypt by the end of the nineteenth century, but their curriculum remained largely unchanged.⁹¹ The local *Fasci*—established in Egypt in 1922 to monitor and control Italian institutions and to strengthen connections among Rome, the consulates, and Italian residents—had not yet

⁸⁷ Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo, eds., *Il fascismo e gli emigrati: La parabola dei Fasci italiani all’estero (1920–1943)* (Bari, 2003). See also Enzo Collotti, *Fascismo e politica di potenza: Politica estera 1922–1939* (Milan, 2000), 140; Emilio Gentile, “La politica estera del partito fascista: Ideologia e organizzazione dei Fasci italiani all’estero,” *Storia contemporanea* 26, no. 6 (1995): 897–957; Gentile, *La Grande Italia* (Bari, 2006); Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain’s Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford, 2003); Donna Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (London, 2000).

⁸⁸ Luca De Caprariis, “I Fasci italiani all’estero,” in *Il fascismo e gli emigrati: La parabola dei Fasci italiani all’estero (1920–1943)*, ed. Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo (Bari, 2003), 3–26.

⁸⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 215–17. For more on Italian emigrants and the politics of nationalism, see Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 29, and Labanca, *Oltremare*, 70–72.

⁹⁰ Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità: La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Bari, 2010). For a detailed consideration of how fascist ideology became a “secular religion founded on the myth of the nation,” see Emilio Gentile, “Fascism as Political Religion,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, nos. 2/3 (1990): 229–51, and Gentile, *Il culto del Littorio: La sacralizzazione della politica nell’Italia fascista* (Bari, 1993).

⁹¹ Annalaura Turiano, “De la pastorale migratoire à la coopération technique: Missionnaires italiens en Égypte, les salésiens et l’enseignement professionnel (1890–1970)” (PhD diss., Aix-Marseille Université, 2016). See also Marie Amélie Bardin, “Le scuole italiane al Cairo: Fattore d’identità fra nuova e vecchia emigrazione (1861–1915),” *Altreitalie*, no. 42; and Annalaura Turiano and Joseph John Viscomi, “From Immigrants to Emigrants: Salesian Education and the Failed Integration of Italians in Egypt, 1937–1960,” *Modern Italy* 23, no. 1 (2018): 1–17.

linked the schools' activities to the regime's ideals.⁹² An entirely new curriculum was thus devised in 1931/32 in Cairo and implemented the following year in Alexandria—one that, observed Piero Parini, the general director of Italians Abroad, would provide young Italians with the tools to survive in Egypt and would serve to reinvigorate the “prestige of Italian communities.”⁹³ In this restructuring, fascist intellectuals and diplomats sought to renew the postunification ideas of Francesco Crispi, who had envisioned communities of Italian emigrants as channels for nation building and for the extension of Italian political influence abroad. The new curriculum emphasized both fascism's “revolutionary” role in Italian political thought and the Italian “contribution” to Egypt's modernization.⁹⁴ Indeed, during his 1922 visit, Volpe had observed that smaller schools—like those subsidized by the Dante Alighieri Society (Società Dante Alighieri, SDA), a cultural institution whose goal was to safeguard and spread Italian language and culture abroad and to reinforce nationalist ideals among Italians outside the peninsula (its branch in Egypt was established in 1896)—often embodied Crispi's ideals better than Italian state schools.⁹⁵ In 1931, the SDA had been integrated into the PNF and its cultural propaganda officially tied to that of the regime.⁹⁶ In Egypt, the SDA circulated fascist publications and Istituto Luce propaganda films, the latter found by the institution's administration to be the most “effective and diffuse” means to reach Italian residents.⁹⁷

As the fascist regime's foreign policy aimed at utilizing its communities abroad to undermine British and French hegemony in the Mediterranean, in Egypt such actions were amplified by the context of extraterritoriality. Institutions such as the state schools and the SDA laid foundations for the promise of “national” protection. Such was the case for the Paonessa family, whose poverty could only be assuaged by the *Patria*, and the young Antoinette rooted her family in this imagined cross-Mediterranean kinship when she addressed the king as his “daughter.”

⁹² De Caprariis, “I Fasci italiani,” 5, 11–19.

⁹³ Marta Petricioli, “Italian Schools in Egypt,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 2 (1997): 185–86; Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 225–29.

⁹⁴ 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).

⁹⁵ Volpe, *Fra storia e politica*, 347–51. For an institutional history of the Dante Alighieri Society, see Patrizia Salvetti, *Immagine nazionale ed emigrazione nella Società Dante Alighieri* (Rome, 1995). On the Dante Alighieri Society's cultural propaganda in the region, see Tamara van Kessel, *Foreign Cultural Policy in the Interbellum: The Italian Dante Alighieri Society and the British Council Contesting the Mediterranean* (Amsterdam, 2016).

⁹⁶ Collotti, *Fascismo e politica*, 142.

⁹⁷ Archivio Società Dante Alighieri (ASDA, Rome), Alessandria-Egitto, b. 11, fasc. 18 “1933–1934.”

As we saw in Mazza's letter, others had already looked toward the state for guidance, anticipating that their days in Egypt were numbered. Still others, such as the florist G. Pugliese, implored the consul to support Italian businesses by purchasing their services for public events, noting the widespread economic hardship in which they found themselves. Acknowledging his contribution as a combatant in the First World War, the consulate took on Pugliese as a supplier and he provided the floral arrangements for the king's 1933 visit.⁹⁸

By late 1934, the Italian consul in Cairo observed that "a natural tendency toward sympathy for the fascist movement had developed" among all social strata of Italian residents.⁹⁹ He attributed this consensus to the consolidation of Italian institutions under the "national cause" and found confirmation in the growing list of Italian elites who volunteered to participate in the events organized during and after the king's visit.¹⁰⁰ The list included prominent *protetti* and members of the masonic lodges who had once been hesitant to accept the new role of the PNF.¹⁰¹ During the *Giornata della fede* (Day of Faith) campaign the following year, which aimed to demonstrate popular support for the colonial war in Ethiopia by symbolically wedding Italians to the fascist regime, Italian residents in 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 insurance policies valued at 200,000 Italian lire. This was nearly double the average amount given by Italians in Italy. Members of the unemployed working class, the wealthy elite, and a large number of Italian Jews were among the donors. While this was an immensely meaningful gesture for a population experiencing a steady rise in unemployment, perhaps it also indicates that members of the Italian community in Egypt sought to safeguard their future in the Italian state.¹⁰²

James Sheehan has argued that territorial claims facilitated the strengthening of national identities.¹⁰³ This Mediterranean example provides a twist to his as-

⁹⁸ ASDMAE, AC, b. 270 (1933), Pugliese, February 13, 1933.

⁹⁹ Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS, Rome), 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; ASDMAE, Gabinetto del Ministro e della S.G. (II) 556/B38, Corrispondenza relativa ai rapporti con l'Egitto 1933–34.

¹⁰⁰ ASDMAE, AC (1933), b. 270, Visita reale—Comitato locale, January 19, 1933.

¹⁰¹ ASDMAE, AC (1923), b. 188, Partito Nazionale Fascista sezione di Alessandria d'Egitto.

¹⁰² ACS, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario 1922–1943, b. 376, "appunto per la segreteria particolare," May 22, 1936; ACS, bib. SPD-CO 578, b. 154, "Il giornale d'Oriente." For an extensive study on this propaganda campaign, see Petra Terhoeven, *Oro alla patria: Donne, guerra e propaganda nella giornata della fede Fascista* (Bologna, 2006).

¹⁰³ James Sheehan, "The Problem of Sovereignty in European History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 1 (2006): 1–15.

sertion: the Italian state was able to extend itself over its subjects abroad through a regime of extraterritoriality that contemporaneously tied them to nationalist and imperialist projects. Among many Italians in Egypt, this coupling of nation and empire fortified a sense that Italy was both a source of protection and a promise for the future. Parini, who had attended the king's inauguration of the Scuole Littorie Italiane in 1933, closed his speech during the visit by declaring: "young Italians on Egyptian soil, the future belongs to you. . . . Preserve the sacred pride of being children of a great *Patria* and remember that every conquest of space and spirit is the fruit of sacrifice."¹⁰⁴ The capitulations permitted Italy's expansive nationalist project at the same moment that Egyptian nationalists sought to redefine Egypt's national sovereignty, setting up an untenable tension between Italian experiences in colonial Egypt and their expectations in the shadow of the *Patria*.

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 portrayed itself as a "peaceful" power that championed nationalist movements during much of the first decade of fascist rule in Rome (1922–32).¹⁰⁵ Historians generally concur that this was a continuation of liberal Italy's foreign policy, which had promoted Italian cultural and commercial "penetration" in the Mediterranean as a means of gaining imperial power relative to the British and the French.¹⁰⁶ In parallel with 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 of the Roman *Mare Nostrum*. In 1934, when Mussolini declared Africa and Asia to be within the "historic objectives" of Italy's "natural expansion," fascist propaganda took on threatening undertones in Egyptian and British political contexts. As a result, Italian residents became more susceptible to reactions from their "hosts" and from colonial authorities.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ ASDMAE, AC, b. 270 (1933), Parini to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, March 10, 1933.

¹⁰⁵ Mario Tedeschi Lalli, "La propaganda araba del fascismo e l'Egitto," *Storia contemporanea* 7, no. 4 (1976): 717–49, 722. See also Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance, 1830–1932* (Albany, NY, 1994).

¹⁰⁶ 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; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*; Giampiero Carocci, "Appunti sull'imperialismo fascista negli anni '20," *Studi storici* 8, no. 1 (1967): 113–37; Manuela Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940* (London, 2006).

¹⁰⁷ ASDMAE, Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale (II), 1059/B2, fasc. "Politica musulmana dell'Italia." Morewood describes 1935 as the beginning of a "col-

Italian efforts to mitigate opposition to its imperialist policies exploited Egypt's diverse public sphere. The Italian Ministry of Press and Propaganda, formed with Galeazzo Ciano as its director in 1935 (and renamed 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 to Egypt.¹⁰⁸ The ministry attempted to control information circulating on Italian colonies: journalists in Egypt writing in Italian, Arabic, French, Greek, and English were bribed and advised on appropriate content regarding Italian history and politics.¹⁰⁹ Radio Bari, the first internationally broadcast Arabic-language radio station, was one of Italy's most powerful weapons in this endeavor. In its cultural programming, Italy was presented as a "friendly nation" to its Arabic-speaking audience. Reports on opposition in Libya and East Africa were explicitly omitted.¹¹⁰ Around 60 percent of the broadcasts were considered "cultural programs" that explored historical encounters between Italians and Muslims.¹¹¹ This formed part of a broader project to mythologize the "timeless" links between Italy and the Arab or Islamic world. Although Radio Bari failed to instill sympathy for the Italian regime, it

lision course" between the Italian and the British authorities in Egypt; see 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*, ed. Robert Boyce and Esmonde M. Robertson (New York, 1989), 167–98.

¹⁰⁸ There is little evidence that Italy planned for an occupation of Egypt until 1942. ASDMAE, AP (Egitto) 1931–45, b. 33, "Sulla necessità che, in caso di occupazione militare dell'Egitto, si adottino speciali provvedimenti legislativi in sostituzione della legge di guerra del 1938," September 1942. See also Rainero, *La politica araba di Mussolini*.

¹⁰⁹ Revealing in terms of the transparency of Italian propaganda in Egypt are the political memoirs that mention Ugo Dadone, the director of the Italian propaganda office in Cairo, and the bribes he and his office offered to local newspapers in 1930s Egypt. 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, 1938), 172–74, and Elizabeth Monroe, *The Mediterranean in Politics* (Oxford, 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 more on Italian propaganda in Egypt, see Arielli, *Fascist Italy*, 46; Tedeschi Lalli, "La politica italiana in Egitto negli anni trenta e il movimento delle 'camicie verdi,'" *Storia contemporanea* 17, no. 6 (1986): 1177–1200, 1196.

¹¹⁰ Daniel Grange, "Structure et techniques d'une propagande: Les émissions arabes de Radio-Bari," *Relations internationales* 2 (1974): 165–85, 171.

¹¹¹ 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* (January–June 1939), and "L'Italia e i suoi rapporti futuri con i paesi arabi," *La vita italiana* (March 1937). For a broader analysis of the Radio Bari and its fascist propaganda, see Arturo Marzano, *Onde fasciste: La propaganda araba di Radio Bari (1934–43)* (Rome, 2015).

was measurably successful in its capacity to incite Egyptian and Arab nationalists against British and French hegemony in the Mediterranean.¹¹² This would become a recipe for later problems.

In the mid-1930s the Italian government began to support several Egyptian nationalist movements, notably the leaders of Young Egypt (Misr al Fatat) and their militant youth group, the Green Shirts, as well as the official Wafd militia, the Blue Shirts.¹¹³ Mussolini's office in Rome furnished literature on fascist political and social projects to these militant groups and closely monitored their activities. Both organizations united youth through "squadrons" and sporting activities and adopted a salute similar to the Roman salute used by Italian fascists. Italian diplomats in Egypt imagined that bolstering these movements—which provided significant opposition to British authorities and to moderate figures in the Wafd—would help Italy appear sympathetic to the aspirations of young Egyptians.¹¹⁴ In this regard, Italian efforts were by no means covert. After a series of anti-Italian critiques appeared in one of the popular English-language newspapers published in Cairo, the leader of Young Egypt openly declared his support for the "Italian government and its people," including in his message a note of appreciation for the Italian community in Egypt.¹¹⁵ His statement was personally received and acknowledged by Mussolini.¹¹⁶

During broad anti-British demonstrations between 1934 and 1935, Makram Ebeid, the Wafd's second in command and a member of its leadership since the party's inception, publicly condemned the PNF for their moral and material support of local militant groups. The English-language press, read widely among

¹¹² Grange, "Structure et techniques," 174, 185. It should be noted that the Italian minister in Egypt reported that British authorities openly expressed their discontent regarding the content of Radio Bari. See ASDMAE, Affari Politici (AP) (1931–45) Egitto, b. 16, fasc. "Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto." Khoury has shown that the strength of Italian propaganda emanating from Egypt was perceived as more than a simple "menace." It caused both the British and French great worry in the eastern Mediterranean. See Philip Shukry Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945* (Princeton, NJ, 1987), 494, 509, 514. British sources show that Radio Bari was a continual source of frustration: the station had previously been used to jam foreign broadcasting throughout the Mediterranean. TNA, FO141/765/10, "Italian propaganda," Minute, August 24, 1932.

¹¹³ 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, no. 1 (1970): 77–95; Jankowski, *Egypt's Young Rebels: "Young Egypt" 1933–1952* (Stanford, CA, 1975).

¹¹⁴ ASDMAE, AP (1931–45) Egitto, b. 16, fasc. "Associazione 'Giovane Egitto' (camicie verdi)" and "Partito Nazionalista Egiziano–Camicie Azzurre."

¹¹⁵ ASDMAE, AP (1931–45) Egitto, b. 16, fasc. "Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto." Letter from Ghigi to Mussolini, October 7, 1935.

¹¹⁶ ASDMAE, Gabinetto del Ministro e della S.G. (II) 557/B39, "Riassunto dell'esposto di Ahmad Hossen [sic], presidente del partito 'Giovane Egitto.'"

Egypt's elite classes and non-Egyptian populations, warned that Italian support for these paramilitary movements obstructed a prompt resolution to the "question of the Capitulations" and, in doing so, served only to exacerbate the disquiet among foreign communities in Egypt.¹¹⁷ The primary goal that united militant groups was the eventual abolition of capitulatory privileges for foreign residents and businesses. The issue was of exceptional concern to European residents because it threatened the legal structures that legitimized their presence in Egypt. In drawing attention, then, to Italian support of the militant groups, British authorities hoped to build a united movement among foreign communities against the Italian position.

The Wafd feared that Egypt could become a theater of war for Anglo-Italian conflict. Italy's 1935–36 invasion of Ethiopia had revealed a violently imperialistic regime,¹¹⁸ compelling many Egyptian intellectuals who had previously shown even the slightest sympathy toward the Italian regime to back away from their positions. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia also stirred some nationalists due to religious affinities between Egyptians and Ethiopians.¹¹⁹ 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. Other Egyptian nationalists anticipated that Italian control of the headwaters of the Nile would have disastrous effects on Egypt's agriculture.¹²⁰ The Suez Canal occupied a central place in British anxieties. Italian ships amounted to nearly 50 percent of the traffic passing through its waters in 1935 and, as Italian forces grew in Libya and Ethiopia, the potential of an attack from the Western Desert to protect Italy's passage through the canal became 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 brought hostility specifically from Greek and Coptic communities due to their shared Orthodox Christianity but also evoked more general concerns that Italy's actions would disrupt Egypt's status quo. He cautioned that these apprehensions would compromise both wealthy and poor Italian residents.¹²¹ The director of the bank de-

¹¹⁷ ACS, MCP, b. 62, fasc. 23 "Egitto-1936"; ASDMAE, AP (1931–45) Egitto, b. 16, fasc. "Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto." See also Jankowski, "Egyptian Blue Shirts," 82–84, 87; see also Berque, *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution*, 496.

¹¹⁸ Giorgio Rochat, "The Italian Air Force in the Ethiopian War (1935–1936)," in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York, 2005), 37–46; Alberto Sbacchi, "Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1936)," in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York, 2005), 47–56.

¹¹⁹ Monroe, *The Mediterranean*, 202; H. A. R. Gibb, "The Situation in Egypt," *International Affairs* 15, no. 3 (1936): 351–73.

¹²⁰ 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), 54.

¹²¹ Archivio Banco di Roma (BR, Milan), XI/8/15/I B10 fasc.10, "conflitto italo-etiopico atteggiamento della concorrenza 1935–38."

scribed “tendentious voices” agitating Egyptians and European residents in 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 Italian residents, who would remain without any protection.”¹²² Italy’s menace as an imperial power had outpaced its “Arab propaganda,” and the projected consequences rattled the foundations of the Italian community. As the fascist regime mapped Egypt’s Italians into their policies as “historical” and “cultural” justification for their special relationship with militant Egyptian nationalists, its imperialist aspirations directly undermined the legal structures that made the Italian community possible.¹²³

V. DISMANTLING THE PAST, DISMANTLING THE FUTURE

In 1935, Mussolini sent Pellegrino Ghigi as the minister of Italy in Egypt to craft a plan to improve the conditions of the Italian community.¹²⁴ In the meantime, however, the Egyptian government had reinitiated talks for a Treaty of Alliance with the British, which amplified problems for the Italian leadership. Signed in summer 1936, the treaty acknowledged Britain’s interest in the Suez Canal, permitted British troops to remain in the country without constituting a military occupation, and conceded greater authority to the British administration in the case of war. Importantly, it also set a date for formal negotiations to end the capitulations. The treaty represented an alliance between British authorities, the Wafd, and the Egyptian monarchy after several years of violent unrest.¹²⁵ Whereas rumors had spread that Italian diplomats were on the verge of reaching a nonaggression pact with Egypt, British concessions, arguably made out of fear that Egypt would indeed fall into alliance with Italy, helped to draw the “wind out of the Italian sails.”¹²⁶ Tensions had grown so palpable around the time of the

¹²² BR, XI/8/15/I B10 fasc. 31, Biagi to Executive Committee in Milan, September 21, 1935. See also Martelli, *Whose Sea*, 169.

¹²³ ASDMAE, Gabinetto del Ministro e della S.G. (II), 556/B38, Corrispondenza relativa ai rapporti con l’Egitto 1933–34. See also Labanca, *Oltremare*, 158.

¹²⁴ Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 92.

¹²⁵ Berque, *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution*, 525. See also Albert Bourgeois, *La formation de l’Égypte 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, “Italy’s Expansionist Policies on Anglo-Egyptian Relations in 1935,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 2 (1984): 206–31, 206.

¹²⁶ Martelli, *Whose Sea*, 173; Laila Morsy, “Military Clauses of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, 1936,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984): 67–97. For more on this point, see Eric Schewe, “State of Siege: The Development of the Security State in Egypt during the Second World War” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014), 42.

invasion of Ethiopia that the British devised a plan to arrest and intern around 12,500 Italian civilians in order to quell the “threat” of what they saw as a “fifth column community.”¹²⁷ Some historians have argued that it was precisely the conflict of Anglo-Italo-Egyptian interests that drove Mustafa al-Nahhas, Egypt’s prime minister, to come to terms with the British.¹²⁸ According to a contemporary British commentator, the alliance was “brought about through the agency of a third party—Italy.”¹²⁹ With this treaty, the fascist regime suffered a major blow to its regional interests.

In Egyptian historiography, the 1936 treaty is remembered as demarcating a new phase in the country’s political history.¹³⁰ The desire to deal finally with the capitulations was central. Tax exemptions and legal privileges enjoyed by foreigners had made it exceedingly difficult for an ascendant population of educated Egyptians (the *efendiyya*) to participate in the country’s economy.¹³¹ Privileges enjoyed by foreigners were perceived to encumber Egyptians directly. In one report, the Italian minister Ghigi 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 resoundingly on one matter alone: that an end to the capitulatory regime was paramount to “the struggle for complete independence.”¹³²

¹²⁷ Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 377. Although the conception of the plan was purportedly secret, it was acknowledged as a possibility among Italian residents by the late 1930s. Achille Vogliano, “l’Egitto e noi,” *La lettura: Rivista mensile del Corriere della Sera* 40, no. 10 (1939): 750–57. At the time there was discussion in British circles about whether Italians donning black shirts would be considered civilians in the case of the outbreak of war, and thus could be tried for war treason by a military court and liable to the death penalty. See exchange of notes in TNA, FO141/606/20. The so-called Tombak plan was placed on the back burner until Italy’s entry into the Second World War. TNA, FO371/24065, Empson to Rasmy Bey, June 7 and June 8, 1940, and Lampson to FO, June 11, 1940. WO201-2409, Wavel to Lampson, June 12, 1940.

¹²⁸ Morsy, “Italy’s Expansionist Policies.”

¹²⁹ Monroe, *The Mediterranean*, 35–37.

¹³⁰ Asim Ahmad al-Dasuqi, *Misr fi al-harb al-'alamiyya al-thaniya, 1939–1945* (Cairo, 1976), 15.

¹³¹ Gibb, “Situation in Egypt,” 368. For more on the struggles of the emerging class of unemployed, educated Egyptians in the context of colonialism and capitular privileges, see Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of Efendiyya* (Oxford, 2014), and, by the same author, “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*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt et al. (Cairo, 2005), 124–63, and Berque, *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution*, 455–60.

¹³² ASDMAE, AC, b. 301, “relazione sulla abolizione delle Capitolazioni in Egitto,” Ghigi to Ministry of Foreign Affairs Rome.

Prior to the signing of the 1936 treaty, Ghigi nevertheless made a last-ditch effort to defend the capitulations. With the anticipated consequences for the Italian community in mind, he wrote to the Egyptian government that “reform” was fundamental to the “development” of the public and private lives of the Egyptian populace. Yet, he argued, the capitulatory regime involved “real agreements” that should be settled one-by-one 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.¹³³ He wrote, “[the capitulations] are anything but an internal affair and their cancelation or modification certainly cannot be derived by the will of Egypt alone.”¹³⁴

The minister had the full support of Ernesto Cucinotta, the Italian consular judge and a crucial intermediary between Italian residents and diplomatic actors. Cucinotta had a first-hand sense of the extent to which jurisdictional extraterritoriality was integral to safeguarding national interests and institutions. The consular courts, he argued, gave Italian residents autonomy among the mix of national communities in Egypt. He claimed that without the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the consular courts, Italian subjects would not be considered equal to other Europeans, their institutions would collapse, and the community would lose the “prestige” that had been carefully propped up in the early 1930s.

Cucinotta anticipated that dissolving extraterritorial jurisdiction would turn the community inside out. The proportionately large Italian population and the vast amount of work that would be transferred away from the consular courts was the only argument he believed would persuade the Egyptian government to allow for substantive Italian participation in future negotiations. At the time, Italians 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 noted that in the Italian consular courts, around 1,100 penal and 200 civil proceedings had been processed each year since 1930. He suggested that the drastic increase in the volume of work that would be required of a transitional court could aid in lobbying for a larger Italian presence in a future legal system—

¹³³ Ghigi drew attention to the fact that they were often called *al-imtiyazat al-agnabiyah*, or “foreigner privileges.” It is worth noting here the piece of popular poem circulating at the time written by Bairam al-Tunsi, “The Privileges” (*Al-Imiyazat*), referred to the social inequalities perpetuated by the capitulations, portraying Sicilians as an “affliction” on Egyptian society. See Bairam al-Tunsi, *Diwan Bairam al-Tunsi* (Cairo, n.d.).

¹³⁴ ASDMAE, 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.” ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter.

or, he proposed, it could be used to persuade Egyptian authorities to allow modest protections for the Italian community. These details alone, he claimed, could preserve the national sovereignty of Italian residents and institutions.¹³⁵

Questions regarding the future of the Italian community became more urgent. In 1935, only a few years after having been linked to the PNF, the leadership of the SDA expressed angst regarding the “likely” closure of foreign schools in Egypt.¹³⁶ The signing of the 1936 treaty aggravated such anxieties. Several months later, the Italian consul in Alexandria wrote that Italian institutions were ultimately in a state of “continual decline.” Fearing the end of the community’s support networks, many residents had “repatriated” at their own expense and an additional 183 individuals (and their families) had done so at the expense of the consulate in Alexandria—a trend he expected to accelerate due to the upsurge in requests for “consular repatriation.”¹³⁷ An inauspicious future pushed 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, returned to Italy himself, “selling off” (*svendere*) his belongings, he wrote, “[because] the tense relations [between Italy and Britain] portend the outbreak of war.”¹³⁸

The Italian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in Cairo—an institution that represented artisans and small businesses as well as major industrial interests—told a similar story. Its members expected that the adversities confronting Italian residents would be intensified by the cancellation of the capitulations. The ICC presented a “large-scale repatriation” as the only viable solution to the anticipated scarcity of employment opportunities and infrastructural support.¹³⁹ The institution’s leadership advised that in future negotiations, Italy should demand clear assurances from the Egyptian government that Italian residents would be free to depart and return as they wish. Without this guarantee, which it noted was quite unlikely, the divide between metropolitan Italy and Italians in Egypt caused by the latter’s ever-increasing privation would become dangerously acute. Indeed, by 1937, the financial support provided to Italian institutions by elite members

¹³⁵ ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., Rapporto 9/11/1936; ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., Cucinotta to Console Generale d’Italia Alessandria and Legazione italiana, August 10, 1936.

¹³⁶ ASDA, Alessandria d’Egitto, Stanislao Rocchi to Felice Felicioni.

¹³⁷ ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., telespresso, September 11, 1936.

¹³⁸ ACS, MI, Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati, 1938, b. 17, Prefettura di Firenze to Ministro dell’Interno DGPS, Rome, May 18, 1938.

¹³⁹ ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., “prevedibili ripercussioni dell’eventuale abolizione del regime capitolare” (anticipated repercussions of the eventual abolition of the capitulatory regime), January 1937.

of the community had diminished alongside a steady drop of investments in Italy made by Italian residents in Egypt.¹⁴⁰ Italians lost ground in every category of professional life and their incomes rarely matched the rising cost of living.

The ICC in Alexandria noted that the vast majority of Italians lived hand to mouth.¹⁴¹ Throughout the late 1930s, Salvatore Caccioppo, an Italian resident in Attarin, Alexandria—a neighborhood in which Italians numbered roughly 10 percent of the non-Egyptian population—had requested pecuniary aid from the consulate for his children’s expenses at the Italian state school. In considering Caccioppo’s circumstances, the consul noted that “because of the employment crisis [facing Italians], Mr. Caccioppo is absolutely unable to pay and occasionally his family even lacks bread at home.”¹⁴² His circumstances, the consul continued, were typical of those facing the residents who would suffer the immediate consequences of an end to the capitulations.

The Società Italiana di Beneficenza, which had been the lifeblood of the community, also witnessed decreasing contributions from in-country donors.¹⁴³ Italian residents needed every piaster to maintain their livelihoods; a majority had come to rely on the heavily subsidized resources of state institutions.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, many Italians suspected that integration into local jurisdiction would entail new taxes and residency fees, thus augmenting the overall cost of living.¹⁴⁵ 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. . . . Without means to resist, and with moral and material assistance below its current level. . . [Italians] will be constrained to repatriate.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ BR, XI/8/15/I B10 fasc. 34, “regime capitolare in Egitto 1936–37.”

¹⁴¹ ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., notes prepared for Ghigi by the Camera di Commercio Italiana Alessandria d’Egitto (presided over by De Semo), February 1937. Elizabeth Monroe observes that most Italian “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 hungryman of the Italian treasury.” Monroe, *The Mediterranean*, 193.

¹⁴² CGAE, “Caccioppo Salvatore di Giovanni—1897.”

¹⁴³ Petricioli, *Oltre il mito*, 47–65; Morsy, “Italy’s Expansionist Policies,” 222.

¹⁴⁴ BR, XI/8/15/I B10 fasc. 34 “regime capitolare in Egitto 1936–37,” Appunto, October 1, 1936.

¹⁴⁵ ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., notes attached to “relazione . . .” from Ghigi to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁴⁶ ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., “prevedibili ripercussioni dell’eventuale abolizione del regime capitolare,” January 1937.

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. . . . If it is inevitable that our communities resign [themselves] to a gradual retreat . . . they would find themselves required to abandon—in a short time—the territory in which they have lived and worked for decades.¹⁴⁷

As these reports reached Rome, the fascist regime inflated the “historic” role Italians played in Egypt’s modernization, inadvertently highlighting the contrast between experience and expectation. During the late 1930s, Italian intellectuals in Egypt, including the historian Angelo Sammarco and others sent from Rome, orchestrated a series of conferences and publications around this topic.¹⁴⁸ For these intellectuals, the community’s significance could only be measured through retrospection. Members of the Italian community, however, interpreted unfolding events as irreversible processes: work progressively vanished for the generalized “Italian worker,” composed of a mosaic of families similar to those of Caccioppo, Mazza, and Paonessa mentioned in this article. In addition, the weakening capacity of the consulates to provide secure shelter for Italian *protetti* 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 Volpe had imagined fifteen years prior.¹⁴⁹ The anticipation of possible outcomes began to shape the present. Anxieties fueled the unfolding of historical time that, in turn, displaced Italian futures from Egypt. Several weeks before the conference organized to negotiate the cancellation of the capitulations, one report concluded that it would become impossible for Italians to remain in Egypt without legal protections “at the very moment” they would “begin to truly live in Egypt.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., notes prepared for Ghigi by the Camera di Commercio Italiana Alessandria d’Egitto, February 1937.

¹⁴⁸ I refer here to the notion of “historic” developed by Claudio Fogu in *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto, 2003). Publications that resulted from the conferences convened in late-1930s Egypt include Angelo Sammarco, ed., *Gli Italiani in Egitto: Il contributo italiano nella formazione dell’Egitto moderno* (Alessandria, 1937), and Sammarco, *Egitto moderno*.

¹⁴⁹ ASDMAE, AC, b. 301/ter., “relazione sulla abolizione delle Capitolazioni in Egitto,” Ghigi to Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome; ASDMAE, 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.

¹⁵⁰ ASDMAE, 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, March 22, 1937, 56.

VI. DEPARTURES

In April 1937, the conference for the abolition of the capitulations convened in Montreux, Switzerland. During preliminary statements, Egyptian delegates stressed their desire for “complete liberation” from the capitular regime, drawing upon the example of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Pellegrino Ghigi, who headed the Italian delegation, noted that the 1923 treaty had brought an end to all Italian institutions in Turkey. He imagined that the conclusions of Montreux would similarly strike a final blow to the much larger community of Italians in Egypt.¹⁵¹ The Italian delegation aimed to protect the “current and future” interests of Italians in Egypt; they stressed the importance of state institutions in “maintaining *italianità*.” Despite tense discussions between Ghigi and Makram Ebeid, who led the Egyptian delegation, Ghigi was promised that the Egyptian government had the “absolute intention” to secure Italian institutions.¹⁵² Such assurances, however, were binding only for the duration of the period of transition away from the capitulations.¹⁵³

These uncertain futures, Ghigi supposed, would produce detrimental “psychological effects” among Italians. Indeed, during the negotiations in Montreux, Italian residents bombarded their consulates with notes of trepidation. The pages of *Il giornale d'Oriente* conveyed their apprehension.¹⁵⁴ Intending to quell unrest by navigating the tension between experience and expectation, the newspaper's editors stated: “[Italians] must not think that all will continue as before. Important things will change; but any pessimism is futile and illegitimate. To live

¹⁵¹ 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),” telesspresso 13, Italian delegation to MAE, April 17, 1937.

¹⁵² MAE, AC, b. 301/ter., Italian delegation to MAE, April 17, 1937, colloquio con Makram Ebeid Pascia (Ghigi), April 14, 1937, p. 88, colloquio col Presidente del consiglio egiziano (Ghigi), April 15, 1937, p. 90, Ciano to Italian delegation at Montreux, April 17, 1937, p. 95. See also ASDMAE, 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),” telesspresso 48, Italian delegation (Aldrovandi) to MAE, May 6, 1937. The annex of this exchange of letters included the following definition of institutions that applied to the agreement: “1) les ‘Regie Scuole Italiane’; 2) les ‘Scuole dell’Associazione Nazionale Italica Gens’ avec les immeubles destinés aux religieux qui les gèrent; 3) les hôpitaux, les asîles; 4) les Oeuvres dépendentes du Fascio destinés à l’assistance pécuniaire ou spirituelle en tant qu’elles s’occupent d’assistance à l’exclusion d’autres activités; 5) institutions épiscopales et paroissiales, couvents et séminaires.”

¹⁵³ This was one of the most contentious points of debate between delegations. It was eventually settled that the transitional period would last twelve years, ending in 1949, at which point the former capitular powers would need to negotiate bilateral accords with the Egyptian government.

¹⁵⁴ *Il giornale d'Oriente*, April 14, 1937.

and work in Egypt for foreigners will no longer be easy. . . . One epoch finishes and another begins. . . . It is a gross error to believe in the fixity and immovability of certain [demographic and national] situations. The world goes on and woe unto those who regret that it does not stand still.”¹⁵⁵

Events in the following year intensified the disquiet. While the Italian population was never homogenous, it had transformed from a scattered population of residents into a tightly knit community that demonstrated a strong sense of *italianità*.¹⁵⁶ This rang true across all social strata. During the 1930s, antifascist organizations in Egypt had been almost nonexistent; the few that emerged did so on the eve of the Second World War and received little attention from within the Italian community.¹⁵⁷ British authorities struggled to find Italians opposed to the regime,¹⁵⁸ and until 1940 they worried that the fascist regime would use its con-

¹⁵⁵ *Il giornale d'Oriente*, April 16, 1937.

¹⁵⁶ The contemporary political scientist Elizabeth Monroe observed, “at first sight [the Italian emigrant] looked unprepossessing. . . . Such was the creature whom Fascism set out to waken to a sense of national pride, and it did so by the simple method of making him feel important. It taught him to fly an Italian flag, and to display pictures of his King and Duce. It turned his ragamuffin children into spick-and-span Ballilas, complete with black shirt, blue neckerchief, and toy gun. It improved his bastard Italian, and built him bigger schools and better hospitals; it provided clubs and night schools and after-care. . . . The result of [the Direzione degli Italiani all’Estero and the Dante Alighieri Society] is remarkable. . . . The communities still live in slums . . . and the older generation, which is conservative, has not appreciably changed its habits; but elsewhere a miracle has been worked. Their sons and grandsons are a new breed, radiating not only national loyalty but self-respect.” Monroe, *The Mediterranean in Politics*, 196–97.

¹⁵⁷ The number of active antifascists in Egypt since the early 1930s never appeared to surpass roughly one hundred individuals. ASDMAE, Affari Politici (AP), Egitto 1931–45 b. 33, “Appunto July, 28 1944”; ASDMAE, AC (1930), b. 248, ASDMAE, AC (1933), b. 270. See also Leila El Houssi, *L’urlo contro il regime: Gli antifascisti italiani in Tunisia tra le due guerre* (Rome, 2014), and, by the same author, “Italians in Tunisia: Between Regional Organization, Cultural Adaptation and Political Division, 1860s–1940,” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 19, no. 1 (2012): 163–81. Paolo Vittorelli recounts the struggles of a small group of antifascist Italian youth in Egypt in his memoirs. Paolo Vittorelli, *L’età della tempesta* (Milan, 1981), 11–22.

¹⁵⁸ TNA, FO/371/24634, Lampson, September 9, 1940. Because the selection of antifascists in Egypt was small, disorganized, and prone to infighting, British authorities briefly considered relocating Carlo Sforza, at the time living in exile in the United States, to Egypt. There was great doubt, however, that this would produce any consolidated movement. TNA, FO371/24634/1947, exchange of notes, September 1940. Most antifascists had arrived in Egypt from elsewhere only after Italy entered the war. For example, the leaders of *Giusitizia e Libertà* in Egypt, Stefano Terra and Enzo Sereni, were brought in to create an antifascist press. The antifascist “groups” in general, according to Fausta Cialente, were mainly constituted by a broader, international membership. Once Italy entered the war, many of the Italians who declared themselves to be “antifascists” had been active members of the PNF, arousing suspicion among both Italian antifascists and British authorities. For more on this, see Guido Valabrega, “Note sulla partecipazione di

nections among Italian Jews to subvert any restrictive measures the British authorities might apply against Italians.¹⁵⁹

The application of the Italian Racial Decree Laws in 1938, however, threatened to challenge this consensus. Until 1938, few Italian Jews in Egypt had outwardly exhibited sentiments contrary to fascism. Indeed, rather than evoking animosity toward the regime itself, the anti-Jewish legislation provoked a great deal of confusion within the community. Many Italian Jews felt themselves to be as patriotic as other Italians; this was especially the case among those who contributed on a regular basis to local Italian charities and institutions. After the fascistization of Italian schools in Egypt, some had gone so far as to pull their children from French schools and place them in Italian ones.¹⁶⁰ When asked to complete “declaration of race” (*dichiarazione di razza*) forms, documents required after the implementation of the racial decrees, many Italian Jews contended that religious identity had been secondary to their “Italian sentiment” and that it had never compromised their loyalty to the regime.¹⁶¹ In some cases, these forms included interventions from the consul or leading members of the

Italiani ai movimenti antifascisti in Egitto negli anni trenta e quaranta,” *Italia contemporanea* 203 (1996): 293–304 (accessed at Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia “Ferruccio Parri,” INSMLI, Milan); Fausta Cialente, “L’azione degli antifascisti italiani in Egitto,” in *Resistenza, liberazione nazionale e prospettiva mediterranea: Atti del seminario internazionale per il XXX anniversario della Liberazione*, ed. Manlio Brigaglio (Naples, 1975), 85–88 (accessed at INSMLI).

¹⁵⁹ In 1938 Italy reached a quiet peace with England, the latter officially recognizing the Italian Empire in Ethiopia. Some have argued that this was motivated by a desire to subdue conflict in Europe and to weaken the Italian-German connection. See Alberto Sbacchi, “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, no. 4 (1975): 555–74; see also TNA, FO371/24605, minutes, July 5 and 17, 1940.

¹⁶⁰ Petricioli, “La comunità italiana,” 40–41.

¹⁶¹ CGAE, “Pinto Umberto”; “Dello Strologo Ernesto”; “Dello Strologo Carlo”; Fiorentino Umberto”; “Sierra Luciano.” See also Joe Battino, “Una famiglia di vagabondi del Mediterraneo” (unpublished manuscript), Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia “Ferruccio Parri” (INSMLI, Milan, fondo “Joe Battino,” 23; Paolo Bagnoli, *Rosselli, Gobetti e la rivoluzione democratica: Uomini e idee tra liberalismo e socialismo* (Florence, 1996), 249 (accessed at INSMLI). It is difficult to determine what individual intentions were in this regard: were they seeking protection by emphasizing their loyalty to the regime, or were theirs genuine sentiments of affinity to the nationalist cause? There is scant scholarship that deals with this question in the colonial context. For studies that focus on metropolitan Italy, see Enzo Collotti, *Il Fascismo e gli ebrei: Le leggi razziali in Italia* (Bari, 2003); Ilaria Pavan and Guri Schwarz, eds., *Gli ebrei in Italia tra persecuzione fascista e reintegrazione postbellica* (Florence, 2001); Ilaria Pavan, *Il podestà ebreo: La storia di Renzo Ravenna tra fascismo e leggi razziali* (Bari, 2006).

Fasci asserting that the individual in question had demonstrated exemplary signs of *italianità* through their regular participation in or donation to Italian institutions. Such was the case of Alberto Belleli, the lawyer who had negotiated the contract with the Egyptian government for the purchase of the lands used to build the Scuole Littorie Italiane. After several objections were sent to Rome, both the consul and the Fascio refused to dismiss Belleli from his role as a legal consultant for the Alexandrian consulate.¹⁶²

In this conjuncture, requests for repatriation steadily increased. Nicola Santoro, in 1939, wrote to the consul declaring: “I can’t afford to live amidst so many enemies.”¹⁶³ Another Italian worker who had been discharged from the Suez Canal Company 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 (vous etes Italien, Monsieur, nous regrettons de ne pouvons vous engager) [*sic*].’”¹⁶⁴

While fascist policy and propaganda had drawn the Italian community closer together under its nationalist banner, it had concurrently pulled the rug out from under the community.¹⁶⁵ The leadership of the Dante Alighieri Society struggled to obtain payments from its associates, and rumors spread widely among the society’s most loyal members that it was bound to disappear. Attempting to breathe life into the welfare coffers in 1939, the consul in Alexandria appealed to past donors. He implored, “it is futile to illustrate for you, who know all too well the needs of our community, [and] the need to help—today more than ever—the innumerable families fallen into poverty who search for work in vain and for whom . . . repatriation is not possible.”¹⁶⁶

The Italian community never recovered. Following Italy’s entry into the war in June 1940, British authorities proceeded with the arrest and internment of more than 5,000 Italian males between 18 and 60 years of age. They suspected that Italians would incite militant Egyptian political movements.¹⁶⁷ Anglo-Egyptian authorities imposed the military clauses of the 1936 treaty, and diplomatic relations between Italy and Egypt were severed. British authorities put a conservative sequester on all Italian accounts, which went unresolved until

¹⁶² CGAE, “Belleli Alberto fu Vittorio cl. 1883, Camerani, November 24, 1938, and Rufini, January 14, 1940.

¹⁶³ CGAE, “Santoro Nicola.”

¹⁶⁴ CGAE, “Paoletti Enrico Rodolfo fu Albino.”

¹⁶⁵ Williams, *Mussolini’s Propaganda*, 127.

¹⁶⁶ CGAE, “Turrini Virgilio—1897.”

¹⁶⁷ The number of interned Italians was much lower than the British would have liked. After considerable debate, the Egyptian government used the arrest and internment as a means to garner autonomy in relation to British authorities. TNA, FO371/24605, Empson to Rasmy Bey, June 7, 1940. See also Schewe, “State of Siege.”

1947.¹⁶⁸ Poverty and prostitution became widespread in a community that lacked employment opportunities and political representation.¹⁶⁹ The Scuole Littorie Italiane was converted into a hospital for Egyptian troops after Italian air raids destroyed part of the city (and in 1949 the school was ceded to the Egyptian government following negotiations to reestablish ties between the two countries). After the release of imprisoned Italians in 1945, the postwar Italian government avoided discussion of a collective repatriation at all costs, despite insistence on its necessity from within the community. The new republican government concluded that the political sympathies of the Italians from Egypt would impede Italy's democratic transition.¹⁷⁰ The Italian community went from being portrayed as essential to Italy's future in the Mediterranean to being perceived as a community encumbered by its past. When Vittorio Emanuele III abdicated in 1946, he left Italy for Egypt, where he was received by a community of Italians that remained overwhelmingly loyal to him.¹⁷¹

This article has argued that developments during the interwar period set into motion key processes that disentangled the colonial Mediterranean. These insights are clarified through a hermeneutic that focuses on the tension between experience and expectation as engines of historical time. As this article has shown, the extraterritorial conditions set in place by the Ottoman-era capitulations in conjunction with Italian emigration, the rise of fascism, and competing Mediterranean imperialisms made possible the formation of an Italian community in colonial Egypt that increasingly looked toward the Italian state to safeguard its futures. Yet, antagonisms between imperialist and nationalist projects that extended beyond territorial colonial relations caused great uncertainty regarding the jurisdictional boundaries that had engendered this very community. These antagonisms culminated in the abolishment of the capitulations, the legal regime that had been foundational to Italian experience in Egypt. In showing this, we have seen how the expectation of "repatriation" during the interwar period locates physical departures from Egypt in a longer historical duration. Within this Mediterranean constellation of nation, empire, and territory, anticipated

¹⁶⁸ The sequester was not formally lifted until 1948, and many of its restrictions lasted until 1950.

¹⁶⁹ ACS, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (PCM), 1944–47, 15-3/11222, "notizie sulla collettività italiana d'Egitto," December 21, 1944.

¹⁷⁰ As in France, the postwar Italian government feared the possibility of "repatriate" becoming a social category with political consequences. Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 155.

¹⁷¹ Vittorio Emanuele died in Alexandria on December 31, 1947. He remained entombed in Egypt, in St. Catherine's Church of Alexandria, until December 2017, when his body was transferred to Italy. Political sympathizers and self-identified "monarchists" made a pilgrimage to the tomb on a nearly yearly basis. CGAE, "Vittorio Emanuele di Savoia."

futures of departure thus challenge the teleological frameworks that center narratives of decolonization around the events of the “long 1950s.”

This tension between experience and expectation had concrete consequences. Although Italians were provided the opportunity to opt for Egyptian nationality in 1948, which would have assured them of residency status, few chose to do so.¹⁷² In order for most Italians in Egypt to remain “Italian” in the way they had come to understand their national affinities within Italy’s imperial enclave in extraterritorial Egypt, departure became necessary. Indeed, two decades after his speculations on Italian futures in Egypt, the historian Volpe would write of the Italian community in Egypt only in the past tense.¹⁷³ After the Second World War, the population that had numbered over 55,000 sharply declined. Many emigrated to South America and Australia; most went to Italy. By the early 1950s, “repatriation” had become a social fact in the lives of Italian residents. Reports from 1950 and 1951 estimated that as many as 6,000 Italian families had left Egypt since the end of the war in search of “the security of a more prosperous future.”¹⁷⁴ The circumstances of mass departure forced the Italian government to address at last the long-standing question of repatriation. By 1960, the legal definition of “national refugee” was expanded to include Italians arriving in Italy from Egypt who lacked connections and resources in the metropole, but who nevertheless saw themselves as emblems of Italy’s history in the Mediterranean.¹⁷⁵ As history unfolded, Italian futures in Egypt became futures past.

¹⁷² Of the roughly 800 applications for naturalization, which included Italians among other non-Egyptian subjects (precise numbers have yet to be found), less than half were accepted. Those whose applications were accepted were either individuals with advanced technical training or industrialists who contributed substantively to the Egyptian economy. The applications of laborers, artisans, and the unemployed often went unanswered or were rejected by Egyptian authorities. ASDMAE, AP (Egitto) 1951, b. 703, Appunto acquisto della cittadinanza egiziana, October 30, 1950.

¹⁷³ Volpe, *Italia moderna*, 196.

¹⁷⁴ G.P.d.F., “Il passato e il presente degli Italiani in Egitto,” *Italiani nel mondo*, February 25, 1951; Raniero Giani, “Declino a Porto Said della collettività italiana,” *Italiani nel mondo*, January 25, 1951.

¹⁷⁵ ASDMAE, AP 1956, b. 1059 Direzione Generale di Emigrazione, “promemoria,” October 11, 1956. See also Joseph John Viscomi, “Un’integrazione fallita? La partenza degli Italiani dall’Egitto nel secondo dopoguerra,” *Archivio storico dell’emigrazione italiana* 14 (2018): 83–95.