

ALEXANDRIA AND CAIRO: THE “BALAD” OR “TERRA NOSTRA” OF THE
ITALIANS IN EGYPT: 1860-1956.

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ABSTRACT

Egypt became the second homeland of the many Italians that migrated there from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first three decades of the twentieth century because of political and economic reasons. In Egypt, the Italian community, together with the other foreign minorities, lived a privileged life protected by the capitulations laws. However, cosmopolitanism became a problem when Egyptian nationalism emerged in 1919. The rise to power of Mussolini in Italy, and the appearance of Zionism caused the gentile and Jewish Italians in Egypt to view their national identity as a problem. World War Two and the rise to power in 1956 of President Nasser put an end to the foreign communities in Egypt. The cosmopolitan Egypt Italians lived in survived only in their memories.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Antonio and Emma, my sister Giovanna, my brother-in-law Andrea, and my two best friends Manuela and Vanessa. Thank you for never giving up on me and for always supporting my decisions with unconditional love.

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INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Italian community in Egypt was fundamental for the political, economic and cultural development and modernization of Egypt. While usually historians focus on the role of Britain, which occupied Egypt in 1882, and of France, the contributions the Italian community provided Egypt are often forgotten. This thesis illustrates the role of the Italian community in Egypt, which was important in the creation of modern Egypt.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, while Italy was going through wars of independence, many Italian Masons and members of Italian secret societies, exiled by the states of the peninsula, were welcomed by the Viceroy of Egypt, Mohammad Ali. After the unification of Italy, another wave of Italian migrants moved to Egypt and stayed there until the advent of President Nasser in 1956. In Egypt, the capitulations laws allowed foreigners to live a privileged life. Egypt was a cosmopolitan place where nationality was displayed only when convenient. Egypt was considered to be diverse, multiethnic and cosmopolitan as the United States, another place where many Italians migrated in the second half of the nineteenth century. Egypt was just warmer and closer to Italy. In Egypt any foreigner could gain profit. Foreigners benefitted from the Capitulations, which not only protected them, but also provided social and economic advantages in comparison to the local population.¹

However, the prestige of the Italian community in Egypt was overshadowed by the French and by the British after 1882. British nationality became the most influential in Egypt at the expense of the Italian one. Nevertheless, after a moment of crisis, the

¹ Daniel Fishman, *Il chilometro d'oro: il mondo perduto degli italiani d'Egitto* (Milano: Edizioni Angelo Guerini e Associati SpA, 2006), 21.

Italian community regained momentum from the turn of the twentieth century until the 1930s.

The relations between Egypt and the Italian community were good. Contrary to the British and French, the Italians were not perceived by the Egyptians as a colonial power. The Italians also considered Egypt a second motherland. However, the emergence of an exclusive Egyptian nationalism in 1919, put an end to Egypt's cosmopolitanism. Foreignness was now a problem in Egypt. Moreover, Egyptian national movements and the rise to power of Mussolini in Italy, led the Italian community to view their national identity as an issue. The Italians in Egypt could no longer consider themselves loyal both to Egypt and Italy. The situation of the Italian Jews in Egypt was even more complex. The rise of Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel, further fragmented the national identity of this group.

World War Two and the rise to power in 1956 of President Nasser put an end to the foreign communities in Egypt. The Italians also had to leave what was for them a homeland and return to Italy. These Italians thought of Egypt and its people with nostalgia. The cosmopolitan Egypt they lived in survived only in their memories.



Figure 1. Cosmopolitan Alexandria in the summer of 1931: locals and Europeans living together in Michael Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 32.

This study traces the contribution of the Italian community in the political, economic and cultural development of Egypt from 1860 to 1956. A contribution that has been underestimated and neglected by historians who focus mostly, if not only, on British and French involvement in Egypt's modernization. Even though the historiography of who contributed to Egypt's development in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, favors the British and the French, however history tells us that it is the Italians community that played a crucial role in the modernization of Egypt. The contribution this thesis gives is to grant the Italian community in Egypt the merit they deserve in playing a central role in the building of modern Egypt, free of any political and colonial agenda until the 1930s.²

As for the time limits chosen for this study, the starting point of 1850 requires explanation. This year was chosen as it coincides with the first major waves Italian

² Antonio Monti, *Gli italiani ed il canale di Suez; lettere inedite di P. Paleocapa, L. Torelli, E. Gioja e altri* (Roma: Regio Istitutio per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1937), viii.

immigrants moving to Egypt as a consequence of the failing revolutions of 1848. This thesis then ends with the 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal, when President Nasser decided to expel all those people who did not have an Egyptian passport, therefore ending the presence of foreigners in Egypt.

This thesis is the product of researches carried out in Cairo, Alexandria, Rome and Wilmington since the spring of 2009. Many of the resources, which are both in English and in Italian, and were important for the creation for this thesis were not easy to retrieve, as per *Oltre il Mito* by Marta Petricioli, published in 2007, there are only five copies, including mine, throughout Italy.

The books that had been important to realize this thesis are *Esuli italiani in Egitto* by Michael Ersilio, which provided detailed information of the reasons why the first wave of Italians moved to Egypt from 1815 to 1861. This book provided an important background, which was key in understanding the relationship the Italians community in Egypt had with Italy and the loyalty to both their homeland and Egypt. Crucial books were also Fausta Cialente's *Ballata Levantina* and *Cortile a Cleopatra*, which provided a further understanding of how the cosmopolitan life in Egypt was perceived by the Italian community and how these Italians' every-day-live changed with the rise of Fascism, Zionism and Egyptian nationalism. Gudrun Krämer's *The Jews in modern Egypt* contribution was to explain the situation of the Jewish community in Egypt between 1914 and 1952 and how the national identity of the Italian Jews was influenced by the rise of Zionism, Fascism in Italy and nationalism in Egypt. Antonio Monti *Gli italiani ed il canale di Suez* allowed to rewrite the history of the creation of the Suez Canal giving the rightful credit to the contributions of the Italians in the project. A collection of documents

written by the members of the Italian team that was part of the construction of the Canal, Monti argued in his book, that contrary to the *Histoire de l'Isthme de Suez* published in 1869 by Olivier Ritt who attributed all the merit of the construction of the Suez Canal to the French Ferdinand de Lesseps, the Italians team lead by Negrelli was fundamental to realize the project.³

However, the books that contributed the most to the creation of this thesis are *Gli Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del XIX secolo* by L.A. Balboni, *Gli Italiani in Egitto* and *In Egitto* by Marco Sammarco, and *Oltre il Mito* written by Marta Petricioli. Balboni's book is thoroughly researched work published in 1906. This was the first book that highlighted the importance of the Italian community in the creation of modern Egypt and has been influential for the development of later works about this issue. Sammarco's two books, a product of his research in the Egyptian archive, were published in 1937 and 1939. His work was both instrumental to promote Italian influence in Egypt during the Fascist regime and to ensure a strong position of the Italian community vis-à-vis the British and French. But also to further reinforce the role of the Italian community in the history of modern Egypt, which Sammarco defines to be the most efficient contribution of the development and progress of Egypt.⁴ *Oltre il Mito* by Marta Petricioli, a contemporary work published in 2007, deals with the Italian community in Egypt from 1917 to 1947. The book is well researched and provides detailed information about the political, cultural and economic contribution and merits of the Italians in Egypt.

³ Antonio Monti, *Gli italiani ed il canale di Suez; lettere inedite di P. Paleocapa, L. Torelli, E. Gioja e altri* (Roma: Regio Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1937), vii.

⁴ Angelo Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto; il contributo italiano nella formazione dell'Egitto moderno* (Alessandria d'Egitto: Edizioni del Fascio, 1937), xii.

This thesis, contrary to these books, looks at the important and contribution of the Italian community in Egypt on a longer time frame, from 1860 to 1956, also putting in consideration how events in Italy and Israel further impacted this community and its relations with the local population and the other foreigners.

CHAPTER 1: ESCAPING THE RISORGIMENTO FOR THE MODERNIZING EGYPT OF MOHAMMAD ALI, 1860-1882

The Italian community of Egypt tied the history of Italy and Egypt together. The events that took place in both countries, from the unification of Italy to 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal, affected the Italian community in Egypt as well as the impact the community had on the local population and Egypt. The failed nationalist movements taking place in Italy in 1848 led many Italian Masons, who unsuccessfully attempted to unite Italy, to seek refuge in other countries as they were exiled by the authorities governing the peninsula. In the early nineteenth century, the place that provided hospitality, jobs, asylum and privileged life to exiled Italians was Mohammad Ali's Egypt. Mohammad Ali (r. 1805-1848) saw in these refugees a tool to modernize Egypt along European lines. This is how the story of the Italian community in Egypt began. That story evolved over time, until its end in 1956.

This chapter argues that the Italian community was crucial in modernizing Egypt from the beginning of the nineteenth century until 1882. Italian secret societies and Freemasons created organizations devoted not only to support patriotism at home but also to help the Italian community in Egypt and the local population. Newspapers, mail service, urban constructions, transportation, military training, charitable organizations, schools and hospitals were among the many contributions the Italians provided their host country. From the beginning of the nineteenth century until 1882, the intentions of the Italian community were free of any colonial agenda.⁵

This first chapter provides an historical background of the events taking place in Italy and Egypt: the unification of the former and the modernization of the latter. The

⁵ Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Viaggiatori in Egitto: Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Eça de Queirós, Giuseppe Ungaretti* (Torino: Ananke, 2007), 90.

good relations among the two countries were strengthened by the activities of the Italian community in Egypt, and reinforced by the events of 1882 when Italy did not side with the British occupation of Egypt. The year 1882, however, marked the decline of the prestige and influence of the Italian community, which was thereafter overshadowed by the power of the British and the French.

This chapter also explains the differences between the two waves of Italian immigrants to Egypt and how the reasons that triggered these immigrations were related to the issue of Italian politics and economy. The first wave of Italian immigrants, who moved to Egypt in the early nineteenth century consisted of soldiers and political refugees. This group was very patriotic. They wanted to go back to Italy, but they could not as they were exiled from the peninsula. While in Egypt, those immigrants created institutions and secret societies that could support the unification of Italy financially. Later they sent men willing to fight the wars of independence. The national identity of this community was Italian. Even though Italy was not united, a strong sense of nationalism was already present.⁶

The second wave of Italians, who migrated to Egypt after the Italian unification, differed markedly from the first. The Italy they left was united but not able to provide for its citizens. These Italians moved to Egypt in search for jobs and a better life. They were disillusioned Italian Masons who hoped for a liberal, united Italy and were dissatisfied with the king and the inability of the Italian parliament to address the problems of the country. Many were professionals, engineers, architects, artists and bureaucrats but also workers, farmers and artisans. They were attracted to the many opportunities presented by the reforms and modernization programs of Egypt, the building of the Suez Canal and

⁶ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 35.

many other projects aimed at developing the country. In contrast to the first exiles, the Italians of the second wave could go back to Italy but did not want to, as they found in Egypt a second homeland that could provide for employment and a better life than the one in Italy. These Italians were considered the ‘settlers’ of the Italian community. Their children were Italian, born in Egypt, who often never saw Italy and felt more attached to the land they were born in than their parents homeland. These Italians, also affected by the wave of nationalism that broke out in 1882, the imposition of British colonialism on Egypt and the more aggressive foreign policy of Italy, experienced a crisis in identity, and were often torn between feeling loyal to Italy or Egypt.⁷

Italy from beginning of 19th century to the Risorgimento

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, while France, and Great Britain were established nations, Italy was not yet a country. Rather, it was a conglomeration of city-states, and kingdoms ruled by princes and dukes. The Bourbons ruled the territory from Naples to Sicily, also referred as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; in the center of the Italian peninsula there were three Duchies, of Tuscany, Parma and Modena and the Papal State. This latter was among the biggest enemy of Italian patriotism, as Pope Pius IX (Pope from June 1846 to February 1878) threatened to invoke foreign help every time his temporal rule, over the central part of the peninsula, was challenged. In the North-Eastern part of the peninsula there were Lombardia and Venezia, which had been administered by the Habsburg Empire in Vienna since the eighteenth century. In the North-East there was the kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont ruled by the Savoy family, future kings of unified

⁷ Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), 175.

Italy until the establishment of the republic after World War Two and also close friends with the Egyptian royal family.⁸

Political fragmentation of the peninsula was further promoted by foreign invasion and internal wars.⁹ With the spread of the ideas of the French Revolution, the idea of a unified sovereign nation, called Italy, began to appear among the elites. It was also at the beginning of the nineteenth century that secret societies emerged. The Grande Oriente d'Italia was founded in 1805 and its motto was that of the French Revolution – Liberté, égalité, fraternité-. However, the most famous of these secret societies was the *Carboneria*. Usually translated in English as 'charcoal-burners' these were mostly the producers not the consumers of such goods. The *Carboneria*, largely spread in the southern part of the peninsula, was a secret society like the Freemasons. Both aimed at unifying Italy. While the *carbonari* promoted the idea of armed revolution, however, the Masons "intended to spread humanist, anti-clerical values by peaceful means."¹⁰ Their role, in 1848, was to achieve Italian unification by planning, financing and carrying out subversive acts. However, these pre-political organizations failed to obtain unification in 1848 as they lacked any unity and did not have a clear program to carry out.¹¹

Many members of secret societies fled the not-yet-unified Italy and sought political asylum in Egypt. Many others were Masons whose liberal ideas were not applicable in the peninsula and who became politically disillusioned. The secret societies found Egypt as a host country willing to receive them.¹² By 1834 there were already several different Italian secret societies in Egypt. The *Giovine Italia*, founded in the

⁸ Denis Mack-Smith, *The making of Italy, 1796-1866* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 3.

⁹ Christopher Duggan, *A concise history of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

¹⁰ Harry Hearder, *Italy in the age of the Risorgimento, 1790-1870* (London: Longman, 1983), 178.

¹¹ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 188.

¹² Duggan, *A concise history of Italy*, 103.

peninsula by Giuseppe Mazzini, was in Egypt competing with a newer society, the *Veri Italiani*. These two organizations did not have many members, as the majority of Italians in Egypt were still loyal to the older secret societies, the Freemasons and the *Carboneria*, which by now were developing their program, a process which required a more international and cosmopolitan outlook.¹³ These organizations were fundamental to the cultural development of Egypt as they were the ones that financed the creation of schools and institutions that helped and supported the Italian community in Egypt.

Italy gained geo-strategic importance to Britain and Austria when, in the early nineteenth century, maintaining a balance of power was the main concern in Europe. France's expansionistic aim led the rest of Europe to view Italy as a good tool to limit Napoléon Bonaparte. This new status contributed to the consolidation of a national idea in Italy. Britain used Italy to contain Napoléon. From 1806 to 1815, Britain occupied Sicily in order to keep the French fleet in check. More importantly, the Italian peninsula extended towards Egypt, a crucial point of connection for Britain with its most profitable colony, India. Therefore, by occupying Sicily, Britain ensured the free flow of goods in the Mediterranean. Again in the 1850s, when France seemed to become a threat to Europe once again led by emperor Napoléon III, Britain supported Italian unification as it was seen to be a good counter-weight to its neighbors. The foreign policy of the French Second Empire aimed at expansion. As Britain and France were then competing over creating empires in Africa, and with Russia and Austria fighting over the Balkans, Italy's geo-strategic position grew in Europe.¹⁴

¹³ Michael Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861* (Pisa: Domus Mazziniana Collana Scientifica, 1958), 61.

¹⁴ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 3.

Regardless of Italy's new geo-strategic importance in the nineteenth century, once it was unified it did not manage to use its new status to obtain an economic advantage over the other European nations. One of the reasons why Italy was not economically competitive was because, after unification, the economic gap between the North of Italy and the South increased. The South was not competitive and still backward. Almost 100 per cent of the population of the South was illiterate, rural and with an agricultural economy.¹⁵

The 1840s was a harsh decade for Europe in general and in particular, Italy. The economy was stagnating and a large portion of the population, which grew in number in the 19th century, was starving. The economic crisis was followed by a series of failed nationalistic revolutions, which further destabilized the political situation of Europe. The unrest of the 1840s was not only a sign of discontent due to the restoration granted by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, but also an outcry for the establishment of a new social order as a consequence of changes that occurred with the Industrial Revolution. In Italy, revolts also broke out but were not successful in bringing unity to the peninsula. However, unity was ultimately achieved.¹⁶

In 1842 Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour (in office from March 1852 to June 1861) became the Prime Minister in Piedmont and began to unify Italy by extending the power of the royal house of Savoy in the North. In 1860 Giuseppe Garibaldi (July 1807 – June 1882) began conquering Italy from the South, and on May 11 he and a group of a thousand men, called the Mille, landed in Marsala and liberated the peninsula from foreign control. By October 25, 1860 Garibaldi and the Mille conquered the Kingdom of

¹⁵ Duggan, *A concise history of Italy*, 14-5.

¹⁶ Mack-Smith, *The making of Italy*, 9.

Naples and Sicily. Garibaldi then met with King Victor Emmanuel in Teano, near Naples and “handed over the South to the King.”¹⁷ By 1860 the only two missing pieces for Italian unity were Veneto and the Papal State. The following year Victor Emmanuel of Savoy assumed the title of King of Italy. Unification was, however, completed by September 20, 1870 when a military branch called bersaglieri entered Rome through the breccia di Porta Pia. Italy was united.¹⁸

The economic situation in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century worsened for many reasons. First, the peninsula did not have coal, the natural resource with which the Industrial Revolution began and took place in Great Britain and other major European states. Italy managed to industrialize only at the end of the nineteenth century with the construction of hydro-electric dams in the Alps.¹⁹ As the country lacked natural resources and the population was mostly rural. Italian industries were linked to agriculture. Silk for example, became an important Italian industrial product, and was a good that was later exported to Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰

Another cause of the economic downfall was the resources’ shortage. As a consequence, there was not enough food to feed everybody. The population in Italy was 11 million in 1660. By 1800 it had grown to 18 million, and when Italy unified there were 26 million Italians. However, once it became a state, Italy was not able to address the issue of resources and a large number of Italians, who were unemployed and could not feed their families, chose to emigrate in search for jobs. Many went to Egypt.²¹

Another reason why many Italians left Italy after unification was because the new

¹⁷ Duggan, *A concise history of Italy*, 133.

¹⁸ John A. Davis, *Italy in the nineteenth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154.

¹⁹ Davis, *Italy in the nineteenth century*, 236.

²⁰ Marta Petricoli, *Oltre il Mito* (Milano: Mondadori, 2007), 157.

²¹ Davis, *Italy in the nineteenth century*, 253.

kingdom was mostly centered in the hands of the Lombards, Venetians or Piedmontese. A Civil Service began opening positions for Italians in the South only in the early twentieth century. This caused many problems for the peninsula: inefficiency, political insecurity and resentment towards the North.²²

The newly created Italian kingdom also fought a battle against illiteracy. More than half of the population did not know how to write or read and, in the South, the illiteracy rate was close to 100 per cent. The government saw education as a good way to promote national ideas and strengthen Italian identity.²³ Hard work, industrialization, national loyalty and patriotism were the values stressed in schools. However, the majority of peasants became literate thanks to compulsory military service, which by 1875 mobilized 65,000 Italians annually. Nevertheless, while the middle and lower class attended elementary school only, secondary and high schools were meant to educate the future ruling elite.²⁴ Administration or the professions were the main employment of these elites. These same professions were the ones Italians performed in great numbers in Egypt. In the late 1870s and throughout the 1880s more than a million Italians migrated due to the worsening of the agricultural crisis that hit both North and South.²⁵

In 1887 Francesco Crispi (r. 1887-1891 and 1893-1896) became prime minister after the death of previous Premier Agostino Depretis (r. 1876-1878). Crispi served two terms as head of the Italian government, the first from 1887 to 1891 and a second from 1893 to 1896. His most important point in this political agenda was to restore the authority of the state by giving more power to the executive and carrying out an

²² Duggan, *A concise history of Italy*, 141.

²³ Hearder, *Italy in the age of the Risorgimento*, 249.

²⁴ Duggan, *A concise history of Italy*, 155.

²⁵ Davis, *Italy in the nineteenth century*, 178.

aggressive foreign policy. Crispi was committed to promoting national loyalty through political education or, he thought, Italy would disintegrate. His idea of patriotism implied praising the heroes of the Risorgimento, such as Garibaldi and Mazzini, and “mobilizing the nation through war” as he thought war created a sense of nationhood, just like during the wars of independence.²⁶ Therefore, regardless of the economic crisis, military spending increased as Crispi, like Mazzini, thought that Italy should gain some land in Africa.²⁷ Crispi was important because his political educational policy was carried out both in Italy and the Italian communities abroad, including Egypt. His policy re-established prestige to the Italian schools in Egypt after they had been undermined by British and French institutions, after the British occupation of Egypt in 1882.

Egypt and the Italian colony from Mohammad Ali to 1882

Traces of an Italian community in Egypt go back to the period of the Maritime Republics, in the Middle Ages. The Maritime Republics gained from the Sultan of Istanbul the ability to trade with Egypt and were among the first to benefit from the privileges of capitulations laws, which were privileges that entailed exemption from paying taxes, and that granted extraterritoriality and diplomatic immunity.²⁸ The first to achieve the permit to do business under the privileges of Capitulations were the people of Pisa in 1173. By 1453 Genoa and Venice were granted permission to trade under the rules of Capitulations. Soon after, in 1488, Florence joined as well.²⁹

²⁶ Duggan, *A concise history of Italy*, 169.

²⁷ Davis, *Italy in the nineteenth century*, 180.

²⁸ Domenico Gatteschi, *Manuale di diritto pubblico e privato ottomano* (Alessandria d'Egitto: Tipografia della Posta Europea di V. Minasi E.C., 1865), xii.

²⁹ Camillo Manfroni, *I colonizzatori italiani durante il Medio Evo e il Rinascimento* (Roma: La libreria della Stato, 1933), 147.

Nevertheless, a large and well structured community of Italians in Egypt emerged only in the nineteenth century, when many Italians were drawn there, attracted by job opportunities and the modernization programs carried out by Mohammad Ali, (r. 1805-1848). It was in the middle of the nineteenth century, when Italy and Europe underwent a series of revolutions –the Industrial Revolution, the spreading of the ideas of the French Revolution through Napoleonic conquests, and the failures of the nationalistic movements in 1848- that the first wave of Italian immigration to Egypt took place. Egypt was also going through a phase of modernization and detachment from the Ottoman Empire under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Pasha.³⁰

The story of the Italian relationship with Egypt in modern times began in the nineteenth century when Mohammad Ali exposed Egyptians to “western institutions, ideologies, habits and customs.” Mohammad Ali sent many government employees abroad to study Western states’ institutions and styles of government. Mohammad Ali’s aim was to modernize Egypt so that it could be compared to Western states. In 1809 many Egyptians were sent to Italy to study “military science, shipbuilding, engineering, and printing.”³¹

The first immigrants were a mixture of political refugees and troops who had fought for Napoleon. A second wave of Italians consisted of skilled workers, engineers, lawyers and professionals who helped build modern Egypt. The increase in the number of Italian immigrants to Egypt was possible thanks to the technological revolution taking place in Europe which provided for easier and cheaper means of transportation. However,

³⁰ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 30.

³¹ Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 9, 15, 31.

it also facilitated the decrease in the number of skilled workers in favor of unskilled people and sometimes criminals.³²

Mohammad Ali was an ethnic Albanian who went to Egypt in 1801, on behalf of the Ottoman government, to free Egypt from the French, who had occupied it since 1798. As he was successful in expelling Napoléon and his troops, the Sultan appointed him Ottoman Viceroy in 1805. Egypt had been an Ottoman protectorate since 1517 and was ruled by an Ottoman- Circassian elite who dominated Egyptian politics, economy and military. The Ottoman Empire consisted of a group of *vilayets* that allowed the local leader to govern its people as long as they paid tribute and maintained loyalty to the Sultan in Istanbul. With the advent of Mohammad Ali's rise to power as Viceroy of Egypt a new series of reforms was undertaken in the country. Not only did the new Viceroy promote the modernization of Egypt, and established a family dynasty; he also wanted to break away from the Ottoman rule and identity.³³

Mohammad Ali spent four decades modernizing and developing Egypt, which was transformed from a province of the Ottoman Empire into a state. The Viceroy wanted to resemble European systems and prosperity. Egypt also established diplomatic and economic relations with Europe. Many Europeans were also welcomed to Egypt, from where they could benefit from the capitulations laws.³⁴

On one side Mohammad Ali's modernization was beneficial for Egypt; on the other, it limited its independence. The land reform passed by the Viceroy established cotton as the main crop cultivated in Egypt. This tied the destiny of Egypt to that of

³² Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 35.

³³ Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "The Transformation of the Egyptian elite: Prelude to the Urabi revolt." *The Middle East Journal* 12 (1967): 330.

³⁴ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 2.

Britain, which at the time was very interested in the crop, important for British industrial development. As a consequence, Egypt became dependent upon European fluctuating markets.³⁵ Moreover, as the local population was not made part of the modernization programs, the Viceroy nominated an Englishman as minister of railways and communication in 1855. In 1861 the spot was given to an Italian. Along with the many privileges coming from Capitulations, the local population began resenting the foreign presence in Egypt, which then erupted in the uprising of 1882.³⁶

Many Italians migrated to Egypt in the nineteenth century because, in a century of political uncertainties, and persecution, Mohammad Ali, assisted by his advisers, the Italian Piedmontese Bernardino Drovetti consul of France and the rich Venetian businessman Carlo de Rossetti, opened Egypt to foreigners and assured them tranquility, protection and jobs.³⁷

The Italians who found their refuge in Egypt in the early nineteenth century were mostly figures who were escaping political persecution in the peninsula. As the Italian community was the largest in Egypt from the beginning, they managed to create a Masonic group. Mostly from Piedmont, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Papal State, these Italians were in contact with the liberals and loyal to Napoléon in the peninsula. Among their many goals, these early Masons wanted to put Napoléon back on the throne of France so that liberal ideas could spread everywhere in Europe.³⁸

³⁵ Michael J. Reimer, *Colonial bridgehead: government and society in Alexandria, 1807-1882* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1997), 5.

³⁶ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 153.

³⁷ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 30.

³⁸ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 3.

In the 1830s Tuscan emigrants were particularly active in Egyptian modernization. Pietro Avoscani became the director of a new royal palace; Carlo Buscioni was the head of the *l’Affricana*, a bank for marine insurance; and Consul De Rossetti started a marine service in 1838 in which a steamboat, called the *Generoso*, would transport goods and people from Alexandria to Istanbul and back.³⁹

In 1843 the news that revolutionary acts were again taking place in the peninsula reached Alexandria. The Italian community was ecstatic and patriotic demonstrations took place in the streets of Alexandria. The demonstrations ended in chaos. There were at this time two theaters in town, one Italian and one French. In the fall of 1843 Raffaele Imbellono from Naples rented both theaters in order to avoid competition. Upon the occasion of the revolutions taking place in the peninsula a play called ‘*L’Assedio di S. Miniato*’ was reproduced. In one of the final speeches, the main character, while holding the Italian tricolor shouted “Rise up Italians, we are united!”⁴⁰ The spectators were enthusiastic, and wanted the actor to repeat that part over and over, showing how involved and supportive the Italian community in Egypt was regarding the events taking place in the peninsula.

The secret societies in Italy were using branches in Egypt, and other parts of the Mediterranean such as Malta and Tunisia, to organize men who could contribute to the national revolutions. For this reason, the different consuls of the states in the peninsula were keeping an eye on the secret societies in order to prevent any Italians from helping the national cause in the peninsula.⁴¹ The secret societies in Egypt were the ones organizing the patriotic subscriptions of volunteers that wanted to go to Italy to help in

³⁹ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 74.

⁴⁰ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 90.

⁴¹ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 99.

the war of independence. These organizations were also the ones raising money for patriotic causes and financing Italian newspapers aimed at informing the Italian community of the events taking place in the peninsula. The secret societies were the backbone of the Italian community. Their activities were in cooperation and support of the consulates in opening schools and libraries, providing assistance to the community and helping relations with the locals at the economic, political and social levels.⁴²

The Italian community managed to found two newspapers by the end of the 1840s, further encouraging a sense of community. The *Spettatore Egiziano* directed by doctor G. Castelnuovo was published twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and it was soon read by many in the community and also by others who could read Italian. Around the same time, another periodical was founded by Giovanni Batta Cupocilla, called *La Voce d'Oriente*. This latter paper dealt only with subjects related to science, agriculture and trade. With the lack of an everyday newspaper that could inform the Italian colony of the situation in the peninsula, the Italians in Egypt had to rely on private correspondence or the foreign press, mostly French, to obtain news.⁴³

The events of 1848 were received in Egypt with enthusiasm. When the news that Carlo Alberto, King of Savoy, granted a constitution in February 1848, Italians gathered from all over Alexandria to celebrate. So did the Italians in Cairo. When the news that Carlo Alberto also declared war on Austria reached Egypt, many wanted to volunteer to fight in the peninsula. The Italians who wanted to help were not only those from Piedmont, but from many different parts of the peninsula. However, there were no funds to send these people to Italy. Therefore, the Italian community gathered on April 16 and

⁴² Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 188.

⁴³ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 151.

decided that those who could not volunteer, because of age, illness or exile could fund those that could fight but did not have the financial means to reach Italy. Italians contributed as much as possible to the cause. In the meanwhile, the Egyptian authorities wanted to remain as neutral as possible regarding the situation in Italy and made sure that unrest and riots were not taking place among Italians and other foreigners involved in the struggle in the peninsula.⁴⁴

The construction of a railroad that connected Cairo to Alexandria in 1852 and the beginning of the construction of the Suez Canal two years afterwards left Egypt better linked to other markets. At the same time, however, it left the country indebted. When the Canal was finished in 1869, Egypt owed European banks a large sum of money. The project was not well regarded by the local population, as they were taxed for its construction costs.⁴⁵

When Mohammad Ali died on August 2 1848, Egypt mourned the man who brought modernization to the country. Consulates kept their flags lowered for three days and participated in the funeral. The European community mourned, as Mohammad Ali was not only the father of modern Egypt but also the one who created a safe heaven in Egypt for many Europeans. Among the foreign communities in Egypt, the Italians were the ones who expressed the most gratitude to the leader.⁴⁶

From 1848 to 1854, Abbas succeeded Mohammad Ali after his death. Abbas was not committed to carrying on the reforms of his father. Nor did he have the ruling skills of Mohammad Ali. Abbas, contrary to his father, was not open to the European presence in Egypt and put a halt to the constructions, decreased the size of the army to only 9,000

⁴⁴ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 126.

⁴⁵ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2004), 94.

⁴⁶ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 150.

soldiers and fired many people working in the administrative sectors of the government. Many Italians lost their jobs under Abbas' reign.⁴⁷ While in the peninsula national revolutions were taking place in different parts, with the intervention of France, Spain and Austria, in Egypt there was also tension as a consequence of what was taking place in Italy. Often Austrian and Italian seaman would fight on the dock of Alexandria after insulting each other's homelands, or bragging about a specific fight.⁴⁸

During the three wars of independence in Italy, many were those who escaped from the peninsula to Egypt. They were mostly from the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and Venice, both occupied by the Austrians. As the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont was gaining influence in Italy since it was the leader of the wars of independence in the peninsula, so the status of this consulate grew at the expense of those of Tuscany, Venice and the Kingdom of Two Sicilies. The Piedmontese Consul was allowed also to take part in the creation of the Mixed Tribunals and was permitted to advise in judicial matters concerning Ottoman and European subjects. When a colony of Italians settled in the Sudan, Piedmont opened the first consular office in Khartoum. Among the consulates representing the states of the peninsula, the one of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia was the one most interested in the domestic situation in Egypt and the foreign policy in Egypt carried out by Britain and France.⁴⁹

On July 13, 1854 after the death of Abbas, Mohammad Said obtained the throne of Egypt. Said, like Mohammad Ali, was a promoter of reform and friendly relations with Europeans. The administration and the army were reorganized under his reign. Many

⁴⁷ L. A. Balboni, *Gl'Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX; storia-biografie-monografie* (Alessandria d'Egitto: Tipo-litografico v. Penasson, 1906), 1.

⁴⁸ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 147.

⁴⁹ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 166.

Italians were part of the Egyptian military, such as Giovanni Batta Begni captain of the military doctors, and Onofrio Abbate, head doctor of the Egyptian fleet, to name a few. Under the reign of Said, there were also many Italians who obtained jobs in other civilian fields: Pietro Avoscani was in charge of constructing building both in Cairo and Alexandria; Luigi Vassalli was nominated head inspector of archeological findings and Francesco Pini who was in charge of the personal property of Ahmed Pasha, prince hereditary of Egypt.⁵⁰

Italians were not only soldiers and constructors, but also journalists. Nicola Fabrizi began the publication of a clandestine newspaper, the *Cronaca Ebdomadaria's*, in April 1855, aimed to inform the Italian community, mostly the patriotic members of the community, of the political events taking place in the peninsula. The publication of Italian newspapers in Egypt was important, as it was a tool the Italian community had to be informed of what was going in Italy and also to maintain relations with their country of origin. Italians used to obtain information through foreign newspapers, mostly French and Austrian, however the news was partial and biased. The Italian newspapers opened in Egypt would provide more detailed information of what was going on the peninsula.

The Egyptian-based followers of Mazzini founded in this land a party that they called *democratico rivoluzionario*.⁵¹ This party promoted subscriptions of volunteers that could be sent to the peninsula to fight in the wars of independence and also raised money to buy cannons and ammunitions to send to Italy.⁵² Another important newspaper that was freely circulated in Egypt was the *Spettatore Egiziano* directed by Castelnuovo. In the 1850s this newspaper became more political and pro-unification of Italy. The *New*

⁵⁰ Balboni, *Gl'Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX*, 224.

⁵¹ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 208.

⁵² Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 231.

York Times reported about the creation of this political newspaper under the patronage of the Pasha.⁵³ It began to be published in both Italian and French. In this way the newspaper could attract also the French-speaking audience that sympathized with the Italian cause. However, as articles began to criticize the French Republic and its relations with the Papal State against Italian unification, the Egyptian authorities demanded that Castelnuovo suspend the publication of the newspaper.⁵⁴

As a consequence of increased riots and crimes that occurred in the country, in 1857 the Egyptian government established more restrictive rules to regulate and control foreigners in the country. Foreign press was also regulated. Articles were published only if they received the authorization of the Egyptian Ministry of Interior.⁵⁵ Yet the clandestine newspaper promoted by Mazzini, *Pensiero ed Azione*, managed to go around the new restrictions and also increased the number of publications as many Italians demanded a copy. This newspaper was the voice of those Italians that wished for a revolution that could establish a democratic republic in Italy. The majority of the Italians in Egypt were not sympathizers of the Piedmontese's leadership in unifying Italy and they also did not want Italy to be ruled by the Savoy royal family. These Italians did not trust the intentions of Cavour, rather wished that the ideas of Mazzini would be carried out.⁵⁶ Italians in Egypt began to change their ideas and side with the Savoy royal family in unifying the peninsula when Garibaldi decided to help Cavour. Garibaldi was considered a hero among the Italians in the peninsula and in Egypt as he freed the South of Italy from the authority of Spain; therefore if he sided with Cavour it meant that

⁵³ "Affairs in Egypt." *New York Times* (Aug. 23, 1855).

⁵⁴ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 247.

⁵⁵ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 252.

⁵⁶ Balboni, *Gl'Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX*, 98.

Piedmont's intentions toward uniting Italy were genuine. As a consequence, when the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and other states of the peninsula were annexed to the Kingdom of Piedmont then the Consul in Egypt of these states closed.⁵⁷

In the meanwhile, the Italian community in Egypt continued to contribute to the development of their host country. Giacomo Castelnuovo created an Academy to train doctors and surgeons in Alexandria. The facility, connected to a similar one in Turin, was to strengthen relations between the peninsula and Egypt.⁵⁸ In May 10, 1860 Garibaldi reached Marsala with the Mille and once again the Italian community in Egypt had been the most involved in raising money to help the cause. The city of Alexandria collected 11.500 lire and donated them to the institution *Soccorso a Garibaldi*.⁵⁹

After the war of independence most of the Italians who left for the peninsula to fight for unification, returned to Egypt where their family and work were waiting their return. It was at this time that an Italian Saverio Vollaro, understanding the importance of the Italian community in Egypt, decided to buy the stock market of Alexandria. He turned it into the Italian club. Even though Italy was now unified Italians still migrated to Egypt as the new kingdom of Italy did not assure employment to the same extent Egypt did.⁶⁰

In 1863 Isma 'il (r. 1863-1879) became the khedive of Egypt. He intended to transform Egypt into a European country. He emphasized that the Egyptian elite would obtain a European education. He increased the budget devoted not only to the primary and secondary schools but also to technical institutions. The most important institutions founded in this time were Dar al-Ulum, the School of Languages, and the Cairo School of

⁵⁷ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 304.

⁵⁸ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 306.

⁵⁹ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 312.

⁶⁰ Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-1861*, 316.

Law. During the reign of Isma 'il, an new institution was created: the Mixed Courts.⁶¹

This judicial body was created to settle disputes between locals and the many foreigners in the country. The Mixed Courts, established in 1876, dealt with civil and commercial cases involving locals and Europeans. This system was essential in order to have the ability to put foreigners on trial who, before the Mixed Courts, could get away with the majority of the crimes they committed as the Capitulations provided them with extraterritoriality and diplomatic immunity. National Courts were then established in 1884 to deal with disputes pertaining only to locals.⁶²

Isma 'il also wanted Egypt to look like Europe. He then promoted the construction of buildings in Cairo and Alexandria so that they could resemble European cities. Boulevards, squares, fountains, parks, tramways were built under his reign. Many were the Italians employed in the architectural projects. An Italian was also chosen to compose an opera to open the celebration of the Suez Canal: Giuseppe Verdi. 'Aida' was played in the opera house in Cairo, which was also built by two Italians, Avoscani and Rossi.⁶³

The grandiose projects promoted by Isma 'il further indebted the country and led to the end of Egypt's political autonomy. In fact, while British investments allowed for the development of the Suez Canal, which pushed many Italians looking for job to come to Egypt, it made Egypt financially tied to Britain. The Suez Canal was vital for Britain as it permitted them to reach India, declared a colony of Britain in 1858. In the 1870s Egypt was experiencing financial crisis due to the fluctuation of the market. Britain and

⁶¹ Bruno Aglietti, *L'Egitto dagli avvenimenti del 1882 ai giorni nostri* (Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1965), 41.

⁶² Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 98.

⁶³ Balboni, *Gl'Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX; storia-biografie-monografie*, 168.

France were afraid that Egypt, strategically important for Europe, could fall into unmanageable chaos and demand independence as nationalist sentiments were growing in 1881 under the leadership of Urabi Pasha.⁶⁴

When Isma‘il attempted to dismiss the two foreigners in charge of controlling the Egyptian debt, he was deposed by the Ottoman Sultan under pressure from the Europeans. In 1879 Tawfiq (r. 1879 - 1892) became the khedive of Egypt. This further intrusion from European powers in the affairs of Egypt further angered the local population. In 1881 Colonel Urabi, an Egyptian from a peasant family and traditional training, protested against a law that forbade Egyptians from the lower social strata to become officers in the military. The protest soon became a national uprising against foreign influence under the slogan of “Egypt for the Egyptians.” Urabi also demanded a limitation of the power of the khedive through a constitution. In 1882 Tawfiq appointed Colonel Urabi as minister of war and a national assembly to control the budget was created. However the khedive asked for European intervention to maintain his throne. Violence broke out in places where there was a large presence of foreigners, such as in Alexandria where fifty foreigners were killed in a riot and a bomb exploded close to an English institution.⁶⁵

Many were the speculations about who began to riot. The British government pushed for the theory that the Urabists and nationalists were behind the unrest in Alexandria so that the British could justify their interventions. “Unfortunately for the British government, no such proof existed.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the Urabi Revolt proved to

⁶⁴ Robert F. Hunter, *Egypt Under the Khedive 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 179.

⁶⁵ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 100.

⁶⁶ Reimer, *Colonial bridgehead: government and society in Alexandria, 1807-1882*, 180.

be the perfect excuse for the British to ensure that the Suez Canal, so vital for its connection to India would not fall in the hands of a national movement, and also ensure that Egypt would repay its debt.⁶⁷

On 13 September 1882 British ships bombarded Alexandria in response to anti-foreign riots, which broke out in the city in July. Britain occupied Egypt. Colonel Urabi was arrested, and sent into exile.⁶⁸

The occupation of Egypt marked a turning point in Egyptian and Italian relations. Britain invited Italy to join in the military operation to gain control of the country. Italy refused, and gave the khedive's family asylum in Italy. This action further strengthened the already solid friendship between the Egyptians and the Italian royal family, which had positive repercussions for the Italian community in Egypt. When Great Britain offered Italy to join her in the military expedition to bring control to a tumultuous Egypt shaken by national revolts, the Italian ministry of foreign affairs, Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, declined the offer on behalf of the Italian government.⁶⁹

There are many reasons why Italy did not want to undermine Egyptian rights to state sovereignty. First of all, Italy in 1882 was a newly-unified country. It did not want to endanger its newly acquired right of state sovereignty by neglecting the same right to another state. Secondly, Italy was going through a harsh time reconstructing its domestic economy. The South needed large amounts of subsidies in order to catch up with the prosperous North. Socially, there were also many problems to be solved in order for Italy to aspire to reach prestige internationally and compete with other European countries. In

⁶⁷ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian moment: self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 66.

⁶⁸ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 100.

⁶⁹ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 17.

order to attain economic and social prosperity Italy then preferred to avoid expensive military expeditions abroad. Lastly, Italian foreign policy and possible expansion abroad would be harder to pursue in the event that Great Britain would take control of a strategic place such as Egypt. Therefore, helping the British to extend their influence over another important location would harm Italian colonialism in the long run. Hence, Italy preferred not to join in 1882. Also, the Italian community in Egypt at that time already numbered 18,665 people.⁷⁰ Siding with the British would have endangered the relations between the Italian community and the Egyptian locals and government.⁷¹ Italian refusal to cooperate was taken poorly in London, where the British considered Italian behavior to be inappropriate.⁷²

On September 13, 1882 Britain took control of Egypt making it a protectorate and putting the khedive back on the throne. Even though Britain managed to exercise its power in Egypt, the seeds of nationalism were already planted in the country with the Urabi revolt. These seeds would grow later on and nationalism would fight against colonialism in Egypt in the years to come.⁷³

⁷⁰ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 40.

⁷¹ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 24-5.

⁷² Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 33.

⁷³ Balboni, *Gli Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX*, 321.

CHAPTER 2: THE ITALIAN COMMUNITY IN EGYPT: BUILDING A NATION, 1860-1956

Contrary to the common understanding that Britain and France had the greatest influence on Egypt's modernization, this chapter argues that it was the Italian contribution that led to the political, cultural and economic development of Egypt. In the 1930s, after investigating the Italian community, the British assessed that it was "the best" in terms of organization as compared to any other foreign communities in Egypt. Its charitable institutions and schools were among the most efficient. Its commercial activities were well coordinated and directed. Its consul and social leader were very active.⁷⁴ Moreover, unlike the British and French, the Italians interacted with the Egyptian population with a "spirit of tolerance, lack of religious or nationalist chauvinism and, unlike other peoples, aversion to appearing superior."⁷⁵

Italians did not aspire to conquer, control or occupy Egypt, as the British and French had.⁷⁶ On the contrary Italians helped build modern Egypt and established the most organized, efficient and the second largest community after the Greeks. The institutions created by the Italian community were the pillar of Egyptian political, cultural and economic development.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the prestige of the Italian colony decreased at the end of the nineteenth century when the influence of Britain and France increased, and as the Italian government neglected its colony in favor of dealing with domestic issues.⁷⁸

Census records showed the increase in the number of Italians living in Egypt in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In 1820, 6,000 Italians were in Egypt. Fifty years

⁷⁴ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 383.

⁷⁵ Angelo Sanmarco, "The Italians in Egypt." *Al-Ahram* (Feb. 19, 1933).

⁷⁶ Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*, 80.

⁷⁷ Reimer, *Colonial bridgehead: government and society in Alexandria, 1807-1882*, 184.

⁷⁸ Angelo Sanmarco, *In Egitto* (Roma: Societa' nazionale Dante Alighieri, 1939), 37.

later the number reached 16,000. Regardless of the British takeover of Egypt, the number of citizens emigrating from the peninsula to Egypt did not stop. In 1897, the number of Italians reached 24,454. In 1907 the number reached 34,926. Twenty years later there were 52,462 Italians in Egypt. The Greek community was the largest, which in 1927 numbered 76,264 people. However, most of them held dual nationality. On the contrary, the members of the Italian community in Egypt were mostly all from Italy. Few were those from Italian colonies. Additionally, while the Greek community increased by 53 per cent between 1882 and 1917, and the French by 31 per cent, the Italian community increased by a remarkable 122 per cent.⁷⁹

The British community was mostly composed of bureaucrats and upper-class people, who interacted with the local population with cultural superiority. The Italian community, instead, was composed of all social strata and interacted at all levels with the Egyptians, from the advisers of the khedive to the Italians and Egyptians working together to construct the Suez Canal. Moreover, even though the British replaced Italian prestige, nevertheless, the great number of Italians in Egypt made them a presence impossible to ignore. This was especially true with the advent of Fascism and the challenge this community posed to the British.

The Italians in Egypt were not only numerous. They were also the one that could practice the widest variety of jobs. Italians were soldiers, businessmen and artisans. They were also writers, scientists, intellectuals and researchers.⁸⁰ The Italian community in Egypt was composed of people from many social levels. Some were upper-class Italians. The majority of Italians were middle-class people who worked in banks or for the

⁷⁹ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 41.

⁸⁰ Sammarco, *In Egitto*, xviii.

administration. There were also a number of lower-class Italians. Some were military personnel, from Piedmont and artisans from the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Italian soldiers also joined the Egyptian army and participated in the 1818 Sudan expedition pursued by Mohammad Ali's son, Ibrahim.⁸¹ Important Italians were Alessandro Ricci from Siena, a doctor that joined the Sudan expedition and saved Ibrahim's life when he was sickened with dysentery.⁸² Ermenegildo Frediani, from Seravezza, reached Alexandria in 1817, later became among the most important archeologists in Egypt. A census taken in 1927 noted that Italians employed in agriculture were 556, those extracting minerals were 70. The public services had 914 Italians working with them. There were also 2011 professionals, 5914 working in the finance, insurance and trade. The Italians working for mechanical industries were 5905 and those employed in the transportation industry were 2785.⁸³ Women working as maids came mostly in the third wave of immigration after the Great War and numbered 2079. The reason why this third wave of immigrants occurred was aiming to the fact that after the end of the Great War, many became unemployed as the previous increase in production was for the war effort. By 1919 two million Italians were without a job.⁸⁴

As Alexandria was about to become one of the most important ports in the Mediterranean, the Italians were already the ones in charge of the movements of goods and organization of the fleet. In 1826 the majority of the people working to build the Egyptian fleet were Italians. Four years later, while Egypt stopped buying vessels from Europe, Mohammad Ali kept purchasing military ships from Livorno. In 1832 when

⁸¹ Balboni, *Gli Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX*, 288.

⁸² Ersilio, *Esuli Italiani in Egitto: 1815-186*, 12.

⁸³ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 42.

⁸⁴ Duggan, *A concise history of Italy*, 198.

Egypt and the Ottoman Empire were engaging in a conflict in the Mediterranean Sea, the Sultan in Istanbul complained that the Grand Duchy of Tuscany was providing military ships to Mohammad Ali.⁸⁵

From 1861 to 1875, 12 per cent of the naval traffic departing from Alexandria was going to Italy. Between 1872 and 1874 the maritime traffic to Italy increased. A British-Italian mail service pursued by the boat *Adriatico Orientale* was created. It connected Alexandria with Corfu, Ancona and Venezia. The other maritime service provided jointly by Britain and Italy was the Lloyd Triestino and Società Italiana Trasporti Marittimi (SITMAR), which “operated weekly sailings from Trieste, Venezia, and Genova to Alexandria.”⁸⁶ Also the *Compagnia Rugantino* sailed from Alexandria to Messina, Napoli, Livorno and Genova. In 1870, in addition to the regular lines connecting Italy and Egypt, a new one connecting Genova and Bombay India, through the Suez Canal, was opened. This new line, between Italy and India, was promoted by the Italian government to ensure Italian presence in the Mediterranean and influence in the Orient and Egypt.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ulisse Topi, *Di alcune colonie italiane all'estero* (Roma: Tipografia dell'Unione Cooperativa Editrice, 1892), 68.

⁸⁶ Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 111.

⁸⁷ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 407.



Figure 2. Lloyd Triestino in Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 111.

From 1882 until 1893, however, once Egypt became a British protectorate and the Italian influence declined, the number of boats leaving from Alexandria to go to Italy also decreased. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, when communications began modernizing and as the Italian economy was prospering, the connections between Italy and Egypt increased. By the end of the nineteenth century, Italy had two boats devoted to the mail service that stopped in Egypt. Even though Italy could not compete with the French and English ships, it nevertheless managed to re-acquire prestige in maritime activity with Egypt and the Suez Canal.⁸⁸

In 1817, the different states of the peninsula also financed the creation of a hospital. The *Ospedale Franco*, built under the leadership of Bernardino Drovetti and

⁸⁸ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 410.

other Italians, was built to provide help to the Italians in need. Even though the situation in Egypt was not so good, as the spread of diseases such as cholera and plague killed many in the cities of Alexandria and Cairo, the number of European emigrants to Egypt nevertheless keep increasing –including Italians. Among the doctors that were treating the ill, 20 were Italians. They worked hard to contain the spread of the plague.⁸⁹

By 1820 there were already six thousand Italians in Egypt. While the need for Italian artisans was diminishing as locals were increasingly practicing such professions, Italians still held all the administrative positions and the highest jobs in the government. Italians held the highest position of advisers to the Viceroy as well. Berbardino Drovetti (1776 – 1852) and Carlo de Rossetti (1780 – 1820) were in Mohammad Ali's closest circle.⁹⁰ Upon the death of Carlo de Rossetti in 1820, his grandchildren Carlo and Annibale succeeded their grandfather in the role of Consul of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and as advisor of the ruler in domestic and foreign issues.⁹¹ Other illustrious Italians who contributed to the development and modernization of Egypt were Carlo Meratti, from Livorno, who created the first mail service in Alexandria, and Lorenzo Masi, also from Livorno, who founded the land registry.⁹²

The role of Italians in creating numerous buildings and infrastructures in Egypt, left a “powerful and permanent influence on the direction of urban development.”⁹³ Artists, architects, workers and engineers improved the look of Cairo and Alexandria and made them more efficient. The construction company Cartareggia built the pier of Alexandria. Alfonso Maniscalco designed the Justice building in Alexandria, Prosperi

⁸⁹ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 69.

⁹⁰ Balboni, *Gl'Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX*, 205.

⁹¹ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 65.

⁹² F. Santorelli, *L'Italia in Egitto* (Cairo: Tipografia italiana, 1894), 45.

⁹³ Reimer, *Colonial bridgehead: government and society in Alexandria, 1807-1882*, 184.

built the Anglo-American Hospital, Aldo Rossi was the creator of the Abu-Al-Abbas Mosque also in Alexandria, Alessandro Loria was the architect of most of the buildings in Alexandria and Francesco Mancini was in charge of the planning of the city. These Italian architects gave Alexandria “a distinctive Mediterranean atmosphere. Alexandria could easily have been an Italian city.”⁹⁴ Also, the railroad that connected the oasis of Kharga to the cities was built by the Denamaro and Guzman construction company and the dam of Assuan was mostly built by Italian workers.⁹⁵ These Italians left a permanent and visible proof of the importance of the Italian community in Egypt modernization and desire to look and be like Europe. Employing Italians to carry out important projects throughout Egypt is also an evidence of the positive perception the Egyptians had of the Italians. The Egyptians had confidence in the Italians’ ability.



Figure 3. “The Venetian-style building, second from the right, is the work of Alessandro Loria” in Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 33.

⁹⁴ Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 3.

⁹⁵ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 172.

The first Egyptian typographer to print in Arabic characters was the Italian, Bulacco. In 1822 he published his first book, which was a dictionary of Italian-Arabic written by don Raffaele Zakkur.⁹⁶ Italians had also been important to the military history of Egypt. Colonel Giovanni Romei and del Carretto led the successful battle at San Giovanni d'Acrida, which had a strong impact on the war between Egypt and Turkey in 1831-1833. The Egyptian navy was mostly built in Italy.⁹⁷

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Italian language also obtained prestige in Egypt and it became the language of the government and of its modernization projects. Consuls and commerce also used Italian as the language of work. Italian was spoken among the populations and it could be heard on the streets of Egypt. For this reason, many Italian words became part of the Arabic spoken in Egypt. [see Appendix A].⁹⁸

Many Italian newspapers emerged in Egypt. These newspapers contributed to the spread of the Italian language and also provided information about the events taking place in the peninsula to the Italian community in Egypt. These Italian newspapers also circulated information regarding Egypt's domestic affairs. The emergence of the press showed that Egypt was evolving and resembling European states. The first newspaper to be printed in Egypt was the Italian *Lo Spettatore Egiziano*. In 1851 another Italian newspaper was created, *Il Manifesto*. *Il Progresso d'Egitto* and *Il Giornale Marittimo* emerged the following year. By 1861 two more newspapers were created: *L'Eco d'Egitto* and *Il Commercio*. In 1864 *Il Giornale di Politica* was founded. *La Farfalla*, *La Finanza*,

⁹⁶ Waldimaro Fiorentino, "C'è un secolare rapporto di sintonia e di affetto tra l'Italia e l'Egitto." *Scienza e Tecnica* 424 (Dec. 2005): 4-6.

⁹⁷ Angelo Sammarco, "Origini e sviluppi della colonia italiana in Egitto." *ANPIE, Associazione Nazionale pro Italiani in Egitto*. http://www.anpie.info/online/?page_id=16

⁹⁸ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 149.

Il Giornale Uморistico, *L'Avvenire d'Egitto* and *L'Economista* all emerged in the 1870s. Then, in 1882, *Il Messaggero* was created. Italian newspapers were tuned into the events taking place in Egypt, especially when they directly involved the safety and prestige of the Italian community there, as in the case of the 1882 Urabi Revolt. This shows that Italy valued the Italian colony in Egypt.⁹⁹ [see Appendix B] In 1911, another newspaper emerged, *L'Imparziale* and by 1930 *Giornale d'Oriente* were published. The *Giornale d'Oriente* was the main Italian newspaper in Egypt and it remained in circulation until 1940, which was the period when Italian journalism in Egypt ended.¹⁰⁰ However while the Italian newspapers boomed from the mid nineteenth century until 1875, then they were also replaced by French publications.¹⁰¹

The public services in Egypt were built by Italians, who also ran them. Italian doctors and Italian hospitals allowed for the betterment of the sanitary condition of Egypt. In 1816 a hospital was opened to help those who were afflicted by the plague that was spreading in Egypt. This hospital was funded by European countries, but mostly by the Italian states. Moreover, the doctors working in it were almost all Italians. The first pharmacy was also Italian, founded by the Piedmontese Del Signore who, between 1822 and 1825, also directed the institution. Also during the Egyptian military expedition against the Wahabis in 1814 to 1819 the military doctors that followed the Egyptian army were Italians. Antonio Scoto was the personal doctor of Ibrahim Pasha and others such as Andrea Gentili were surgeons, pharmacists, and personnel who rescued and treated injured soldiers.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 130.

¹⁰¹ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 152.

¹⁰² Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 92.

As a consequence of the spread of diseases such as plague, dysentery and cholera, Mohammad Ali decided to establish a Public Health superintendence, which was at first staffed only by foreigners. The secretary of this newly-established institution was Lorenzo Ernesto Borrini, a subject of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, who held the position for seventeen years and who devoted himself to the improvement of the sanitary condition of Egypt. More than half of the doctors employed by the Superintendence were Italians, who were numerous in Egypt. Among the noteworthy, was doctor Agostino Cervelli, head of the military hospital in Alexandria who played an important role in limiting the spread of cholera in 1831. Also, Francesco Grassi, was nominated the head inspector of sanitation in the country. By 1835, the Sanitary Committee decided that since Italian was the language in use inside the sanitary institutions throughout Egypt, that members were required to be fluent in Italian.¹⁰³

The President of the Sanitary Superintendence and Municipality of Alexandria, the Italian Antonio Colucci, was also the director of the water system of the city. For his devotion to Egypt and his invaluable activities in developing the country, Colucci was appointed Pasha in 1873 by Khedive Isma 'il. Colucci represented Egypt in many scientific international conferences. Therefore, since he brought honor to Italy with his actions, the Italian Kingdom awarded him the title of baron. He returned to Rome in 1879 when Khedive Isma 'il was forced to abdicate.¹⁰⁴

Onofrio Abbate Pasha, was another Italian doctor who arrived in Egypt in 1845 and was immediately employed by the government. In 1855 he was nominated doctor of the Egyptian fleet sent to Crimea and later the Viceroy wanted him to be a member of his

¹⁰³ Mirella Galletti, *Medici, missionari, musicisti e militari italiani attivi in Persia, impero ottomano ed Egitto*, (Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 2007), 171.

¹⁰⁴ Galletti, *Medici, missionari, musicisti e militari italiani attivi in Persia, impero ottomano ed Egitto*, 172.

following in the campaign in Sudan. Abbate was the head of the surgeons in the governmental hospital, vice-president of the healthcare service, and then the head of the healthcare service in Cairo.¹⁰⁵

The School of Medicine in Egypt was a work of the Frenchman, Clot Bey. However, the school, founded in 1821, was first opened to teach Italian to the young Egyptian Muslims of the el-Azhar mosque. After three years, mathematics, sciences and engineering began to be taught. By 1825 botany, physics, medicine, and surgery were also taught in the school. The majority of the school's staff was Italian. On 20 July 1902 an Italian worker at a typography in Egypt, moved by the sufferings of the many afflicted by different diseases, founded an association that could provide emergency aid in Alexandria. The same institution was opened in 1906 also in Cairo and it was called the *Associazione di pubblica assistenza*. The first members were all young Italians who already had some experience in this type of work in Italy, and until 1914 all the meetings were in Italian. That language was later switched to French.¹⁰⁶

Italians also helped to develop a modern medical system. While, Egyptians were hospitalized at the local hospitals. Europeans were taken to the hospitals that had been opened by their country of origin. Europeans hospitalization then was paid for by the consuls and the charitable organizations of their nationality. However, the ambulance services were funded by donations and by the Egyptian government. Italians were hospitalized at the Italian hospital Umberto I. Yet, in case of contagious illness, they were brought to the Egyptian hospital as the Italian one did not have a unit dealing with these

¹⁰⁵ Galletti, *Medici, missionari, musicisti e militari italiani attivi in Persia, impero ottomano ed Egitto*, 173.

¹⁰⁶ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 105.

types of diseases. Operations and medicines were free for the poor Italians.¹⁰⁷ In 1923 another Italian hospital was opened called Benito Mussolini in honor of the Duce. The most prestigious transfusion center and department specializing in tuberculosis and cancer was the Italian one in Cairo, which was considered the best among all other European institutions.¹⁰⁸

As previously stated, Italian was necessarily for a doctor to be nominated the General Commissioner of healthcare. Similarly, when a police force was established to ensure the security of the European population, among the requisites were Italian and French. By 1865, Italian began to be replaced by French and English. The reasons for this were multiple: first because Italy had just been through a decade of wars, it did not have the power to combat the increasing pressures of Britain and France. Additionally, Italian weakness at home made it impossible for the peninsula to provide support to the colonies abroad. Therefore, the colony in Egypt was left to take care of its own, and it fell short of the new European powers. Finally, Italian foreign policy witnessed only defeats and humiliation in Africa. Britain and France took advantage of these perceived weaknesses to take the lead in Egypt.¹⁰⁹

Many of those that traveled to Alexandria in the second half of the nineteenth century noticed how the city had changed in appearance. While the entire country was going through a period of modernization begun by Mohammad Ali Pasha, Alexandria in particular became more European. An Italian traveler, Amalia Nizzoli, who lived in Egypt, wrote in her diary “how Alexandria had been transformed by its contacts with Europeans involved in the increasing trade between the two, and it was now easy to

¹⁰⁷ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 61.

¹⁰⁸ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 64.

¹⁰⁹ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 153.

forget for a moment the distance separating us from our own countries.”¹¹⁰ Nizzoli, just like the rest of the Italian community, was able to adapt to Egyptian culture and traditions, without imposing superiority. She left Livorno in 1819 when she was only thirteen years old and went with her parents, to live with her uncle Filiberto Marucchi, personal doctor of the Treasury of Egypt.¹¹¹ Contrary to the English women, Nizzoli did not approach things with superior mindset. She became fluent in Arabic, and therefore was able to interact with the local population. Because of her uncle’s status she also had the privilege of interacting with upper-class Egyptian women and their culture, contrary to her Italian husband, a diplomat, who was only interested in archeology.¹¹²

After the unification of Italy and its economic crisis, a large number of Italians moved to Egypt when the project to build the Suez Canal (1859-1869) began. The Italians employed were engineers, workers, architects and professionals and they were looking for jobs and better opportunities that Italy could not provide.¹¹³

The peak of Italian immigration to Egypt was in 1904-5. Italians’ incentive to move to Egypt was due the privileges provided by the Capitulations and also the wage difference between Italian and Egyptian building industries. While in Italy masons “were paid some 60 per cent above laborers, in Alexandria foreign masons were paid 246 per cent and indigenous masons 180 per cent above laborers.”¹¹⁴

With regards to the project of the Suez Canal, Mohammad Ali wanted the project to be a joint effort with the different powers of Europe. In this way none of the European

¹¹⁰ Paul Starkey, and Janet Starkey, *Unfolding the Orient: travelers in Egypt and the Near East* (Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 2001), 227.

¹¹¹ Anna Vanzan, *L'Egitto di Amalia Nizzoli: lettura del diario di una viaggiatrice della prima metà dell'Ottocento* (Bologna: Il nove, 1996), 13.

¹¹² Vanzan, *L'Egitto di Amalia Nizzoli*, 8.

¹¹³ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 33.

¹¹⁴ Bent Hansen, “Wage Differentials in Italy and Egypt: The Incentive to Migrate before World War I.” *The Journal of European Economic History* 14, 2 (1985): 351.

states would be excluded and Mohammad Ali would not lose foreign investors and allies, who were essential for Egypt's development. The three teams established to do more research about the project were the British, lead by Robert Stephenson, the Austrian-Italian with Luigi de Negrelli as the head and the French delegation lead by Paulin Talabot. However the British were not enthusiastic about the project. Britain thought that French and Italian participation in the project would entitle them to control over the Canal. This in turn would threaten British communications with India. Therefore, as soon as the opportunity of another major project emerged, the British focused on building a railroad system that would connect Cairo and Alexandria.¹¹⁵ This railroad system was a faster way to collect the raw materials produced in the countryside, and move them to the markets of Cairo and Alexandria, then increasing Britain's profit from Egypt.¹¹⁶

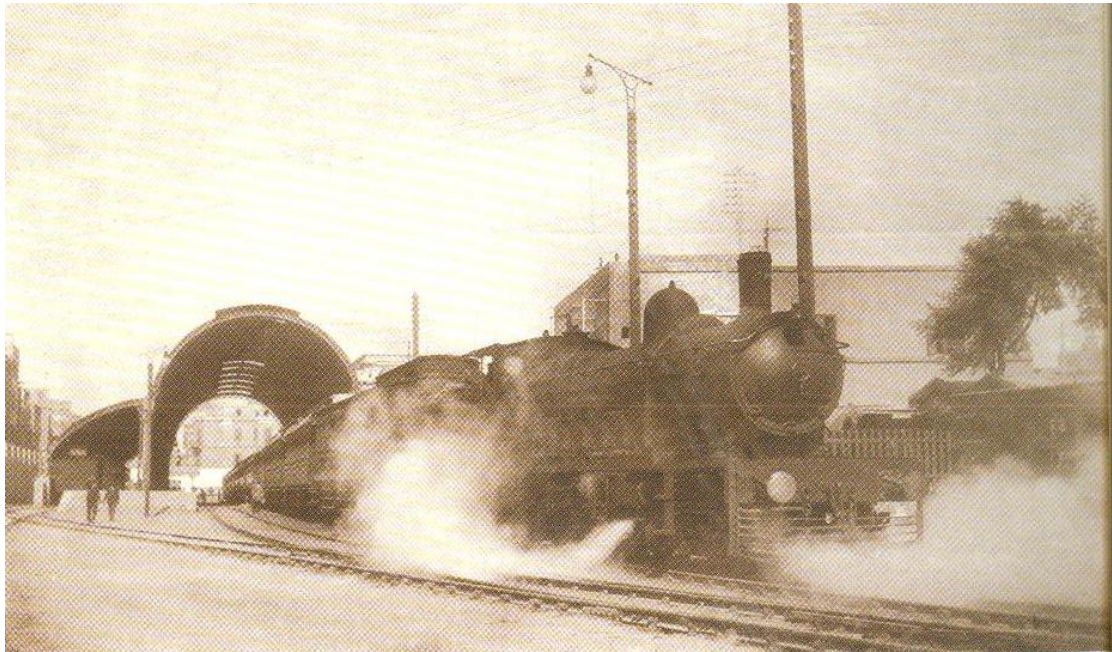


Figure 4. The railroad system built by the English that connected Alexandria and Cairo in Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 58.

¹¹⁵ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 115.

¹¹⁶ Monti, *Gli italiani ed il canale di Suez; lettere inedite di P. Paleocapa, L. Torelli, E. Gioja e altri*, 8.

The international commission, created to choose the best proposal for the works concerning the Canal, decided that the project of Negrelli was the best one to use. He was nominated director of the project but died soon after on 1 October 1858. Pietro Paleocapa, minister of Public Works in Turin and famous around Europe for his competence in plumbing systems, was working with Negrelli on the project. Therefore, upon the death of Negrelli, Paleocapa continued to collaborate with Ferdinand de Lesseps and the international commission.¹¹⁷ Once the digging started many Italians worked on the project. The father of an illustrious poet, Giuseppe Ungaretti, died while excavating. Furthermore, Edoardo Gioia, was the Italian engineer who directed the excavation at the hardest part, between the rocks at el-Guiar and the northern part of lake Timsah.¹¹⁸

Italians were also among the most important archeologists who discovered many remains of the Pharaonic period in the nineteenth century. The most famous were Bernardino Drovetti and G. B. Benzoni. This latter examined many parts of Egypt from the south of Egypt to the oasis of Faium. He also discovered among many things the tomb of Pharaoh Seti I, in the Valley of the Kings, and many of his findings are still conserved in the museum in Turin.¹¹⁹

Italians played a role in educating modern Egyptians. In 1908 the first European-style Egyptian university was created at the request of Prince Fuad I (r. 1917-1936), who believed that educating the Egyptians in European culture was important for Egyptian progress. Prince Fuad I was advised about how to proceed with this project by Italian intelligentsia. The organizer was Ugo Lusena Bey and the two majors taught at first were literature and law. Many Italians were part of the faculty body of the school. By 1925

¹¹⁷ Monti, *Gli italiani ed il canale di Suez*, 537.

¹¹⁸ Monti, *Gli italiani ed il canale di Suez*, 7.

¹¹⁹ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 138.

medicine and science degrees were also introduced. In 1927, during a visit to Italy, King Fuad received a *laurea ad honorem* from the University of Rome and in his speech he expressed gratitude to the many Italians that organized and taught at the Egyptian university. Even though Italians were an important asset in this new institution, Italian culture and languages did not have a predominant role as political influences from Britain and France imposed their culture first. Nevertheless Italian-ness was well represented by prestigious Italian professors, such as Carlo Alfonso Narlino.¹²⁰

Scholarship on Egypt was also important to the Italian community. Narlino was a prominent scholar who in 1900 published a book on the Egyptian Arabic dialect. Fluent in Arabic he obtained a job at the Egyptian University as professor. Among his pupils was Taha Husayn, one of Egypt's most famous authors, later Minister of the Interior. Narlino was also nominated member of the Royal Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo and in 1921 he founded in Italy the Istituto per l' Oriente, which published the journal *Oriente Moderno*.¹²¹ A journal that narrated the events taking place in Egypt and the Orient, which was important as it provided information of the Italian community in Egypt and its invaluable contribution to the modernization of the country.

Schools were important institution where Italian-ness was kept alive in a foreign country. With the growth of the Italian community, many Italian schools emerged in Egypt. The first Italian school was opened on 21 September 1862 in Alexandria. The *Collegio Italiano* was built thanks to Viceroy Said's donation of 60,000 francs. Later Khedive Isma 'il donated a vast piece of land for building the school. The following year

¹²⁰ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 159

¹²¹ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 142.

an Italian school was also opened in Cairo.¹²² This was an example of the close relationship between Italy and Egypt, a land that many Italians already began to perceive as a second homeland. Italians, “while retaining a strong sense of parochial loyalty, so rooted themselves in the land of Egypt that they developed a feeling of belonging to Egypt.”¹²³

The Italian schools were the most prestigious ones in Egypt, as Dor Bey, superintendent of Egyptian public education, stated in 1870: “Il ne nous reste plus à parler que d’une école, mais c’est la meilleure, la seule qui réponde réellement aux exigences pédagogiques, le Collège italien d’Alexandrie.”¹²⁴ [“There is only one school to speak of, it is the best school, the only one that will rise to all pedagogical exigencies, and that is, the Italian school of Alexandria.”] These prestigious and famous Italian schools were the Istituto Don Bosco, the Scuola Commerciale, the Dante Alighieri and the Libera Università di Alessandria. The Collegio Maschile Italiano, a governmental school founded in 1865 for male students only, was the first Italian school created abroad, and it was built in Alexandria just a couple of days after the proclamation of the Italian state.¹²⁵ The Università Popolare di Alessandria was the first conservatory of music in the town.

When Francesco Crispi became Prime Minister (r. 1887-1891 and 1893-1896) his aggressive foreign policy and desire for Italy to create a colony also meant the spread of Italian culture through education abroad. His goals were stated in legislation passed on December 8, 1890, allowing funding to be devoted to the opening of more Italian schools abroad. In the 1890s the Regie Scuole Tecniche were built in Alexandria and Cairo.

¹²² Balboni, *Gli Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX; storia-biografie-monografie*, 53.

¹²³ Reimer, *Colonial bridgehead: government and society in Alexandria, 1807-1882*, 12.

¹²⁴ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 160.

¹²⁵ Giovanni Oman, “Considerazioni sugli Italiani d’Egitto.” *ANPIE, Associazione Nazionale pro Italiani in Egitto*. http://www.anpie.info/online/?page_id=16

Elementary schools were declared to be free to anybody, including the local Egyptians. As a consequence, the number of students doubled after Crispi's legislation, and many of the newly enrolled students were Egyptians from all social strata, a great majority of whom were from the lower class. However, in June 1891, Crispi's legislation was overturned by Antonio di Rudini, Prime Minister from 1891 through 1892. In his short time in office Rudini managed to close many of the schools opened under Crispi's legislation. When Crispi regained the seat of Premier in 1893 he re-adopted his legislation. This time he did so in more modest terms. Most of the closed schools were reopened but with limited funding. As a consequence, the school could not afford enough faculty and the buildings and curricula were dragging behind. Even when the Italian community in Egypt complained about the poor situation of the schools, the Italian government did not intervene to protect the Italian culture, which was soon replaced and surpassed by the French and British schools. The Italian language was slowly banned from offices and administrative jobs; the upper classes also preferred to speak French and English rather than Italian, and this was also true for the Italian upper class and the younger generations.¹²⁶ It was in this period that Tito Figari and Enrico Lusena established La Gioventu' Italiana, which aimed to push the Italian youth to study and cultivate the Italian culture in a period when Italian schools were losing prestige.¹²⁷ However, after the end of World War One, when many male Italians came back after fighting the war, Italian was largely spoken inside the family.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 162.

¹²⁷ Topi, *Di alcune colonie italiane all'estero*, 13.

¹²⁸ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 219.



Figure 5. Italian school in Alexandria promoting the Italian culture. “The student is reciting the words written on the blackboard: “O sole tu non possa veder mai nulla più grande e più bello d’Italia e di Roma” [O sun you cannot see anything more grand and beautiful than Italy and Rome.]” in Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 61.

The Italian schools regained prestige with the advent of Fascism. Then large sums of money were again devoted to the conquest of foreign lands, not only militarily but also culturally. Prominent faculties were hired, and the curricula were updated so that they could reflect the highest European standard of the time. Buildings were endowed with all the necessary equipments for teaching. Many Italians, Egyptians and foreigners enrolled to the extent that it was necessary to build more infrastructures. This was a result of the Fascist policy of ‘rastrellamento,’ which meant forcing all Italian families to support Italian nationalism by sending their children to Italian schools. By 1936, for the first time

in Egypt the number of students attending Italian schools was greater than that of the Greek institutions and second only after the French.¹²⁹

The Scuola 28 Ottobre in Cairo, in honor of the March to Rome by the Duce, and the Scuole Littorie in Alexandria were opened in 1933. They represented the prestige of Italy and were seen in the peninsula as strong tools for spreading the Italian culture in Egypt. The number of students attending Italian schools increased with the reform under the Fascist regime. In Alexandria alone, while in 1910 only 1200 were enrolled in Italian institutions, by 1922 there were 1900. In 1936 the number increased to 4342.¹³⁰ This number includes not only Italian pupils but also Egyptians and students from other European countries. In addition to the Italian schools of lower and higher education, the Fascist regime also promoted the creation of evening language classes, where foreigners mostly from the upper classes could learn Italian. Also, the Liceo Musicale in Alexandria offered not only music lessons but language as well. However, students' enrollment in Italian schools declined in 1939 when another world conflict was about to start. The reason why students' enrollment declined was due the fact that Italy was an ally of Germany, therefore many Italians were put in internment camps.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 234.

¹³⁰ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 164.

¹³¹ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 165.



Figure 6. The Italian school Scuole Littorie, funded by Mussolini, opened in Alexandria in 1933 in Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 62.

Italian culture was also very appreciated in Egypt. In November 1896 the Italian Enrico Dello Strologo undertook the first movie screening in Egypt. Also the first movie with sound was showed at the movie theater in 1906 thanks to two Italians, Aziz Bandarli and Umberto Malafasi Does. These latter also made the first Egyptian short-movie in 1907 and in 1912 Leopoldo Fiorello screened for the first time a movie with Arabic subtitles. This is another example of the importance of Italians in Egyptian cultural life.¹³²

In the cultural realm Italian operas were the ones mostly played in the theaters in Cairo and Alexandria. Also in the inter-war period many concerts were organized by

¹³² Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 277.

Enrico Terni, husband of the famous Italian writer Fausta Cialente, at the Istituto Musicale Italiano in Alexandria, created in 1932 by Giuseppe Galassi, president of the newspaper *Giornale d'Oriente*.¹³³

Not only were many Italians leaving their country in search for better opportunities in Egypt. Alexandria also gave birth to illustrious Italian figures. Many Italian poets were in fact born in this Egyptian city. The most famous were men such as Enrico Pea who founded the '*Baracca Rossa*', a place for socialists and anarchists to gather; Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Giuseppe Ungaretti were prominent contributors to 20th century Italian literature. Another important figure in Italian literature was Fausta Cialente. Renato Mieli, founder of ANSA, Italian most prominent journalist agency, was also born in Alexandria in 1912 from a Jewish family. He left Alexandria to study physics in Italy yet he had to leave Italy in 1939 after Mussolini passed the racial laws.¹³⁴

Marinetti mostly described the economic paradise that Egypt was for Italians. He wrote about the trade between Italy and Egypt pursued by the "fastest transportation Suez Canal marine-miles-traveled annual-traffic fast-delivery perishable-good voyages."¹³⁵ Ungaretti wrote in his prose and poems that he considered himself African and Egyptian more than Italian. After finishing his studies in France and working in Italy, Ungaretti returned to Egypt on behalf of the Italian newspaper *Gazzetta del Popolo* in Turin. The Italian public was very interested in the events taking place in Egypt, because they viewed Egypt's modernization and development as a product of the Italian community. Moreover, after the World War One Italy was very interested in reinforcing its influence in Egypt, strategically important due to the Suez Canal and economically crucial as it was

¹³³ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 272.

¹³⁴ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 213.

¹³⁵ R. W. Flint, *Marinetti: Selected Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 307.

an export market for Italian products. Ungaretti returned to Egypt in 1931. He wrote critically about Egyptian nationalism, which seemed to him to have lost its traditional culture and was too European.¹³⁶

Fausta Cialente, moved to Egypt in 1921, with her husband, the composer Enrico Terni. Cialente remained in Egypt until 1947 and this land was the subject of many of her writings. While for Lawrence Durrell Egypt was an exotic, filthy place, on the contrary, Fausta Cialente described Egypt as a refined and civilized country.¹³⁷ She admired the hospitality of the Egyptians and their culture, and when she left in 1947 she was nostalgic for Egypt and its people.¹³⁸ In *Ballata Levantina*, Fausta Cialente narrates the story of an Italian family in Alexandria from the reign of Khedive Isma 'il, described by the family's grandmother as days of "splendor and luxury"¹³⁹ when the *Aida* was played at the Khedival Opera House in Cairo and the "Opera was the Italians' ever lasting pride."¹⁴⁰ The characters, even though deeply rooted in the Egyptian culture, and Alexandria's cosmopolitanism, were proud of their Italian-ness. They were also proud of being the descendants of the patriotic exiles of the revolutions of 1848, and proud that the Italian language was the diplomatic language before French.¹⁴¹

The protagonist of Cialente's story talks about the decline of Italian prestige after the events of 1882, the Egyptian crisis of 1907, the fall of Capitulations and Mixed Tribunals and their necessity to find an Egyptian passport in order to be able to find a job. Fausta Cialente, an anti-Fascist, conveys her dislike of the Duce through the dialogue of

¹³⁶ Caratozzolo, *Viaggiatori in Egitto: Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Eça de Queirós, Giuseppe Ungaretti*, 90.

¹³⁷ Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, 119.

¹³⁸ Fausta Cialente, *Cortile a Cleopatra* (Milano: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 1936), 90.

¹³⁹ Fausta Cialente, *Ballata Levantina* (Milano: Baldini Castoldi Dalai 1961), 22.

¹⁴⁰ Cialente, *Ballata Levantina*, 31.

¹⁴¹ Cialente, *Ballata Levantina*, 124.

the characters and the disagreement with the regime to engage in a war with Ethiopia.

The book ends with the internment of the Italians that remained in Egypt and the death of those that fought the World War Two.¹⁴²

As I am arguing in this chapter, Ungaretti stated that the Italians' influence and contribution to the modernization of Egypt was superior to that of the French. Ungaretti claimed that Italians "hanno fornito all'Egitto, nel corso dei secoli, generoso consiglio, disinteressato, privo di fini politici."¹⁴³ [Throughout many centuries, Italians' help to Egypt was done disinterestedly and did not have any colonial agenda.]

Italians also contributed to the development of the Egyptian economy. Italian banks helped finance a growing Egyptian economy. The Italian banking system, Banco di Roma, opened in Cairo Alexandria, Port Said, and Suez in 1905. The bank was an active and important player in Egyptian economy as it provided loans that were invested in the industries, constructions and other economic activities in Egypt. Italian banks suffered a period of crisis during the Italian war with Ethiopia in 1935, when many Egyptians and foreigners withdrew their deposits from Italian banks. When the rumors of a possible Second World conflict were spreading and Italy was moving closer to Germany then away from Britain, many Italians in Egypt moved the money they deposited in the Banco di Roma in Egypt and put their savings abroad. This caused the further collapse of the Italian banking system, which in the first twenty years of its activities in Egypt had flourished and provided important contributions to the Egyptian economy. When World

¹⁴² Cialente, *Ballata Levantina*, 228.

¹⁴³ Caratozzolo, *Viaggiatori in Egitto: Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Eça de Queirós, Giuseppe Ungaretti*, 95.

War Two began, Britain requested the Egyptian government to freeze all Italian assets and the Italian banks were closed down.¹⁴⁴

Italian industries also contributed to Egypt's economy, another testimony of Italian involvement in Egypt's development. The most important Italian industries dealt with construction, and textiles. Carlo de Rossetti, introduced the silkworm to Egypt.¹⁴⁵ Other important industries were also those exporting Egyptian products such as cotton by Silvio and Ezio Pinto, sugar by Maurizio Coen, oil exported by Vittorio Giannotti and tobacco by Carlo Grassi.¹⁴⁶ Egypt also served as an important market for the Italian economy. Italy, in fact, exported pharmaceutical products to Egypt as well as liquors, dairy products, paper from Northern Italy. Wine and olive oil was exported to Egypt from Tuscany, while bread, fruits and other food products shipped to Egypt were from the South of Italy.¹⁴⁷ However, Italian industries in Egypt began declining in 1930, when Egypt decided to impose protectionist tariffs on its national industries to promote economic independence.¹⁴⁸

Italians also were among the first to push for the creation of a worker's union in Egypt. This is important, because the gradual evolution of the Egyptian labor movement from a state of dependence, to a self-conscious and autonomous force in Egyptian society and politics contributed to Egypt's independence.¹⁴⁹ After the strikes taking place in the summer of 1919, because of an increase in inflation, workers went on strike.¹⁵⁰ Two

¹⁴⁴ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 152.

¹⁴⁵ Topi, *Di alcune colonie italiane all'estero*, 67.

¹⁴⁶ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 132.

¹⁴⁷ Topi, *Di alcune colonie italiane all'estero*, 12.

¹⁴⁸ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 159.

¹⁴⁹ Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 3.

¹⁵⁰ Bent Hansen, "Wage Differentials in Italy and Egypt: The Incentive to Migrate before World War I." *The Journal of European Economic History* 14, 2 (1985): 348.

Italians, Max of Collalto and Giuseppe Pizzuto, had an important role in this agitation. Max was the owner of the newspaper *Roma* and the head of the International Society of employees in Cairo. His role in the agitation was of propaganda. Pizzuto, more involved in the workers' struggles than Max, was an Italian born in Egypt. He fought the Great War in Italy and returned to Egypt once it was over and became the head of the typewriters' union. Pizzuto was a revolutionary socialist and was very influenced by the Italian Socialist Party and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. He opened the workers' union for the first time to the Egyptians too (until then workers unions were merely for foreigners and Europeans).¹⁵¹ This participation of local workers in the trade union also was a sign of increased Egyptian nationalism and the determination of its people to govern themselves.¹⁵² Pizzuto founded the Chamber of Labor but the British authorities shut it down as it was perceived to be a dangerous organization, which had connections with the nationalist movement. Collalto and Pizzuto were then deported to Italy.¹⁵³

Good relations existed between rulers of Egypt and Italy. The Savoy royal family of the Italian Kingdom invited Khedive Isma 'il, exiled from Egypt in 1879, to stay in Italy. Prince Fuad, the king of Egypt in 1936, was educated at the military academy in Turin and grew up considering King Umberto as a second father. Prince Fuad, was an admirer of the Italian culture and felt affection for the Italian people. He considered Queen Margherita as a second mother and had a statue of her next to his bed.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 74.

¹⁵² Bein and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954*, 448.

¹⁵³ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 75.

¹⁵⁴ Felice Le Monnier, *Il Contributo Italiano alla Formazione dell'Egitto Moderno* (Firenze: Biblioteca Popolare di Cultura Politica, 1941), 18.

In 1927 once he was the sultan of Egypt, he visited Turin and Rome, where he met with King Victor Emmanuel III, Mussolini and other Italian ministers. Then, King Fuad visited the Vatican and Venice and invited the Italian King to visit Egypt. The King of Italy visited Egypt with the royal family on February 20, 1933 and was greeted with joy by the Italian community once he reached the shore of Alexandria. King Fuad welcomed the Italian royal family with magnified celebration and the Italian national anthem was played in honor of the Italian royal family. However, the visit of King Emmanuel III to Egypt was perceived by Britain in a suspicious way. Britain feared "Italy's influence in the East, the prominence of the Italian expatriate community in Egypt and Italy's economic ambitions and drive to spread Italian culture."¹⁵⁵ British distrust of Italian intentions in Egypt, derived from the Fascist foreign policy centered to create an Italian empire in Africa. Moreover, the British did not want Italy to take control of the Suez Canal, vital for Britain to reach India.

After the end of the World War One another group of Italian immigrants reached the shore of Alexandria. They were Italian women from the northeast. These working-class women left Italy for Alexandria in search for better jobs. They were employed as nannies, waiters, housekeepers, cooks, dancers and dressmakers.¹⁵⁶ However, as Egypt was granted some sort of independence in 1922, foreign workers were not needed to the same extent as local people. Egyptians were preferred for employment in order to make Egypt economically independent, and to limit the influence of foreigners politically. For this reason, Egypt began slowing the process of granting visas to foreigners. In this period Italians began to have a more restricted access to the country. Sometimes Italians

¹⁵⁵ Angelo Sanmarco, "The Italians in Egypt." *Al-Ahram* (Feb. 19, 1933)

¹⁵⁶ Paolo Rumiz, "Quando le badanti erano italiane." *Alexandrie* 25 (Dec, 2005): 13.

who would leave Egypt temporarily to visit relatives in the peninsula had a hard time returning because of visas.¹⁵⁷ In 1923 Law 28 was in fact passed, stating that in case of equal credentials, those who knew Arabic should be hired or promoted. This law harmed the European employees. Many Italians began losing their jobs. This crisis affected workers and clerks, but also those Italians who for many decades had worked in the administration and government of Egypt and other prestigious positions. Additionally, in case a position had to be given to a foreigner, the British were preferred over the Italians as they were the former colonial power and could exercise a lot of influence over the Egyptian government.

Italian national colonialism began in 1890, but the Italian colony in Alexandria “was far from being a mere extension of Italy abroad; rather, it was part of Alexandria’s larger, complex and multicultural colonial society.”¹⁵⁸ The Italians were “neither exiles not expatriates but rather actual members of the Alexandria’s multicultural community.”¹⁵⁹ In 1920 Ungaretti described Egypt as a land not too far away and not too foreign. The poet also defined himself as an African thrown into the horrors of the Great War.¹⁶⁰ The majority of Italians in fact considered Egypt their second motherland. At the end of the World War One, those that fought for the Italian state, returned back to Alexandria as they “considered themselves Alexandrians first, and were proud of their long-standing Egyptian heritage.”¹⁶¹ Nevertheless the relationship between the Italian community, the local population and other foreigners changed with the rise of Fascism

¹⁵⁷ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 73.

¹⁵⁸ Patrizia Palumbo, *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from post-unification to the present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 168.

¹⁵⁹ Palumbo, *A Place in the Sun*, 169.

¹⁶⁰ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto*, 320.

¹⁶¹ Palumbo, *A Place in the Sun*, 189.

and Mussolini's intent to create an Italian empire in Africa. With the advent of Fascism in Italy, and Mussolini's aggressive foreign policy, the Italians outside of Italy, including Egypt, were not referred to as a community but rather as a colony.¹⁶²

After the end of World War One many associations emerged in the Italian community in Egypt. The Istituto Coloniale Italiano and the Lega Italiana for the protection of Italian interests were created in 1920 and aimed to promote Italian economic and political penetration in Egypt.¹⁶³ Italy in fact aimed at obtaining political influence in Egypt through its Italian community there, in order to create an Italian empire. Many of these associations took care of the Italian community in Egypt in every aspect of their lives, both financially and physically. They provided food and shelter for the poor Italians. They also took care of the sick and organized social events. In Alexandria the organizations of the Italian community were the Società Fratellanza Italiana di Mutuo Soccorso Operaia and the Associazione Lavoratori del Mare, which took care of the Italian proletariat. The social and cultural gatherings were organized by the Circolo Italiano, the Circolo Unione Italiana, the Dante Alighieri, the Società Artistico Letteraria, the Società Egizia and the Società Drammatico Musicale. There were also associations dealing with sport and educational activities the Giovani Esploratori Italiani, the Giovani Esploratori Italiani Don Bosco, the Palestra Italiana, the Canottieri Italia and the Rari Nantes. Cairo hosted similar institutions such as: the Società di Mutuo Soccorso Fra gli Operai Italiani, the Dante Alighieri, the Società Filodrammatica Italiana, the Società del Risotto, the Filodrammatica Ermete Novelli and the Banda Savoia. These associations joined during the Great War associations created for soldiers and the war

¹⁶² Monti, *Gli italiani ed il canale di Suez*, xi.

¹⁶³ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 9.

effort such as the Associazione Nazionale Combattenti Italiani, the Associazione Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra, which dealt with mutilated soldiers and the Associazione Ufficiali in Congedo which was for officers on leave.¹⁶⁴ These associations were important as they took care of the wounded soldiers, who could not take care of themselves.

With the rise of the Fascist regime, Italian-ness abroad gained even more importance. More institutions were created to preserve and reinforce the Italian presence in Egypt. The creation of Fascist institutions abroad was a way for Fascist Italy to expand its empire not only militarily and politically but also culturally. The Fascio Italiano was the first created, followed by Fascist youth organizations as the Balilla, Avanguardisti, Piccole e Giovani Italiane all grouped under a bigger organization for the young Italian Fascist abroad called the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio Estero.¹⁶⁵ This youth institution organized summer camps in Italy, Egypt and Lebanon. The trips were organized not only to entertain the young Italians, but also to strengthen relations between Fascist Italy and its citizens abroad.¹⁶⁶

Other Fascist organizations were the Opere Maternità e Infanzia for pregnant women and their infants, and the Dopolavoro organized the cultural activities and entertainment and slowly took over all the other social institutions created before the advent of Fascism. However by the 1930s the situation of the Italian charitable institutions was deteriorating. The economic crisis that was affecting Egypt also affected the Italian community. Unemployment and financial problems increased among the Italians and the charitable institutions did not have enough foundlings to take care of them. Additionally, the racial laws passed in Italy by Mussolini led many Italian Jews in

¹⁶⁴ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 163.

¹⁶⁵ Sammarco, *In Egitto*, 55.

¹⁶⁶ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 54.

Egypt to stop donating large sums of money to these institutions. Also, the abolition of Capitulations made it even more difficult for those Italians of the lower and middle classes.¹⁶⁷

The end of Capitulations caused not only the number of funds to shrink, but also the number of Italian nationals. Many of those from the Greek islands taken by Italy, people from Libya, an Italian colony, and some Jews decided to give up the Italian passport as it did not allow them to benefit from the privileges of the Capitulations.¹⁶⁸ They were then trying to obtain an Egyptian passport.

In 1938 the Italian government passed a decree to encourage Italians abroad to return to their home country. In Alexandria, which was home of 35000 Italians 200 of which unemployed, only fifteen repatriated as they were below the poverty level. The French Embassy thought that the Italian decree was only a formality. They thought that the Fascist government needed to keep a numerous Italian colony especially at Port Said as the Suez Canal was a source of interest for the Fascist government as well. However, the decree was not met with enthusiasm in Egypt because the Italian community felt Egypt to be their home and had no intentions of returning to Italy. Many Italians were already second generation born in Egypt and never set foot in the country of their parents, therefore felt no need to return to it.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 51.

¹⁶⁸ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 89.

¹⁶⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 95.

CHAPTER 3: ITALIAN JEWS IN EGYPT: A COMPLEX IDENTITY, 1860-1956

The Sultan of the Ottoman Empire passed *Tanzimat*, in the nineteenth century, which provided legal equality among the different groups in the Ottoman Empire, including Egypt. Mohammad Ali, then welcomed foreigners to Egypt. The Viceroy perceived foreigners to be an asset that would help Egypt develop and modernize. Among the foreigners that came to Egypt, were many Jews. In Egypt, the Jewish minority was not only heterogeneous but a community fragmented through the lines of “regional origin, rite, language, nationality, social class and, within the limits of a basic sense of Jewishness, of identity as well.”¹⁷⁰

This chapter examines the Italian Jewish community, its relationship to the greater Italian community, and its relationship to Egyptian nationalism. In the twentieth century, foreignness became a problem to those living in Egypt as Egyptian nationalism became increasingly exclusive. Whereas in the nineteenth century cosmopolitanism in Egypt was considered by European and Egyptians as a sign of modernization, in the twentieth century it was perceived as an obstacle to Egypt’s independence. While Italian identity was fragmented as Italians had to choose between Egyptian nationalism and Italian patriotism, as promoted by Mussolini’s Fascist regime, the Italian Jewish identity was doubly fragmented due to the emergence of Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel. The position of all Jews in Egypt was made further tenuous when, in the 1930s, Zionism and being Jewish became synonyms.¹⁷¹ Egyptians perceived all Jews to be Zionists, which further aggravated the position of Jews in Egypt in light of Egyptian

¹⁷⁰ Gudrun Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt, 1914-1952* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), 223.

¹⁷¹ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt, 1914-1952*, 209.

nationalism and events in Palestine. This chapter considers Jews in the Italian community to further illustrate the questions of national identity, inclusion and exclusion that were taking place in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century.

Among the Italians who emigrated to Egypt there were also Italian Jews, mostly from the city of Livorno, which since the Spanish expulsion of Sephardim in 1492, had been home to a substantial Jewish community.¹⁷² Unlike other nations in Europe, which were home to big communities of Jews, Italy had only thirty thousand, one tenth of those in France.¹⁷³ Jews in Italy were among the main supporters of the Risorgimento upheaval, which led to the unification of Italy. This active support of unification in turn allowed Italian Jews to “provide a minister of war, the first in modern Jewish history, and two prime ministers.”¹⁷⁴ However, Jewish political involvement in Italian affairs died soon after the Risorgimento period.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, many Italian Jews, both in Italy and Egypt, even if they lost their nationalist fervor at the end of the nineteenth century, preferred not to embrace Zionism, as they believed that the “Jewish national movement undermined the patriotism of the Italian Jews.”¹⁷⁶ In fact “Jews have tended to feel Italian before they feel Jewish.”¹⁷⁷

Jews in Egypt perceived the British occupation of the country after the Urabi revolt of 1882 as an assurance for protection and privilege. Regardless of the passing of the *Tanzimat* by the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, which ensured that all citizens were equal, in the nineteenth century, “Jews were sometimes arbitrarily arrested and only

¹⁷² Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 33.

¹⁷³ Dan Vittorio Segre, *Memoirs of a fortunate Jew: an Italian story* (Bethesda, Md.: Adler & Adler, 1987), 17.

¹⁷⁴ Segre, *Memoirs of a Fortunate Jew*, 19.

¹⁷⁵ Segre, *Memoirs of a Fortunate Jew*, 34.

¹⁷⁶ Segre, *Memoirs of a Fortunate Jew*, 50.

¹⁷⁷ Gini Alhadeff, *The Sun at Midday: Tales of a Mediterranean Family* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 6.

released upon payment of a heavy fine.”¹⁷⁸ Many Jews in Egypt thus tried to obtain European citizenship or to become the protégé of European nations. This status guaranteed the Jews protection and privilege under the capitulations laws. The British occupation of Egypt ensured the privileged position of foreign minorities in Egypt, including the Jewish population.¹⁷⁹

The Italian Jews who immigrated to Egypt resided mostly in urban areas such as Cairo, but they were mostly concentrated in Alexandria. This latter town was the home of many foreigners. Even though there was a small number of indigenous Egyptian Jews, the majority of Jewish immigrants identified with the foreign minority communities. However, Jews were not the most influential, important or threatening community among the non-Muslim minorities, that could challenge the role of the local population in Egypt. The Copts constituted the most important non-Muslim group in Egypt. Among the local foreign minorities, the Greeks were the most numerous. The English and French also figured prominently as foreign minorities who had political control of Egypt.¹⁸⁰

Besides the privileges and protections under capitulations laws, Jews had to abide by the obligations to the country of their nationality, for example serving in their country's army. This dual allegiance created contradictory situations as in the case of the 1935 Italian campaign in Ethiopia. This Ethiopian conflict was seen, by the British and the Egyptian government, as a possible threat to Egypt's sovereignty. Egypt and Britain, in fact, feared Italian intentions of including Egypt in the Italian empire, along with Libya and Ethiopia. Even though the Italian campaign in Ethiopia was considered to be a threat to Egypt's sovereignty, Jews residing in Egypt with Italian passports had to contribute to

¹⁷⁸ Jacob Landau, *Jews in nineteenth-century Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 19.

¹⁷⁹ Jacob Landau, *Jews in nineteenth-century Egypt*, 21.

¹⁸⁰ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt*, 220.

the war effort, which they did. The Italian Jewish community of Egypt donated gold for the Italian war effort in Ethiopia.¹⁸¹

The Jewish community in Alexandria was composed of 30,000 members. Among these, those that claimed Italian nationality 5,000. Italian Jews were numerous and held among the highest roles within the Jewish community; for four generations Italians hold the position of chief Rabbis and president of the Jewish Tribunal. Raffaele Della Pergola was one of the chief Rabbi of the Jewish community. Later on his grandson became a demographer of the Jewish people at the Hebrew University.¹⁸² Solomon Ottolenghi, an Italian Jew from Livorno, founded the first Hebrew printing press in Egypt in 1862.¹⁸³ Jews in Egypt were “leading bankers, cigarette makers, and merchants.”¹⁸⁴

While Jews in Egypt were known for their significant contributions to the country’s industrial, commercial and intellectual development, Jews always were reluctant to participate actively in politics even while supporting the national movement in Egypt.¹⁸⁵ The chief rabbi of Egypt told Jews to commit to Egyptian patriotism, in order to promote the idea that “the Jewish minority wished to be regarded as an integral part of the ‘Egyptian family.’”¹⁸⁶ The chief rabbi said that Jews should not actively participate in politics. This advice was given to the Jewish community because the chief rabbi realized that the position of the Jewish minority in Egypt was not secure. Egyptian nationalism was growing in an exclusivist direction. Foreigners were no longer seen as part of a cosmopolitan society but rather as an obstacle to Egyptian independence. The issue of

¹⁸¹ Liliana S. Dammond, *The Lost World of the Egyptian Jews* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2007), 10.

¹⁸² Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 20.

¹⁸³ Landau, *Jews in nineteenth-century Egypt*, 93.

¹⁸⁴ E. N. Adler, *Jews in Many Lands* (London: Macmillan, 1905) in Jacob Landau, *Jews in nineteenth-century Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 231.

¹⁸⁵ Landau, *Jews in nineteenth-century Egypt*, 12.

¹⁸⁶ Shimon Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt: a Mediterranean society in modern times* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 72.

Jewish settlement and conflict with the local population that was taking place in Palestine, together with the rise of Zionism and pan-Arabism, further jeopardized the presence of Jews in Egypt. For these reasons, the “Jewish community leaders had always avoided taking a definite stand on political issues other than calling for harmony, cooperation and mutual understanding.”¹⁸⁷

The exception to the idea that Jews should refrain from participating in politics were two Italian Jews James Sanua (1839-1912) and Joseph de Picciotto (1872-1938), who were prominent political activists for Egyptian national independence. James Sanua, known by his nickname ‘Abu Naddara’, meaning the ‘man with glasses’ was an Italian Sephardic playwright and journalist, born in Cairo. He was first exposed to Italian nationalism and Risorgimento while studying in Livorno. He exported those ideas to Egypt through his writings. Once back in Egypt he came in contact with Urabi Pasha, head of the 1882 rebellion, while teaching at the Cairo Polytechnic School.¹⁸⁸ Picciotto was an Italian Jew who organized a reception in honor of Saad Zaghlul, leader of the nationalist movement in Egypt, upon his return from exile in 1923. Picciotto, was an Italian Jew, loyal to Egypt and its king. He represented the Jewish community in the Egyptian Chamber of Deputies in the 1920s.¹⁸⁹

From a religious point of view, Cairo had 5,000 Jews who followed the Ashkenazi rite; 55,000 were Sephardim and mostly came from Italy and other Mediterranean lands. 3,000 Jews were of the Kairite group, which did not recognize the authority of the Rabbinate. Unlike Cairo, in which there was distinction among Jews of

¹⁸⁷ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt*, 167.

¹⁸⁸ Victor D. Sanua, "Egypt for the Egyptians: the story of Abu Naddara – A Sephardic Egyptian Patriot (1839-1912)," <http://www.sefarad.org/publication/lm/032/histoire.html> (accessed October 2, 2009).

¹⁸⁹ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt*, 169.

different rites and all three communities had a synagogue of their own, in Alexandria there was one united Jewish community regardless of their rites. The difference between the Jewish community in Cairo and Alexandria was not only based on the fact that there were three distinct communities in the capital while Ashkenazim and Sephardim of Alexandria were all united in one community. The Cairene Jews were mostly leading families who in the past had ties with the political establishment of Egypt. The Alexandrian Jews on the contrary were mostly upper-class Jewish closer in culture and habit with Western foreigners. The Jews in Alexandria also either completely rejected Zionism or supported it in a discreet manner.¹⁹⁰

The Jewish community of Alexandria established itself as an autonomous community, meaning separate and independent from the one in Cairo, in 1854. While the number of Italian Jews grew due to immigration, not all those referred to as Italian were actually coming from the peninsula. In 1855 the Jewish community in Alexandria asked Austria-Hungary for protection. However, as the number of Ashkenazi Jews began to increase at the end of the nineteenth century, they wanted to create a separate community different from the Sephardim.¹⁹¹ While this did not take place in Alexandria, the Ashkenazim were more successful in Cairo. In 1893, Cairo was home to an Ashkenazi community and a Sephardic one.¹⁹² Nevertheless the difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardim was never a crucial element in the identity of the Jews of Egypt.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 21.

¹⁹¹ Segre, the Italian Chargé d'Affaires in Alexandria. Dispatch 6581 to Visconti Venosa. Archivio Storico, AER, Serie Politica July 5, 1872 in Jacob Landau, *Jews in nineteenth-century Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 193.

¹⁹² M. Morris, Secretary of the Ashkenazi Community in Cairo to the British Agent and Consul-General in Egypt July 7, 1893 in Jacob Landau, *Jews in nineteenth-century Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 241.

¹⁹³ Dammond, *The Lost World of the Egyptian Jews*, 153.

The Jews in Alexandria passed written laws that regulated their community. The first attempt was made in 1840 when Sir Moses Montefiore, a Sephardic Jew of Italian origins, was visiting Alexandria. Later on, due to the increase in the number of Jews immigrating to Egypt, the 1854 statutes were replaced by more detailed ones in 1872. This latter code of laws was written in Italian. Among the many regulations, the Jews in Alexandria established that there would be no discrimination among the Jews in the community based on nationality and origin.¹⁹⁴

The occupation of Egypt by Britain and mass immigration of foreigners to the country allowed for the opening of a French Jewish system of education in 1896 called The Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU). The main objective of this system was to educate the Jews living in Arab lands.¹⁹⁵ Among the founders and later also president of the AIU was the Jew of Italian origins, Sir Montefiore, who also gave large sums of money to finance philanthropic associations aimed at helping the Jewish community.¹⁹⁶ Through this institution the Egyptian Jews were exposed to European ideas and languages, especially the middle and upper-class Jews began using European languages as a way to communicate and to assert their status in society.¹⁹⁷ Until 1876 the language that was mostly used and the one of administration in Egypt was Italian. Even if replaced by French, Italian remained the main language of instruction in the schools of Alexandria until 1905.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ G. Della Valle, President of the Committee, “Statuti della Comunità Israelitica di Alessandria d’Egitto, 1872” in Jacob Landau, *Jews in nineteenth-century Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 192.

¹⁹⁵ Fishman, *Il chilometro d’oro*, 35.

¹⁹⁶ Paul Goodman, *Moses Montefiore* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1925), 18.

¹⁹⁷ Andre Aciman, *False Papers* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), 4.

¹⁹⁸ Michael M. Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970: in the midst of Zionism, anti-Semitism, and the Middle East conflict* (New York : New York University Press, 1949), 2.

Italian was the language of study preferred by the Jewish youth in Alexandria as many Jewish families preferred to send their children to Italian schools rather than French or English ones.¹⁹⁹ The Jewish community, in fact, had closer relations with the gentile Italian community than with the Greek, French, British and Maltese communities. A proof of this was the fact that, many non-Jewish Italian families preferred to send their children to Jewish schools. Additionally, the Italian government promoted the opening of Jewish schools to extend Italian influence in the Levant. Schools were important institutions in which Italian-ness was kept alive in a foreign country. With the growth of the Italian community, many schools emerged in Alexandria at the turn of the twentieth century. The most prestigious and famous were the Istituto Don Bosco, the Scuola Commerciale, the Dante Alighieri and the Libera Università' di Alessandria.²⁰⁰ However, schools were not the only place where Italian-ness was nurtured. Newcomers from Italy and old Italian residents of Alexandria were taken care of and looked upon by the Italian philanthropic societies and hospitals, which constituted an intricate network of welfare.

In 1911, the fiftieth anniversary of Italian unification coincided with the advent of the Italian war of expansionism in Libya. The Italian government accused religious schools in Alexandria of lack of patriotism to the motherland as these schools were highly integrated with the locals. The Presidents of these Italian religious schools responded to the accusations of the Italian government, saying that their religious congregations could not be considered tools of the Italian foreign policy; therefore they

¹⁹⁹ Sanua, Victor. "Who am I?" *The Historical Society of Jews from Egypt*.
<http://www.hsje.org/problem%20of%20identity.html> (accessed October 1, 2009).

²⁰⁰ Petricoli, *Oltre il Mito*, 24.

had no intentions of forcing Italian-ness if it was not the will of their students.²⁰¹ With the outbreak of World War One, many Italians left Egypt to serve in the Italian army.²⁰² These Italians who settled in Egypt fought for the Italian state, but returned to Alexandria as soon as World War One was over, as they “considered themselves Alexandrians first, and were proud of their long-standing Egyptian heritage.”²⁰³

A crucial contact between the Jews of Egypt and the *Yishuv* in Palestine took place during World War One, when Egypt welcomed a large number of Jews from Palestine expelled by the Ottoman Empire. This event also altered temporarily the ratio between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews in Egypt. In fact, even though the majority of the Egyptian Jews were middle-class Sephardim, who “were politically quietist, concerned primarily about the well-being of their families, and generally satisfied with their relatively comfortable lives in Egypt.” During the Great War the number of Ashkenazi Jews living in Cairo and Alexandria grew in number as more than 11,000 of them had been expelled from Palestine by the Ottoman commander of Syria and Palestine, Jemal Pasha.²⁰⁴ Among these exiled Jews of Palestine there was also David Ben-Gurion (r. 1949-1963), soon to be a founding father and pioneer of the state of Israel.²⁰⁵

These Jews who returned to Palestine by the end of World War One, reported criticism of the Jewish community in Egypt in their diaries. Their main complaint was that the Egyptian Jews were indifferent to the Zionist rhetoric about living in the Holy Land, revival of Jewish culture and tradition as well as the use of Hebrew. Apart from

²⁰¹ Daniela Sarasella, *La Lingua italiana nel mondo attraverso l'opera delle congregazioni religiose* (Catanzaro: Rubettino, 2001), 64.

²⁰² Andre Aciman, *Out of Egypt: a memoir* (New York: Riverhead Trade, 1996), 4.

²⁰³ Palumbo, *A Place in the Sun*, 189.

²⁰⁴ Joel Beinin, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: culture, politics, and the formation of a modern diaspora* (Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 4.

²⁰⁵ Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt: a Mediterranean society in modern times*, 179.

these complaints, Egyptian Jews provided support and solidarity to the Palestinian Jews. Schools and other philanthropic institutions were funded by the Egyptian Jews to help out the exiles.²⁰⁶

Throughout the twentieth century Jewish people claimed attachment to both the Egyptian and the European society and culture. While the indigenous and rural Jews were more assimilated to the Egyptian culture, the Jewish urban middle-class and elite were mostly associated with the Western foreigners, were cosmopolitan and were more segregated. Urban upper and middle-class Jews in fact mostly attended European institutions or were educated in Jewish schools. Not only Jews did not mix with the Egyptian population, segregation took place also within the Jewish community, as the Ashkenazim did not mix with the Sephardic Jews.²⁰⁷

The dual identity that Jews held was also manifested in their day-to-day lives. While on the economic level, the Jewish middle and upper-classes had more ties and were identified with the European and colonial powers, on the political level Jews were loyal to the Egyptian nation even though they did not participate in politics.²⁰⁸ However, things began to change after World War One. With the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire after the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, the right of self-determination announced by American President Woodrow Wilson, which created a growth of nationalism in Egypt, and the evolving issues in Palestine, the situation among the Jewish community in Egypt began to worsen and they could not hold on their dual identity anymore.

In 1919 a national revolution broke out in Egypt when Saad Zaghlul (1859-1927) demanded a role at the Paris Conference in order to request President Wilson's support

²⁰⁶ Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt*, 187.

²⁰⁷ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt*, 230.

²⁰⁸ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt*, 230.

for Egyptian independence from British control. He was disappointed when President Wilson instead approved the British protectorate over Egypt. Zaghlul then realized that Wilson's idea of self-determination was not a universal principle as it was not meant for those living in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. When British authorities exiled Zaghlul to Malta a revolution broke out in Egypt. Upon Zaghlul's return from a second exile "foreigners, as well as natives, joined in the demonstration of welcome."²⁰⁹

While Egypt was shaken by growing nationalism and foreign immigration, the situation in neighboring Palestine was evolving as well. Tensions between the Jews and the local population of Palestine grew because of the increase in number of Jews immigrating to that land, making the two groups compete for natural resources. In Egypt, nationalism began to be exclusive and foreignness was seen as a threat. Therefore, the Egyptian government opposed Jewish attempts to buy land in the 1910s, in the Sinai Peninsula, in the Egyptian territory of Rafah, to be colonized by "Russian or other Jews."²¹⁰ Egypt, did not want more foreigners in its land. Rather, it wanted fewer of them.²¹¹

Many events were taking place in Palestine after the end of World War One, which were altering the situation in the region and were reported in Egypt through the newspaper *Israel*. The editor was Dr. Albert Mosseri, a member of the Egyptian Jewish elite and also one of the main promoters of Zionism in the country. The newspaper, established in 1920, published in three languages: French, Hebrew and Arabic. The

²⁰⁹ William Walter, "Egypt welcomes Zaghlul Pasha," *New York Times* (Apr. 6, 1921): 2.

²¹⁰ Sir Gerard Lowther, Despatch N. 346 from Constantinople to Sir E. Grey, Foreign Office (17 May 1911) in B. Destani, *Minorities in the Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries 1841-1974 Volume 2* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 2005), 574.

²¹¹ Mr. M. Cheetham, confidential dispatch N. 62 from Ramleh to Sir E. Grey, Foreign Office (17 June 1911) in B. Destani, *Minorities in the Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries 1841-1974 Volume 2* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 2005), 576.

publication of the newspaper in three languages manifested the reality of Jewish life in Egypt, which was a mix of different national and linguistic identities. “The Hebrew edition represented the revitalized Jewish culture, the French—the dominant Western culture, and the Arabic—the ruling culture of the Middle East.”²¹² Mosseri promoted both Zionism and Egyptian nationalism through his newspaper as he believed that both ideologies could coexist in harmony and were not necessarily mutually exclusive. After Mosseri’s death in 1933 the newspaper was directed by his wife Mathilda, an Egyptian Jew born in Hebron from Iraqi parents. *Israel* was published until 1939 when Mathilda moved back to Palestine.²¹³

Mosseri reported events in Palestine, such as the revolts of 1928 and 1929, when riots broke out at the Wailing Wall. The riots pushed the British administration to send the Shaw Commission to provide recommendations on how to avoid other insurrections among the Jewish and Palestinian populations in the Mandate. The recommendation, not implemented, suggested limiting the flow into Palestine of Jewish immigrants, which aggravated the issue of land among the two communities then creating more ground for the outbreak of violence. Mosseri, while reporting the events in Palestine also promoted the need for coexistence among Arabs and Jews. This promotion was fueled by the fear of Egyptians siding with the Palestinians. Such an alliance could, in turn, cause the Jews in Egypt to be trapped in an uncomfortable position, as they could be identified with their co-religious in Palestine. In order to make the Zionist cause appealing to the Egyptian Jews and to promote support of the *Yishuv* among the rest of the Egyptian population,

²¹² “Israel,” *Historical Jewish Press* <http://jpress.huji.ac.il/publications/israel-en.asp> (accessed October 2, 2009).

²¹³ “Israel,” *Historical Jewish Press* <http://jpress.huji.ac.il/publications/israel-en.asp> (accessed October 2, 2009).

Mosseri tried to argue that Egyptian nationalist movement for full independence from Britain was only figurative, since Britain still held a strong military presence in the country and influenced its politics and economy. He also argued that his position was similar to the “Zionist struggle and the *Yishuv*’s aim to secure the national home” in Palestine.²¹⁴

At the same time that the revolts at the Wailing Wall were taking place in Palestine, in Egypt the passing of the Nationality Laws in 1929 [see Appendix C] put an end to Jewish dual identity as Egyptian and European. While up to the 1920s Jews could claim loyalty to the Egyptian state, be affiliated with Western education, and benefit from the capitulations laws either by being a protégé of the European countries or by taking foreign citizenship, now with the Nationality Laws the Jewish population of Egypt found itself trapped.²¹⁵ “Among the various aspects of Jewish life, the ‘nationality problem’ was the most complex.”²¹⁶ National identity began to be an issue also for the foreigners mostly living in the urban part of Egypt as Egyptian nationalism became more aggressive and exclusive. Egyptian institutions in fact made it hard to obtain naturalization and many Jews who were used to the urban cosmopolitan life of Cairo and Alexandria never really bothered to obtain citizenship of any state. Forty percent of Egyptian Jews were labeled as stateless in the interwar period. The number grew after the 1929 Nationality Law.²¹⁷ However, Nationality Laws made it difficult to all foreigners, gentile and Jews to obtain an Egyptian passport. In 1956 this became problematic as President Nasser established

²¹⁴ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 30.

²¹⁵ Beinín, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 38.

²¹⁶ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 8.

²¹⁷ Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt*, 35.

that only those with Egyptian citizenship could remain in the country, leading then to a mass migration of foreigners, including Jews to flee from Egypt.

Politically, the 1930s culminated with growing Egyptian nationalism, Islamic revival, Pan-Arab ideology and the 1936 riots in Palestine between the *Yishuv* and the Arabs. All these events strongly impacted Jewish perceptions of security. Moreover, the passing of the Montreaux Conventions in the spring of 1937, which abolished capitulations laws and imposed the closing of the Mixed Tribunals, both the Jewish community as well as the foreign ones became concerned about their future. With the end of the special status ensured by the Capitulations, foreigners lost their power to influence Egyptian politics and economy.²¹⁸

It was in these times of fast-changing events taking place in Egypt and neighboring Palestine that the Jews were influenced politically by socialism, communism, and Zionism as an alternative to Egyptian nationalism. This latter was becoming exclusive and more supportive of the Palestinian cause. The exclusive brand of Egyptian nationalism further compromised the situation of the Jews in Egypt. Egyptian nationalism was, in fact, anti-British as it aimed to obtain independence from Britain. Therefore, when the Jewish community expressed “their deepest gratitude for [the British] decision to establish in Palestine a Jewish National Home,” this was seen as a lack of loyalty to the Egyptian national cause on the part of the Jews.²¹⁹

While in the 1920s Egyptian Zionism promoted cultural, educational and philanthropic help to the Jews in Palestine by funding the Hebrew University in

²¹⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 46.

²¹⁹ Chief Rabbi Kuk, Telegram N. 442 from Foreign Office to High Commissioner for Egypt (12 May 1920) in B. Destani, *Minorities in the Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries 1841-1974 Volume 3* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 2005), 122.

Jerusalem, after the unrest of the 1930s the Egyptian Jews did not want to be associated with Zionism. They therefore withdrew their membership with Zionist organizations. Helping the *Yishuv* was not at this point “considered consistent with patriotic loyalty to Egypt.”²²⁰ Before the 1940s Zionist activities were not oriented toward the *aliyah*. Nevertheless, Zionist activities were stronger in Alexandria. In the mid 1930s, for example, a kibbutz training Jews in farming and preparing them for life in Palestine, was built in Alexandria called Kibbutz Hakhshara he-Haluts.²²¹

Political Zionism, introduced in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century, was mostly supported by lower middle-class Jews. The middle and upper classes, and mostly Sephardic Jews, did not want to be associated with Zionism as they did not see the need to endanger their comfortable status in Egypt to promote the ideology emerging among the Jews of Palestine. (Sephardic Jews, contrary to the social demotion they later experienced in Israel, held a higher status and were wealthier than the Ashkenazim). Political Zionism, found support mostly during the period of the Great War, when a large number of Jews from Palestine were in exile in Egypt.²²² Jews mostly restrained from participating in politics up until the 1930s, when the coexistence and status between Jews and the rest of the Egyptian population was still intact. However, when Jews’ security was in doubt, the Egyptian Jewish community was very active in defending Jewish interests.²²³

The number of members of the two major Zionist federations in Cairo and Alexandria decreased drastically in number from 3,000 to only 600 between the 1920s

²²⁰ Beinun, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 121.

²²¹ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 47.

²²² Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt*, 75.

²²³ Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt*, 78.

and the second half of the 1930s. This decline in participation by Jews of Egypt took place while at the same time the situation in the *Yishuv* was changing dramatically. A possible explanation for this change was the fear of Egyptian Jews that events in Palestine could threaten their status and security in Egypt considering that the Egyptian society was going through changes internally and as a reaction to the events in Palestine and Europe.²²⁴ Additionally, groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Young Egypt were associating their struggle against Britain more with that of the Palestinians. These two organizations which saw Islam as an alternative to nationalism for Egyptian identity, also began to associate being Jewish with Zionism, while the two things were and are still separate and distinct, yet not mutually exclusive.²²⁵

Up to the 1930s the Italian non-Jewish community and Jewish one maintained good relations with one another as underlined by the events such as the one in 1930 when the Italian Chief Rabbi David Prato carried out a solemn ceremony in the major synagogue of Alexandria in honor of the wedding of Italian Prince Umberto.²²⁶ However, with the passing of racial laws by the Fascist Party in 1938, relations between Italians and Jews began to deteriorate. For the Italians in Egypt, Fascism was not appealing. Those pushing for the adherence to Fascist rules were the Italian governmental personnel, the ambassador and the consul.²²⁷ The Italian population of Egypt instead was not interested in Mussolini's policy. A testimony of these sentiments was the lack of enthusiasm and poor attendance of Italian schoolchildren to the Scuole Littorio, built during the Fascist

²²⁴ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 50

²²⁵ Beinín, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 35.

²²⁶ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 28.

²²⁷ Sarasella, *La Lingua italiana nel mondo attraverso l'opera delle congregazioni religiose*, 62.

era and with a curriculum loyal to the Fascist propaganda.²²⁸ As many of the students that attended Italian schools were Jewish, the passing of the Racial Laws by Mussolini in 1938 led the Italian Jews in Egypt “to send their children to British and French schools.”²²⁹ As a consequence, many Italian schools had to close down.²³⁰

While in the 1930s the Zionist group in Egypt lead by Mosseri was promoting greater participation by the Sephardic Jews in the cause of Zionism, Mosseri, was also focusing attention on the situation of the Jews in Germany and Hitler’s propaganda. In Egypt a league was founded to fight anti-Semitism. This organization called Ligue Contre L’Antisémitisme Allemand (LICA), promoted the boycott of German products in Egyptian towns and opposed the work of the National-Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP), active in Cairo and Alexandria.²³¹ In March 1933, an Italian Jewish businessman named Umberto Jabès, sued a member of the NSDAP who published a pamphlet inciting anti-Semitism. Brought to the mix-tribunal of Cairo in January of 1934 the case was, however, dismissed as the author of the article did not directly insult Mr. Jabès but the entire Jewish community.²³² As relationships between Italians and Jews in Alexandria deteriorated due to Mussolini’s promulgation of the racial laws, the Jews also boycotted Italian products and caused economic difficulties for the Italian businessman in Egypt. But the Jews were not the only ones in Alexandria who were against Italian fascism.

²²⁸ Cialente, *Ballata Levantina*, 268.

²²⁹ Marta Petricioli, “Italian Schools in Egypt.” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24, 2 (Nov., 1997): 179.

²³⁰ Palumbo, *A Place in the Sun*, 190.

²³¹ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 58.

²³² Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 65.

The year after Jabès' case, other events in Palestine led to the further worsening of the situation for Egyptian Jews. Revolts broke out in Palestine in 1936 and the British authority sent another commission to investigate what happened and what could be done. The Peel Commission recommended creating two separate homogenous states in Palestine, one for the Jews and one for the Palestinians, by transferring this latter. This caused a negative reaction among the Palestinians as well as the Egyptians. The student movement organized a hunger strike in the University of Cairo to protest against the Peel Commission on April 29 and 30 1938. British sources claimed that the situation in Egypt was deteriorating as anti-British and anti-Jewish protests were rampant among student movements.²³³

With the passing of the racial laws by Mussolini and Italy's alliance with Germany in World War Two the relationship between the Italian Jews in Alexandria and the Italian government deteriorated. So did relations between Jews and the local population of Egypt when, after the end of World War Two and the pressure of Zionism to create a Jewish state in Palestine led to the outbreak of riots on Balfour day, November 2, 1945.²³⁴ Nevertheless, those protesting against the Balfour Declaration were mostly radical.²³⁵ In the 1940s in fact anti-Semitic sentiments emerged among the ultranationalist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Young Egypt, which also saw in sympathizing with Italy and Germany a way to challenge the British power in Egypt. However, anti-Semitism was embraced by a minority of the Egyptian population. The Wafd Party, "continued to endorse secular-liberal conceptions of the national

²³³ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 70.

²³⁴ Daniel Clifton, "Cairo's Students Protest Zionism." *New York Times* (Nov 2, 1945): 1.

²³⁵ "State Sanctioned Persecution of Jews in Egypt." *Justice For Jews From Arab Countries* <http://www.justiceforjews.com/egypt.html> (September 30, 2009).

community” and supported the British in World War Two. Moreover, the vast majority of Egyptian population rejected fascism and anti-Semitism.²³⁶ In fact while riots broke in Egypt on Balfour Day, many Muslims and Copts risked being harmed as they were rescuing their Jewish compatriots. This Muslim and Christian support for Jews shows that regardless of the unrest, the situation of the Jews in Egypt was not as precarious as Zionism was portraying. Zionism in fact was promoting the idea that the security of the Jews was in danger in Egypt and promoted their movement to Israel.²³⁷

Between 1942 and the war in Palestine of 1948, the Jewish community in Egypt underwent more changes. *Aliyah* to Palestine became one of the propaganda points of Zionist organizations in Cairo and Alexandria. Moreover, Jewish organizations such as the Hagana, the Jewish Agency and Mossad began operations in Egypt.²³⁸ These latter three institutions went underground during the years Egypt and Israel were at war. The Hagana, the Jewish Agency and the Mossad, together with Egyptian national exclusiveness led to the “rupture” between the Jewish population in Egypt and the rest of the population. “Rupture,” according to the Zionist ideology, would push Egyptian Jews to want to flee to Israel.²³⁹

Zionist organizations in Egypt not only promoted *aliyah*. Jewish youth were, additionally, taught Hebrew, self-defense and how to cultivate the land. Agricultural skills were considered to be the most important task Jews had to learn. (Agricultural training was and still is so important that up to today the first year of military service, mandatory for Jews in Israel, is devoted to learning this skill.) Mossad and Hagana

²³⁶ Beinín, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 61.

²³⁷ Beinín, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 65.

²³⁸ Victor D. Sanua, “A Short History of The Exodus Of Jews From Egypt,” *Sephardic Studies* <http://www.sephardicstudies.org/short.html> (accessed October 1, 2009).

²³⁹ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 299.

operations additionally aimed at the gathering of British ammunitions to be transported to Palestine illegally and the “gathering of intelligence data about the British and Egyptians.”²⁴⁰ During World War Two, some regiments from Palestine, formed also by Italian Jews wearing British uniforms also volunteered for the Allies, and found themselves in Italy again. This is another indication of the complexity of identity taking place at this time among the Italian Jews.²⁴¹

In 1947, pursuing the process of Egyptianization, the government passed the Company Law making it mandatory for every company, foreign or national, to hire Egyptians whose quota had to be at least 75 per cent of the workforce.²⁴² Zionism and Jewish gatherings of any sort became illegal and Jews who did not hold an Egyptian passport were forced to return to the state of their nationality. “Jews born and raised in Egypt who had obtained foreign nationality were now expelled,” together with all the other foreigners that did not held Egyptian passports, regardless of the fact they were born in Egypt and lived there most of their lives.²⁴³

On 29 November 1947 the United Nations passed a resolution to divide Palestine into two states according to demographic data. From this point on, the situation among Jews and Palestinians deteriorated and a civil war broke out. On 14 May 1948 the British mandate in Palestine expired and Israel proclaimed its independence. This Israeli declaration of independence was soon followed by a war between Israel and five Arab states: Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq and Egypt. While the Muslim Brotherhood dispatched volunteers to fight for the Palestinian cause, any Zionist activities in Egypt

²⁴⁰ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 102.

²⁴¹ Segre, *Memoirs of a Fortunate Jew*, 93.

²⁴² Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt*, 59.

²⁴³ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 130.

were banned and the Jews' loyalty to their country doubted. While Egypt and Israel were at war, incidents of violence were taking place in Egypt and Jewish businesses were closed and seized.²⁴⁴ Some Italian Jews, like Marco Mosseri and the Gattegno family of Alexandria, were among those whose property was sequestered by the Egyptian government.²⁴⁵ Other Jews were put in internment camps. Nevertheless, the Jews were not the only minority targeted.²⁴⁶ There had been attacks on Europeans as well.²⁴⁷

As a consequence of the Palestinian war, 20,000 Egyptian Jews emigrated to Palestine, and Europe –Italy included- between 1948 and 1950. Many others remained in Egypt comforted by the possibility of internal stabilization with the rise to power of the Wafd party. By the late 1940s, Egyptian Jews, like many others in Arab lands, were not driven by the rhetoric of Zionism to pursue *aliyah*. They were not attracted by immigration to Israel, where the situation for them did not seem any better. During first two years of the 1950s, however, Egypt was shaken by chaos and revolts due to the struggle between the Wafd party and the Palace. On Black Friday, the 26 of January 1952, a violent anti-British demonstration in Cairo, Jews were arrested and harmed. However, Jews were not the only victims as the resentment in the country was not only targeted towards the Jews but it was anti-foreigner in nature.²⁴⁸

Up to the 1940s, anti-Semitic sentiments were mostly professed by the ultranationalists and Islamic revivalists. After the Israeli-Arab wars however, they gained ground among the government as well. This led to the imposition by Egyptian authorities

²⁴⁴ Aciman, *False Papers*, 4.

²⁴⁵ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 127.

²⁴⁶ Victor D. Sanua, "A Short History of The Exodus Of Jews From Egypt," *Sephardic Studies* <http://www.sephardicstudies.org/short.html> (accessed October 1, 2009).

²⁴⁷ Mr R. L. Speaght, conversation with the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs enclosing an aide memoire by the British Ambassador for Egypt (July 20, 1948) in B. Destani, *Minorities in the Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries 1841-1974 Volume 4* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 2005), 155.

²⁴⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 145.

of discriminatory laws that compelled the Jewish minority to flee the country. While after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 the number of Jews that left Egypt was 20,000, after the 1956 Suez Canal war 45,000 more left. The June 1965 war caused many more Jews to flee from Egypt leaving only 350 Jews in Egypt by the 1980s.²⁴⁹ Even in the case that the state of Israel had not been created, “sooner or later, due to domestic problems, Egyptianization, and the surge of nationalist and fundamentalist ties, the Jews, like the other minorities would have been forced to resort to communal self-liquidation.”²⁵⁰

Neither the neo-lachrymose theory (term marked by Mark Cohen Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University) that Jews were constantly persecuted in Arab lands, a narrative that makes them part of the European narrative of persecution part of the Zionist cause, nor the counter-theory that Jews and Muslims lived in constant harmony, are good explanations for the causes that led the Jews in Egypt to flee. Regardless, with the creation of the state of Israel and the war with the Arab world, Jews, like all other minorities such as the Italians, French Greek and British, were to be expelled from Egypt as a consequence of changing domestic situation and the rise of a more ethnic and religious nationalism. The coup carried out by the Free Officers, which brought Gamal Abdul Nasser to power as first president of the newly created republic of Egypt, initiated a period of pan-Arabism and nationalization. As a consequence, everything foreign was nationalized and those who did not have an Egyptian nationality were expelled. Nasser’s political platform was also hostile to Israel and Zionism. All of these events irrevocably damaged the status of the Jews in Egypt.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt*, 4.

²⁵⁰ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970*, 301.

²⁵¹ Beinun, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 78.

In the early 1950s the Jews, who were still numerous in Egypt, returned to their every-day-lives. “They were no more affected by the events of 1952 than were the other non-Muslims minorities,” and felt at ease in Egypt.²⁵² However, Zionist youth clubs continued to organize operations within Egypt to promote rupture between the Jewish population and the locals, then pushing for an *aliyah* to Israel. While Egyptian exclusive nationalism and the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 posed complications to the national identity of Jews in Egypt, Operation Susannah, which took place in July of 1954, compromised the status of Jews in Egypt and made them be perceived by the Egyptians as a fifth column. The post office and movie theaters in Alexandria and Cairo as well as the train station and United States Information Service library in the capital had been targeted and bombs were planned next to these facilities.²⁵³ “The involvement of Egyptian Jews in acts of espionage and sabotage against Egypt, organized and directed by Israeli military intelligence, raised fundamental questions about Jewish identities and loyalties.”²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Egyptian Jews were also targeted because they were Communists or were identified with other political identities considered threatening to the state of Egypt. The most important Egyptian Jewish communist was the Italian citizen Henri Curiel, son of Daniel, an influential banker in Cairo.²⁵⁵ Because he was Italian, Jewish and Communist he was forced to return in Italy on August 26, 1950. Curiel was active in politics while living in Egypt. In the 1930s he protested against Fascism. Later on, in the 1940s, he

²⁵² Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt*, 220.

²⁵³ Beinín, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 19.

²⁵⁴ Beinín, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 31.

²⁵⁵ Gilles Perrault, *A man apart: the life of Henri Curiel* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 82.

promoted a communism that supported the Egyptian struggle against British imperialism.²⁵⁶

The reason why Jewish and Muslim relations deteriorated was not due to changes within the Jewish population. Rather that change came from within the Egyptian society. In the 1940s, European presence and modernization, Egyptian nationalism both secular and religious, the emergence of the issue of Palestine and the growing strength of the Zionist movement all contributed to the deterioration of Jewish-Muslim relations. However, there are different opinions among historians regarding when relations between the Arab and Jewish population in Egypt changed and why the Jews of Egypt decided to flee their homeland. One narrative explains that the trigger that made Egyptian Jews decide to leave en masse in 1948, 1956 and 1967, was the Israeli-Arab conflict. Nasser's nationalization and expulsion policies were also important factors.²⁵⁷

The sporadic hostility that emerged after the 1940s was the result of militant nationalism and Islamic activists in support of the Palestinian issue. The "Jewish question", which only emerged in the twentieth century, was neither the consequence of historic Muslim-Jewish hostility nor the rupture of centuries of harmony due to the emergence of Zionism. Rather, the lack of popular anti-Semitic propaganda, with the exception of radical nationalists and Islamic militant groups, and the Jewish social and economic success indicated that "Jews were not discriminated against because of their religion or race, but for political reasons."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Marianne Wigboldus, *Inventory of the papers of the Egyptian Communists in Exile (Rome Group), including the papers of Henri Curiel (1914-1978): 1945-1979* (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1997), VII.

²⁵⁷ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt*, 230.

²⁵⁸ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt*, 234.

By 1956, when the Suez War took place, the Jews in Egypt were more or less 50,000.²⁵⁹ Those who remained were mostly adult, Sephardic Jews. The younger generations were in fact more willing to migrate and Ashkenazis left in greater numbers because they usually had more ties in Israel and other countries. The Sephardim, however, were more rooted in Egyptian society and therefore were more reluctant to leave what was for them their country. By 1960, the Jewish population in Egypt was 2,500.²⁶⁰

What emerged from the events related to the Jews in Egypt is that Egyptian and Israeli national narratives are inadequate explanations of identity and loyalty on the part of the Egyptian Jews. The Egyptian narrative defines the Jews in Egypt as the ‘other,’ as ‘Zionists’ and as ‘colonialists.’ The Israeli story claims that Jews could only be safe in Israel. Yet the Jews in Egypt did not see any contradiction in being both Egyptian nationalists and Jewish.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, 145.

²⁶⁰ Aciman, *False Papers*, 4.

²⁶¹ Beinín, *The dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 21.

CHAPTER 4: NATIONALISM IN EGYPT, FASCISM IN ITALY AND THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY 1919-1956

The early twentieth century was a period of change for both Egypt and Italy. New forces of nationalism emerged in which foreigners were perceived as a problem. The rise of Fascism in Italy led to the emergence of Fascist organizations and an aggressive foreign policy in the Middle East that destabilized the position of the Italian community in Egypt even more. This chapter proves that cosmopolitanism and a privileged life protected by capitulations laws all ended in 1930s and national identity became a problem for the Italian community in Egypt. The Italian community in Egypt wanted to revert to how things were before Fascism and World War Two. However, things were no longer the same. Egypt was going through a chaotic period, which ended with the 1952 coup of the Free Officers. The era of 'the Pasha,' the period from Mohammad Ali to King Faruk, was over and so was the one of the privileged European community. Even for Italians: those that remained in Egypt during the war and the many that returned after World War Two had to leave the country they considered their second home. What was left was the nostalgia of a life lived in a multicultural, multiethnic and cosmopolitan Egypt that would never return.²⁶²

Between the British occupation in 1882 and the outbreak of World War One, Britain did not define Egypt as either a protectorate or a colony. Egypt was legally an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire. However, even though Britain occupied Egypt to ensure the control of Suez Canal, avoid a French takeover, and ensure that Egypt would pay its debt, nevertheless Egypt was not ruled by its khedive but by the British Consul General of Egypt. Evelyn Baring (1841-1917), later Lord Cromer, served

²⁶² Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 470.

as Egypt's Consul General from 1883 until 1907. Cromer previously worked in India, which was declared a colony of Britain in 1858 after the Sepoy mutiny. A product of the Victorian era, colonialism and social Darwinism, Cromer thought that Egypt was backward and Oriental, and incapable of governing itself. He promoted political stability by supporting the rule of the khedive, ensuring the paying of the debts Egypt owed Britain, and guaranteeing British industrial supremacy at the expense of the Egyptian. Cromer in fact pushed for the expansion of Egyptian agricultural products so that its industries would not develop to the point of becoming British competition. In order to promote growth in agriculture, Cromer authorized the creation of the Aswan Dam (finished in 1902) and other canals that allowed for a better irrigation system. Egypt's railroad system boomed at the turn of the twentieth century, thanks to Cromer's assistance. As a consequence, the production of cotton increased, making the Egyptian economy even more dependent on the output of this single crop.²⁶³

By the beginning of the twentieth century, even though Egyptians were employed in the management offices, the British dominated decision-making positions. Not only were the British salaries much higher than those of the Egyptians, but the British officials were paid by the Egyptian government and not the British. The Egyptians were growing discontent with the British presence and attitude of superiority, and began to grow confident of their ability to govern their own country.²⁶⁴

In the meanwhile, in Italy, the economy flourished from 1896 on. Economic growth during the term of Prime Minister Giolitti (in office between 1892 and 1921) came about because of the boom of the industrial sector and the regulation of the bank

²⁶³ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 104.

²⁶⁴ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 105.

system. Despite of this economic growth, in 1902, a number of strikes took place in Italy, regardless of Giolitti's introduction of social reform, and trade unions began forming.²⁶⁵

In 1892 Tawfiq died and the next khedive was his eighteen-years-old son Abbas II who ruled Egypt until the beginning of World War One. Abbas II was a supporter of Egyptian nationalism and often challenged the authority of the British Consul General. Nationalistic sentiments and resentment towards the British presence were felt at all levels of Egyptian society. The sentiments of the Urabi revolt of 1882 did not disappear with the occupation of Egypt by Britain. On the contrary, Khedive Abbas II's challenge to Cromer's authority, the incident of Dinshaway of June 1906, and the international economic crisis of 1907-1911 that drove the price of cotton down in Egypt increasing poverty in the country side all fueled a nationalist sentiment which was anti-British and exclusive. Dinshaway was a village on the delta of the Nile, where British officers wounded the spouse of the religious leader of the village and set fire to the threshing floor while practicing pigeon shooting. As a consequence the villagers killed one British officer and wounded another. The British authorities, then condemned fifty-two villagers under the accusation of premeditated murder. Egyptians were outraged and upset with this episode, which further united the fellahin with the nationalist movement, which became increasingly anti-British. In fact Egyptian nationalism began to take a different turn in the twentieth century, as the Young Turks' revolution in 1905 and the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire were taking place.²⁶⁶

In 1907, Cromer resigned and Sir Eldon Gorst took the role of Consul General of Egypt until 1911, later succeeded by Lord Kitchener who ruled until the beginning of

²⁶⁵ Duggan, *A concise history of Italy*, 181.

²⁶⁶ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 108.

World War One. Both of Lord Cromer's successors attempted to address the economic problem and Egyptians' political dissatisfaction with the British presence; however, what they did was too little and too late and Egyptian nationalism was growing.²⁶⁷

Egypt was dragged into World War One unwillingly. It was British decision to use Egypt as the strategic point from which British troops attacked Syria. The local population was drafted and the agricultural products all used for the war effort, causing inflation and shortage of goods that hit the Egyptian population at home. With the end of World War One, discontent was rampant among the Egyptians. The dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire after the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, and the right of self-determination announced by American President Woodrow Wilson, pushed for greater nationalism in Egypt.²⁶⁸ The Italian community in Egypt contributed to the Italian war effort during the Great War by both sending men to the front and also collecting money.²⁶⁹

In 1919 a national revolution broke out in Egypt when Saad Zaghlul demanded to participate at the Paris Conference in order to request President Wilson's support for Egyptian independence from British control. Zaghlul then demanded that Reginald Wingate, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, from 1917 to 1919, grant him permission to attend the Peace Conference with a delegation, *Wafd* in Arabic.²⁷⁰ However Wingate refused Zaghlul's request, saying the delegation could not attend, as it did not officially represent the Egyptian people.²⁷¹ Zaghlul therefore collected signatures from the Egyptians as a petition to participate in the Peace Conference. The petition authorized the delegation to represent the Egyptian population when demanding independence from

²⁶⁷ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 108.

²⁶⁸ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 194.

²⁶⁹ Petricoli, *Oltre il Mito*, 42.

²⁷⁰ T. J. C. Martyn, "Zaghlul steered Egypt to her freedom." *New York Times* (Aug. 28, 1927): 3.

²⁷¹ Nathaniel Peffer, "Unrest of East shows its head in Egypt." *New York Times* (Nov. 30, 1924): xxii.

British colonialism. The request, Zaghlul ensured, would be “through peaceful and legitimate means.”²⁷² Zaghlul also launched a non-violent campaign in which the Egyptian population was encouraged to boycott all British goods.²⁷³ In light of the population’s support of the Wafd, which by then Zaghlul turned into a political party, British forces arrested Zaghlul and exiled him to Malta on March 8, 1919.²⁷⁴ A revolution then broke out in Egypt. The population was unhappy with the British decision to exile Zaghlul, and therefore a mass movement of civil disobedience began, in which the Egyptian population demanded independence and representation at the Peace Conference.

For weeks students, merchants, peasants workers, religious leaders (both Muslims and Copts) engaged in civil disobedience against the British. Postal, telegraph, tram and train personnel as well as Egyptian government workers soon joined them.²⁷⁵ By March 16 even women joined the protest.²⁷⁶ Therefore, all Egyptians, regardless of religion and social class, took up Zaghlul’s cause.²⁷⁷

Demonstrations and strikes began on March 14 across Egypt, but were mostly centered in Cairo and Alexandria. While in the cities the revolution was predominantly non-violent, in the countryside it was not the same. British military installations and civilians were in some cases attacked. Twenty British soldiers were in fact killed and 114 wounded.²⁷⁸ Yet violence came mostly on the part of the British forces against the Egyptian population. After three weeks of riots 800 Egyptians were killed. The British

²⁷² Zaheer Masood Quraishi, *Liberal Nationalism in Egypt; rise and fall of the Wafd Party* (New Delhi: Zaheer Massod Quraishi, 1967), 47.

²⁷³ John Charmley, *Lord Lloyd and the Decline of the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 115.

²⁷⁴ John Bowle, *The Imperial Achievement: The Rise and Transformation of the British Empire* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 367.

²⁷⁵ Elinor Burns, *British Imperialism in Egypt* (London: The Labour Research Department, 1928), 30.

²⁷⁶ Quraishi, *Liberal Nationalism in Egypt*, 51.

²⁷⁷ Quraishi, *Liberal Nationalism in Egypt*, 45.

²⁷⁸ “800 Natives dead in Egypt’s rising.” *New York Times* (July 25, 1919): 1.

responded with force against the non-violent protesters by firing on them.²⁷⁹ The demonstrations stopped when General Allenby, appointed High Commissioner in 1919, threatened Egyptian governmental employees that if they did not resume work, they would be punished, even violently, or jailed. By that time the revolution of civil disobedience proved so effective that normal daily life came to a halt and the British had to give in and allow Zaghlul's return to Egypt, which was welcomed by "foreigners, as well as natives."²⁸⁰ Zaghlul was given permission to participate in the Peace Conference.²⁸¹

The Wafd delegation managed to reach the Peace Conference in Paris, where they hoped to gain U.S. support in their struggle for independence, demanded according to the new Wilsonian principle of self-determination.²⁸² However, Zaghlul was disappointed when President Wilson instead approved the British protectorate over Egypt. Britain in fact did not want to let go of the strategic position of Egypt, which proved successful in the battle against Syria where Egypt was used as a launching country for the attack and also the Suez Canal that controlled the maritime traffic between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The U.S. Consul General in Cairo, Hampson Gray, stated that Egyptians were not ready to govern themselves as they were "politically undeveloped" and therefore could not establish an efficient government "conversant with American and European ideals."²⁸³ Zaghlul then realized that Wilson's principles of self-determination

²⁷⁹ James Lawrence, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 389.

²⁸⁰ William Walter, "Egypt welcomes Zaghlul Pasha." *New York Times* (Apr. 6, 1921): 2.

²⁸¹ Stephen Zunes, *Non-violent social movements: a geographical perspective* (Malde, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 42.

²⁸² "Egypt under the Sun." *New York Times* (Aug. 29, 1920): 1.

²⁸³ Manela, *The Wilsonian moment: self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism*, 75.

were not universal as they were not meant for those living in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Britain announced independence in 1922. This was just a formality as Britain maintained political, economic and military control in the country. The following year a constitution was granted. In January of 1924 elections proclaimed the Wafd Party as the winner with 90 per cent of seats in parliament. However, the constitution still let the king, or sultan (an upgrade from the title of khedive), to exercise power in Egypt. Fuad, King from 1917 to 1936, could nominate the prime minister and dissolve parliament. On top of parliament, Britain continued to interfere with Egyptian sovereignty.²⁸⁴

An Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was signed in 1936 as Britain was “alarmed by Italian expansionism in Ethiopia.”²⁸⁵ The agreement was a renegotiation of the declaration of 1922. This time, not only did Britain recognize the independence of Egypt and legalize the presence of British troops in the zone of the Suez Canal and the right to intervene in case Egypt was attacked. Rather, the treaty of 1936, which was signed by British officials and the elected Wafd government, gave legality to the British presence in Egypt. This same year King Fuad died and was succeeded by his son Faruk (r. 1936 -1952). In 1937, the Montreaux Convention, which abolished the privileges allowed to Europeans in the country under the capitulations laws, was passed. Mixed Tribunals were eliminated in 1949.²⁸⁶ However, internally the figure of the Wafd Party had continued to lose members since 1919. The population saw politicians as corrupt, as too secular and as puppets of the British. The politicians’ focus on Western values was perceived by many Egyptians as

²⁸⁴ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 197.

²⁸⁵ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 197.

²⁸⁶ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 37.

“an attack upon tradition.”²⁸⁷ A new form of nationalism that was to challenge that of the Wafd Party, emerged in the late 1920s. This new movement was not secular like Zaghlul’s party, rather it was Islamic in nature. In 1928 Hasan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood.

In 1939, as Britain entered in the Second World conflict, the Egyptian government interrupted diplomatic relations with Germany and announced martial law in the country. However, as the British used Egypt as a strategic place, anti-British sentiment grew. The Egyptians in fact blamed the British for the Axis’ attack on Alexandria, inflation and shortage of food. At the end of WWII nationalism was a force that the British could not control anymore as it was emerging in all its colonies. Moreover, both the monarchy and the Wafd Party were unpopular among the Egyptians as they lost credibility with the 1936 treaty.²⁸⁸

Relations between the Italian community in Egypt and the local population and the British presence changed with the rise of Fascism and Mussolini’s intent to create an Italian empire in Africa. In 1936 large numbers of Italian troops were sent to Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. Mussolini wanted to turn Abyssinia into an Italian colony.²⁸⁹ Egypt perceived this action by the Fascist regime as threatening its independence, and the British were threatened by Italy’s increased interest in the Suez Canal, which became vital not only for Egypt but also for Italy, as it allowed the peninsula to be connected to its colony in Ethiopia.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 198.

²⁸⁸ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 203.

²⁸⁹ Sammarco, *In Egitto*, 93.

²⁹⁰ Monti, *Gli italiani ed il canale di Suez; lettere inedite di P. Palescapa, L.Torelli, E. Gioja e altri*, Xi.

However, the Italian community in Egypt was not interested in Fascism.²⁹¹ Two distinct groups made up the Italian community: the settlers, many of whom were born in Egypt. They were loyal to Egypt as they considered it as a second homeland and were not interested in politics. They conformed to Fascism only because they had to. The second group was composed of newcomers, who believed in Fascism and were involved in politics. In fact, those pushing for the adherence to fascist rules were the Italian governmental personnel, the ambassador and the consul. The Italian population of Egypt instead was not interested in Mussolini's policy. A testimony to this fact was the lack of enthusiasm and poor attendance of Italian schoolchildren to the Scuole Littorio, built during the Fascist era and with a curriculum loyal to the Fascist propaganda.²⁹²

The Italian government's relationship with the locals and other foreigners in Alexandria also changed after the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia. The local population of Alexandria began distrusting the Italians. However, the British were those that really feared Italian expansionism and pushed the Egyptians to distrust the Italians. Mussolini's foreign policy was based on the creation of an Italian colonial empire where the Mediterranean would become "the 'mare nostrum', and his recent ambitions in Abyssinia made it imperative that Britain resolve the Egyptian problem."²⁹³ Thus meant that Britain needed to put an end to Egyptians' struggle for full independence from British control. The British in fact feared that if relations with Italy deteriorated then Italy could possibly wage an attack from conquered Libya and Ethiopia.

²⁹¹ Palumbo, *A Place in the Sun*, 190.

²⁹² Palumbo, *A Place in the Sun*, 190.

²⁹³ Lawrence, *The Rise and Fall of the British empire*, 392.

When the Benito Mussolini was nominated Prime Minister in 1922, Fascist organizations began to form in Egypt.²⁹⁴ The Italian consul in Egypt, Galeazzo Della Croce, was afraid that Fascist institutions, even with their best intentions, would bring chaos to the Italian community and take over its already established organizations. The consul reportedly noticed that Fascism was not welcomed by the Italians in Egypt. The middle and upper-classes especially tried to stay away from it as much as possible. Fascists, in fact, were mostly poor Italians who recently moved to Egypt. Therefore, they did not have strong ties with the country and were very affected by the political situation in the peninsula. The black shirts tended to be inclined to start riots and violence. There had been also an incident where a group of Fascists threatened a group of Italian fishermen in Alexandria to shoot them if they did not join the Fascist Party. For this reason the Italian Fascist Organization in Alexandria was dismissed for a period of time, while the one in Cairo keep functioning.²⁹⁵

By the 1930s the Fascist organizations in Egypt began to stabilize. Internal competition among members of the organizations decreased, and aggressive members were kept under control. The only challenges and rivalries were among the Masonic organizations.²⁹⁶ In fact, while the number of secret societies in Egypt increased from four in 1840 to 11 in 1923. With the advent of Fascism the number of secret societies decreased to one in 1932. Fascist organizations tool over the role and functions of the secret societies in Egypt, in providing support to the Italian community there.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, 134.

²⁹⁵ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 322.

²⁹⁶ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 342.

²⁹⁷ Rainero and Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo*, 204.

The Fascist Party's membership increased and the most exuberant black shirts were kept under control by Italian consul and other Fascists. In 1934 more than one thousand Italians gathered at the Fascist headquarters to listen to Il Duce's speech. Minister Pagliano communicated to the Italian consul in Egypt to he should be ready for a reaction among the locals and the British in regards to the part of the speech assessing Italy's intentions to expand in Africa. Some British newspapers in fact picked up the news and replied saying that if it was not for the British presence in Egypt, Italy would have already taken over. The consuls were instructed by Minister Pagliano to ensure the Egyptians that Italian expansion did not intent to take over territories. Rather, it implied the exporting of the Italian culture and the establishment of trade relations. The Fascist empire, as meant by Mussolini, was not only intended in military terms but also culturally and morally.²⁹⁸

Many also participated in the campaign to collect gold for the Fascist cause in Ethiopia. The gold donated by the Italian community in Egypt was 46,850 kilos of which 15,350 from wedding rings. Not only gentile Italians participated but also other foreigners and many Italian Jews contributed. The relations between the Italian and the Jewish community though changed, however, after the passing of the racial laws in Italy in 1938.²⁹⁹

Anti-fascism did not flourish in Egypt because the Consular authority as per the capitulations laws could control all the members of the Italian community.³⁰⁰ Some Italians, however, had been expelled from Egypt because they were considered subversive elements who plotted against the Fascist authorities. In 1929, Antonio

²⁹⁸ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 336.

²⁹⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 337.

³⁰⁰ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 357.

D'Errico and Donatello Gronchi were expelled from Alexandria. The following year, Agostino Ferraiolo, who lived in Egypt for ten years, and who was working for the tram company, was expelled under the accusation of being an anti-fascist Mason.³⁰¹

Accusations of being a communist was another reason the Fascist regime used to expel Italians from Egypt. The Communist Party in Italy was outlawed in 1926 and anarchist and communists were considered by the regime as anti-Fascist and subversive. In 1920 a Communist Party emerged in Egypt. The first communist groups such as the Communist Club and the Clarté Group of Alexandria were lead by Joseph Rosenthal, a Jewish Italian who emigrated to Egypt in 1899. The Egyptian Communist Party had few members, who were mostly intellectuals and middle class. Many foreigners were interested in the Marxist ideas. In fact many of those who were members of the Egyptian Communist Party were Europeans and Jews. After organizing strikes in Alexandria in 1924, which were suppressed by the Wafd government, the Communist Party was outlawed the following year.³⁰² In May 1928, the police carried out a series of investigations and three Italians were arrested and expelled as they were convicted of being members of the Communist Party, which went underground after being announced as illegal.

An official anti-fascist group emerged among the Italians of Alexandria after the abolition of the Capitulations as during the Italian war against Ethiopia. The group, inspired by the Italian *Giustizia e Libertà*, was against the creation of an Italian colony in

³⁰¹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 359.

³⁰² Rami Ginat, *The Soviet Union and Egypt* (London: Frank Cass&Co. Ltd, 1993), 23.

Abyssinia. This group also created a newspaper called, *La Democratie*, which was run by Italians and financed by the Egyptian Michel Levi.³⁰³

The British had perceived the Italian community in Egypt as a possible threat since the end of the Great War due to its large numbers and to the emergence of Fascist organizations as a consequence of the political events taking place in the peninsula. However, British apprehension increased during the war in Ethiopia and the British perceived the Italian community in Egypt to be a fifth column. During the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, the Italians in Port Said were strictly supervised by the British authorities. British intelligence investigated the Italian community and informed London about it. The information gathered assessed the Italians in Alexandria to be 27,000 excluding children. Of these 27,000 Italians, 12,694 were men, of whom 3,000 were in possession of weapons. The majority of adult men were artisans or workers. The intellectuals and professionals were mostly Italian Jews. Eight hundred Italian males fought the Great War and 1,000 had a military training even though compulsory military service was only for those Italians living in the peninsula. Members of the Fascist party were not armed, but a few possessed a revolver, legal according to the capitulations laws.³⁰⁴

Ernesto Verucci Bey, Egypt's chief court architect, was among the persons considered 'threatening' to the British from the mid 1930s. Verrucci in fact was close to the Egyptian King and the British feared he could push the king to take a pro-Italian position in the Ethiopian matter. The British intelligence also monitored the relations between Italians and Young Egypt. This latter was a group like the Muslim Brotherhood.

³⁰³ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 371.

³⁰⁴ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 374.

In 1930s, Young Egypt began disillusioned with the Wafd Party, which was viewed as corrupted, and collaborating with the British. The platform of Young Egypt in the 1930s was to promote better salaries for the Egyptians peasants and workers who were suffering from impoverishment. While in the 1930s Young Egypt was not promoting a fascist and anti-Semitic agenda, in the 1940s it promoted anti-Semitism and it was pro-axis.³⁰⁵

However, anti-Semitism was supported by a small fragment of the Egyptian populations and ultranationalist groups, such as Muslim Brotherhood and Young Egypt. The majority of Egyptians were not interested in Fascism because they felt threatened by its foreign policy, which envisioned an Italian empire in Africa and disliked its racist rhetoric.

However, while the Egyptians sympathized with Jews in Europe and condemned the atrocities inflicted upon them by the Nazis, “they nonetheless opposed the Zionist solution of the colonization of Arab Palestine as the answer to the Jewish problem.”³⁰⁶

Britain was afraid that Young Egypt would support a pro-Italian and anti-British propaganda, and that at the appropriate time Italy would support a full independence of Egypt from British control.³⁰⁷

Italian propaganda during the conflict in Abyssinia was carried out through newspapers and radio. The Italian government was trying “to corrupt the Egyptian press and politicians” by giving money to Egyptian newspapers in exchange for pro-Italian articles.³⁰⁸ Italy financed the most popular Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*, and the weekly paper *Lataif al Musawara*, which promoted, according to the Italian policy, that

³⁰⁵ Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 255.

³⁰⁶ Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, 12.

³⁰⁷ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 378.

³⁰⁸ Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, 16.

Egypt remained neutral and not side with Britain in case of war.³⁰⁹ In 1934 an Arab Propaganda Bureau was created in Rome. The intent of this organization was to spread Italian propaganda throughout the Middle East. In the same year, the Italian Radio Bari began broadcasting in Egypt in Arabic.³¹⁰

Italian propaganda was also spread person to person by workers and schools, especially by those who could speak Arabic and could reach the local people of every social status.³¹¹ Italians also used the 1936 riots in Palestine, claiming that the British committed atrocities in that situation. Nevertheless, Italian propaganda did not have positive effects.³¹² On the contrary, Egyptian newspapers began publishing caricatures of Mussolini [see Appendix D] and criticizing his “claim to be a protector of Islam and of recent Italian construction projects in Libya” for military purposes, which were perceived by the Egyptians as a threat to Egypt’s sovereignty.³¹³ Also, Radio Bari was losing audiences in Egypt and the rest of the Middle East. By 1938, the signing of the Anglo-Italian Rome Agreement of March 1938 ensured the cessation of Italian anti-British propaganda. This time Italy’s effort was to deter the criticism the Egyptian newspapers were reporting in regards to the invasion of Albania by Fascist Italy, in April 1939.³¹⁴

The British assessed that the Italian community was the most organized as compared to any other foreign community in Egypt. Its charitable institutions and schools functioned the most efficiently. Its commercial activities were well coordinated and

³⁰⁹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 301.

³¹⁰ Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, 15.

³¹¹ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 385.

³¹² Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 302.

³¹³ Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, 17.

³¹⁴ Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, 17.

directed; its consular and social leaders were very active and the Italian consular tribunal was known to be just and strict. The Italian authorities did their best to keep friendly relations with Egypt in order to prevent sentiments of distrust from being displayed towards the Italian community in Egypt as a consequence of the events taking place in Libya and Abyssinia.³¹⁵

In 1937, the British were still alarmed by the activities of the Fascist groups in Egypt. However, King Faruk stated that he did not fear the Italians as they had been his father's best friends. The newspaper *Al-Ahram* also wrote an article praising the Italians for having been an important part of Egypt's modernization. The newspaper also reported, that the Italians by learning the language and customs, became the collectivity that was the closest to the Egyptian people. The articles continued saying that "gli italiani vivono su questa terra [l'Egitto], amati e rispettati, perché rispettano e amano gli egiziani." [Italians in Egypt are loved and respected by the locals and vice versa.]³¹⁶

In January 1939, on the eve of World War Two, the Italians were pushing to sign an agreement of neutrality, or non-aggression of Egypt in case Italy and Britain emerged on different sides. However, the visit of the Italian governor general of Libya, Italo Balbo, to Egypt and his speech to the Italian community to not worry as Italian troops were at Egypt's border, was threatening both to the Egyptian population and the British. With the outbreak of the war, the British began in Egypt what they called the Tombak plan, created in 1935. The plan was to take over key Italian and German buildings

³¹⁵ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 383.

³¹⁶ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 391.

suspected of being used for propaganda and training and arrest the most suspicious people who were already on a list.³¹⁷

On the eve of the war, Italian propaganda also changed from assuring the Egyptian population that Italy would not attack and sign a pact of non-aggression, to discrediting Egyptian trust that the British would protect them. In the meanwhile, the Italians allied themselves with Ahmed Hussain, head of the Young Egypt Party. The Egyptians began to question Italian intentions and the King began being afraid as the number of Italian troops in Libya increased to 170,000 soldiers, and as many more military airplanes were sent to Eritrea. The Egyptian government and the British authorities then decided to fire all Italians working in public facilities and services, along with those working for the Suez Canal Company to avoid acts of sabotage by them. In case of emergency, the police were ready to arrest all Italians on the suspect list created under the Tombak plan.³¹⁸

As soon as Italy entered the war on 10 June 1940, the British Ambassador to Egypt Miles Lampson told Egyptian Prime Minister Ali Maher to actuate the third phase of plan Tombak. All Italian males were registered. Those that could serve in the military were kept under control, and arrested in case of emergency. However, Italian Jews and Italian anti-fascists were not interned.³¹⁹ Members of the Fascist Party were jailed (5,800 in total). The 550 Italians on the security list were immediately arrested in Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said. Italian males of military age were put into internment camps for civilians, as the British feared acts of sabotage against the Allies. The concentration camps were near the Suez Canal and were called Fayed and Geneifa. Italian consulates

³¹⁷ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 397.

³¹⁸ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 402.

³¹⁹ Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt, 1914-1952*, 154.

were evacuated and their diplomats expatriated. However, Egypt never declared war on the Axis; it just ceased diplomatic relations. Trading with Italy was announced to be illegal and all things in possession of Italians were seized, except for those of Italian citizens who were actually Libyans, Jews, Albanians, clerks and small businessmen.³²⁰

On September 13, 1940 Italian troops crossed the Libyan border and advanced for sixty miles into Egypt. However, they never got to the main British defensive positions. The goal of the Italian troops was to take control of the Suez Canal, a strategic point for the British and the Italians, as it connected the peninsula with the Italian colony of Ethiopia. Italian submarines patrolled the Mediterranean, forcing the British Royal Navy to supply Egypt by going around the Cape. This caused communications and supplies to be delayed up to three months.³²¹ In the meanwhile, German and Italian aircraft kept bombarding Alexandria. This city was vital for the British troops: its harbor was the base of the British Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet and the city was "a staging post for the Western Desert campaigns."³²² On December 8, 1940 British troops were able to go behind Italian lines in Mersa Matruh and then take the Italians at Sidi Barrani and at Buq Buq. By the 11 of December, British troops carried out a full attack against Italian troops, called Operation Compass. The Italian Tenth Army in Egypt was defeated and now forced to withdraw out of Egypt, and back in Libya.³²³

³²⁰ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 408.

³²¹ Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, 180.

³²² Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 116.

³²³ Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, 185.



Figure 7. Summer 1940: Italian and German aircraft bombarding Alexandria in Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 116.



Figure 8. Summer 1940: “When not dropping on the Western Harbor, German and Italian bombs fell with sporadic aimlessness throughout Alexandria,” in Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860-1960*, 118.

On September 8, 1943 Italy signed the armistice, and in Egypt an Association of Freed Italians was founded. The movement was created by joining the Azione

Antifascista and the Italiani Liberi. The first group consisted of anti-fascist Jews and the second was composed of democratic Italians. Also in the fall of 1943 a large number of Italians who were liberals and who had joined the Fascist regime by force were released from the internment camps. Of the 6006 Italian males jailed, 182 were released because they were antifascists and 1149 due to health issues. 160 were released to work in Egyptian industries.³²⁴

Good relations between the royal family of Egypt and Italy remained intact regardless of Fascism. When on 14 May 1946 King Victor Emmanuel III was forced to abdicate and the republic was established in Italy, King Faruk welcomed the Italian king sent into exile. King Victor Emmanuel and his wife Elena lived in a house in Shuma, the Egyptian countryside. The King died on 28 December 1947. An Italian flag and the shield of the royal house of Savoy were put on the king. Even though in exile, King Faruk wanted his friend to have a solemn funeral. The body of the last king of Italy was carried in a parade through the main streets of Alexandria and soldiers in uniform gave the proper salute to the Victor Emmanuel III, who was buried in Santa Caterina Catholic Church in Alexandria.³²⁵

When the war ended Italy decided to re-establish diplomatic and friendly relations with Egypt. Many in the Egyptian government still had sympathy to democratic Italy therefore were willing to restore relations with Italy. The first step of rapprochement was the opening of an Egyptian office in Rome and of an Italian office in Cairo. Then on March 21, 1946 the Italians' funds that had been frozen during the war were officially

³²⁴ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 422.

³²⁵ Josca Giuseppe, "Quella tomba dimenticata di Vittorio Emanuele" *Corriere della Sera* (3 febbraio 2001) : 6.
http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2001/febbraio/03/Quella_tomba_dimenticata_Vittorio_Emanuele_co_0_0102031538.shtml

opened again. The Dante Alighieri school was reopened and Italian professors reassumed their positions. However, the buildings of many Italian charitable organizations that had been sold and used by British and Egyptians could not be given back to the Italian community.³²⁶

After the end of World War Two a wave of nationalism and decolonization took place. In 1947 Britain, trying to recover from the hardship of the war, lost its most important colony India, which gained independence from Britain. Therefore, the British not wanting to give up the Suez Canal, were not willing to grant Egypt its independence. This reluctance created resentment among the Egyptian population in regards to the British and the Egyptian ruling elite, who was not addressing the issue properly. While discontent increased as a consequence of economic issues, which saw the gap between rich and poor increase, the authority of King Faruk was also endangered by Egypt's humiliating defeat during the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this climate the Muslim Brotherhood gained momentum. The assassination of Prime Minister al-Naqrashi by the Brotherhood and the retaliation of the government by killing its leader Hasan al-Banna in 1948 further complicated the situation in Egypt.³²⁷

The Wafd Party won the elections of 1950 and Prime Minister al-Nahhas declared in 1951 that the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 was abrogated. This act had positive repercussions among the Egyptians; however, clashes with the British army emerged. The British then replied by destroying the barracks of the Egyptian police. As a consequence, the Egyptian population exploded in riots and demonstrations on January 26 1952 also known as Black Saturday. On 23 July the Free Officers put the government

³²⁶ Petricioli, *Oltre il Mito*, 470.

³²⁷ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 302.

down in a coup. This was the end of an era for Egypt and the beginning of another one. King Faruk abdicated and was sent into exile. The republic was established and in June 1956 Nasser became its first President and a constitution was passed.³²⁸

With the advent of Nasser to power, pan-Arabism and Nationalism did not provide room for foreign presence in Egypt. Nasser, did not want foreigners in Egypt because he believed that they took advantage of Egypt's resources and the labor of its people during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. He wanted Egypt to be independent from foreign influence and free of foreign presence. He carried out social policies, which called for nationalization, state control and social welfare. Nasser was a promoter of Pan-Arabism, a secular idea focused on the greatness of the Arabic language, culture and people. He also adhered to the non-alignment movement, but then grew closer to the Soviet Union. The growing closer to the Soviet Union took place during the Cold War and was a reason for the expulsion of Westerners from Egypt. It was the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 that made Nasser a leading figure in the Middle East, for standing against Egypt's former colonial power and against Israel. However, the Suez Canal crisis "further distanced Egypt from the Western alliance."³²⁹ 'Egypt for the Egyptians' resurfaced as a slogan. The foreigners had to go. Many Italians, who were living in Egypt, went to Italy, a land they felt was unfamiliar, a land which many of them never saw before. Many Italians remained in Egypt. By 1970 the number of Italians in Egypt was only 3,000. Italians in Egypt did not want to leave what for them was their *balad*.³³⁰ Egypt was their homeland.

³²⁸ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 308.

³²⁹ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 309.

³³⁰ Raml, Mahattet. La colonia italiana ad Alessandria SM-25. Consolato Italiano in Alessandria d'Egitto inside *Alexandrie* 25 (Dec, 2005): 12.

CONCLUSION

Italy has exercised a pivotal role in the history of modern Egypt. The Italian community was essential for the political, economic and cultural development and modernization of Egypt. Many Italians lived in Egypt, a paradise where job opportunities were numerous and protection under the Laws of Capitulation allowed foreigners to pursue a privileged life. Italians created good relations with the Egyptians because the locals never perceived them as a colonial power as they had with the British and the French. These good relations allowed the Italian colony in Cairo and Alexandria to perceive Egypt as a homeland. As a consequence, Italians were loyal both to Egypt and Italy.

Feelings of loyalty and connection with Egypt were mostly felt by those Italians that came in the second wave of immigration, after the unification of Italy, and settled there. They came to Egypt by choice, contrary to the political exiles that constituted the first wave of immigration, in the first half of the nineteenth century. The children of the second group of Italians, large in numbers, were more familiar with Egypt, the land they were born in, than with Italy. Things changed when Fascism took control of the peninsula in 1922 and Egypt developed an exclusive idea of nationalism after the riots of 1919. It was in this period, that national identity became a problem for the Italians in Egypt. While in the nineteenth century cosmopolitanism was considered by Europeans and Egyptians a sign of Egypt's modernization, in the twentieth century, foreigners were increasingly unwelcomed, as they were considered by the local population to be an obstacle to Egypt's independence. Egyptian nationalism and Italy's aggressive foreign policy under Mussolini, made it impossible for the Italian community in Egypt to be loyal

to both Egypt and Italy. The national identity of the Italian Jewish community became even more complicated with the rise of Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel.

World War Two, the advent of Nasser to power in 1956, pan-Arabism and nationalism did not provide room for foreign presence in Egypt and put a definite end to the idea of cosmopolitanism in Egypt. Many Italians, who were living in Egypt, had to return to Italy, a land they felt unfamiliar. These Italians were nostalgic for their life in Egypt and its people. For these Italians Egypt was their balad. Egypt was their homeland.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Italian words used in Arabic³³¹

<u>Arabic</u>	<u>Italian</u>	<u>English</u>
Agasyja	agenzia	agency
Âgy fylo	aghi e filo	needle and thread
Asbaragy	asparagi	asparagus
Ballo	ballo	dance
Bânjo	bagno	bathroom
Bantalôn	pantalone	pants
Barkyta	barchetta	boat
Baskawyt	biscotto	cookie
Bâsta	pasta	pasta
Bastôn	bastone	stick
Batâtis	patate	potatoes
Bêscy	pesce	fish
Biljetto	biglietto	ticket
Bisilla	piselli	peas
Bomâta	pomata	ointment
Bôsta	posta	mail
Bykoly	piccolo	small
Bytello	vitello	veal
Byra	birra	beer
Byraryja	birreria	brewery
Bûsla	bussola	compass
Duzzyna	dozzina	dozen

³³¹ Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto*, 193-200.

Falyza	valigia	luggage
Fasciulja	fagioli	beans
Ferâwla	fragola	strawberry
Fijôko	fiocco	bow
Gallyna	gallina	chicken
Gambary	gambero	shrimp
Gango	gancio	hook
Gelâta	gelato	gelato
Gonella	gonnella	skirt
Gornâl	giornale	newspaper
Guwanty	guanti	gloves
Iskôla	scuola	school
Iskônto	sconto	sale
Kabbût	cappotto	coat
Kambjo	cambio	change
Kastana	castagna	chestnut
Kerawâta	cravatta	tie
Kuwâlja	quaglia	quail
Lamunâta	limonata	lemonade
Lôkanda	locanda	inn
Mandaly	mandorle	almonds
Mastyka	mastica	to chew
Nôta	nota	musical note
Osterigy	ostrica	oyster
Rôba fêkja	roba vecchia	old things
Rôsto	arrosto	roast meat
Salôtto	salotto	living room

Salsa	salsa	sauce
Sciokolâta	cioccolata	chocolate
Scyrotto	cerotto	band aid
Sôldy	soldo	money
Warda	guarda	to look

Months

Janâjir	gennaio	January
Fibrâjir	febbraio	February
Mars	marzo	March
Abryl	aprile	April
Mâjo	maggio	May
Jûnjo	giugno	June
Jûlio	luglio	July
Agostos	agosto	August
Sibtimbar	settembre	September
Oktôbar	ottobre	October
Nôfembar	novembre	November
Dysembar	dicembre	December

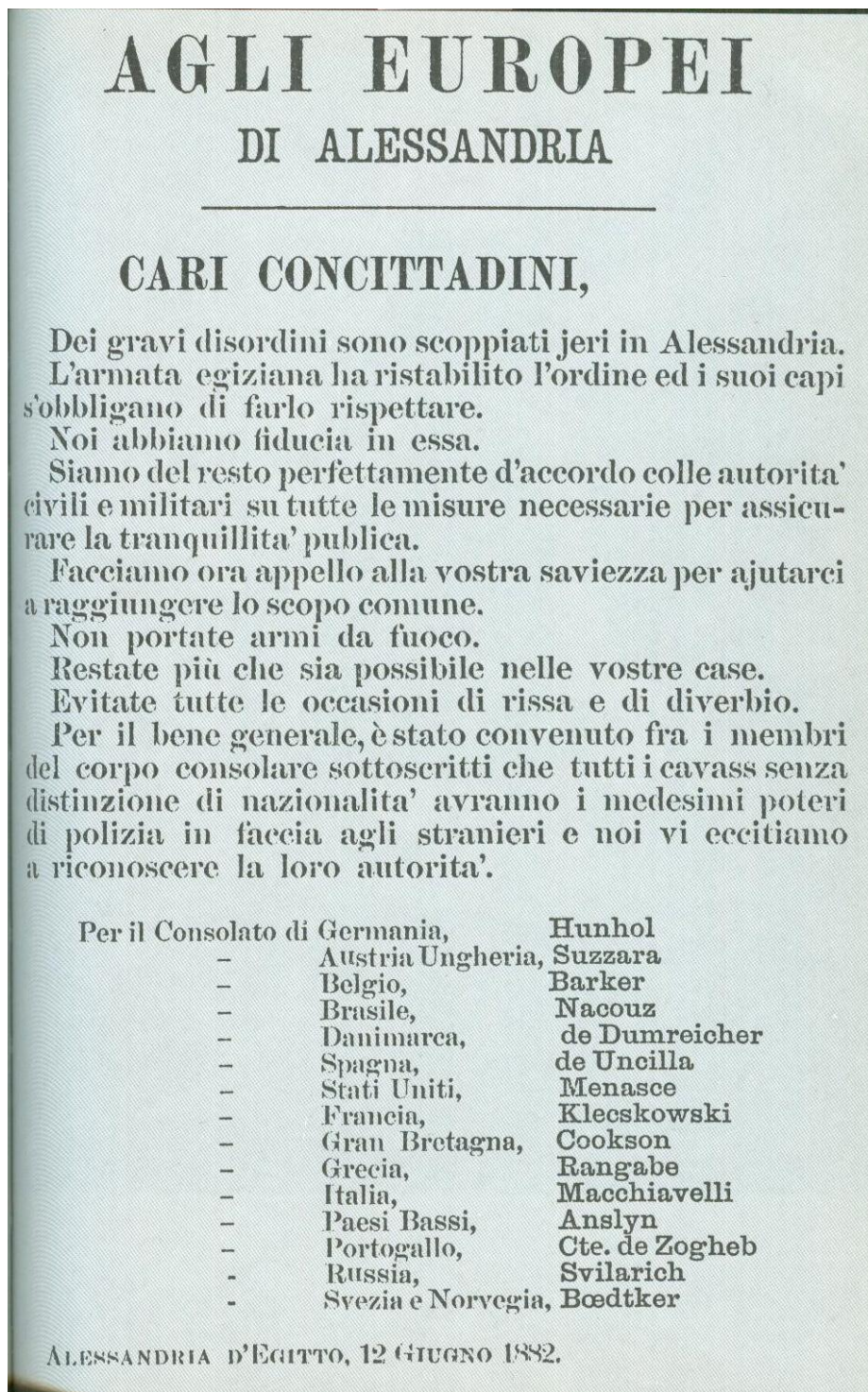


Figure 9. Manifesto agli Europei di Alessandria [Poster for the European community in Alexandria] *Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, June 12, 1882 in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 2.



Figure 10. Urabi Pasha to John Bull: “Bada mercante! Malgrado i tuoi cannoni, i tuoi vascelli e i tuoi milioni, saprò insegnarti che dove alberga vero amor di patria, si sanno compier miracoli d’eroismo in difesa del suolo natio!” [“Beware merchant! In spite of your cannons, your vessels and your money, I will teach you that where there is patriotism, heroic act to defend the homeland will take place!”] *L’Epoca* (newspaper in Genova), July 6, 1882, first page in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L’Italia e l’Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia’ all’avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 3.



Figure 11. Urabi Pasha to a British General: “Caro generale, bada che è duro quell’osso; arrischi di romperti i denti.” [“Dear General, be careful because that bone is hard to eat; you will risk breaking your teeth.”] *L’Epoca*, Aug. 16, 1882, first page in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L’Italia e l’Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia’ all’avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 4.



Figure 12. *Cucina Cosmopolita* “Per quanto sia brava nel preparare i manicaretti di merli, finirà un bel giorno col fare il gran pasticcio europeo.” [*Cosmopolitan cuisine* “Even though she is very good at cooking, she will end up making a European mess.”] *L'Epoca*, Aug. 17, 1882, first page in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 5.

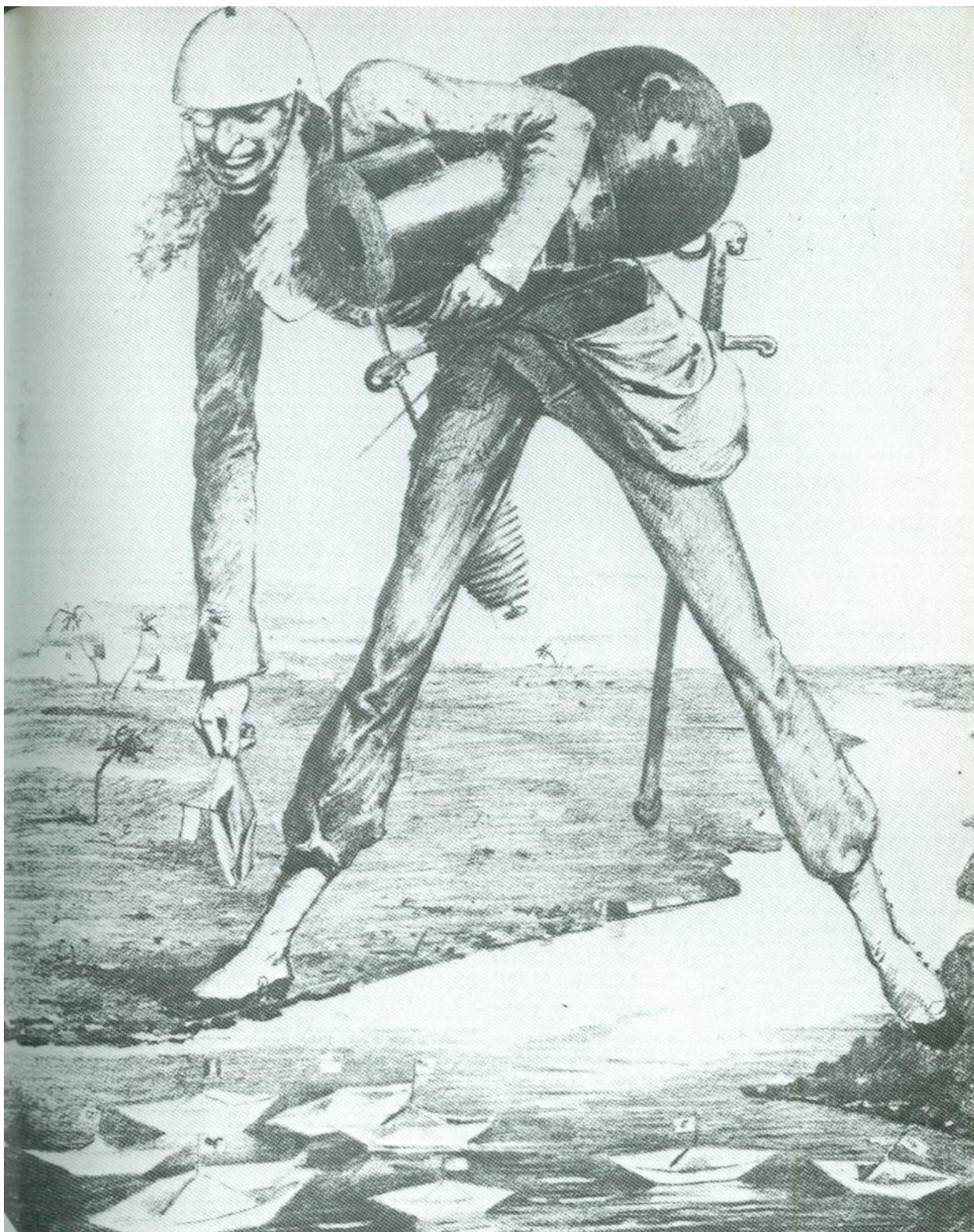


Figure 13. *L'occupazione collettiva* [Collective occupation] *L'Epoca*, Aug. 25, 1882, first page in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 6.

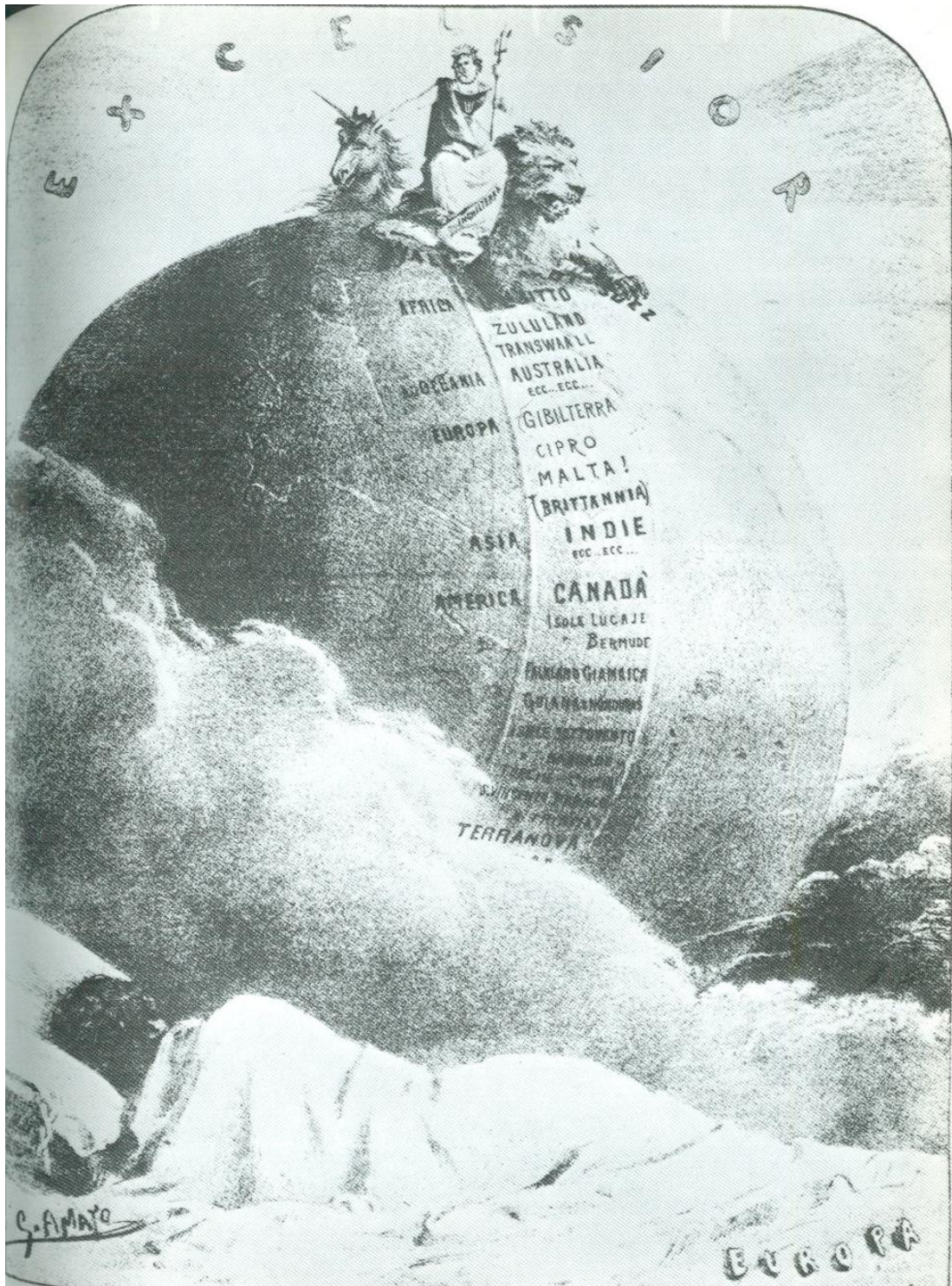


Figure 14. *Una nuova scala di Giacobbe* “Non sogna – è una cruda verità – e dorme l’Europa!” [*A new Jacob’s ladder* “It is not a dream – it is the harsh reality – and Europe sleeps!”] *L’Epoca*, Aug. 29, 1882, first page in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L’Italia e l’Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia’ all’avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 7.



Figure 15. *Maremagno politico* “Ecco perchè tutti chiudono un occhio permettendo lo sciempio che si commette dall’Inglese in Egitto: perchè ognuno mangia, od ha mangiato o vuol mangiare!” [*Political chaos* “The reason why everybody does not say anything about the British atrocities in Egypt is because everybody else is also profiting, has profitted or will profit from the situation.”] *L’Epoca*, Aug. 31, 1882, first page in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L’Italia e l’Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia’ all’avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 8.

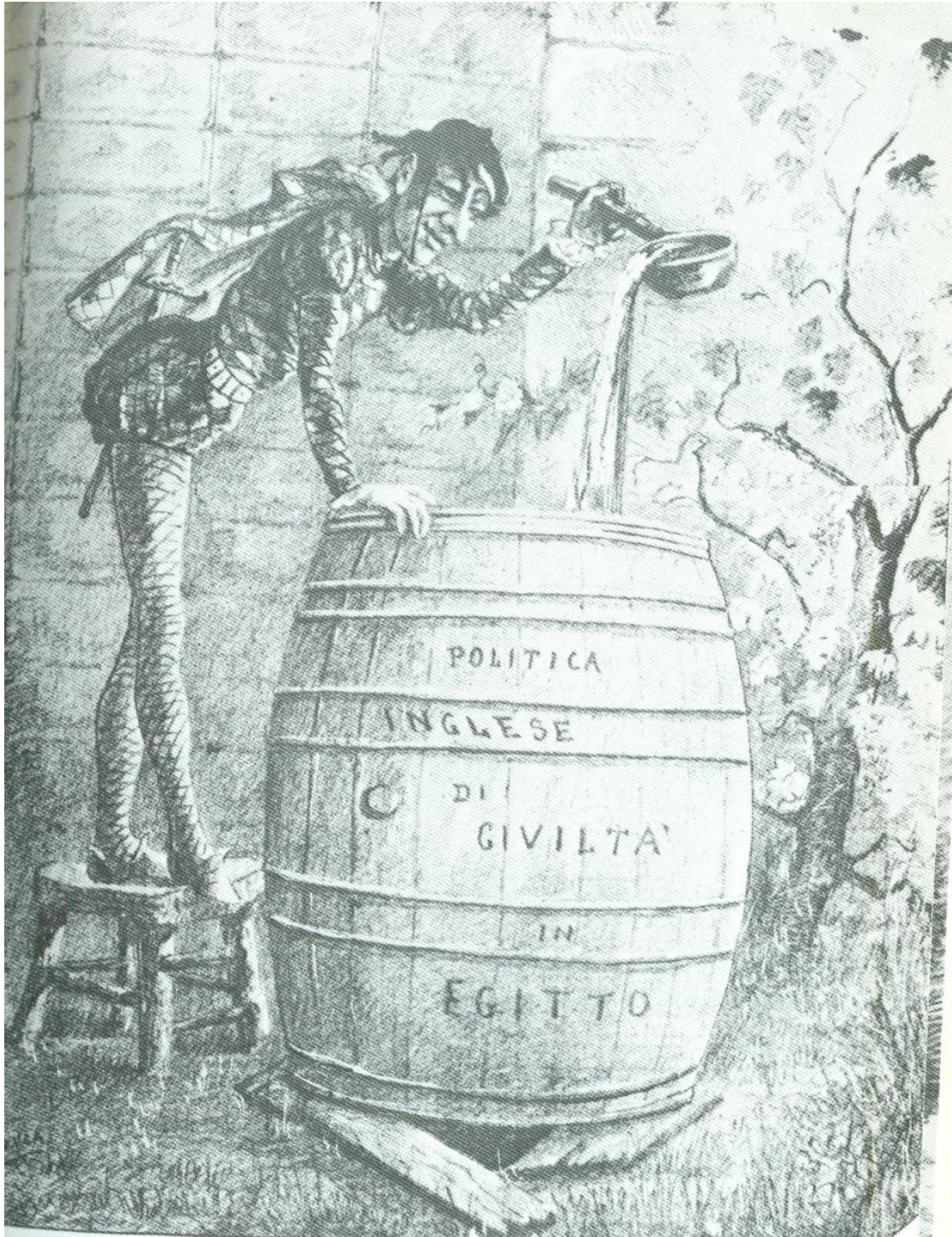


Figure 16. *Giuoco sbagliato* “Per quanto Johnbull cerchi di attirare l’attenzione e dimostrare che la sua botte contiene del buon vino, tutti ormai sanno che vi è del pessimo aceto.” [*Wrong policy* “Even though Johnbull tries to demonstrate that his barrel contains good wine, everybody knows that the only thing there is in there is bad vinegar.”] *L’Epoca*, Sept. 2, 1882, first page in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L’Italia e l’Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia’ all’avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 9.

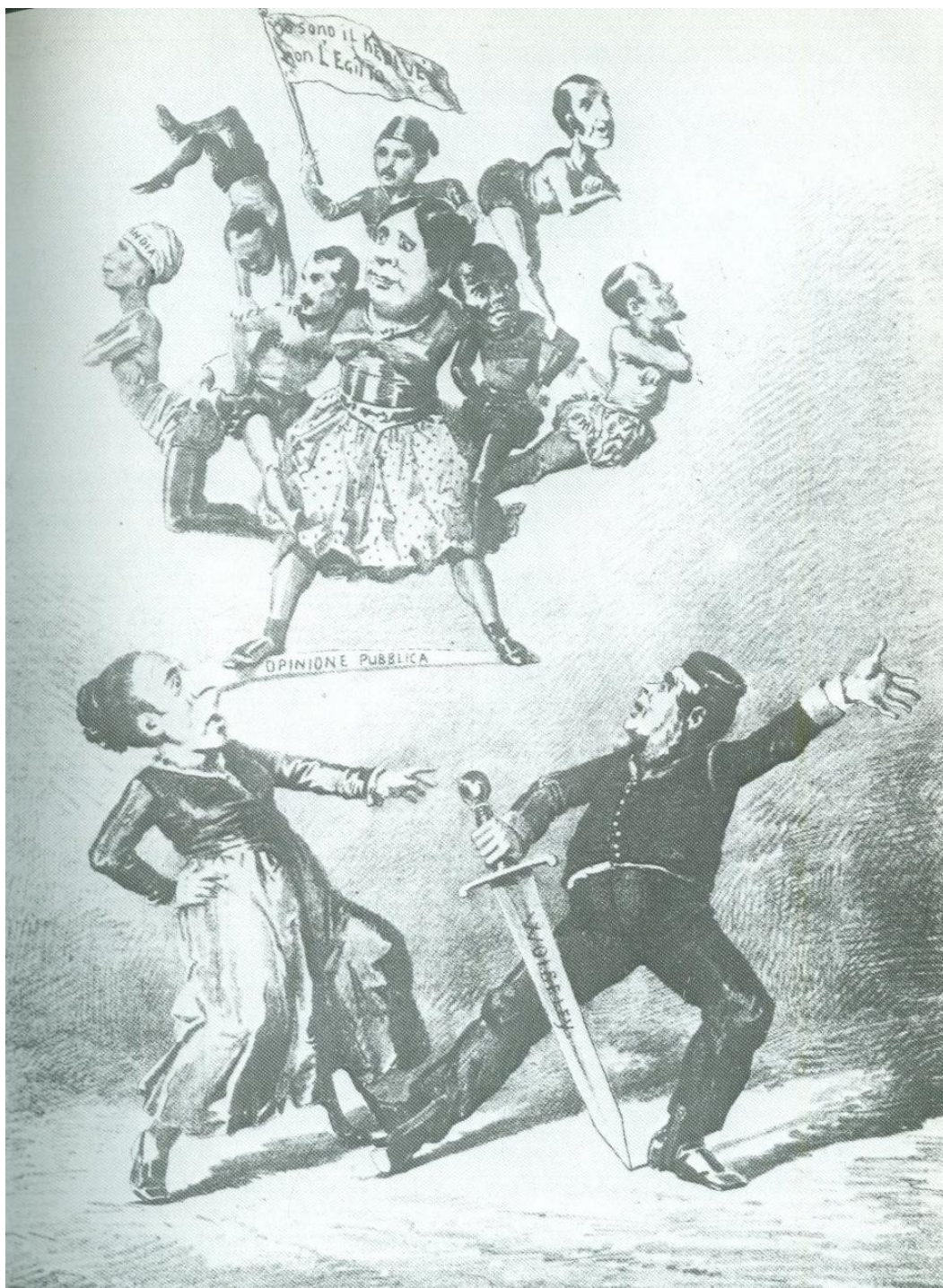


Figure 17. *L'equilibrista inglese* "L'opinione pubblica contraria alla conquista, resta meravigliata della abilità e prepotenza inglese." [*The British equilibrist* "The Italian public opinion, which is contrary to the occupation, is astounded by the British abilities and arrogance."] *L'Epoca*, Sept. 14, 1882, first page in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 10.

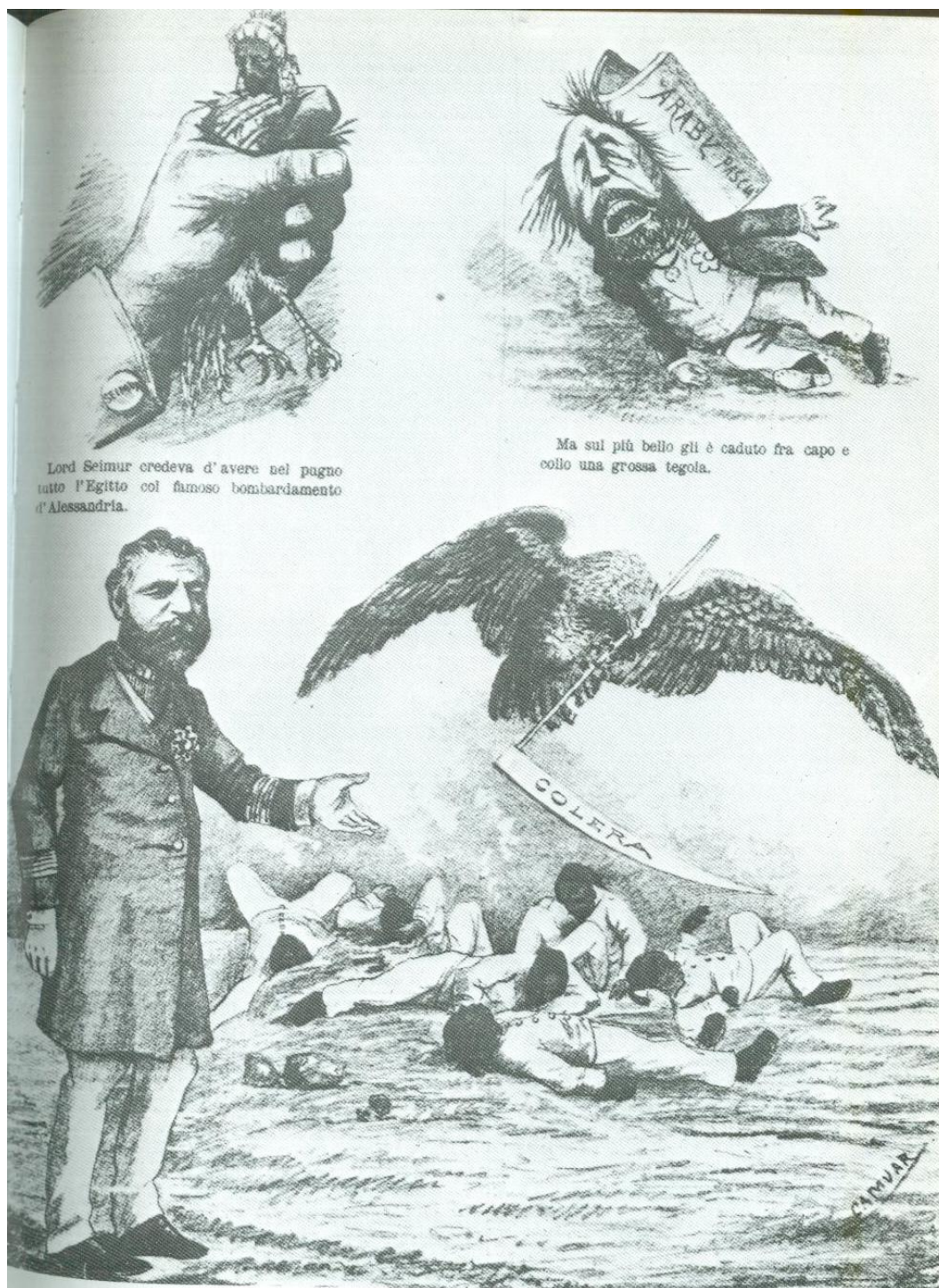


Figure 18. *Storia contemporanea* Lord Seymour: “riavutosi dallo sbalordimento si è confrontato nella speranza che Lord Colera riesca a domare gli Egiziani meglio che non abbiano saputo fare i generali inglesi.” [*Contemporary history* Lord Seymour: “when he recovered from the amazement he hoped that Lord Cholera could subdue the Egyptians better than the British general did.”] *L'Epoca*, Sept. 15, 1882, first page in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 11.

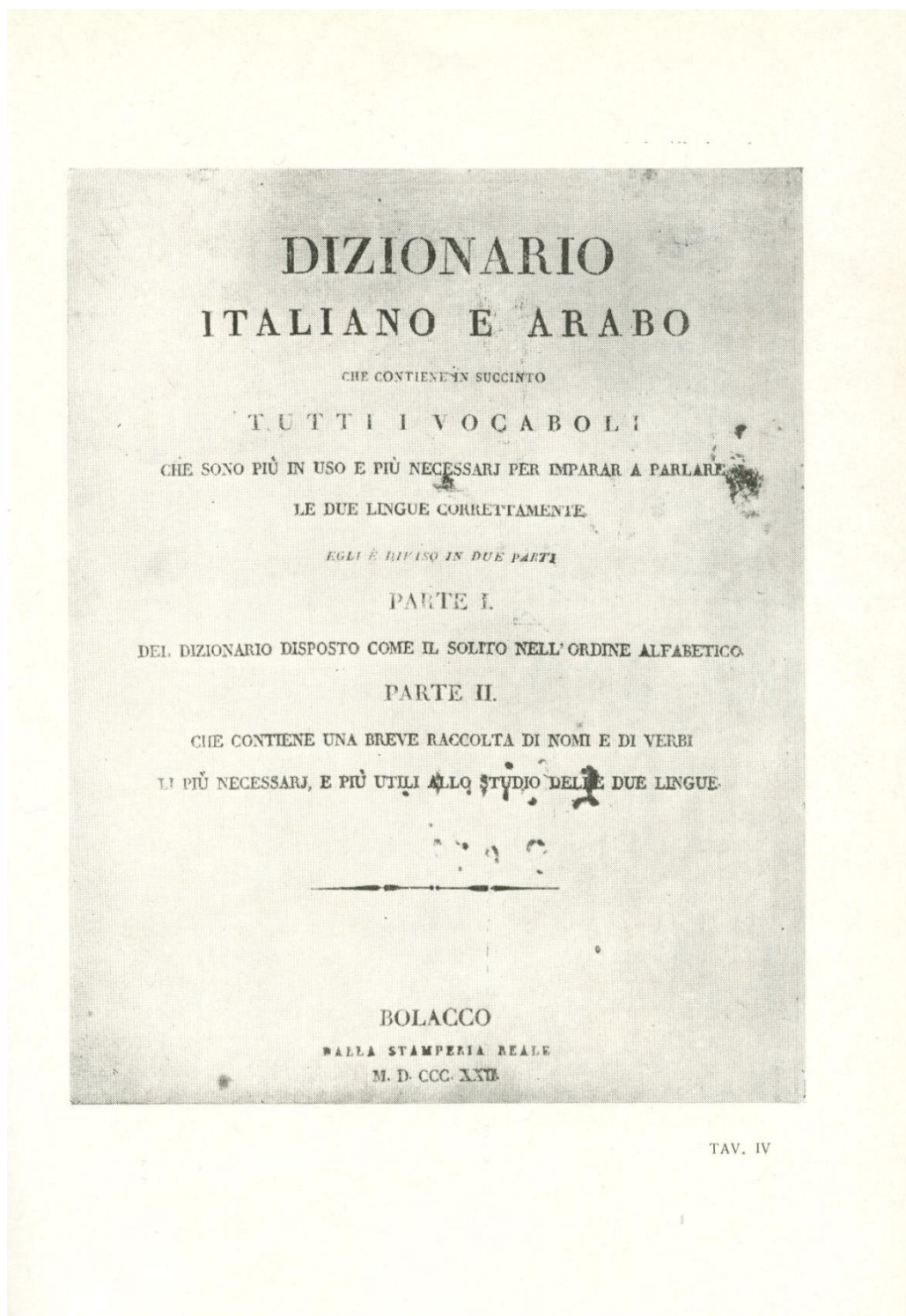


Figure 19. The first Italian-Arabic dictionary printed in Egypt by Bulacco in 1822 in Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Serra, *L'Italia e l'Egitto: dalla rivolta di Arabi pascia' all'avvento del fascismo* (Marzorati: Settimo Milanese, 1991), n. 12.

Appendix C: Egyptian Nationality Law of 1929³³²

“The decree law number 19 of February 1929 states that:

- 1) all those whose families had resided in the country without interruption since January 1, 1848 (the proof of which, however, was very difficult to provide given the absence of proper registration);
- 2) those former subjects of the Ottoman Empire who made their habitual residence in Egypt on November 5, 1914 (when Great Britain declared war on the Ottoman Empire) and stayed there ever since;
- 3) the children of foreigners born in Egypt and habitually resident there were eligible for Egyptian nationality within one year of attaining their majority, provided they gave up their foreign citizenship;
- 4) in all other cases, the requirements of naturalization included a ten-year residence in the country, an adequate command of Arabic, sufficient means of support and, finally, the proof of good conduct.”

³³² Krämer, *The Jews in modern Egypt, 1914-1952*, 33-34.

Appendix D: Egyptian newspapers caricatures of Mussolini

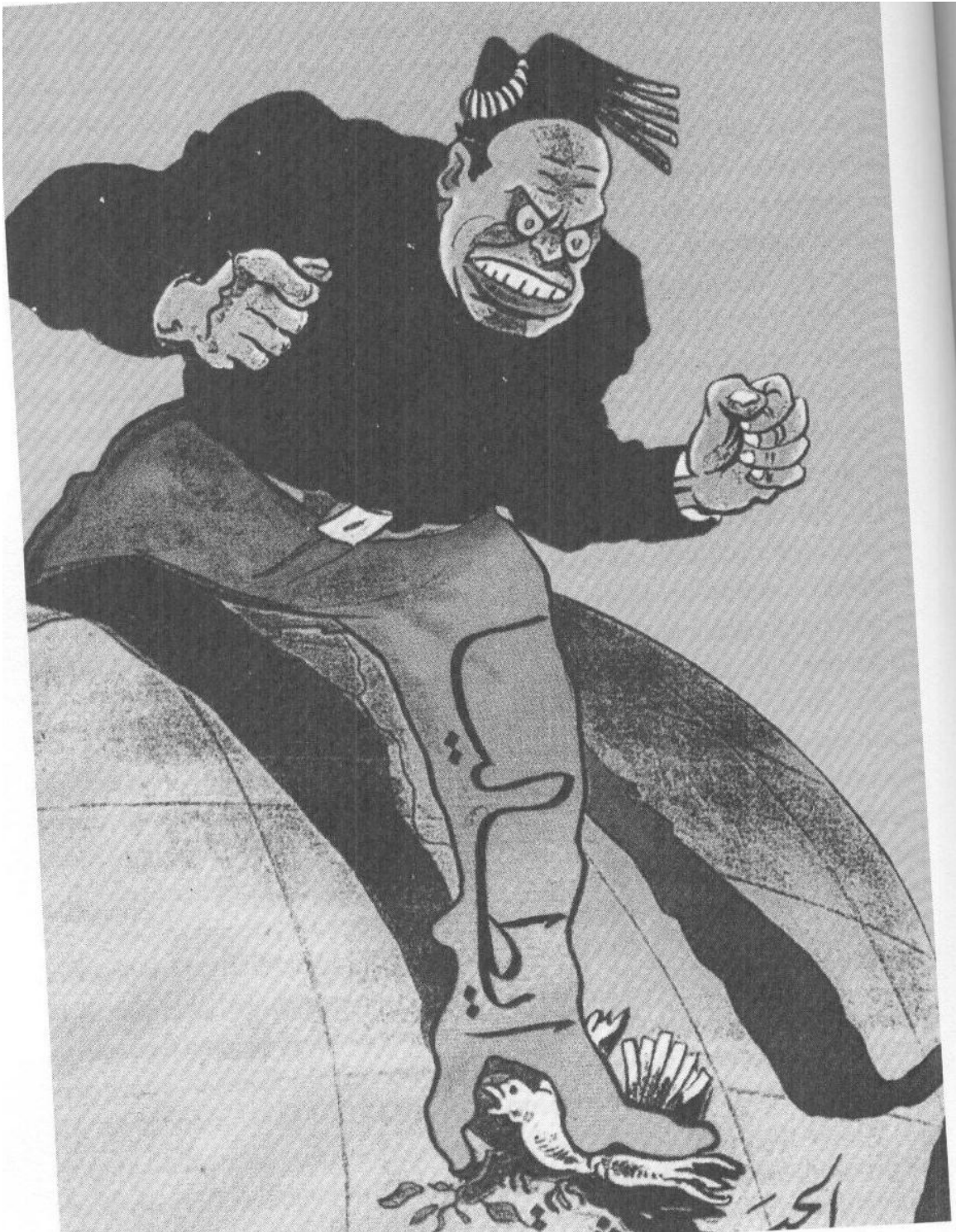


Figure 20. “With His Foot, Mussolini Is Crushing the Dove of Peace.” *Al-Musawwar*, Sept. 6, 1935, front page in Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, 94.



Figure 21. “New Axis?” Azrael: “What do you think about a covenant between the three of us that we will call the ‘Rome-Berlin-Azrael’ Axis?” *Ruz al-Yusuf*, Apr. 2, 1939, p. 7 in Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, 104.



Figure 22. Mussolini: "How strange: I have been a dictator for longer than you, and all I do is watch you greedily gobble up everything and yet you are never satisfied!" *Al-Ithnayn wa al-Dunya*, Apr. 3, 1939, p. 3 in Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, 106.



Figure 23. “Her Guardian...” Mussolini: “Come, my darling, I am longing to hug you.” Albania: “Please, unhand me, stop squeezing me, I am dying!!” *Al-Ithnayn wa al-Dunya*, Apr. 17, 1939, front page in Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, 107.