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The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

MANUFACTURING CONSENT: ITALY, THE *MUTAMASSIRUN*,  
EGYPT, AND THE INVASION OF LIBYA

A Thesis Submitted to the  
Middle East Studies Center  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts in Middle East Studies

by Andrew Heiss

May 2010

The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

MANUFACTURING CONSENT: ITALY, THE *MUTAMASSIRUN*,  
EGYPT, AND THE INVASION OF LIBYA

A Thesis Submitted by  
Andrew Thomas Heiss

to the Middle East Studies Center

May 16, 2010

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts in Middle East Studies

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Any errors in this text are my own. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian, French, and Arabic are mine.

## ABSTRACT

The period between 1902-12 reveals a number of insights into both Italy's imperial history and Egypt's colonial experience. Facing an economic crisis at home, hundreds of thousands of Italians emigrated to expatriate communities throughout the world, including Egypt. This massive hemorrhage of Italy's population led the government to embrace emigration, and new policies enacted by the Italian foreign ministry after Italy's military failures in Somalia and Eritrea recast migrant Italians as "colonists" and global Italian communities as "colonies."

Egypt posed a particularly difficult problem for the foreign ministry—because of the multi-ethnic character of the Egyptian social system, established by Mohammed Ali and his khedival successors, Europeans benefitted from a number of legal and economic advantages while simultaneously integrating into cosmopolitan Egyptian society as *mutamassirun*. Emigrant assimilation threatened to destroy Italy's global emigrant colonial model and consequently funded various programs and associations to reinforce notions of *italianità*.

At one level, the bureaucrats and officials in the Cairene and Alexandrian Italian consulates were concerned with the identity of the Italian communities in Egypt, but their strategy was not limited simply to the Italianization of the wayward *mutamassirun*. Egypt, given its geographic and cultural proximity to the neighboring provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, represented a strategic

backdoor for Italy's program of cultural and economic *pénétration pacifique* into the Mediterranean Basin prior to their military invasion of Libya. Italy sought to manufacture consent for its impending invasion and direct colonization of Libya and engaged in campaigns of propaganda to convince both the Italian community and the Arabic-speaking world that Italy, as a benevolent European nation, was morally justified in colonizing Libya.

This thesis uses the archives of the Italian foreign ministry to examine the nature of Italy's campaign to manufacture consent and to ascertain its effectiveness in convincing the Italian *mutamassirun* and the Egyptian public of its supposedly benign imperial ambitions, and concludes that despite its attempts at promoting Italian imperial benevolence, Italy's hidden colonial ambitions were obvious to the Egyptians and disbelieved by many in the Italian community.

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## Chapter 1

# Community or Colony?

The nascent Italian kingdom, only nominally unified in 1861, desperately sought to compete as a colonial power as stronger European nations pursued aggressive imperial policies in Africa, Asia, and the Mediterranean. Italy, a late “second comer”<sup>1</sup> in the great imperial game dominated by Britain and France, fell behind in the quest for direct control of Mediterranean lands, losing the opportunity to colonize North Africa, Egypt, and the Levant to French and British imperial armies. Rather than establish colonies of direct control, in the late 1800s the Italian government adopted an alternative form of imperialism—the policy of emigrant colonialism, or placing “[Italian] culture and tradition in the service of economics and politics.”<sup>2</sup> Italy sought to recreate the cultural and economic prestige of the ancient Roman Empire by establishing a worldwide network of spontaneous “colonies” of expatriate emigrant Italians who remained connected to the homeland by maintaining their *italianità*, or their sense of Italian identity. Italy hoped to create a global emigrant “nation” of patriotic Italian citizens.

1. Daniel J. Grange, *L'Italie et la Méditerranée (1896-1911): Les fondements d'une politique étrangère*, 2 vols. (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1994), II:1523.

2. Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 220.

Under the new policies of emigrant colonialism, the Italian expatriate population in Egypt boomed: between 1882 and 1917 the Italian population in Egypt more than doubled.<sup>3</sup> As the Italian consulates, cultural centers, and printing presses in Cairo and Alexandria began to stress and protect the *italianità* of the new waves of emigrants, the Italian community in Egypt represented a challenge for the policy of emigrant colonialism. Faced with economic benefits in Egypt, thousands of generally poorer migrants became semi-integrated into Egyptian society and its flourishing colonial economy. These migrants were known as the *mutamassirun*, “people of foreign origin who had become permanent residents and had been ‘Egyptianized.’”<sup>4</sup> In 1905 the Italian consul in Cairo complained that over a fourth of the Italian community were Italian in name only and had no connection to the homeland—many had lost their *italianità* despite government efforts to prevent integration into Egyptian society.<sup>5</sup> Assimilation into the cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic Egyptian culture threatened the basic premise of emigrant colonialism—Italian economic and political power would only spread and increase if Italian emigrants remained loyal to the homeland. If *italianità* was forsaken, Italy would suffer colonial losses.

Italy’s imperial agenda in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not limited to emigrant colonialism. In the 1890s, driven by the desire to have

3. Davide Amicucci, “La comunità italiana in Egitto attraverso i censimenti dal 1882 al 1947,” in *Tradizione e modernizzazione in Egitto: 1798-1998*, ed. Paolo Branca, Collana storica del Centro studi per i popoli extraeuropei dell’Università di Pavia, no. 16 (Milan: F. Angeli, 2000), 82.

4. Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1988), 9.

5. Marta Petricioli, *Oltre il mito: L’Egitto degli italiani (1917-1947)* (Torino: Mondadori Bruno, 2007), 1.

a strong foothold in the Red Sea, Italy invaded Abyssinia and established colonies of direct military control in Addis Ababa, Eritrea, and elsewhere. Native insurgents, however, successfully resisted the Italian military, and after the violent Battle of Adwa in Ethiopia in 1896, where over 7,000 Italian soldiers were killed, the Italian parliament lost interest in direct foreign colonies and began to emphasize the growth and support of expatriate colonies. A little over a decade later, in 1911, Italy decided once again to try its hand at direct colonial intervention and launched a massive invasion of the Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, or modern-day Libya.

The Italian invasion of Libya represents a watershed event in the history of the expatriate Italian community in Egypt which tested the limits of both emigrant colonialism and Italian diplomatic strategy. Egypt, because of its proximity to Libya, became a focal point in Italy's strategy for Libyan colonization. During the years leading up to the actual military invasion of 1911, Italy undertook a strategy of "peaceful penetration"<sup>6</sup> into Libya, with a series of programs for economic development and cultural propaganda which sought to prove Italy's reputation as a benevolent European power that was free from imperial ambitions. Because of Egypt's reputation throughout the Arabic-speaking world as a political and cultural center, Italy was able to launch both its economic and its cultural campaigns from Cairo. The Italian foreign ministry hoped to manufacture Arab and Egyptian consensus for the eventual Italian endeavor in Libya through these campaigns of propaganda and economic development.

6. Grange, II:1392.

Italy's strategy of peaceful penetration was not aimed solely at building consent among the Arabic-speaking population of the region. Driven by fears of emigrant assimilation into Egyptian society—integration which fundamentally threatened emigrant colonialism—the Italian government pursued similar campaigns of propaganda to manufacture consent for the invasion among the Italian *mutamassirun*. The foreign ministry hoped to strengthen the Italian community's ties to Italy and reinforce the notions of *italianità*. The government understood that the invasion of Libya would pose a crisis for *mutamassirun* sympathetic to the Libyans. Would the Italians in Egypt support the Italian government or the Libyan resistance? How would they react to the invasion? Would they sympathize with their Libyan neighbors, or did the years of exposure to the myriad of cultural programs of Italianization succeed in garnering support for such a direct colonial enterprise?

Until recently, existing literature regarding the history of the various *mutamassir* communities in Egypt during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been sparse at best. Since the opening of consular court archives in Cairo, a growing body of social history has arisen and has used these court records to better understand the relationship of the *mutamassir* communities to the native Egyptians in Cairo and Alexandria.<sup>7</sup> However, no study has yet analyzed at the relationship between European expatriate communities in Egypt and their respective "homelands." This thesis aims to better understand the

7. Some recent unpublished works include Mario M. Ruiz, "Intimate Disputes, Illicit Violence: Gender, Law, and the State in Colonial Egypt, 1849-1923" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2004); and Will Hanley, "Foreignness and Localness in Alexandria, 1880-1914" (PhD diss., Princeton, 2007).

relationship between Italy, the Italian *mutamassirun*, and the khedival throne and its British backers by analyzing the Italian foreign ministry's preparations for the invasion of Libya and its subsequent dual-purposed campaign of economic and cultural propaganda. The archives of the Italian embassy in Cairo, housed at the foreign ministry in Rome, are rich and rather unexplored in both American and Italian scholarship. This thesis makes extensive use of these consular archives, primarily the hundreds of pages of typed correspondence between Cairo, Alexandria, and Rome. By analyzing official government documents I intend on revealing the attitude of the Italian government towards both the *mutamassir* community in Egypt as well as the Egyptian government. While such an approach is not strictly social history, this analysis will add to the growing body of scholarship on cosmopolitan Egypt in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, challenging longstanding notions of British imperial primacy in Egypt as well as dispelling and adding nuance to the "myth" of *mutamassir* acquiescence and dependence on their home nations.

After establishing the importance of emigration and expatriate colonists in Italian foreign policy, the history and scope of Italian colonization and imperial domination, and the role of Egypt in Italy's Libyan goals, the thesis will examine Italy's actions towards both its *mutamassir* emigrant colonies as well as the general Egyptian population, focusing primarily on the period from 1903-1912—the heyday of Italian intervention in Egypt. Chapter 2, "*Italianità* vs. *Mutamassiriyya*," reviews the existing literature on *mutamassir* identity and its place in Egyptian and Middle Eastern historiography. It sets the groundwork for this thesis's goal, which is to recount the history of the Italian *mutamassir*

community by looking at the dual mission of the Italian ministry of foreign affairs within Egypt during the decade preceding the imperial invasion of Libya: strengthening the *italianità* of the emigrant Italian colony and building Italian prestige in the Egyptian and Arab world. Chapter 3, "*Colonia in Colonia*," looks at one of the main obstacles Italy faced as it worked to manufacture consent and spread propaganda among its colony and the Egyptians. Because Egypt was a British protectorate, Italy, as a lesser European power, was forced to operate within the British colonial order, often to the detriment of Italy's foreign policy. Chapter 4, "Italy and the Press," addresses one of the principal battlegrounds for the two-pronged Italian campaign to build and maintain Italian prestige and prepare for the invasion of Libya. Finally, chapter 5, "Manufactured consent?," examines the efficacy of the Italian press campaign, as well as philo-Islamic propaganda efforts, and analyzes the reaction of both the Italian community and the Egyptian public to Italy's subtle campaign of *pénétration pacifique*. In the end, this thesis will prove the Italian foreign ministry largely unsuccessful in winning over either the Egyptians or the Italian *mutamassirun* despite its attempts to manufacture consent for the war among both communities. Although it tried to build up its image as a culturally and morally benevolent European center—disinterested in the economic subjugation of Egypt and the rest of the region—the underlying imperialist veneer of its professed benevolence was incontrovertibly clear.

## Emigrant colonialism

During the 1870s and 80s, the major European powers competed in the “scramble for Africa” in an attempt to secure lands rich in resources and situated in geographically strategic locations. Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, and other countries vied for the same Mediterranean and African territories, at times waging diplomatic battles over rights of territorial exploitation. In 1878 diplomats from the leading powers met together in Germany as part of the Berlin Congress in an effort to divide up the African continent and avoid future complications and territorial disputes. Italy’s delegation, headed by Prime Minister Benedetto Cairoli, surprisingly refused to lay claims on any African territory, for he held that “each nation in Europe, and across the world, had the right to self-determination.”<sup>8</sup> Cairoli’s idealistic “clean hands” policy caused Italy a major setback in the ensuing land grab. France, which did not hold the same romantic ideals, invaded and occupied Tunisia in 1881, barely 100 miles from Italian Sicily. Cairoli was promptly ousted from the government and the succeeding prime minister, Agostino Depretis, and his foreign minister, Pasquale Mancini, formally launched Italy’s African imperialist agenda.<sup>9</sup> Mancini believed that the source of future Italian imperial power lay in controlling the Mediterranean, and that the key to the Mediterranean was the Red Sea, since it fed into the Mediterranean through the newly opened Suez Canal. In December

8. Choate, 30.

9. Ibid., 30.

1881 Italy claimed the Ottoman port of Assab in Eritrea, and over the next eight years sought to take control of the rest of the Horn of Africa, including Somalia and Eritrea.<sup>10</sup> Italy was so focused on its military endeavors in the Horn that it refused to participate in other colonial invasions; in 1882 Britain invited Italy to assist in the British anti-nationalist expedition against General Ahmed ‘Urabi in Egypt, but Italy declined, despite the sizable Italian communities in Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

While pursuing its newly formed imperial agenda, Italy was forced to deal with a severe crisis domestically. The Italian economy faced deep stagnation and lagged behind its French and German neighbors, whose economies were thriving. Italian workers, encouraged by growing industrialized markets in Europe and across the Atlantic in North and South America, began to leave Italy by the millions. Between 1880 and 1915 thirteen million Italians left their homeland in search of better economic opportunity.<sup>12</sup> Italian politicians scrambled to stop or slow this hemorrhaging of the population, but because migrants were able to double or triple their wages abroad,<sup>13</sup> the government was unsuccessful in curbing the rising rates of migration. In 1887, however, Prime Minister Francesco Crispi, successor to the East African imperialist Depretis, proposed a solution to Italy’s unchecked emigration—direct settler colonialism. By opening up new markets in Somalia and Eritrea, Crispi hoped to institute East African colonies that could “accommodate that immense emigration which goes to

10. Choate, 30-31.

11. Ibid., 30.

12. Ibid., 1.

13. Ibid., 3.



foreign lands, placing this emigration under the dominion and laws of Italy.”<sup>14</sup>

Crispi felt that by using East Africa as an escape valve to redirect American and European emigration, Italy would be able to take its place among the other European world powers, unhindered by economic recession at home.

Despite Crispi’s intentions, Italy’s military ventures in the Horn of Africa were disastrous. East Africa already had a large indigenous population—it was hardly an empty land, ripe for Italy’s colonial exploitation. The Ethiopian resistance was stronger and better equipped than the Italian military had originally planned, and skirmishes between the two sides were fierce. On January 26, 1887, Ethiopian forces near the Eritrean town of Dogali ambushed an Italian battalion and killed 422 soldiers.<sup>15</sup> Less than a decade later, on February 29, 1896, the Italians suffered the worst military defeat of a European military in the history of European imperialism in Africa. Ethiopian forces, under the command of King Menelik and supplied with long-range machine guns by France and Russia, decimated three columns of Italian troops near the Ethiopian town of Adwa; 7,000 Italian and Eritrean soldiers were killed, 1,500 wounded, and nearly 2,000 captured, while the Ethiopians lost anywhere from three to twelve thousand soldiers.<sup>16</sup> While the 1887 Dogali massacre was commemorated throughout Italy, and even led to the erection of a memorial obelisk in Piazza dei Cinquecento, or Square of the Five Hundred, in Rome, the bloody defeat at Adwa “could not be commemorated for shame” and Crispi resigned in humiliation.<sup>17</sup>

14. Mar. 6, 1915, in *Discorsi parlamentari di Francesco Crispi*, 3 vols. (Rome: Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati, 1915), III:469; cited in Choate, 7.

15. Choate, 21.

16. *Ibid.*, 37.

17. *Ibid.*, 38.

The bloody rout at Adwa forced a reexamination of Italian imperial strategy. In 1899, Luigi Einaudi, a young economics professor from Torino published a groundbreaking monograph entitled *The Merchant Prince* in which he proposed that Italy's imperial strength lied not in military victories, but in economic might. He argued that Italian trade did not "follow the flag" of militant colonialism, as traditional notions of European imperialist economics held, but that, instead, trade followed emigration.<sup>18</sup> Einaudi's theory of the Italian merchant prince held that Italy's emigrants could be transformed into a cohesive expatriate "nation" that would spread Italian economic prowess abroad—if emigrants throughout the world "loved Italy and spoke Italian, Italy's exports and political influence would grow."<sup>19</sup> Emigrants were no longer cast as near-traitors who had betrayed their homeland in pursuit of wealth; they were often compared to the medieval poet Dante Alighieri, who was exiled from Florence in the thirteenth century, or even the Roman poet Virgil, also exiled from Italian Mantua.<sup>20</sup>

In 1901, on the heels of Einaudi's theory, the Italian parliament passed an emigration law that shifted responsibility for Italian emigrants from the interior ministry to the foreign ministry, thus "marking emigration as an international expansion instead of an internal hemorrhage."<sup>21</sup> The rhetoric of the government reflected this shift in the definition of imperialism—*colonia* was used to describe both the Italian colonies in East Africa as well as colonies in Argentina, Egypt,

18. Choate, 51.

19. *Ibid.*, 41.

20. *Ibid.*, 6.

21. *Ibid.*, 59.

Tunisia, and all other Italian expatriate communities—the proceedings of the *Istituto Coloniale Italiano* (Italian Colonial Institute, or ICI) made little distinction between the actual old-style imperial colony in Eritrea and the fledgling Italian communities in Syria; both were *colonie*.<sup>22</sup> Every Italian migrant worldwide thus became an Italian colonist and every expatriate Italian enclave a colony. While other European powers, such as Britain and France, built up their global empires with actual land grabs and military invasions, Italy attempted to use economics and culture to create an international expatriate empire.

## **The risk of emigrant colonialism: identity**

While the policy of emigrant colonialism enabled Italy to spread its economic and cultural influence throughout the world, from North and South America to Tunisia, Tripolitania, and Egypt, the idea of sending Italians to live and work in foreign societies and economies presented a difficult problem: assimilation. Migrants, far from the Italian homeland, often adopted the culture and language of their host countries, forsaking their *italianità*, or Italianness, as they became integrated into their new countries. Because Italian foreign and economic policy hinged on remittances from Italian emigrants and the strengthening of international Italian commercial prestige, the loss of *italianità* threatened to destroy the strategy of emigrant colonialism—without strong ties to Italy, the global network of Italians would collapse. Driven by concerns of emigrant

22. The tables of contents for the proceedings of both the 1906 and the 1911 ICI congresses labelled both types of colonies simply as “colonies” , *Atti del secondo congresso degli italiani all'estero*, Istituto coloniale italiano (n. p., 1911).

assimilation, the Italian government instituted and subsidized a number of programs, organizations, and publications to reinforce the notion of *italianità*.

In 1913, the leading Italian newspaper in Argentina, *La Patria degli italiani*, published what would become an almost canonical set of instructions for all Italian emigrants worldwide. This decalogue, entitled “The New Ten Commandments of Italian Emigrants,” was circulated throughout the global Italian community and reflects the Italian government’s fears of emigrant assimilation:

1. There is only one Fatherland, and your Fatherland is Italy. You shall love no other country as much as Italy.
2. You shall never name your fatherland without reverence. Exalt the glories of your Italy, which is one of the most ancient and noble nations in the world.
3. Remember the national holidays, wherever you might be. On these occasions, at least, forget your political party and religious faith; remember only that you are Italian.
4. Honor the official representative [consul] of your fatherland, and respect him as a symbol of the faraway fatherland, even if sometimes he displeases you.
5. You shall not kill a citizen of the Fatherland by erasing in yourself the Italian consciousness, feeling, and citizenship. You shall not disguise your name and surname with a barbaric transcription.
6. You shall not attack out of envy the authority and prestige of your compatriots who hold honorary appointments.
7. You shall not steal citizens from your fatherland, letting your children squander their *italianità* to become absorbed by the people among whom you have emigrated.
8. Be proud to declare yourself always, everywhere and on every occasion, Italian in origin and in sentiment, and be not servile, be not despised by those who host you.
9. You shall always buy and sell, consume and distribute goods and merchandise from your fatherland.
10. You shall marry only an Italian woman. Only with this and by this woman shall you be able to preserve in your children the blood, language, and feelings of your fathers and of your Italy.<sup>23</sup>

23. Choate, 73.

The parallels between this modern emigrant’s decalogue and the original biblical ten commandments that the Catholic Italians were already intimately familiar with are fascinating and reveal the deep concern the Italian government had regarding the massive amounts of emigrants leaving the country. Each emigrant commandment clearly corresponds with its biblical counterpart: thou shalt have no other gods before God, or fatherlands before Italy; remember the sabbath—and national holidays—to keep them holy; honor thy father and thy mother, and thy local consular officer; thou shalt not kill... thy Italian identity, for assimilation is a form of murder; thou shalt not covet your neighbor’s wife or thy neighbor’s commercial goods. Although these concerns were formally presented as a decalogue in 1913, the risks inherent in assimilation among the various melting-pot host societies were an issue from the beginning of the emigrant colonialism experiment. In order to mitigate those risks, the Italian government pursued various strategies to retain emigrant culture worldwide. The main policy used to create and maintain *italianità* abroad was the promotion of the Italian language, for, as Italian scholars and politicians believed, “if [Italian migrants] spoke the “language of Dante,” they would be moored to Italian culture and society no matter where they lived.”<sup>24</sup> Organizations like the *Società Dante Alighieri* (SDA), *Italica Gens*, and the previously mentioned ICI allowed the government to remain engaged with its global communities and promote *italianità* throughout their indirect colonial holdings. SDA, a liberal organization with masonic and governmental funding, became the center of a wide range of emigrant cultural activities. The Society promoted emigrant literacy by providing

24. Choate, 101.

free libraries of Italian literature and reference books. It established local mutual aid committees and societies that assisted emigrants with self-improvement and provided social assistance. Additionally, it founded free Italian-language schools and literary societies, as well as competitive community sports clubs.<sup>25</sup> The actions of the SDA allowed the various Italian communities to remain involved in their host communities to a certain degree while remaining closely connected to the Italian homeland—these activities “gave the Italian expatriate colonies pride in themselves and earned respect from outsiders.”<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, the Catholic Church also sought to build up *italianità* among the large Italian expatriate population. Catholic monks and missionaries, supported by funding from the *Italica Gens* organization, were sent out among the various emigrant colonies in order to “counsel the Italian emigrants to avoid the dangers of crowding in big [anticlerical] cities, guiding them into compact and homogeneous colonies... [where] they can preserve the ancestral faith, and the national language and character.”<sup>27</sup> Like SDA, *Italica Gens* focused on language as its primary mission. It built dozens of heavily subsidized religious schools run by volunteer priests and nuns. Beyond simply teaching the Italian language, the schools built by *Italica Gens* pursued a blatantly nationalist agenda, instilling, and even forcing, patriotism in their pupils in the name of *italianità*. The organization at times even went as far as to urge priests to “withhold the sacraments from parents who did not send their children to Italian schools.”<sup>28</sup>

25. Choate, 105, 109.

26. *Ibid.*, 109.

27. *Ibid.*, 141.

28. *Ibid.*, 142-143.

*Italica Gens* and SDA were crucially important for maintaining both *italianità* and the overall policy of emigrant colonialism. If emigrants lost their connection to the homeland, remittances would cease and Italian economic influence abroad would wane as Italian emigrant culture became swallowed up in the various host cultures. The efforts of these organizations focused both on the middle class, who were more likely to form athletic clubs and literary circles, and on the lower class of laborers, who needed subsidized or free Italian education. The efficacy of these programs of Italianization varied along class lines: in the more well-off Italian colonies, members of the emigrant middle class often rallied together to form the base of local SDA leadership, while in colonies that merely provided migrants with manual labor the working class was at high risk of forgetting their *italianità*, for amidst their heavy labor, which often took place alongside indigenous workers, “the memory of Italian culture and traditions could quickly dim.”<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, both organizations, along with the dozens of other independent societies and committees throughout the Italian diaspora, held tremendous influence over *italianità* and were largely successful in protecting Italian identity abroad and promoting Italian commercial prestige during the first decades of the experiment in emigrant colonialism.

## **Italian emigrant colonialism in Egypt**

Italians have had a long history in Egypt. Merchants from Venice, Genova, and other prominent Italian port cities had markets and even homes in Alexandria and

29. Choate, 115.

Cairo throughout the late medieval and renaissance periods of European history. Under the reign of Mohammed Ali Pasha (1803–49) the status of Italians, and Europeans in general, in Egypt made a dramatic shift. As part of his sweeping military and economic reforms, Mohammed Ali relied heavily on European assistance from both within and beyond Egypt. The pasha sent delegations of students to France where they could observe French government and society, while at the same time importing hundreds of European advisors to work directly in the government bureaucracy and run various ministries, in addition to dozens of European technicians and counselors.<sup>30</sup> Italian influence on Mohammed Ali's government ran deep. The Egyptian state press opened in 1822, with Italian typographic equipment and materials, and edited and published its first book shortly thereafter—an Italian–Arabic dictionary that aimed to improve international government correspondence, which was conducted largely in French and Italian.<sup>31</sup> By 1840, Clot Bey, a leading French physician who headed medical reforms under the wali, estimated that there were 2,000 Italians living as permanent residents in Egypt,<sup>32</sup> mostly working as government advisors.

Throughout the following decades, thousands of other Europeans flocked to Egypt, motivated by economic and political opportunities. As Mohammed Ali's dynasty, in concert with Britain and France, undertook immense construction projects—such as the Suez Canal—and other economic and commercial reforms, the Egyptian economy grew tremendously. This rapid development “created

30. Grange, I:507.

31. Anna Baldinetti, “Gli Italiani nella cultura egiziana, 1900–1930,” *Levante* 49, no. 1–2 (2002): 43–58, 46.

32. A. B. Clot-Bey, *Aperçu général sur l’Égypte*, 2 vols. (Masson et Cie, Paris: Fortin, 1840), I:167; cited by Amicucci, 81.



lucrative opportunities for foreigners” and attracted thousands of immigrants from Italy, Greece, and other Southern Mediterranean European countries, since “the difficulty of making a decent living in their countries of origin was an incentive to emigrate.”<sup>33</sup> By 1907 the number of Italians in Egypt rose to 35,000 and Italians represented nearly 24% of the entire European population, which made the Italian community the second largest foreign community in Egypt, after the Greeks.<sup>34</sup> The largest single surge in Italian immigration to Egypt occurred between the censuses of 1897 and 1907—the community increased by 10,000 in just ten years.<sup>35</sup> This jump coincides with the institution of emigrant colonialism following the Italian military failures in Eritrea and Somalia, and the influence of government-backed migration is clearly visible. In 1907 38% of the Italian community in Egypt lived in Cairo, 46% in Alexandria, with the remainder spread throughout Upper and Lower Egypt and the Canal Zone.<sup>36</sup> In 1897 most of the Cairene Italians lived in Azbakiyya and al-Muski, one of the central thoroughfares of medieval Islamic Cairo and home to the Khan al-Khalili market. After the surge of immigration over the next decade, the geographic centers of Italians shifted from al-Muski to ‘Abdin, Bulaq, and Shubra, important loci of the rising European commercial sector.<sup>37</sup>

This move away from al-Muski to neighborhoods with a higher concentration of Europeans highlights the rise in importance of Italian commerce and government support in the early 1900s. The geographic and demographic

33. Beinin and Lockman, 35.

34. Amicucci, 82; Beinin and Lockman, 35; Grange, I:513.

35. Amicucci, 83.

36. Grange, I:509.

37. Amicucci, 87-88.

shift towards 'Abdin, the location of the khedival palace, indicates the increase of Italian involvement in the Egyptian government. By 1904 nearly half of the Europeans in the municipal government of Alexandria were Italians,<sup>38</sup> and in Cairo Italians were the second largest nationality employed by Egyptian government ministries, after the British, who were the colonial rulers.<sup>39</sup> Azbakiyya remained a center for Europeanized Cairene commerce, given its large gardens and proximity to the newly built opera house, as Italians and other Europeans were able to establish thriving private businesses such as shops, tobacco stands, restaurants, and cafés.<sup>40</sup> Neighborhoods renovated and revitalized during the first years of the British occupation, such as Shubra and Bulaq, became centers of Italian residential life. The primary Italian consulate today remains in Bulaq, a vestige of the neighborhood's emigrant heritage.

While there was a permanent core of Italian residents in Egypt, a large number of poorer migrants came for seasonal work before returning to Italy. Although the Italian population grew tremendously between 1897 and 1907—an increase of over 10,000 new migrants—a number far greater departed Egypt. Between 1904–1907 alone nearly 14,000 Italians left Egypt for Italy.<sup>41</sup> It is impossible to tell how many of those departures were permanent and how many lasted only for a few months or weeks. Cheap steam ferries made the trans-Mediterranean voyage more convenient and led to an increase in two-way human movement between Egypt and Italy. This was particularly important

38. Grange, I:517.

39. Petricioli, 86.

40. André Raymond, *Cairo: City of History*, trans. Willard Wood (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 315.

41. Amicucci, 93–94.

for poorer Europeans who were unable to establish cafés, printing presses, or factories in Azbakiyya and Bulaq, as their better-off compatriots had done. A large subset of the Italian community consisted of less-skilled and unskilled laborers who came to work as temporary factory or construction workers. As economic opportunities for emigrant foreigners increased, though, Italians were much more likely to remain in Egypt. The account of one typical Italian expatriate worker corroborates this trend:

R.'s father owned a flour mill near Syracuse which had to be sold to pay the inheritance taxes after his father died in 1903. The sons left the country; R. went to Egypt to look for work, leaving his wife and six children behind. After six months in a carpentry shop in Alexandria, R. worked in construction and learned masonry. His higher wages allowed him to bring his family to settle in Cairo where he worked as a stonecutter at the British army barracks in 'Abbasiyya.<sup>42</sup>

R., facing economic difficulties at home, moved to Egypt in search of better work, and most likely never fully intended to permanently settle down. However, the economic conditions created by Ottoman capitulations, which advantages had only flourished after the direct British occupation, favored foreign workers and interests, so much that "these foreigners, generally poor peasants or workers in their countries of origin, filled the upper ranks for the working class in Egypt and occupied a highly disproportionate share of the skilled, supervisory, and technical positions."<sup>43</sup> Following their move to Egypt, R.'s family likely began to become more involved with the local community. Far from the Italian homeland, countless Italian migrants like R. faced a type of crisis

42. Beinin and Lockman, 36.

43. *Ibid.*, 36.

of identity—were they full Italians, as the Italian government wanted them to be, or did they identify themselves as something else: Egyptianized *mutamassirun*?

As discussed previously, Italy feared potential emigrant assimilation and Egyptianization, as it posed a threat to their strategy of colonial emigration. If emigrants saw themselves as *mutamassirun* more than Italians, remittances would cease, international Italian prestige would no longer grow, and Einaudi's theory of the Italian merchant prince would fail. To mitigate this risk, the Italian foreign ministry, in concert with SDA, *Italica Gens*, and other international emigrant organizations worked to build up *italianità* among the Italians in Egypt. Dozens of schools, both Catholic and secular, were established and focused on teaching the Italian language. SDA took responsibility for the secular education and Italianization of the Egyptian colony, with the stated goal to "encourage the study of the national language in institutes connected to the Society [SDA] and make the homeland understand the necessity of increasing the number of national schools [in Egypt] in order to reinforce strict *italianità*."<sup>44</sup> As part of this agenda of strengthening *italianità* through cultural and secular education, in 1905 the Egyptian branches of SDA adopted the following strategy for completing their task:

1. Support Italian state schools.
2. Promote conferences.
3. Establish a periodical or magazine as the main editorial organ for the Society in Egypt.
4. Develop serial schools to offer Italian language classes to working class adults.
5. Find larger locations that were more amenable to these schools.

44. L. A. Balboni, *Gl'Italiani nella civiltà egiziana del secolo XIX*, 3 vols. (Alexandria, Egypt: Penasson (Comitato Alessandrino della Società Dante Alighieri), 1906), III: 232-33.

6. Establish a public library with an open reading room.
7. Institute a circulating library.
8. Encourage theatrical productions.
9. Introduce Italian classes in private foreign schools for the benefit of the Italian pupils that attend.<sup>45</sup>

Like its many other branches in Europe and the Americas, the SDA's primary focus was on cultural education. In Egypt it sought to open public libraries and hold cultural activities that featured drama and music. It opened dozens of serial schools to teach Italian language and culture to the large numbers of lower class Italians who spent their days working in factories or shops. The Central Council of the SDA, headquartered in Rome, received government subsidies and provided the Alexandrian and Cairene branches with thousands of francs annually for operation expenses.<sup>46</sup>

More important than these cultural undertakings, though, was the establishment of formal schools. In 1905 the director of the Society bemoaned the indifferent attitude of the Egyptian colony towards patriotism. The solution to this cynical indifference was clear: "For the citizens that too easily forget the duties of our civilization, we must remember that national schools, where along with Italian knowledge one also learns the religion of [patriotic] duty, represent the strength of the colony's unity.... It is therefore necessary that our citizens rally to our national schools as if they were our flag, for in them they receive true Italian education as children of all Italians."<sup>47</sup> The SDA hoped to increase the quality of Italian state schools, which had fallen behind German,

45. Balboni, III: 233.

46. Ibid., III: 233.

47. Ibid., 243.

French, and British schools, due to minor budgetary shortfalls and general lack of interest among the Egyptian elite—Italian had been abandoned as an Egyptian administrative language, in favor of French and English.<sup>48</sup> The Society made plans to institute two public primary schools for boys, a similar school for girls, and several secondary schools in order to compete with other European schools.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, as listed in the Society’s general strategy, SDA worked to open Italian language classes in the competing foreign schools until the curriculum of the Italian state schools was sufficiently strengthened. In 1910 the Italian parliament passed legislation providing better funding for international Italian schools, and the quality and enrollment in those schools in Cairo and Alexandria increased, thereby promoting both *italianità* and Italian prestige throughout Egypt.<sup>50</sup>

## **Egypt as back door to Libya**

As was the case with most aspects of emigrant colonialism, Italian state schools funded by the SDA served a double purpose. The schools not only infused the community with a deep sense of Italian language and culture, they provided an avenue for the ruling Egyptian elite to provide European education for their children. This direct influence on the education of the rising generation of elite was aimed at bolstering Italian prestige in Egypt “in preparation for the day

48. Angelo Sammarco, *Gli Italiani in Egitto: il contributo italiano nella formazione dell’Egitto moderno* (Alexandria, Egypt: Angelo Procaccia, 1937), 162.

49. Balboni, III: 240.

50. Sammarco, 162.

when Italy would seize political control”;<sup>51</sup> the day when the years of emigrant colonialism would finally pay off and Italy would become a great and respected imperial power.

Italy was not to keep colonial emigration as their final strategy in foreign policy. From the defeat at Adwa in 1898 until 1911—the heyday of emigrant colonialist policy—the Italian government remained committed behind the scenes to restarting their ambitions of direct imperialism rather than build up a tenuous global network of expatriate communities. A growing undercurrent of anti-emigration Italian nationalists proposed the idea of invading and annexing Libya as part of an effort to recreate the glory of the ancient Roman Empire. The nationalists never referred to the Ottoman provinces as Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, but rather Libya, the former Roman province carved from the Carthaginian Empire after the Punic Wars in the 2nd century BC. They argued that the Libyan Arabs would welcome the Italian army as liberators from the oppressive Turks and that the military campaign would be an easy victory.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, as Prime Minister Crispi had proposed with Eritrea and Somalia, Italian politicians in the decade prior to 1911 heralded that a strong Italian colony in Libya would redirect Italian emigration and replace America as the main outlet for emigration. Libya would come so far as to be seen as the new America; one Italian soldier in Libya wrote home to his family in October 1911,

51. Choate, 113.

52. *Ibid.*, 172.

“So dear father calm down and be happy because we are safe.... Dear father, I ask you not to worry because here we really have America.”<sup>53</sup>

Italy had little presence in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica before the 1911 invasion and occupation. It did, however, have a long history in neighboring Egypt, with its large Italian communities *cum* colonies in Cairo, Alexandria, and the Suez Canal zone. Because the Italian government perceived the Italians in Egypt to have high prestige within Egypt, the foreign ministry considered Egypt to be the ideal base for Italian expansion throughout the Mediterranean, and especially Libya.<sup>54</sup> Rather than use Egypt as a forward operating base for a military invasion, which was militarily and political impossible, Italy pursued a subtle policy of *pénétration pacifique*,<sup>55</sup> or peaceful penetration, and used Egypt as the base for launching economic and agricultural programs into the neighboring Ottoman provinces over the decade prior to the start of the actual military campaign in 1911. Egypt, backed by a strong and united Italian community, would become Italy’s cultural and economic backdoor to Libya.

53. Salvatore Bono, *Morire per questi deserti: Lettere di soldati italiani dal fronte libico (1911-12)* (Catanzaro: Abramo, 1992), 57; cited in Choate, 180.

54. Anna Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo* (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente “C. A. Nallino”, 1997), 17.

55. Grange, II:1391.



## Chapter 2

### ***Italianità vs. Mutamassiriyya***

A popular story in Egypt during the late nineteenth century recounted that during the Napoleonic expedition in Egypt, an Englishman and an Egyptian were assigned to deliver a message to the Ottomans. At a certain point during their journey the Egyptian's horse stumbled and the Egyptian fell to the sand, cursing in Piedmontese as he crashed. Surprised by his use of language, the Englishman asked the Egyptian in Piedmontese, "Are you from Piedmonte?," to which the Egyptian responded "Yes, of course." The Englishman replied, "I am too! What are you doing here?"

"I'm being an Egyptian!"

"And I'm being an Englishman!"<sup>1</sup>

This apocryphal account highlights one of the most dynamic aspects of Egyptian society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Despite the rise of a kind of proto-nationalism, identities and loyalties were often fluid and shifting. Dozens of different ethnic groups and European nationalities—Egyptians, Greeks, Italians, French, Maltese, British, Syrians, Turks, Albanians, Armenians, Moroccans, and Belgians, to name a few—all

1. Amicucci, 81.

converged and mixed in Egypt. One modern fictional account demonstrates the complexity of identity in nineteenth-century Egypt. In his semi-autobiographical work *Birds of Passage*, Robert Solé briefly narrates the story of Henri Touta, a francophile Greek Catholic Syrian who appointed himself as both the Peruvian and Costa Rican consul in Egypt after Lichtenstein conferred upon him the title of count as payment for his diplomatic services to their monarchy. However, despite his multi-ethnic and multi-national identity and experience, Touta considered himself an Egyptian.<sup>2</sup> Although Henri Touta is fictional, his character represents a larger historical trend: as thousands of outsiders flocked to Egypt in the late nineteenth century, they began to take on a new hybrid, Egyptianized, identity—they became *mutamassirun*, or Egyptianized foreigners.<sup>3</sup>

Perceptions of the role of the *mutamassirun* in Egyptian society, as well as and the definitions of Italianness, Egyptianness, or what I have termed *mutamassiriyya*<sup>4</sup> have varied widely in Egyptian historiography. Some schools of thought have portrayed the *mutamassirun* as fundamental to the establishment of modern Egypt and see the foreigners as veritable heroes. Others see them as imperialist pawns, used to spread European influence in Egypt and force unwanted negative societal and economic changes upon the emerging Egyptian nation. Understanding these differing historiographic trends will aid in understanding the approach of this thesis regarding the Italian foreign ministry's policy towards the Italian community in the years preceding the invasion of Libya.

2. Robert Solé, *Birds of Passage* (London: Harvill Press, 2000), 279.

3. Beinín and Lockman, 9.

4. Arabic for *mutamassirness*; the essence of being an Egyptianized foreigner.

## **The *mutamassirun* as cosmopolitan Egyptians: nationalism and royalism**

In her biography of Mohammed Ali, Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot presents a near-native Egyptian leader who cared deeply about the future of his beloved proto-independent nation by pursuing enlightened economic and political policies. As part of a massive mercantilist program he undertook agricultural reforms, built up internal infrastructure, and imposed protective tariffs on foreign imports. Additionally he launched a wide reaching military campaign which aimed to raise Egypt to the same level as other European empires of the time. Marsot claims that these reforms were motivated by genuine concern for Egypt and the pasha pursued them without interference from Europe. She acknowledges the historical fact that hundreds, if not thousands, of Europeans assisted in these reforms—many of whom would become the *mutamassirun* of the early twentieth century. Marsot, like other Egyptian nationalist historians, frames her concept of Egyptian nationalism as an unchanging, timeless characteristic of the Egyptian people and she attributes Egypt's initial foray into modernization and nationalism to the dynamic personality and inspired leadership of Mohammed Ali, who provided the spark to end the dormant Egyptian spirit—in fact, she says, it was Mohammed Ali and his administration who “inevitably put Egypt on the path of independent statehood and self-recognition.”<sup>5</sup> For nationalist historians, Egyptians, not Europeans, were the agents of change.

5. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammed Ali* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 264.

Paradoxically, however, Mohammed Ali was hardly an “Egyptian” by even Marsot’s standards. The wali himself was a foreigner—an Albanian who was commissioned by the Sublime Porte in Istanbul to govern Egypt. He spoke little Arabic and most likely had no real connection to “regular” lower-class Egyptians, whose dormant Egyptian nationalist flame he would supposedly ignite. Marsot does make an attempt to excuse the wali’s shortcomings as a non-Egyptian foreigner: she claims that he used European counsellors merely as advisors and had them sent home after implementing their recommendations.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Marsot attempts to excuse Mohammed Ali’s foreignness, to little success; as Ehud Toledano has humorously pointed out, “Marsot’s Mehmet Ali indeed had the well-being of Egypt and the Egyptians at the top of his priorities. So much so, that he even desired to become an Egyptian, but alas, psychologically he simply could not, *pauvre* Pasha.”<sup>7</sup> While other historiographic paradigms have proven the large distance between the Ottoman-speaking Egyptian throne and the lower class, Arabic-speaking population, Marsot papers over the linguistic and cultural divide in order to ascribe the origins of Egyptian nationalism to Mohammed Ali’s dynasty. Marsot’s European-inspired concept of modern nationalism needed a hero. Mohammed Ali, with his foreignness hidden by creative historiographic acrobatics, could fill that role.

By extension, this school of modern nationalist historiography attributes the development of modern Egypt in part to Europeans and the *mutamassirun*.

6. Marsot, 194–95.

7. Ehud R. Toledano, “Mehmet Ali Paşa or Muhammad Ali Basha? An Historiographic Appraisal in the Wake of a Recent Book,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 4 (Oct. 1985): 141–159, 156.

While Marsot vehemently repudiates the Europeanness or foreignness of the khedival throne, other scholars have historically embraced the influence of the *mutamassirun* in Egyptian nationalist history. This historiographic trend was unsurprisingly adopted by the Europeans and Egyptians who worked within the khedival bureaucracy. Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, one of the most prominent khedival advisors who led educational missions to Europe as part of Mohammed Ali's programs of modernization, encouraged the throne to support the immigration of foreigners "so that they could pass on skills to Egyptians in return for being treated as Egyptians themselves." He justified his position by citing Ancient Egyptian history, indicating that in the sixth century BC, pharaoh Psammetichos I encouraged Greek settlement in Egypt, which in turn reinforced diplomatic and cultural ties with Greece and mutually strengthened the two empires.<sup>8</sup>

Royalist historiography differs from the modern nationalist in that, rather than excuse or ignore European involvement in Egyptian society, royalists fully acknowledge the heavy European presence in the khedival bureaucracy. According to royalists, the *mutamassirun* were directly connected to the Egyptian government by virtue of the numerous economic and legal advantages guaranteed them by the Capitulations. Royalist historians were members of scientific and academic institutes such as the Institut d'Égypte and the Royal Geographical Society, which were often funded by the throne, and wrote glowingly of the foreign contributions to the Egyptian economy and political system.<sup>9</sup> Royalist scholarship viewed the *mutamassirun* as part of a larger

8. Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State And Politics In Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation* (London: Routledge, 2003), 177.

9. *Ibid.*, 177.

mission to modernize Egypt and bring it up European standards of governance, industry, and intellect, and emphasized the deep integration of these resident foreigners in Egyptian society. *Mutamassir* integration in certain levels of Egyptian society was indeed far-reaching—beyond the government bureaucracy *mutamassirun* were involved in construction, dock loading, printing presses, cafés, and dozens of other sectors of the economy. After the first Aswan Dam was completed in 1902, the builders installed a commemorative plaque that highlights the multi-ethnic character of the Egyptian economy at the time:

This dam was designed and built by British engineers  
Egyptians assisted by Greeks excavated  
To the rock foundations and  
Built the rubble masonry  
Skilled Italian workmen dressed and built  
The granite ashlar<sup>10</sup>

The construction of the dam was truly an international endeavor—Italian laborers were brought in to excavate some of the hardest granite with dynamite,<sup>11</sup> and the bulk of the project was led by British and other European engineers and contractors. The question of whether or not the *mutamassir* workers saw the project as contributing to the rising glory of modern Egypt, or simply just another construction job, is inconsequential to the royalists. For royalists the *mutamassirun* were part of Egypt's cosmopolitan golden age and contributed greatly to the development of modern Egypt; without foreign aid Egypt would have failed to achieve modernity.

10. Gorman, 195.

11. Federico Cresti, "Comunità proletarie italiane nell'Africa mediterranea tra XIX secolo e periodo fascista," *Mediterranea* 5 (2008): 189-214, 201.

## **The *mutamassirun* as Egyptians: The “myth” of *mutamassir* Egypt**

The story of the famous twentieth-century Italian hermetic poet, Giuseppe Ungaretti, who was born in 1888 in Alexandria, highlights the self-perception of the Italian *mutamassirun*. Like countless other Italians, Ungaretti’s father had moved to Egypt in search of financial opportunity and had found employment with a construction company in the Suez Canal zone. Two years after Ungaretti was born his father suffered a fatal construction accident, leaving his widowed mother to take care of the young family. Like many *mutamassir* immigrants, Ungaretti’s family was rather poor; after the death of his father, his mother was constrained to open a bakery to support herself and her children.<sup>12</sup> While growing up in Alexandria, Ungaretti built friendships with other *mutamassirun*. One of his closest friends, Mohammed Shehab, was Syrian and later moved to Paris with Ungaretti to attend university. In 1913, while in Paris, Mohammed committed suicide. Three years later, Ungaretti wrote about the cause of this tragedy:

12. Mohebb Saad Ibrahim, “L’Egitto di Ungaretti,” in *Tradizione e modernizzazione in Egitto: 1798-1998*, ed. Paolo Branca, Collana storica del Centro studi per i popoli extraeuropei dell’Università di Pavia, no. 16 (Milan: F. Angeli, 2000), 159.

Si chiamava  
Moammed Sceab  
discendente  
di emiri di nomadi  
suicida  
perchè *non aveva più*  
*Patria*  
Amò la Francia  
e mutò nome  
Fu Marcel  
ma *non era Francese*  
e non sapeva più vivere  
nella tenda dei suoi  
dove si ascolta la cantilena  
del Corano ...

His name was  
Mohammed Shehab  
descendent  
of emirs and nomads  
He committed suicide  
because *he no longer had*  
*a nation*  
He loved France  
and changed his name  
He became Marcel  
but *he was not French*  
and he could not live  
in the tent of his people  
where one hears the chanting  
of the Qur'an<sup>a</sup>

a. Giuseppe Ungaretti,  
"In memoria," in *Selected Poems*  
of Giuseppe Ungaretti, ed. Allen  
Mandelaum (Ithaca, New York: Cornell  
University Press, 1975), 10, emphasis  
added.

According to Ungaretti, Mohammed Shehab no longer knew how to live according to his princely Islamic heritage. Mohammed was not Egyptian; he was Syrian, living an expatriate life comparable to Ungaretti's. Because of the cosmopolitanism of *mutamassir* Egypt he lacked any firm identity—he was lost in the urban chaos of Alexandria and Paris. Ungaretti's emphasis on the universal need for identity is logical—he wrote this ode while in the cold and bloody trenches of the Isonzo and Carso between Italy and Austria-Hungary during World War I. Ironically, though, even as an Italian infantryman, Ungaretti himself lacked a firm identity—raised in Egypt and schooled in Paris he nearly gave his life for Italy in a global war over national identities.

Further examination of Ungaretti's experience reveals more of this paradox of national identity. When speaking of Middle Easterners, he referred to them as "noi orientali"—us orientals—including himself in the definition of



an oriental.<sup>13</sup> In his mind, despite the seeming contradictions in his identity, he was at heart an Egyptian. In a poem penned after a particularly bloody battle along the northern Italian border, he still remembered his oriental homeland with affection.

Ora	Now
Il sereno è chiuso	Serenity is closed
Come	Like
A quest'ora	Right now
Nel mio paese d'Affrica	In my land of Africa
I gelsumini	The jasmines <sup>a</sup>

a. Giuseppe Ungaretti,  
"Giugno," in *Mandelaum*, 48, emphasis  
added.

Ungaretti's rosy memory of his expatriate homeland is part of what Marta Petricioli has described as "il mito," or the "myth" of *mutamassir* Egypt.<sup>14</sup> Because of Italy's longstanding history in Egypt, from its hundreds of khedival government advisors, to the thousands of Italian laborers at the Suez Canal and Aswan Dam, Italians resident in Egypt genuinely felt a part of cosmopolitan Egypt—truly felt integrated as part of the Egyptian national fabric. While their *italianità* and *mutamassiriyya* blended fluidly, both forms of identity were social constructions. Italians in Egypt were often "the children of Greek, Egyptian, Armenian, Syrian, Lebanese, or Maltese mothers."<sup>15</sup> Because of this ethnic, religious, and national diversity, members of the Italian community attended synagogues, mosques, and churches for baptisms, bar mitzvahs, weddings, and funerals. According to Petricioli, in practice the Italian *mutamassirun* could

13. Ibrahim, 161.

14. Petricioli.

15. *Ibid.*, viii.

hardly call themselves either Egyptian or Italian. Despite Ungaretti's nostalgia for his "oriental" homeland and his gentle criticism of Mohammed Shehab's lack of national identity, while in Egypt, Ungaretti himself was neither Italian or Egyptian. *Mutamassiriyya* defined his identity.

## **The *mutamassirun* as imperialists: colonialists, militant nationalists, and Islamists**

Colonialism has also been used as a historiographic paradigm to describe the history of the *mutamassirun*. For colonialists, the *mutamassirun* were unwilling pawns in a larger imperial game. Much like Choate's theory of emigrant colonialism, Michael Reimer has argued that Europe used expatriates in Egypt to force spatial change and increase potential colonial control of the country. Reimer's basic premise is that Alexandria in the nineteenth century was a bellwether of European colonial ambitions; the same patterns of urban colonization in Alexandria were followed later in Cairo and the Canal Zone. In essence, he states, "Alexandria was a colonial city before Egypt was a colony."<sup>16</sup>

Reimer bases his thesis on the theory of colonial urbanism posited by R. J. Ross and Gerard Telkamp in 1984, which states that colonial powers often force spatial change in certain bridgehead cities to shift the socio-political status quo, giving the colonizers an upper hand in controlling the country; that is, urban planning is used for colonial consolidation. Alexandria was a textbook example of forced spacial change. At the turn of the century, during the Napoleonic

16. Michael J. Reimer, "Colonial Bridgehead: Social and Spatial Change in Alexandria, 1850-1882," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 4 (Nov. 1988): 531-53, 531.

invasion, only 8,000 people lived in Alexandria; fewer than 100 were foreigners.<sup>17</sup> By the 1860s, however, the population had risen to more than 170,000 with a large percentage of immigrants from Europe and other nearby Ottoman provinces, primarily Syria. As the population grew, the city rapidly expanded outward towards the desert and along the Mediterranean coast. These new urban expansions followed European norms of urban planning and design and attracted richer classes of Europeans.

One suburb, al-Raml, was built along the coast ten kilometers away from the city center. The land was initially owned by the military and illegally occupied by European squatters, but European investors saw the potential in the land and procured it from the Egyptian government. Al-Raml soon became “a fashionable suburb with large homes, shops, flower gardens, hotels, and a Khedivial palace,” marketed for wealthy Europeans and Egyptian royalty.<sup>18</sup> Al-Raml was an isolated European neighborhood secluded from the rest of Alexandria and became a prominent symbol of European colonial desires for the rest of the country. Alexandria experienced an “urban bifurcation”<sup>19</sup> and became a dual city—wealthy Europeans lived far in their suburbs and commuted downtown to run their shops and businesses while Egyptians and working-class Europeans stayed in Alexandria proper.

Cairo underwent a similar geographic division in the decades following the establishment of an urban colonial bridgehead in Alexandria. As European

17. Reimer, “Colonial Bridgehead: Social and Spatial Change in Alexandria, 1850-1882,” 532.

18. *Ibid.*, 536.

19. *Ibid.*, 538.

powers became increasingly involved in Egypt both economically and politically, a massive influx of European and Levantine migrants entered Cairo and began to transform the city. Under the reign of Khedive Isma'il, Cairo's urban nature went through a process of bifurcation as "native" and "European" cities emerged. The area bounded by Bab al-Hadid to the north, Azbakiyya and 'Abdin to the east, Sayyida Zaynab to the south, and the Nile to the west, was markedly European and featured wide streets, foreign markets, and European architecture, while the rest of the city remained "anarchic" and "native."<sup>20</sup> The two regions were separated by an invisible, yet powerful, frontier which bound Cairenes to their respective *mutamassir* or Egyptian worlds.

The idea of urban colonialism is closely tied to the larger ontological framework of imperialism proposed by Timothy Mitchell in his noteworthy book *Colonising Egypt*. Mitchell proposes that during the late nineteenth century, Europe became enthralled with the idea of organizing the world and reinforcing the Benjaminesque ideal of the "certainty of representation."<sup>21</sup> Microcosmic models, managed by Europe, could be used to explain and rule over every aspect of the vast European empires. In fact, "everything seemed to be set up before one as though it were the model or the picture of something. Everything was arranged before an observing subject into a system of signification (to use the European jargon), declaring itself to be the signifier of a signified."<sup>22</sup> This novel worldview—that of the world as an exhibition or a model or be controlled—led

20. Raymond, 333.

21. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6.

22. *Ibid.*, 12.

imperial leaders to hubristically proclaim that “England is at present the greatest Oriental empire which the world has ever known,”<sup>23</sup> for only Britain was capable of using rational thought to control the Orient. Europe set the requirements for modernity and provided the true ideal model for achieving modernization. Egypt’s urban transformation in Alexandria and Cairo is reflective of the European idea that Egypt was merely a model to be controlled—an exhibit to be ordered. Much like the royalist historians, European powers, as documented by colonialist historians, believed that the *mutamassirun* were the only capable agents of reform and change in Egypt because of their ability to model the world and use rational thought, and consequently, European colonial administrations used *mutamassir* talent to remake Egypt.

While both the royalists and colonialists connected the *mutamassirun* to the khedive and British imperialism, those who were excluded from the elite European center of power—militant nationalists and Islamists—had an entirely different, and overwhelmingly pessimistic, view of the role of the *mutamassirun* in Egyptian society. While in most circumstances the trajectories of nationalist and Islamist historiography are wildly divergent, their views of the *mutamassirun* are surprisingly coincident. In these historiographic schools the *mutamassirun* are seen as outsiders and are “regarded at best as passive beneficiaries of British authority and at worst active supporters of British imperialism.”<sup>24</sup> Islamists such as Muhammed al-Ghazzali and Sayyid Qutb labeled the *mutamassirun* as *musta‘mirun dakhiliyyun*, or domestic imperialists, and accused them of

23. Mitchell, 7.

24. Gorman, 179.

“introducing an alien culture into Egyptian society and corrupting its traditional values.”<sup>25</sup> As Egyptian nationalism took deeper root and anti-British and other xenophobic sentiments grew, the royalist heritage of the *mutamassirun* was vilified and erased. In 1947, at the apex of Wafdist nationalism, the plaque at the Aswan Dam was “deemed unsuitable” and was removed on the grounds that it did “not shed a true light of things.” The dam’s *mutamassir* legacy was forgotten and the dam was declared a purely Egyptian construction. The *mutamassirun* were “erased from the record by the ideological demands of national discourse,” and unfortunately became “historiographical casualties” in Egyptian nationalist history.<sup>26</sup>

### **The *mutamassirun* as compradors: the materialists**

Related to militant nationalism is the Marxist materialist school of historiography, which, like the nationalists and Islamists, viewed at least a section of the *mutamassir* community negatively. In the wake of the 1919 nationalist movement, the *mutamassirun* were increasingly seen by materialists as a “comprador, non-national bourgeoisie” which, despite their status as a strong middle class, lacked commitment to national independence.<sup>27</sup> For these historians, the *mutamassirun* were not “real” Egyptians and thus contributed little to the nationalist independence effort. Beyond being cast as simply removed from the nationalist effort, the opposition of the *mutamassirun* to a purely Egyptian state is

25. Gorman, 184.

26. Ibid., 195, 145.

27. Ibid., 181.

often interpreted as anti-Egyptian and overly capitalist and pro-Western. Because of their goal of analyzing the emergence of an independent Egyptian labor movement, Beinín and Lockman tend to label the entire *mutamassir* population as merely a colonial arm of the government. For the most part, expatriate *mutamassirun* are exempted from the rising social movements since, according to Beinín and Lockman's historiographic trajectory, Egyptian labor movements led to a reinforcement of indigenous nationalist thought. The *mutamassirun* were not part of (or at least marginally part of) the Egyptian working class, and as the Egyptian state swelled with nationalist fervor, the government pursued corporatist economic policies and sought to minimize the impact of the foreign sectors of the economy. Throughout *Workers on the Nile*, Beinín and Lockman repeatedly refer to the negative effects of *mutamassirun* on the local Egyptian economy, always linking *mutamassir* capital with the elite financial resources of foreign investors and the Egyptian state.<sup>28</sup> These Europeans filled the upper echelons of the working class and "occupied a highly disproportionate share of the skilled, supervisory, and technical positions,"<sup>29</sup> a division which caused much social and class tension with the Egyptian workers.

Beinín and Lockman's definition of *mutamassirun* focuses on the smaller section of the foreign European population that was actually directly involved in commerce and business, which indeed had connections to foreign governments and companies, and fails to include the larger portion of *mutamassirun* who were migrant workers. As stated previously, in the wake of the completion

28. Beinín and Lockman, 23.

29. *Ibid.*, 36.

of the Suez Canal, “the rapid development of the Egyptian economy created lucrative opportunities for foreigners, while the difficulty of making a decent living in their countries of origin was an incentive to emigrate.”<sup>30</sup> Within the separated European world—the European center of Cairo build by Isma‘il, or the isolated community of al-Raml—these migrants continued to struggle financially, even if their economic situations had indeed improved from when they were in Europe. R., mentioned in the previous chapter, was constrained to change jobs to eventually bring his family to join him in Egypt, and the Ungarettis in Alexandria never became wealthy as bakers. Even in Egypt, Italian construction workers and dock loaders faced low wages and poor working conditions, and European workers were among the first in Egypt to unionize and strike.

Besides grouping all *mutamassirun* under the same comprador label, materialists fail to fully account for the phenomenon of shifting identities—the aforementioned “myth of Egypt.” In materialist historiography nationality overrides class identity. For example, in 1919, following World War I, the workers of the Suez Canal Company unionized in an effort to permanently secure their wartime benefits, including a set wage scale, bonus pay for holiday work, and an eight hour workday. The union, named Le Phénix, was led primarily by Greeks, who notably “reached across ethnic lines to their disadvantaged Egyptian fellow workers,” in a display of class solidarity.<sup>31</sup> A similar Italian union soon joined with Le Phénix because of Italian contempt towards the British after the war—they felt slighted over their perception of “Britain’s treacherous refusal to allow Italy

30. Beinun and Lockman, 28.

31. Ibid., 106-7.



the rewards of her wartime sacrifices.”<sup>32</sup> Beinín and Lockman’s analysis of the strike then shifts away from looking at the inclusive coalition of exploited and angry workers and instead looks at subsequent international politics behind the resolution of the strike. They demonstrate that Britain, the backers of the Suez Canal Company, sought to appease and contain the Greek and Italian workers, and that immediately after settling with these foreigners, normal operations resumed. They infer that the *mutamassir* workers had only gone on strike to secure their own jobs and that showing solidarity with Egyptian workers was only part of their overall strategy. For Beinín and Lockman, the nationality of the workers was an obstacle to true class unity, thus proving that the *mutamassirun* fell outside the world of the Egyptian working class. Furthermore, they tend to portray foreign workers as proxies in a larger conflict between Britain, Greece, and Italy, the large comprador nations which exploited capitalist development in Egypt. Because of this, materialist history often falls in line with colonialist and imperialist histories, which make a sharp distinction between Egyptian and foreigner and fail to differentiate groups within the monolithic foreigner population.<sup>33</sup>

However, as has been mentioned, European nations, especially Italy, worried about the identity of their expatriate communities. National identities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were far from static or unchanging and the *mutamassirun* presented a difficult challenge for the Italian government, so desperate to hold on to its empire-building emigrants. As Italians

32. Beinín and Lockman, 106–7.

33. Gorman, 183.

became more involved with working-class Egyptians in the Canal Zone or in Cairene factories, or with the cosmopolitan middle class isolated in the bifurcated cities of Cairo and Alexandria, features of their Italian identity were slowly lost. Ungaretti, like many other Europeans in Egypt, truly felt that he was an Egyptian. In 1905 the Italian consul in Cairo, Giuseppe Raggi, complained in a letter to the foreign ministry that over a fourth of the Italian community in Egypt were Italian in name only and had no connection to the homeland—many had lost their *italianità* despite government efforts to prevent integration and assimilation.<sup>34</sup> Materialist historiography fails to take into account the phenomenon of *mutamassiriyya*, assuming instead that foreigners in Egypt naturally followed what their respective home countries demanded.

Given this wide range of historiographic interpretation, few scholars have looked at the relationship between European homelands and their respective *mutamassir* communities. By looking at the policies and actions of European countries towards their expatriate populations in Egypt, we can gain additional insight into the history of the *mutamassirun*. The dynamism and importance of the Italian *mutamassir* community becomes especially visible during the previously mentioned shift in Italy's imperial paradigm. Egypt, as the back door to Libya, was a critical base for Italy's operations of peaceful penetration to Libya and the rest of the Mediterranean. The Italian foreign ministry undertook a program of propaganda aimed at both the Egyptian and Arabic-speaking public, as well as the Italian *mutamassir* colony, in order to manufacture consent for the impending Libyan enterprise. The fact that Italy dedicated so many resources to

34. Petricioli, 1.

prevent emigrant assimilation and create consensus for the invasion highlights the fact that the *mutamassirun* were not as disengaged from Egyptian society as the militant nationalists and materialists thought, nor were the *mutamassirun* as linked to European imperial and economic policies as colonialists and royalists have asserted.

### Chapter 3

## ***Colonia in Colonia***

The question of shifting identities among the Italian *mutamassir* colony in Egypt was not the only problem Italy faced as it bolstered its Mediterranean presence in preparation for its invasion of Libya. In practice, Italy had little actual direct control over its global emigrant colonies since these communities were established in dozens of different sovereign nations, ruled by varying systems of law and ideology. Nations that hosted Italian emigrants could (and often did) easily resist efforts of Italianization and protective measures were often enacted to force immigrant assimilation, thus undermining Italy's foreign policy. Italian emigrant colonies were limited by their host nations; the Italian government was unable to interfere directly in the affairs of the various host nations. Italy, as a sending state, "could only create an open, indirect, and adaptive policy for emigrants, relying upon persuasion, incentives, and sometimes deception."<sup>1</sup> Unlike other host nations like the United States, Argentina, or France, which were independent and sovereign states, Egypt was a colonial protectorate, a *de facto* colony under British administration. While the Italian government could try to work directly with the American or Argentinian governments to lobby for

1. Choate, 15.

Italian issues, in Egypt they were forced to work indirectly with Britain, who more or less controlled the khedival throne.

## **British imperial primacy in Egypt**

Nearly every European nation had some measure of interest in the Ottoman Empire in general. Starting in the 1500s, the French won a series of legal and economic concessions which guaranteed freedom of movement throughout the empire, regulated French trade according to French law rather than local laws, exempted French businesses from all taxes and duties, ensured inviolability of domicile, and established separate legal and judicial systems. Other European powers quickly followed suit and used the French precedent to acquire their own capitulatory privileges, such that by the nineteenth century, European powers effectively had *imperia in imperio*, or empires within an empire.<sup>2</sup> Following the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s, Europe was able to take advantage of these Capitulations and flood the Ottoman market with products free from protective tariffs. For example, in the 1840s in French-influenced Damascus the indigenous textile industry faced an enormous economic challenge in the face of European commercial advantages. Imported Swiss fabrics woven in faux Damascene patterns were sold for 2 piasters per meter while equivalent indigenous Syrian cloth sold for 4-5 times that amount.<sup>3</sup> Capitulatory protections from tariffs on cloth directly impacted the price of the cloth, which in turn had a

2. James B. Angell, "The Turkish Capitulations," *The American Historical Review* 6, no. 2 (Jan. 1901): 254-259, 256.

3. Sherry Vatter, "Journeymen Textile Weavers in Nineteenth-Century Damsacus: A Collective Biography," chap. 5, in *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Edmund Burke, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 83.

negative impact on Syrian society, often leading to market failures or even violent massacres.<sup>4</sup>

Egypt, as part of the Ottoman Empire, was not immune to the effects of the Capitulations. Because of its large size and its vast agricultural and commercial potential, Egypt was a battleground for competing European interests. Much like Syria, in the early 1800s the Egyptian cloth industry faced intense pressure from tariff-free French, Austrian, and British textiles, which led to the collapse of Egyptian cloth production for export or local consumption by 1820.<sup>5</sup> As European powers gained economic primacy in Egypt they began to vie for influence in the government, especially as Mohammed Ali embarked on his program of military and political reforms. The Greeks were particularly close to the Ottoman viceroy—Mohammed Ali was close to the Tossizza family in Alexandria and granted them special business deals and appointed them to political offices.<sup>6</sup> As the Greeks grew in power, Britain faced stiff competition: because of ““their restless activity, their knowledge of the Levantine languages, and their unscrupulous manner of doing business,’ Greek merchants were driving native Englishmen out of the field.”<sup>7</sup> Italians, helped by the Capitulations, also gained favor with the khedival regime and secured political and economic advantages. Ludovico Colucci was appointed as court doctor;<sup>8</sup> Antonio Colucci

4. See Bruce Masters, “The 1850 Events in Aleppo: An Aftershock of Syria’s Incorporation into the Capitalist World System,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 1 (Feb. 1990): 3–20.

5. Fred H. Lawson, “Rural Revolt and Provincial Society in Egypt, 1820–1824,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 2 (May 1981): 131–153, 142.

6. Michael J. Reimer, *Colonial Bridgehead: Government and Society in Alexandria, 1807–1882* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 84.

7. *Ibid.*, 85, citing FO 142/15, Murray to Palmerston, Cairo, December 1, 1851.

8. Ettore Rossi, “Gl’Italiani in Egitto,” chap. 4, in *Egitto Moderno* (Roma: Edizioni Roma, 1939), 80.

chaired the Egypt Commission on Health for nearly two decades;<sup>9</sup> Licurgo Santoni became director of the Egyptian postal system in Upper Egypt;<sup>10</sup> Paternosto Bey held a “high position” in the Egyptian foreign ministry;<sup>11</sup> Federico Amici-Bey was head of the khedival Office of Statistics in the Ministry of Finance from 1876–1883 and appointed his close friend, Giuseppe Randone, as his successor.<sup>12</sup> Firmly entrenched in the government and legally protected by the provisions of the Capitulations, these Europeans had immense power over the local administration of Egypt.

The influence of various European powers in Egypt waxed and waned throughout the nineteenth century, each attempting to gain the ear of the khedive while reducing potential competition from their European rivals. Gradually, European business interests, protected by the Capitulations, led to increased control of the Egyptian government, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal, the construction of which placed an immense debt on the Egyptian government and led to the institution of French and British Dual Control in 1876. Additionally, in May 1876, France, Italy, and Austria established the Commission of the Public Debt, which established the terms of repayment of the Suez debt. As each European *imperium in imperio* encroached further on khedival sovereignty, the risk of intra-European conflicts heightened, giving rise to “a new system of intrigues, of conflicting ambitions, of suspicions and jealousies” among the

9. Rossi, 80.

10. Ibid., 81.

11. Ibid., 81.

12. Balboni, II: 265–66, 269–70.

European powers in Egypt.<sup>13</sup> Britain especially feared occupying Egypt directly because of concerns that such an action would lead to direct conflict with France and Italy.<sup>14</sup>

This uncertain atmosphere of jealous uncertainty lasted until 1881, when a nascent national Egyptian movement, driven by “the desire to emancipate themselves” from the heavy debt incurred by capitulatory concessions,<sup>15</sup> revolted under the leadership of General Ahmed ‘Urabi. European diplomats, investors, merchants, and residents in Egypt feared losing their property, their influence, and more importantly their capitulatory privileges.<sup>16</sup> In July 1882 Britain, proclaiming that it was acting in defense of all Europeans in Egypt, bombarded Alexandria and invaded the mainland. Armed with the newly invented Gatling machine gun, British marines quickly destroyed the nationalist movement and took control of the entire country. Following the eight-week conflict, the British held a grand parade in Cairo that spectacularly vaunted British technical and military prowess. The parade was symbolic—“more than a mere spectacle, the display of arms demonstrated to an ‘Eastern population’ [and rival European powers] the effectiveness and authority of Britain’s military occupation.”<sup>17</sup> With its victory over the ‘Urabi Revolt, Britain asserted itself as the indisputable European colonial ruler in Egypt, simultaneously fortifying European capitulatory privileges and putting an end to the fragile system of European jealousies that

13. R. C. Mowat, “From Liberalism to Imperialism: The Case of Egypt 1875-1887,” *The Historical Journal* 16, no. 1 (Mar. 1973): 109-124, 111.

14. *Ibid.*, 110-11.

15. Reimer, *Colonial Bridgehead*, 170.

16. Juan Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt’s ‘Urabi Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 281.

17. Mitchell, 128-29.



previously determined European involvement in Egypt. Italian, Greek, and French *mutamassir* involvement in the Egyptian government declined sharply as British colonial officials filled their positions; one Italian historian and former lawyer in the Mixed Court system wrote that after the British occupation “the ranks of [Italian bureaucrats] thinned and in many departments you could count the number of Italians on your fingers.”<sup>18</sup> The arrangement of European *imperia in imperium* thus transformed into European *coloniae in colonia*, or colonies within a colony—any “lesser” European power had to pursue its colonial interests within the British colonial protectorate of Egypt.

### **Italian imperialism within a British colony**

As discussed previously, Italy’s strategy in Egypt in the early twentieth century was twofold: (1) strengthen the *italianità* of its emigrant expatriate colony, and (2) use Egypt’s central location and political clout as a base for spreading pro-Italian propaganda throughout the region in preparation for the impending colonial invasion of Libya. As Italy pursued this dual mission it was constrained to act within the framework of British protectorate, follow British rules, and give general deference to Britain, the clear colonial ruler. Whenever the Italian government attempted to engage the khedive directly in matters related to Italian colonial and imperial pursuits, the Italian foreign ministry was forced to ensure that their political goals in Egypt did not disrupt the colonial balance and consequently infringe upon British power. Three diplomatic incidents in early

18. Edoardo D. Bigiavi, *Noi e l’Egitto* (Livorno: San Belforte, E. C., 1911), 16.

1910 exemplify the tightrope that the Italian government was forced to walk as it attempted to pursue its own colonial interests within the British colony.

Banco di Roma was unique among Italian banks of the early twentieth century. For decades Italian banks generally had some measure of international presence, especially as Italian emigration skyrocketed in the late nineteenth century, but the majority of these branches, mostly subsidiaries of the larger Banco di Napoli, were non-profit branches charged with receiving remittances from emigrant workers abroad. Banco di Roma was founded in 1880 with substantial capital from the Vatican, and was the first Italian financial institution to establish for-profit branches internationally. Two years after starting a Parisian branch, in 1904 Banco di Roma opened an office in Alexandria. Following the success of these two international divisions, the bank quickly built up a “ring of gold” that encircled the Mediterranean basin, with offices in Cairo, Malta, and Madrid.<sup>19</sup> The Italian government soon realized that the bank could contribute to Italy’s goal of increased economic influence in the Mediterranean, and Banco di Roma was adopted as “the Italian government’s chosen instrument to carry out its policy of ‘peaceful penetration.’”<sup>20</sup> Like much of Italy’s foreign policy at the time, the bank’s activities and investments throughout the Mediterranean often served a dual purpose: beyond basic banking and investments, Banco di Roma was used to spread Italian influence. This was especially true in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, where the bank pursued the bulk of its economic development projects—it even went so far as to build its Tripoli branch inside the Roman

19. Grange, II:1407.

20. Timothy Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya: 1911-1912* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 32.

Victory Arch of Marcus Aurelius, a symbolic declaration of Italy's economic imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean.<sup>21</sup> Banco di Roma's investments in Libya were wide reaching and comprehensive. The bank financed a steamship company, *La Navigazione Generale Italiana*, which ran regular service between Malta, Tripoli, Benghazi, Alexandria, and Istanbul. The bank oversaw and subsidized the construction of a railroad line connecting Tripoli and Alexandria, in addition to numerous other public works projects ranging from the construction of a telegraph system between Western Egypt and Cyrenaica, to investment in new agricultural techniques in Libya, to the digging of phosphate mines in Egypt's Western Desert.<sup>22</sup>

At the end of April 1910 a representative of Banco di Roma, Enrico Bresciani, travelled to Cairo to hold a private audience with Khedive 'Abbas Helmi II. The khedive had expressed interest in becoming involved with some of Banco di Roma's development plans, specifically those projects, such as phosphate mining and the railroad, that dealt with Egypt directly. The Italian consul-general in Cairo, G. De Martino, hurriedly wrote to the foreign minister, Marquis Antonio di San Giuliano, expressing his concern over their meeting. He warned that any visible cooperation between the khedive and Banco di Roma would be a grave political error.<sup>23</sup> Because Banco di Roma was perceived (and acted) as an arm of the Italian government, the khedive's cooperation in Italian colonialist projects would signal to Egypt and the British government that he

21. Choate, 173.

22. Grange, II:1436-44.

23. De Martino to San Giuliano, letter, Apr. 20, 1910, in *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (1908-1914)*, vol. 5/6, ed. Edoardo Del Vecchio, quarta serie (11 Dicembre 1909-29 Marzo 1911) (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 2001) (henceforth cited as DDI IV), 228-29 (no. 228).

was working with Italy. De Martino feared that this would in turn result in a loss of Italian moral position within Egypt, as Egyptians would see their ruler working with a European power in neighboring Libya, an action that smacked of imperialism. Moreover, both the khedive and the Italian foreign ministry were restricted by the British, who, as the khedive's colonial backers, also would have been implicated in an Italian imperial endeavor. Understanding these risks, De Martino suggested to San Giuliano that they ensure that no agreement be made between the khedive and Banco di Roma.<sup>24</sup> San Giuliano contacted the head of the bank in Rome and commanded him to call off Bresciani and avoid any investment deals with the khedive beyond the mining and railroad projects, which took place entirely in Egypt. He then instructed De Martino to keep a close watch on Bresciani during his visit to confirm that no clandestine agreements were reached.<sup>25</sup> While the additional Egyptian capital would have been beneficial for the bank's development projects in Libya, which would have then furthered Italy's plans of regional economic "peaceful penetration," the risk of embroiling the khedive, and by extension the British, in these plans was too great. Italy was thus restricted in its own imperial plans by its status as a colony-within-a-colony in British Egypt.

Italy was also limited by Britain's power in the arena of high level royal politics. On April 29, 1910 the khedive informed De Martino that he was planning to travel to London and Paris the coming summer, and that presumably on the basis of his ongoing undisclosed collaboration with Italian plans for

24. De Martino to San Giuliano, see n. 23.

25. San Giuliano to De Martino, letter, 1007, Apr. 28, 1910, in DDI IV, 250 (no. 241).

economic development in Egypt and Libya, he desired to have an audience with King Vittorio Emanuele III in Italy. De Martino wrote to San Giuliano with his full approval, stating that “given the high level of British interference in his government, the khedive would be able to address many important issues”<sup>26</sup> free from the direct influence of London. Meeting with ‘Abbas outside of Egypt would allow the Italian government to work directly with the khedive, thus avoiding the pitfalls of pursuing their own imperial ambitions within the British protectorate. Further, De Martino continued, such a royal visit would make an excellent impression on both the Italian colony in Egypt and the indigenous population.<sup>27</sup> The visit would demonstrate the cordial relationship between the two nations and promote Italy’s image as a benevolent European power while showing that the khedive was not beholden to British and French influence alone.

San Giuliano responded positively the next day, but his brief reply subtly highlights the foremost drawback to within the British colonial system: “You may inform the khedive that His Majesty will be happy to receive his visit next summer. *I have already advised the British government of our intentions* and they have indicated that are most pleased that the khedive will be visiting the king of Italy.”<sup>28</sup> Even though De Martino had cast the khedive’s forthcoming visit to Italy as an opportunity to get around British restrictions, San Giuliano was forced to go through the British diplomatic filter and inform the British of their plans. As the British were in charge of the Egyptian colony, they had to give their blessing

26. De Martino to San Giuliano, letter, 1326/28, Apr. 29, 1910, in DDI IV, 251 (no. 243).

27. Ibid.

28. San Giuliano to De Martino, letter, 1041, Apr. 30, 1910, in DDI IV, 252-53 (no. 246), emphasis added.

to both the khedive and the Italian foreign ministry for any meeting to occur. Despite this limitation, San Giuliano arranged for the visit to take place during the last two weeks of July at the royal summer palace in Racconigi.

One week later, on May 6, Britain's King Edward VII died, which further complicated the scheduled khedival visit. Because of 'Abbas's colonial relationship with Britain, it was necessary that he visit the British court before visiting Italy for symbolic reasons—Egypt's true ruler was Britain. The purpose of his initial itinerary was precisely to visit Britain; his stopover in Racconigi was planned as an afterthought to his larger European tour. Now that the king had died, though, the only reason for the khedive to travel to London would be to attend the funeral and George V's subsequent coronation ceremony. 'Abbas had confided to De Martino, though, that he wanted to do everything possible to avoid the coronation, because in the ceremonial procession "he would be presented as the last of all the kings";<sup>29</sup> as merely a khedive he was at the bottom of Britain's imperial hierarchy, and thus wanted to avoid embarrassment at the ceremony. Additionally, Sir Eldon Gorst, the British consul-general, counseled 'Abbas to postpone any visits to London for the remainder of the year, out of respect for the mourning royal family. The khedive consequently had no reason to travel to England and accordingly cancelled his summer visit to Vittorio Emanuele, asking to reschedule it for the following summer.

De Martino, who had been so enthusiastic about the planned regal visit, met with Gorst to see if other arrangements could be made. Gorst confirmed

29. De Martino to San Giuliano, letter, 720/256, May 27, 1910, in DDI IV, 309–310 (no. 298).

that he had indeed asked the khedive to not visit London until the next year, but that ‘Abbas was free to visit Italy without traveling to Britain first. However, the khedive later confided to De Martino that while Gorst had given him permission to travel, he felt that the British preferred he not go. Both De Martino and ‘Abbas agreed that a visit dedicated entirely to the Italian king would lead to “false political interpretations” that would give “political significance to his visit to the king of Italy, and would show that the British king had not wanted to receive the khedive.”<sup>30</sup> Neither Italy nor ‘Abbas could act beyond the colonial framework established by Britain—the khedive had to meet with the British court first as a symbolic gesture of who was truly in power in Egypt. Italy had no place in Britain’s imperial plans and thus could not take the attention of the British-backed khedive. De Martino lamented this turn of events, writing that “the planned visit had an undeniable moral importance, and it was a reaffirmation of Italy’s moral position in Egypt—a distinguished status that must be maintained for the sake of our traditions in this country and in the interest of our businesses and our colony.”<sup>31</sup> The visit would have reinforced Italian-Egyptian ties, promoting Italy’s image as an impartial, benevolent European power that stood outside the British colonial structure, which would in turn both bolster Egyptian public opinion of the local Italian colony and help create consent among the Italian-Egyptians regarding the impending Libyan undertaking. Italy’s position as a colony-within-a-colony, however, severely limited what diplomatic policies it could undertake, as Britain remained the predominant European power in Egypt.

30. De Martino to San Giuliano, see n. 29.

31. *Ibid.*

In both of the previous examples, Britain was a passive actor; Italy exercised self-restraint because of their fear of going against British desires and thus compromising the delicate situation of their colony within British Egypt. One final example demonstrates that this was not always the case. Britain understood well that Italy was in a precarious position and at times took advantage of their political supremacy to force Italy's hand in Egypt. While Italy had substantial influence in the Mediterranean Basin and the Red Sea Coast in East Africa, it lacked emigrant colonies and official diplomatic presence in the remainder of Africa. In February 1910 the Italian military attaché to British Sudan, Cav. Rossetti, floated the idea of building an official Italian consulate in Khartoum to Reginald Wingate, the governor-general of Sudan. Sensing an opportunity, Wingate accepted Rossetti's proposal, on the condition that Italy first recognize and ratify the Anglo-Egyptian agreement of 1899<sup>32</sup>—the treaty that established the controversial Anglo-Egyptian Condominium in Sudan and which granted Britain *de facto* and *de jure* rights to govern Sudan almost independently, uninhibited by interference from other European powers.<sup>33</sup> While the Anglo-Egyptian agreement had already been in place for eleven years, many European nations with interests in Egypt and the rest of the Ottoman Empire, including Italy, hesitated to ratify it, worried of the consequences that would follow their outright support of British expansion.

Rossetti conveyed this possible deal to De Martino and then-foreign minister Francesco Guicciardini, San Giuliano's outgoing predecessor, who

32. De Martino to Guicciardini, letter, 258/102, Mar. 2, 1910, in DDI IV, 165–67 (no. 151).

33. Randolph Gherson, "The Anglo-Egyptian Question," *Middle East Journal* 7, no. 4 (1953): 456–483, 463–464.



both ardently rejected Rossetti's idea. De Martino understood that Egyptian public opinion, especially the rising nationalist movement, cared deeply about the political future of Sudan. Any recognition of the 1899 agreement "would inevitably be interpreted as Italian acquiescence to British power," and that as a result, such an endorsement "would produce a hostile, and even damaging, impression towards our moral position and our plans of influence in Egypt... including our prosperous colonies."<sup>34</sup> San Giuliano, who had just taken Guicciardini's post, agreed, stating that caving to these British demands would "hurt Italy's material and moral interests, especially for the Italians residing in Egypt."<sup>35</sup> The issue of the Italian consulate in Sudan was quickly dropped.

A consulate in Sudan would have been beneficial; it can be assumed that Rossetti's initial proposition was likely not simply a rogue, off-the-cuff idea, but one that was influenced by a larger Italian strategy. Somalia and Eritrea were far removed from Egypt and Libya, where Italy had dedicated considerable political and economic capital to furtively spread its agenda of cultural and moral superiority. Having an increased Italian presence in Khartoum would help bridge the wide land gap between the Horn of Africa and Egypt, thus geographically unifying all of Italy's emigrant and direct colonies. The British clearly understood this as well, evidenced by their offer of consulate real estate in exchange for Italian recognition of the unpopular Anglo-Egyptian agreement. Britain attempted to use their power to compel Italy into submitting to British colonial order and Italy, limited in its bargaining power by the fear of losing their moral and

34. De Martino to Guicciardini, see n. 32.

35. San Giuliano to De Martino, letter, 25, Apr. 7, 1910, in DDI IV, 213-14 (no. 203).

cultural prominence in Egypt, was thus forced to change its Sudanese strategy. In all three of the aforementioned cases Italy's intended goals were stymied by British interests. Italy was thus limited in its ability to directly influence the Egyptian public through diplomatic channels, as Britain more or less controlled the khedival throne. However, because of the commercial infrastructure of their Italian colony, the foreign ministry was able to partially circumvent the British colonial organization through the use of the press.

## Chapter 4

# Italy and the Press

In June 1911, Sheikh Ali Ahmed al-Girgawy and Mohammed Amin established a new newspaper in Cairo: *al-Irshad*. Amin, a former railway commissioner and son of a wealthy Egyptian man, possessed enough capital to purchase a printing press, lease a building, and finance the endeavor, and subsequently became *al-Irshad*'s self-nominated administrator. Although little else is known about him, according to the Italian embassy al-Girgawy provided some of the paper's ideological and editorial voice as the primary founder.<sup>1</sup>

The paper was written in Arabic and had a pronounced nationalist tone and agenda. One author, writing under the pseudonym Abou Galambo, was most likely Amin Omar al-Baghoury,<sup>2</sup> a former editor of *Misr al-Fatat*, which was a well known and powerful Egyptian nationalist organization. Another contributor to the paper was Sayed Ali, a friend of al-Baghoury and former editor of *al-Liwa*, one of the earliest nationalist papers in Egypt. Ali was a politico known for his aggressive, and at times violent, opinions and reporting.<sup>3</sup>

1. Grimani to San Giuliano, letter, 1131/402, June 24, 1911, Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Ambasciata al Cairo collection, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma (henceforth cited as ASDMAE AC), 124:1911, 4.

2. Summary and analysis of *al-Irshad*, report, June 24, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 1911:124, 1.

3. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 1, 4.

*Al-Irshad*, albeit well-financed and fully staffed, never managed to distribute any issues. Its first edition was seized by Egyptian authorities because the paper had failed to obtain proper legal authorization—rather, was outrightly denied permission—under the Egyptian press law of 1881. As part of its militant nationalist agenda, *al-Irshad* openly flaunted the fact that it attempted to publish in the face of government restrictions.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, while *al-Irshad*'s boasted breach of law prevented the actual delivery of the paper, the business apparatus of the paper was not closed immediately. The paper remained in a sort of legal limbo for months after the initial closure due to a peculiar, but not uncommon, legal technicality.

While Amin's financial assets were most likely sufficient to cover the costs of the Egyptian nationalist paper, *al-Irshad*'s official legal owner and financier was an Italian man named Luigi Pignatin. Because Pignatin, a foreigner, was involved with the paper, *al-Irshad* was not beholden to Egyptian press laws—only the Italian foreign ministry and the local mixed courts could make any legal move against it. However, since the paper was run by Egyptians, the Italian foreign ministry was hesitant to launch any suit against it, fearing any damage to Italian reputation in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Pignatin admittedly “didn't understand a word” of Arabic, did not give any money to the paper, and stated that he was uninterested in what the paper might print.<sup>6</sup> The subsequent flurry of diplomatic, parliamentary, and

4. Summary and analysis of *al-Irshad*, 2.

5. San Giuliano to Grimani, letter, 1479, Div. 3, Sez. 2, N. 37, Pos. 103, July 15, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 124:1911, 2.

6. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 1, 2.

legal maneuvers to shut down “his” paper, provides insight into Italy’s discreet colonial role in Egypt.

This chapter will examine Italy’s varying strategies of working with the Egyptian and Italian presses in Cairo before and throughout its invasion of Libya. Italy’s strategy for working with the presses varied widely. At times, to avoid implication in complicated legal cases that could compromise what Italy often perceived as their high moral and cultural position, the Italian government sought to distance itself from potential controversy. At other times the foreign ministry and Italian legation in Cairo used the press to launch overt campaigns of propaganda. In many cases, Italy sought to censure, shut down, or even buy out newspapers that wrote against Italian policy. Control of the press became a dynamic behind-the-scenes battleground led by the Italian Foreign Ministry. While Italian involvement with the press varied in substance and circumstance, it always had the same scope: (1) build and maintain Italian cultural and political prestige, and (2) manufacture consent for the Libyan invasion in both the Egyptian and expatriate Italian communities.

## **Press laws, Mixed Courts, and Italian embarrassment**

In late June 1911, before *al-Irshad* began printing, Luigi Pignatin visited Count Grimani, the chargé d’affaires at the Italian embassy in Cairo. His visit was unexpected, as was the news Pignatin brought. Pignatin related to the count that several Egyptians had approached him about opening a local newspaper and establishing Pignatin as the owner. They promised him “certain benefits” in reward for his participation. Pignatin announced to Grimani that he had decided

to back up their enterprise wholeheartedly and that he was already assisting the Egyptians with their new publication<sup>7</sup>

A perturbed Grimani confronted Pignatin in an attempt to dissuade him from continuing with his plans. He explained that the benefits he was promised were mitigated by the fact that he was “selling his own nationality, placing it in the service of interests and matters that had no business meddling with,” and that by doing so, he could cause “irreparable damages” to Italy’s good international relations and standing in Egypt. On Thursday, June 22, Grimani called Pignatin back to the embassy for a second meeting with both himself and the Italian judicial consular officer. The judge warned Pignatin that anything he wrote, or rather, allowed to be written, would fall under Italian national laws, and that he “would not hesitate to apply those laws to him.”<sup>8</sup> The embassy’s pleas fell on deaf ears—Pignatin’s only response was that he would “think about it.”<sup>9</sup>

Two days later, on Saturday, June 24, the Egyptian chief of police visited the embassy to ask for assistance and advice regarding a criminal case they sought to open against Pignatin. The first issues of *al-Irshad* had been printed and were being stored at Pignatin’s house. Despite the embassy’s anger at Pignatin’s insistence on working with a renegade Egyptian newspaper, Grimani was legally constrained to give legal protection to Pignatin because of the mixed court system, which will be described at greater length shortly. The Egyptian police,

7. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 1, 2.

8. *Ibid.*, 2.

9. *Ibid.*, 3.

therefore, were unable to take possession of the illegal papers—any Egyptian move against Pignatin “would have constituted an arbitrary and illegal act.”<sup>10</sup>

While Egyptian authorities were unable to sequester the newspaper in Pignatin’s house, by Sunday morning they had successfully confiscated all copies of *al-Irshad* by seizing its issues from the newsstands and other local sellers.<sup>11</sup> Immediately following the police requisition, Pignatin returned to the embassy in a panic. He asked Grimani what he should do, but Grimani merely reminded him of their previous discussions. He stated that since the confiscation had not taken place inside Pignatin’s home, the Egyptian police had done nothing wrong and that the embassy would not get involved. He repeated the same threat levied by the consular judge, declaring that the embassy would examine his case to see if it fell under Italian legal jurisdiction, and if so, that his case would be prosecuted to the fullest.<sup>12</sup> Pignatin left the embassy alone, having lost all potential Italian legal and moral support.

Regardless of Grimani’s legal threats, neither the Italian embassy nor the Egyptian police could do much about Pignatin. Grimani had unofficially charged Pignatin with ignorantly supporting a foreign newspaper, thus harming Italy’s international reputation and global relationships, but that was his only crime. *Al-Irshad* had not published anything against Italy *per se*—Pignatin’s wrong lay in the fact that he put Italian national reputation at risk. The Italian government could either lend their compatriot’s name (and by extension their national backing) to the illegal Egyptian nationalist movement, or it could step in and

10. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 1, 3.

11. *Ibid.*, 3.

12. *Ibid.*, 4.

forcibly shut down the paper, which could be misinterpreted as an anti-nationalist and anti-Egyptian move.

The Egyptian police became involved after Pignatin allowed the first issues to be distributed, but their action was merely a temporary stopgap. Although it was run by Egyptian nationalists like al-Girgawy, al-Baghoury, Sayed Ali, and Mohammed Amin, Egyptian authorities were unable to fully shut down *al-Irshad* because Pignatin was a European. Under Egyptian law, established under the auspices of the British colonial administration, *al-Irshad* was thus considered “Italian” and fell under the jurisdiction of the mixed courts.

The phenomenon of the Egyptian mixed courts created a parallel legal system for foreigners or institutions with foreign backing. The mixed courts were originally established in 1876 after an intense process of negotiations, spearheaded by an Armenian Egyptian politician, Nubar Pasha. Nubar Pasha recognized a gap in the existing pre-colonial legal system—Egyptians could sue other Egyptians in local courts while Europeans could bring other Europeans to court in each country’s respective consular court, but cases involving both Europeans and Egyptians lacked a distinct legal locus. In cases involving international parties it was unclear which consular court had full jurisdiction—in cases involving Egyptians, Europeans were almost universally favored.<sup>13</sup> Nubar Pasha proposed the institution of a mixed court system, which would consist of a council of both European and Egyptian judges, and would be presided over by a European on a rotating basis. Under Nubar Pasha’s plan, the mixed courts

13. F. Robert Hunter, *Egypt Under the Khedives, 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), 174-75.



would be endowed with the authority to take up ambiguous international cases and execute their subsequent mandates.<sup>14</sup>

Nubar Pasha sought to bring the primary antagonists, Khedive Isma'il and the largest European powers, France and Britain, to a consensus in order to repair what he considered a broken legal system. Isma'il was willing to concede more European judicial power: because the new mixed courts would be co-chaired by Egyptian judges, they "offered [Egyptians] the prospect of rulings more favorable than those issued by foreign consuls" in international cases.<sup>15</sup> The European powers were far more reluctant, as they feared a loss in the economic privileges granted them by the Capitulations, a series of Ottoman laws that gave special legal and commercial privileges to European powers. Some in the Italian community in Cairo feared the proposed legal reforms, claiming that they would destroy the privileged legal position of all foreign colonies in Egypt.<sup>16</sup>

Eventually, though, the European powers came to see the mixed court proposal as a possible means of circumventing Isma'il's legal authority. After nine years Nubar Pasha had gained the consent of 14 European capitulatory powers, including Italy, who all reluctantly signed a contract for a five-year provisional period of mixed court rule,<sup>17</sup> thus creating a judiciary system that was "altogether independent of the existing political regime."<sup>18</sup> After the preliminary five-year trial period, each capitulatory power was responsible

14. Nathan J. Brown, "The Precarious Life and Slow Death of the Mixed Courts of Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 1 (Feb. 1993): 33-52, 34-36.

15. *Ibid.*, 35.

16. Jasper Yeates Brinton, *The Mixed Courts of Egypt* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1930), 30.

17. *Ibid.*, 41.

18. *Ibid.*, xxiv.

for renewing its quinquennial contract—failure to do so resulted in temporary suspension from the court. While bureaucratic delays occasionally obstructed the renewal process—Italy was suspended for a few days in 1916—<sup>19</sup>with rare exceptions, the capitulatory powers continued to renew their mixed court charters until the agreement to begin phasing out the mixed court and capitulatory system in 1937.

While each European power gave continuing consent for the mixed courts, their support was at best tenuous—the mixed courts in reality “were constantly threatened with abolition and lived precariously throughout their history,”<sup>20</sup> and powers often threatened to withhold their renewal as they bargained to secure future legal privileges.<sup>21</sup> While the mixed courts did provide the capitulatory powers with some loopholes in dealing with Egyptian cases, many of the powers continued to object to what they perceived as limitations on their capitulatory rights. As for the Egyptians, Isma‘il quickly realized that the courts had actually empowered the foreign powers, and Egyptian peasants resented the sentiment that Egyptians became foreigners in their own country;<sup>22</sup> the courts became one of the grievances of the nationalistic 1881–82 ‘Urabi Revolt.<sup>23</sup>

The British occupation of Egypt following the ‘Urabi Revolt further complicated the issue of the mixed courts and their relationship to the Capitulations. Because so many other European powers had vested economic

19. Brinton, 43.

20. Brown, 34.

21. Byron Cannon, *Politics of Law and the Courts of Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 204–5, 210, 215–19.

22. Cole, 65–66.

23. Brown, 34.

interests in Egypt, the British were hesitant to destroy the capitulatory privileges in their new Egyptian protectorate. On the other hand, if they themselves remained subject to the capitulatory mixed courts, they would inherently limit themselves in their control of Egyptian affairs.<sup>24</sup> Rather than resolve this political and legal quagmire, the British kept an ambivalent policy regarding the mixed courts. They sought to minimize their own national involvement in the courts while simultaneously attempting to strengthen the courts, hoping to placate the less-powerful European powers. Under the new British regime, most European powers, including Italy, were much more willing to adhere to the mixed courts, since the courts became “the firmest guarantee”<sup>25</sup> of continued capitulatory privileges under British colonial rule.

After the British occupation of 1882, Italy continued to participate in the mixed court system as a pseudo-colonial capitulatory power. As explained in the introduction, while Italy did have a sizable community of expatriates and emigrants in Egypt, their primary concern and goal was neighboring Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, or Libya. Egypt served as the backdoor to Libya; the Italian government sought to prepare and control as much of the future campaign as possible from Cairo. As part of this strategy, Italy built up its image as a benevolent center of refined culture, disinterested in the economic subjugation of Egypt and the rest of the region, while at the same time preparing a campaign of propaganda to convince the region of the necessity of invading Libya. The mixed courts presented a dilemma for this Italian strategy. Italy wanted to remain

24. Brown, 36.

25. *Ibid.*, 38.

involved with the courts since the system gave them good legal and economic leverage against Britain and since, as stated previously, the courts guaranteed Italian capitulatory rights. On the other hand, to many Egyptian observers, the courts often appeared “as a product of foreign influence in Egypt and a limitation on Egyptian sovereignty”—some even went as far as to describe them as a “crime against humanity.”<sup>26</sup> Italy was forced to balance its legal endeavors in the mixed courts between privilege and public opinion. The press was a particularly vulnerable spot in Italy’s balancing act. Italy wanted to avoid being associated with the Egyptian nationalist movement, the principal group to use the mixed courts to circumvent Egyptian law, while also avoiding being seen as an oppressive colonial power that got involved in the minutiae of closing down native journalistic endeavors.

By 1911 cases like Pignatin’s were hardly anomalies. Egyptians often created companies and incorporated newspapers with minimal European presence to avoid Egyptian prosecution, thus throwing their cases into the politically fraught mixed courts. The Italian government especially resented getting involved with such nominal cases, given their undisclosed ambitions for the direct colonization of Libya. On March 25, 1909, the Italian foreign ministry sent a verbal note to the Khedival foreign affairs office, declaring that the Italian embassy would no longer use the mixed courts to prosecute issues regarding the press, but that instead, the Egyptian press law should be fully applicable to all “respected newspapers published either in Arabic or European languages”

26. Brown, 33.

in Egypt.<sup>27</sup> The note further proposed that any Italian wishing to establish a newspaper would need to go through the formalities of registration with the Egypt bureaucracy, thus disavowing the Italian consulate (and by extension the potentially embarrassing mixed courts) of all responsibility in dealing with any renegade publications. Not wanting to lose control over its legitimate press interests, however, the note included one stipulation: while the Egyptians would be responsible for enforcing press legislation for the Italian community, it would be unable to “prevent an Italian publishing a newspaper when its application [is] supported by the [diplomatic] representative of Italy.”<sup>28</sup> In essence, the 1909 verbal note sought to remove Italian responsibility over awkward mixed court trials while maintaining Italian control over any press endeavors they felt worthy of Italian support.

In July 1910 Marquis Antonio di San Giuliano, the Italian foreign minister, submitted the issue of the Egyptian press law and the mixed courts during the summer parliamentary session. Acting on behalf of the embassy in Egypt, he brought forth a short piece of legislation consisting of two articles. The first was procedural—the quinquennial renewal of Italy’s adherence to the mixed court charter for the period of 1911–1916. The second article, however, was tendentious. It aimed to give the 1909 verbal note the full backing of Italian law, proposing that the Italian government would give its consent to apply the Egyptian press law to Italians living in Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

27. Nota verbale diretta al Ministero Khediviale degli Affari Esteri dalla Regia Agenzia Diplomatica d’Italia, handwritten note, Nov. 29, 1909, ASDMAE AC, 124:1911.

28. Ibid.

29. “Disegno di legge,” Camera dei Deputati–Atti Parlamentari No. 589, Legisl. XXIII — Sess. 1909–10 — Documenti — Disegni di legge e relazioni, draft legislation, July 4, 1910, ASDMAE AC, 124:1911, 3.

In the accompanying legislative summary, San Giuliano admitted that allowing for one Egyptian law to be applied to Italians exceptionally would concede some measure of capitulatory privilege and could possibly undermine the future legitimacy of the mixed courts. However, he argued that benefits of ending the continuing abuses of the press law in the mixed courts outweighed the potential damages. He held that with the passing of this new law “the abuses which expose the system of capitulations to not unfounded critiques will cease, while our colonies in Egypt will face no detriment.”<sup>30</sup> Legally established newspapers would be associated with the Italian consulate while the Egyptian government would face the task of reining in any dissenting or renegade paper. The Italian government would no longer need to embroil itself in native (or partially native) affairs, and could thus continue its strategy of benevolent pseudo-colonial influence.

The legislation remained locked in parliamentary procedure and debate until June 1911, and during the intervening months, Italian policies and ambitions for a Libyan invasion were intensified. A powerful press campaign of propaganda started in Italy in the early spring of 1911,<sup>31</sup> and as will be seen shortly, that campaign spilled over into the Italian press in Egypt. The fact that the Italian government wanted to distance itself from potentially embarrassing and damaging legal cases in dealing with local press cases in the mixed courts just as the official Italian press campaign was launched is indicative their desire to retain their perceived positive public opinion. The Egyptian press law was passed

30. See n. 29, 2.

31. Childs, 38, 54.

in 1881—it was not until 1909, months before the Libyan invasion, that the Italian government decided to tackle the latent legal embarrassments.

The result of the final vote on the measure shocked the Cairo embassy. On June 11, 1911 parliament agreed to extend the contract with the mixed courts, but rejected the proposal to apply Egyptian press laws to Italian citizens.<sup>32</sup> Evidently the risks of losing capitulatory privileges outbalanced the impossible desire of the Italian embassy to only deal with the “good” papers—parliament did not want to allow for piecemeal exceptions to the mixed court system and only apply Egyptian laws *ad hoc*.

The controversy over Pignatin and *al-Irshad* began only days after the Italian parliament announced the new legislation, thus stymieing Grimani’s hopes of remaining transparent and uninvolved in it and future local disputes. In one letter to Ahmed Heshmat Pasha, the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs in Alexandria, Grimani complained that while 1909 verbal note had successfully given the Italian embassy an unofficial legal loophole for several months, the Italian government had effectively taken it away. Faced with no alternative, Grimani was forced to apologize and tackle the case, promising Ahmed Heshmat Pasha that “in order to demonstrate to your Excellency my strong desire to give all my support to avoid the turmoil and disruption that the newspaper published by Mr. Pignatin caused, I can assure your Excellency that I will do my best to convince my citizen to cease to give assistance to the publication of a newspaper

32. Agenzia Telegrafica Italiana, no. 171, telegram, June 11, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 124:1911.

that could cause prejudice to the maintenance of good relations existing between our two countries.”<sup>33</sup>

The earlier Egyptian sequestration of the first issue of *al-Irshad* directly from the vendors was only a temporary measure—the paper’s staff remained organized and continued to work on a second number. San Giuliano ordered Grimani to take care of the situation as quickly and quietly as possible, confident that he would “adopt any measures that would reduce further embarrassment.”<sup>34</sup> Over the next few weeks, Grimani confronted Pignatin several more times, demanding that he cease and desist immediately,<sup>35</sup> most likely using threats and arguments similar those used in his first meetings with Pignatin. By July 18, the situation had been fully resolved without resorting to either the mixed courts or the Egyptian police. No additional numbers beyond the first were printed.<sup>36</sup> San Giuliano commended Grimani for his “practical results”<sup>37</sup>—it had taken weeks of fierce negotiations, and threats, but Grimani was able to avoid an embarrassing public spectacle in the mixed courts, thereby saving face for official Italian interests in Egypt.

## **Enrico Insabato and *Il Convito/al-Nadi***

Italy’s strategy towards the press was not limited to attempting to remain hidden and anonymous in controversy. Direct involvement in the local Arab press was

33. Cairo Embassy to Ahmed Heshmat Pasha, letter, 1134, June 28, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 124:1911, 3.

34. San Giuliano to Grimani, see n. 5, 2.

35. Grimani to San Giuliano, letter, 1184/430, July 5, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 124:1911.

36. *Ibid.*, 3367.

37. San Giuliano to Grimani, letter, 1530, Div. 3, Sez. 2, N. 38, Pos. 103, July 18, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 124:1911.



another avenue for controlling and influencing public opinion in the lead up to the invasion of Libya. The Italian government saw Egypt's central regional location, bridging North Africa with the Levant, and understood its potential for geographic political influence. At the turn of the century, Cairo was an influential center of intellectual discussion and thought, and the Cairene press figured prominently throughout the region. The influence of the Egyptian press went far beyond the borders of Egypt; newspapers and other periodicals printed in Cairo had relatively wide readership in Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, Palestine, and the rest of the Levant. The widespread and dynamic nature of the Egyptian press made it an ideal means for influencing regional public opinion. It has been noted that "whoever intended to undertake any action of propaganda or to influence Arab-Islamic public opinion... found the ideal atmosphere in Egypt. One could logically assume that once Egyptian public opinion was conquered, the opinion of other Muslim countries would follow."<sup>38</sup>

The Italian government sought to capitalize on the powerful and widely read Egyptian press as it prepared for its invasion of Libya. For six years preceding the invasion of Libya, from 1904-1910, the Italian foreign ministry supported and subsidized a bilingual Italian-Arabic periodical that promoted Italian commitment to the doctrines and tropes of Islam and attempted to instill philo-Islamic Italian propaganda into the literate Muslim community throughout the region. Additionally, the periodical, dually titled *Il Convito/al-Nadi*,<sup>39</sup> levied veiled attacks against British imperialism in Egypt, asserting that the

38. Angelo Scarbel, "Una Rivista Italo-Araba d'Inizio Secolo: an-Nadi (Il Convito)," *Oriente moderno* 58 (1978): 51-67, 52.

39. The Banquet/The Crier

Italian nation was the only true friend of Islam and the only colonial European nation with “clean hands.”<sup>40</sup> *Il Convito/al-Nadi*’s cultural mission was clearly “intertwined with the imperialist aspirations of its patrons in Rome,”<sup>41</sup> and provides an excellent example of Italy’s use of the press in their strategy of quiet “peaceful penetration”<sup>42</sup> in Libya and the Mediterranean Basin.

The founder and chief editor of *Il Convito/al-Nadi* was an Italian named Enrico Insabato. Insabato was born in Bologna in 1878 and in 1900 received a diploma in colonial medicine and surgery from the *École Supérieure de Médecine Coloniale* in Paris.<sup>43</sup> In December 1902 he travelled to Cairo to participate in an international medical congress and planned on staying for two months, but the congress seems to have simply been a cover to justify his arrival—his name does not appear on the list of the members of the Italian delegation.<sup>44</sup> Insabato instead remained in Cairo until 1912, working for the Italian government in various confidential endeavors. In an undated letter, Insabato explained that his goal in moving to Cairo was to establish a publication that would become “the center of all politically natured information and initiatives that could not be associated with the Royal Legation in Cairo,”<sup>45</sup> and that since Cairo, in his estimation, was “the brain of the whole Muslim world,”<sup>46</sup> it would provide an ideal location for his quasi-diplomatic publication to become a regional political tool. Despite this

40. Scarbel, 59.

41. Meir Hatina, “Where East Meets West: Sufism, Cultural Rapprochement, and Politics,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 3 (Aug. 2007): 389-409, 394.

42. Grange, II:1390.

43. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 33.

44. *Ibid.*, 34, see footnote 7.

45. Carlo Gotti Porcinari, *Rapporti Italo-Arabi (1902-1930) dai documenti di Enrico Insabato* (Roma: E. S. P., 1965), 17.

46. *Ibid.*, 17.

mission of creating a semi clandestine outlet for Italian diplomatic endeavors, Insabato often insisted on his own autonomy.<sup>47</sup> He insisted that he himself had proposed the idea of establishing a journal in Cairo to Prime Minister Giolitti;<sup>48</sup> whether or not this is the case is impossible to tell.

Upon arriving in Egypt Insabato formed a close friendship with Abd al-Hadi al-Maghrabi, a Swedish artist, self taught orientalist, and polymath. Originally named Ivan Aguéli, as a result of his studies Abd al-Hadi became fascinated with Sufism and converted to Islam while in Egypt. Abd al-Hadi dreamed of creating “friendship and active collaboration between his native homeland, the West, and his chosen homeland, the Islamic East.”<sup>49</sup> Both Insabato and the Italian ministry of foreign affairs shared similar ambitions, albeit less idealistic and more politically motivated. In December 1902, days after arriving in Cairo, Insabato and Abd al-Hadi established *Il Commercio Italiano*, a newspaper dedicated primarily to Italy’s commercial connections and activity in the Middle East, with some articles exploring Italy’s relationship with Islam.<sup>50</sup> In 1904 Insabato and Abd al-Hadi began to further develop their pro-Islamic themes and thus transformed *Il Commercio Italiano* to *Il Convito/al-Nadi*, published in both Italian and Arabic.

*Il Convito/al-Nadi* was not a simple bilingual publication with translated articles mirroring each other. The Arabic language section of the periodical was not limited to the translation of the Italian half—Muslim writers such as

47. Scarbel, 53.

48. Porcinari, 17.

49. Scarbel, 54.

50. Hatina, 392; Scarbel, 54.

Mohammed Sharbatli and Yusuf Kamil al-Bukhari regularly contributed.<sup>51</sup> Both halves of the periodical pursued related editorial interests. Further, *Il Convito/al-Nadi*'s subtitle declared that it was an "italo-islamico" periodical, which entailed that its intended audience was much larger than the Arabic speaking Middle East;<sup>52</sup> Abd al-Hadi and Insabato (and by extension the Italian government) sought to engage the global Muslim community, or *'umma*. *Il Convito/al-Nadi* ambitiously sought to become a "guide to cultural harmony" between the two cultures,<sup>53</sup> fulfilling Abd al-Hadi's goal of bridging the gap between East and West, with Italy as the impartial and fair European mediator.

*Il Convito/al-Nadi* was initially published daily, with two pages in Italian and two in Arabic, and in mid-1904 two pages in Ottoman Turkish were added, paving the way for much wider readership throughout the Ottoman Empire.<sup>54</sup> For the first half of its existence, from 1904 to mid-1907, *Il Convito/al-Nadi* emphasized two primary themes: the legacy of civility between Italy and the Ottoman empire, and the longstanding Italian respect for Islam.<sup>55</sup>

Insabato introduces all these themes in his first editorial, published in the paper's inaugural edition on May 22, 1904. He explains that when he arrived in Cairo, "that Orient that I had so longed to see," he immediately recognized that contrary to European prejudices condemning Islam as ignorant and an "enemy of human progress," Islam actually had enormous "civilizing potential."<sup>56</sup> He then

51. Scarbel, 57.

52. *Ibid.*, 56.

53. Hatina, 393.

54. Scarbel, 56.

55. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 41.

56. Enrico Insabato, *Il Convito/al-Nadi*, May 22, 1904.

states that the Islamic world is split into two binary worlds. The first, which he calls “the people of the mosque,” represents those Muslims who practice their religion and conform to the Sunna, or traditional doctrinal Islamic practices. These “people of the mosque” are driven by their desire for knowledge and continually seek to expand their learning and share it with others. These pious Muslims have been able to adapt natively to changes in society, always using Islam as their foundation and standard, and thus have built and sustained Islamic civilization for centuries.

The second half of Muslim society, Insabato continues, is a “mixed, unsettled, pretentious, and ridiculous world composed of grotesque imitators of Europe.”<sup>57</sup> This world is composed of and led by a growing movement of Muslim scholars who had been influenced by European intellectuals—a rising class of native intelligentsia that intended to use reformed Islam as a model for European-style modernization. These scholars had accepted those prejudices that Europe had projected in the region through their imperialist endeavors, believing that the modern incarnation of Islam was the primary obstacle to progress and true modernization. One of these scholars, Jurji Zaydan, a Lebanese Christian in Egypt, was responsible for producing the history curriculum for government schools in the late nineteenth century. In his textbooks he stated that Islamic civilization achieved its apex during the reign of the first four Rightly Guided caliphs in the years immediately following Mohammed the Prophet’s death, and that ever since, Islamic culture had been in steady decline.<sup>58</sup> Because of the

57. Insabato, see n. 56.

58. Mitchell, 169.

backwardness of Islam, Islamic societies had “not properly followed the laws of social development,” and therefore needed to imitate Europe, which offered the only unilinear path to modernization.<sup>59</sup> For Insabato, the proposed reforms of these Muslims, who adhered to Islam “in name only,” aimed to distort the very core of Islam, creating a type of “Protestantism in tarboosh”—that is, a soulless European shell of intellectualism and modernity.<sup>60</sup>

Insabato concludes that, rather than this distorted idea of European-inspired Islamic reform, “pure Islam, the foundation of Arab civilization, is absolutely indispensable for true progress in the Orient.”<sup>61</sup> He states that “we do not consider the Orient to be a backward or untamed region... rather we see it as a land of immense intellectual and moral resources, only temporarily disorganized, that can easily lift itself up again by calling upon its latent potential.”<sup>62</sup> His goal, then, is to break with the rising current of reform and instead “demonstrate to Europe *true* Islam” and its civilizing potential, while reciprocally “revealing to Muslims the true Europe,”<sup>63</sup> and thus redeem European intellectualism, which had been convoluted with the reform movements he so derided.

Insabato discreetly poses Italy as the mediator between Islam and Europe. The “people of the mosque,” in his view, were pure and intellectually undefiled, ready to carry the burden of modernization and adaptation in the twentieth century; on the other hand, the second half of Islamic society, the reformers

59. Mitchell, 169-170.

60. Insabato, see n. 56.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

inspired by Europe, sought to destroy Islam. Other European powers were unable to stand in between the two parties, especially Britain and France, who had long pursued their colonial interests in Egypt and who had created this new cohort of reformists. Only an Italian, an outside observer and an ardent admirer of “true” Islam, could bridge this gap.

Subsequent issues of *Il Convito/al-Nadi* continued to develop this philo-Islamic theme. Articles and editorials were published regarding Italy and its assistance of Muslims, Italy and Islam, the nobility of Islam, the grandness of Islam, and numerous other topics.<sup>64</sup> Insabato and Abd al-Hadi argued that since “all peoples stem from a single source... their sole goal is to advance enlightenment and morality.... The strong have a duty to display sympathy for the weak instead of stealing their land and usurping their freedom.”<sup>65</sup> In their view, “European powers [had] failed in this lofty mission, but not Italy.”<sup>66</sup> Italy understood the importance and power of “pure Islam” and was therefore devoid of any prejudice to the Muslim world.

In May 1907 *Il Convito/al-Nadi* eliminated the Turkish section and switched to a monthly format, printing substantially larger issues. While his articles and editorials continued to promote pro-Italian philo-Islamic ideals, Insabato intensified his condemnation of other European colonial powers, arguing that the great European powers failed to understand or respect Islam.<sup>67</sup> The

64. See Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 40 for a full list of principal themes.

65. Hatina, 393.

66. *Ibid.*, 393.

67. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 41.

continuing anti-British critiques eventually caused Lord Cromer, the British Consul-General, to deport Insabato temporarily.<sup>68</sup>

Beyond the ongoing concern of Italy's innocent and honorable relationship with the Muslim world, the writers of *Il Convito/al-Nadi* also repeatedly emphasized of two aspects of Islamic culture: (1) scholastic and legal issues, and (2) mystical Sufism.<sup>69</sup> *Il Convito/al-Nadi* addressed the status of the Ottoman caliphate in 1906 and stated that it was incumbent upon all Muslims, worldwide, to obey the caliph, Sultan Abdülhamid II. Insabato advocated for a type of federative pan-Islamic 'umma, presided over by Abülhamid's Ottoman dynasty, and backed up his conclusions using Islamic legal arguments and tradition.<sup>70</sup>

Apart from the support of the caliphate, *Il Convito/al-Nadi* also advocated for the full restoration of Islamic *shari'a* law, which was described as "one of the loftiest judicial systems in the world, typified by legal flexibility and founded on the principles of justice and liberty. It alone could uproot the manifestations of crime and corruption in society and strengthen internal unity."<sup>71</sup> In keeping with Insabato's negative view of Western intellectualism in the region, the paper criticized the Ottoman Empire for abandoning *shari'a* for Western legal codes, "which only obstruct[ed] justice."<sup>72</sup>

While these calls for the application of Islamic law and for the continuation of the caliphate fit into Insabato's stated goals of promoting a nativistic "pure Islam," there was a hidden political agenda behind the

68. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 42.

69. Hatina, 394.

70. *Ibid.*, 393.

71. *Ibid.*, 394.

72. *Ibid.*, 394.



philo-Islamic decrees. A federated and diffused Islamic social system, loyal to a symbolic caliph, could serve two political goals. By encouraging all Muslims to reaffirm their loyalties to the Ottoman sultan, including those Muslims in British and French controlled regions near Istanbul, such as Syria and Palestine, where nascent nationalist and anti-Ottoman movements were gaining strength, the paper sought to undermine British and French imperialist ambitions, as these colonial powers sought to dismantle and decentralize the troubled empire in order to further their own colonialist and economic plans. Additionally, less-centralized and more federated loyalty to a distant caliph would leave the further-removed Mediterranean basin (especially Libya) more open for the establishment of a lasting Italian colonial presence.<sup>73</sup>

*Il Convito/al-Nadi* also repeatedly addressed topics related to Sufism—a logical editorial choice considering Abd al-Hadi’s involvement with the paper. According to the Muslim contributors to the paper, Sufism was the true driving force behind Insabato’s proposed anti-Western, nativist intellectual revival, as it “provid[ed] individuals with inner strength and act[ed] as an important lever to reinforce social solidarity,” and had a long history of intellectual openness.<sup>74</sup> The Muslim writers of *Il Convito/al-Nadi* concluded that it was only through the acceptance of the pure doctrines of Sufism that West and East could be truly bridged.<sup>75</sup>

While these spiritual pronouncements may appear to be genuinely motivated underlying political motivations are evident. The paper’s philo-Islamic

73. Hatina, 394.

74. *Ibid.*, 394.

75. *Ibid.*, 396.

emphasis on Sufism can actually be understood as a veiled attack on the British. *Il Convito/al-Nadi* sought to use Sufi intellectualism to create a new class of Muslim scholars that would lead the much hoped-for native process of modernization and adaptation, thus replacing the new British-inspired intelligentsia that stood against Insabato's idea of "pure Islam." Moreover, the paper's preoccupation with Sufism furthered Italy's rising regional imperialist ambitions. Italy had its sights set squarely on Libya, where the Senussiya, a powerful Sufi brotherhood, held tremendous sway in local politics. As early as 1903, Insabato already had plans for building up an Italian-Senussi relationship, stating that because the Senussiya was predominant in Tripolitania and Somalia (already under semi-colonial Italian control), "we can enter into agreements with [the Senussis] in case of occupation or colonization in Tripolitania."<sup>76</sup> At its highest point, *Il Convito/al-Nadi* had a readership of 5,000 and was distributed across the Middle East and the Islamic world (Insabato even claimed there were readers as far away as Japan<sup>77</sup>). Italian Prime Minister Giolitti made special care that the paper was distributed in Libya, precisely "to spread Italian influence... in Tripolitania."<sup>78</sup>

*Il Convito/al-Nadi's* pan-Islamic, anti-imperialist, anti-British, pro-Ottoman, pro-Italy, and pro-Sufi agenda, published in both Italian and Arabic, was read throughout Egypt, Libya, and the region in the years preceding Italy's own imperial invasion of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The paper targeted two audiences: Arabic-speaking Muslims and Italian-speaking intellectuals

76. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 36.

77. Porcinari, 17.

78. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 38.

and expatriates in Egypt. *Il Convito/al-Nadi*'s cultural mission was clearly "intertwined with the imperialist aspirations of its patrons in Rome,"<sup>79</sup> and "served as a springboard for Italy's [colonial] entrenchment in the region"<sup>80</sup> as it attempted to both manufacture consent for the future Libyan invasion and bolster Italian cultural and political prestige among the Muslim world and Italian expatriates in Egypt.

### **Censorship to directly suppress dissent**

The official invasion of Libya started on September 29, 1911. Once the war began, Italy largely dropped its pretenses of benign colonial ambition, especially as battlefield reports filled the Arabic-language Cairene newspapers. Publication of *Il Convito/al-Nadi* had ceased a year previously, and the delicate legislative and diplomatic dance over the application of the Egyptian press law in the mixed courts was forgotten. The Italian government turned all its interests to the ongoing war, and Egypt remained a critical battleground over public opinion. While other philo-Islamic initiatives in Egypt, which will be discussed in the following chapter, continued throughout the war, Italian policy towards the press in particular shifted from subliminal influence to a much more aggressive strategy of censure, acquisition, and closure as part of a larger military strategy. Italy's quest to control or silence dissident newspapers in Egypt served to decrease the effectiveness and morale of the Libyan insurgency, and to limit the

79. Hatina, 394.

80. *Ibid.*, 396.

spread of negative public opinion among Egyptians and the Italian community in Egypt.

As discussed previously, the Cairene press had wide readership throughout the region and during the war, Egyptian newspapers were shipped to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, where they were distributed among the Libyan resistance and general population.<sup>81</sup> Many Egyptian papers were hostile to Italy throughout the war; *Al-Mahrousa* was particularly vehement. Beyond its standard battlefield reports, *Al-Mahrousa* regularly published pro-Islamic articles that sought to incite anti-Italian sentiments and swell the numbers of the volunteer *mujahideen* force in Libya. On October 4, 1911, only a week after the official start of the war, *Al-Mahrousa* reported that Muslims as far away as India had pledged their full support, and some even their services as volunteers, against Italy.<sup>82</sup>

As the war continued, anti-Italian government articles became a regular feature.<sup>83</sup> *Al-Mahrousa* regularly published emotional poetry written by Muhammed Mustafa al-Islambouli, Muhammed Ahmed Ghayth, and Muhammed Ramzy Naziim, praising the Ottoman regiments in Libya,<sup>84</sup> commending the *mujahideen*,<sup>85</sup> and harshly criticizing the war and the Italians in general.<sup>86</sup> Other newspapers followed similar agendas. *Al-Muqattam* reported several

81. Grimani to San Giuliano, letter, Agenzia Diplomatica, 2013/752, Nov. 17, 1911, Archivio Centrale del Stato, Presidenza Consiglio Ministero collection, Archivio Centrale del Stato, Roma (henceforth cited as ACS:PCM), 1912 T 11, 1.

82. "Kalkūta fī al-thani min oktūbir," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Oct. 4, 1911, 25.

83. "Fashal al-Itāliyyin," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Feb. 12, 1912; Sayid Ali, "Ilā al-mawt—la nurīd 'an namūt," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Mar. 5, 1912; "'Ajaz al-Itāliyyin," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Feb. 10, 1912; "Fashal al-Itāliā," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Mar. 3, 1912; "Intiṣār al-'Uthmāniyyin," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Mar. 14, 1912.

84. "Taḥiyyat al-shu'arā' lil-'oṣṭūl al-'uthmāni Naṣr Allah," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Oct. 30, 1911; "Taḥiyyat al-shu'arā' lil-'oṣṭūl al-'uthmāni," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Oct. 4, 1911.

85. "Talaḥīn al-mujāhidīn," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Nov. 15, 1911.

86. Muhammed Ramzy Nazim, "Al-ḥarb—mawqif al-khayāl," *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Feb. 28, 1912.

anti-Italian demonstrations in Mahalla, Alexandria, and Cairo in November 1911,<sup>87</sup> often emphasized Italy's military incompetence,<sup>88</sup> and like *Al-Mahrousa*, published several anti-Italian, pro-Ottoman poems by Muhammed Emad and Khalil Mutran.<sup>89</sup>

In November 1911, six weeks after the invasion, Count Grimani sent a wire to San Giuliano, complaining that it had almost become a competition among the Egyptian newspapers to write the most hostile articles against Italy. He wrote that "the most widespread journals are those that demonstrate Italy as hostile and Turkey as victorious." Even those papers that were initially pro-Italy had begun to turn. One, *al-Jarida*, "was initially favorable to [Italy], but after seeing a reduction in readership, changed its language and standpoint and was once again held in high esteem [among Egyptians]."<sup>90</sup> Italy's hard-fought prestige in Egypt was quickly waning, putting the Italian community at risk. Additionally, this negative press had wide readership in Libya and threatened to undermine the ongoing Italian military operation.

To reduce the spread of anti-Italian publications in Libya, and secure Italian interests in Egypt, Grimani proposed gaining more direct control over the Cairene press and raised the possibility of funding a pro-Italy Arabic-language newspaper. Grimani suggested that rather than found a new publication *ex nihilo*, the foreign ministry could subsidize and control an already extant paper.

87. "Muḏāharāt fi al-Maḥalla ta'ayyedan lil-dawla al-'uthmāniyya," *Al-Muqattam*, Oct. 7, 1911; "Muḏāharāt al-'Askandariyya," *Al-Muqattam*, Nov. 4, 1911; "Muḏāharāt thāniyya fi al-'Askandariyya," *Al-Muqattam*, Nov. 6, 1911.

88. "'Ajaz Iṭāliā al-zāhir," *Al-Muqattam*, June 2, 1912.

89. Mohammed Emad, "'Uṣṭūl Iṭāliā," *Al-Muqattam*, Jan. 12, 1912; Khalil Mutran, "'Etāb w-'istiṣrākh," *Al-Muqattam*, Jan. 30, 1911.

90. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 81, 1.

He nominated *al-Akhbar* as the paper most appropriate for this strategy, as it was owned by Sheikh Youssef al-Khazen, a Syrian Egyptian who “could be trusted” with this special mission.<sup>91</sup> He recommended that Italy purchase forty subscriptions to the paper and then distribute those issues in Tripoli to “demonstrate to the [Libyans] that our endeavor is not detested by everyone [in Egypt].”<sup>92</sup> If, following this trial period of subscription, *al-Akhbar* succeeded in delivering consistent pro-Italian coverage, it could eventually be purchased by the government and potentially be relocated to Tripoli.

An ambitious budget was then proposed, which included provisions for the construction in Tripoli of a printing press, typography, and adjunct cultural library, which would transform the relocated *al-Akhbar* into a bilingual Arabic-Italian newspaper.<sup>93</sup> The initial trial progressed well and on December 31, 1911, General Caneva, commander of the Italian expeditionary corps in Libya, expanded the evaluation, increasing the number of subscriptions to *al-Akhbar* to 150, specifying that 75 be distributed in Tripoli, 15 in Homs, 25 in Bengasi, 20 in Derna, and 15 in Tobruk, in order to maximize distribution across Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.<sup>94</sup> Hedging their bets, the Italians also gave money to another Egyptian newspaper, *al-Omran*, and purchased 100 subscriptions to distribute in Libya.<sup>95</sup>

91. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 81, 1.

92. Ibid., 2.

93. Abi Rascid to San Giuliano, handwritten proposal, 92994, Dec. 7, 1911, ACS:PCM, 1912 T 11, 1-6.

94. Ministro di Guerra to Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, letter, Ministero della Guerra, 14526, Dec. 31, 1911, ACS:PCM, 1912 T 11.

95. Ministro di Guerra to Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, letter, Ministero della Guerra, 4229, Mar. 4, 1912, ACS:PCM, 1912 T 11.

In February 1912, General Caneva ordered that both *al-Omran* and *al-Akhbar* cease to be distributed in Libya, alleging that “while they publish favorable articles about Italy every once in a while, they publish many others decidedly against [the war].”<sup>96</sup> He concluded that it would be dangerous allowing continued circulation of these newspapers in Libya, especially since the Italian army itself was the primary importer and distributor, having purchased hundreds of subscriptions months earlier. It seems that although both papers received Italian subsidies, the temptation to join *al-Muqattam*, *al-Mahrousa*, and the other Egyptian papers in anti-Italian rhetoric was strong.

In March 1912, Prime Minister Giolitti proposed that the foreign ministry begin the process of relocating *al-Akhbar* to Tripoli.<sup>97</sup> In the meantime, the paper continued to publish in Egypt its vacillating opinions and reports of the war. Giolitti’s plan to move *al-Akhbar* received an unexpected push in May, after the khedive applied the Egyptian press law and ordered the closure of several Cairo newspapers, among which was *al-Akhbar*, which had recently published an article critical of the regime.<sup>98</sup> Having lost the only Egyptian newspaper that gave any positive coverage of the war, Grimani proposed that Italy either establish a new newspaper under the direction of the newly unemployed Youssef al-Khazen,<sup>99</sup> in Egypt, or, as part of the original plan, create a new pro-Italian paper in Tripoli itself. However, the plan was soon abandoned. The costs of relocating

96. C. Caneva to Ministro di Guerra, letter, Comando del Corpo di Spedizione in Tripolitania e Cirenaica, 1166, Feb. 24, 1912, ACS:PCM, 1912 T 11.

97. Ministro di Guerra to Giolitti, letter, Ministero della Guerra, 6555, Apr. 17, 1912, ACS:PCM, 1912 T 11.

98. Grimani to San Giuliano, letter, Agenzia Diplomatica, 1119/405, 43325, May 22, 1912, ACS:PCM, 1912 T 11, 1.

99. *Ibid.*, 2.

the paper to Tripoli or using al-Khazen to establish a new paper in Cairo were prohibitive, despite the allocated budget, and the political ramifications of creating a blatantly pro-Italian Arabic newspaper in Cairo were too inconvenient and risky.<sup>100</sup> Having effectively lost *al-Akhbar*, as fickle an ally as it was, the foreign ministry was left with only one option—find new Egyptian publications to support. This policy of press bribery continued until the end of the war in December 1912 and on into the ensuing colonial occupation of Libya,<sup>101</sup> and Italy was never able to outrightly and exclusively finance an Arabic-language Egyptian newspaper.

By subsidizing, bribing, and even planning to take over elements of the Egyptian press, Italy sought to instill doubt in and undermine the confidence of the Libyan resistance and insurgency, which regularly consumed and distributed the pro-Ottoman, pro-Islamic, anti-Italian literature coming out of Cairo. Furthermore, Italy hoped to bolster and maintain the waning support of their community in Egypt. Positive press coverage provided an avenue to counter the constant stream of anti-Italian invective assailing, which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, often outrightly rejected and protested against the war.

Italy pursued varying strategies and policies when working with the Egyptian and Italian press in Cairo before and during Italy's war in Libya, from 1901 to 1912. Initially, in the decade before the invasion, Italy sought to portray itself as a benevolent, philo-Islamic nation that had few, if any, colonial

100. San Giuliano to Giolitti, letter, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 491, June 10, 1912, ACS:PCM, 1912 T 11, 1.

101. Grimani to San Giuliano, letter, Agenzia Diplomatica, 837, Dec. 18, 1912, ACS:PCM, 1912 T 11; Ministero delle Colonie: Ufficio Politico to Giolitti, letter, Ministero delle Colonie, 01094/17, Feb. 10, 1913, ACS:PCM, 1912 T 11.



ambitions in the region. This image served as a cover for larger Italian imperial ambitions and attempted to convince Italians and Egyptians (and by nature of Cairo's central location, the rest of the Islamic world) of the benevolence of Italy's involvement in Libya. At times, the Italian foreign ministry and embassy attempted to remain unseen during potentially embarrassing legal issues regarding the press, such as Luigi Pignatin and *al-Irshad*, opting to sacrifice their capitulatory rights for the ability to remain unconnected with petty legal issues that could damage Italian prestige.

At other times, Italy sought to project their philo-Islamic agenda through the press, launching veiled attacks on imported British intellectualism among the rising Muslim intelligentsia, and portraying Italy as a friend to the worldwide community of Muslims. Additionally, by addressing the importance of Sufi intellectualism, Enrico Insabato's *Il Convito/al-Nadi* attempted to garner support among its readers in Libya, where the Senussiyya held considerable power, and would see Italy as a benign European supporter of "pure Islam." Once the war began, Italy shifted its role as an outsider in the influential Cairene press and attempted to bribe and control different papers to ensure that a positive voice was heard among the streams of criticism and protest. These varying attitudes towards the Egyptian and Italian press in Cairo always aimed at building and maintaining Italian cultural prestige with the purpose of manufacturing consent for the invasion among the Egyptians and the expatriate Italian *mutamassirun*.

## Chapter 5

# Manufactured Consent?

One critical aspect of Italy's policy of *pénétration pacifique* into Libya was the portrayal of Italy as a noble philo-Islamic nation, uninterested in imperial expansion in the Muslim world and genuinely concerned about the future of Islam in a modern world. By undertaking this campaign of propaganda, the foreign ministry hoped to convince the general Egyptian population that Italy could be trusted as a European power. This trust would then be understood as implicit consent and support from Egypt for the invasion of Libya. For many Egyptians, however, Italy's strategy of manufacturing consent was readily seen as a simple deception. Before the invasion, the Egyptian front of Italy's philo-Islamic campaign was met with cynicism and distrust which transformed itself into open hostility following the outbreak of the war.

The other facet of Italy's strategy in Egypt in the decade prior to its imperial invasion and occupation of Libya was to build *italianità* within the Italian communities, or colonies, in Egypt. As previously discussed, the multiethnic and cosmopolitan nature of Cairo's and Alexandria's bifurcated geography helped to create feelings of *mutamassiriyya* among the expatriate European communities. Thanks to economic and legal privileges such as the Capitulations and the Mixed Courts, many emigrant Italians found economic success in Egypt and felt

themselves deeply connected to Egyptian society. The Italian foreign ministry used its campaign of *pénétration pacifique* to project an image of imperial benevolence in order to build national pride among the Italian *mutamassirun* and to manufacture consent for the eventual invasion of Libya. While Italy's efforts to persuade Egyptians to support the ongoing invasion largely failed, the foreign ministry was initially successful in maintaining consensus and Italian patriotism in the Italian *mutamassir* communities. However, as the war dragged on, community and association leaders began to drop their support and lead their own anti-Italian government protests.

## **Egyptian skepticism and cynicism**

While the press campaign discussed in the previous chapter served the dual purpose of convincing both the Egyptian and the Italian communities that Italy was benevolent and non-imperial and that an eventual Libyan invasion would only have positive outcomes, the Italian foreign ministry pursued several other strategies aimed solely at improving relations in the Islamic world. As we have seen, Enrico Insabato, the paid agent of the foreign ministry and the publisher of *Il Convito/al-Nadi*, spearheaded the primary philo-Islamic campaign. Upon his arrival in Cairo in 1901, Insabato drafted a list of various recommendations promoting philo-Islamic policies, which included working with the Italian community to establish an Italian school for Egyptians alone, the creation of an Arabic-Italian periodical that could be read throughout the Muslim world (*Il Convito/al-Nadi* satisfied this recommendation in 1904), instituting Islamic *shari'a* law in Italy's East African colonies in order to abolish slavery, the construction

of a mosque in Rome, and the institution of various Italian businesses to aid in the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>1</sup> One of his key proposals was to collaborate with Sufi brotherhoods, especially the Senussiya, for “it is predominant in Tripolitania and Somalia, insomuch that at the right moment we can enter into negotiations with them, in the case of the occupation or colonization of Tripolitania.”<sup>2</sup>

To build close relations with regional Sufi orders, Insabato worked with a prominent Egyptian religious leader, Sheikh Abd al-Rahman ‘Ilaysh, one of the founders and regular contributors to *Il Convito/al-Nadi*. His father, Muhammed ‘Ilaysh, was the *shaykh al-Azhar* and mufti over the Malaki school of Islamic jurisprudence, and was the leader of the *al-‘Arabiyya al-Shādhiliyya* Sufi fraternity. Additionally, Muhammed ‘Ilaysh worked with the Egyptian proto-nationalist movement and helped organize resistance against the British during the 1882 ‘Urabi revolt. In July 1882 he joined with several other high ‘ulema and called for Khedive Tawfiq’s deposition from the throne, condemning him as an apostate for collaborating with Europeans,<sup>3</sup> and a few weeks later he ordered a mob to pull down a statue of Ibrahim Pasha, Tawfiq’s grandfather, in a central Cairene square.<sup>4</sup> As a result of his anti-British actions, he was arrested during the British military intervention and died in prison a few months later.<sup>5</sup> In 1882 his son had himself become a professor at al-Azhar, but because of his

1. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 36-37.

2. “1903: Studi Insabato,” Untitled study, Archivio Storico del Ministero dell’Africa Italiana, held in ASDMAE, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma (henceforth cited as ASMAI), Varie 179/4-31, 8 pages, 2; Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 36.

3. Cole, 247.

4. Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians!: The Socio-Political Crisis in Egypt, 1878-1882*, St. Anthony’s Middle East Monographs, no. 14 (London: Ithaca Press, 1981), 282; Cole, 258.

5. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 42.

connections to his dissident father, Abd al-Rahman was condemned to a five year exile in Syria and Istanbul. Upon returning to Egypt, ‘Ilaysh presided over his own Sufi order—the same order that Abd al-Hadi al-Maghrabi (the Swedish polymath formerly known as Ivan Aguéli) and Insabato later joined.<sup>6</sup>

‘Ilaysh was hardly the nationalist his father was—he actively collaborated with Insabato and the Italian government in their philo-Islamic agenda and was a keystone in Italy’s propaganda campaign. From 1905–06 ‘Ilaysh independently funded and built a small mosque in the al-Azhar quarter, only meters away from the entrance to the eminent Islamic university, and named it after the king of Italy.<sup>7</sup> By building the Umberto I mosque ‘Ilaysh hoped to convey to the *‘ulema* the benevolence of Italy. In 1906 he justified his pro-Italy stance, declaring that “Italy is the only power that can agree with us Muslims, for the Italians are friendly and treat us fairly, without pride.”<sup>8</sup> The foreign ministry agreed to take responsibility for the maintenance of the Umberto I mosque after its completion, giving Italy a veritable foothold in the center of Islamic Cairo.

Insabato and the Italian government also worked with ‘Ilaysh to make inroads with the Senussiyya, since, as Insabato posited, “partnership with the Senussiyya was critical for Italian cultural and commercial penetration in the Tripolitanian hinterland.”<sup>9</sup> Together with the translator for the Italian consulate in Cairo, Mohammed Ali Elui Bey, ‘Ilaysh and Insabato held secret meetings with Sidi Mohammed Abed, the brother of the Grand Senussi, Sidi Ahmed, and paid

6. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 42.

7. *Ibid.*, 43.

8. Ugo Ojetti, “Accanto alla vita,” *L’Illustrazione Italiana*, June 11, 1906, 130–31; cited in Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 42.

9. Enrico Insabato, Jan. 3, 1910, in DDI IV, 32–34 (no. 32), 32.

the Senussi leader thousands of *lire* in cash and gifts to obtain his support for Italy.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, De Martino, the Italian consul general in Cairo, met secretly with the khedive to discuss the Egyptian government's clandestine support of an Italian-Senussi alliance.<sup>11</sup> In a final effort to win over the Senussiya, in January 1912, in the middle of the actual invasion of Libya, Insabato and 'Ilaysh published an Arabic pamphlet entitled *al-Mudawwana al-thahabiyya*, or *The Golden Document*, and distributed it in both Egypt and Libya as a special supplement to *Il Convito/al-Nadi*. The text was the culmination of Italy's philo-Islamic agenda in the Arab world and summarized the various activities Italy had undertaken during the past decade in an attempt to make a final proof of Italy's benevolence. Insabato and 'Ilaysh cited passages from the Qur'an and the *hadith* to prove to the Islamic world that "the Ottoman sultan did not protect the interests of Muslims in Tripolitania" and that it was therefore necessary for Italy to "liberate [Tripolitania's] people from slavery and from the misdeeds of the Turks."<sup>12</sup>

Despite all their efforts, however, Insabato and 'Ilaysh failed to create any sort of working partnership between the Italian government and the Senussiya. In fact, the Senussiya brotherhood became one of the primary insurgent forces in Cyrenaica, and in a highly tenuous alliance (occasionally bordering on civil war) with the leader of the Tripolitanian resistance, Ramadan al-Suwayhli, the Sufi order forced an eventual Italian stalemate and won substantial autonomy in

10. Insabato, see n. 9, 32.

11. De Martino to Guicciardini, letter, Riservato 190/75, Feb. 15, 1910, in DDI IV, 132-34 (no. 120), 134.

12. Enrico Insabato, *Al-Mudawwana al-thahabiyya* (Cairo: n. p., 1912), 3; cited in Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 65.

Cyrenaica.<sup>13</sup> As early as 1908, Libyans were acutely aware of the dangers posed by Italian cultural and economic *pénétration pacifique*, “recalling the European economic penetration that had preceded the occupations of Tunisia and Egypt.”<sup>14</sup> Neither the Italian press campaigns, the distribution of *Il Convito/al-Nadi*, Italy’s philo-Islamic posture, nor the investments of Banco di Roma in the Libyan infrastructure were enough to sufficiently convince Libyan Muslims of Italy’s benevolence.

Italian policies faced similar disbelief and cynicism in Egypt. In 1907, five years before the true nature of Italy’s Egypt-based philo-Islamic agenda was revealed in *al-Mudawwana al-thahabiyya*, Rashid Rida, the intellectual leader of the Egypto-Syrian Arabist movement and editor of the journal *al-Manār*, criticized ‘Ilaysh for his unprecedented audacity in building a mosque dedicated to a Christian Italian king. Rida accused ‘Ilaysh of being on the payroll of the foreign ministry and that as such, the mosque was illegal according to Islamic law.<sup>15</sup> Later that year, Rida suggested that the Umberto I mosque was merely a front for Italy’s foreign policy in Egypt.<sup>16</sup> When the war began in 1911 popular Egyptian newspapers attacked ‘Ilaysh’s relationship with the Italian government: in February 1912 *al-Mahrousa* attacked Enrico Insabato and ‘Ilaysh over *al-Mudawwana al-thahabiyya*,<sup>17</sup> and *al-Muqattam* followed up with its own exposé

13. Lisa Anderson, “Ramadan al-Suwayhli: Hero of the Libyan Resistance,” chap. 8, in *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Edmund Burke, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 123.

14. *Ibid.*, 118.

15. Rashid Rida, “Bid‘a gharība fī Miṣr,” *Al-Manār*, July 1907, 398–400; cited in Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 43.

16. Rashid Rida, “Siyāsāt iṭāliyā bi-maṭā‘imiha fī bilād al-muslimīna,” *Al-Manār*, Oct. 1907, 637–38; cited in Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 44.

17. “Al-Shaykh ‘Ilaysh,” *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Feb. 8, 1912; “Matha ‘aṣāb al-shaykh?” *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Feb. 19, 1912.

of Insabato, 'Ilaysh, and their involvement with the Italian foreign ministry a few months later.<sup>18</sup>

In the face of Italy's ongoing propaganda campaign, and notwithstanding the Italian government's repeated attempts at controlling or censoring the press, Italophobic sentiment grew increasingly more powerful and more violent. Through populist, and occasionally fabricated, news reports, the Arabic press helped incite pro-Libyan mobs that rallied against both the Italian government and the Italian *mutamassirun*. The first anti-Italian demonstrations started in the Canal Zone. Egyptian police halted a small riot in Port Said on October 2, 1911 and gave the Italian consulate in Cairo assurances that similar demonstrations would not happen again. The demonstrations were precipitated by false reports that the Ottoman military had destroyed the Italian naval fleet in the Aegean Sea. Grimani speculated that Turkey had intentionally spread the false news in order to "stir up the Arab population... and to provoke the Italian colonies."<sup>19</sup>

Contention continued to rise in Port Said throughout the month. In late October, several Italian *mutamassirun*, most likely dock workers, visited the Café Paradiso. One had a copy of the *Corriere della Sera*, the leading Italian newspaper printed in Rome, which had published a photo of captured Arab leaders forced to kneel in front of the head Italian admiral. A Turkish dock worker from the Suez Canal Company came into the café, took the paper by his teeth and ripped it up, causing a scene.<sup>20</sup> According to newspaper reports in Port

18. "Nafi al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Ilaysh 'aw 'irsālihi 'ilā mustashfā al-mujāthib," *Al-Muqattam*, July 15, 1912.

19. Grimani to San Giuliano, 1683/642, Oct. 3, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 130/2 10.

20. Tintoni to Grimani, letter, 1721/2089, Oct. 25, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 130/2 10, 1.



Said newspapers *La Verité*, *La Gazzetta di Porto Said e Cairo*, and even the Cairo-based and *mutamassir*-run *L'Imparziale*, a violent altercation then ensued between the Italian workers and the Turks and Egyptians.<sup>21</sup> The Italian consul in Port Said denied any wrongdoing on behalf of the Italian community and accused the papers of "acting Italophobic because they were bought off by some Egyptian bey."<sup>22</sup>

Anti-Italian protests exploded in Alexandria the following week as the first reports of Italian losses trickled out of Libya. On October 23 the 11th Bersaglieri regiment was attacked by a force of Ottoman regulars and Arab irregulars (most likely with volunteers from Egypt) in the outskirts of Libya, near Shar al-Shatt. The confrontation, also known as the Battle of al-Hani, left over 500 Italians dead and effectively disabled the Italian division.<sup>23</sup> Days later an Arab uprising occurred in Tripoli itself, a surprise to the Italian forces who expected to be greeted as liberators. In retaliation for both the defeat at the Battle of al-Hani and the subsequent uprising, the military ordered a massacre, and on October 26, "the Italians had killed all the inhabitants of an entire quarter [of Tripoli], women and children included."<sup>24</sup>

The response to both the Italian defeat, as well as the massacre in Tripoli, was vehemently Italophobic in Egypt. On the morning of October 31 Egyptian newspapers *al-'Alam* and *Wadi al-Nil* reported the "complete destruction of the Italians at Tripoli, and the loss of all its artillery, and the flight and retreat of

21. Tintoni to Grimani, see n. 20, 2.

22. *Ibid.*, 1.

23. Childs, 86.

24. *Ibid.*, 86.

General Caneva [the commanding officer for the expedition],”<sup>25</sup> and by two o’clock that afternoon thousands of pamphlets had been printed and distributed announcing “the brilliant victory of the glorious Ottoman armies.”<sup>26</sup> Later that afternoon a large mob moved through the city, threatening and insulting Italians and other *mutamassir* Europeans. By nine o’clock the rioters had swelled in numbers as they shattered the windows of various *mutamassir* Italian, Greek, and Armenian shops and residences, and several Greek stores were looted.<sup>27</sup> The police proved to be largely ineffective against the rioters; most of the police themselves were Greek or Italian *mutamassirun*, and thus had little power against the anti-Italian Egyptians, and Egyptians in the police force were sympathetic to the rioters.<sup>28</sup> Fearing a reprise of the violence of the 1882 ‘Urabi Revolt, many Italians took their security into their own hands and fired weapons into the crowd. Dozens of Egyptians and Europeans were killed and wounded in the skirmish, among them two injured Italian policemen.<sup>29</sup>

The Italian consulate attempted to calm the situation, and the Alexandrian consul, Dolfini, attempted to work with the municipal government and the chief of police, but because the most violent riots happened at night, he was powerless. The British had a warship docked in the main port and sent a unit of marines to the city to restore order in a quick military operation.<sup>30</sup> Dolfini visited the damaged Italian properties the next morning, assuaging the colony’s fears of

25. Dolfini to San Giuliano, letter, Nov. 1, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 130/2 10, 1.

26. *Ibid.*, 1.

27. *Ibid.*, 3.

28. Grimani to San Giuliano, letter, 1910/717, Nov. 3, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 130/2 10, 3.

29. *Ibid.*, 2.

30. *Ibid.*, 3.

further protests, and later met with heads of the various Italian associations to reinforce the foreign ministry's dedication to the security of the Italian colony.<sup>31</sup>

A few days later, Grimani took the night train up from Cairo to inspect the aftermath of the violence and personally visit the shaken community.

Grimani predicted that the riots and the Italophobia would be contained in Alexandria and not spread south to the capital, since he felt that Alexandria was a particularly "excitable" city,<sup>32</sup> but *Al-Muqattam* reported that during the first week of November there were several more riots in Alexandria, Mahalla, and Cairo.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the riots in the Canal Zone, Alexandria, and Cairo, the foreign ministry and the Italian consulate continually emphasized the need for the Italian community to remain calm, lay low, and not get involved in order to maintain Italy's benevolent image.<sup>34</sup> Despite the previous decade's campaign of philo-Islamic *pénétration pacifique*, and contrary to the myth of deep *mutamassir* integration, ethnic and proto-national lines ran deep throughout Egypt. Italy's attempt to gain the support of the Egyptian public failed. The Egyptian press saw the invasion as yet another violent encroachment on Arab lands.

## **The secret *mutamassir* dissidents**

During the first decade of the twentieth century a series of natural disasters hit Italy with devastating force. In 1905 a large earthquake struck the southern

31. Dolfini to San Giuliano, see n. 25, 4.

32. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 28, 4.

33. "Muḏāharāt fi al-Maḥalla ta'ayyedan lil-dawla al-'uthmāniyya," *Al-Muqattam*, Oct. 7, 1911; "Muḏāharāt al-'Askandariyya," *Al-Muqattam*, Nov. 4, 1911; "Muḏāharāt thāniyya fi al-'Askandariyya," *Al-Muqattam*, Nov. 6, 1911.

34. Grimani to C. Zervudachi C. Knosp Ci. Daira, 1941, Nov. 6, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 130/2 10.

city of Calabria, killing hundreds, and three years later a massive quake shook Calabria and Messina which leveled 98% of Messina, destroyed over 300 towns, and killed nearly 120,000 people.<sup>35</sup> The international response of the global network of Italian emigrants was enormous. Relief donations poured in from America, Argentina, France, Egypt, and elsewhere as Italian expatriates rallied together in support of their wounded homeland. Italian organizations such as the SDA and the Red Cross worked in Egypt to raise funds and were highly successful, both with the *mutamassir* community and with the Egyptian government; one Ibrahim Bey Abdu made repeated donations for Italian relief.<sup>36</sup> The government's strategy of creating a real global empire of emigrant colonialists worked well when the homeland faced natural disasters.

During the first months of the invasion of Libya the Italian community in Egypt was equally engaged and supportive of the Italian endeavor. Many in the community made substantial donations to the Red Cross in order to support the Italian military, but their contributions quickly became a point of contention. Grimani requested the head of the Italian Red Cross to stop soliciting donations in Cairo and Alexandria, notwithstanding the growing need of military medical support in Libya, because while Egypt was nominally independent, it clearly sided with Libya and Turkey during the expanding Italian aggression. Grimani felt that any outward display of support towards the Italian military effort would undermine Italy's delicate position in Egypt—if the *mutamassirun* publicly displayed any pro-Italian sentiments the colony could come under attack.<sup>37</sup>

35. Choate, 190.

36. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 45.

37. Grimani to San Giuliano, letter, 1773/669, Oct. 17, 1911, ASDMAE AC, 130/2 10, 1.

As the war continued, though, and the military campaign slowly ground to an effective stalemate, many within the Italian community began to break with the foreign affairs ministry and launch their own anti-Italian protests. The leaders of this Italian dissident movement came from a surprising source—the *mutamassir* elite who were initially charged with building *italianità* and Italian cultural prestige in Egypt, primarily from Italian academia.

In December 1908, Egyptian University, later renamed Cairo University, opened its doors in Cairo. Two of the members of the university's general council were Europeans with deep elite *mutamassir* roots: the French egyptologist Gaston Maspéro and the Italian Ugo Lusena Bey, a civil servant with close connections to the khedive, as well as one-time president of the Egyptian SDA.<sup>38</sup> Under their direction the university hired over a dozen European Arabists, most of whom had lived in Egypt for years. Three Italian Arabists—C. Alfonso Nallino, Gerardo Meloni, and David Santillana—taught in the faculty of letters, while other Italians were hired in various other departments.<sup>39</sup> In his memoirs, Taha Hussein remembered the lectures of Santillana with fondness, and recalled that Nallino continued to teach despite the widespread anti-Italian sentiment.<sup>40</sup> Like the myriad of other programs undertaken by the Italian foreign ministry, the underlying political purpose of using Italians to teach Islamic philosophical and literary history to the Egyptian students was to project Italian benevolence and philo-Islamic image.

38. Baldinetti, "Gli Italiani nella cultura egiziana, 1900-1930," 50.

39. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 78-80.

40. Taha Hussein, *The Days* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 280-81, 288; Baldinetti, "Gli Italiani nella cultura egiziana, 1900-1930," 54.

The political motivations for assisting with the fledgling Egyptian University become even more clear in the case of Vincenzo Fago, who was hired as the university's librarian in 1909. While he was well-qualified for the position, he was most likely hired because of his close friendship with San Giuliano,<sup>41</sup> the minister of foreign affairs, who charged Fago with furthering the cultural preparations for the Libyan invasion. As university librarian, Fago worked closely with Prince Fu'ad and became one of his most trusted advisors and friends, while simultaneously informing the Italian government of the affairs of the khedival court. Fago's wife, Clelia Lilia Golfarelli, also played an important role both in the court and in the Italian community; she often worked with the SDA to further Italian patriotism, and because of her husband's status, she was one of the few European women permitted into the khedival harem.<sup>42</sup>

The start of the invasion in the fall of 1911 stirred up trouble in the university. The Italian faculty were all demoted and some were nearly fired. Fago faced particular difficulty remaining employed due to a professional rivalry with Nallino, but his friendship with Fu'ad provided him a certain measure of protection. However, in March 1912, due to pressure from both Nallino and the general anti-Italian sentiment at the university, Fago was fired.<sup>43</sup>

Not coincidentally, the Italian community's attitude towards the war shifted that same month. Rather than support the military action and rely on the protection of the Italian consulate, as they had done during the Alexandrian riots in November 1911, a large and vocal section of the community began to

41. Baldinetti, "Gli Italiani nella cultura egiziana, 1900-1930," 52.

42. *Ibid.*, 52-53.

43. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo*, 119.

rebel against the authority of Grimani and the consulate. Italian migrants sent an increasing number of negative telegraphs home, criticizing the war and the Cairo consulate's handling of the Egyptian outbursts against it.<sup>44</sup> Italian associations and organizations, including the SDA, the keystone of emigrant Italianization, held secret meetings to stir up anger against the consulate. On March 18 Grimani cancelled a masquerade ball held at the Leonardo da Vinci state school because of reports that the presidents of the various Italian associations in Cairo would use the event as a front to organize a coalition against the consulate.<sup>45</sup> Undeterred, the dissident community leaders rescheduled their planning meeting for another event to be held at the khedival opera house. Grimani, under the impression that he had stopped the movement at the masquerade, allowed the opera event to proceed. With the tacit (and unknowing) permission of the consulate, community leaders publicized the meeting in the local Italian press, inviting all Italians to join in the anti-government protest.<sup>46</sup> Following the event at the opera house, the protestors continued to meet and protest, causing both the Italian and British consulates great alarm. Grimani worried about the consequences of massive Italian protests and how that would reflect on the Italian colony in the eyes of the Egyptians, who were already fiercely Italophobic,<sup>47</sup> and Lord Kitchener sent a warning memo indicating his anxiety over the deterioration of order within his Egyptian colony, advising Grimani to

44. Grimani to San Giuliano, letter, 784/268, Apr. 3, 1912, ASDMAE AC, 130/2 10, 2.

45. *Ibid.*, 1.

46. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

47. *Ibid.*, 2.

prevent any meetings that “might have the effect of disturbing [the] public in Cairo.”<sup>48</sup>

Grimani launched an investigation of the dissident movement and discovered, to his immense surprise, that the *de facto* leader of the protesters was none other than the former librarian, Vincenzo Fago, who was collaborating closely with the president of the Cairene SDA, Sciarrino. Grimani received this intelligence from Lasciac Bey, the famed Italian khedival architect, and regretted that he had little reason to doubt its reliability. Fago, according to Grimani, was an unpardonable turncoat who sought only to “create for himself a modicum of popularity” at the expense of the unity and reputation of the Italian colony.<sup>49</sup> Grimani interrogated Sciarrino to extract the names of other leaders of the movement, but was unsuccessful—Sciarrino refused to name any one else in the organization and claimed full responsibility.

Because of Fago’s close connections to the khedive and to Prince Fu’ad in particular, Grimani was unable to approach Fago directly. In a private audience with ‘Abbas II at the khedival court, the khedive confided to Grimani that he would prefer that Fago be deported from Egypt, believing that he was dangerous not only for the Italian colony, but also because he held too much sway on Fu’ad’s judgment. However, Fu’ad joined their meeting later that day and the khedive reversed his position completely, stating that Grimani had no right to attempt to deport Fago. Fago’s special relationship with the prince proved to be his redemption, and he remained in Egypt, much to Grimani’s chagrin.<sup>50</sup>

48. Kitchener to Grimani, handwritten note, Mar. 23, 1912, ASDMAE AC, 130/2 10, 2.

49. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 44, 3.

50. *Ibid.*, 4.



Grimani was outraged by Fago's blatant "antipatriotism" and wrote that he felt that not only was it offensive, it was extremely dangerous for "foreigners who are guests of this land" to engage in such covert civil disobedience.<sup>51</sup> Grimani lamented that he found it deplorable that "Italian nationals fail to realize their moral obligation, especially in these exceptional circumstances, to remain united behind their country."<sup>52</sup> Fago's actions may not have been rooted in true anti-Italian, pro-Libyan sentiments, especially considering the debacle at the Egyptian University that immediately preceded the start of anti-Italian protests among the *mutamassirun*. However, even if Fago acted simply out of spite for being fired as librarian, the fact that so many other Italians rallied around him and his anti-government protests highlights the very real and growing rift between the foreign ministry and the Italian *mutamassirun*. In their missives, Italian officials worried not only about the subversive Fago, but the overall malaise and discontent of the Italian community in general.<sup>53</sup> Fago was able to tap into a growing reserve of anti-Italian government sentiment, spurred on by the prolonged war, which threatened the very premise of emigrant colonialism. That the very institutions that led the dissident movement, such as the SDA and the faculty of the Egyptian University, were the bulwarks of Italy's pro-*mutamassir*, pro-emigrant agenda reveals that the foreign ministry strategy was not wholly successful. Italy's manufactured consent was far from unanimous.

51. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 44, 1.

52. Grimani to Incaricato d'affari, letter, 56/1008, Apr. 12, 1912, ASDMAE AC, 130/2 10.

53. Grimani to San Giuliano, see n. 44, 2.

## Chapter 6

# Conclusion and Future Prospects

Despite Italy's legal maneuvers to avoid diplomatic embarrassment, the thousands of francs and lire of bribes and subsidies to buy off Egyptian newspapers, its support of *Il Convito/al-Nadi*, its professed philo-Islamic leanings and support of Sufi movements, its work to improve Italian education and inculcate Italian nationalism and patriotism, and the dozens of other tactics aimed at casing Italy as a benevolent center of refined European culture, disinterested in the economic subjugation of Egypt and the rest of the region, its decade-long push for Egyptian and *mutamassir* consent for the invasion of Libya appears to have been unsuccessful in the short term. Many of the leaders of the very institutions Italy had established to encourage pro-Italian government sentiment rebelled against the colonial military invasion of neighboring Libya. Government correspondence reveals uneasiness and frustration with the Egyptian colony for failing to support such a deeply patriotic goal as the direct expansion of the Italian empire into Libya. The *mutamassirun*, the foreign ministry's courtship, were far from unanimous in their consent or support.

But was the failure to manufacture and sustain unanimous consent for the Libyan undertaking a true failure, or merely a minor setback in Italian foreign policy in Egypt? As discussed previously, Italy's overall goal with the policy of

emigrant colonialism was to create an international network of Italians who felt part of the Italian homeland; to formulate a “nation” of loyal citizens willing to support Italy from their respective host countries. Italy was able to successfully reap the benefits of its largely successful program. In 1914, at the onset of World War I, the major European actors, which all had relatively extensive imperial holdings worldwide, called up their expatriate communities to assist in the war. While France, Britain, and Germany struggled to find willing recruits throughout their wide empires, Italy saw the return of over 300,000 emigrant reservists. Surprisingly, Italy was the only combatant country in Europe to *gain population* during the long war of attrition.<sup>1</sup> Unlike soldiers in the British and German empires, these Italian reservists were not recruited or drafted—most volunteered.<sup>2</sup> Two years after the anti-foreign ministry protests in Cairo, Italians in Egypt rallied to the side of their Italian homeland in the Great War. Nearly 3,000 *mutamassirun* volunteered to fight in the trenches, including Giuseppe Ungaretti.<sup>3</sup> If the Italian *mutamassirun* were so supportive of Italy in World War I, why did they fail to support the Libyan invasion?

According to the sources used in this thesis, the *mutamassirun* failed to understand the importance of the invasion of Libya. Government sponsored institutions such as SDA failed to instill deep *italianità* in the Italian colony and the embassy and consulates were unable to connect with the Italian *mutamassirun* and build a trusting relationship. Grimani’s lament, cited previously, summarizes the foreign ministry’s conclusions: “Italian nationals

1. Choate, 208.

2. Ibid., 210.

3. Ibid., 211.

fail[ed] to realize their moral obligation, especially in these exceptional circumstances, to remain united behind their country.”<sup>4</sup> To the foreign ministry it appeared that the fickle Italian community only stood by their homeland when the war went well—as soon as the military struggle turned sour the colony rebelled. Many in the foreign ministry, as is evident from the many telegrams and other forms of correspondence, blamed the colony’s infidelity on the cosmopolitanism of Cairo and Alexandria—a large proportion of the community had little or no connection to Italy, and more had lost their *italianità* despite ongoing government attempts to prevent integration and assimilation into Egyptian society.<sup>5</sup>

However, high-level diplomatic and parliamentary correspondence can only go so far in explaining the lack of enduring support. The Italian *mutamassirun* were hardly a homogenous sector of Egyptian or Italian society, and thus their reaction to the colonization of Libya cannot truly be generalized. Future research regarding the Italian colony in Egypt could be served by an analysis of the *mutamassirun* through the lens of class relationships and structures. It is plausible that the division of the *mutamassirun* over Libya fell along class lines. Poorer migrant workers in the Suez Canal zone and on the periphery of the bifurcated European cities in Cairo and Alexandria were most likely to live among Egyptians rather than Europeans.<sup>6</sup> The lower classes of *mutamassirun* were far less isolated than their upper-class counterparts in the heart of Isma‘il’s Cairo or the European neighborhood of Ramla in

4. Grimani to d’affari, see n. 52.

5. Petricioli, 1.

6. Chapter 3 in Ruiz, explores the geographic domestic spaces shared by poorer Europeans and Egyptians and supports the idea that class ideology and identity often transcended budding notions of nationality.

Alexandria, and were thus more likely to harbor sympathies for lower-class Libyans subjugated by Italian colonialists.

Class identity may also explain the dissidence of the Italian academics at Cairo University. As stated in the previous chapter, Vincenzo Fago led anti-war demonstrations after getting fired from the university. While his anger at the foreign ministry may have been driven simply by self-interest, self-protection, and revenge, it is also likely that Fago and the other intellectuals in the Italian colony were influenced by class ideology. Leftist anti-imperialist sentiment often emerged from universities and coincided with the growth of socialism throughout Europe. Conversely, it is likely that the more bourgeois elements of the community tended to support the invasion, as they benefitted directly from the investments of Banco di Roma and the other *pro-italianità* programs.

Given the documentation available, such class-based analysis must unfortunately remain speculative for this thesis—it is difficult to arrive at such conclusions by looking solely at government correspondence. Additionally, the lack of any lasting documentation, such as books, letters, or memoirs, from the Italian *mutamassirun* will make it difficult to find a clear picture of the fragmented and diverse community. However, recent trends in modern Egyptian social history provide a novel approach to understanding the class relationships of the European communities in colonial Egypt. By using consular and mixed court records, only recently made available by the Egyptian and British governments, scholars such as Mario Ruiz, Will Hanley, Shane Minkin, and Hanan Kholoussy have been able to uncover class ideologies and other historiographically forgotten insights in the history of cosmopolitan colonial

Egypt where documentation “from below” is lacking. In the same vein of these new historians, future archival work in the mixed court and consular court files in Cairo and London will add tremendous nuance to the topic of Italian *mutamassirun* in Egypt.

For the intents of this thesis, though, by looking at the sparsely documented reactions of the *mutamassirun* in concert with the heavily documented and unexplored government correspondence during the decade preceding the Italian invasion and colonization of Libya, it is clear that the *mutamassirun* proved to be a difficult obstacle in Italy’s strategy of *pénétration pacifique*. The Italian foreign ministry was largely unsuccessful in winning over either the Egyptians or the Italian *mutamassirun* despite its attempts to manufacture consent for the war among both communities, and while it attempted to portray itself as a philo-Islamic and culturally and morally benevolent European center, the underlying imperialist veneer of its professed benevolence was incontrovertibly obvious and the Egyptian and emigrant communities failed to give their full support to the colonization of Libya.

## Archives and Manuscript Collections

- ACS:PCM      Archivio Centrale del Stato. Presidenza Consiglio Ministero collection, Archivio Centrale del Stato, Roma.
- ASDMAE AC    Archivio Storico Diplomatico. Ambasciata al Cairo collection, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma.
- ASMAI        Archivio Storico del Ministero dell’Africa Italiana. Held in ASDMAE, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma.
- DDI IV        Edoardo Del Vecchio, editor. *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (1908-1914)*. Vol. 5/6. quarta serie (11 Dicembre 1909-29 Marzo 1911). Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 2001.

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