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Welfare after Empire: Italy, Egypt, and the politics of assistance after 1945



Le bien-être après l'empire : l'Italie, l'Égypte et les politiques sociales après 1945

JOSEPH J. VISCOMI


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Abstracts

English Français

How could a state's distanced approach to the welfare of its national subjects shape experiences at the end of empire? In this article, I consider this question by looking at the relationship between the Italian state and the departure of Italians from Egypt after 1945. The article presents a sociopolitical history of how experiences and expectations of welfare have shaped relations between the state and its migrant subjects at the end of empire. I argue that the regional strategies of the postwar Italian state turned away from institutional support of Italian residents in Egypt as a means of positioning itself closer to Nasser's government after 1954 and, in doing so, marginalised the interests of migrant Italians even while it relied on interwar narratives about their importance for Mediterranean political kinships. The article begins by using oral history to understand how the memories of repatriated Italians from Egypt framed the historical context of experiences and expectations of welfare support in relation to the state. It then looks back to the political conjuncture of the early 1950s and its reverberations among Italians in Egypt seeking to re-establish their lives after the Second World War, the collapse of fascist imperialism, and decolonisation. It examines how, at the very moment the two new republics moved closer together one another, Italian residents in Egypt were kept at a strategic distance by the Italian state and its diplomatic actors in Egypt. With the so-called unmixing of the colonial sea, then, it looks at how Italians sought – and failed to acquire – aid and assistance from the Italian state when departing from Egypt and how this contoured the perspectives of Italian repatriates.

Comment l'approche distanciée d'un État à l'égard du bien-être de ses sujets nationaux a-t-elle pu façonner les expériences à la fin de l'empire ? Dans cet article, je me penche sur cette question en examinant la relation entre l'État italien et le départ des Italiens d'Égypte après 1945. L'article présente une histoire sociopolitique de la manière dont les expériences et les attentes en matière de bien-être ont façonné les relations entre l'État et ses sujets migrants à la fin de l'empire. Je soutiens que les stratégies régionales de l'État italien d'après-guerre se sont détournées du soutien institutionnel aux résidents italiens en Égypte afin de se rapprocher du gouvernement de Nasser après 1954 et, ce faisant, ont marginalisé les intérêts des migrants italiens tout en s'appuyant sur les récits de l'entre-deux-guerres concernant leur importance pour les liens de



parenté politiques méditerranéens. L'article commence par utiliser l'histoire orale pour comprendre comment les souvenirs des Italiens rapatriés d'Égypte ont encadré le contexte historique des expériences et des attentes en matière d'aide sociale par rapport à l'État. Il revient ensuite sur la conjoncture politique du début des années 1950 et ses répercussions sur les Italiens d'Égypte qui cherchaient à reprendre leur vie en main après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, l'effondrement de l'impérialisme fasciste et la décolonisation. Il examine comment, au moment même où les deux nouvelles républiques se sont rapprochées l'une de l'autre, les résidents italiens en Égypte ont été maintenus à une distance stratégique par l'État italien et ses acteurs diplomatiques en Égypte. Avec ce que l'on appelle le démélange de la mer coloniale, il examine comment les Italiens ont cherché – et n'ont pas réussi à obtenir – l'aide et l'assistance de l'État italien en quittant l'Égypte et comment cela a façonné les perspectives des rapatriés italiens.

Index terms

Mots-clés : migration, décolonisation, bien-être, histoire orale, mémoire impériale

Keywords: migration, decolonisation, welfare, oral history, imperial memory

Geographical index: Mediterranean, Italy, Egypt, Europe, North Africa

Full text

1 How could a state's strategically distanced approach to the welfare of its national subjects shape experiences at the end of empire? In this article, I consider this question by looking at the relationship between the Italian state and the departure of Italians from Egypt after 1945. This distanced stance taken by the state, which sought to rebuild its presence in the Mediterranean on new terms, reinforced an idea of community that had been cultivated in imperial contexts and under previous governments, most intensely during the fascist *ventennio*, when welfare was central to building consensus among Italians abroad. During the interwar years, Mussolini's government viewed the population of over 50,000 Italians in Egypt as a strategic asset in the Mediterranean and it had flooded Italian political and cultural institutions with financial, material, and cultural resources¹. These networks were strengthened by the Ottoman-era Capitulations, which had enabled a regime of extraterritorial jurisdiction and semi autonomy for certain national subjects and institutions, including Italians. The capitular regime existed until it was officially cancelled at the 1937 Montreux Convention and then phased out over a 12-year transitional period². With the help of extraterritoriality, the fascist government had fostered the belief that Italian subjects in Egypt were at the centre of the regime's imperial ambitions – and, although it may have been based mostly on political rhetoric, the consolidation of the Italian population had consequences that outlasted both the regime and empire.

2 The regime's reorganisation of Italian life had been so extensive that, on the eve of the Second World War, it created what British colonial officers perceived to be a viable fifth column threat to their own authority in Egypt. After Italy's entry into the war in June 1940, Anglo-Egyptian authorities repatriated Italian diplomats and closed all Italian institutions. They placed up to 7,000 Italian men (and a few women) of working age in civilian internment camps along the Suez Canal between 1940 and 1944/45, and the wider community was banned from free circulation. Other nationals were forbidden from conducting business transactions with Italians, apart from some exceptions. After years of relying on the Italian state for financial support, as chronic unemployment increasingly affected Italian workers in the 1930s, the population of Italians in Egypt fell into poverty. During the war, many families received meagre welfare payments from the Swiss authorities, but their coffers were exhausted by late 1943³. In reality, growing unemployment and impoverishment had already begun to stimulate departures by the late 1930s⁴. While exacerbated by internment and isolation during the war, the resurfacing of concerns over the Italian population's impoverishment after 1945 brought a shift in the approach taken by the state toward its national subjects in Egypt, particularly as the Christian Democrat government sought to carve a space for itself in emergent Mediterranean geopolitics.

3 This article considers the political conjunctures of the early 1950s and their consequences for Italian residents in Egypt and repatriates from Egypt after the collapse of fascism and during the “unmixing” of the colonial sea⁵. In this case, assistance and welfare are not just about material support, but also play an important role in the conceptualisation of a political community deeply entrenched in imperial structures. This is, therefore, a sociopolitical history of the perceived absence of state-led welfare; in other words, I examine the dynamics that occur when a “community” falls between the often-nascent institutions of the state, while members of that community anticipate assistance from that state. The article begins by seeking to understand how a sense of “protection” figured in the narratives of repatriated Italians from Egypt. Using oral histories, it demonstrates how individuals looked to the historical conditions from which they remember departing to explain a perceived rupture between their expectations of assistance from the state and their actual experiences of arrival. Then, it returns to this past through documentary archives to examine the prospects of Italian residents in Egypt as they attempted to make sense of their place in the new geopolitical configuration in the postwar Mediterranean. As relations unfolded between the two new Republics in the 1950s, the article illustrates how Italian residents in Egypt were marginalised from the interests of the Italian state. Paradoxically, this occurred while Italian diplomats and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs used “the Italian community” as an emblem through which to navigate ties with Nasser’s government after 1954. In this conjuncture, departure became a means of settling “uncertainty” for Italians in Egypt, a condition shaped by expectations of “protection” that had been fostered in the imperial Mediterranean. The impact of debates about displaced Italians from Egypt would be lasting. Finally, the article concludes by examining the Italian home for the elderly in Alexandria, which was overseen by the oldest functioning Italian benevolent association in Egypt. It reflects on several attempts to provide resources for this ultimately fading community at the end of empire.

Remembering the end of empire

4 Between 1945 and 1961, at least 40,000 Italians left Egypt. During those years of “exodus” – a term Angelos Dalachanis employs critically to refer to the sociopolitical dynamics of mass departure of Greeks from Egypt during the early 1960s⁶ – most Italians from Egypt “returned” to Italy as “repatriates” or, eventually, “national refugees”. Others departed once more as “emigrants”. In postwar Europe, these terms had imprecise socio-legal implications; but they all shaped experiences of departure, welfare regimes, and processes of integration⁷. Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that the articulation of these categories “made” postwar Europe (or postwar worlds more generally)⁸. In part due to the trans-imperial nature of Italian departures from Egypt, the multiple and often contested meanings implied by these categories were channelled through the institutions and offices of the Italian state; at the same time the state deployed narratives of political kinship to articulate ties with the Egyptian government⁹. Even as the two Republics arranged new ties, they turned their backs to the Mediterranean, as one scholar has put it: Italy turned towards Europe and Egypt to the Middle East and North Africa¹⁰. Although this rupture may not in reality have been so dramatic, as we shall see, the absence of assistance informed the narratives of many Italians from Egypt who sought to trace continuities in their experiences of this regional transformation.

5 The uncertainty of arrival, which in many ways multiplied precarity already experienced in Egypt, seems to have fostered a sense of nostalgia for worlds left behind, where political belonging had relied on the structures of empire. This section seeks to understand how the perception of an “inadequate reception” in postwar Italy – like that described by *pieds noirs* in post-Algerian War Marseille¹¹ – compelled many repatriates

to historicise their departures by placing them within a longer chronology, a chronology that will be carefully unpacked in the following sections. In the same way as historian Peter Fritzsche describes the sense of the past slipping away for Europeans and Americans in the aftermath of the French Revolution, nostalgia engendered a shared refuge from the irretrievable past. In reflecting on departures, many repatriates described their lives in Egypt as a “world within a world” shaped by a sense of “protection” within national-imperial hierarchies¹². One repatriate, Bruno Buccetti, carried a copy of a timeline prepared by another repatriate which was published in the bulletin of the Association of Italians of Egypt (Associazione Italiani d’Egitto, AIDE), a group that had emerged from refugee camps and other centres which housed repatriates in Italy¹³. The chronology was a means of ordering time and experience. He pointed to Mehmet Ali’s reign, then to the period of Khedive Ismail’s rule, noting that his grandfathers had moved to Egypt from Messina (Sicily) to work on the construction of a dam in Asyut (Upper Egypt) in the 1870s. For several years, they returned to their families in Sicily, but then decided to move permanently to Cairo: “at the time,” he said, “it was better than Europe ... we were *protected* by laws which gave us possibility. Many Europeans today don’t understand this, we didn’t have to change nationality ... we weren’t obliged to change our habits.” This imperial context was the primary point of reference for many repatriates as they navigated their postwar experiences, especially in a new Europe from which they were seemingly marginalised¹⁴.

6 The imperial hierarchy had placed Italians within a category of European privilege, even as those structures crumbled around the Italian and other non-Egyptian populations that had benefitted from the Capitulations. “European” functioned in sociopolitical terms; it was not a category that entailed jurisdictional emplacement, which was national within the capitulatory regime, but it marked an important symbolic division of colonial societies¹⁵. Renato Berni, born in 1930s Cairo, recalled a plurality of national communities, noting, “it was a country created *by* Europeans *for* Europeans.” Each “community”, he continued, had their own public spaces: cinemas, clubs, restaurants, hospitals, schools, and so forth, “because of the Capitulations, the Egyptian police couldn’t do anything!” The “autonomy” associated with these spaces, he claimed, allowed Italian residents to distinguish themselves “as a national community” and to rely on national institutions. This sense of protection attributed to one’s status within national communities began to change, he claimed, around 1949, when the transitory period away from extraterritoriality formally ended. Berni stated, “Europeans no longer felt they had someone to defend them ... they weren’t protected anymore.” With that loss of protection, according to many repatriates, the “exodus” commenced: “when you met someone the first question was no longer ‘how are you?’ it was ‘when are you leaving¹⁶?’”

7 As part of this transformation, Berni recalled that Egyptian laws began to require Arabic to be taught in schools. Most Italian residents had had only a basic knowledge of Arabic – enough to communicate in stores or in the street in informal situations. The instruction of Arabic became obligatory in 1949, in theory, as a method for integrating non-Egyptian residents into national life. Some would even cite this as a reason for their departure. Berta Massoni, for example, requested a consular repatriation in the mid-1950s, stating, “I won’t have any work here because I don’t know the Arabic language and now they want everything in Arabic¹⁷.” Others noticed the lack of “protection” in the physical spaces around them. Claudio Cherini remembered his childhood in downtown Cairo as “carefree” (*spensierato*). He went out, played football with the neighbourhood youth and frequented Cairo’s cinemas. Reflecting on the “cosmopolitan” city, however, caused him to pause. He observed, “... the burning of Cairo was nasty”. Returning to the destruction of the symbols of that demarcated European spaces in Egypt, the destruction of downtown Cairo touched the experiences that he saw as essential to fostering the conditions to feel at once Italian and European. The Cairo Fire in 1952 transformed the urban landscape. Few suffered personal attacks, and few homes were damaged. The destruction of public spaces that distinguished “Egyptian” and “European” realities, in the perception of repatriates, however,

contemporaneously destroyed the separation between “Egyptian” and “European” politics. The “autonomy” that had been engendered by extraterritoriality had been suspended by this permeation of boundaries. Indeed, while the political changes that unfolded after the Second World War transformed the conditions that made it possible for foreigners to remain in Egypt as they had prior to 1937, the events of the Cairo Fire in 1952 figured as visceral and affective reminders of the dismantling of the legal regimes that privileged “Europeans” and allowed for Italian institutions to support a “national community” for its own regional interests.

8 Lidia Mieli, who was a child at the time, remembered the burning of the cinemas, stressing that only downtown Cairo was touched, “they did nothing to Shobra ... they went to the *European* neighbourhoods, they were against the English and French, not the Italians ... and that’s where they did damage, where there was the European neighbourhood in the centre.” Here she made a further distinction; in mentioning Shobra, Mieli isolated a neighbourhood whose Italian population was comparatively large: Shobra included nearly one quarter of all the Italian residents in Cairo in 1947 (around 35 percent of the neighbourhood’s total population were non-Egyptian residents)¹⁸. Mieli clarified that the sites destroyed during the Cairo Fire – while affecting all who witnessed them – were chosen because of their significance to a specific, yet broadly defined, “European” landscape within the city. She described how hearsay about the Muslim Brotherhood commenced after 1952, as though the Cairo Fire itself propelled Egyptian politics into Italian circles. “I can’t forget that date, 26 January 1952 ... then in July they sent away the King ... there was one general, Naguib, but it was Nasser that led and after a year he took power, that’s when it became really difficult to live in Egypt.” She explained that, notwithstanding the damage done to stores owned or operated by members of different communities, “the Egyptians” (ambiguously signified) were against the English – “they’d had it with the English!” Yet, these events convinced her father that their presence in Egypt was no longer welcome.

9 The conditions of colonial Egypt were described by many as a “structural situation” that had permitted Italians and Italian institutions to operate “in [their] own country¹⁹”. Many repatriates interpreted the regime of protection prior to the 1950s as having engendered a sense of belonging to Italy and Italian state institutions that had administered their lives in Egypt. Alberto Ades, whose father was an Italian *protégé* in Syria before coming to Egypt in the early 1920s, ran a small textiles factory on the periphery of Cairo²⁰. During the Suez Conflict, his company was nationalised and allowed to run under the supervision of a high-level Egyptian officer, but his family had already transferred most of their wealth into Swiss banks. One by one, as political tensions became more overt after the 1948 war in Palestine, he recalled how he and his siblings left to find work in Europe. He said, “it wasn’t too difficult because we had money ... but it wasn’t easy, *from one world you arrived in another* ... you always felt uneasy, a little foreign [emphasis mine].” I asked if he could elaborate on his experience of departure, and he responded by shifting from an affective register to what he referred to as an “objective” historical one in which he described how extraterritoriality had perpetuated inequality:

“the British exaggerated with the Egyptians ... it wasn’t right ... if a foreigner beat an Egyptian, the Egyptian couldn’t do anything ... there was a word, *hemāya*’ (protection) ... one would say, “I’m protected by the Italian consulate...”²¹”

10 The ease with which he recalled the usage of “protection” demonstrates a common knowledge of the hierarchies that existed under the logic of the Capitulations and of the perceived implications of their abolishment²². Nearly all repatriates recalled vividly how the ending of extraterritoriality transformed their possibility of remaining in Egypt. More than a legal concept denoting a state of exception, *hemāya* (protection) was a social practice or strategy used among members of communities under the capitulatory regime to distance themselves from Egypt and place themselves in the protection of national institutions²³. Narrative accounts of the loss of protection focused not on causal or determinant “events” that led to transformation in, and departure from,

Egypt, but rather on the emergence of new political regimes in Italy and Egypt. Many repatriates contended that “Egyptian” politics interrupted Italian and European “cultural” spaces, dissolving the boundaries and institutions that had made community life possible. As Patrizia Paoletti, who was repatriated as a young girl during the 1956 Suez Conflict, claimed, “the problem” that “caused” departure had been that neither Egypt nor Italy favoured “integration”. Neither had provided the means to assist in the integration of Italians at the end of empire²⁴. These acts of remembering trace partial threads back to some of the uncertainties that marked the postwar context.

Postwar uncertainties

11 When the deposed Italian monarch, Vittorio Emanuele III, arrived in Egypt in 1946, he benefitted from a long history of exchange between the House of Savoy and the Mehmet Ali dynasty. In Alexandria, he had been welcomed – even recognised – by many residents who remained loyal to this affinity. But as new political regimes emerged in Italy by the late 1940s and in Egypt following the 1952 military coup, which would force King Faruk to abdicate the throne and lead to the creation of the Egyptian Republic in 1953, unsettling questions for Italian diplomats and residents in Egypt surfaced regarding the alignment of the past and the future. It was clear to many that the symbols of the imperial Mediterranean, on which earlier migrations had rested, would cease to carry the same significance. The expansionist project of fascist imperialism and the consolidation of Italian institutions in Egypt had invested heavily in the idea of two “nations” bound in this “historic” affinity, and the royal families had been celebrated as the embodiment of this relationship (for example, in the aftermath of the 1905 and 1908 earthquakes, which destroyed vast parts of Sicily and Calabria, King Fuad provided substantial aid to the Italian government to assist displaced Italians)²⁵. Indeed, in 1938, the National Fascist Party (Partito nazionale fascista, PNF) in Alexandria, through the guise of “the Italian community”, erected a tributary statue of Khedive Ismail as a gesture towards this political kinship²⁶. The coexistence of nationalist and imperialist projects had flourished in large part thanks to the extraterritorial jurisdiction which linked Italian residents in Egypt to metropolitan Italy; conditions which concurrently augmented the fascist regime’s perception of the Italian population’s potential as an asset to counter British and French imperial hegemony in the region²⁷. The Italian king’s arrival in Egypt, then, was not simply a consequence of the creation of an Italian Republic and the emergence of a new political regime, but it was a harbinger of change in Egypt. Faruk’s commemoration of the Italian king upon his death in 1947 with a military funeral embraced those historical affinities. In the following years, however, transformations in the political landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean destabilised narratives of regional partnership and fostered intense uncertainty for Italian subjects who had become accustomed, and even encouraged, to look to the Italian state for assistance.

12 The differentiation of national communities that had been propped up by imperial legal regimes took on new meaning; and, contemporaneously, as decolonisation shifted political alliances in the Mediterranean, the interests of states and their citizens clashed. Assistance was often at the heart of these clashes. Although few Italians suffered direct personal attacks in the demonstrations that shook Cairo in January 1952, just months before the military coup, the destruction of the public spaces that had constituted the centre of Cairo’s “European” city ruptured the perceived separation between “Egyptian” and “European” politics, a separation that had characterised many colonial urban settings in the Eastern Mediterranean since the late-nineteenth century²⁸. According to both diplomats and Italian residents in Egypt, by the early 1950s “Italians” were being “denationalised” and “assimilated” into the larger category of “foreigner”²⁹. This emergent, and yet uncertain reality, was perhaps best encapsulated in the spring of 1952 – while the fate of residency regulations went undecided in Egypt’s parliamentary

debates – by the country’s General Director of Passports and Nationality, Ali Darwich, who stated, “it is necessary that foreigners convince themselves that they are guests [in Egypt], with all the significance this word carries³⁰.” This was interpreted by many to signify that any residence would be temporary. Such language would be reinforced during Muhammad Naguib’s first speeches following the Free Officer’s coup d’état later that year³¹. For an Italian state that sought to carve a place for itself in the postwar Mediterranean, this redefinition of the Italian population as foreign “guests” proved a significant challenge to state strategy.

13 Residence came to be seen by Italian subjects as temporary and marked by an anticipated departure, particularly as the Egyptian government enacted employment laws that sought to provide more opportunities for Egyptian workers and, in consequence, the unemployment rate rose steadily among Italians. On what institutions would they rely for assistance in these anticipated departures? Italian publications had been suppressed since Italy’s entry into the war. When the publication of Italian newspapers resumed in 1950, Atanasio Catraro, an Italian of Greek origin from Trieste, who had previously been editor of the PNF-aligned *Il Giornale d’Oriente*, founded the daily newspaper, *Cronaca*. He was permitted to publish under the condition that the newspaper omitted any form of “political nostalgia”. Around the same time, Max Terni (and Aldo Fetonte) founded the weekly paper, *Oriente*, in Cairo. The former was staunchly anti-Communist and monarchist, while the latter was in line with the post-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement, MSI). Both newspapers engaged with the present through the past: each issue included full pages devoted to “times past” (“*Il tempo che fu*” in the case of *Cronaca*) comprised of stories and photographs from the years of internment³². *Oriente*, on the other hand, positioned “Italians abroad (*italiani all’estero*)” as “the most dear to Italy’s heart” and championed the MSI’s campaign to include them – for the first time – in the national vote, a strategy clearly aimed at widening the post-fascist movement³³. Terni was critical of the Christian Democrats’ liberal emigration policy and Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi’s call for young Italians to emigrate – calls that would accelerate in the coming years³⁴. Both newspapers linked concern for the plight of Italian migrants to their own precarious conditions, and letters streamed into consular offices imploring the Italian government to assist in relocating Italians from Egypt.

14 While the Italian government aimed to foster relations on new terms in Egypt – across state and military infrastructure, rather than through community-based channels, as had been practised during the fascist *ventennio* – populations like the Italians in Egypt edged to the margins of national preoccupations. Although emblematic of historical ties, their limited horizons in Egypt became a roadblock for state policy. Such a reality did not sit well with existing ideas of political belonging among Italians in Egypt, for whom political and cultural propaganda during the 1930s had instilled in many the belief that as a “community” they were at the centre of Italian regional ambitions. This disjuncture created a sense of resentment among Italian residents towards their own government. Terni, claiming to represent the fears expressed by local Italians and addressing the changing political landscape in the Mediterranean, used the term “refugees” (*profughi*) to talk about Italians returning from Tunisia, Libya, the Dodecanese, and Yugoslavia. He described these as territories seeking to “liberate themselves from the Italians”, and suggested that a similar fate awaited Italians in Egypt³⁵. Catraro’s *Cronaca*, reprinted, with added emphasis, excerpts from the magazine *Italiani nel Mondo* that portrayed the proposal to give Italians abroad the right to vote, as an indication of the replacement of “la Patria”, a construct that entangled nation and empire with the emerging *partitocrazia*:

“[Italians abroad] want to continue to love Italy [...] as they have always loved it. Italy; not whatever Italian political party. They want to continue to see in the compatriot (*connazionale*) who works beside them, or whom they meet in the evening at the hangout or in the street, a brother, not a political adversary. They also want their relations with the countries hosting them to go undisturbed³⁶.”

15 The newspapers conveyed notions of Italians in Egypt as extensions of the Italian state, built upon imperial regimes of protection; notions that fell on deaf ears in the Italian government's development Mediterranean policy and in the context of Egypt's acceleration towards national sovereignty. The conflict between these positions demonstrates the important history of fascist imperialism in postwar nation building³⁷. At the same time, when viewed from the standpoint of Egypt and the unique jurisdictional context that existed in the interwar years, and with the collapse of the fascist empire-nation after 1943, the trajectories of the Italian state and Italian subjects in Egypt conflicted. Italian residents largely remained attached to an understanding of their location in an imperial Mediterranean that required the Italian state's active administration of their welfare as a "national community" rather than a population of individual migrant subjects. The disjuncture between interwar experiences and the quickly changing political landscape after the war offered little direction for the future. In 1953, the new Italian ambassador to Egypt claimed that Italians in Egypt suffered from chronic "uncertainty and disquiet" that was tied up in impossible expectations of the Italian state³⁸.

Marginalising community

16 Emigration, repatriation and refuge served as conduits through which these disjunctures could be navigated. If the postwar was characterised by a marked shift towards understanding Italy's colonial communities as populated by "proletarian" migrants – as a strategy to transform histories of settlement into histories of migration – then emigration, repatriation and refuge presented viable solutions to the insecurities of welfare provision³⁹. While debates and discussions ensued in Italy about the predicaments of individuals displaced from Italy's former colonial possessions, no concrete policy was articulated to integrate national subjects entering Italian territory from lands that had not officially constituted part of Italy's empire⁴⁰. Indeed, although displacement from Egypt looked like flows from other decolonising states (such as Italians departing Tunisia in 1956 or Algeria during the War for Independence), the steady departure of Italians from Egypt after the Second World War was more directly linked to changing legal and residency circumstances which increased unemployment and poverty exacerbated by the internment and isolation of Italians during the Second World War. Departures accelerated after the 1956 Suez Crisis, as we will see, but this was not caused by bellicose events⁴¹. The Italian government recognised that the means to deal with Italians leaving Egypt in impoverished conditions could not be met on a large scale – neither through political discourse nor through pecuniary assistance on the ground. This recognition pointed to an awareness that the Italian state lacked resources to address the already growing crisis of population displacement⁴². Moreover, the Foreign and Interior Ministries feared that displaced Italians from Egypt, would carry with them experiences of the colonial Mediterranean and thus disrupt political balance in favour of a re-emergence of political fascism or would feed into the rhetoric of the communist left.

17 In the early 1950s, over 1,000 Italian families received weekly or fortnightly welfare payments from the consular offices in Egypt – a position that local consular authorities deemed unsustainable⁴³. Departures (and arrivals) were encouraged but dealt with on a case-by-case basis through consular offices in an effort to forestall the creation of "communities" of "refugees" or "repatriates". Due to these practices, it is difficult to estimate how many individuals and families left Egypt in the years after the Second World War. In seeking departure, many hopeful "repatriates" inserted themselves in regional political questions by claiming that they should receive welfare payments directly from the Italian government to fund their travel and integration upon arrival⁴⁴. Indeed, this sense of macroscale political belonging resonated with many Italians in Egypt after the 1930s, and it continued to inflect narratives of "repatriation" with the

hope of “returning” to metropolitan Italy. Italians in Egypt petitioned for collective repatriation that would settle growing their uncertainty; importantly, they also perceived that it would link them to the Italian state to which they saw themselves as inextricably attached. Collective repatriation was perceived as a recognition of their “historic community” because it would connect their presence in Egypt to Italy’s national-imperialist project of the past. Initially, few accounts portray departing Italians as “refugees” fleeing Egypt, but rather as Italians “returning” to the home which they had “served” and represented at the end of empire⁴⁵. The policy developed by the Italian government, however, avoided collective repatriation and thus, in the eyes of many, did not recognise these as historical rights. In contrast, state actors came to view the intergovernmental institutions that had developed to resolve questions of population displacement at the European level, such as the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM, established in 1951), as outlets that could be used to externalise and internationalise displaced Italians⁴⁶. In the gaps between these processes, repatriating Italians would create their own institutions and, in this way, their displacement became formative in institutionalising a political community.

18 By May 1954, Italy and Egypt had settled contracts on around 600 million EGP worth of public works projects. By stressing collaboration and shared “heredity” of the Mediterranean, Pasquale Janelli, the new Italian ambassador to Egypt, attempted to convince Gamal Abdel Nasser of the “historic and geographical necessity” of organising a common defence against communism. Janelli’s attempts evoked little response from Nasser. Instead, the Italian diplomat came to understand that the sole means by which he could connect with Nasser was through the latter’s familiarity with “the Italian community”.⁴⁷ In order to do this, Italian diplomats would attempt to reinvigorate the cultural propaganda of the fascist *ventennio* when migration diplomacy was used as a key path to creating links between Italy and Egypt. Conscious of the ongoing flow of Italians out of Egypt since the end of the Second World War, Janelli addressed the Italian press office in Egypt as journalists prepared to cover the anniversary of the military coup. He assured them, paradoxically, that the “period of uncertainty” for Italian residents had passed.

19 To acknowledge the approximation of the two governments, Janelli requested that Nasser publicly address the Italian community. In a speech written by members of the Italian diplomatic team and read in Italian by Nasser, the Egyptian leader evoked interwar tropes to highlight “the Italian contribution to the construction of modern Egypt” and expressed plans to “[protect Italian] interests and communities”. Italian diplomats sought to foster an image of Italians as contributors to and proponents of Egypt’s modernisation and its path towards independence; as agents in Egyptian history⁴⁸. The speech was broadcast in Egypt and on Radio Roma in Italy.

20 Italian policy aimed to avoid taking a position on Egypt’s emerging political horizons. In the early 1950s, the Italian government had created an institutional organ to “valorise” the efforts of Italian works in Africa through documentary evidence (Comitato per la documentazione dell’opera dell’Italia in Africa). In other words, within the halls of the Foreign Ministry, political actors attempted to appropriate recent history to shape post-colonial political relations with formerly colonised territories⁴⁹. The Egyptian government, on the other hand, had suspected many foreign residents of communist and Zionist organising. Some of these suspicions carried over into the public realm, and the image of the “foreigner” often assimilated all non-Egyptian national communities into one collective Other. As long as Italian residents were seen “positively” by the Egyptian government, then, Italian diplomats understood that they had an advantage over other foreign powers and thus greater manoeuvrability⁵⁰.

21 To remain detached from ongoing political changes in Egypt, the position of the Italian state needed to generalise its national community; at the same time it refused to collectivise departure: efforts were made to depict the “true” Italian community as one constituted by honest workers who had never challenged Egyptian sovereignty. Around the time of the anniversary of the military coup, for example, Vittorio Giannotti, an Italian insurance broker, had been accused of making irregular financial transactions in

what ostensibly would have been perceived as a demonstration of foreign subjects' exploitation of the Egyptian economy. Vittorio Zoppi, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, cautioned Janelli to portray Giannotti as acting independently, so as not to tarnish the "prestige" of the wider community of Italian residents. Any slight on "the community", Zoppi believed, would harm "Italy's economic penetration of Egypt⁵¹."

22 This manipulation of the idea of community meant that institutions and individuals were carefully scrutinised and deployed strategically, both in discourse and practice. But Italian residents who placed themselves at a political nexus between Italy and Egypt continued to foil the position of strategic distance. Egyptian authorities held a meeting to prepare for a celebration of the anniversary of the coup in Bulaq, the Cairene district where Italian residents constituted over half of the foreign population⁵². Nasser and other members of the Revolutionary Council were present, as well as the Italian Consul De Michelis, and local journalists. Giuseppe Cattaneo, a resident of Bulaq, stood up to address the Egyptian officers. We do not know precisely what he said, but the following day, *Le Progrès Egyptien* reported that Cattaneo had claimed to speak in the name of "the Italian community", declaring, "in perfect Arabic ... that it was natural for the Italian community to support the Liberation Movement". *Al-Ahrām* the largest Arabic-language daily newspaper, inflated the incident, claiming that "the Italian community, which represents a large part of the foreigners [in Egypt], announced its support for the revolution and its leaders and puts the lives and goods of its children at Egypt's service for the realisation of its national claims". De Michelis later averred that Cattaneo had spoken only for himself and, without clarification, maligned "the enemies of Egypt's independence", therefore speaking abstractly with respect to national alliances (in relation to broader Anglo-Egyptian and Anglo-Italian relations, Italian diplomats were also wary of taking a stance against British authorities). In this context, Janelli considered "any collective manifestation that might give the impression of participation in the political life of [Egypt] by our community" to be a risk, yet condemning Cattaneo's alleged speech would appear to be taking a stance *against* the Revolutionary Council. Because Cattaneo expressed a favourable opinion of Nasser's movement, then, Janelli chose not to challenge the "positive" attention the incident received in the Egyptian press⁵³.

23 The only damning public reaction came from the daily newspaper *Cronaca*, which had become the most popular newspaper among Italian residents. Its private sponsors were among the largest contributors to the Italian Charity Association (Società italiana di beneficenza, henceforth SIB) and were the last remaining buttresses to Italian institutional life in Egypt⁵⁴. The Italian government subsidised its publication, seeing it as a simple path to influence its national readership⁵⁵. Catraro, the paper's editor, cautioned Italian residents about making statements in the name of the larger population. In direct reference to the circulation of Cattaneo's comments, Catraro heralded their "good cause". Yet, he advised that Italians should avoid any public input on "Egyptian politics". He asked, rhetorically, what might occur if someone else spoke, "in the name of Italians": "Are we sure that [these statements of partnership] will be favourable criteria for Italo-Egyptian friendship?" Within the changing political context and the growing precariousness of foreigners in Egypt, any form of political expression risked misinterpretation. Catraro saw that, on this occasion, Cattaneo's statement had been in line with the politics of the Egyptian government. Indeed, Catraro's stance appears to be a clear divergence from his previously critical position towards the Italian state; the discourse of the post-fascist state approximated the political rhetoric of the fascist government by attempting to generalise and reinforce a conception of "the Italian community" as fundamentally benevolent, even while unanswered demands for collective repatriation denoted an increasingly marginalised community. The welfare of Italians in Egypt fell within the interstices of a government seeking to align itself politically with Egypt, but unable to provide material support for its national subjects there. At this juncture, the absence of assistance would shape not only the present conditions and courses of possible action for Italians, but also how they understood the rights of the community.

Becoming refugees

24 This first half of this article has dealt with the growing distance between Italian state interests and the conditions of Italian residents in Egypt in the early 1950s. Before the rest of Europe confronted the social and welfare implications of its empires “coming home”, Italy’s decolonisation prompted questions about the intersections of ideas about sovereignty, patriotism, and citizenship, all of which would come to define debates around internationalism in post-1945 Europe⁵⁶. For Italians entering from Egypt, their displacement and “coming home” multiplied these questions, particularly because they did not easily conform to the categories of colonial or post-colonial subjects so often linked to the developing (national) binaries of decolonisation. In the absence of policies for their integration, the population of Italians from Egypt was conceived by state actors as a community fostered by historical contingencies that unsettled postwar political narratives. Both displaced Italians from Egypt and state actors around them began to articulate “community” in a political sense in order to make claims about its rights in postwar Italy. They often did so by embracing categories of socio-legal belonging that cut across colonial and post-colonial histories of the Mediterranean⁵⁷.

25 The 1956 Suez conflict that followed Nasser’s nationalisation of the Suez Canal overlapped with the repression of the Hungarian Revolution, which displaced around 200,000 Hungarians⁵⁸. Although both resulted in the arrival of refugees to Italy, the regulations around their reception were varied. The influx of Hungarian refugees resonated with Cold War narratives and their circumstances were widely reported. News that institutional assistance had been provided to the more 3,000 Hungarians who entered Italy in the beginning of 1956 provoked an atmosphere of hostility among contemporary arrivals from Egypt. Official estimates claimed that assistance to Hungarian refugees was quadruple the amount spent on repatriated Italians⁵⁹. On the other hand, the lack of political conflict between Italy and Egypt meant that repatriates from Egypt could only be classified as “poor” (*indigenti*), and would therefore receive the same aid as any locally-based citizen who received welfare⁶⁰. Such an arrangement did not account for their displacement; a perceived inequity that became a point of contention and enlivened neo-fascist MSI’s claims that the Christian Democrat government had failed to provide for what it claimed subjects of former imperial territories were entitled.

26 In February 1957, Edoardo Costa, the MSI’s foreign affairs attaché, travelled to Egypt to meet with Nasser. In one speech to Italians, he claimed that the contemporary government had failed to acknowledge the importance of the “Italians of Egypt” – as a community – by designating them as “impoverished Italians”. Italians in Egypt, he argued, had become victim not of Egypt’s national policies but rather of Italy’s denial of its own history. Costa portrayed the Italian government’s lack of “reception” of repatriates as a repudiation of the “historic role” Italians had played in “developing Italy’s prestige” abroad and enabling the current relations between Italy and Egypt⁶¹. His words resonated with the perspectives of many Italians in Egypt, whose petitions for assistance went unanswered as they sought to navigate the changing postwar Mediterranean.

27 Carmelo De Lorenzo, a teacher born in Cairo, wrote to then Prime Minister, Antonio Segni, one of the pioneers of Italy’s movement towards European integration. De Lorenzo had arrived in Genoa nearly one month earlier, after having been made redundant in Egypt. His son, a designer for the Arabic-language *el-Moqattam* newspaper, had also been dismissed at the beginning of the Suez conflict. De Lorenzo identified himself as “an Italian without political affiliation” and advised Segni that a similar letter had been sent to all the local Genovese newspapers. The only paper that had agreed to publish his letter was an unspecified one on the “political Left” and he asserted that other papers (he specifically mentioned *Secolo XIX* and *Nuovo Cittadino*) had promised publication but then declined, stating that the letter expressed strongly worded anti-governmental sentiments.

28 In his letter to Segni, De Lorenzo explained how he and his acquaintances understood their situation. He detailed that as an unemployed foreigner in Egypt he felt “in danger for our lives and therefore sold off all of [his] belongings and objects [...]” He bought tickets for his family, and they departed Egypt at the encouragement, but not the expense, of local Italian authorities. He had been accepted to emigrate to Brazil through the Catholic Relief Services and awaited departure in Genoa, where he was temporarily hosted by the ICEM’s regional centre⁶². Once he received confirmation of his emigration, he claimed that he had been asked to leave the ICEM housing, saying, In spite of the fact I made clear my family’s grave state of poverty, especially with this cold and freezing weather that has invaded Genoa. After an initial welfare payment, the municipal authorities advised De Lorenzo to go to his legal “residence” (his *paese di origine*) in Reggio Calabria, where he no longer had connections to family. De Lorenzo refused to leave on account of the anticipated paperwork for his emigration to Brazil. He reported having been told by a representative of the Italian Red Cross that they had been instructed only to help refugees from Hungary and had no guidance for providing relief to Italians from Egypt. Steeped in nationalist rhetoric, before closing his letter to Segni, he proclaimed himself a “lover of the *Patria*”, and implored the PM and anyone who might read the letter in the bureaucratic hierarchies of the Italian government to concede the title “refugee from Egypt” to him and other Italians from Egypt so that they could benefit from the assistance provided to non-national refugees⁶³.

29 De Lorenzo’s letter is one among many in the archives that demonstrate the complex sociopolitical conjuncture created by the tension between welfare regimes at the end of empire. Bureaucratic processes linked to assistance played into the politics of departure in such a way that leaving Egypt implied entering into multiple precarious scenarios without clear prospects for resolution. Similar stories about the experiences of recently arrived Italians began to surface in the press. Letters like De Lorenzo’s stoked political fires and brought the experiences of displaced Italians into geopolitical discourse. As the flow of Italians from Egypt continued, political parties pressured the government to act. By early 1957, over 3,000 repatriated Italians had requested assistance from the government in Rome or from its regional offices. In Livorno, the municipality rented four private villas to house 237 individuals. Over the course of 1957, at least 89 of these 237 departed in search of work in other cities and abroad. Some went to urban centres like Milan where, between August 1956 and February 1957, over 400 families requested assistance upon arrival⁶⁴. This repetition and accumulation of shared and similar experiences made it impossible to effectively portray departures as decisions, requests, or displacements connected to individual circumstances.

30 Providing aid for Italians from Egypt increasingly became a public concern. The so-called exodus from Egypt, as it was being portrayed in media reports, sparked controversy in the Italian parliament⁶⁵. In one sitting, two senators demanded to know the degree to which departures were “voluntary”, citing restrictions placed by the Egyptian government on foreigners leaving Egypt⁶⁶. Randolfo Pacciardi – who had visited the Italian community and met with Egyptian military officials several years prior – spoke angrily to members of the parliament, noting that Nasser’s government was “appropriating” the earnings of Italians and “sending them back to their country with only enough money for cigarettes!⁶⁷” He questioned, then, why “thousands” were being “induced” to repatriate by Italian diplomats⁶⁸. Members of the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI) inquired as to whether similar procedures as those available to Hungarian refugees would be extended to Italians arriving from Egypt. The PCI representatives demanded a guarantee of “adequate financial resources” for repatriates⁶⁹. Members of the Christian Democrats warned that the growing number and isolation of repatriated Italians risked attracting the attention of “subversive” parties, especially drawing attention to the “miserable” conditions of the camps and the lack of opportunities available to them⁷⁰.

31 Such interventions draw attention to the conflicting senses of responsibility towards recently arrived Italians from Egypt. Furthermore, they demonstrate how historical logics informed and shaped the ways by which the Italian government handled claims

about responsibility in the constitution of a legislative apparatus to integrate repatriates from Egypt. In February 1957, parliament voted to extend the definition of “refugee” (according to Law 137 of 1952) to include Italians from Egypt, but it would take several years for the legal status to take effect⁷¹. Institutional resolutions attempted to absorb the fallout from this delay. The Ministry of Interior defended its position, noting that it took responsibility for the assistance of 2,500 “repatriated” Italians from Egypt, housed in Refugees Centres (Centro di Raccolta Profughi, CRP) throughout the country, and that the Ministry of Work and Social Welfare (Ministero del Lavoro e Previdenza Sociale, MLPS) had made efforts to procure employment for the displaced Italians. They continued to stress that departures were voluntary “precisely because [Italians leaving Egypt] were unemployed”. To resolve the problem of employment, the MLPS planned to profit from the linguistic skills of Italians arriving from Egypt (placing them in state positions as translators and interpreters).

32 But local integration was not a permanent solution. Italy’s postwar refugee situation was much larger than the population of Italians from Egypt. The MLPS worked with ICEM to internationalise the redistribution of recent arrivals, relocating unemployed repatriates to Brazil, Australia, Rhodesia, Argentina, and Uruguay. This cooperation was seen as one of the few answers to the economic and financial strain caused by repatriation. Emigration was portrayed as a palliative to “moral and economic poverty” caused by failed integration⁷². Relief from uncertainty became necessary for many in this period. In 1956 and 1957, over 680,000 Italians left Italy – the highest numbers since the end of the Second World War⁷³. At the same time, Italy was seen by many as a “bridge” for refugees as the Ministry of the Interior struggled to keep up with provisions, with some 26,000 individuals housed in camps (mostly from Istria, Dalmatia, Fiume, and Pola) and a further 20,000 subsidised outside of camps⁷⁴. Italy, to many arriving from Egypt, had already appeared as the unwelcoming “*matrigna*” (stepmother) that failed to provide the resources they sought to re-establish their lives as post-imperial citizens⁷⁵. Clearly, some of the dissatisfaction that came with this displacement from Egypt to Italy was the loss of privilege that had been enjoyed within the imperial hierarchy; within little more than a decade, Italians in Egypt went from occupying a symbolically central place in an Italian national empire, to seeking aid in integrating in the country where they had anticipated being “welcomed”.

33 Around this time, local assistance workers came to the conclusion that there were few possibilities for integrating Italians from Egypt. To demonstrate the severity of challenges faced after arrival, aid workers for the Italian Red Cross (Croce rossa italiana, CRI) drew from typical situations. Angelo Fantuzzi, born in 1915 in Zagazig, an electro-technician who had worked for Fiat in Egypt, found employment with *Air France* at Ciampino Airport, where he carried luggage but he was unable to support his family on the income. Although he had relatives in Australia, he could not afford the cost of travel there. Arturo Bajo stayed with his wife and four children in the station for two nights before being sent by the police to the La Marmora Barracks in Rome, where they were placed in a small, windowless room. The La Marmora Barracks, a reused military barracks from the First World War, had been officially closed to refugees since the 1940s. Its reappearance in the late 1950s is undocumented, implying that local police illegally used the quarters to house refugees when other options were unavailable⁷⁶. Between September 1956 and August 1957, Bajo was unable to find work. Michele Azzellini was a driver in Alexandria for a Jewish merchant who departed Egypt, leaving Azzellini without work and unable to find a replacement job. Once Azzellini arrived in Italy, he could not procure employment. His daughter was hired as a nanny, but his family purportedly ate only once every 48 hours. Emigration, again, was the solution to an absence of welfare support. The CRI managed to expedite the emigration applications of around 100 families, but material assistance was still urgently needed⁷⁷. In the following months, around 350 families were sent to South America (mostly to Brazil) through ICEM, while they continued to pressure the Australian government to accommodate Italians from Egypt in its immigration quota, hoping this would alleviate the requests for aid and assistance⁷⁸.

A fading institution

34 When I was reading in the archives of the Italian consulate in Alexandria from 2012 to 2013, the history of Italians in Egypt was understood publicly in terms of a fragmented urban heritage⁷⁹. The institutions from which Italian subjects had drawn in the past had been symbolically re-signified and practically repurposed. And yet, each afternoon, after the consulate closed, I visited the elderly residents of the Casa di Riposo, the Italian care home, which had been designed and built at a time when “the Italian community” in Egypt was at the (rhetorical) centre of Mussolini’s imperial vision of the Mediterranean. By way of a conclusion, then, its disrepair and decline represent a final thread in understanding the perceived absence of welfare at the end of empire.

35 The roughly twenty residents of the Casa di Riposo asked me to recount stories from the archives as they narrated intimate details of the political landscapes of 20th-century Italy and Egypt. Their home, the Casa di Riposo Vittorio Emanuele III, had been designed and built on a piece of land gifted to the Italian community for 99 years by then King Fuad in 1928⁸⁰. At the time, it was an essential institution for a growing and ageing population of Italian residents. Its location marked the divide between the popular quarters of Alexandria and the emerging middle-class districts along the city’s eastern coastline. Now, it sits in the crowded urban landscape behind the Alexandria Library. Its architect, Ernesto Verrucci, had been a close acquaintance of King Fuad and had been included among those who served as intermediaries between the Italian and the Egyptian states before Italy and Egypt became republics. The Casa di Riposo was constructed when the National Fascist Party enacted a major reform on the curriculum of Italians schools in Egypt which had sought to bring Italian emigrants into the folds of the Party’s nationalist and imperialist imaginaries.

36 At its opening, it was dedicated to the then Italian king, Vittorio Emanuele III, whose bust greeted visitors in the main lobby⁸¹. Marble plaques celebrating Mussolini and the leaders of the Fascio in Egypt adorn the wall adjacent to the entryway. At the time of writing, this entryway was not in use and the bust of Vittorio Emanuele III stood facing a closed door. On the ground floor, where the current entryway is situated, there is an office for the nurses who care for its residents. From its opening in 1928 until 1999, care at the Casa di Riposo was administered by a Combonian missionary congregation, the Suore missionarie pie madri della Nigrizia. Yet, with the departure of Italian residents by the late 1960s, the Italian nuns also left, withdrawing from their role as caretakers and leaving the home without any supervision. During that period, nearly one person passed away each week.

37 Several members of the Casa di Riposo assumed authority at this time and brought the Società italiana di beneficenza (Italian Charity Society, SIB) into a more prominent role. The SIB drew upon a pre-fascist history of Mutual Aid societies in Egypt⁸², most of which had been absorbed by the PNF and its offices during the interwar years; the SIB was the only charity organisation reconstituted after the war⁸³. After 1945, it assumed an ever more present role in providing aid and assistance to Italian residents in Egypt, increasingly taking on responsibilities that had fallen under the authority of state organs like the consulates. The SIB, effectively, became an institutional centre for Italians remaining in Alexandria. Indeed, when it was reconstituted in 1947 it listed amongst its main tasks:

“1) to procure work for the unemployed; 2) to oversee the institutionalisation of impoverished children and the recovery of the elderly; 3) to grant subventions – in money or material form – to those who merit them; 4) to propose to consular authorities necessary [cases for repatriation]; and 5) to assist the sick at home or in hospitals⁸⁴.”

38 The organisation had played an important role in supporting calls for a collective repatriation after the war. Furthermore, the SIB attempted to maintain control over the urban landscapes in which Italians lived. For example, in the 1970s, they had hoped to convince the consulate to protect Italian tombs in the “civil cemetery”. This

non-denominational cemetery holds the graves of many of Alexandria's anarchists and Freemasons and its state of disrepair mirrors that of the much larger Catholic Cemetery. The administration of the SIB at the time imagined that the small monetary request to provide for the cleaning and maintenance of the cemetery would have been fulfilled by Italian consular authorities, but the Consul refused to provide this assistance. Oscar Laterza, treasurer of the SIB during the 1970s, insisted that this was due to a pervasive fear of extending Italian state resources where they were no longer welcome, given the tense political strategies described above. At the time of writing, the cemetery was being transformed by the Coptic Church as it seeks additional sites for the interment of its deceased in Alexandria's crowded city⁸⁵.

39 By 2000, the SIB had assumed full control of the Casa di Riposo and located a group of Egyptian nurses to care for its residents. The care home was overseen by Antonio Rollo, formerly an electrician whose grandfather had migrated to Egypt in the early 20th century. Rollo managed the day-to-day activities of the care home. The SIB was run by Francesco Monaco, who carries the name of his paternal grandfather, founder of a pork production industry that had lasted for three generations in Egypt. Once a household name among Italian and European residents, Monaco closed its 100-year-old production in 2012, after being required to import pork from Brazil following the mass culling of pigs ordered by the then president, Hosni Mubarak during the swine flu scare of 2009.

40 Monaco lives between Italy, where his children reside, and Alexandria. Frequently, he pondered the politics of assistance and migration in the contemporary Mediterranean, which posed him a particular dilemma. On one occasion, he said, "Look at Italy today, Egyptian migrants number in the tens of thousands ... they say that Italy doesn't treat them well, doesn't give them their institutions or allow for cultural differences..." Then, he paused and said, "but look at our history, look at the Casa di Riposo". Monaco perceived a great disjuncture in the fact that, in Egypt, Italian residents had lived through increasing regulation of their institutional autonomy, being ever more constrained to live according to Egyptian or Italian national norms, while contemporary claims of pluralism invited calls for the "protection" of transnational migrant identities. He wondered aloud about what the political regimes of the past, around which the idea of an Italian community in Egypt had been forged and negotiated, would make of the decline of their presence in today's Mediterranean. His goal, he confessed, was to maintain the Casa di Riposo as an island of *italianità* (Italianness) for as long as he could, by providing institutional protection for a community that otherwise no longer existed. He acknowledged, however, that the care home was likely to share the same fate as other Italian institutions in Egypt and would eventually be ceded to the Egyptian state⁸⁶. The Casa di Riposo and its decline, in contrast to its creation at the centre of the Italian state's imperial ambitions in the region and the community's marginalisation since the 1950s, helps to throw light on the sociopolitical history of assistance at the end of empire. The perceived absence of welfare at the end of the empire, in a sense, has been in many ways a vehicle for departure and the reimagination of the imperial past. As this article has demonstrated, as the distance between the Italian state, its institutions, and its migrant subjects in Egypt has widened, a politicised understanding of "community" has taken shape and informed the historicisation of decolonisation and imperial memory.

Notes

1 See the articles by Costantino Paonessa and Eleonora Angella in this special issue.

2 For a comparison to cases in South America, where Italian migrants arrived under the auspices of the local state or at least due to its changing policies, rather than through an extension of the extraterritorial Italian state, see Angelo Trento, "In Brasile," in Piero Babilacqua, Andreina De Clementi and Emilio Franzina (eds), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana :2 : Arrivi*, Roma, Donzelli Editore, 2009 [2001], p. 3-23 and Fernando Devoto, "In Argentina," in Piero Babilacqua, Andreina De Clementi and Emilio Franzina (eds), *Storia dell'emigrazione*

italiana :2 : *Arrivi*, Roma, Donzelli Editore, 2009 [2001], p. 25-54. For how a similar system of extraterritoriality was transformed with the creation of the French Protectorate in Tunisia in 1881, see Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2014; and, more broadly on the subject of extraterritoriality in the Mediterranean, see Jessica M. Marglin, "Extraterritoriality and Legal Belonging in the Nineteenth-Century Mediterranean," *Law and History Review*, 39, 2021, n° 4, p. 679-706, Doi : 10.1017/S0738248021000390.

3 See Annalaura Turiano and Joseph J. Viscomi, "Delegazione apostolica, internati italiani e carità transnazionale in Egitto (1939-1945)," *MEFRIM: Mélanges de l'École française de Rome : Italie et Méditerranée*, 134, 2023, n° 2, <<http://journals.openedition.org/mefrim/12113>>.

4 I have addressed the interwar context at length in: Joseph J. Viscomi, "Mediterranean Futures: Historical Time and the Departure of Italians from Egypt, 1919-1937," *The Journal of Modern History*, 91, 2019, n° 2, p. 341-379.

5 Manuel Borutta and Sekas Gekas, "A Colonial Sea: the Mediterranean, 1798-1956," *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, 19, 2012, n° 1-"A Colonial Sea: The Mediterranean Sea, 1798-1956", p. 1-13, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2012.643609>>; Jan C. Jansen, "Unmixing the Mediterranean? Migration, demografische 'Entmischung' und Globalgeschichte," in Boris Barth, Stefanie Gänger and Niels P. Petersson (eds), *Globalgeschichten: Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven*, Frankfurt, Campus Verlag, "Reihe Globalgeschich, 17", 2014, p. 294-313.

6 Angelos Dalachanis, *The Greek Exodus from Egypt: Diaspora Politics and Emigration, 1937-1962*, Oxford, Berghahn, 2017, p. 4.

7 G. Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the postwar Order*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, "Oxford studies in international history", 2011; Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011.

8 Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2020; Tara Zahra, "Migration, Mobility and the Making of a Global Europe," *Contemporary European History*, 31 2022, n° 1, p. 142-154, Doi: 10.1017/S0960777321000758.

9 Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, "Transimperial History – Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History*, 16, 2018, 4, p. 429-452.

10 I would argue that the rupture was not as complete as portrayed by Lazarev, rather that the terms of a shift from diplomatic ties based on "community" to ones based on politico-economic institutions did indeed transform the place of national subjects in the Mediterranean. Anouchka Lazarev, "Italians, Italianity and fascism," in Robert Ilbert, Ilios Yannakakis, Jacques Hassoun and Colin Clément (eds), *Alexandria 1860-1960: The Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Le Caire, Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1996 [1977], p. 84.

11 G. Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake...*, op. cit.

12 Oral history interview with Bruno Buccetti, 23 March 2012, Milan.

13 AIDE onlus, *L'eredità culturale della presenza degli Italiani in Egitto: Atti della I Conferenza organizzata dall'AIDE sul tema della presenza italiana in Egitto*, Roma, Presso Genestampa, s.r.l., 2010. See also, Alessandra Vigo, "Dealing with returns: African Decolonization and Repatriation to Italy, 1947-70," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 57, 2022, n° 3, p. 751-774, Doi: 10.1177/00220094221087860 and *Rimpatriati d'Africa: Assistenza, associazioni e reintegro tra storia e memoria (1939-1952)*, Padua/Verona, Associazione nazionalista partigiani d'Italia Veneto/Scripta Edizioni, 2016.

14 Beyond the scope of this article, there is a burgeoning scholarship on the entangled histories of empire, decolonisation, and European integration in the 1950s. See Emily Marker, *Black France, White Europe: Youth, Race, and Belonging in the Postwar Era*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 2022; and Megan Brown, *The Seventh Member State: Algeria, France, and the European Community*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2022.

15 After the creation of the French Protectorate in 1881 in Tunisia, the term worked in a similar fashion but with legal backing. Mary Dewhurst Lewis, "Europeans before Europe? The Mediterranean Prehistory of European Integration and Exclusion," in Patricia M.E. Lorcin and Todd Shepard (eds), *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories*, Lincoln/London, University of Nebraska Press, "France Overseas: Studies in Empire and Decolonization", 2016, p. 232-262, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1d8h8t4.13>>.

16 Oral history interview with Renato Berni, 7 October 2011, Milan.

17 Archivio Consolato Generale di Alessandria d'Egitto (ACGA), "Massoni Maurizio fu Michele."

18 Davide Amicucci, "La comunità italiana in Egitto attraverso i censimenti dal 1882 al 1947", in Paolo Branca (dir.), *Tradizione e modernizzazione in Egitto 1798-1998*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2000, p. 87-88.

19 Oral historical interview with Patrizia and Anna Paoletti, 28 January 2012, Pisa.

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71 ACS PCM 1959-61 15/3/57749(3) Tambroni to Ministero del Tesoro, delle Finanze, del Bilancio and PCM 6 February 1957; The law which granted legal status as “national refugees” to Italians from Egypt was Law 1306 of 25 October 1960. This entitled them to the option of temporary housing (initially in one of three refugee camps in Puglia) or a small subsidy (*Gazzetta Ufficiale*, n° 279, 15 November 1960).

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76 I thank Giacomo Canepa for this observation.

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About the author

Joseph J. Viscomi

Joseph John Viscomi is a historian and anthropologist who specialises in the modern Mediterranean region. He is a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in European History in the School of Historical Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. His forthcoming book, *Migration at the End of Empire: Time and the Politics of Departure between Italy and Egypt*, examines political membership and historical temporalities through a microhistory of the anticipated, actual, and remembered departures of Italians from Egypt from the late-19th century to the 1960s. His work has appeared in *The Journal of Modern History*, *History and Anthropology*, and *Modern Italy*. With Carl Rommel, he co-edited *Locating the Mediterranean: Connections and Separations in Space and Time* (University of Helsinki Press, 2022). He has also begun new research on archives, depopulation, and material landscapes in Southern Italy from the late 18th century to the present. Joseph John Viscomi est un historien et un anthropologue spécialisé dans la région méditerranéenne moderne. Il est maître de conférences (professeur assistant) en histoire européenne à l'école d'études historiques de Birkbeck, Université de Londres. Son prochain ouvrage, *Migration at the End of Empire: Time and the Politics of Departure between Italy and Egypt*, examine l'appartenance politique et les temporalités historiques à travers une microhistoire des départs anticipés, réels et mémorisés des Italiens d'Égypte de la fin du XIX^e siècle aux années 1960. Ses travaux ont été publiés dans *The Journal of Modern History*, *History and Anthropology* et *Modern Italy*. Avec Carl Rommel, il a coédité *Locating the Mediterranean: Connections and Separations in Space and Time* (University of Helsinki Press,

2022). Il a également entamé de nouvelles recherches sur les archives, la dépopulation et les paysages matériels en Italie du Sud de la fin du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours.

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