La Spada dell'Islam: Northern African Reaction to Fascist Interference during the Interwar Period

Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation *with research distinction* in International Studies in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

Kaitlyn Rabe

The Ohio State University

April 2016

Project Advisors: Dana Renga, Department of French and Italian

Richard Gunther, Department of Political Science

Introduction

Mare Nostrum and Mussolini's Pull Toward the East

There is much scholarship devoted to Fascist and Nazi propaganda; most history textbooks in the Western world contain the name "Goebbels", for example, and Mussolini and Hitler's abilities in persuading public opinion are well known. A bias exists, however, toward the fascist movements and their diplomacy in a European context, despite the fact that fascism did reach into other areas of the globe, such as Northern Africa and the Middle East.[1] Naturally, the scholarship devoted to the subject of Italo-Arab relations during the interwar period is thus limited and still typically Eurocentric in scope. Most scholarly arguments on the subject concern the success (or lack thereof) of fascist Italy's efforts in the Arab world, whilst English sources on the perspectives of the Northern African elites are incredibly rare.

The intellectual framework for my project, in contrast, attempts analyze Italo-Arab interwar relations from the Arab perspective, not in order to dispute the current paradigm on the subject but in order to refine it. During the interwar period itself, fascist propaganda was able to sway (and frighten) public opinion and therefore most Europeans believed in the effectiveness of fascist interference in North Africa.[2] Since that time, most scholars have proven that Mussolini was not successful in his propaganda and military efforts within North Africa, using the outcry against fascist atrocities in majority-Muslim countries as their logical foundations.[3] Here, however, I will demonstrate that taking Islamist rhetoric at face value undermines the importance

---

[1] Manuela Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940.* (Routledge: New York, 2006) 36.

[2] Peri, Gabriel. *Ombres du fascisme sur l'Afrique du Nord: collection d'article parus dans l'humanité après une enquête en Afrique du Nord.* (Editions du Comité populaire de propagande : Paris, 1938) 1-6.

[3] Gershoni, Israel and Jankowski, James. *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s.* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2009) 1-12.

of North African political events and movements, especially those of a nationalist nature. Additionally, the role of European colonialism and interwar power politics is particularly essential in understanding the true motivations of the elites who vocalized disapproval of the fascist regime. Italy itself was attempting to consolidate its own colonies, and in order to understand the ways in which fascist ideology and colonial efforts affected the opinions and actions of North African elites it will first be necessary to define fascism at its core.

The original "cell" of fascism—the *fasci d'azione rivoluzionaria*—was born in Italy circa October 1915.[4] Since that time, the public has used "fascism" as a nebulous, largely pejorative term to refer often to any right-wing party or movement (due to its historical record of crimes-against-humanity) which is why knowledge of a strict definition of "fascism" is crucial towards understanding the regime's actions abroad. First, broadly speaking, fascism is in a constant struggle against other nations—"the enemy"—using often-violent nationalist rhetoric.[5] Furthermore, the ideal fascist regime depends on authoritarianism to eliminate internal dissent, as the interests of the collective body supersede the interests of the individual; a symbolic "head" (in this case, Mussolini) therefore leads the body and constitutes the all-important leader of the body politic.[6] The fascist movement began in the early 20th century, inspired mainly by aggressive Nationalism, but the social context refined it into an authoritarian ideology; mainly, the insecurity following World War I and the rapid change in the world economy made fascism appealing to those who were disillusioned by classical liberalism and traditional nationalism.[7] This disillusionment did not only apply to young European men just-returned from the Great

---

[4] Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism : Action Francaise, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz. (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1965) 172.
[5] Nolte, *Three Faces*, 16-21.
[6] Richard Gunther, "The Collapse of Parliamentary Regimes: Prologue. 19th Century political ideologies and the left-right continuum", Lecture given at The Ohio State University, 25 September 2015.
[7] Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism : Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century.* (London: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1964) 20-24.

War and frustrated with the continent's economic state, but also applied to the elites of Northern Africa who were more than ready to modernize their contemporary societies (for the remainder of this work, "elites" will refer to the leaders of Northern African nationalist movements). The fascist ideology also incorporated aggressive nationalism and sought to spread its influence through military coercion, as is the case in the Northern African country of Libya. Ultimately, fascist ideology, although by origin a European concept, managed to seep into Northern African political thought through peaceful and military methods during the years 1920-1939.[8]

For Italians, the appropriated concept of "mare nostrum", a concept developed from nostalgia for the Roman Empire, gained a degree of popularity due to Mussolini's propaganda. According to Ruth Ben-Ghiat, the desire for an Italian empire—this *mare nostrum*—emerged from the worry that a vague, encroaching foreign threat would dilute the "European-ness" of Italy, and that it was Italy's duty to colonize and modernize Africa in order to dominate the "other".[9] The methods utilized in this endeavor were mixed and contradictory, as the fascist regime used methods ranging from propaganda to genocide to take over the areas of Africa that it intended to annex into its empire. The former two methods, however, will be the focus for now, as Mussolini attempted to use propaganda in order to promote the concept of an Italian empire amongst the Italian people themselves; in 1934 during the second quinquennial Fascist assembly, Mussolini stated: "Italy's historical objectives have two names: Asia [the Near East] and Africa… These objectives of ours have their justification in geography and history."[10] The motivations pushing the Italian fascist regime to make itself present in Africa, peaceful or otherwise, therefore originated in the popular belief that Italy was destined to re-manifest the

[8] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*, 36.
[9] R. Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945*. (Berkeley: University of California, 2001) 1-5.
[10] E. and D. Susmel (eds), *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, Vol. XXVI. (Florence: La Fenice, 1953) 191-192.

Roman Empire in order to bring modernity to the native peoples and to crush any possibility of Arab invasion.

The idea of "mare nostrum" led Mussolini to present himself as "*La Spada dell'Islam*", or as the hero of the Muslim people. The concept of fascism did appeal to Northern African intellectuals who were disillusioned by their contemporary systems; the general poverty of North Africa, paired with African subjugation to British and French colonialism, created a dissatisfaction amongst academics that in some cases fostered admiration for European fascism. Egypt in particular had a disappointing experience with democracy and was still in a state of harsh poverty and thus, the authoritarian, modernizing economic system of fascist regimes held some charm in certain Egyptian intellectual circles.[11] In Tunisia, the nationalist end of European fascism was the most ideologically appealing, but Tunisian elites tended to use the Italian fascist regime's foreign funds to their own advantage rather than openly promoting its ideology, and simply tolerated the fascist regime's existence because it benefited the Tunisian nationalist movement. Despite the controversial nature (and actions) of Italian fascism and the differing reactions to fascism in Northern Africa, the system therefore held at least some appeal toward Egyptian and Tunisian elites. [12]

Nationalism and the Arab World's Reception of Fascism

Therefore, there were Arab elites who praised fascism in light of its promises of aggressive modernization. One of the clearest examples of the Arab elites who appropriated and lauded fascist ideology was Shakib Arslan. Arslan, during World War I, had been a leading figure in the Syrian nationalist movement, and from 1913 to 1918 used Berlin as a propaganda

---

[11] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* 36.
[12] Anna Baldinetti, "Fascist Propaganda in the Maghrib", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft 37*(3) 434-35.

capital in light of Germany's alignment against France and Britain, who were Syria's contemporary colonizers.[13] Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, Arslan was exiled to Europe where his rhetoric shifted from support for Palestinian and Syrian independence to support for Pan-Arab nationalism. In his Geneva-based periodical, *La Nation Arabe*, Arslan stated: "We will prove that the Arab nation deserves, in the light of its past and present, to join the club of civilized nations and we will maintain that its admission will strengthen the spirit of peace and solidarity between East and West, for the benefit of the League of Nations." The Italian fascist regime opportunistically used Arslan's publicized opinions of Mussolini as "The Sword of Islam" to their own advantage in regards to propaganda, but was also able to enlist his services in the realm of intelligence.[14] The work of Shakib Arlsan therefore is a specific example of the logic of Arab intellectuals who were willing to utilize and work with Italian fascism in order to progress the colonial independence of their home countries.

In Tunisia, the nationalist movement "officially" began with the establishment of the Destour Party in 1920, but was not solidified until 1952 under Habib Bourghiba and the Neo-Destour Party. Due to the complexity of the events that occurred in Tunisia from 1922 to 1939, I have devoted a chapter to the interactions between Tunisian and Italian fascist elites, but will introduce them here. First, Tunisia was the fulcrum of the Franco-Italian rivalry, and so Tunisian nationalists were willing to take advantage of the Italian fascist regime's aid to free themselves from France.[15] Habib Bourghiba himself cooperated with the fascist government, under the condition that it acknowledged the Tunisian right to independence.[16] Other "minor" members of

---

[13] Philip Khoury, "Factionalism among Syrian Nationalists during the French Mandate", *International Journal of Middle East Studies 13*(4) 447.
[14] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*, 73-76.
[15] Juliette Bessis, *La Mediterranee Fasciste : L'Italie Mussolinienne et la Tunisie*. (Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne) 9.
[16] Habib Bourguiba, *La Tunisie et La France: Vingt-cinq ans de lutte pour une coopération libre*. (Tunis: Maison Tunisienne de l'Edition, 1954) 182-184.

the Neo-Destour capitalized upon the fascist government's willingness to subsidize the nationalist movement and, at times, would openly praise not only the Italian fascist government, but also certain ideologies of fascism.[17] The leaders of the Neo-Destour were therefore less "openly fascist" and rather more willing to cooperate with the regime, provided it benefitted them in their fight for independence.

Egypt, although having officially gained independence from the British in 1922, was still experiencing political unrest amongst the populace during the interwar period. Student groups were a major source of the turbulence in interwar Egypt, and eventually became some of the most influential political groups in the nation's history. For example, the "Wafd" was the country's primary political party during Egypt's time as a parliamentary monarchy and was supported by student paramilitary organizations known as the Blue Shirts.[18] The Green Shirts of Young Egypt—a hyper-nationalist student group led by Ahmad Husayn—led the opposition to the Wafdist party, and openly praised the nationalism and militarism of European fascist regimes.[19] Egypt, from 1922 through 1938, was therefore highly volatile, unstable, and prone to extremist viewpoints, especially those on the right.

The obvious contradiction within the concept of *La Spada dell'Islam*, however, was that earlier and contemporary Italian colonial efforts had negatively affected the Arab public opinion on not only Italy, but on fascism as a whole. Seeing Italy's brutal actions within countries with religious, historical, and political ties to Tunisia and Egypt left many African Arabs unconvinced of Mussolini's supposedly peaceful intentions. Complete independence from their colonizers was

---

[17] Mustapha Kraiem, *Le Fascisme et les Italiens de Tunisie (1918-1939).* Tunis : Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Economique et Sociales) 179.
[18] James P. Jankowski, "The Egyptian Blue Shirts and the Egyptian Wafd, 1935-1938", *Middle Eastern Studies 6*(1) 77.
[19] Haggai Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics.* (Tel Aviv: Cass) 111-113.

the main impetus for Tunisian and Egyptian nationalists during this time, and so any indication

of a European power taking control in a manner that would interfere with their independence was

at least suspicious, when Arab elites did not outright criticize it. Italian colonization of the Horn

of Africa and Libya, areas with cultural ties to North Africa, therefore ended up sparking

negative reactions throughout the Arab world.

In Libya, Italy had emerged as the victors of the Italo-Turkish War and through the First

Treaty of Lausanne (1912) officially annexed Cyrenaica. The "official" status of Cyrenaica,

however, was of no concern to Libyan "Sanusi" tribesmen, who continued to engage in guerrilla

warfare against the Italian military. The Sanusi tribesmen engaged in warfare so intense that it

came to be called the "Italo-Sanusian War" and was considered to be a part of World War I.

This conflict between the Italians and Cyrenaican tribesmen would continue through the interwar

era and would ultimately end in vain for the Libyan people, as the fascist regime committed

brutal atrocities in Cyrenaica after the defeat of the Sanusians.[20] Italy also consolidated its

colonies in Eritrea and Somalia during the early twentieth century and in light of these efforts

Mussolini's reputation as a hero of Islam was tarnished.

The Political Ideologies within Northern Africa

The events that took place between Italy and Northern Africa during the interwar period

were highly complex on a geographic, political, religious, and social level, and so the ideologies

that preceded the reactions by Arab elites were also exceedingly complex. The Western world,

however, is generally unfamiliar with the multiplicity of Northern African political movements,

and so tends to view Arab ideology as being a result of Islamic sentiment. Pan-Arabism, for

example, was one of the movements in the interwar Arab world and is often assumed to be the

---

[20] Helen Metz (ed). *Libya: A Country Study*. (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1989) 24-25.

major political motivator for Arab elites. The main tenets of Pan-Arabism are self-explanatory through its title; through propaganda, the movement promoted the political and religious "reform, revival, and unity of the Islamic community".[21] Most academics label Pan-Arabism as the main driving force behind the outcry from other North African and Middle Eastern countries upon Italy's brutal actions in its colonies abroad, and as being both the result and source of Arab nationalism. Gamal Nasser, who became president of Egypt in 1956, summarized the goal of Pan-Arabism in stating,

> Can we ignore that there is a Muslim world with which we are tied by bonds which are not only forged by religious faith but also tightened by the facts of history… It is not in vain that Islamic civilization and Islamic heritage, which the Mongols ravaged in their conquest of the old Islamic capitals, retreated and sought refuge in Egypt where they found shelter and safety as a result of the counterattack with which Egypt repelled the invasion of these Tartars at Ein Galout.[22]
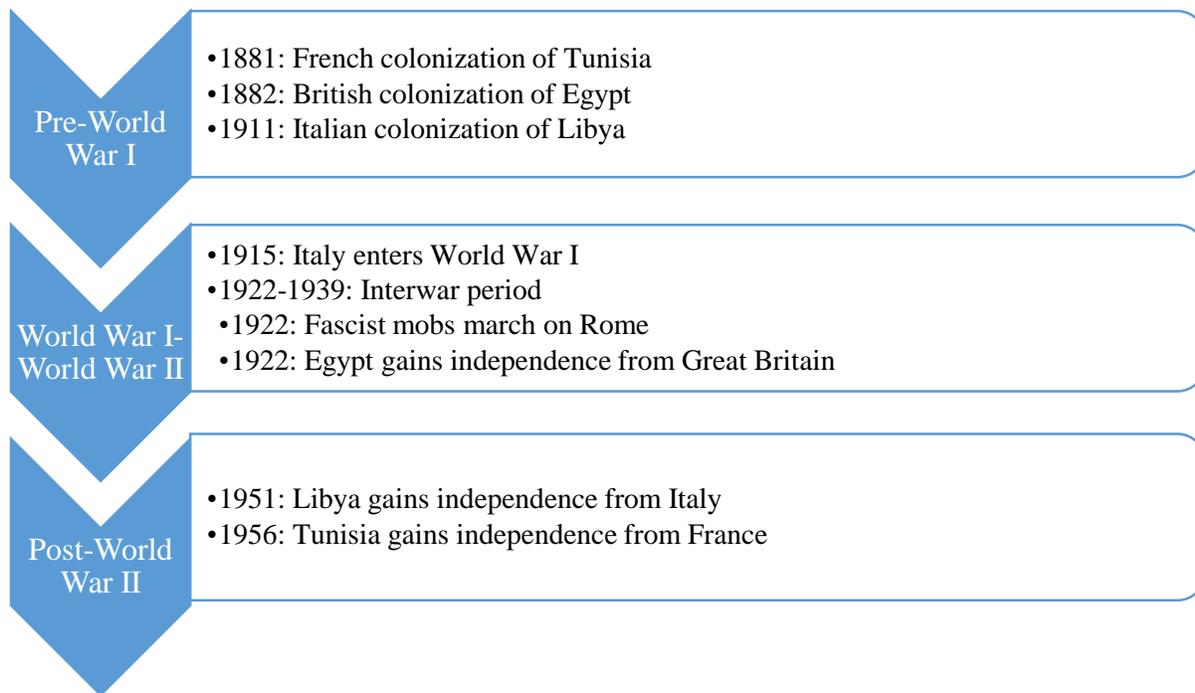
Pan-Arabism, therefore, was the belief that Islam was the common thread that connected all Arab nations, and the desire for all Arab peoples to unite and support each other in the pursuit of Islamic brotherhood.

I now present a visual representation of the general history of this period. The histories of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and their diplomatic and military relations with Europe can be somewhat disorienting, especially in a comparative context. The following is the first of four timelines, and will illustrate the major events of interest, covering colonialism through independence and including the World Wars.

---

[21] P.J. Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt.* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969) 166.
[22] Gamel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution.* (Buffalo: Smith, Keynes, & Marshall, 1959) 37.

Pre-World War I
- 1881: French colonization of Tunisia
- 1882: British colonization of Egypt
- 1911: Italian colonization of Libya

World War I-World War II
- 1915: Italy enters World War I
- 1922-1939: Interwar period
- 1922: Fascist mobs march on Rome
- 1922: Egypt gains independence from Great Britain

Post-World War II
- 1951: Libya gains independence from Italy
- 1956: Tunisia gains independence from France

My research project is motivated by the following concerns: first, that Italo-Arab relations and Northern African political events of the interwar era are widely under-taught in the occident, and scholarship on World War I and World War II is highly Eurocentric in its scope. There is a much greater focus on European diplomacy and politics during the World Wars than on how the wars affected other continents and vice-versa. In my project, I clarify what *specifically* motivated Arab politicians, whilst also analyzing their decisions from a political point of view, rather than assuming that Islam and Pan-Arabism were their main motivations. My project also attempts to "redraw" the map of the diplomatic relations between Italy and Africa by examining Europe and Africa not as two eternally conflicting continents, but rather as two cooperative entities. In summary, the main point of geographic focus will be the Mediterranean, with two separate, autonomous actors, as opposed to two continents in which one dominates and the other is dominated. In so doing, I will illustrate the ways in which the academic paradigm focuses upon the European perspective in Italo-Arab relations and inadvertently ignores the

complexities of Northern African politics, portraying the Arab world in a disproportionately spiritual light.

I will also attempt to "fill the gap" and analyze these key questions: why was European fascism accepted in certain Arab countries but not in others? What do interactions between the Italian fascist regime and these Arab countries—specifically Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya—tell us about both the political motivations in each individual country and in the interwar Arab world in general? And how much of a tangible influence did propaganda and subversion from the Italian fascist regime have on the political events within these Arab countries? Specifically, my project looks at three of the Northern African countries—Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya—in order to generally examine the diplomatic relations between Italy and North Africa during the interwar period. Using this method, I will also show the ways in which these diplomatic ties clarify the underlying, true motivations of North African political events. Here, I have addressed the socio-psychological reasons for the presence of fascism in Arab countries in order to view more clearly the ways in which certain Arab elites appropriated and admired fascist ideology. In the following three chapters, I will look at interactions between the fascist regime and Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya in order to determine the major influences behind Arab political movements. Ultimately, I will argue that Islamic solidarity was less influential than past studies have assumed, and that the Northern African peoples during the interwar period were indeed more interested in the welfare of their own respective countries.

Chapter 1

Tunisia: Italo-Destourian Relations and Anti-French Cooperation

For the past five-hundred years, Italian trade and immigration has had deep connections with Tunisia. Today, for example, migrants arrive in Lampedusa from Tunisia, as the voyage from the former to the latter takes but a matter of hours. In addition, the northern coast of Tunisia contains a plethora of ancient Roman relics; the city of Dougga still houses the most complete array of Roman structures in Tunisia, and traces of the ancient power of olive oil commerce is visible in the presence of preserved Roman theaters and villas.[23] Intertwined in both their history and geography, Italy and Tunisia held a variety of diplomatic relationships during the fascist and interwar periods and beyond. The scope of this chapter is then to examine these Italo-Tunisian relations, or specifically the motives behind Tunisian elites' hesitancy to endorse the fascist regime. Academics often blame Italian actions in Muslim countries for Tunisian elites' lack of support for Mussolini, but fascist brutalities committed abroad failed to spark a lasting reaction on the part of Tunisian nationalists.[24] Therefore, the main question I aim to answer is this: what do the interactions between Tunisia and Italy tell us about the nature of the motives driving the revolutionary forces within interwar Tunisia?

To answer this questions, I first present a timeline of significant events occurring in Tunisia during the relevant period (1922-1939). I will then discuss why, how, and in what quantity Italians chose to migrate to Tunisia and the ways in which the Tunisian government and population reacted to the Italian minority. To understand why both the Tunisian government and people did not consider the Italian settlers to be a threat, I will then analyze Tunisia's diplomatic focus on France and discuss how the former interacted with the latter. Lastly, I will examine how
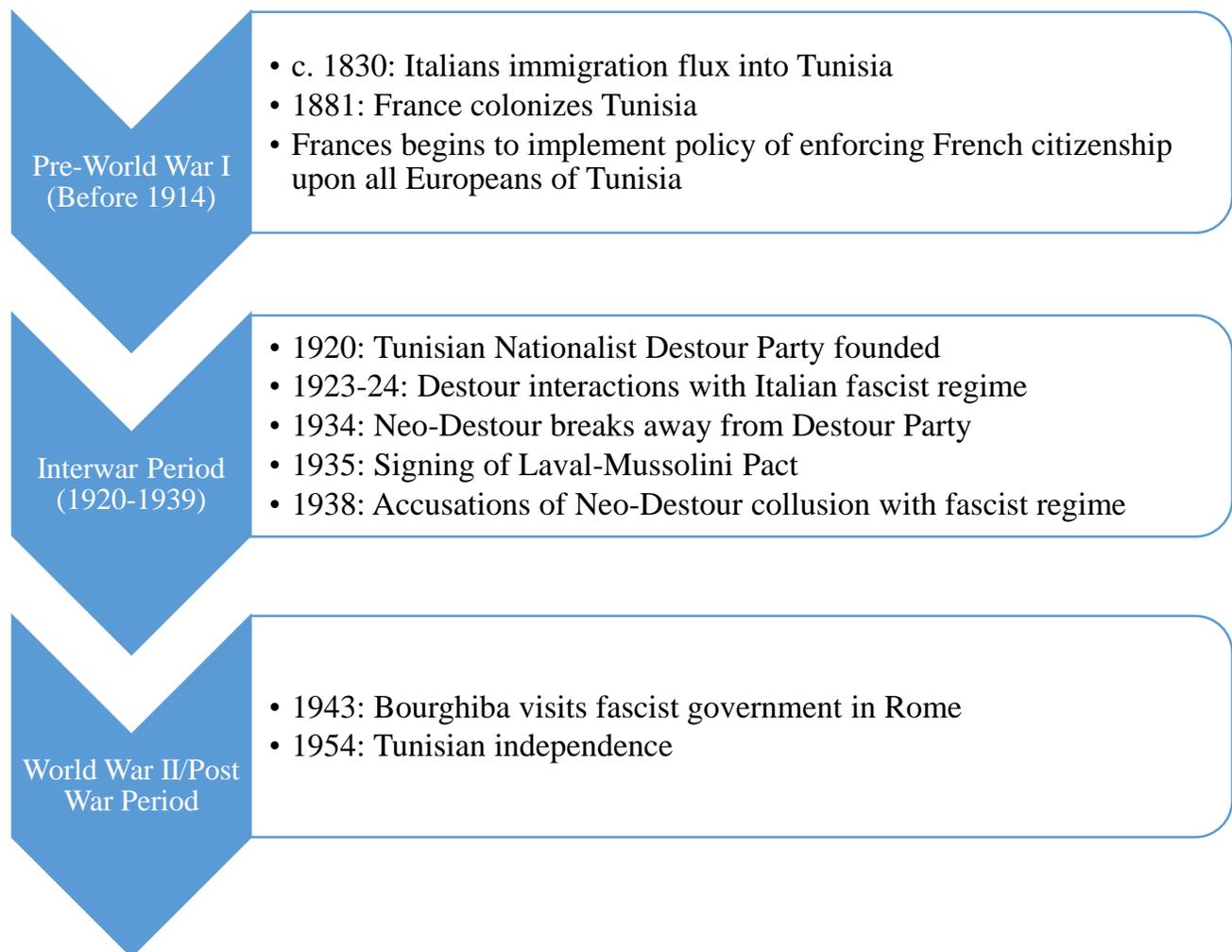
---

[23] Fabricant, Florence. "Rome's Glory Is Now Tunisia's". *The New York Times*. 18 October 1998. Accessed 20 February 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/18/travel/rome-s-glory-is-now-tunisia-s.html?pagewanted=all
[24] Baldinetti, "Facist Propaganda", 415.

Tunisian elites responded specifically to the Italian fascist regime, and the fascist regime's interactions with leading Tunisian nationalist politicians. In researching Italian migration into Tunisia and the relationship between Tunisian nationalist parties and Italy, I will demonstrate that nationalism—not Pan-Arabism or Islam—was at the heart of the motives of leading Tunisian political elites.

Timeline of Main Events in Tunisian Nationalist Movements and Italo-Tunisian Interactions

Pre-World War I (Before 1914)
- c. 1830: Italians immigration flux into Tunisia
- 1881: France colonizes Tunisia
- Frances begins to implement policy of enforcing French citizenship upon all Europeans of Tunisia

Interwar Period (1920-1939)
- 1920: Tunisian Nationalist Destour Party founded
- 1923-24: Destour interactions with Italian fascist regime
- 1934: Neo-Destour breaks away from Destour Party
- 1935: Signing of Laval-Mussolini Pact
- 1938: Accusations of Neo-Destour collusion with fascist regime

World War II/Post War Period
- 1943: Bourghiba visits fascist government in Rome
- 1954: Tunisian independence

Italian Settlement of Tunisia

From the early 19th century through the interwar era, many Italians, especially of Southern origin, chose to settle in Tunisia due to personal and economic motives.[25] The *de facto* presence of Italy in Tunisia was central to Italo-Tunisian relations of the period, as it allowed the Italian fascist regime to involve itself in Franco-Tunisian affairs. This pattern of immigration was largely unsponsored by the Italian government and rather occurred during the general flux of economic emigration from Italy. The presence of an Italian minority in Tunisia therefore carried none of the threatening implications that an official, government-sponsored influx of immigrants would have carried. Rather, the Italian minority coexisted with Tunisians for centuries, and so the Tunisian people felt no official threat from their European neighbors.[26]

The economic motives that pushed Italians to emigrate are relatively clear, but the motives of those who specifically chose Tunisia are less apparent, which I will examine here. In the case of immigration to the Americas, the economic "pull" was of the greatest significance, but the exodus from Italy into Tunisia most likely occurred due to "push" factors. The Italians living in Tunisia were largely Southerners, whilst refugees or political exiles (such as Italian Jews) had been pushed into Tunisia as well; the former groups were searching for more opportunities in agriculture abroad whilst the latter were simply forced to flee to the most geographically convenient area. Economically, the South of Italy during the pre- and interwar periods (and, in fact, to this very day) was seriously underdeveloped in comparison to the North. As of 1911, approximately forty-five percent of employed males living in the North worked in agriculture, whilst in the South approximately fifty-six percent of males worked in agriculture. Due to economic underdevelopment, therefore, from 1911 through 1913 approximately six

---

[25] Mustapha Kraiem, *Le Fascisme et les Italiens de Tunisie (1918-1939).* (Tunis : Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Economiques et Sociales, 1987) 15.
[26] Kraiem, *Les Italiens de Tunisie*, 3-14.

percent of the working rural population emigrated.[27] As for the choice of Tunisia, the economic

refugees of Italy most likely settled there as a matter of geographical accessibility; in considering

the short distance between Tunis and Sicily—one of the most rural, underdeveloped areas of

Italy—the logic of Italian settlers in Tunisia becomes much clearer.

Indeed, it is estimated that by the time the fascist government came into power,

approximately five-hundred thousand Italians were living in Tunisia.[28] Fifty-five percent of the

Europeans living in Tunisia at the end of World War I, therefore, were Italian, making Italians

the European majority in Tunisia despite France's colonization of the country in 1881. In fact,

the Tunisian people and government generally accepted Italian immigration, as Tunisia was

lacking in the modernized capital and economy that they saw to be a product of European work

ethic.[29] Despite the fact that most Europeans living in Tunisia were Italian, however, by 1936

Italy officially possessed only 62,000 hectares of land in comparison to France's 676,000

hectares, and so the threat of potential Italian colonization paled in comparison to the threat

posed by Tunisians' long-established French overseers.[30]

Although there is a shortage of primary sources on Italian settlers' experiences in Tunisia,

official endeavors to displace the Italian communities did not take place and Tunisian elites did

not view the Italians as a threat; despite isolated cases of anti-Italian xenophobia, Tunisians did

not systematically attempt to oppress or uproot Italian-Tunisians.[31] The fact that the Italian

minority had been present since the early 1800s was the main reason for natives' acceptance of

their presence. In addition, however, France's colonial presence in Tunisia negatively affected

---

[27] J.S. McDonald, "Some Socio-Economic Emigration Differentials in Rural Italy, 1902-1913. *Economic Development and Cultural Change, 7*(1). 56.
[28] Bessis, *La Méditerranée Fasciste: L'Italie mussolinienne et la Tunisie.* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1981) 3.
[29] Kraiem, *Les Italiens de Tunisie*, 3-14.
[30] Kraiem, *Les Italiens de Tunisie.* 143.
[31] Baldinetti, "Fascist Propaganda", 415.

both native Tunisians and the Italian minority, creating a "common enemy" between Tunisia and Italy. French hegemony therefore prevented Italy from officially colonizing Tunisia, and so *France* remained the main target of Tunisian nationalism, whilst also creating a common cause amongst native and Italian-Tunisians: the expulsion of French colonialism.

In the case of Italy, it is interesting to note that France was not only delivering injustices to the native Tunisians, but to the Italian-Tunisians as well. Namely, the rivalry between France and Italy over Tunisia was aggravated in 1896 by France's decision to enforce French citizenship to all European inhabitants of Tunisia, including Italian residents. This move clearly struck a discord between the Italian government, representing the interests of the Italian people who preferred to remain Italian citizens, and the French government, which was looking to increase the number of its subjects abroad. Both Italians and Tunisians were therefore placed in a subjugated position to the French people and government, creating a common cause between the former two groups.[32]

The Laval-Mussolini Pact of 1935 settled the discord between France and Italy, as Italy released all "official" hold over Tunisian land in exchange for French recognition of Italian interests in Ethiopia and Libya. Mussolini's release of his colonial intentions in Tunisia benefitted Italy's image as it further reduced any perceived threat of Italian colonization at a crucial moment in Tunisian history: the year in which Bourghiba founded the Neo-Destour. Interestingly enough, the Pact also gave Italy permission to control the Western border of Libya.[33] Tunisian elites, however, did not openly chastise the fact that Italy was officially receiving an area where they had already been committing atrocities, and the Tunisian nationalists even continued to openly work with and express sympathy toward the fascist regime.

---

[32] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* 33.
[33] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad.* 42.

The Neo-Destour and the Italo-Tunisian Rivalry with France

France, as Tunisia's official colonizer, had therefore been the main enemy to Tunisian independence and so was the center of the nationalist movement's focus. France—as we have seen—was the largest land-holder in Tunisia, and, as Tunisia's colonizer, controlled its public policy and economic activity. French officials often imprisoned and executed Tunisian nationalists; Habib Bourghiba, for example, spent time incarcerated in French prisons, and once barely escaped execution by French officials.[34] From the founding of the Destour (the original Tunisian nationalist party) in 1920 until official independence from France, Tunisians had fought against French colonialism for a total of thirty-four years. French brutality thus made *France* the center of Tunisian anti-colonial focus, whilst the actions of other European powers in the Arab world were in the peripheral vision of the Tunisian elites.

Bourghiba, founder of the Neo-Destour Party, was especially strategic in his diplomatic policies. In an official Neo-Destour publication, the author affirms that Bourghiba utilized the passions and sympathies of other Arab elites in order to further the mission of his own nationalist movement. He states:

> Bourghiba estimates… that his mission abroad is finished… He has agitated the… Egyptians and Arabs, met with the principal leaders of the Middle East, *exploited* the concept of Pan-Arabism to its full potential, and gained the support of both the Arab League and thousands of Americans. Joined by comrades from both his own party and other nationalist North-African parties, he has founded a propaganda office, "The Office of the Arab Maghreb".[35]

The concept of Pan-Arabism was not of central importance to Bourghiba, but rather was a tool that he and other Tunisian nationalists utilized in order to achieve liberation. Ultimately,

---

[34] (1955) "Profile: Habib Bourghiba." *Africa Today 2*(2), 18.
[35] Habib Bourghiba, *La Tunisie et la France: Vingt-cinq ans de lutte pour une cooperation libre.* (Tunis : Maison Tunisienne de l'Edition, 1954) 223.

independence from France and freedom from brutalities were the main goal of Tunisian nationalists, and all else was simply diplomatic leverage.

Summarily, Tunisian elites, even if they did not openly cooperate with Italian fascism, did take advantage of what the fascist regime offered when it benefited the nationalist movement. As shown by Bourghiba's diplomacy throughout his independence movement, he and the Neo-Destour took an extremely calculated approach to diplomatic relations. Therefore, whilst it is difficult to find any real connection between Bourghiba's policies and characteristics of Italian fascism, the Neo-Destour did take advantage of the regime when it best suited their nationalist efforts, despite Italian brutalities in Libya. There were, however, cases in which Tunisian nationalists colluded with the fascist regime and even propagated fascist materials, showing that the "lesser" members of the Destour—though more eager to actively engage with the fascist regime—were also more concerned with Tunisian independence than with Italy's treatment of other Arab countries.[36]

An example of Tunisian capitalization upon fascist aid occurred in 1938, when fascist authorities secured Bourghiba's release from a French prison. The Italian government then allowed Bourghiba to make a speech through the Italian propaganda radio station of the Middle East, "Radio Bari" in the hope that he could sway Tunisian public opinion toward sympathizing with Italy. As of 1943, however, Bourghiba was still intent on connecting with the regime only under the condition that they promised support for Tunisian independence, and so he proceeded to thank Italy for their generosity. On the Radio Bari broadcast from Rome, he declared,

> Here I give my thanks to the Axis Powers for the sentiments that they have expressed toward the Tunisian people… for their commendable gesture in liberating the men not only in prisons and detention camps throughout Tunisia, but also in the penitentiaries and places of exile throughout France. I thank the Italian government in particular for their generous hospitality and the welcome they gave us upon our arrival in Italy.[37]

---

[36] Baldinetti, "Fascist Propaganda", 434.

[37] Bourghiba, *La Tunisie et la France.* 182.

Nevertheless, Bourghiba never publicly expressed his approval or disapproval of fascist policy.[38]

Expressing the former would have most likely harmed his reputation amongst those who

disapproved of Italian actions in Libya, whilst the latter would create a discord between the Neo-

Destour and European fascists. As conflict with the Arab community and the European fascists

would have harmed the effectiveness of his movement, he continued to take advantage of both

groups until the fall of the fascist regime.

Furthermore, before the establishment of the Neo-Destour, the original Destour party

almost certainly received subsidies from the Italian government and was even willing to

propagate fascist materials. For example, in 1924 the Destour's weekly newspaper *al-*

Mumaththil ("The Representative") published images of the Destour Party embodied as a young

man holding the fasces. In 1923, the journal *Oriente Moderno* also established contacts with

Abdelaziz Thaalbi, one of the founders of the Destour Party, in order to publish an interview on

the Destour's demands for Tunisian independence, whilst Thaalbi himself probably met with

Mussolini during the same trip to Italy.[39] There were also instances in which Neo-Destour

members, due to a particularly tense era with the French protectorate in 1938, were accused of

collusion with Italian fascist elites. For example, Ali Cherif, a speaker for Radio Bari, was

detained by French officials at the Tunisian border "with stacks of substantial amounts of cash"

and a letter—signed by both Bourghiba and Italian officials— naming him official representative

of the Neo-Destour.[40] Furthermore, French authorities found an Italian resident of Tunisia with a

letter from Rome that was addressed to Bourghiba, and which discussed a fascist-sponsored

subsidy of forty thousand Italian lira for the Neo-Destour.[41] The Tunisian nationalists, therefore,

---

[38] Baldinetti, "Fascist Propaganda", 434.
[39] Baldinetti, "Fascist Propaganda", 410.
[40] Bessis, *Méditerranée Fasciste*. 226.
[41] Kraiem, *Le Fascisme et les Italiens.* 179-80.

profited from the "generosity" of the Italian government without ever expressing much in return, solely in order to advance their cause.

Conclusion: Nationalism as the Core of Interwar Tunisian Politics

Therefore, despite some suspicion about Italian motives in Tunisia and the brutality of fascist actions in Arab countries, the overwhelming concern for Tunisian nationalists was independence from France, showing that Pan-Arabism played a much smaller role in Tunisian nationalism than often portrayed by academics. The Destour and Neo-Destour's strategic and opportunistic tactics in diplomacy allowed them to take advantage of both fascism and Pan-Arabism when they most benefitted the Tunisian nationalist movement; these strategies did benefit them financially, but it also (quite literally) saved their lives in periods of particularly intense conflict with the French. Overall, the Tunisian nationalists could utilize these right-wing movements successfully to help achieve ultimate independence without adopting or praising policies that might have repelled the left of Arab society.

Understanding the "individuality" of Tunisian elites' motivations is crucial towards disseminating erroneous ideas about Africa and the Orient in general. First, there is a general tendency in the West to view Africa and the Arab countries as solid, homogeneous masses that constitute "the other".[42] From *The Travels of Marco Polo* to "The White Man's Burden" and even in today's popular media, there has been rhetoric of a "mystical" or mysterious nature surrounding the East and Africa, which separates Africa and the Middle East from the ability to utilize logic in political and diplomatic affairs. The anti-colonialism of interwar Tunisian elites, however, was not religiously driven, but rather was highly strategic. It is interesting to note that Tunisia is the only country to have emerged from the Arab Spring with a democratic

---

[42] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) 1.

government, due to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet's removal of Islamist elements from the country's Constitution and leadership whilst setting elections.[43] Tunisian leaders' abilities in reconciling the need for a secular government with Islamic interests, therefore, can serve as an example for any country in governmental or societal transition.

In the next chapter, I will show the ways in which Egypt's situation paralleled that of Tunisia; the "diplomatic triangle" between France, Italy, and Tunisia reflects diplomatic relations between Egypt, Italy, and Great Britain. Its situation, however, was slightly different from that of Tunisia, as Egypt channeled its nationalism into *growing* its newly independent state rather than *liberating* it. There is nevertheless enough evidence to demonstrate that despite Pan-Arab rhetoric, the underlying motives of Egyptian elites were based on nationalism and centered on Egypt, not Islam or a Pan-Arab Empire. I will therefore show although there were substantial differences between Tunisia and Egypt, the fundamental motives of Egyptian elites were parallel to those of Tunisian elites.

---

[43] Chris Stephen, "The Tunisia quartet: how an impossible alliance saved the country from collapse". *The Guardian.* 8 December 2015. Accessed 23 February 2016. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/08/tunisia-quartet-arab-spring-islamist-nobel-peace-prize

Chapter 2

Egypt: Pan-Arabism versus Diplomacy in the Post-Colonial Period

On an unknown night during World War II, a group of young Egyptian nationalists set out to consolidate their ultimate goal of obtaining all remaining territory from Great Britain. The young Egyptian militants did not do so through diplomatic discourse, however, but through a manner of violence that could only arise from 20-year-old impatience with their contemporary system: assassination of a political enemy. The attempted assassination committed on that night was the first of its kind by this particular group and was led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the future President of Egypt and a former participant in ultranationalist movements. Although Nasser never names the victim in his memoirs, he names the motive of his violence quite clearly, which was a Pan-Arab empire under the leadership of Egypt.[44]

During the interwar period as well, Egypt, in comparison to Tunisia, was in a much more volatile situation both diplomatically and internally. Great Britain had granted Egypt independence in 1919 and so Egypt embarked on its own political course more than thirty years before Tunisia became an independent state. The political turmoil within Egypt that followed its independence consisted largely of internal conflicts amongst major parties, and many Egyptian elites were also more eager than Tunisian elites to express open praise toward both radical fascism and Pan-Arabism. Tension between Egypt and Italy was also a reflection upon the incredibly complex diplomatic situations between the two states. Academics tend to attribute Italo-Egyptian diplomatic tension to the Egyptian commitment to other Muslim peoples, but this perspective neglects the broader historical context.[45] By analyzing individual cases of tension

---

[44] Nasser, *Philosophy of the Revolution*, 46.

[45] Elizabeth Fortunato-Crider,"Italo-Egyptian Relations of the Interwar Period, 1922-1942" (Doctoral diss., The Ohio State University, 1978) 26-7.

between Italy, Egypt, and Great Britain during the interwar period, I will demonstrate that it is not sufficient to place Islam and Pan-Arabism at the heart of Egyptian elites' political motives. Rather, as in the case of Tunisia, Egyptian elites focused majorly on nationalist goals during their development of the state, and Pan-Arabism was simply an ideology that suited the achievement of their desires for Egypt.

Diplomacy between Italy, Great Britain, and Egypt largely took place over matters of the status of the Mediterranean, and so the Mediterranean will serve as the primary focus in this study. For example, studying the Italian annexation of Albania in its historical context reveals that the Egyptian reaction to the annexation was more political than religious. Furthermore, the question of the Libyan border, and the practical reasons behind Egypt's desire for certain areas along the border, is central in an analysis their nationalist interests. Lastly, the fluctuation of Egyptian student groups' views toward fascism and the radical support that the groups' members gave to the fascist regime demonstrate how the students—some of the most influential political actors in interwar Egypt—could use fascist policy to their advantage.[46] Egypt's diplomatic and domestic situation was therefore much more unstable than that of Tunisia, but Egyptian elites interacted with the Italian fascist regime in similar ways. The diplomatic relations between Egypt, Great Britain, and Italy ultimately show that the nationalist elites were more concerned with Egyptian political issues than with Pan-Arab motivations.

---

[46] James P. Jankowski, *Egypt's Young Rebels: "Young Egypt," 1933-1952.* (Hoover Institution Press, 1975) 61.

Timeline of Main Events in Italo-Egyptian Relations and Egyptian Nationalist Movements

Pre-Interwar Period (1919 and Before)
- 1882: British colonization of Egypt
- 1919: Egyptian Revolution

Interwar Period
- 1922: Egyptian independence from Great Britain
- 1924: talks over Egyptian-Libyan border
- 1938: Ahmed Hussayn of Young Egypt visits European fascist countries
- 1939: Italy annexes Albania

The Mediterranean, the pivotal geographic area behind *mare nostrum*, is also the center of interwar diplomatic relations between Italy and Egypt. For the purposes here, the Balkans and Libya will thus serve as case studies for the friction between Italy, Egypt, and Great Britain. Interwar Egyptian rhetoric and current academics state that the large number of Muslims in the Balkans caused the negative reaction in Egypt to Italy's annexation of Albania. Similarly, scholars assume that Egypt was unwilling to give up land along the border in order to protect their fellow Muslims from Italian actions within Libya.[47] These diplomatic issues over the Balkans and Northern Africa, when further unraveled, however, portray Egyptian elites' concern with their own self-interest.

---

[47] Fortunato Crider, "Italo-Egyptian Relations", 26-37.

Italo-Egyptian Diplomatic Crises, 1922-1939

Upon Italy's entrance into the Entente Cordiale, the Italian military removed its troops that were defending the Egypto-Libyan border, leaving the border to the protection of the British military. Italian interests in Eastern Libya were further harmed when Great Britain took the coast of Libya and continued to extend its influence along the Egypto-Libyan border and into the Jarabub Oasis, which was especially important to Italian interests as it was the capital of rebel Sanusi activity.[48] Before Great Britain and Italy could reconcile their differences over the Oasis, Britain granted Egypt its independence, thereby giving the Jarabub Oasis to Egypt and leaving the Egyptian government to settle the issue with Italy. The current paradigm is that the tension between Italy and Egypt over the Jarabub Oasis occurred because of Egyptian interests in protecting the Sanusi tribesmen, although this is not a completely "fulfilling" explanation.[49] Egyptian elites were hesitant to give up the Oasis largely because Great Britain had promised it to Egypt before World War I, and not because the Egyptians were concerned with the well-being of the Sanusi tribesmen.

Unfortunately, for the newly instated Italian fascist regime, the fledgling Egyptian government was overwhelmingly unprepared for any diplomatic action that would resolve the border issue. In 1924, the lack of negotiations ultimately led Yehia Ibraham Pasha's Egyptian government to turn over several Libyan political refugees to Italy. Fortunato-Crider states,

> The incident…temporarily established a negative tone between Egypt and Italy. The Egyptian press was hostile to Italian extradition demands, in part because of sympathy for the Sanusi as fellow Muslims but also because it vividly reminded the Egyptians of the

---

[48] Fortunato-Crider, "Italo-Egyptian Relations". 26-7.
[49] Fortunato-Crider, "Italo-Egyptian Relations". 36-7.

ambivalent status of their independence and the fact that they were still under the provisions of the hated Capitulations in regard to European powers.[50]

The sincerity of the Pan-Arab rhetoric within Egyptian society is therefore questionable, as it took place within the broader context of Egypt's recent liberation. Part of the animosity for the flimsiness of the Pasha government's decision to hand over Libyan refugees emanates from a hatred of European colonialism, especially when it was so perilously close to Egypt. Furthermore, the fact that the Egyptian government eventually turned over political refugees to Italy demonstrates Egyptian elites' unwillingness to entangle themselves diplomatically with Italy whilst still seeking full independence from Great Britain. One can conclude, therefore, that the Egyptian government was loathe to give up any land along the border because Egypt had only recently gained this land and was unwilling to sacrifice such an important location during its first steps as a state. The Egyptian government's compliance in relinquishing Libyan political refugees to Italy confirms that the concern of elites lied in the good of Egypt as an independent state, and not in the good of the hypothetical Pan-Arab empire.[51]

Another area of conflict between Italy, Great Britain, and Egypt during the interwar period came about due to violations of a series of Mediterranean Agreements. The first, established in 1887, created an understanding between Italy, Great Britain, and Austria-Hungary that they were to not to expand their influence throughout the Mediterranean. Essentially, the Russian Empire was attempting to enter the Balkans in order to break down the Ottoman Empire, and so Great Britain, Italy, and Austria-Hungary agreed that the Mediterranean was to maintain its status quo in order to prevent the collapse of the Ottomans.[52] The 1887 Agreement was then updated in the 1937 "Gentleman's Agreement", in which Italy and Great Britain again agreed to

---

[50] Fortunato-Crider, "Italo-Egyptian Relations". 36-7.
[51] Fortunato-Crider, "Italo-Egyptian Relations", 17.
[52] W.N. Medicott, "The Mediterranean Agreements of 1887," *The Slavonic Review* 5(1926), 66.

respect the status quo in the Mediterranean. As a result of the Gentleman's Agreement, Britain

blocked Italy from continuing its aid to Franquist Spain and sending troops to Libya, whilst Italy

prevented Great Britain from sending troops to Egypt.[53]

The agreements of 1937 between Italy and Great Britain were unsuccessful, as in 1939,

Italy annexed Albania, a majority-Muslim country, and in so doing violated the Gentleman's

Agreement. Since Egypt was one of the most important geographical and political areas in Italo-

British relations of the interwar period, the possible repercussions of this violation upon Egypt

were substantial. Scholars assume that the outcry from Egyptian elites regarding the annexation

was one of *Pan-Arab* origins, but the *political* motivations were immediate and make a much

stronger case. First, it is necessary to notice the context in which the annexation of Albania took

place. Italy had already been reinforcing their military efforts—quite violently—in Libya, which

was already a partial violation of the Gentlemen's Agreement. Therefore, the larger problem,

especially considering Egypt's place within the Italo-British rivalry, was that the British could

have countered Italian actions in Albania within Egypt. It is more likely that the large outcry

against the annexation was due to the political consequences that Egypt would face, especially in

light of the following statement from an *al-Balagh* editorial:

> …whether Italy has designs on Egypt or not we [Egyptians] must face certain facts.
> These are that Egypt cannot excape attack in the case of war between the two dictatorial
> and democratic camps as is demonstrated by the large forces Italy has gathered in Libya
> on the Egyptian and Tunisian frontiers.[54]

Therefore, the Pan-Arab sentiment pales in comparison to the immediate threat of Italian or

British aggression against Egypt in light of violations of the Gentleman's Agreement.

---

[53] Fortunato-Crider, "Italo-Egyptian Relations", 127.
[54] Fortunato-Crider, "Italo-Egyptian Relations", 139.

The diplomatic ties between Italy, Great Britain, and Egypt thus show that although Pan-Arabism may have contributed to or been a tool in Egyptian elites' political motivations, the ultimate underlying factor was concern for the newborn Egyptian state. From the events surrounding the Libyan border conflict and Libyan political refugees, it is clear that in 1924, Egypt was not yet prepared to engage in an ideological battle with yet another European power, and focused on internal issues involving multiple fallen governments. Although academics typically assume that the annexation of Albania led to a negative reaction from Egyptian elites because of Pan-Arabism, some unraveling of the event's context shows that fear of an Italo-British clash over or within Egypt was a much stronger motivator than the idea of Islamic brotherhood with Albanian Muslims. There were therefore stronger diplomatic tensions between Egypt and Italy than between Tunisia and Italy because of Italian complications with Great Britain and military disputes over the status of the Mediterranean.[55]

Egyptian Student Groups and Appropriation of European Extremist Ideologies

Student groups constituted another sector of influential Egyptians who interacted heavily with the Italian fascist regime. The student groups' members were born in an era in which Great Britain still held hegemony over Egypt, and thus the students often acted upon intense Egyptian nationalism. Furthermore, the slow modernization of Egypt, which created the universities themselves, allowed these student groups to exist and so facilitated a philosophy of aggressive futurism amongst the student groups. Lastly, the debilitating poverty and antiquity of capital in Egypt was an emotional jolt that pushed the students toward volatile and extremist ideologies.[56] During the late 1930s, Egyptian student groups therefore identified with European fascism more

---

[55] Fortunato-Crider, "Italo-Egyptian Relations", 139.
[56] Haggai Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics.* (Frank Cass, 1989) 1.

than any other Arab political group, and idolized European fascism above any other existing political system, showing that these elites were much more concerned with short-term goals for Egypt, as opposed to long-term goals for the Arab world.[57]

The socio-psychological motivations of students who identified with fascism derive from ultra-nationalism and their impatience with their contemporary system. During the latter half of the interwar period, the groups and intellectuals who were attracted to right-wing authoritarianism were incredibly disillusioned with the newly installed system of democracy. From 1920 to 1924, Egypt experienced six failed regimes on top of its poor economic state, and even the Egyptian citizens who ideologically supported a democratic system agreed that major reforms were necessary.[58] Especially during the early years of the interwar period, nationalism was an important factor on both ends of the Egyptian political spectrum; the country had recently received independence but was still in conflict with Great Britain over one of Egypt's key economic assets: The Suez Canal.[59] Therefore, the most politically active groups in interwar Egypt were still fighting for economic freedoms from Great Britain, and so ultra-nationalism was an important factor in the presence of European fascism in Egyptian student groups.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Egypt was suffering from general poverty and antiquated capital, and so many—including the student groups and its leaders—were attracted to the futurist side of European fascism. Futurism, as Bowler states, "upheld the glory of war, 'the world's only hygiene', as an announcement of the imminent crisis that would reveal the radical foundation of a new social and aesthetic world order."[60] In contrast, Egypt's early modern economy was largely based on agriculture, as its heavy industry was seriously underdeveloped. Furthermore,

---

[57] Erlich, *Students and University*, 112.
[58] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* 37.
[59] Vatikiotis, *Modern History of Egypt*, 90.
[60] Anne Bowler, "Politics as Art: Italian Futurism and Fascism," *Theory and Society*, 20(1991) 763.

the period from 1930 through 1934 was marked by economic crisis in Egypt; agricultural

products plummeted in price due to a crisis in the cotton market, which brought a large majority

of Egypt's agricultural sector into debt.[61] The aggressive, government-controlled modernization

techniques utilized by the Italian fascist regime—along with its incredible post-war economic

recovery—were therefore appealing to many of those disillusioned by the failure of democracy

and classical liberalism, and many contemporary Egyptian intellectuals transitioned from being

ideologically liberal to radically right wing. The Egyptian academics who supported fascism

therefore claimed that it was the system most compatible both with Islam and within Egypt, and

yet did not call for serious action against Italy for military actions within Libya.[62]

The contemporary Wafd government was thus the target of the Egyptian student groups

and academics who participated on the side of the radical right. The Wafd was a liberal political

party that supported a democratic, constitutional monarchy and was the single-most influential

political party in Egypt during the interwar period.[63] The differences between the Wafd and the

student groups can be summarized by comparing the outcomes of the 1919 Revolution, where

Great Britain granted Egypt independence, and the 1952 Revolution, where anti-Wafdists

overthrew the constitutional monarchist government. The president of the New Wafd Party,

established in 1978, stated,

> What has been called the Revolution of 1952 was not really a revolution; *a revolution should start from the bottom, not the top*. The 1919 Revolution…created the Egyptian man, whilst the 1952 revolution killed him. The 1919 Revolution…achieved… the British evacuation, whilst the 1952 revolution brought with it several defeats. The leaders and members of the 1919 Revolution faced torture in prisons, whilst the leaders of the

---

[61] Vatikiotis, *Modern History of Egypt*, 284.
[62] Manuela Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* 36.
[63] Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink.* (Yale University Press, 2010) 26.

1952 revolution built palaces with money from secret sources and sent hundreds of people to military prisons.[64]

Therefore, the Wafd, as a liberal, pro-democratic party and as the most influential party of the era, was the prime target for student groups who were seeking to change the system in a radical, top-down manner, and essentially represents the opposite of the ideals that fascist sympathizers were seeking.

Young Egypt (1933-1953), the ultranationalist, anti-Wafdist military party led by Ahmed Hussayn, is the prime example of an Egyptian student group idolizing European fascism. The chaotic ideologies of Young Egypt reflect why they so easily swayed from one political view to another, but during the latter years of the interwar period, the predominant European influence for the group was European fascism. It is not a coincidence that the youth paramilitary organization of the Young Egypt party was called the "Green Shirts". There is, in fact, evidence that the model of the original Young Egypt party was based on the structure of European fascist organizations, whilst the paramilitary Green Shirts were modelled after the Italian Blackshirts and the German *Hitlerjugend*.[65]

The Young Egypt party's reasons for openly praising and appropriating European fascism are contextualized in the broader theme of postcolonial Egyptian ultra-nationalism. In 1938, well after Italy had colonized Libya through excessively brutal methods, Ahmed Hussayn

> declared that the principles of his party are made up of a combination of the principles of Rome and Berlin, that he does not consider Hitler and Mussolini to be dictators but rather that they are reflections of their peoples, of the basis of their life and greatness, and that Germany and Italy are the two democratic states in Europe, the other states being capitalist-parliamentary organizations.[66]

---

[64] Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "The Reemergence of the Wafd Party: Glimpses of the Liberal Opposition in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 16(1984), 99.

[65] Haggai Erlich, *Students and University*, 112.

[66] From an interview with a correspondent of *Il Lavoro Fascista*, July 29, 1938, as quoted in *JMF*, Aug. 1, 1938, 2.

Young Egypt and its leaders began to drift away from identifying with European fascism shortly thereafter, but only in response to the growing tension amongst European countries in light of the approaching war. Young Egypt—and all student groups, for that matter—had already been influenced enough by fascist ideology and by disillusion with the democratic system, and so their members remained convinced of the merits of nationalist authoritarianism.[67] Young Egypt and the student groups mark an example of how poverty and unstable government shaped the interwar Egyptian social psychology to be more concerned with its own immediate interests than with those of the whole Arab world.

Conclusion: Comparing the Nationalist Causes of Tunisia and Egypt

Egypt, due to the tumultuousness of its postcolonial politics, was therefore in a situation that was incredibly different from the situation in Tunisia; at the same time, however, Egypt was still similar enough to Tunisia to compare the two countries' reactions to fascist interference. Nationalism was the common link between these two Arab countries, but due to their respective colonial situations, the elites of each country expressed nationalist sentiment in different ways. Egypt was newly independent, although partially still under British influence and experiencing massive disillusionment with capitalism and democracy. Furthermore, the triangular web of diplomatic interactions between Italy, Egypt, and Great Britain show how Egypt marked a tension between the two European powers, especially in light of the diplomatic crisis over the Jarabub Oasis. The complexities of these clashing factors show us that the Pan-Arab sentiment was not of great importance in Egyptian public policy and diplomacy during the interwar period, as Egyptian internal issues were of much greater concern to the elites.

---

[67] Jankowski, *Egypt's Young Rebels,* 60.

A comparison of Egyptian elites to Tunisian elites reveals that the former were more brash and reactionary; Bourghiba's ability to profit from both Arab countries and Italy was much more logical and calculated than the fiery sympathy that Young Egypt gave to European fascism. Context, however, is crucial, as Tunisia was in need of deliberately planned diplomacy in order to free themselves peacefully from the French, whilst Egypt was experiencing agricultural, economic, and governmental crises that the elites could not fully control. It is also interesting to note that despite the growing right-wing Islamist sentiments amongst intellectuals, we find no substantial call for a Pan-Arab empire in response to Italian actions in Libya or Albania. Lastly, the Egyptian government's lack of action in the face of Italy's military movements into Libya and Albania shows that diplomatic logic was, in fact, the main actor behind the behind the veneer of the "extremist" ideologies that convulsed interwar Egypt.

To this point, Tunisia and Egypt have served as examples of the Northern African countries that were begrudgingly willing to cooperate with the Italian fascist regime. Throughout these chapters, I have demonstrated that Tunisian and Egyptian elites were willing to work with Italy to the extent that it benefited their nationalist causes, but were also suspicious of Italy when it came to matters that may have harmed these nationalist causes. I have also contested the commonly held belief that Northern African suspicion toward Italy was due to Pan-Arab sentiment and outrage over Italian military action in Libya. The next logical step, therefore, is to examine the atrocities that Italy was committing in Libya, whilst simultaneously examining the exact response of Libyans to these atrocities, especially from a diplomatic perspective. In so doing, I will further demonstrate the lack of religious and Pan-Arab motivations within Libyan politics, and that nationalism and anti-colonialism were the main motivations of Libyan elites.

Chapter 3

Libya: The Religious Flame within a Secular Society

The academics who criticize Italian fascist policy in Libya do not lack evidence for their claims; from a humanitarian, diplomatic, and military perspective it was, if not a disaster, a humiliation.[68] The intense rivalry between the fascist regime and the Sanusi religious tribe led to a conflict that lasted much longer than expected by the Italians. Through the end of the conflict, Libyans rejected the presence of Italy and fascism within their society and many Arab elites criticized Italy for their actions in Libya. The history of Italian colonialism in Libya, therefore, shows us which factors pushed Libyans away from fascist ideas, along with how much religion, politics, and nationalism motivated the Libyan people's reaction. Comparing Libya's situation to those in Egypt and Tunisia also demonstrates the African Arab peoples' concern with their own nationalist causes (as opposed to Pan-Arab and religious causes), specifically in light of the atrocities that Italy was committing in Libya.
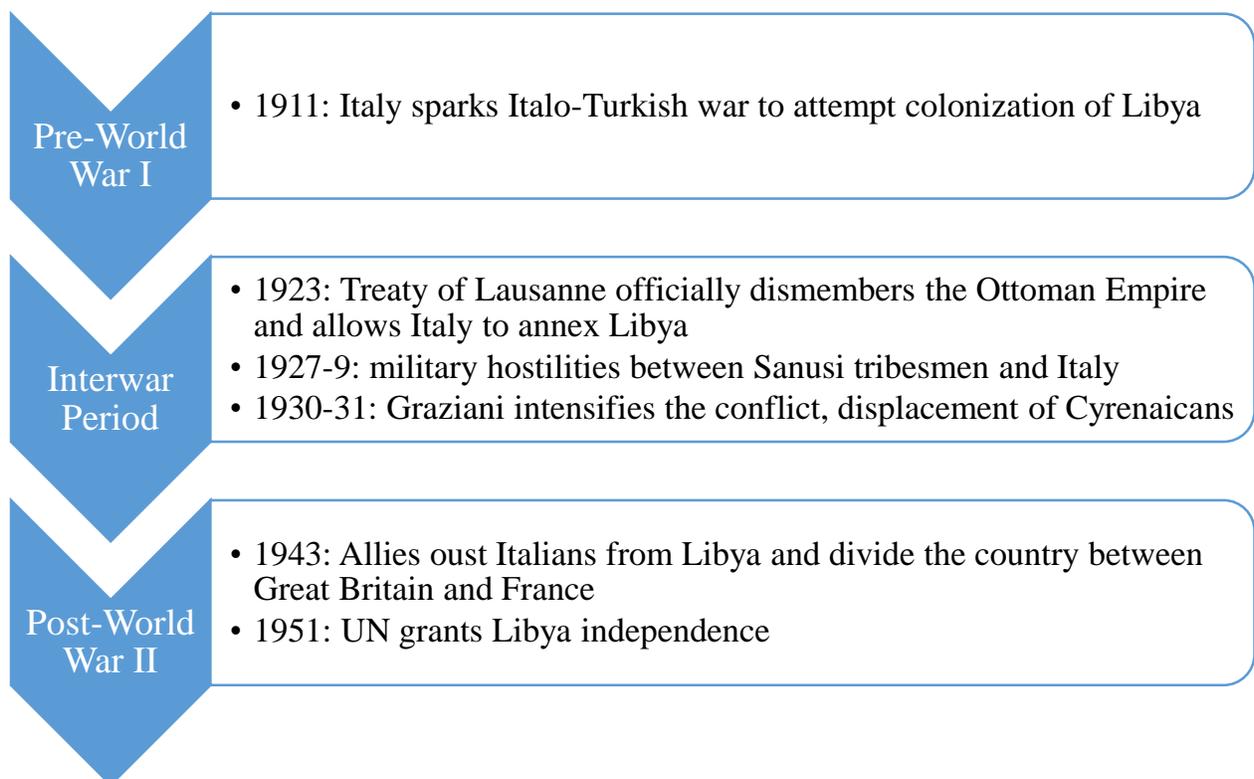
Yet again, to understand the motives behind political actions in Libya, it will be necessary to set the context of the conflict. First, the original colonization of Libya occurred before the interwar period, and therefore had roots that extended beyond the immediate situation. The interwar period, however, saw the most aggressive action taken against the Sanusi 'rebels', and so this era needs to be the most-studied, especially considering the fascist regime's involvement. Omar al-Mukhtar, the spiritual and military leader of the Sanusi tribesmen, plays an especially important role here, as his combined religious and political motives are comparable to those of other Libyans and Arab elites. Libyans also vehemently rejected fascism and diplomatic ties with Italy due to Italian atrocities, and so comparing Libyan nationalism to

---

[68] "Second Italo-Sanusi War 1923-1931." *On War*, 2016.

Egyptian and Tunisian nationalism demonstrates why the former country rejected relations with Italy whilst the latter two countries did not. Essentially, the Italian fascist regime's brutalities in Libya explain the unpopularity of fascism amongst all Libyans and the reaction from Sanusi tribesmen, but the reaction from Arab elites abroad and Libyans themselves show that the tribesmen were largely alone in their religiously-motivated fight for independence.

Timeline of Main Events in Italo-Libyan Relations and Libyan Nationalist Movements

Pre-World War I
- 1911: Italy sparks Italo-Turkish war to attempt colonization of Libya

Interwar Period
- 1923: Treaty of Lausanne officially dismembers the Ottoman Empire and allows Italy to annex Libya
- 1927-9: military hostilities between Sanusi tribesmen and Italy
- 1930-31: Graziani intensifies the conflict, displacement of Cyrenaicans

Post-World War II
- 1943: Allies oust Italians from Libya and divide the country between Great Britain and France
- 1951: UN grants Libya independence

The Beginnings of *Mare Nostrum* in Libya

In the late 19th century, before Italy took action in Northern Africa, the Italians' proclaimed motivations for desiring a colony in Libya were those of any typical monarchical regime of the time. Giovanni Bovio (1841-1903), an Apulian philosopher, once wrote that "*sbarbarire* ['to de-barbarize'] is not a matter of homilies and sermons, but of long-lasting

economic contacts…". To Bovio and many other Italians of the Risorgimento period the Libyan

people did not have the "right" to be *barbari*, as it was the Italians who would bring modern

industry into Libya and thereby benefit from the colony.[69] More generally, France's annexation

of Tunisia in 1881 pushed Italians to look for the next logical geographic step; given Tripoli's

strategic maritime position, Libya became a key location in attempts for Italian hegemony in

Africa.[70] This desire for a maritime military post—or at least obtaining one of the few available

in Northern Africa—was also a motivation to colonize for Mussolini specifically, as he also

viewed colonialism as a way of further expanding his appropriated *mare nostrum*.[71]

Transitioning fully into the interwar period, then, the brutal tactics that the Italian military

used to enter and fully colonize Libya pushed the Libyan people to reject any cordiality with

Italy. In 1911, when Italy falsely accused the Ottoman Empire of arming Libyan "rebels", it

purposefully occurred when the Balkans—then partially still under the influence of the Ottoman

Empire—were pulsating with the threat of war. The conflict within the Balkans further weakened

the Ottoman Empire and thereby allowed Italy to take advantage of the Ottomans' vulnerability

in Libya, and claims of Ottoman subversion favoring the Libyans acted as an excuse that allowed

the Italian military to take many coastal areas of Libya with little resistance. The conflict ended

in 1912 at the Treaty of Lausanne, where the Ottoman Empire sued for peace with Italy. The

sultan announced independence for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica whilst Italy annexed both areas,

and the war between native Libyans and Italian armed forces began immediately thereafter.[72]

Italian colonization of Libya was therefore unique in comparison to other European

countries' respective colonial histories; the fact that Italy did not become a unified country until

---

[69] Nicola LaBanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell'Espansione Coloniale Italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007) 58.
[70] LaBanca, *Oltremare,* 109.
[71] Santarelli et al, *Omar al-Mukhtar: The Italian Reconquest of Libya*. (London: Darf Publishers, 1986) 12.
[72] Metz, *Libya*, 24.

1870, for example, pushed Italian colonization efforts into the early 20th century.[73] Had colonization occurred any earlier, it is quite possible that the interwar nationalist movements sweeping other Arab countries (especially Tunisia and Egypt) would have influenced the Libyan people to try to achieve independence during this period as well. Since Mussolini was still attempting consolidation of his "empire", however, there was no sympathy or longing for diplomacy amongst the Libyan people. Italy's delay in entering the colonial game then sparked a war 1911 with the Sanusi tribesmen that would last for thirty years.

The Colonial War in Italy: Graziani and Mukhtar

The fascist Italian government took advantage of the interwar period to put full force into colonial efforts, utilizing brutal methods against both the Sanusi guerrilla fighters and general civilians. These brutalities largely derived from frustration on the part of the Italian military; although the rival Sanusi tribes did not constitute an official military (and only numbered in the thousands), the conflict lasted for thirty years partially due to the desert terrain, and partially due to Sanusi guerrilla fighters' expertise on desert fighting. Omar al-Mukhtar was the primary expert on desert guerrilla warfare and was able to sabotage outposts and troop lines only to disappear back into the desert.[74] In 1927 and thereafter, Sanusi guerrilla warfare was thus continuously thwarting Italian military efforts, especially in Cyrenaica (the Eastern region of Libya). In 1927 and 1928, there was a series of hostilities between Libya and Italy, followed by a period of shaky treaties and brief tranquility, only for military action to begin again in a much more brutal fashion. The year 1927 also marked a turning point in which Italy offered Libyan fighters a new ultimatum: "either conditional surrender or a slow and fatal attrition by force."[75]

---

[73] Metz, *Libya,* 24.
[74] Metz, *Libya*, 29.
[75] Santarelli et al., *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 27.

General Rodolfo Graziani, the leader of the Italian campaign in Libya, carried out this ultimatum over the course of several years with brutal methods that dissuaded many Arab intellectuals away from relations with Italy and fascism, although primarily for nationalist—not Pan-Arab— reasons.[76]

In 1930 Graziani and his fellow colonial generals in Libya completed the final "crushing" of resistance in Cyrenaica, and Graziani's name became synonymous with brutality in both Italy and the Arab world. Graziani's analysis of the Sanusi rebellion acknowledged that Libyans did mostly support the Sanusi fighters, but did not concede the factors that led to the original rebellion: namely, the ethnic and religious differences amongst Libyans. The "solution", therefore, stripped *all* Cyrenaican civilians, regardless of religious or political affiliation, of rights in order to uncover the elusive Sanusi rebels. Graziani's tactics included confiscating Sanusi property, eliminating many Arab officials within the Italian government of Libya, disbanding Libyan military and police battalions, and placing an embargo on Egyptian goods in an attempt to starve out the rebels and their possible sympathizers.[77] These tactics, all being of a political nature, therefore led to a fundamentally political reaction from the Libyan people.

Beginning in 1923, the Italian government also instituted a policy for which its Nazi neighbors are more infamous: the creation of concentration and internment camps. Although in the Italian Yugoslavia, for example, Italy created these camps in order to protect refugees from extermination by the Nazi government, in Libya they were utilized *a scopo repressivo*— essentially to subdue the rebels by also deporting civilians. Giorgio Rochat estimates that approximately 30,000 to 70,000 Libyans were lost to either war, concentration camps, or escape

---

[76] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* 77.
[77] Santarelli et al., *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 66-70.

to Egypt, and unhesitatingly calls this a 'genocide' (considering that the population was approximately 200,000 people before the war).[78] As a prisoner recounted, "Every day fifty corpses left el Agheila. They were buried in mass graves. Fifty corpses a day, each day. We always counted them. People who had been killed. People who had been hung or shot. Or people who had died of hunger or illness."[79] Omar al-Mukhtar himself claimed that he failed to drive out the Fascist colonizers due to the people's lack of Islamic and Pan-Arab spirit. During his trial, he stated, "The people of the cities hated me because I brought them bad luck, and I hated them in return because they did not help the cause of their religion, for which I alone fought."[80] The civilians living in the towns of Cyrenaica, therefore, had no interest in supporting the rebels as long as Italy would continue to repress them for the Sanusi's actions. The devastation inflicted upon Libyan society essentially disabled any sort of religious-based morale (except, of course, on the part of the leaders of the Sanusi rebels) and political motives were the main factor in the Libyan people's rejection of fascism and cooperation with Italy.

In 1931, the Italian fascist government consolidated its colony in Libya, as warfare ended but brutalities continued. After forcibly displacing native Cyrenaicans from their homes in order to help "reveal" the guerrilla fighters, the Italian military managed to wound, capture, and ultimately execute Omar al-Mukhtar.[81] In a clandestine publication marking the first anniversary of Omar al-Mukhtar's execution, Cyrenaican nationalists called upon all Arabs to condemn the "fascist assassins", mentioning Islam only once, and writing the manifesto within a strongly political, nationalist context in saying:

---

[78] Walston, James, "History and Memory of the Italian Concentration Camps," *The Historical Journal* 40 (Mar. 1997), 172-73.

[79] Eric Salerno, *Genocidio in Libia: le atrocita` nascoste dell'avventura coloniale italiana (1911-1931)* (Milan, 1979) 90.

[80] Santarelli et al., *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 156.

[81] Santarelli et al., *Omar al-Mukhtar,* 153.

> The lessons of heroism… that he [al-Mukhtar] gave the Fascist armies do honour to all Arabs, because the Arab people are… united… Always remember our martyr who was condemned to death after being taken prisoner. Remember that hero who raised the banner of Arabism and who renewed the glory of your glorious fathers. Remember and always celebrate this day so as to let the Fascists know that you are not asleep and that you are a united nation which rejects the scorn of the colonizers.[82]

Analyzing this publication from a more complete historical perspective whilst also critically examining the ultimate goals of its writer therefore reveals the nationalist motivations behind the usage of Pan-Arab language. Overall, despite the utilization of some Pan-Arab and Islamist rhetoric, the overwhelming, underlying motivation for Libyan independence movements were purely political.

The Aftermath of Italian Colonization of Libya

Following the consolidation of the Italian colony in Libya, the Libyan people felt no desire to rally behind a spiritual cause. The first reason for the lack of religious morale is the fact that it was almost impossible to rally the people in light of the establishment of concentration camps, the forced displacement of Cyrenaicans, and the dramatic drop in population. In addition, Omar al-Mukhtar himself stated that civilians were generally tired of the spirituality motivating the Sanusi rebel movement that brought them "bad luck" as a response to the rebellion; the Libyan people therefore rejected both Islam as a political motivator, and Fascism as an oppressor.

On the economic front, Italy's brutal actions reduced the necessary resources for mass mobilization. There was economic difficulty in Libya even before the Italo-Turkish, as the Sahara made trade and modernization almost impossible for that period's technological capabilities. As of 1922, commerce in Libya was, naturally, entirely in the hands of Italian

---

[82] Santarelli et al., *Omar al-Mukhtar*, 168.

officials, and mostly European Jews and Maltese residents handled trade with natives. Native Libyans therefore had little share in the economy involving their own country's resources, and essentially no contact with Italian officials. The separation between the Italian government and the Libyan people was a foundation for the aforementioned atrocities, and acted as a basis for Libyans' unwillingness to interact diplomatically with Italians and appropriate fascism.[83]

The fascist regime had acted negatively upon Libya, and so Libyans viewed fascism and the regime just as negatively. The desire to liberate themselves from Italian control led Cyrenaican leaders to announce their sympathy with the Allies through subversive connections with British officers. Tripolitanian leaders were also eventually convinced to support the Allies (despite the possibility of defeat and harsh retribution by the Italians) under the condition that the British would then support Libyan independence. Libyan politicians were still, however, unwilling to accept any religious affiliation with the Sanusi government that was established, as the Tripolitanian politicians were mostly concerned with maintaining a position which would appeal to their British allies.[84] Therefore, during the period in which Libyan elites were simultaneously striving to create a united state and gain independence, Libyan nationalism was more important than Pan-Arabism and Islamism.

Conclusion: The Western Misunderstanding of Libyan Society

Italy's brutalities in Libya therefore pushed Libyans away from identifying with fascism or cooperating with Italy, motivating them majorly from a nationalist, political perspective. Furthermore, as I argue in previous chapters, the reactions of Tunisian and Egyptian elites to these same brutalities demonstrate that nationalism and politics were more important than Pan-

---

[83] "The Commercial Situation", 494.
[84] Metz, *Libya,* 32.

Arabism or religion to Libya and its elites. The general attitude towards the spiritualism of the Sanusi tribesmen, both from civilians and Libyan politicians, makes it apparent that Libyans were generally exhausted from the results brought about from Pan-Arab and Islamic movements in regards to liberating Libya, and so desired a diplomatic approach. Furthermore, the fact that Egyptian and Tunisian elites were willing to cooperate with the fascist regime whilst it was committing inhumane acts in Libya shows that Pan-Arabism was not as important as each respective country's nationalist interests. Overall, by examining Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya it becomes clear that each individual country's nationalist movement superseded Pan-Arabism in motivating Northern African elites.

In the case of Libya, it is important to analyze the roles of Pan-Arabism and nationalism for the same reasons as it is important to do so in Tunisia and Egypt. In Libya, however, the successive government was given to the Sanusis and was therefore based on Islam. Although the presence of a theocracy makes it more difficult to examine the other motivators of Libyan elites (besides Islam), it makes it all the more crucial; for example, would the Sanusi tribesmen have used something as personal-yet-universal as religion if it were not for the atrocious crimes being committed against the Libyan people? In addition, in giving disproportionate emphasis to the role of Sanusi fighters as representatives of the Libyan people, is it truly possible to view Libya as a multi-dimensional society? Finally, without examining all contributing factors in motivating not just Libyan elites, but all elites of Northern Africa, is it possible for us to separate ourselves from the Western tendency to stereotype "the East" as a place of mysticism?[85] In summary, therefore, we must take care to consider the complexities of motivators behind Arab political

---

[85] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 1.

events in order to see the Arab world as a place which is not foreign, but which is understandable

and with which we should fully engage.

Conclusion: Western Assumptions of "the Other"

In his landmark work *Orientalism*, Edward Said wrote,

> The more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance.[86]

Summarily, detaching oneself from inculcated ideas of "the other" whilst simultaneously becoming sympathetic to the Arab world's history, politics, and motives is crucial in understanding the area that the West labels as "the East". The lack of research on the subject of Italo-Arab diplomatic relations both adds to and results from the West's general want of instruction on the Arab world, and so we must attempt to delve into the latter subject from every angle in order to understand the true motives of Arab politicians. The scope, therefore, of my work here has been twofold: first, by viewing Italy, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt as parts of the Mediterranean (as opposed to viewing them solely as parts of Europe and Africa) it is possible to redraw the social map of these countries and see them as being naturally intertwined, and not in perpetual ideological conflict. Second, by considering the holistic picture of the Arab world during the interwar period, Northern Africa emerges as an area which responded rationally to political events, in lieu of the mystical "other" as which academic and popular writers tend to portray it.

Concerning Italian fascism's role in this work, it has been majorly a tool for understanding the Arab world, especially in the role of the nationalism (inherently a part of fascism) and its effects on Northern African countries. There are, however, two issues within the realm of scholarship on fascism that I have attempted indirectly to address: the first is that

---

[86] Said, *Orientalism*, 259.

Nazism is undoubtedly the most-studied fascist movement in its diplomatic and military actions, and so the subject of Italo-Arab relations has been generally understudied. The second is that the work on the subject that does exist does not go "beyond" the simple historical events involved in this diplomatic web, and so does not demonstrate their significance on a mass scale. Essentially, to this point most experts on the subject of Italo-Arab relaions only demonstrate their futility from a European perspective, and so here I have attempted to view these relations holistically, taking into account all possible factors that may have motivated Arab leaders in Italo-Arab relations.

As for Arab elites and their motivations, I have argued against the sweeping generalizations that scholars have made regarding the extent to which Pan-Arabism and Islam influenced their political decisions.[87] The few writers who exist on the subject inadvertently tend to give Pan-Arabism and religion primary positions as the motivations of top Northern African politicians and academics. The situation, however, is much more complex, as shown in the previous chapters; the willingness to cooperate with Italian fascists, on the part of Tunisia and Egypt, shows that nationalism was much more important in each country for their own respective reasons. In contrast, most Libyans preferred strategical solutions to the issue of independence from Italy (especially in allying themselves with Great Britain) over continued religious guerrilla warfare. Overall, Pan-Arabism and Islamic unity were not the ultimate goals of interwar North African leaders, but rather were one of the "tools" through which leaders could rally nationalist sentiment in order to achieve strategic political gains.

The importance of this subject in a modern context lies in its method used to discover the true root causes of the Western misunderstanding of the Arab world. The public generally

---

[87] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* 36.

accepts, for example, that self-proclaimed "jihadist" groups are truly a result of religious

motivation when, in reality, their origins are just as complex as the original nationalist

movements of Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia.[88] To believe that any single factor, including religion,

is the motivator for political movements is counter-productive in the effort to find effective

solutions for diplomatic issues with "Eastern" countries. A specific example of the need to

understand the complexity of Arab political movements is that of Rodolfo Graziani's reaction to

the Sanusi tribesmen and misunderstanding of the causes of guerrilla warfare; Graziani's shallow

recognition of the complexity of Libyan society serves as illustration of the consequences of

intervening in a situation that Western leaders do not fully understand.

Furthermore, although drawing connections between these events and subsequent

political turmoil is beyond the scope of this work, it is still interesting to note the post-

independence paths of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. After the consolidation of Tunisian

independence, Habib Bourghiba ruled from 1957 to 1987 as president without ever intending to

instill democracy.[89] After the Arab Spring, however, Tunisia was the sole country to emerge

intact and with a full democratic government. Tunisia's success in consolidating a democracy

was due to the ability of the "Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet" in strategically coordinating

the interests of Islamic and secularist groups as another instance in which Arab elites—both

academic and political—were overwhelmingly more concerned with the nation's good than with

spiritual ideas.[90] These events arose, therefore, as a direct result of Bourghiba's non-democratic

---

[88] Thomas Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism after the Iraq War." *Middle East Journal* 60(2006). 11.
[89] Ines Pizzardi, "La Tunisia da Bourghiba a Ben Ali: dalla modernita` alla democrazia?" *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituo italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 58(2003) 330.
[90] Bill Chappell, "How Tunisia's 'Quartet' Saved a Country from Civil War and Won the Nobel Peace Prize," *NPR* 9 Oct. 2015.

tendencies in the short-term interests of the nationalist movement, and Tunisia today can act as a model for successful consolidations of democratic regimes.

Egypt's subsequent events also continued to revolve around a nationalist movement, despite its official independence from Great Britain in 1922. The revolution of 1952, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, was the watershed nationalist event in post-war Egypt. Despite being a self-professed supporter of the hypothetical Pan-Arab Empire, he was above all an Egyptian nationalist, clearly influenced by the radical nationalist movements previously discussed. The Suez Canal was the epicenter of Nasser's cause, and so logically, the relationship with Great Britain—especially in nationalizing the Suez Canal—was the major focus in Nasser's foreign policy.[91] Nasser's radical Pan-Arabism therefore took a back seat in order to pave the way for Egypt's emergence as a leading Arab power, especially through annexation of the Canal.

Libya also experienced its share of incredibly influential nationalist movements, most importantly in the 1969 coup d'état of King Idris. The revolution was sparked by Egypt's defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel, especially in light of Libyan elites' growing fascination with Pan-Arab ideas (Nasser, for example, had a huge influence on Muammar Gaddafi's formative years). This Pan-Arabism, however, grew out of a discontent with the contemporary monarchy of King Idris; the policies of his regime, for example, were notorious for pitting internal Libyan groups against one another, and so radical Pan-Arab ideas were born as an extreme response. Furthermore, many militant elites in Libya saw the regime as being too "friendly" with Western governments and not promoting Libyan interests, and so yet again, North African elites simply used Pan-Arab concepts in order to achieve their own nationalist

---

[91] Roger R. Trask, "Reviewed Work: *Egypt and the United States: The Formative Years* by Gail E. Meyer." *The Journal of American History* 67(1989) 736.

goals.[92] Colonel Muammar Gaddafi became Prime Minister in 1970 but, interestingly enough, exchanged his Pan-Arab policies for Pan-African ones due to lack of support for Pan-Arabism: another example of an Arab elite capitalizing upon Pan-Arab ideology to his own state's advantage.[93]

Therefore, comparing Northern African elites' reaction to the Italian fascist regime's interference in North Africa during the interwar period reveals Arab politicians' primarily nationalist motivations. By looking at the aftermath of these nationalist movements and their complex relations with the Western world, it also becomes clear that although Pan-Arab sentiment and rhetoric increased during this time, it mainly served as a tool that Northern African leaders utilized in the interest of their nationalist goals. Whilst the Italian fascist regime may not have influenced the Arab world in the way which Mussolini had intended, its influence was indeed strong enough to push each country to act in the interests of their fledgling states, at times even influencing certain groups to appropriate certain fascist characteristics based upon nationalism.[94] Just as the fascist regime claimed to act for the re-establishment of a Roman Empire but truly existed to advance the interests of Italy, so were the "Pan-Arab" elites who helped to drive the nationalist movements of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. There is more complexity behind Arab politicians' motives than that which is seen by Western media and scholarship, and so in order to comprehend the early forces that created today's Arab world, we must take a deeper look into the strategies and motivations within the societies of "the East".

[92] "1969: Bloodless Coup in Libya." *BBC*, September 1, 1969.
[93] Adekeye Adebajo, "Gaddafi: the man who would be king of Africa." *The Guardian*, August 26, 2011.
[94] Erlich, *Students and University,* 1.

Works Cited

(1920) The Commercial Situation in Italian Libya. *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts 68.*

(1938). *Il Lavoro Fascista* (qtd. in *JMF).*

(1955). Profile: Habib Bourghiba. *Africa Today 2*(2)*.*

(2016). "Second Italo-Sanusi War 1923-1931." *On War*.

1969: Bloodless Coup in Libya. *BBC*. 1 September 1969. Accessed 3 March 2016.

Adebajo, Adekeye. Gaddafi: the man who would be king of Africa. *The Guardian*. 26 August, 2011. Accessed 3 March 2016.

Baldinetti, Anna (2011). Fascist Propaganda in the Maghrib. *Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 37*(3), 408-436. Online.

Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. (2001). *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bessis, Juliette. (1980). *La Méditerranée Fasciste: L'Italie Mussolinienne et la Tunisie.* Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne.

Bourguiba, Habib. (1954). *La Tunisie et la France: Vingt-Cinq Ans de Lutte pour une Coopération Libre.* Tunis: Maison Tunisienne de l'Edition.

Bowler, Anne. (1991). Politics as Art: Italian Futurism and Fascism. *Theory and Society 20*.

Chappell, Bill. How Tunisia's 'Quartet' Saved a Country from Civil War and Won the Nobel Peace Prize. *NPR*. 9 October 2015. Accessed 20 February 2016.

Fabricant, Florence. "Rome's Glory Is Now Tunisia's." *The New York Times.* 18 October 1998. Accessed 20 February 2016.

Fortunato Crider, E. (1978). *Italo-Egyptian Relations in the Interwar Period, 1922-1942* (Doctoral Dissertation). The Ohio State University, Columbus.

Erlich, Haggai. (1989). *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics.* Tel Aviv: Frank Cass & Co.

Gershoni, I., and Jankowski, J. (2010). *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Gunther, Richard (25 Sep 2015). "The Collapse of Parliamentary Regimes: Prologue. 19th Century political ideologies and the left-right continuum." Lecture given at The Ohio State University.

Hahn, Lorna (1962). Tunisia Pragmatism and Progress. *Middle East Journal, 16*(1), 18-28.

Hegghammer, Thomas (2006). Global Jihadism after the Iraq War. *Middle East Journal 60*(1).

Hinnesbusch, Raymond (1984). The Reemergence of the Wafd Party: Glimpses of the Liberal Opposition in Egypt. *International Journal of Middle East Studies 16*.

Jankowski, J. (1975). *Egypt's Young Rebels: "Young Egypt," 1933-1952*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.

Khoury, Philip (1981). Factionalism among Syrian Nationalists during the French Mandate. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 13*(4).

Kraiem, M. (1987). *Le Fascisme et les Italien de Tunisie (1918-1939)*. Tunis : Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Economiques et Sociales.

LaBanca, Nicola (2007). *Oltremare: Storia dell'Espansione Coloniale Italiana*. Bologna : Il Mulino.

McDonald, J.S. (1958). Some Socio-Economic Emigration Differentials in Rural Italy. *Economic Development and Cultural Change, 7*(1).

Medicott, W.N. (1926). The Mediterranean Agreements of 1887. *The Slavonic Review 5*(13).

Metz, Helen, ed. (1989). *Libya: A Country Study*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

Nasser, G. (1959). *The Philosophy of the Revolution*. Buffalo: Smith, Keynes, & Marshall.

Nolte, Ernst (1965). *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag.

Osman, Tarek (2010). *Egypt on the Brink*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Peri, Gabriel (1938). *Ombres du fascisme sur l'Afrique du Nord: collection d'articles parus dans l'humanité après une enquête en Afrique du Nord*. Paris : Editions du Comité populaire de propagande.

Pizzardi, Ines (2003). La Tunisia da Bourghiba a Ben Ali: dalla modernita` alla Democrazia? *Africa:Rivista trimestrale di studi e doumentazione dell'Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e L'Oriente, 58*(3).

Said, Edward (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Salerno, Eric (1979). *Genicidio in Libia: le atrocita` nascoste dell'avventura coloniale italiana (1911-1931)*. Milan.

Santarelli et al (1986). *Omar al-Mukhtar—The Italian Reconquest of Libya*. London: Darf Publishers Ltd.

Stephen, Chris. "The Tunisia quartet: how an impossible alliance saved the country from collapse." *The Guardian*. 8 December 2015. Accessed 23 February 2016.

Susmel, E. and D., eds. (1953). *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini,* Vol XXVI. Florence: La Fenice.

Trask, Roger (1980). *Egypt and the United States: The Formative Years* by Gail E. Meyer. *The Journal of American History 51*(4).

Vatikitotis, P.J. (1969). *The Modern History of Egypt*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger.

Walston, James. (1997). History and Memory of the Italian Concentration Camps. *The Historical Journal* 40(1), 169-183.

Weber, Eugen. (1964). *Varieties of Fascism*. Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company.

Williams, Manuel (2006). *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940.* New York: Routledge.