

# VU Research Portal

## Building the Intimate Boundaries of the Nation

Tarchi, Andrea

2023

**DOI (link to publisher)**  
[10.5463/thesis.93](https://doi.org/10.5463/thesis.93)

**document version**  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

### **citation for published version (APA)**

Tarchi, A. (2023). *Building the Intimate Boundaries of the Nation: The Regulation of Mixed Intimacies in Colonial Libya and the Construction of Italian Whiteness (1911-1942)*. [PhD-Thesis - Research and graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam]. s.n. <https://doi.org/10.5463/thesis.93>

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**E-mail address:**  
[vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)

PIANO REGOLATORE  
DELLA CITTA' DI  
BENGASI  
1930-VII

MARE MEDITERRANEO

# BUILDING THE INTIMATE BOUNDARIES OF THE NATION

The Regulation of Mixed Intimacies in Colonial  
Libya and the Construction of Italian Whiteness  
(1911-1942)

Andrea Tarchi

BACINO STERILE INDUSTRIALE  
E BACINO DI ATTHARADDI

CARPO DAVAZIONE



VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

## Building the Intimate Boundaries of the Nation

The Regulation of Mixed Intimacies in Colonial Libya and the Construction of  
Italian Whiteness  
(1911-1942)

### ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor of Philosophy aan  
de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam  
op gezag van de rector magnificus  
prof.dr. J.J.G. Geurts  
in het openbaar te verdedigen  
ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie  
van de Faculteit der Rechtsgeleerdheid  
op vrijdag 24 februari 2023 om 13.45 uur  
in een bijeenkomst van de universiteit,  
De Boelelaan 1105

door

Andrea Tarchi

geboren te Fiesole, Italië

promotoren:

prof.dr. B. de Hart  
prof.dr. M.L.J.C. Schrover

copromotoren:

dr. E. Zambelli  
dr. G.R. Jones

promotiecommissie:

prof.dr. S. Ponzanesi  
prof.dr. A. Gross  
prof.dr. L.C.H. Slingenberg  
prof.dr. G.I.J Steijlen  
dr. O. de Napoli

# **Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Research questions and hypotheses.....	8
1.2 Review of the Literature on Mixture in the Italian Colonial Context and Beyond .....	10
1.2.1 The Regulation of Mixed Intimacies in Colonial Settings .....	10
1.2.2 Mixed Intimacies in the Historiography of Italian Colonialism.....	16
1.3 Methodology .....	21
1.3.1 Methodology and Sources .....	21
1.3.2 Research Scope and Limitations.....	25
1.3.3 Ethics .....	28
1.3.4 Positionality .....	30
1.4 Outline of the Thesis .....	32
<b>2. Main Themes and Concepts.....</b>	<b>35</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	35
2.2 Social Categorization Mechanisms .....	36
2.3 Mixture.....	39
2.4 Race and Racialized Religion .....	42
2.5 Gender .....	46
2.6 Class .....	49

2.7 Whiteness .....	51
2.8 Regulations of Mixture and State Power .....	53
2.9 The Political Economy of Archives .....	55
2.10 Conclusion.....	57
<b>3. Historical, Demographic and Juridical Contexts.....</b>	<b>60</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	60
3.2 The Italian Colonial Rule over Libya and Its Populations .....	61
3.3 Overview of Legislation Prohibiting Mixture in the Italian Colonies .....	69
3.4 Conclusion.....	73
<b>4. The Colonization of Libya in the Italian National and Racial Formation .....</b>	<b>75</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	75
4.2 Italian Racial Identity and its National and Imperial Formation.....	78
4.3 Italian Imaginaries on the Colonization of Libya: A Turning Point .....	90
4.4 Libyan Women, Mixed Intimacies, and the Italian Colonial Imagination.....	100
4.5 Conclusion.....	115
<b>5. Concubinage and Prostitution in Militarized Colonial Libya (1911-1932) .....</b>	<b>117</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	117
5.2 "Proper Restraint Towards the Natives": The Italian Discursive Stance Towards Libyan Women in The First Years of Colonization .....	121
5.3 <i>Mabruchismo</i> : Libyan Concubines for Italian Officers .....	126
5.4 State-Regulated Prostitution in Colonial Tripoli.....	140
5.5 Conclusion.....	151

**6. Regulating Mixture while Building a Settler-Colonial City: the Case of Benghazi... 153**

6.1 Introduction ..... 153

6.2 Mixture in the City: Racial Boundaries and Gendered Regulation of Public Morality 158

6.3 Plans of Racial Segregation in Benghazi ..... 171

6.4 Conclusion..... 181

**7. Fascism's debate on the Legal Status of Libyans and the Issue of Mixed Marriages (1938-1939)..... 184**

7.1 Introduction ..... 184

7.2 Connecting the Legal Status of Libyans to the Regulation of Mixed Marriages..... 187

7.3 Settler Colonialism and a New Racial Paradigm: Italo Balbo's Plan..... 193

7.4 Fascism's Reaction to Balbo's Plan on the Juridical Inclusion of Libyans..... 199

7.5 Conclusion..... 210

**8. Regulating Mixed Marriages in Colonial Libya: At the Crossroads of Religion, Nationalism, and Race ..... 212**

8.1 Introduction ..... 212

8.2 The Catholic Church in Libya: Between Proselytism and Nationalist Support of Colonialism ..... 216

8.3 The Libyan Catholic Church before the Lateran Pacts: The Issue of Mixed Marriages ..... 221

8.4 The Lateran Pacts and Their Impact on Mixed Marriages..... 233

8.5 The Vatican and the Regime after 1936: The Fascist Reaction to Mixed Marriages .. 239

8.6 Conclusion..... 245

<b>9. Conclusions.....</b>	<b>248</b>
9.1 Mixture and Race in the Libyan Colonial Context .....	249
9.2 The Regulations of Mixed Intimacies in Colonial Libya.....	253
9.3 Mixed Intimacies and the Political Economy of the Italian Colonization of Libya.....	262
<b>10. Epilogue - Colonial Echoes on Mixture in Republican Italy.....</b>	<b>267</b>
10.1 The Rejection of Mixture in the First Years of Postcolonial Italy .....	269
10.2 Colonial Echoes in Contemporary Italian Society .....	274
<b>Archives .....</b>	<b>280</b>
<b>List of Illustrations.....</b>	<b>281</b>
<b>List of Referenced Legislation .....</b>	<b>283</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>321</b>

## **Acknowledgments**

Writing this Ph.D. dissertation has been a long and fascinating endeavor, a four-year-long journey that has enriched me with many experiences, new acquaintances, and friends I have made along the way. It has also been an extraordinarily challenging and complex project that I would not have accomplished without the funding of the European Research Council (grant number 725238) to the Euromix Project and the help of the many people who have supported me throughout these four years.

When the Principal Investigator of the Euromix Project, prof. Betty de Hart hired me to conduct the research behind this dissertation, I was not well-versed in archival research. My background was in anthropology and ethnography; I was interested in politics and, more than anything, in the present. Being a historian was not something I had planned, but when I saw the possibility of studying the colonial past of my country, Italy, I immediately thought that it would have been an invaluable chance for me to learn about a tragic and essential, albeit overlooked, part of my cultural heritage. Enthusiasm, however, is insufficient to be proficient at academic research, and I had much learning to do before I could write an entire doctoral thesis. This is where my supervisors stepped in and laboriously guided me through my long and painful education as an academic researcher. It is thanks to the work of prof. Betty de Hart, dr. Elena Zambelli, prof. Marlou Schrover and dr. Guno Jones that I was able to produce the research you are now about to read. As supervisors, they taught me how to read academic texts, collect data, write a dissertation to be proud of and spent innumerable hours trying to better my work. As mentors, they guided me throughout these four years and helped me grow academically and personally. Thanks to their work, I understood myself as a professional and made the choices that have brought me to where I am today. In other words, the work I have been doing for the

past four and a half years would not only not have been possible without them but also would not have meant to me what it does today.

Academics often say that writing a doctoral dissertation is a solitary and alienating endeavor that pushes a student's mental boundaries and emotional stamina. I was no exception, and I went through highs and lows, moments of proud accomplishments and bitter defeat, bright optimism and intense feelings of inadequacy. I would not have been able to push through this emotional and mental rollercoaster without the friendship and support of my two doctoral mates, Nawal Mustafa and Rébecca Franco. We were there for each other in the darker moments of our doctorate and were ready to celebrate our accomplishments. They say you do not have to become friends with your colleagues to succeed at your work. For me, it has been quite the opposite. Completing my doctorate would have been impossible without Nawal's and Rébecca's friendship. As social scientists in a law department, we supported each other emotionally and helped each other with the contents of our writing. Working alongside them helped make my dissertation what it has become after these years. While not directly involved in my doctoral trajectory, I would also like to thank the people at the Migration Law Section of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Although their work was inherently related to legal practice and hence not related to my own, they have always shown interest in my research and had kind words to share. In particular, I would like to thank dr. Lieneke Slingenberg, Jordan Dez, prof. Thomas Spijkerboer and Amin Roozdar. Their little acts of kindness were essential in the long process of writing my thesis.

During these years, I have been lucky to have had two fascinating experiences abroad. My two research visits, one at the University Federico II in Naples and the other at UC Berkeley, not only helped with my research endeavors but also proved to be excellent life experiences. For my visit to Berkeley, I would like to thank prof. Mia Fuller for her hospitality and her comments on my research. For my time in Naples, I would like to thank dr. Olindo De Napoli, who not

only let me sit in his office, shared many lunches with me, and made me feel at home in the city but also proved to be a constant helpful presence throughout my doctorate. Our discussions on Italian colonialism, the archives, and the importance of the foreclosure of race and racism from the Italian discourse on colonialism have proven to be essential to my thesis, and I will be forever grateful. Studying colonialism in the Italian setting sometimes feels like fighting a losing battle, with Italian society and public discourse minimizing colonial atrocities as a minor hiccup in an otherwise non-problematic national history. Confronting my ideas with critical minds such as prof. Fuller's and dr. De Napoli's expanded my understanding and made me not lose focus on the importance of my research.

Prof. Fuller and dr. De Napoli were not the only ones who helped write my thesis with valuable comments, criticism, and feedback. Among the many people who made my dissertation possible, I would like to thank prof. Sandra Ponzanesi. Prof. Ponzanesi followed my writing since the earliest stages and played a significant role in making my dissertation what it is now. Similarly, I would like to thank dr. Cristoph Lorke, prof. Federico Cresti, prof. Anna Baldinetti, dr. Dienke Hondius and all the other academics who had the patience to read parts of my work. Moreover, I would like to thank the members of my doctoral commission, prof. Sandra Ponzanesi, prof. Ariela Gross, prof. Lieneke Slingenberg, Prof. Fridus Steijlen and dr. Olindo de Napoli for agreeing to read my thesis and giving me valuable final comments on how to perfect it. All the feedback given to me by these researchers was instrumental in developing my work.

Additionally, I would like to thank all the excellent employees of the Italian State Archives, the Archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Archives of the Vatican Missionary Congregation for their support during my research. My experience in the Italian and Vatican historical archives would not have been as engaging without the many people who helped me navigate the archival institutions that were utterly unknown to me only a few years

ago. I want to thank Paolo Busonero, Giancarlo Colombo, Mons. Luis Manuel Cuña Ramos, Gaetano Petraglia, Stefania Ruggeri and many others for the help they gave me during my fieldwork trips to Rome. Their kindness and helpfulness were instrumental in making this research possible.

Besides all the professional help I have received from the amazing people I just mentioned, I would not have been able to complete my research without the emotional support I have received from my family and friends throughout these years. The support of my friends here in the Netherlands has been nothing short of the support given by a true family, and I will be forever grateful for this. Most importantly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my fantastic partner Sarah. I want to thank her for spending an interminable number of hours listening to my complaints about how challenging and frustrating my research was and for being even happier than I was about my successes. Finally, I also want to express my gratitude to my parents, Cristina and Marco, who supported me in moving to the Netherlands and pursuing an academic career against all odds and challenges. For their unwavering support and dedication, this thesis is also dedicated to them. Despite having no expertise in my field of research, they nonetheless showed admiration for my efforts. The pride of my partner and my parents in my work has been one of the primary fuels that kept me going throughout these years.

# 1. Introduction

It was July 23, 1940, and the Head office of the Voluntary Militia for National Security [also known as the Blackshirts, the voluntary militia affiliated to the Italian Fascist regime] sent a letter to the Ministry of Italian Africa, detailing what follows:

During a scheduled review, it emerged that two Blackshirts officers were Libyan citizens of Berber race and Muslim religion and, therefore, not allowed to be part of the militia. The Command is unaware of why these two individuals were enrolled in the first place, but it is nonetheless determined to expel them. Moreover, this Command urges the Ministry to deal with officer Saleh with particular care, as he said that if his expulsion from the corps resulted in his repatriation to Libya, he would bring with him his Italian wife, a fact that could arise the opposition of the Libyan colonial government.<sup>1</sup>

Italy had joined World War II just a month before. The Fascist regime had recently completed its regulatory shift toward institutional racism, enforcing racial segregation, particularly in mixed intimate relationships and marriages,<sup>2</sup> throughout the national and imperial territories.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Archivio Centrale dello Stato, (hereafter ACS), Fondo Ministero Africa Italiana (hereafter MAI), busta (hereafter b.) 556, fascicolo (hereafter f.) 10-26. *Lettera del Comando MVSN al Ministero dell’Africa Italiana, oggetto Vice capi squadra*. July 23, 1940.

All translations from Italian present in this dissertation are my own.

All names of non-public figures present in this dissertation have been pseudonymized.

<sup>2</sup> The conceptualization of the terms mixed and mixture deployed in this dissertation is discussed more at length in Section 2.3 of Chapter 2. However, to provide a first brief clarification to the reader, it is necessary to spell out that these terms are conceptualized in this dissertation as the coupling of two individuals who are socially understood as belonging to two differently perceived racialized categories at a specific time and place. As such, they are understood in this research as social constructs that have their roots in the social construction character of race and racialized categories and hence of their mixing.

<sup>3</sup> By the time of redaction of the letter, Fascist Italy held two colonial possessions: Italian Eastern Africa and Libya. Italian Eastern Africa (A.O.I.) was the official denomination of the Italian colonial possessions in the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia), proclaimed by Benito Mussolini on May 9, 1936, after the Italian conquest of Ethiopia. Libya was the Northern African colony created in 1934 off of the unification of the colonies Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, both invaded by Italy in 1911. For more information on the historical coordinates of Italian colonialism, see Chapter 3.

State regulation of intimate relationships between Italians and racialized individuals native to the colonies was central to governing essentialized racial categories laid at the core of colonial boundaries. Even if, at first, prohibitions of mixed intimate relationships had been applied only to unions between Italians and Eastern African colonial subjects,<sup>4</sup> by 1939, bans of mixture applied to all intimate relationships involving “Italians and natives of Italian Africa,” including Libyans.<sup>5</sup> Given this context, the presence of a Libyan man married to an Italian woman within the nation's physical boundaries and in the heart of Fascism's military organization appears to be surprising.<sup>6</sup> Even more so, considering that the letter mentions that the repatriation “could raise the opposition of the Libyan colonial government,” pointing to regulatory frameworks of mixture not only in metropolitan Italy but also in the colony.

However, according to a notion quite common within Italian postcolonial academic tradition, “in the Libyan colonies [...] there was not a consistent and widespread anxiety regarding mixture and mixed children as it instead was in Eritrea first and Ethiopia next” (Spadaro 2013, 31). Moreover, scholars have also argued that “there is little to no research on whether the 1937 racial law [R.D. 880, prohibiting concubinage between Italians and Eastern African colonial subjects] had any effect in Libya. It seems that it did not because the Arab population was very isolated and did not seek interaction with the Italians” (Pergher 2017, 197). However, if that was the case, what to make of the letter sent by the Blackshirts' command to the Ministry of Italian Africa? Was the prohibition of mixture and, therefore, the protection of Italians' racial purity in this specific colonial context a matter of little concern to the liberal and fascist colonial

---

<sup>4</sup> Royal Decree (hereafter R.D.) n. 880, April 19, 1937.

<sup>5</sup> R.D. n. 1004, June 29, 1939.

<sup>6</sup> The names “Libya” and “Libyans” were used to indicate the colonial territories and their populations only after Governor Italo Balbo unified Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan in 1934. As discussed more in-depth in Chapter 3, in this dissertation the terms “Libya” and “Libyans” will be used as encompassing terms to indicate all populations and territories under Italian rule in the region.

elites? Was it a policy concern born out of the racist late Fascist regime, or was it a relevant regulatory framework throughout the Italian colonization of Libya (1911-1942)?

This dissertation aims to answer these questions while looking for the political, discursive, and material reasons that motivated the Italian colonial government's policy changes. As it will become apparent in this dissertation, for the colonial government of Libya, the marriage between the Italian woman and the Libyan man highlighted by the Blackshirts' command was in open defiance of colonial boundaries built upon specific understandings of race, gender, and class categories related to the Italian colonial context. As this study will show, these boundaries and their enforcement changed over time, reflecting shifting assumptions regarding essentialized categories and power relations in colonial contexts.

This research focuses on the policing of intimate racial boundaries during the Italian colonization of Libya and their relation to the Italian racial identity construction both in the metropole and the empire. Hence, this project is concerned with state policy and regulations and how they influenced and were influenced by discursive constructions of social categories and material power relations developed in Libya immediately before and during its colonization. In particular, it assesses the Italian colonial administrations' regulatory approach toward forms of concubinage between Italian officers and Libyan women, unsegregated prostitution, and mixed marriages, and how they changed according to geographical, temporal, and geopolitical conjunctures. This study aims to further the understanding of mixed relationships during Italian colonialism, adding to the existing scholarship the grossly understudied Libyan context.

This introduction is structured as follows. First, it outlines the research questions orienting this dissertation, with a first overview of the hypotheses laying the starting point of its inquiry. Second, it highlights the historiographical coordinates in which this dissertation places itself, discussing the academic literature on the regulation of mixture in Italian and other colonial

contexts. Third, it details the methodology deployed in the research and the sources used to answer the research questions, describing the research scope and limitations. Finally, the introduction concludes with an explanation of the structure of the dissertation.

## **1.1 Research questions and hypotheses**

As mentioned in the previous section, this dissertation's inquiry seeks to answer the following main research question:

*Were mixed intimacies between Italians and Libyans regulated by Italian colonial authorities, and, if so, did such regulations play a role in the racialization of Italy's national identity as intrinsically white?*

I will answer this question through the following set of sub-questions:

- What was the relationship between the processes of racialization of Libyans and the racialization of Eastern African populations and Southern Italians?
- What role did the regulation of mixed intimacies play in the racialization of Libyans?
- What types of regulations of mixed intimacies were implemented in Colonial Libya between 1911 and 1943?
- How and why did such regulations differ based on gender, race, class, and religion?

- How did the Italian and Catholic Church administrations' attitudes towards mixture change according to different temporal and political conjunctures?

This research aims to trace intersecting patterns of "Italianness" and whiteness through regulations aimed at policing racial boundaries in colonial Libya. A translation of the widely used Italian term *Italianità*, the notion of "Italianness" encompasses a diverse array of characteristics that identify Italians as such. Defined by Virga (2019, 102) as a (de)racialized myth that includes whiteness as its racial marker while foreclosing it from public discourse, "Italianness" remains a vague, elastic signifier of Italian identity used broadly in Italian society to this day. In order to trace how notions of *Italianità* became racialized as white, this research analyzes circular letters, legislation, memos, and personal notes referring to mixture and its various conjugations to map the policies that framed the development and reinforcement of racial categories in colonial Libya. More specifically, this research adopts a socio-legal historical analysis of institutional sources to assess official state regulations and ascertain the different policies that endorsed, limited or tolerated forms of mixed intimacies in the period 1911-1942. Moreover, it deploys an analysis of the discourses that framed such policies to ascertain the discursive tools used to justify or condemn mixture at different times and political conjunctures and their relation to the construction of Italian whiteness.

The central hypothesis of this research is that Italian colonial administrators regulated mixture throughout their colonial presence in Libya to establish the category of "whiteness" on the settler population while racializing Libyans as Others. In particular, this dissertation argues that the racialization of the colonial Other through the regulation of mixed intimacies was a significant factor that allowed a modern, white, European subjectivity to emerge and represent itself as a signifier of Italian identity in the empire. Regulating mixture coincided with keeping

control of categorization processes that affected both colonizing and colonized societies; for this reason, the production of whiteness was a consequence of boundaries inscribed on racialized bodies.

In the next section of this introduction, I discuss the most important scholarly works that laid the foundations for the study of mixed intimacies in colonial contexts, with particular attention to the regulation of those intimacies analyzed in this dissertation. Moreover, I detail the state of the art of the study of intimacies in the Italian colonial contexts to describe what strand of academic tradition this research aims to contribute to.

## **1.2 Review of the Literature on Mixture in the Italian Colonial Context and Beyond**

### **1.2.1 The Regulation of Mixed Intimacies in Colonial Settings**

The subject of this dissertation is mixed colonial intimacies, which I define as the affective and/or sexual relationships involving an individual belonging to a colonizing power and an individual who was part of the society subjected to colonial rule. In this study, I rely on scholarship on colonial intimacies (McClintock 1995; Stoler 2002; Ghosh 2006; Saada 2012) as inspirational and groundbreaking examples. Nonetheless, I acknowledge the problematic nature of the concept of "intimacy" in colonial contexts. As explained by Stoler (2010, XXII), colonial intimacies have been framed in scholarship as "either the redemptive tales that endowed 'love' with the capacity to triumph over racial differences or those that dismissed such attachments as subterfuges to disguise more base desires." In this project, I acknowledge that

mixed intimate couplings in colonial contexts often resulted from coercive and violent power relations between male colonizers and colonized women, as I will show in the following sections of this literature review. At the same time, however, I strive to see colonial intimacies as not only a primary site of exertion of colonial power over the intimate sphere but also as the "social and cultural space where racial classifications were defined and defied, where relations between colonizer and colonized could powerfully confound or confirm the structures of governance and the categories of rule" (Stoler 2001, 830-831). This framing does not intend to romanticize and depoliticize relationships most often devoid of love, nor to hint at a fixed binary between romance on one side and exertion of power on the other. However, it intends to state that no matter the affection or the agency of the couples involved, intimacy in colonial settings was a central location for defining and (at times) defying social meanings and categories, one that academic scholarship has recognized for more than four decades.

Given the centrality of mixed intimacies' regulation in reproducing colonial power, academic research on the topic has been growing in quantity and quality since the 1980s. This research positions itself within this vast body of literature by adding the understudied context of colonial Libya, in which the presence and relevance of mixed intimacies and their regulation have been under-explored. As this dissertation primarily focuses on the heterosexual intimate relationships more common in colonial contexts, such as concubinage, prostitution, and marriage, what follows is a literature review of the primary scholarship on the regulations of these practices across different colonial contexts accompanied by a description of how this dissertation contributes to the study of each practice. More detailed literature reviews on the specific issues analyzed in this dissertation will accompany each chapter to provide the reader with a thorough contextualization of this research's position within each specific scholarly tradition.

## *Concubinage*

Colonial concubinage was the widespread sexual and domestic arrangement between colonizing men and colonized women, in which men used their power to have women provide them with sex, companionship, and domestic labor in exchange for money, material goods, housing, and/or status in colonial societies. Academic research on colonial concubinage is vast and thorough, and the selection of this large body of work that characterizes this research's greatest inspiration includes Stoler's work (2002) on the Dutch East Indies context, *Carnal Knowledge*. This monograph still stands as arguably the most defining research in the field, able to frame the policing of sex as a highly contested endeavor to maintain racial boundaries in the colonies. Although to a varying degree depending on context and historical period, concubinage was extremely common in many colonial societies, including French South-East Asia (Stoler 1989), Italian East Africa (Barrera 2002), French West Africa (Conklin 1997), Dutch East Indies (Stoler 2002), and the British Empire (Hyam 1986). As Stoler argued (2002, 44), colonial elites saw concubinage as a preferable alternative to prostitution, particularly for higher-class officers. However, its acceptance varied across time, with the practice "coming under more direct attack when European identity and supremacy were thought to be vulnerable" (Stoler 2002, 51), that is to say, when European colonial elites struggled to enforce a well-defined boundary between settlers and colonized populations.

The scholarship on concubinage showed that the practice's acceptance declined around the beginning of the twentieth century due to several factors discussed throughout this study, including the rise of scientific racism and an increase in the number of white women migrating to the colonies. This shift led to outright bans of the practice of mixing in the German empire in 1905 (Widenthal 2001) and the British empire in 1909 (Hyam 1986). By mapping and assessing concubinage throughout the Italian colonial presence in Libya, this research adds an understudied conjugation of the practice to the rich literature on colonial concubinage.

## *Prostitution*

Levine (2000, 7) argued that “the greater part of inter-racial sexual connection between colonizer and colonized was heterosexual prostitution where white men purchased the sexual services of native women.” Given its prevalence across different colonial settings, prostitution remains a central field of inquiry for understanding the relationship between mixed sex and imperial power. In this regard, the most studied context is the British empire. The work of Levine (2003) still stands as the most comprehensive history of colonial prostitution, with a thorough analysis of four British colonial contexts and how colonial administrators regulated prostitution to protect their armies from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and surveil racialized women and their intimate encounters with colonial soldiers. Other works on colonial prostitution in the British empire focus mainly on the Indian context (Ballhatchet 1980; Banerjee 1998) and have found similar results on the centrality of the regulation of prostitution in establishing state control over mixed sexual colonial encounters. Levine (2003, 37) wrote that the policing of prostitution “demonstrated the state’s need to assert and maintain the control over sexuality in order to assure its rule.”

Regarding the French colonial context, the works of Taraud (2003) and Dunne (1994) stand as the most important contributions to the study of regulations of prostitution in colonial Northern Africa. Of particular interest for this research is French Algeria, in which "prostitution increasingly became a racially segregated system, reflecting the polarization of colonial society" (Dunne 1994, 27), a stance that, as I will show in Chapter 5, seems to contrast with the management of prostitution in colonial Libya. Given Libya’s proximity to Algeria and the Italians' interests in the management of prostitution in the French Northern African colonies, a portion of Chapter 5 looks for parallels and inconsistencies between these contexts and the Libyan one.

### *Mixed Marriages*

Finally, this dissertation aims to contribute to the scholarship on the regulation of mixed marriages in the colonies. Following critical works on mixed marriages in the American context by Pascoe (2009) and Hodes (1997), this work understands the regulation of mixed marriages as a particularly significant indicator of colonizing white societies' management strategies of racial boundaries. According to Pascoe (1991, 5), the regulation of mixed marriage “involves the making and remaking of notions of race, gender, and culture in individual lives, as well as at the level of social and political policy.”

Given marriage regulations' intrinsic connection to access to citizenship, patrilineality, inheritance, and religious affiliation, colonial states and religious authorities had varying approaches to mixed marriages and their regulation depending on temporal, geographical, political, and ideological conjunctures. Academic literature has recognized that, like in the case of colonial concubinage, mixed marriages involving white men were at times endorsed by colonial authorities to expand European power and control over colonized populations. Influential studies have proven this dynamic to be accurate, at least until the turn of the twentieth century, for the Dutch (Stoler 2002, Steijlen 2010), French (Saada 2012), Portuguese (Mata 2007), and British (Freeman 2005) colonial contexts. At the same time, other research has recognized that mixed marriages and relationships also fostered anxieties regarding white men “going native” (Edgar 2007; Owen 2004) and “racial promiscuity,” possibly undermining the “superiority” of settler communities (Saada 2012).

As mentioned, the regulation of mixed marriages was intrinsically related to states' claims to regulate the private sphere due to its connection to the right to citizenship and racialized hierarchies of power. Given this crucial link between mixed marriages and the regulation of legal boundaries between settler and colonized societies, De Hart's work on the Dutch context (2006; 2015), Barrera's on the Italian (2004), and Windenthal's on the German (1997),

demonstrated the connection between the regulation of mixed marriages and regimes of citizenship and patrilineality. This vast body of literature has shown the highly gendered, racist nature of citizenship regimes in colonial settings and their effects on questions of belonging and social exclusion. By analyzing the colonial citizenship conceded to Libyans and how it intersected with anxieties toward mixed marriages, this research directly situates itself within this scholarship.

By the nineteenth century, the setting changed drastically, with an increase of European women in basically every colonial context and new ideas regarding race and mixing developing towards the modern notion of scientific racism (Lake and Reynolds, 2008).<sup>7</sup> Defined as “the pseudo-scientific belief that there is a biological basis for the historical divisions of people into distinct racial groups” (Lea 2020, 585), scientific racism gained significant traction in colonialist circles, providing the ideological context to the colonizing impulse represented by the Berlin Conference and the “Scramble for Africa.”<sup>8</sup> The increase of European women in settler communities and global discursive attitudes also had clear and immediate implications for the regulation of mixed marriages in colonial contexts. The examples of Germany, which, as mentioned, officially banned mixed marriages in some of its colonies in 1905 (Hartmann 2014), and Great Britain, which implemented the 1909 Crewe Circular prohibition for its civil servants to marry indigenous women (Hyam 2010), stand as clear-cut consequences of white women’s increased presence in the colonies and the growing popularity of white supremacy in European countries.

Italy, which joined the colonial stage later than most other European powers, had a similar if more time-compressed, trajectory. This dissertation traces the development of mixed marriage

---

<sup>7</sup> The arrival of more consistent numbers of white women in colonial contexts and the repercussions they had in the policing of intimate racial boundaries are explained in detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>8</sup> The “Scramble for Africa” was the invasion, and colonization of most of Africa carried out by Western European powers during a short period known to historians as the New Imperialism (between 1881 and 1914).

regulation in Libya while relating it to the State-Catholic Church struggles over marriage jurisdiction. As Italy was a predominantly Catholic country, the Roman Catholic Church had enormous power over the private sphere of Italian society. At the same time, however, the Church and the Italian state had been in conflict since the latter's creation in 1861. As I will show in detail in Chapter 8, the regulation of marriage, particularly mixed ones, proved to be a contentious issue regarding the Church and state jurisdictions over the management of the private sphere of Italian citizens. By analyzing the declination of this struggle in Libya, this dissertation aims to add complexity to the literature on marriage regulations in the Italian colonial context while relating it to the broader literature on the role of churches in managing mixed marriages.

### **1.2.2 Mixed Intimacies in the Historiography of Italian Colonialism**

As the colonization of Libya represented a significant episode in contemporary Italian history, it may appear odd that the intimate encounter in the Libyan context has not received more attention. In order to explain such a gap in the literature, it is first necessary to mention the process of "foreclosure of race and racism" (Spivak 1999, 6) concerning Italian colonial and postcolonial power structures. Such foreclosure has boosted the Italian colonial enterprise's representation as less violent than other colonial powers, and the Italian national formation as not characterized by racialization processes of internal and colonial Others. Del Boca (2005) summarized this self-representation with the expression *Italiani brava gente* [Italians [are] good people].<sup>9</sup> This self-representation allowed, in turn, the quasi-disappearance from public discourse of the process of construction of the Italian population's whiteness as grounded in the racialization of subaltern groups.

---

<sup>9</sup> A similar dynamic has been highlighted by Wekker (2016) regarding the Dutch context and by Stovall and van Abbeele (2003) regarding the French one.

Given this broader societal context, Italian academic research on the history of Italian colonialism has been late compared to research on other colonial contexts and other periods of Italian national history. The myth of *Italiani brava gente* fostered colonial amnesia in Italian academia, an unwillingness to recognize the role of colonialism in shaping post-war Italy.<sup>10</sup> Del Boca, one of the first Italian postcolonial scholars to break with this tradition, explained that the delay of Italian postcolonial studies was due to the dominance of colonialism apologists in the post-war period public debate. Del Boca attributes this dominance to the loss of the colonies during the war, a fact that silenced the debate on Italy's responsibilities towards its former colonies and the atrocities it had committed during the colonial wars (Del Boca, 1998). The new Italian republic, attempting to distance itself from the atrocities of the Fascist regime, had to relegate its colonial history to a past inherently different from its present and future.

At least until recent years, the historiography of Italian colonialism has been characterized by a traditional method of analysis that focused on the colonizers' experience without engaging with the structures of inequality that characterized both colonial and postcolonial Italian society, resulting in the lack of any study on the regulation of mixture in the Italian empire until the late 1990s. In the last two decades, however, a growing body of literature has engaged with the cultural and social effects that the Italian empire still has on contemporary Italian society's framings of whiteness and modernity. Giulietta Stefani (2007) compiled a gender history of the Italian colonization of the Horn of Africa, focusing on the significance of intimate colonial encounters for developing discourses around Italian masculinity. Cristina Lombardi-Diop, alongside Gaia Giuliani (2013), wrote a comprehensive historical account of Italians' racial identity, the role of colonialism in its development, and its impact on racial relations in contemporary Italy. Moreover, she edited an edited volume in English with Caterina Romeo

---

<sup>10</sup> The discursive deconstruction of the *Italiani brava gente* myth has been conducted by scholars such as Del Boca (2005), and Ahmida (2005).

(2012), collecting various essays on the coloniality of contemporary Italian society. The recent works of Spadaro (2013) and Proglione (2016) on Italian Libya and its role in the Italian imagination and public memory are relevant additions to the discussion of the colony's role in the formation of Italian nationalism.

Regarding the imperial formations in Republican Italy, Deplano's (2017) and Morone's (2015) works on the first years of postcolonial Italy and the fate of ex-colonial subjects in republican Italy represent a relevant starting point in the study of the Italian early postcolonial society. Moreover, Marchetti (2011) added a particularly pertinent analysis of the postcolonial migration of Eritrean women into Italy and the echoes of colonial racism and exploitation in their experiences as domestic workers. Finally, the works of Stephanie Malia Hom (2019) and Ballinger (2021) on the "colonial echoes" linking the imprisonment of Libyan rebels during the colonial era and the contemporary management of immigration in the country represent examples of how research on Italy's colonial past can provide an outlook on the imperial echoes still present in modern Italian society.

Italian scholarship has seen increasing interest also in mixed intimacies in the former Eastern African colonies. This research has undoubtedly been influenced by gender and sexuality studies' growing stature in colonial and imperial histories. The most thoroughly researched form of mixed intimacy is *madamato* or colonial concubinage between Italian middle-upper class colonial officials and colonized women. Since the late 1980s, *madamato* has been studied from many analytical points of view, particularly within the Eritrean context. Sòrgoni (1998) focused her monograph on the practice's inclusion in juridical and anthropological discourse, tracing the discursive framework that accompanied it throughout the Italian presence in Eritrea. Campassi (1987) and Iyob (2000) focused instead on the practice's role in shaping colonial discourse regarding the sexual imagination related to Eritrea and its impact on the representations of Eritrean women in colonial society. Giulia Barrera's work (2002; 2003;

2004; 2008) dealt more in-depth with the role the practice had in shaping power relations in the colony, the way it framed the issue of belonging, citizenship, and patrilineality, and how it impacted definitions of public and private spheres relative to Eritrea. Sandra Ponzanesi's work (2012) brought a "gender corrective" to dominant discourses regarding the practice in Eritrea and accounted for the agency and experiences of the Eritrean women involved in *madamato*. The study of *madamato* has also expanded to the Ethiopian context with the work of Trento (2011), which conveyed a comparative study between the Eritrean and Ethiopian contexts using interviews with the women directly involved in the practice.

Another form of mixed intimacy researched in the Italian Eastern African context is unsegregated, state-sanctioned prostitution. The first work that directly looks at the regulation of prostitution in Italian Eastern Africa was the article by Richard Pankhurst (1974), who inserted the Italian colonial regulations in Eritrea within the historical development of the policies that framed the practice in the region over time. On the same topic, Locatelli's chapter in the edited volume *African Cities* (2009) analyzed the relation between the establishment of settler communities and the work of Eritrean prostitutes in the city of Asmara. Strazza (2012) wrote a comprehensive account of policy changes regarding racial segregation in Italian Eastern Africa after the conquest of Ethiopia. In particular, he conveyed an in-depth analysis of how Italian Fascist administrations ensured segregation of prostitution along racial and class lines in the region's cities.

Despite the scholarly attention to *madamato* and prostitution, not much has been written about marriage and juridically sanctioned unions in the colonies, even in the more thoroughly studied Eastern African context. Most unions between Italian men and Eastern African women were sanctioned by the customary union known as *demoz*, which Italians equated to the mentioned *madamato*. The *demoz* was a conjugal union stipulated under a contract in which women provided domestic and sexual services to men in exchange for a stipend (Sòrgoni 1998).

Conventional mixed marriages still happened in Eastern Africa, as testified by Barrera in her work on patrilineality in Eritrea (2002).

The outlined historiography on mixed intimacies and their regulation in Italian Eastern Africa signals its more developed stage than the study of the Libyan context. While scholars have thoroughly mapped the historical development of the colonization of Libya (Del Boca 1986, 1991; Labanca 2012; Baldinetti 2010), the study of mixed intimacies and sexuality in Italian Libya is still in its early stages. Notable recent works on the topic were provided by Yeaw (2018a) and Spadaro (Spadaro 2013; Yeaw and Spadaro 2020). Barbara Spadaro's work (2013) was the first that traced the colonial encounter in Libya in its intimate character, working on the specific conjugations and relations between conceptions of race, gender, and class in the colony. Yeaw's dissertation and the volume she edited alongside Spadaro were focused on highlighting Libyan women's voices and experiences as agents of anti-colonial resistance while removing them from "the margins of nationalist and colonial narratives" (Yeaw 2018b, 3).

My thesis builds on these recent works while focusing on the power structures that framed the intimate colonial encounter under Italian colonial rule. By doing so, I aim to shed further light on Italian colonial discourse and practices regarding racial mixture and how shifting conceptions of racial purity and colonial prestige were directly influenced by the regulation of Libyans and Italian settlers' bodies, emotions, subjectivities, and social interactions. What is still needed in the academic debate on sexuality and Italian colonialism is a thorough assessment of the role that mixed intimacies played in colonial Libya, the way colonial governments reacted to them, and how they went on to shape race, class, and gender relations both in Italy and Libya. In this research, I do precisely that.

In the next section of this introduction, I detail the methodology used to answer this dissertation's research questions, a description of the sources analyzed in these pages, and how I went through the process of collecting them. Moreover, I discuss my positionality as a

researcher of Italian colonialism and how I understand the biases, epistemological conflicts, and hurdles that such a position might create in my inquiry.

## **1.3 Methodology**

### **1.3.1 Methodology and Sources**

To assess regulations of mixture, this dissertation also aims to look at how they differed according to race, gender, class, and religious dynamics and the ideological conjunctures that framed Italian colonial power in Libya. Hence, this research deploys a socio-legal historical analysis of official state archival sources to answer these questions. As Schiff postulated (1976, 287), a socio-legal approach looks at regulations as directly linked to the analysis of the social context in which such regulations apply. Therefore, regulations should be put into the perspective of that situation by seeing the role of regulations in the creation, maintenance, and/or change of the given social context. At the same time, however, I seek to combine the socio-legal approach with a cultural analysis of regulations and the social contexts in which they operate as “sites of race-making” (Gross 2001, 668). By looking at regulations as a product of social contexts and their cultural characteristics, it is possible to “break down easy assumptions based on monolithic models” (Gross 2001, 684) and ground discursive constructions of racial categories into the complex interrelational social structures that produce them and are produced by them.

This study deploys this methodological approach to the analysis of archival sources on the regulation of mixture in the Libyan colonial context. At the same time, it traces the social changes that influenced and were influenced by these regulations. I did extensive archival

research in Italy. I studied the entirety of the Italian Central State Archive, the Historical Archive of the Ministry of Italian Africa,<sup>11</sup> and the Historical Archive of the Army General Staff.<sup>12</sup> I conducted archival research from September 2018 until December 2019, visiting the ACS three times, the ASMAI four times, and the ASSME once. In these archives, which are mostly not digitized, I looked for any mention of intimate relationships between Italians and Libyans throughout the Italian colonial presence in the region (1911-1942).

I researched over 230 archival boxes throughout my visits to state archives and looked through thousands of individual papers. Specifically, I searched all boxes preserved in archival collections related to the administration of the Libyan colony and searched through all the documents they contained, looking for any sign of the mentioned relationships. Such documents include, among others, military circulars on the policy regarding concubinage, folders related to the expulsion of Italians found guilty of engaging in mixed relationships with Libyans, urban plans that instated racial segregation in the colony, epistolary exchanges between Fascist officials detailing the problem of mixed marriages, and many more. All the relevant sources that included mentions relevant to this research inquiry were photographed in compliance with the archives' policy.

Besides looking in these sources for mentions of mixed relationships and “racial promiscuity,” I searched for mentions of “prestige,” “racial consciousness,” and “proper restraint.” I identified these words as fundamental keywords because they represented widespread expressions used in Italy when there was a mention of racial relations. As will be further explained in later chapters, these keywords were intrinsically related to racial discourse and helped me discern how mentions of prestige, when related to cases of intimacy, were always

---

<sup>11</sup> The Archivio Storico del Ministero dell’Africa Italiana (hereafter ASMAI) is an historical archive hosted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, Italy.

<sup>12</sup> The Archivio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito (hereafter ASSME) is the historical archive of the Italian army located in Rome, Italy.

tied to instances of racial categorization. Moreover, they helped me connect cases of mixture with colonial administrators' perception of breaches of racial boundaries in the colony. Consequently, I related such findings on the overall ideological position of the Italian administrations to the mentioned types of regulation of mixture to depict the social setting that framed the oscillation in policy attitudes toward the enforcement of intimate racial boundaries in the colony. As I will make clear in the discussions conveyed in the individual empirical chapters, the transition from liberal colonial governments to Fascist ones was characterized by a shift in language toward more widespread use of terms such as "racial consciousness," "racial prestige," and "defense of the race," signaling an ideological shift that carried over to more distinct forms of prohibition of mixture in the colony.

The analysis of institutional sources from the ACS, ASMAI, and ASSME archives is primarily used for the historical reconstructions of the regulation of mixture in the transition of Italian Libya from militarized space to settler colony, as discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. In these chapters, institutional sources are analyzed to trace the colonial administrators' attitude changes towards episodes of mixture and the causes that prompted these shifts. Sources that mentioned the practices of concubinage, prostitution and romantic relationships between Italians and Libyans are analyzed to assess how race, gender, class, and religious dynamics changed regulatory attitudes and what these changes meant for the categorization of Italians as white and Libyans as racialized.

Regarding mixed marriages, the sources differ from those used to map other types of mixture. As the institution of marriage was one of the most relevant sites of political struggle between the Italian state and the Catholic Church, this dissertation includes not only state archival sources but also Church ones. In particular, the regulation of mixed marriages in Libya is assessed through the historical analysis of sources preserved in the Historical Archive of

Propaganda Fide<sup>13</sup> and the Historical Archives of the Order of the Frati Minori (ASOFM).<sup>14</sup> I visited both of these archives only once, in November 2019, thanks to the permission granted to my project by the Vatican and Franciscan institutions that hold these archives. As for the cases of the state archives mentioned earlier, I searched for any mention of marriage between Italians and Libyans officiated by Catholic friars in Libya between 1911 and 1942. The Vatican and Franciscan archives are also not digitized to this date, and I searched through more than fifty boxes of missionary reports directed to the Propaganda Fide headquarters in Rome.

The archival sources of the mentioned religious institutions are used in Chapter 8 to shed light on how Catholic missionaries saw formal relationships between Italian settlers and Libyans and how their influence over the private sphere of Catholics clashed with the ideological and biopolitical projects of the Italian colonial administrators. Moreover, since mixed marriages and their regulations intersected with issues of belonging and citizenship, the analysis of Church sources is coupled with an assessment of the juridical debates that sprouted in Italy regarding the prohibitions of mixture approved by the Fascist regime in the second half of the 1930s. The analysis of these juridical debates is carried out in this thesis through a careful reading of texts published in the 1930s by the jurists themselves and that are mostly digitized or preserved in the National Central Library in Florence and Rome.

As it contains an analysis of the discourses that connected the colonization of Libya to the Italian national and racial formation, Chapter 4 of this study relies on sources that differ from the ones analyzed in the other chapters. In particular, the chapter relies on literary sources and politicians' speeches that I collected from digitized, non-copyrighted sources on the internet and the Florence and Rome National Central libraries. I collected these sources through a

---

<sup>13</sup> The Archivio Storico "De Propaganda Fide" – Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei popoli (hereafter Archivio Storico Propaganda Fide), is the historical archive of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, or the Vatican Ministry for missionary practices, and is located in the Vatican City.

<sup>14</sup> The Archivio Storico Frati Minori (hereafter ASOFM), is the historical archive of the Franciscan monastic order, located in Rome, Italy.

keyword-based search of sources related to discourse on the Italian North-South divide and its relation to Italian colonialism, particularly in Libya. All the sources I could not find on the internet were later researched in the National libraries. This analysis of non-institutional sources is used to map the political and cultural discourses that framed the construction of Italian whiteness from the birth of the Italian nation-state in 1861 through the invasion of Libya in 1911 and the rise and fall of Fascism (1922-1943). Poems, travel reports, newspaper articles, and colonial novels collected from the internet and the libraries are analyzed in Chapter 4 to detail the continuities and inconsistencies in representations of internal and colonial Others as a means of constructing Italy as a racially homogenous national community. This analysis aims to trace discursive linkages between the Italian national and racial formation to representations of mixed intimacies in the context of the colonization of Libya. The analysis conveyed in Chapter 4 aims to provide a discursive framework for the analysis of mixed intimacies regulations in the context of Italian Libya that will be carried out in subsequent chapters.

### **1.3.2 Research Scope and Limitations**

This research's scope is to trace the regulatory framework of mixture in the Libyan colonial context and the Italian colonial elites' relative discursive and material goals. By analyzing sources related to this regulatory framework, this thesis maps the attitudes that prompted Italian colonial administrators to endorse, tolerate or prohibit different forms of mixed intimacies between Italians and Libyans according to their ideological and political needs. Consequently, the subjects of this research are not the individuals who engaged in mixed intimacies but the regulations and discourses that constrained their agency and experiences according to the Italian ruling classes' specific representational and geopolitical plans.

Accordingly, the objective of this research is not to shed light on the experiences of those Libyan women who were coerced into concubinage and prostitution by the Italian army, nor is it to give relevance to the agency of Libyan men who engaged in intimate relationships with Italian women, though an exploration of these two topics is undoubtedly necessary. Almost all mixed relationships in Libya were framed along intersectional lines of discrimination and exploitation. Unfortunately, official Italian archival sources tell us almost nothing about the experiences of the Libyan women and men who engaged in various forms of mixed intimacies. Moreover, I could not travel to Libya for research purposes throughout my project due to the ongoing internal conflicts that still affect the country. This state of affairs negatively impacted the possibility of engaging with first-hand archival sources on the experiences of the individuals involved in mixed relationships.<sup>15</sup> While engaging with sources in Libyan archives would have been hampered by my lack of knowledge of the Arabic language, the geopolitical instability of the country excluded any possibility of collaboration with local scholars to obtain and translate archival sources on the Libyan perspective on the colonial period. As a result, this research relies on the voices of the Italian colonizing authorities over those of the Libyans that were subject to the formers' authority. As a counterbalance to the one-sidedness of the sources analyzed, it needs to be underlined that I do not take the meaning of Italian state sources at face value, but I apply a critical analysis of their content. Thus, the analysis of official sources that I carry out in this thesis does not amplify them by reiterating Italian colonial rhetoric but uses them to convey a critical view of colonial practices that have never been systematically analyzed before this work.

Another limitation of this research is that it focuses solely on heterosexual intimacies. Ponzanesi (2014, 89) testified that the "invisibility of homosexuality" in Italian archival records

---

<sup>15</sup> At the time of writing of this dissertation, Libya remains a politically unstable country where conducting research represents a highly dangerous endeavor.

is one of the main hurdles of any research on queer couples in the Italian context, particularly the colonial one. Indeed, in my lengthy research conducted in the archives, I found no trace of non-normative intimacies in any of the many hundred boxes I thoroughly looked through. While being aware that this research limitation risks reproducing the heteronormative narrative that mixed intimacies in the Italian colonies were solely between cisgender men and women, the archival sources at my disposal directed my focus toward the specific demographic of heterosexual intimacies.

The final limitation of this dissertation's inquiry comes not from an external limitation such as the ones described until now but from a personal choice that I made during the research design stage of my project. As mentioned, this research focuses on the intimacies that prompted Italian colonial administrators to create regulatory structures to enforce racial boundaries in Libya. As such, it looks at the individuals involved in these relationships and the regulations of the act of mixing, namely all the intimacies (sex, intimate relationships, marriages) that colonial administrators regulated across thirty years. Given the already challenging task of mapping various kinds of intimacies and their regulation in a context that has hardly been studied before, I chose to exclude from the analysis the most immediate consequences of these mixed intimacies: children. Although the role of mixed children would have broadened the understanding of the regulation of mixture in the Libyan context to issues of patrilineality and inheritance, I chose to restrict the scope of the research to have a more focused depiction of the regulations that are the subject of this research. Moreover, Italian archives hold little to no sources directly mentioning Italian-Libyan children, unlike the well-documented cases of Italian-Eritrean *meticci* [Italian for "person of mixed descent"].<sup>16</sup> Future research, which would expand its archival inquiry to Libyan archives, could elaborate on my argument in this

---

<sup>16</sup> Academic literature on Italian-Eritrean *meticci* is particularly rich. See for example Barrera (2002), Strazza (2012), and Stefani (2010).

dissertation and include Italian-Libyan children's role in Italian colonial and postcolonial history.

In the next section, I detail the ethical coordinates that guided my archival research and the analysis of the sources I collected.

### **1.3.3 Ethics**

#### *Ethical Clearances*

I conducted this research mostly in public archives, including the Italian Central State and Italian Ministry archives. The ACS is fully open access, and I was hence permitted to search its collections.<sup>17</sup> Regarding the ministerial archives, a prior authorization provided by the "Head of the Archive Unit" was necessary to start the consultation. The authorizations to consult the ASMAI and ASSME were given to me after I signed up to the archives' portal and provided an identification document and a presentation letter written by the Principal Investigator (P.I.) of my research project – Prof. Betty de Hart. The same process also applied to the Church archives of Propaganda Fide and ASOFM, which, although formally archives of private institutions, are open to any researcher in possession of a recommendation letter from a research project's P.I.

The Italian ministerial decree 1012/BIS/712 of December 22, 2015, allows every document older than thirty years to be openly consultable and publishable. Conversely, other more sensible documents, as stated by article 221 of law n. 675, December 31, 1996, and articles 8 and 9 of the legislative decree n. 281 of July 30, 1999, need to have been preserved by the

---

<sup>17</sup> The access procedure to Italian State archives can be found here:  
<http://www.archiviodistatoroma.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/227/accesso-digitale>

archives for over seventy years to be published. Since the entirety of the research focuses on a period older than seventy years ago, such rules did affect my capacity to consult these archival sources. Such rules conform to the European-wide General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as explicitly stated in article 89 of said regulation.<sup>18</sup>

### *Anonymity*

As the entirety of the individuals portrayed in this research is composed of deceased individuals, the reproduction of their names and life histories does not require anonymity, following Italian privacy laws and the newly enforced GDPR.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, following the ethical proposal I submitted to the Vrije Universiteit Ethical Board in 2018, I pseudo-anonymized all the private persons whose stories were recorded in the archives. Such measure was taken to comply with the "do no harm" principle to avoid uncovering events that possible descendants of the people involved would not want to know or become public. However, no anonymization was used regarding public figures, politicians, or private persons whose names had already been published, as it is not deemed necessary by the GDPR and Italian privacy law.<sup>20</sup>

Before moving to the structure of the dissertation and the end of this introduction, it is necessary to outline how I envision my positionality as a researcher of Italian colonialism. Such a discussion will clarify how I understand my role as the author of this dissertation.

---

<sup>18</sup> Article 89, Recital 160, GDPR: "Where personal data are processed for historical research purposes, this Regulation should also apply to that processing. This should also include historical research and research for genealogical purposes, bearing in mind that this Regulation should not apply to deceased persons."

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Provv. Garante March 2, 2006

### **1.3.4 Positionality**

The understanding of my positionality as the author of this research endeavor follows the example of feminist standpoint theory as detailed in Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Sandra Haring (1991, 1992). This approach implies understanding any research endeavor as intrinsically situated in the social reality of the researcher. Hence, the social categories that apply to the "knowledge creators" - their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and sexuality - are all relevant constraints on what they can know and how they transfer research data into the academic medium. Moreover, the motivations that fuel the researcher's work and the nuances of the research, such as the institutions that provide material support, are essential factors that need to be accounted for to increase my reflexivity on my position as a researcher.

My power position vis-à-vis this research endeavor is the following: I belong to the same Italian national community that invaded the Libyan coasts and subjugated entire populations over a century ago in the name of Italian capitalist expansion and national prestige. At the same time, as a man studying the regulation of intimacies in the Libyan context, I am a clear beneficiary of the same, albeit different in their temporal conjugation, structures of patriarchal power that allowed Italian men the freedom to objectivize, sexualize, and exploit Libyan women for their sexual needs and domestic comfort. Italian colonialism might have formally ended some eighty years ago, but the political economy of the contemporary world is still heavily influenced by the colonial dynamics and logic that shaped the inequalities present in the colonial and postcolonial world.

Given these premises, I intentionally frame my work as an endeavor to understand the colonial logic of regulations of mixed intimacies from the side of the colonizer and to analyze the regulatory conjugations of forms of white supremacy and patriarchy that applied to the context of the Italian colonization of Libya. Consequently, the primary motivation behind my research is to determine the colonial roots of racial thinking in Italian society as they were forged

through the regulation of mixture. As a white Italian man, my position allows me to have an insider view of the Italian mechanisms of patriarchal and colonial power and unpack the role these historical developments had in developing Italian whiteness. At the same time, however, my positionality does not allow me to comprehend what it means to experience colonization fully, the subjugation of one's people by the hand of a foreign power, nor to understand the effects of patriarchal subjugation on women's bodies. These are apparent limitations regarding the situatedness of the knowledge that this research attempts to create. At the same time, their acknowledgment helps make my research more honest in what it can achieve.

As a final reflection on my positionality as a researcher, I want to stress that I am an Italian researcher based in another country, the Netherlands, using European funds to study the country I emigrated from. This particular situation has caused me to reflect on the political economy of academic research and funding in the European context. I sometimes regret researching a critical page of my country's past from a foreign country, spending time in Italy only to carry out archival research. The Italian "brain drain," or emigration of academics looking for research funding, is well-documented (Monteleone and Torrisi 2012; Torrisi and Permagallo 2020) and a reality many Italian academics face in their career. However, the motivations that brought me to carry out this research endeavor have been able to sustain my efforts and look to the positive effect that my research could have, disregarding my current disconnect from the country whose history I have been studying. The positive impact my research on the colonial roots of racial thinking in Italy could have on contemporary Italian society outweighs all the reservations that my position as a researcher might have had.

## 1.4 Outline of the Thesis

This study is organized chronologically and thematically, with the chapter progression following simultaneously the temporal development of the multiple regulatory approaches toward mixture in colonial Libya and the race, gender, class, and religious dynamics that influenced these regulations.

Chapter 2 describes at length all the theoretical and conceptual coordinates used in this dissertation and the social categories involved in regulating mixed intimacies in the Libyan colonial setting, detailing how specific concepts and notions applied to this context. Among these, I discuss how mechanisms of social categorization, race, gender, class, religion, and regulation processes create the theoretical framework around the socio-legal historical analysis conveyed in this dissertation.

In Chapter 3, I describe the geographical, historical, and juridical coordinates that frame the discussion carried out in this dissertation. In particular, I describe the territories that comprised modern-day Libya at the time of Italian colonization (1911-1942) and the vicissitudes that brought to the Italian domination of the territory. Moreover, I describe the different populations that inhabited the Libyan territory and how they were referred to by Italian authorities in the sources analyzed in this dissertation. Finally, I outline all the official legislation regarding mixture promulgated in the Italian colonies, particularly in Eritrea and Somalia, to counterbalance the analysis of the Libyan context carried out throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the discourses that framed the Italian national formation and its racial characterization, focusing on processes of Othering of both internal and external racialized social groups. As such, Chapter 4 is identified by an emphasis on literary sources and political speeches, which are dissected in the chapter to assess the role that discourses and

images connected to the colonization of Libya had in the mentioned process of construction of Italian whiteness. As such, the chapter is to be considered an analysis of the cultural substratum upon which the regulations analyzed in this thesis were born and developed into an influential medium of racial categorization in colonial Libya and Italy.

In Chapter 5, I begin the socio-legal historical analysis of the regulatory framework of mixed intimacies in colonial Libya. More precisely, the chapter analyzes how the Italian military command regulated concubinage and prostitution during the first two decades of Italian colonial presence when the region was mostly militarized due to the pervasive anti-colonial resistance in all areas of the region. Moreover, it provides a first glimpse of the regulatory shift toward the prohibition of mixture that accompanied the transition of Libya toward a settler-colonial space after the repression of the resistance.

This transition is more extensively discussed in Chapter 6 by studying the social landscape evolution in Benghazi between the 1920s and 1930s. Specifically, the chapter looks at how the increase in settler population in the city, particularly of Italian women, brought a restructuring of the colonial boundaries in the city that had material impacts on the lives of mixed couples and the spatial organization of the city.

Chapter 7 follows the transition from militarized to colonial settler space with how the Italian Fascist regime managed the juridical implications of such transition. In particular, it focuses on the effects that the increase in Italian settlers and the juridical absorption of Libya into the Italian body politic had on the policies concerning the legal status of Libyans and how the issue intersected with concerns related to mixed marriages. It does so by analyzing the reaction within the Fascist Party to the plans of the annexation of the Libyan colony within the metropolitan territory orchestrated by Governor Italo Balbo and the effects it might have had on the intimate racial boundaries between Italians and racialized Libyans.

Chapter 8 provides a broader analysis of mixed marriages in colonial Libya and the role Catholic missionaries played in their regulation. Since marriage was a key topic of contention between the Italian state and the Catholic Church, the chapter also details the struggle between the two powers over its jurisdiction and how such ideological and political clashes framed the regulation of mixed marriages in the colony. Finally, after the discussion and conclusion chapter, the dissertation concludes with an epilogue that traces the colonality of the category of mixture in early postcolonial and even contemporary Italy, emphasizing the processes of racialization of subaltern groups that still characterize power structures in contemporary Italian society.

## **2. Main Themes and Concepts**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter represents one of the foundations necessary to lay out the analysis conveyed in the empirical chapters of this research alongside the historical and juridical contexts described in Chapter 3. After this dissertation's introduction, in which I outlined the historiographical context in which this research positions itself and the methodology adopted to analyze the archival sources used to answer this inquiry's research question, in this chapter, I focus on the theories and concepts used throughout these pages.

As this dissertation focuses on processes of racialization in the Libyan colonial context and the related production of Italianness as inherently characterized by whiteness, in this chapter, I spell out how I understand these processes on a theoretical level and which conceptualizations I draw on in this regard. In particular, I outline how social categorization mechanisms produce subjects through social norms, shared epistemologies, and regulatory frameworks. As mentioned in the introduction, I do so by analyzing how Italian administrators regulated mixed intimacies and how such regulations influenced and were informed by shared epistemologies on racial, gender, class, and religious difference.

Moreover, I also discuss the conceptualization of notions of laws and regulations used in this dissertation and how they influenced processes of racialization in the structuration of Libyan colonial society. As the context of this research is the Italian colonization of Libya, concepts of regulation are strictly related to the state apparatus, particularly the colonial state and its

biopolitical regulatory practices on the intimate life of settlers and local populations. On a related note, I conclude this chapter by discussing the archives that contain the sources analyzed in this research as a power and knowledge tool created and maintained by the colonial state. The way I understand the colonial archive as the result of power relations intrinsic to Italian colonialism will help further nuance the approach that this research has concerning the socio-legal historical analysis of a colonial context whose historical traces in the archives are skewed in favor of the colonizing society. By the end of this chapter, the theoretical framework of this dissertation will be thoroughly laid out, allowing the empirical analysis conveyed in this research to have a structured conceptual scaffolding at its disposal.

## **2.2 Social Categorization Mechanisms**

Strategies of domination of one social group over others involve discourses and regulations aimed at producing and categorizing subaltern groups while defining dominant ones. Processes of categorization are central to governmentality intended in a Foucauldian sense. In Foucault's view (1980, 200), power in society is organized as dispersed systems of unequal relations coalescing into discursive formations that organize and legitimize structures of inequality and repressive forms of subjection. Foucault recognizes that in Western societies, such discursive formations, or how power strategies produce knowledge and subjects through categorizations, are represented "under a *negative*, that is to say a *juridical* form" (Foucault 1980, 201). Hence, analyzing their regulatory form to map the discursive formations that produced and disciplined subjectivities through categorization is necessary. Categories such as race, gender, and class are "a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott 1986, 1067), as perceived

differences based on such signifiers constitute the discursive *milieu* in which material relations of power and structures of domination are produced and reinforced. Moreover, such categories act as identity signifiers that can be imposed upon social groups by others and/or actively pursued for a social group's self-definition. Such discursive formations strengthen and justify material structures of domination and are incorporated by both hegemonic and subaltern social groups in the process of mutual constitution of experiences of domination and subjugation.

Alastair Bonnett (2002a, 70) argued that "the power and prestige of the European colonizing powers [...] were interpreted through and justified by categories of identity." Following this axiom, I recognize in this research that power imbalances related to the mutual construction of race, gender, and class categories were nowhere as starkly evident in history as in colonial contexts. Colonial power's widespread reliance on brute, repressive military force to establish European sovereignty over colonized lands was based on discursive formations that justified and legitimized it. Political anthropologist Chatterjee (1993, 19) wrote that colonial power was intrinsically characterized by the deployment of a "rule of colonial difference," based on categorizing the colonized as radically Other from the colonizing subjectivity. In the colonial political economy, the self-definition of European elites as superior to colonized societies as much as their material domination was heavily grounded on structures of oppression that followed multiple categorical axes intersecting with each other. Sociologist Avtar Brah wrote (1996, 109) that "structures of class, racism, gender, and sexuality cannot be treated as 'independent variables' because the oppression of each is inscribed within the other - is constituted by and is constitutive of the other." Depending on the geographical and temporal context, colonized populations have been portrayed in different fashions as racialized, backward, and gendered to affirm the dominant groups' material and representational

domination.<sup>1</sup> Analyses of categorization processes inherent to colonial settings shed light on discursive formations that cemented colonial power at different times and places and the power relations established through the colonial encounter.

This dissertation understands processes of categorization through the analytical framework of intersectionality. Therefore, social categories are framed in this research as inherently situational, fluid, shifting, and intersecting with other categories according to the specific context in which they are produced and reinforced (Crenshaw 1991, 1299; Shields 2008, 304). Such categories are produced and reinforced as an ambivalent process of subjection in which the subject is created by power structures while it defines itself in opposition to them. As famously written by Judith Butler (1997, 2), "subjection signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject." In this "paradox of subjection," categorization processes appear as a relational social practice of subject creation and domination, in which the subject represents a performative (re)materialization of its social environment. Therefore, the creation and reinforcement of social categories are framed in this project as the core aspect of identity development in a given society and, therefore, a primary form of legitimization of material power imbalances between social groups.

Race, gender, class, and religion are understood in this research as articulated categories, meaning that "they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other" (McClintock 1995, 5). Social categories exist in intimate, reciprocal, and contradictory relations and their production results from shifting and contrasting knowledge and power relations systems. As McClintock (1995, 61) explained, "the idea of racial 'purity,' for example, depends on the rigorous policing of women's sexuality; as a historical notion, then, racial 'purity' is inextricably

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example Massad (2008) on representations of Arab people by western societies; Hale (2008) on the way individuals from the French colonies were represented in the metropole; Matos (2013) for Portugal and its imperial discursive formations; Zocchi (2019) for the ways in which the representations of Africans influenced Italians' national consciousness.

implicated in the dynamics of gender and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power." Race, gender, class, and religion intersect in often ambivalent and incomplete ways, constituting subjectivities in relation and opposition to each other according to the power relations at their source. In the present research, I deploy an intersectional analysis of the relationship between conflicting and overlapping productions of such categories while inserting them into the broader construction of a specific notion of "Italianness" as conflated with whiteness and European modernity ideas. In order to do so, I utilize an excellent point of analysis for the construction of social categories: the regulation of mixed intimacies.

### **2.3 Mixture**

Following Betty de Hart's definition (2014, 9), this thesis understands mixture as the coupling "between partners of two groups that are considered to be distinct racial or ethnic groups by society at a certain time and place." "Mixture confuses and destabilizes categories that have become fixed and essentialized in certain times and places" (De Hart 2014, 4) and therefore represents an analytical vantage point to untangle the processes that bring to their production. Given its socially constructed nature, the racial or ethnic categories considered to be mixed vary according to the geographical, temporal, and ideological context in which they are inserted. For this reason, scholars have analyzed mixture as an intrinsically context-dependent, non-essentialist category (Rodríguez-García 2012, 45) and an evolving process that can hardly be interpreted as a fixed epistemological category (Edwards et al. 2012).

De Hart (2015, 174) argued that "the term mixedness does not solve the issue of what is mixed," and therefore, it needs to be spelled out on an individual basis, detailing the context in which

the categories that are mixed are constructed. In the case of this research, as I will explain more in-depth in the following sections of this theoretical discussion, the terms mixed and mixture refer to the intimacies between Italian, predominantly Catholic settlers, who were understood by colonizing society and discourse as white, and the predominantly Muslim Arab and Berber populations of the territories that comprised modern-day Libya, whom Italians understood as a racialized population. A different dynamic applied to the Libyan Jewish population, which Italian administrators considered not central to regulating mixture in the colony, at least until the promulgation of Fascism's anti-Jewish racial laws in 1938. Italians viewed the Libyan Jewish population as racially and culturally closer to the European creole population present in the colony and willingly assimilated them into the settler society, with Jewish kids sent to Italian schools (Simon 1992, 81). Their relative inclusion in the settler society fostered a sense of belonging in the Libyan Jewish population (Rossetto 2021), setting them apart from the Arab and Berber populations until the legislative racist and antisemitic turn of the Fascist regime in the second half of the 1930s. These dynamics effectively excluded them from the racializing logic at the core of the categories that could mix with the Italians.

The use of mixture and its regulation as a tool of analysis for categorization processes is particularly relevant in colonial contexts, where essentialized categories signified the discursive foundations of colonial power and informed governmental practices of the state. Using mixture as an analytical lens to untangle categorization processes has the benefit of pointing to the regulation of intimacy and sexuality and the state's active role in disciplining subjectivities. As argued by Thompson (2009, 354) about the North American context, regulations of intimate relationships, particularly of a mixed nature, highlight the state's role in "shifting the boundaries of public and private in order to conform with ideas about race, gender, and sexuality in the service of its own interest."

Mixed intimacies defied essentialized categories, and their regulation (or lack thereof, depending on the temporal and political conjuncture) was telling of European colonial elites' material, political and representational needs. They revealed how both colonizers and colonized understood their relation to each other. Hence, the analysis of the regulation of mixed intimacies needs to consider a "complex interplay of hierarchies that are both raced and gendered" (Thompson 2009, 361). Conversely, mixture and the discourses surrounding it reproduce essentialized categories by the fact that they base mixture's existence on the myth of separate races (Storrs 1999, 203). While fluid and situational from an analytical point of view, mixture also carries an essentialist character that must be understood as a direct product of racializing colonial logic materially and discursively internalized in colonial and postcolonial societies.

Even though the concept of mixture bears a fundamentally colonialist essentialist logic, its regulation in colonial contexts offers a fruitful analysis of the relationship between the White Self and the Racialized Other. It condenses such ideological mechanism into a material process of social categorization informed by the contested questions of intimacy and belonging. Consequently, the regulation of mixture in colonial environments points to inclusion and exclusion mechanisms at the heart of nation-building processes informed by those same categories. Mixture sits at a privileged analytical point that allows untangling production processes of essentialized categories that intersect in ways specific to the temporal, geographical, and ideological context in which they are inserted. In order to better frame how these categories and their intersections are framed in this research, in the following sections of this conceptual discussion, I analyze each of the most relevant categories and how they relate to the Italian colonization of Libya.

## 2.4 Race and Racialized Religion

Within the present study, the category of race is understood as a discursive and material disciplinary tool that has, on the one hand, the primary function of materially subjugating and dominating individuals and social groups by characterizing them as racialized subjects or racialized social groups. On the other hand, it is also understood as an identity signifier for both hegemonic and subaltern social groups: it is a discursive formation that categorizes the individual's subjectivity and frames their identity.

Race is both a signifier of social inclusion and exclusion and a processual, relational, and discursive practice that continuously produces racialized subjects who reiterate such process of racialization themselves following the "paradox of subjection" described by Butler (1997). Such understanding of racialization processes as relational representations originates in Fanon's "Black Skins, White Masks" (1967). Fanon outlined the disarticulation of racial stereotypes associated with black skin and the acquirement of racialized signifiers by colonized people themselves. In Fanon's view, race is discursively and relationally constructed, with dominant social groups reducing racialized groups to their racial markers while constructing their racial identity in opposition to the racialized. What appears clear from this process is the double directionality of racialization processes, in which the assertion of the hegemonic social group's racial identity goes hand in hand with the racialization of subaltern ones.

This "double directionality" of categorization processes was also highlighted by the French feminist postcolonial scholar Colette Guillaumin. In her analysis of racist ideologies (1995, 50-52), Guillaumin pointed to an "auto-referential dimension" of racialization processes (or assertive, meaning that processes of construction of racial identity are self-representational) and an "altero-referential" one (in which processes of racialization addressed towards the Other

serve for the construction of an identity of the Self by contrast). This understanding of race as a relational process is beneficial to analyses of mixture and its regulation in colonial contexts, as it points to the shifting meaning and contested significance of the race signifier for both hegemonic and subaltern social groups. Moreover, it points to material aspects of the biopolitical function of race, such as the regulation of biological reproduction (Roberts 1997; Briggs 2002; Banerjee 2014) and the production of legal regimes and their material outcome (Bell 1970; Delgado and Stefancic, 2013).

Racial classification and the policing of racial boundaries were complex issues in Libya, where perceived “biological” racial differences between settlers and the colonized populations were not as stark as in Italian Eastern Africa. According to Casales (2020, 443), Libyans were "considered racially closer to their European masters than sub-Saharan Africans," and the relative status concessions given to Libyans by colonial authorities that are discussed in Chapter 7 are a testament to the disparity in racial perception between Libyans and other colonial subjects. Until the "Aryan turn" of the Fascist regime in 1936, Italians and Libyans were discursively linked by the "Mediterranean" ideology that pervaded public discourse regarding the Italian population's racial identity.<sup>2</sup> This influential ideology, which I will discuss more at length in Chapter 4, rested on the legacy of Ancient Rome and the demographic inclusivity that characterized its imperial rule (De Donno 2006, 402). According to the “Mediterranean” racial ideology, Libyans belonged to the same ancestral “biological” race as the Italians, although at a higher degree of “racial degeneration.” This meant that colonial boundaries were constructed over racialized markers of difference that separated the colonizing

---

<sup>2</sup> De Donno (2006) detailed the ideological shifts regarding the racial characterization of Italians, which went from an elevation of its “Mediterranean” character as opposed to Northern European “Aryan” paradigms, to the mentioned shift that characterized the last years of the Fascist regime. Starting with the declaration of the empire in 1936 and the concomitant alliance with Nazi Germany, the regime fully adopted an “Aryan” characterization of Italian racial identity which in turn entailed a stark separation between Italian settlers and Libyans, this time fully based on a discursively constructed “biological” racial difference.

society from the colonized rather than “biologically” understood racial boundaries. The most relevant one in the Libyan context was racialized religion.

In order to account for the complexity of the interplay between processes of racialization that involved cultural and religious aspects in the context of the colonization of Libya, further clarification on how race is framed in this study is necessary. Race is a social mechanism of material and discursive subjugation that emerged in its contemporary conjugation directly from the experience of European colonialism (Goldberg 1993; Wilson 1996). During colonialism, Christianity was often an ideological foundation for European superiority and a justification for using material and discursive violence to subjugate colonized populations. Consequently, the racializing logic upon which colonial boundaries were imagined and enforced rested on the binary logic of Christian/non-Christian, in which religion acted as a way to identify and create hierarchies along colonial boundaries (Mills 1997). Given the context of European colonialism and its role in creating contemporary understandings of racial differences, race signified a hierarchization of bodies that rested not only on phenotypical, “biological” differences but also on inherently racialized differences related to culture, geography, ideology, and, relevantly for this research, religion.

In the present research, I show how Islam represented an essential marker of racialization for colonized populations in Libya, while Catholicism was increasingly conflated with the national character of the Italian population. Religion often acted as a signifier of difference that justified and complemented racial hierarchization between the Italian and Libyan populations. The term “Muslim” is used throughout the sources analyzed in this work as a synonym for terms such as “Arab,” “Berber,” and “indigenous” as a category to signify the colonial Other. Religion was an active marker of racialization (Emerson, Korver-Glenn, & Douuds 2015, 201), a category that signified racial differences when racial boundaries in the colony were not ideologically structured yet.

As recognized by historian Catherine Phipps (2021, 4) in her research on sexual relationships between Moroccan men and European women, colonial authorities "almost exclusively assume Moroccans to be Muslim, using *marocain* and *musulman* interchangeably, and understood Moroccan society as one that consisted of Arabs or Berbers but was fundamentally racialized as Muslim." My experience in Italian colonial archives confirmed what was witnessed by Phipps. As mentioned in the subsection of this thematic discussion on mixture, Italian colonial authorities never mentioned Libyan Jews as a source of concern for the regulation of mixed intimacies, despite the significant Jewish population that inhabited the colony.<sup>3</sup> Their acknowledged assimilation within Italian settler society (Rossetto 2021), coupled with existing scholarship demonstrating the widespread presence of marriages between Tripolitanian Jewish women and Italian Christians (Simon 1992, 81), points to different levels of racialization imposed on the colonized populations. Religious affiliation to Islam represented the most apparent racializing trait that separated the settler population from the local one in the Libyan context.

Given the just-explained context, it needs to be underlined that in this research, the subject of inquiry is the mixing of two people that are understood to belong to two separate racialized groups and not to two races ideologically understood as "biologically" different. This theoretical approach allows my analysis to assess racialized boundaries in a context where "biological" race differences were not ideologically sustained until 1936 and to understand what is mixed as fluid and processual categories. As argued by Meer and Modood (2009, 344):

[The concept of racialization] can guard against the characterization of racism as a form of single 'inherentism' or 'biological determinism,' which leaves little space to conceive the ways in which

---

<sup>3</sup> By the time of the Italian colonization the Libyan Jewish community comprised 3,57 per cent of the total population (De Felice 1985, 62)

cultural racism draws on physical appearance as one marker among others, but is not solely premised on conceptions of biology in a way that ignores religion, culture and so forth.

In colonial Libya, racialized differences were constructed on a multi-layered level that included cultural and religious differences that allowed the political economy of Italian domination to structure itself around the development of a racialized colonial boundary. The analysis of mixed intimacies and how they were socially understood and regulated in the specific setting of the Italian colonization of Libya allows this research to point to how the just described processes of racialization intersected with other categories such as gender and class.

## **2.5 Gender**

In this study, I understand gender as defined by Judith Butler in her work *Gender Trouble* (1999, 11):

Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “pre-discursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts.

Given this definition, gender constitutes the main field upon which cultural norms regarding the political economy of sexes and power are built. It is a central category for understanding various forms of normativity related to intimacy and gender roles specific to each cultural *milieu*. Gender dynamics and framings of masculinity and femininity within the context of

European colonialism were central in establishing racial boundaries, and as such, they are dealt with extensively in this research. Ideological systems regarding gender difference and gender roles that characterized Western societies interacted with their counterparts in colonial contexts, creating a cultural articulation of meanings and power relations that shaped colonial societies. Far from being merely discursive constructions, structures of meaning related to gender were grounded in material systems of power in which they played a pivotal role in shaping notions of property, inheritance, wealth, and family organization.

Gender provides this research with a fundamental analytical key to untangling how Italians dealt with the regulation of mixture and the power relations it signified according to their material needs. Masculinity and femininity were the primary categories, alongside race and class, that shaped the colonial social order in different contexts, and the regulations related to the colonial encounter were often shaped around gender dynamics. This dynamic was particularly relevant in the first twenty years of Italian colonization of Libya when men comprised most of the Italian population, and Libyan women were forced to cater to their sexual and caring needs, as shown in Chapter 5. Even when the colony transitioned to a settler colony, gender remained a primary signifier of normative standards of intimacy in the colony, with mixed intimacies being progressively prohibited due to the role of protectors of the racial purity of the nation that Italian women were bestowed upon by fascism, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Analyses of the interactions and struggles between colonizing powers and colonized populations necessarily involve women subjected to colonial rule, whose bodies represented the site on which colonial boundaries were produced and negotiated by both colonizing powers and colonized societies. Women were often subjected to patriarchal domination by the colonized society while being discursively turned into sexualized objects by colonizing powers. The regulation of intimate relationships that involved women under colonial rule was the focal

point of the normative development of intimate colonial boundaries. As I will show in Chapter 5, Italian colonial power used various regulatory approaches to the interactions between Italian men and Libyan women, particularly when Libya was heavily militarized due to the anti-colonial resistance (1911-1932). These attitudes varied from the discursive respect of the country's patriarchal social institutions to the tolerance of mixed relationships to encourage class divisions in the Italian army.

Scholarship on gender and empire has underlined how gender was used to portray discourses relative to the respect of local customs regarding the private sphere (Clancy-Smith and Gouda 1998, Charrad 2001), but also to underline the "backwardness" of colonized populations with regards to the degradation of women in their societies (Wilson, 2004). Given the power struggle between colonizing and local patriarchal assumptions regarding their role during the Italian colonial rule, Libyan women occupied a subaltern role in local society's patriarchal system and the Italian racist and patriarchal organization of colonial rule. As Yeaw (2018, 792) wrote, "Libya and Italy shared fundamental patriarchal assumptions when it comes to violence and honour." Both Libyan and Italian societies shared the belief that women's sexual behavior ought to be regulated according to similar patriarchal assumptions (one example being the fact that honor crimes – crimes in which the murder of female relatives was justified by perceived sexual deviance – were legally sanctioned in both societies).<sup>4</sup> At the crossroads of systems of patriarchal privilege and colonial entitlement over their bodies, Libyan women experienced intersectional axes of domination and repression that constrained their agency and freedom in an increasingly hostile colonial environment.

For what concerns Italian women in the colony, their presence became substantial only after the crackdown of the anti-colonial resistance in Tripolitania (1924) and Cyrenaica (1932). As

---

<sup>4</sup> On the topic of honor crimes in the Italian context and beyond, see De Grazia (1993), and Elakkary et al. (2014).

the colony transitioned from a highly militarized space where most of the settler population comprised male army members to a settler colony with more Italian women, Italian authorities' attitudes toward mixed intimacies changed dramatically. Italian women in the colony were instrumental in creating racial boundaries since "the presence of white women and their safety was repeatedly invoked to clarify racial lines. It coincided with perceived threats to European prestige, increased racial conflict, covert challenges to colonial politics, and outright expressions of nationalist resistance" (Stoler 2002, 57). While the colony was militarized, colonial prostitution and concubinage were tolerated and even endorsed in liberal and Fascist periods. With the first plans of demographic colonization and the arrival of significant numbers of Italian women, the Italian administration pushed for a "moral re-armament" of the Italian settler community to be exerted through the policing of the bodies of white Italian women.

## **2.6 Class**

Colonial societies produced subjects by creating and enforcing racial boundaries while organizing themselves through gender and class lines on both sides of and across colonial boundaries. However, such discursive production of categories and their influence on power relations between different strata of society were not merely discursive tools of subjection but were grounded in the power struggle over material access to resources and wealth. Such discursive inclusionary or exclusionary categories are, therefore, strictly related to the category of class or "the continuous and systematic difference in access and control of resources for provisioning and survival" (Acker 2006, 444). Given its intrinsic relation to access to resources, services, and political agency, class is always closely related to systems of oppression pertinent

to racial and gender categories in an intersection of identities and subjection driven by the historical and geographical context that frames it.

Class divisions cut across racial boundaries in colonial contexts, and racial divisions were influenced by class-framed access to resources and political power. As will be shown extensively in this thesis, the issue of class ran through every decision made by the Italian colonial government regarding the regulation of mixed intimacies. Middle to upper-class Italian officers in Libya were not allowed to frequent state-sanctioned racially unsegregated brothels destined for lower-class soldiers, while the latter were not encouraged to engage in concubinage as the officers were. As argued by Fuller (2006, 174), in the city of Tripoli, racial segregation was less stark in working-class neighborhoods, where Italians and Libyans mixed in "clusters of available labor dispersed throughout the city." Particularly during the years of liberal administrations (1911-1922), racial boundaries in the colony were heavily influenced by class status and political power. With the rise of Fascism, class structures of domination and power exertion became secondary to the racial segregationist plans of the regime.

Class always intersected with gender and race in the Libyan colonial context. As shown in Chapter 5, the Libyan women who engaged in concubinage relationships due to their parents' constraints, personal necessity, or outright colonial patriarchal violence at the hands of the Italian army were often compelled by their social class and relative lack of access to resources. On the other hand, as shown in Chapter 6, Libyan men were never allowed to engage in any form of mixed intimacies with Italian women. If such type of mixed intimacy ever happened, both parties were punished heavily, and the Italian woman in question was always framed in terms of degeneracy derived from her lower-class status and gender. As argued by Brah (1996, 109):

The representation of white women as 'the moral guardians of a superior race,' for instance, serves to homogenise white women's sexuality at the same time as it fractures it across class, in that the

white working-class woman, although also presented as 'carrier of the race,' is simultaneously constructed as prone to 'degeneracy' because of her class background.

Due to its intersectional character with racial and gendered systems of subjection and oppression, class remains a fundamental analysis tool for the intimate relationships between settler and colonized societies. As such, it runs deeply through every page of this thesis. Moreover, it is central to the core issue of this research: the construction of Italian whiteness.

## **2.7 Whiteness**

The analysis of racial categories' production through the regulation of mixture goes hand in hand with the notion of whiteness, the primary marker of Europeans' self-proclaimed "superiority" over colonized populations. Whiteness is that cultural and social construct that Europeans developed to portray the racialization of themselves as "white" in opposition to racialized "non-white" subjectivities. Whiteness encapsulated interlocking concepts of modernity and westernization (Bonnett 2002b) that were so dear to colonizing elites' representational needs as superior to purportedly "uncivilized" colonized populations. The importance that Italian elites gave to conflating notions of "Italianness," whiteness and modernity since the unification of the nation-state in 1861 will be treated in detail in Chapter 4.

Whiteness represented the core paradigm that connotated Western ideologies and practices concerning non-European society, and it elevated and justified Europe's superiority in technological, economic, cultural, and racial terms above all other cultures and societies. Bonnett (2002a, 69) perfectly explained that "European social and economic paradigms were

connoted through the symbols of race, symbols that gave capitalist incursion and modernity a European, and hence white, identity."

Whiteness was nowhere as crucial for the self-representation of Europeans as the incarnation of universal symbols of modernity and capitalist progress as in the colonies. Linked to ideas of "civilization" and "Christianity," whiteness represented the non-negotiable symbol of access to social status in colonial environments, and for this reason, it signified the essence of Europe's superiority. However, whiteness is a fragile notion shaped along class and gendered terms, and that colonial authorities had to protect from the inherent racial diversity present in colonial societies.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, the identification of Italians in colonial contexts as belonging to "whiteness" and "Europeanness," as much as the enforcement of colonial power, was "contingent on constructing categories" and "predicated on identifying who was 'white' and who was 'native'" (Stoler 2002, 43). As shown throughout this thesis, the construction of Italian whiteness was one of the discursive fuels of colonial expansion. Next to and part of capitalist expansion, the affirmation of Italian whiteness through colonialism signified for the Italian elites the symbol of belonging to European modernity from both a material and discursive standpoint.

Even if the production of Italian whiteness was central in both nation and empire formation, it is left out of public discourse regarding the country's past. Akin to the absence of Italy's colonial crimes from public discourse described by Angelo Del Boca (1998), race and whiteness are widely excluded and foreclosed from discourses on Italian identity to the point that "Italians do not see themselves as 'white' but rather as 'normal, as human by default'" (Portelli 2003, 29). This research aims to unveil such foreclosure and point to the fact that "whiteness has constituted for Italians a form of representational cohesion at different historical moments,

---

<sup>5</sup> Studies of whiteness often acknowledged the gender dynamic at play in the anxieties regarding its definition. See Ware (1993), Frankenberg (1994), Byrne (2006) and Leonard (2010).

providing an ideological and discursive tool for national identification and self-representation before, during, and after colonialism" (Lombardi-Diop 2013, 176). It aims to do so by revealing the continuum of categorization practices bestowed upon subaltern groups within Italy's borders and in its colonies, focusing on how the regulation of mixture between Italians and Libyans served as categorization practices aimed at strengthening the self-identification of Italians as white.

## **2.8 Regulations of Mixture and State Power**

Regulations are not only framed in this research as state sovereignty exercising its disciplining rights, nor only as the rules that organically organize a structured human society. Instead, laws and regulations are understood in this research as "the multiple forms of subjugation that have place and function within the social organism" (Foucault 1980, 95-96). Building on Foucault's understanding of power as organized through systems of unequal relations that coalesce into discursive formations, this research frames regulations as the formal and material representation of the relationship between power exertion and knowledge creation.

For this reason, to map the discursive formations that produce and discipline subjectivities through categorization, it is necessary to analyze the regulations that formally organize the forms of subjugation proper to a definite social field. In the case of the regulation of mixture, laws, regulations, informal social norms, and discourses had the power to influence identities and nudge them towards essentialized notions of gender, race, and class relative to the specific hegemonic moment that produced them. Foucault's definition of law is particularly relevant to this research because it links the concept of regulations of the intimate sphere to the

"conceptions and categories on which social practical consciousness is actually formed" (Hall 1986, 20). Through this framework, the categorization of the subaltern that happens through the regulation of mixture is not the product of some legislator's will but the result of the power relations that shape a specific society.

Regulations are not the only forms in which power expresses itself formally. Laws and regulations go, in fact, hand in hand with cultural and ideological *milieus* that inform societal understandings of the world and therefore processes of categorization through different forms of regulation. As a primary signifying practice, the law is "the quintessential form of 'active' discourse, able by its own operation to produce effects. It would not be excessive to say that it creates the social world, but only if we remember that it is this world which first creates the law" (Bourdieu 1987, 839). For these reasons, laws and regulations need to be analyzed in conjunction with cultural images and categories that dialectically shape them and are shaped by them. Specifically for the case of mixture in colonial Libya, the policies (or lack thereof) that regulated it cannot be thoroughly analyzed without assessing the social relations and discursive frameworks that characterized the Italian colonial enterprise in the Northern African territory.

Although more limited in scope than Foucault's, Debra Thompson's definition of regulation (2009) applies perfectly to most forms of regulation that are part of this research's analysis. Specifically, she defines regulation as the "state action designed to identify and control populations and their behavior(s) by mandating conformity with rules and principle" (Thompson 2009, 356). As noted, state legislation and policymaking are only one way to discipline social behavior alongside many social institutions and organic power relations that categorize individuals. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on how state actors regulated mixed relationships according to hegemonic social groups' specific discursive and political projects. Given its top-down impact on colonial society, state regulations must be the preferred

objects of analysis since they provide this research with a view over "the most formalized way that the state demands the conformity of the population." (Thompson 2009, 356).

In the Italian nation-building project, the state actions that shaped national conformity regarding categories of race, gender, and class through categorization are necessarily the primary regulatory forces at stake. Simultaneously, given the centrality of the Catholic Church in Italian society, Chapter 8 is entirely devoted to the relationship between the state and the church regarding the regulation of mixed marriages in Libya. The jurisdiction over the institution of marriage was a contested power field in which the state and the Church collaborated and clashed according to the political conjunctures that framed it, and for this reason, it must be a central focus of this research alongside state regulations and policies.

## **2.9 The Political Economy of Archives**

Signaling and understanding the power relations that created colonial archives is significant in analyzing archival sources. As James Duncan wrote (1999, 121), "to work critically in the archives is not only to study but to acknowledge that the archive itself is a part and parcel of the machinery used to crush resistance to colonialism." Colonial archives played and still play an active part in the colonial and postcolonial political economies of knowledge, and their contents reflect the power dynamics of knowledge production inherent to colonialism. They contain primarily one-sided sources of the colonizers' experience: they are bureaucratic, administrative, and legal and reproduce a European point of view over the organization of colonial society. Particularly regarding regulations of the colonial life's private sphere, official

legal and archival sources have an inherently partial and biased nature, as they lack perspective on the social life and agency of the same couples affected by such regulations.

The Italian colonial archives are no exception and are a clear statement of the legacy of colonialism in post-imperial Italian institutions. The omissions and inconsistencies present in the former Ministry of Italian Africa's records are a clear example of the political process that created the selection of documents preserved in the archive. Del Boca (1998, 591-592) explained that during the first years that followed the Italian empire's end, the Italian archives were characterized by the embezzlement of many documents that portrayed Italian colonialism in a negative light, such as direct records on the genocidal practices of the Italian army in Libya and Ethiopia. The former workers of the Ministry of Italian Africa, who retained their positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after 1945, still held power to mold the archives to portray the history of Italian colonialism in a more positive light. Notably, for this research, the mentioned myths of *Italiani brava gente* and the good Italian colonizer find their foundation partly in the construction of the colonial archive itself. Colonialist lobbies used their power to craft the rhetoric around the Italian presence in Eastern Africa and Libya. In this sense, Italian archives are active political agents in producing recorded history and social categories inscribed in the development of the relation between contemporary society and its colonial past. For these reasons, any research dealing with archival material needs to "identify the conditions of possibility that shaped what could be written, what warranted repetition, what competencies were rewarded in archival writing, what stories could not be told, and what could not be said" (Stoler 2002, 91).

This research maps the context and motives that prompted Italian colonial administrators to enforce the regulation of mixed intimacies in the Libyan context. It focuses on the Italian side of the colonial society and describes the structural forces at play in managing the private sphere in the Libyan colonial context. This research does not analyze the archive *against the grain* to

look for the omitted agencies and perspectives of the couples in these power structures. However, it uses this approach to look at the archives critically to avoid reproducing dominant interpretations of historical records. At the same time, it aims to read the archives *along the grain* to assess "its regularities, its logic of recall, its densities and distributions, its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake" (Stoler 2002, 96). Through this approach, this study intends to look for those power processes that reproduced hegemonic categories used by European states to craft colonial and postcolonial structures of knowledge and power. At the same time, reading the archive *along its grain* allows this research to maintain a clear view of the inherently biased character of the sources it utilizes and frame its inquiry within the power and knowledge structures it aims to describe without reproducing them.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I outlined the main themes and concepts utilized for this research, focusing on the social categorization processes that structured definitions of race and whiteness in the Libyan colonial context. As this research uses the analytical standpoint of mixture to evaluate processes of racialization, this chapter outlined the categories of people considered to be mixing in such intimate relationships by the authorities that had regulatory power, namely the Italian colonial administration. For this reason, in this chapter, I analyzed how definitions of racial difference and the mixing that defied colonial boundaries established through processes of racialization intersected with other categories such as religion, class, and gender. Through the analytical lens of intersectionality, I laid out how the structuration of these different axes

of power and representation created singular social and regulatory dynamics in which mixed intimacies contributed to establishing racial boundaries, class structures, and gender roles in a complex and evolving colonial context. In order to provide more completeness to the theorization of these categorization processes and how they worked through the regulation of mixture, I also detailed the notions of laws and regulations as they are understood in this research. Finally, I added a discussion of how I conceptualize archives themselves as active agents in these very categorization processes to give further depth and reflexivity to the analysis of archival sources carried out in this thesis.

This chapter showed that intersectionality is a particularly advantageous analytical framework to understand how people were categorized through the regulation of mixed intimacies in a context such as colonial Libya. A young colonizing state such as the Italian one, which was still trying to foster a sense of national and racial homogeneity in its population, was faced in Libya with a local population that did not seamlessly conform to pseudo-scientific “biological” racial differences theorized by Italian anthropologists and racial scientists. Given this context, active processes of racialization of religious and cultural traits of the Libyan population were essential in “whitening” Italians while constructing Libyans as racially Other. This process was particularly evident in the regulation of mixture, where processes of racialization collided with gender norms and dynamics of both sides of colonial society. Constructing and enforcing racial boundaries was important for Italian and Libyan authorities alike, but the gender of the society’s members who engaged in mixed relationships was a central factor in the enforcement of said regulations. The same applied to the class of the individuals involved, with the Italians creating completely separate systems of intimacy regulation according to the social class of the Italians involved in mixed relationships. The ways in which categorization processes unfolded through the regulation of mixture and the lived experiences of the individuals involved were a complex interplay of power relations that shaped the colony's intimate life. The consequences

of these dynamics were not confined to the material life of colonial Libya's society but powerfully echoed in how both populations represented the other and themselves.

Through the discussion of all these themes, this chapter conveyed the necessary theoretical and conceptual scaffolding for the analytical work laid out in the empirical chapters of this dissertation. However, before applying the notions displayed in this chapter to the analysis of singular cases of mixed relationships and their regulations, it is first necessary to outline the material context in which the cases analyzed in this research took place. For this reason, the next chapter details the historical context of the Italian colonization of Libya, the demographic composition of the territory, and the legislation regarding mixture that Italian governments implemented in other colonial contexts other than the Libyan one.

## **3. Historical, Demographic and Juridical Contexts**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter is the final introductory section providing the necessary contextualization for the empirical chapters of this research. In this chapter, I introduce the historical and juridical contexts that frame the analysis of the regulation of mixture in Italian Libya conveyed in this dissertation. Libya was the third territory that the Italians invaded for colonial reasons after the annexations of Eritrea in 1882 and Somalia in 1889. Despite the colonizing experience accrued with these two prior enterprises, it was challenging for the Italian government to establish colonial rule over the Northern African territory. The war waged by the Italian government against the Ottoman empire for the colonization of Libya started in 1911 and ended one year later, but the Italians could not gain complete control of the Libyan territories until 1932. The anti-colonial resistance carried out by different groups in the many demographic regions of modern-day Libya repelled the attempts made by the Italian colonial administrators to consolidate their rule in the region. Given this complex geopolitical context, the colonial society in Libya was deeply influenced by the contestation of sovereignty in the region and needs, therefore, to be accounted for to fully comprehend the social reality in which the Italian colonial military and civilian administrations regulated cases of mixture. For this reason, in this introduction, I outline the history of the Italian colonization of Libya and what kind of populations fell under Italian colonial rule. Moreover, in order to create a more nuanced description of the regulation of mixture in the Libyan colonial context, I list the laws that had

already regulated mixed intimacies in the other Italian colonial contexts and how they evolved in the main pieces of legislation that prohibited mixture across the Italian empire in the late 1930s.

### 3.2 The Italian Colonial Rule over Libya and Its Populations

#### *An Outline of the Italian Colonization of the Libyan Territories*

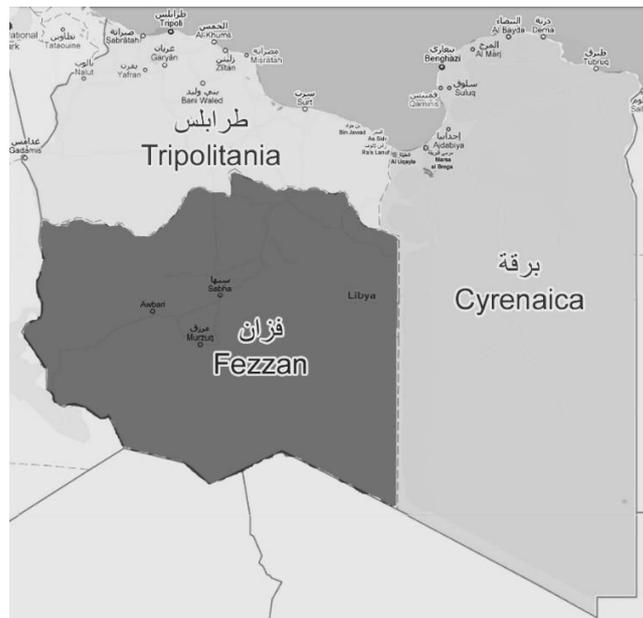


Figure 1. Map of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan within the borders of modern-day Libya.<sup>1</sup>

The three regions that comprise modern-day Libya had been under direct Ottoman control for over three and a half centuries (1551-1911) when Italy invaded them. The Ottoman empire administered the three regions in a single province denominated Tarabulus al-Gharb.

<sup>1</sup> The three provinces of Libya, March 10, 2012, Via De Gasperi. Source: Copyright-free map edited by the author to show the three historical regions. License: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

Tripolitania was the western coastal region, Fezzan was the western internal region, and Cyrenaica comprised the eastern part of modern-day Libya. The Ottoman rule in the region was mainly concentrated on the coastal areas, with the internal desert lands being sparsely populated by primarily nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, each with their warlords that monopolized the use of weapons. The Ottomans had a weak and non-centralized state structure in Libya, with the regency having “no authority over the hinterland and only small garrisons in Fezzan’s and Cyrenaica’s major towns” (Ahmida 2005, 5-6).

Moreover, the Ottoman province lacked a tax collection system and enforcement of private property. While from the 1830s, the Ottoman Empire attempted to strengthen its rule over its provinces as part of its centralized state-building project (Ahmida 2005, 7), it managed to do so successfully only in Tripolitania. On the other hand, Cyrenaica saw the emergence of an independent political power that severely influenced the Italians' colonization attempts throughout the 1910s and 1920s.

In the late nineteenth century, the Sanusiyya, a Sufi order founded in Mecca in 1837, became rooted in Cyrenaica, creating the material and ideological foundations that sustained the fiercest resistance against Italian colonial rule.<sup>2</sup> The Sanusiyya “integrated many ethnic and racial groups under its banner, resulting in the Sanusi order’s proliferation throughout North Africa and the Sahara” (Ahmida 2005, 9). By developing social services for the local population, providing religious guidance to the faithful, and creating a political presence in a region where the Ottomans lacked one, the Sanusiyya became intrinsically connected with the local population and its cultural and political apparatuses.

Given the absence of a centralized state in many parts of the region and the weakened Ottoman Empire's power, the Italians had a relatively easy time invading the coastal areas of Tripolitania

---

<sup>2</sup> On the history of the Sanussiyya, see Ziadeh (1958). On the Libyan anti-colonial resistance see Ahmida (2008).

and Cyrenaica. After the initial victories, however, and the signature of the Treaty of Lausanne in October 1912 between Italy and the Ottoman Empire signaling the end of the Italo-Turkish War, things became more complicated for the Italian army. Upon withdrawing from the region, the Ottomans granted independence to the regions formerly under their control (Labanca 2012, 111) and went on to secretly aid the anti-colonial resistance. The covert involvement, coupled with the pervasive power of the Sanusiyya in Cyrenaica, made the Libyan colonies extremely hard to colonize for the Italians, who spent two decades repressing a pervasive and fierce resistance.

The Italian crackdown on the resistance and the successive reclaim of all the Libyan territories happened separately in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The colonial administration of the Italian liberal period (until 1922) attempted to build a form of indirect rule that was to rely on a complacent class of Libyan notables to enforce Italy's colonial rule in the region. Following the design of this kind of colonial policy, Italian administrators attempted to concede civil and political rights to the Tripolitanian and Cyrenaican population in 1919 to sedate the political unrest that almost pushed the Italians out of the colony during World War I.<sup>3</sup> When the Fascist Party seized power in Italy with the complacency of King Vittorio Emanuele III in 1922, the policy against the Libyan resistance changed drastically, with the regime inflicting war crimes on the local population to repress the rebels in the fastest way possible.<sup>4</sup>

In Tripolitania, the "pacification" of the colony ended on November 23, 1924, when the Italian army managed to enter the city of Sirte, the last remaining rampart of the opposition to Italian rule. In Cyrenaica, the resistance was cracked in 1932 by General Rodolfo Graziani and the newly appointed governor Pietro Badoglio, who, from 1930, ordered the mass killing of 12,000

---

<sup>3</sup> For a thorough analysis of the concessions given to the Libyan population in 1919, see Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

<sup>4</sup> On the atrocities committed by the Fascist colonial army against the Libyan resistance, see Del Boca (1998), and Salerno (2005).

rebels and the deportation of over 100,000 Cyrenaicans in concentration camps located in desert areas.<sup>5</sup> The leader of the Cyrenaican resistance Omar al-Mukhtar was captured and executed in front of 20,000 Cyrenaicans on September 16, 1931, and the "pacification" of the colony was declared complete in January 1932 (Wright 1982, 35). By the end of the pacification of Cyrenaica, over 50,000 Cyrenaicans were killed by the Italian army, or one-quarter of the area's entire population (Mann 2006, 309).

Notably, the military efforts conducted by the various Italian governments in Libya used many battalions of Eastern African *askari* or racially segregated colonial troops comprised solely of soldiers from the Italian colonies. For decades, the *askari* troops were essential to the Italian colonial army. Since the Italian expansion in its first colony, Eritrea, the *askari* had represented the leading intermediary for the Italian colonial administrators. Historians Irma Taddia and Uoldelul Chelati Dirar (1997, 234) argued that the *askari* responded to the need to "build an induced collaboration practice" with the colonized population. For a colonizing country like Italy, which was engaged in colonial wars for most of its empire's duration, the *askari* also played a pivotal role in military terms. On the Libyans' and Eastern Africans' side, joining the ranks of the Italian colonial Army was the best way to sustain themselves and their families in unequal and segregated colonial societies. Due to this reciprocally beneficial arrangement, tens of thousands of Eritreans, Somalians, Ethiopians, and Libyans enrolled in the Italian Army, which deployed them in every colonial war the country fought between the 1880s and the Second World War. Historian Calchi Novati (2011, 164) estimated that some 60,000 Eritrean, Somalian and Ethiopian soldiers were deployed during the twenty-year-long war for the conquest of Libya. Moreover, for the 1936 expedition against Ethiopia, he estimated that over

---

<sup>5</sup> For an historical account and analysis of the deportation of Libyans in concentration camps, see Cresti (1996), and Di Sante (2017).

100,000 *askari* from all colonies, including Libya, participated in conquering the Eastern African country.

As thoroughly researched by Cresti (2011) and Bertazzini (2019), besides the political motivations that I will discuss in Chapter 4, the Italian colonization of Libya was carried out to boost Italian agricultural settlements in an Italian-owned colony. As explained by Bertazzini (2019, 128), “fostering agricultural settlement in what started to be called ‘Quarta sponda’ [The ‘Fourth shore,’ the way Libya was called in Italian public discourse before and during its colonization] was seen as the ideal economic integration between the labor-rich Italy and the supposedly land-abundant colony.” Given these motivations, the Italian settler presence in the colony varied greatly throughout the decades of the colonization of Libya in a strictly dependent relationship with the plans of agricultural settlements planned for the colony. During the 1910s and first half of the 1920s, due to the Italian control being circumscribed to the coastal areas, the settler population was small and almost totally concentrated in the urban areas of Tripoli and Benghazi.

With the successful repression of the resistance, the Italian population grew alongside the demographic and agricultural colonization plans of the Fascist government. In 1927, the Italian population amounted to 26,000, significantly increasing by 1931, when there were 44,600 Italians in the colony (Podestà 2012, 269). The beginning of the 1930s coincided with the suppression of the last pockets of resistance in Cyrenaica and the start of the mass-scale demographic colonization of the territory's fertile areas. In 1936 the Italian settler community had grown to 66,525, and by 1939, one year after the arrival of the *ventimila* [20,000 in Italian] settlers in the ports of Tripoli and Benghazi, there were 119,139 Italians in Libya (Podestà 2012, 269).

The arrival of such a substantial number of settlers in the colony happened in concomitance with the mentioned deportation to concentration camps in the desert of Libyans who inhabited

the fertile rural areas in both Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. Until the 1930s, most of the settler population was concentrated in urban areas, but by 1939, more than forty-six percent of Italians inhabited the settler villages built by the colonial government in the most fertile areas of the colony. The rapid demographic colonization of Libya brought a sudden and radical change to the social landscape of the colony: while in 1929, the ratio between Italian settlers and Libyans was 1 to 17, by 1939, it had become 1 to 6,2 (Podestà 2012, 270). This restructuring of the colony's social fabric had tremendous effects on the regulation of the intimate boundaries of the population. As will become apparent, it was arguably the single most crucial factor in Italian administrators' changes in attitude toward the regulation of mixture.

### *The Population of Libya*

When the Italians landed in Tripoli and Benghazi in September 1911, they found a diverse territory and population divided into three geographical and cultural regions. The populations of Libya reflected the complexity of their territories' political and cultural structures. In 1911, the population of Tripolitania and Fezzan was approximately 570,000 and comprised mainly of “artisans, merchants, small peasants, ex-slaves and tribesmen who were organized communally” (Ahmida 1994, 44) and who “identified their interests according to kinship, regional and religious ideologies” (Ahmida 1994, 50). Merchants and artisans inhabited the coastal areas and were mostly of Turkish, Arab, and Berber ethnicity and Sunni Muslim religion, except for the sizable Christian and Jewish minorities that will be further discussed later in this chapter. In the region's interior, the Libyan population was mainly semi-nomadic, of “Berber and black background, practicing settled agriculture and pastoralism” (Ahmida 1994, 45).

The population of Cyrenaica was much smaller than Tripolitania, with the coastal cities being exceptionally less populated and economically developed than their Tripolitanian counterparts. British traveler James Hamilton estimated the population of Benghazi to be around 5,000 in 1856 (Hamilton 1856, 9), a number that started growing only after the Italian colonization, with the city reaching 10,000 inhabitants only in 1922.<sup>6</sup> The other towns of the region, such as Derna and Misrata, had even smaller populations. The first available census of Cyrenaica was made by Italian colonial demographer De Agostini, who estimated the population to be around 185,400, with only 24,920 living in urban areas (Ahmida 1994, 76). The population was organized in settled tribes in the region's Northern areas, while the region's interior was comprised of a majority of semi-nomads and a small minority of nomads. As in Tripolitania, most of the population was Arab and Berber, with small Christian and Jewish minorities in the coastal communities and Black Africans in the region's interior.

In Italian archival sources, the colonized populations of Libya were mainly referred to with the overarching terms *indigeni* or *nativi* (natives or indigenous, the typically colonial way to refer to colonized populations in almost all contexts). When referring to individual ethnic groups, Italian sources used the terms *arabi* or *musulmani* (Arabs and Muslims, often used interchangeably to refer to the Arabic majority, as mentioned previously) and *berberi* or *beduini* (Berbers and Bedouins, used to refer to the nomadic and semi-nomadic populations of the internal areas of the colony). In addition to these ethnic groups that comprised the demographic majority in different regions, Libya also had a sizable Christian, European creole population of mostly Greek descent. Finally, the urban areas on the region's coast also saw some sizeable Jewish communities.

---

<sup>6</sup> Benghazi's demographic evolution under Italian colonial rule will be discussed at length in Chapter 6.

The Italian administrations captured the highly diverse population that inhabited Libya not only in ethnic categories but also in religious ones, which often acted as the main categories for racializing the colonized populations. Most Arab and Berber populations were Sunni Muslims and racialized as such by the colonizers, and more than 3 percent of the total population was Jewish (De Felice 1985, 62). At the same time, another sizeable portion of the Libyan population identified as Christian, with the Greek-Orthodox population comprising its most significant component.

The diversity of the local populations is hard to capture with all-encompassing terms to define them in opposition to the Italian colonial power that colonized their territory and imposed its rule over their society. This hurdle is especially true if a researcher wants to avoid colonial terms such as "natives" or "indigenous." For this reason, even if the names "Libya" and "Libyans" were used to indicate the colonial territories and their populations only after Italo Balbo unified Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan in 1934, in this dissertation, they will be used as an encompassing term to indicate all populations and territories under Italian rule in the region. While I am aware that the term indicates a political unity that did not exist for most of the Italian colonization of the region, the term "Libyan" was the preferable term that would not reproduce colonial discourse regarding the racialized inferiority of these populations portrayed in the words of the Italian colonizers. Moreover, it is a term that connects the history narrated in these pages to the region's earlier history and the later development of the nation-state known today as Libya.

With the historical and demographic contexts laid out, and before moving on to the actual empirical analysis of the cases of mixture, it is necessary to outline what regulations of mixture the Italian colonial administrations had already implemented in other parts of the empire. This discussion will help situate the regulations analyzed in this dissertation within the broader

context of Italian imperial policy regarding the intimate sphere and the policing of colonial boundaries.

### **3.3 Overview of Legislation Prohibiting Mixture in the Italian Colonies**

As mentioned in the introduction, Italian Libya was not the object of any form of regulation of mixture until 1938, for reasons explained in Chapter 5. However, this lack of regulations was not extended to the rest of the Italian colonies, as in the Italian Eastern African colonies, there had been various forms of regulation of mixed intimacies as soon as 1905. In the following subsections, I list the regulations of mixed intimacies in the Eastern African Italian colonies. I do so by dividing them between the policies enacted by the liberal and Fascist administrations before the promulgation of the 1937 segregationist laws and the ones that were a direct result of the segregationist shift of the regime that followed the proclamation of the Italian empire in 1936. The description will contextualize and nuance the types of regulation implemented in Libya, providing the empirical analysis conveyed in the following chapters with a crucial comparative counterbalance.

#### *Regulations of Mixture Before the Birth of the Italian Empire (1890-1936)*

The Italian government acquired its first colonial possessions from Italian shipowner Raffaele Rubattino in the territories that comprise modern-day Eritrea in 1882, but the region became an official colony only in 1890. Since the beginning of Italian rule in the region, the colonial administrations of Eritrea tolerated concubinage as a means to provide access to local women

for Italian officers. Taking advantage of the customary local *demoz*, or marriage by payment, countless Italian officers took Eritrean women as concubines in exchange for money without actually complying with the customary obligations of the marriage contract (Sòrgoni 1998, 127-138).

At the same time, Italian colonial governments made unions between Italian women and Eritrean men impossible (Barrera 2002, 109). At the beginning of the twentieth century, a commission drafted the first Eritrean Civil Code, which was never enforced in the colony. The Code formally allowed Italian men and women to marry colonial subjects, but specific authorization from the government was needed in the case of Italian women. Even this provision, which was never implemented, was overturned in 1917 by the Governor of Eritrea, Giuseppe Salvago Raggi, who decided to close the possibility for white women to engage in mixed marriages impossible (Barrera 2002, 109).

Before the colonial government's attention to Italian women marrying colonial subjects, Salvago Raggi had already taken measures to enforce tighter state control over mixed unions, particularly concerning colonial officials. In 1909, Salvago Raggi issued a decree prohibiting colonial officials from "cohabiting with Eritrean women."<sup>7</sup> In 1914, Salvago Raggi took an additional step against mixing, endorsing a new code for colonial officials, who would have lost their position if found guilty of contracting marriage with a "native woman."<sup>8</sup> Alongside these punishments for colonial officials found guilty of engaging in mixed intimacies, Salvago Raggi enforced strict racial segregation in the colony's capital, Asmara, with two decrees dividing the city into European and "native areas."<sup>9</sup> Salvago Raggi's plans of racial segregation stayed in place until the birth of the empire when Fascism hardened them even to a greater

---

<sup>7</sup> R.D. n. 839, September 19, 1909, art. 43.

<sup>8</sup> R.D. n. 1510, December 10, 1914, art. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Governor's Decree (*Decreto Governatoriale* in Italian, hereafter D.G.). n. 814, *Zone del piano edilizio di Asmara*, December 19, 1908; and D.G. n. 1909, Art. 17, January 21, 1914.

extent. As Barrera (2002, 108) argued, Salvago Raggi's plans "inscribed racial separation deep in the town's social fabric, thus contributing to the structuring of a colonial society hierarchically ordered along racial lines." This kind of organization of colonial life was maintained by Fascism after its rise to power in 1922, as the regime adopted a policy of continuity with liberal administrations, at least until 1936. Segregationist policies were further strengthened once Fascism conquered Ethiopia in 1936 and proclaimed the birth of the Italian empire, shifting its ideology toward institutional racism, with racial segregation becoming one of the founding principles of imperial and national policy.

#### *Regulations of Mixture in the Fascist Empire (1936-1942)*

After the conquest of Ethiopia and the proclamation of the Italian empire on May 9, 1936, the Fascist government promulgated a vast array of decrees, policies, and regulations to prohibit and prevent all kinds of mixture throughout the empire. The first colony targeted was the newly born Italian Eastern Africa, a new colonial administrative region that included Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia. The first anti-miscegenation law approved by the Fascist government was R.D. 880 of April 19, 1937, which prohibited "relationships of a conjugal nature," or concubinage, in Italian Eastern Africa. The decree was later converted into Law n. 2590 of December 30, 1937. The law specified that "the Italian citizen who, in the territory of the Kingdom or the Colonies, engages in a relationship of marital nature with a subject person of Italian East Africa or a foreigner belonging to a population that has traditions, customs or juridical and social concepts similar to those of the subjects of Italian East Africa, is punished with imprisonment from one year to five years."

Besides this more general prohibition, Minister of Colonies Alessandro Lessona ordered all governors of the Eastern African colonies to promulgate several decrees to segregate along

racial lines the Somalian, Eritrean, and Ethiopian subdivisions of Italian Eastern Africa. This order resulted in decrees that increased the juridical and spatial divisions between Italian citizens and colonial subjects. The R.D. n. 620208 of June 12, 1937, prohibited Italians and other Europeans from inhabiting “indigenous” neighborhoods in all Eritrean cities. The Governor of Somalia issued the R.D. n. 12723 of July 1, 1937, which prohibited metropolitan citizens from frequenting and staying in “indigenous” public establishments and imposed penalties on offenders. Finally, the Governor of Eritrea issued the R.D. n. 41675 of July 19, 1937, prohibiting Italian citizens from using public transport “in promiscuity with colonial subjects.”

Notably, the just mentioned decrees and regulations promulgated in 1937 targeted only mixed intimacies involving Italian citizens and colonial subjects from Italian Eastern Africa. While Eritrea and Somalia had had some form of official regulation regarding mixed intimacies since the early 1900s, Libya still had no actual regulations of mixture even in the year after the proclamation of the empire and Fascism’s regulatory shift toward institutional racism. This delay will be explained throughout this dissertation, particularly in Chapter 7. Finally, in 1938 the tide changed, and the Fascist government started promulgating the infamous *Leggi per la difesa della razza* [laws for the defense of the race], or racial laws. These decrees, then converted into law, were a set of legislative and administrative measures applied in the Italian territories between 1938 and the first five years of the 1940s, initially by the Italian Fascist Party and then by the Italian Social Republic. As the laws were mainly applied to the metropolitan territory, most were directed against Italian Jewish people. Some others, however, implied empire-wide prohibitions of mixture.

The first decree prohibiting mixture throughout the empire, and hence also in Libya, was the R.D. n. 1728 of November 17, 1938. The decree's first article stated that "the marriage between an Italian citizen and a person belonging to another race is prohibited. All marriages officiated

in contrast to such prohibition are considered null.” This decree formalized the racial segregation of marriages in all territories that fell under Italian sovereignty, including the marriages between Italian “Aryans” and Italian Jews and between Italians and colonial subjects in Italian Eastern Africa and colonial citizens in Libya. The ultimate legislation addressed to forms of mixture across the empire was the R.D., n. 1004 of June 29, 1939, or *Sanzioni penali per la difesa del prestigio di razza di fronte ai nativi dell’Africa Italiana* [Penal sanctions for the defense of the prestige of the race vis-a-vis natives of Italian Africa]. This decree prohibited all mixed intimacies between metropolitan citizens and natives of Italian Africa, including Libya and its populations.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter represented the final piece of the contextualization necessary to carry out the empirical analysis of official archival sources of the following chapters. In these pages, I laid out the main stages of the Italian colonization of Libya to provide the subsequent analysis with some defined historical coordinates able to ground the cases discussed in the following chapters in the phases of material colonization of the region. Moreover, I added to this historical scaffolding a discussion of the ethnicities that comprised the Libyan population at the time of Italian colonization, alongside a presentation of the Italian settler presence over the years. This description will aid the analysis of cases of mixture with a demographic contextualization of the settler-to-local population ratio and how it was influenced by the various stages of the colonization of the territory and the fight between the colonizers and the local resistance. The causal correlation between the militarization of the colonial space, settler presence, and

different forms of regulations of mixture is one of the central focuses of this research, and this chapter laid out all the necessary frameworks to understand its workings throughout the pages of this dissertation.

Finally, this chapter also discussed the legislative framework regarding mixed intimacies throughout the fifty-year-long Italian colonial enterprise in Eastern and Northern Africa. It was important to outline the various forms of legislation of mixture not only to provide the reader with a clear outline of the regulations that will be discussed in the following chapters but also to show how Italian colonial governments effectively legislated to regulate mixture since the beginning of their colonial rule, particularly in Eritrea and Somalia. This stance seems to contrast with the policies adopted in Libya, where the only official legislation regarding mixed intimacies dated 1938, some twenty-seven years after the first occupation of the Northern African region. The juridical contextualization outlined in this chapter provides a clear contrast to the many non-legislative forms of regulation that I will discuss in the empirical chapters of this research. This lack of official legislation that was otherwise present in the other Italian colonies will allow me to prove that the regulation of mixture was not solely carried out through the means of official legislation but through a vast array of day-to-day regulations, social norms, and processes of social categorization that structured the intimate life of the Libyan colony. With the methodological, theoretical, and historical scaffolding prepared to sustain the subsequent empirical analysis, it is time to turn to mixed intimacies, their regulation, and their role in constructing a conflated notion of Italian national identity and whiteness.

## **4. The Colonization of Libya in the Italian National and Racial Formation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

"We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians."

This quote, famously attributed to Piedmontese statesman Massimo D'Azeglio, summarizes the political discourse on the Italian population after the birth of the nation-state in 1861.<sup>1</sup> The Italian peninsula had been a politically divided territory for a millennium and a half. The political unification of the country led by the Piedmontese elites did not make the demographic, territorial, and socio-economic divisions that characterized its populations disappear.<sup>2</sup> The wealthier, industrialized North with a growing middle-class diverged from the primarily agrarian and feudalistic South. Due to this socio-economic divide, the unification process was seen by many Southerners as a colonial enterprise carried out for the benefit of the Northern economic elites. The Neapolitan deputy Francesco Proto explained the view shared by many Southern intellectuals and politicians in a Parliamentary motion in 1861:

---

<sup>1</sup> This extremely famous quote attributed to Massimo D'Azeglio, does not actually appear in the original manuscript of his autobiography *I miei ricordi*, but seems to have been added by an editor at a later stage.

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough analysis of the significance of Italian unification and the divisions that characterized the country before it was unified see Patriarca (2010) and the volume she edited alongside Riall (2011).

The government of Piedmont wants to treat the southern provinces as Cortes or Pizarro did in Peru and Mexico, as the Florentines did in the Pisan countryside, as the Genoese did in Corsica, and as the English did in the kingdoms of Bengal.<sup>3</sup>

In the first decades of the young nation-state, political elites in Rome hardly nurtured a sense of unity and cohesion in the population, with cultural and socio-economic differences fostering the racialization of Southerners in the national public discourse (Patriarca 2002, 77). Moreover, the young Italian nation's demographic divisions and economic shortcomings encouraged a European-wide discourse that characterized Italy as an internal Other to the continent (Moe 2002, 64). Within this framework, the colonial enterprise offered a valuable occasion for the Italian political and intellectual elites to foster discourses on national cohesion behind the banner of whiteness and European modernity.

In this chapter, I trace the discourses that constructed notions of whiteness and modernity as closely linked to the Italian national formation, detailing a representational continuum throughout the unification process and the colonial era. This chapter lays out the discursive context that framed the development of Italian nationalism through the colonial experience, detailing the cultural and discursive substratum for the following empirical chapters of this thesis. Accordingly, this chapter aims to show the relevance of colonialism in Libya in developing representations and meanings of the Italian Self as white vis-à-vis the racialized colonial Other. Moreover, this chapter links these discourses to the representations of mixed intimacies in colonial Libya to detail the linkages between the formation of colonial boundaries in the colony and the construction of Italian whiteness. More precisely, this chapter analyzes various written sources to trace the discursive development of the racial characterization of the Italian population. I analyze reports, poems, colonial novels, and newspaper articles on the subject of the Italian national and imperial formation to detail the continuities and

---

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Conelli (2014, 156).

incongruences in the representations of internal and colonial Others. By linking discourses on the Italian national formation and the colonization of Libya to representations of intimate colonial boundaries, this chapter intends to provide a discursive framework for the analysis of regulations of mixed intimacies in the context of Italian Libya that will be carried out in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

As mentioned in the introduction, around the end of the 1990s, Italian scholarship began assessing how Italians' self-identification as white developed hand in hand with the racialization of Eastern Africans and Libyans during the Italian colonial era (1882-1943). The works of Schneider (1998), Dickie (1999), Moe (2002), and Wong (2006) on processes of racialization addressed to Italian Southerners and Italians as a whole in the European context represent a rich body of work on how the roots of Italian identity are grounded in processes of categorization of the internal Other.

On a related note, the works of Verdicchio (1997a, 1997b) added the complexity of representations of the Italian diaspora to the development of Italian nationalism. On the bridging between the colonial character of the Italian unification and the role of Italian state-sponsored colonialism in the construction of the Italian national and racial identity, it is essential to mention the work of Patriarca (2002), Ponzanesi (2004), Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop (2013), Conelli (2014) and Giuliani (2019). These works have proven the colonial continuum of material and representational violence that characterized the Italian national and imperial formation, demonstrating how the construction of the Italian national identity was rooted in the racialization of subaltern groups both in the metropole and the colonies.

Finally, the works of Re (2010) and Proglgio (2016) represent the solid foundation upon which this chapter is built: their analyses of the colonization of Libya as a momentous episode in the homogenization of the Italian population helped shed light on an often-underestimated event that shaped representations of "Italianness" that survive to this day. In this chapter, I will build

on this body of work and add the discussion of these issues concerning the Libya context to the mosaic of the historical construction process of Italian whiteness. Specifically, I aim to do so by adding the role of mixed intimacies and their regulation in Libya in establishing racialization patterns specific to the Italian context.

The first section traces processes of racialization internal to the Italian nation in the years that followed the creation of the nation-state in 1861. Subsequently, it links efforts to foster national homogenization by Italian political elites to the beginning of the Italian colonial enterprise in 1882. The second section builds on the analysis carried out in the first section by assessing the role of the colonization of Libya (1911) in literary and political discourse in developing a widespread national and racial consciousness in the different social strata of the Italian population. Finally, the last section links the analysis carried out in previous sections to the Libyan colony itself, particularly the colonial imagination regarding Libyan women and mixed intimacies portrayed in several colonial novels and one travel diary. In the end, the different analyses carried out in this chapter intend to paint a complex picture of the representational continuum in the racialization of the internal Other first and the colonial Other next that created the conditions for the regulation of mixture in Libya to be a relevant factor in the development of notions of whiteness and racial difference in the Italian context.

## **4.2 Italian Racial Identity and its National and Imperial Formation**

### *The Italian Unification and the Internal Other*

Many distinguished scholars have pointed out the notion of national character and identity as strictly connected to the production of race, gender, and class categories. McClintock noted

that "all nationalisms are gendered" (1995, 352), while Balibar (1991, 165) stated that "ultimately the nation must align itself, spiritually as well as physically or carnally, with the 'race,' the 'patrimony' to be protected by all degradation." The formation of nationalist sentiment, as much as any national identity signifier intended as a European cultural formation, rested on the construction of hegemonic subjects that conformed to categorical standards of whiteness and modernity. This notion was particularly true for a relatively young nation such as Italy.

Since the Italian unification in 1861, subaltern, racialized, and gendered subjects served to delineate the boundaries of the hierarchical structures of a nation attempting to frame itself as white, modern, and worthy of the prestige proper to other European powers. As Gaia Giuliani (2013, 27) put it:

The formation of a bourgeois culture in the big urban centers of Northern Italy followed the *encampment* logic, according to which the establishment of national boundaries goes hand in hand with the identification of national traditions and culture, of an architecture of gender, class, and race relations, besides of those between the dominated and the dominant.

The dialectical relationship between the metropole and the colonies was central to developing the idea of the modern Italian nation as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983). Anderson defined the need to be imagined by its members as the founding character of a nation. Specifically, he wrote that a nation is imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1983, 6). According to this definition, the process of national connection among different social and political groups shapes and is shaped by an ideological and cultural *milieu* that informs practices of belonging

and social categorization. In Italy, the process began with the *Risorgimento*,<sup>4</sup> was strengthened with the modern Italian nation-state's birth in 1861, and matured significantly through colonialism. The racialization of the less modern and economically underdeveloped South that the Northern Italian ruling classes attempted to overcome through the racialization of the colonial Other was an integral expression between the Self and the Other that was at the core of the Italian nation-building process (Mellino 2013, 84; Conelli 2015, 152). In order to understand how this relationship unfolded and influenced the regulation of mixed intimacies in colonial Libya, it is necessary to take a step backward and look at the birth of the Italian nation-state in 1861.

Driven by Northern Italy's political elites, the Italian nation-state's birth consisted of the unification of many small states in Central and Northern Italy and the subsequent forceful incorporation of the agrarian and feudalistic South.<sup>5</sup> In the aftermath of the unification, the Northern ruling classes developed an internal colonial relationship with the Italian South (Gramsci 1991, 4) based on economic protectionism, heavy taxation, and harsh repression of political unrest.<sup>6</sup> The hierarchical division between the two areas of Italy characterized the economic and cultural duality named the "Southern Question," a discourse that can be identified as the origin of the colonial character of Italian identity. Wong (2006, 25) argued that the Southern Question "described a duality between Northern and Southern Italy and what was perceived as the social, economic, moral, cultural, and biological\racial inferiority of the South." The Southern Question was more than a simple socio-economic division between two areas of a country. It became the founding myth of a nation striving to constitute itself as a white, modern European country. As argued by Dickie (1999, 53), stereotypes [on the Italian

---

<sup>4</sup> *Risorgimento* is the Italian word for rebirth, used to indicate the process of unification of Italy as a single nation state. The process lasted from 1848 until the conquest of the city of Rome from the Papal State in 1871.

<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive historiography of the forceful annexation of the Italian south into the nation state see Guerri (2010).

<sup>6</sup> On the *brigantaggio*, or the brigandage framed as a form of political resistance against the Italian state in Southern Italy see Dickie (1999) and Dal Lago (2014).

South] become essential to nationalist discourse because they produce the kind of essentialized differentiation which is necessary for the idea of the nation to take hold on our minds, for it to seem like an obvious, objective reality.” The "essentialized differentiation" mentioned by Dickie allowed the representation of the Southern internal Other as an incarnation of the opposite values to the ones held by the Northern elite and represented the main discursive engine behind the construction of the Italian population as belonging to a European ideal of modernity.

Let us take as an example this passage from a letter sent by the administrator of the Italian South during the Northern conquest of the Southern territories, Luigi Carlo Farini, to the Piedmontese Prime Minister Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, on October 27, 1860. The letter was sent only one day after the famous handshake of Teano, in which *Risorgimento*'s hero Giuseppe Garibaldi handed the newly-conquered Southern lands to the Piedmontese King Vittorio Emanuele II. The Northern Farini, having just arrived in Naples to enforce the Northern Italian state bureaucratic power, signals in his letter all his disdain for the Southern lands of the soon-to-be-born Italian nation:

But, my friend, what lands are these, Molise and the south! What barbarism! This is not Italy!

This is Africa: Bedouins are the pinnacle of civilization compared to these peasants.<sup>7</sup>

Farini underlines the Otherness of the Southern Italian populations to European ideals of modernity through the comparison to Africa, the quintessential Other to all the characteristics that composed the ideal of European whiteness. We find this trope in other sources, including this report sent during a trip to Calabria by politician Diomedede Pantaleoni to the Minister of Interiors Marco Minghetti in 1861:

---

<sup>7</sup> The letter was quoted and translated in De Francesco (2012, 85).

One must rely on forty, sixty bodyguards, all armed to the teeth, go with extra carriages, and travel like caravans in the desert defending themselves from the Arabs and Bedouins... This is not an exaggeration, and it is a simple truth!<sup>8</sup>

Through the racialization of the South, the Northern elites could frame their purported level of civilization as opposed to the one of the racialized Southerners, hence belonging to the ideal of European modernity. They had good reason to do so, as Northern Italians themselves had been considered not wholly European for centuries, at least by other European countries' elites' standards.

Indeed, while they were actively racializing the populations of the recently annexed South, the Northern Italian populations had also been the object of racializing discourses for centuries. Since the Grand Tour's times (Schneider 1998, 4), the whole population dwelling in modern-day Italy had been described as a backward and picturesque Other to European modernity.<sup>9</sup> The stereotypes exchanged between European elites regarding the South of the Italian peninsula extended to the whole region, creating a long-lasting discourse on its economic and cultural backwardness, a "Southern or Latin degeneration" discourse alongside an Orientalist sexualization of its inhabitants. The countries that composed modern-day Italy were described as "the shadow of a nation," as famously stated by Goethe (Moe, 2002), a land of past glory that could not enter modernity alongside Europe. Italians were described as "indolent as the Orientals in everyday life [...]. Life to them is nothing more than a dream-filled sleep under a beautiful sky."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Alatri (771)

<sup>9</sup> The Grand Tour was the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century customary trip that upper-class Northern European young men undertook as an educational rite of passage. The young men who travelled on the Grand Tour mostly looked for exposure to the cultural legacy of classical antiquity and the Renaissance, hence mostly travelling to Italy and Greece. The accounts of such trips often recounted the beauty of the cultural heritage of the Italian lands while juxtaposing it to the backwardness and decadence of contemporary Italian populations (Schneider 1998, 4).

<sup>10</sup> These words were written by Madame de Stäel-Holstein in her *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807), quoted in Patriarca (2002, 12).

Northern European travelers' gaze upon the Italian population followed the classic Orientalist trope of representing the Other as feminine, indolent, and morally slack (Patriarca 2002, 4). "Italian cities are now thin of Inhabitants, their soil barren and uncultivated, and themselves a pusillanimous, enervated, lazy people,"<sup>11</sup> wrote an English traveler in the mid-1700s. One century later, while looking for solace and quiet under Italy's "lucid skies," the English writer Anna Jameson confirmed that by the time of the beginning of the *Risorgimento*, this racialized representation of the Italian population was still very much alive:

Let the modern Italians be what they may, —what I hear them styled six times a day at least, — a dirty, demoralized, degraded, unprincipled race, —centuries behind our thrice-blessed, prosperous, and comfort-loving nation in civilization and morals (Jameson 1858, 277).

With the country's unification or *Risorgimento*, Northern Italian elites actively shifted these racializing representations to the Italian South, which became the recipient of all the prejudices and stereotypes regarding Italy (Conelli 2015, 152). The racialization of Italian Southerners allowed the Northern ruling classes to legitimize their economic and political domination of the South. Within this colonial discourse, the North's hegemony over the South found legitimacy in its portrayal as the absolute opposite of the Italian nation as civilized, white, and European. The portrayal of Italian Southerners as "barbarous, backward, retrograde and virtually part of a different country" (Dal Lago 2013, 57) served to represent the North as "un-South" and therefore legitimize its cultural and political hegemony over the entire peninsula.

Simultaneously, by the second half of the 1880s, the rhetoric on the backwardness of Italians that pervaded European discourse on Italy and Southern European populations at large found an outlet in racial theory, with Northern European philologists and scientists declaring the superiority of the "Aryan race" vis-à-vis the Southern/Latin degenerated race (Goldman 2004).

---

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Mead (1914, 270).

The response of Italian scientists to the Othering of the Italian population was twofold and somewhat antithetical. On the one hand, as explained with regards to political and public discourse, at first Northern Italian scientists shifted the racialization of Italians to the South only, claiming that in modern Northern Italy, there was a prevalence of Aryans, while in the South, the Mediterranean, and the Semitic race was widespread (Lombroso 1896; Niceforo 1901). On the other hand, as a later attempt to discursively unify the Italian population along racial lines, anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi developed the notion of the “Mediterranean race,” an ethnic group autochthonous to the Mediterranean basin that gave birth to the great ancient civilizations. In his view, the "Aryan race" notion developed by German orientalists was nothing other than the barbarian populations assimilated by the Roman Empire (Sergi 1919, 440). Embraced also by Fascism at least until 1936, the discourse on the Mediterranean race "sought to undermine the Aryan idea by means of a specifically Italian rhetoric of unification, inclusion and centrality with regard to Europe and the Mediterranean, and based on Mediterranean regeneration" (De Donno 2007, 398). Such discourse managed to unify the country ideologically and framed Italian culture as worthy of participating in the "Scramble for Africa" as a civilizing power.

Indeed, the racialization of Italians carried out by the Northern European political and cultural elites was intrinsically connected not only to the economic and cultural shortcomings discussed up to this point but also to the Italian failure to participate in the late 1880s wave of European imperialism. This passage from Silvana Patriarca’s *Italianità* (2002), one of the most influential monographs on the construction of the Italian national character, explains this process in clear terms:

In the 1880s and 1890s, [...] critical considerations on Italianism acquired a racial connotation and became intertwined with the idea of "Latin nations", constructed as the negative opposite of

the Anglo-Saxon ones. This negative construction was primarily a consequence of inter-European conflicts and the race for colonies (Patriarca 2002, 107).

Participation in the “Scramble for Africa” was a way to cement the self-identification of Italians as a homogenous nation and elevate the country’s prestige in the eyes of the other European colonial powers. Moreover, in the eyes of the Italian political elites, such a feat would have rested on an elevation and even separation of Italy from the other Northern European colonial powers: Italy would not be worthy of colonization because it was an Aryan nation, but because of its intrinsic “Mediterranean” racial qualities that linked it to the past glories of imperial Rome (De Donno 2006, 399).

As will become evident in this dissertation, the “Mediterranean” racial paradigm had a central role in the hierarchization of different populations in the Italian empire, with Libyans thought to be racially closer to Italians and, therefore, worthy of obtaining more political and civil rights than their Eastern African counterparts.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, before Fascism embraced Aryanism and therefore distanced the Italian population from any other race, the “Mediterranean” idea profoundly impacted how the Libyan population was racialized, with religion and other cultural traits being the fundamental markers of difference. In the 1880s, the Italian ruling classes turned to the colonial enterprise in Eastern Africa with the hope of writing another chapter on the process of Italian capitalist expansion and national formation.

### *"Whitening" Italians Through Colonialism*

Colonialist elites were convinced that the new Italy could become a white nation through its widespread identification as a colonizing power and categorizing the colonial Other as other-than-Italian and, therefore, other-than-white. If seen through the looking glass of the Italian

---

<sup>12</sup> The concessions given to the Libyan population are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

national formation, the Italian colonial enterprise that began in 1882 signifies more than the sole expansion of Italy's capitalism towards new territories and resources to extract. Alongside economic and geopolitical goals, the state-led Italian colonial enterprise in Eastern Africa and Libya can also be seen as a means that the Italian ruling classes adopted to overtake the internal colonial relationship between North and South and stimulate a racially informed national consciousness based on European prestige over African populations. This passage from *Fino a Dogali* [All the way to Dogali] (1912), a colonial novel written by Italian author and historian Alfredo Oriani, perfectly summarizes the discourse on the end of the divisions of post-unification Italy under the banner of newly born Italian imperialism:

"The tragedy of Unification finally came to an end, all the contradictions conciliated, all the ethnographic and historical differences melted: another Italy with a new conscience and a different appearance, rising from the Alps, stared towards Europe" (Oriani 1912, 302).

This view of the Italian colonial enterprise as a uniting factor for the nation was broadly shared by Italian political and cultural elites during the colonial era. The sense of belonging triggered by the altero-referential construction of the Italian national identity through the investment in the colonial enterprise was "at the base of strong forms of broad identification with the imagined community of the nation" (Giuliani 2013, 35). This shift does not entail total support of the colonial enterprise by the entirety of the population, but it points to a momentous change in gear in the identification of the populations inhabiting the Italian peninsula as Italian. As far as collective national epochal moments go, the progressive colonial expansion of the country signified the most significant step toward the racial and cultural homogenization of the Italian population since the birth of the nation-state in 1861.

This process of "whitening" the racialized Southern and rural Italians, by which I mean the steady decrease in negative racialization of these populations previously carried out by the Italian socio-economic and cultural elites, was not sudden nor homogenous. In upper-class,

Northern colonialist circles, the Southern, rural Italians that showed reluctance in actively supporting the national enterprise of colonialism were considered devoid of imperialist and nationalist consciousness and, therefore, compared to colonial subjects (Nani 2006, 60). This discursive context points to a still classist view of whiteness and modernity, in which the prestige and virility of the nation had to be reproduced through individuals animated by imperialist consciousness and nationalist feelings.

Within the described construction process of a racially unified social body conveyed by generations of Italian ruling classes, gender was central in the national and colonial stages. In European nation-building projects, the regeneration of the population through national sentiments was always framed as a sort of “masculinization” of the nation. In Italy, the national “regeneration” to be operated on the racialized Southern and rural populations “meant the recovery of virility, a process of de-feminization and re-virilization of the country and its people” (Patriarca 2002, 31). In this process, the Northern elites believed that the Italian population's regeneration also had to start from a restructuring of the domestic sphere and hence of the gender roles in the country. This restructuring is consistent with the emergence of a new kind of morality of sexuality and gender roles that accompanied the emergence of nineteenth-century nationalism, as underlined by scholarship on nationalism and gender (Mosse 1985; Yuval-Davis 1993). See, for instance, the words of Piedmontese statesman and writer Cesare Balbo, who, during the *Risorgimento*, advocated for a novel definition of the role of women in the soon-to-be united country: one that would account “for a clearer distinction between masculine and feminine behaviors and the relative activities in society” (Balbo 1925, 195). In the same way, gender roles and characterization of the feminine and masculine played a central role in the Italian imperial formation, as I will discuss in-depth in the next section of this chapter.

In nation-building projects, the citizens' interests and identities are always framed in universalistic terms that adhere to the dominant classes of the nation. Accordingly, the discourses that framed the unification and development of the Italian nation were shaped according to the Northern Italian male ruling classes' wishes, which then co-opted into the nationalist program racialized subaltern groups such as Italian Southerners and women. In the Italian context, the colonial enterprise was a particularly effective mechanism in this process of co-optation of subaltern groups within the dominant one.

In its modern European configuration, colonialism represents a clear conjugation of capitalist ideology, which works through differentiation and incorporates and excludes different social categories according to historical and cultural specificities while producing those very categories. In the case of the development of Italian nationalism within a system of capitalist production, it appears clear how the colonial expansion worked by incorporating the "backward" sectors of Italian society (represented in this case by the racialized Southerners but also women) within the capitalist mode of production and creating a new racialized, lower-class Other in the colonized African population. As explained by cultural theorist Stuart Hall (Hall 1986, 25), "these specific, differentiated forms of 'incorporation' have consistently been associated with the appearance of racist, ethnically segmentary and other similar social features."<sup>13</sup>

By its unification in 1861, pre-industrial and almost feudalistic economic sectors characterized Italy, and this continued to be the case for many years after the birth of the Italian nation-state. The expansion of a modern, industrial, and white European Italian national identity within the metropolitan borders that progressively happened by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was closely linked with the racialization of the populations incorporated into the Italian

---

<sup>13</sup> On the relation between capitalist expansion and systems of racial oppression and exploitation see also Robinson (2019).

nationalist discourse through colonialism. This process was not homogenous and monolithic but characterized by an intrinsic fragmentation, with different actors involved and interests at stake. The stages of the cultural struggle for ideological domination involved many different social and political actors struggling to reach that "hegemonic moment" described by Hall as the (1986, 25) "process of unification (never totally achieved), founded on strategic alliances between different sectors."

In the Italian context, the expansion of the capitalist mode of production went hand-in-hand with the growth of nationalist sentiments that found their realization first in the invasion of Libya in 1911 and the rise of Fascism (1922-1943). As a corporate state in which the interests of the capitalist class were made to coincide with the state's, Fascism embodied the peak of racially codified Italian nationalism. With Fascism, the chauvinist nationalist rhetoric that complemented the expansion of a capitalist economy throughout the national territory started relying more heavily on the racialization of the colonial Other (and, consequently, on the policing of racial boundaries embodied by the regulation of mixture). In the hegemonic moment of Fascism (and therefore of Italian nationalism) represented by the Italian empire's declaration in 1936, the racialized and "backward" sectors of metropolitan society were wholly incorporated in the nationalist discourse, while other divisions were constructed in the empire. With Fascism, racism and nationalism fully entered the "terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses is actually formed" (Hall 1986, 25), making the racially codified Italian national identity "hegemonic" for the first time since the creation of the nation-state.

Before the rise of Fascism, colonialism was used by the Italian elites, among other economic and geopolitical objectives, as the means to create a more harmonious social body with a nationally and racially informed consciousness. This process started in the 1880s with the invasion of the first Italian colonial territory in Eritrea and peaked with the colonial enterprise

in Libya, with transversal support for the invasion of the Northern African territory that invested most of Italian society's strata. As argued by Re (2010, 10), "the Libyan war represents both a turning point and a culmination of a racial process of self-definition by Italians as ethnically 'one people,' through which the profoundly disintegrating internal differences of race, gender, and religious belief that threatened the very notion of a united Italy were at once repressed, forgotten, and surpassed." In the case of the colonial invasion of Libya, the economic and geopolitical expansionist agenda of colonialist circles intersected with widespread nationalist support for a colonial enterprise that would have projected the Italian nation in the global imperial stage as a well-defined, modern European superpower.

The next section of this chapter analyzes why the regulation of mixed intimacies in the Libyan context had a prominent role in defining the Italian national and racial identity. To this end, it inserts the colonization of Libya within the role that colonialism played in creating a defined racial consciousness in the Italian population that was explained in the present section. Through this analysis, it will become clear why the investigation of colonial boundaries' enforcement in the colony is so central for a thorough understanding of the colonial roots of processes of categorization and identification in the Italian context.

### **4.3 Italian Imaginaries on the Colonization of Libya: A Turning Point**

#### *The Colonization of Libya as a National Prestige Project*

The colonial imagination is intended as a *screen* on which to project the country's conflicts. It is also intended as a *laboratory* to experiment with possible profiles of a new Italy that would solve its internal issues and be back to its position of greatness in Europe and the world. Last but not

least, the colonial imagination represented a *field* in which, through the contrast to the Other, it was possible to symbolically rebuild the characteristics of Italianness – including whiteness (Proglione 2013, 19).

The colonial enterprise in Eastern Africa represented an opportunity for redemption for the Italian nation, a chance to move past the economic and social shortcomings that had characterized the first decades as a united country. As detailed in the previous section, the Italian colonial enterprise in Eritrea that started in 1882 was welcomed in colonialist circles as a possible uniting factor for a divided and subaltern nation such as Italy.

However, in 1896, with the defeat at Adwa suffered at the hands of the Ethiopian empire, the specter of mediocrity and subalternity to other colonial powers resurfaced. The defeat of the Italian army, the first suffered by a European army in Africa, "became a national trauma which demagogic leaders strove to avenge" (Levine 1996, 4). The stinging defeat sparked a later revanchist sentiment that fueled colonialist discourses regarding the colonial enterprise in Libya in 1911 and Ethiopia in 1935. Vestal (2005, 30) wrote that "the defeat at Adwa brought Italy its greatest humiliation since unification and genuinely demoralized the Italian public." With Adwa's resounding defeat, Italy also failed as a colonizing force. The "shame of Adwa," alongside the Southern Question, became powerful signifiers of the need for the Italian governing elites to redeem themselves from the state of subalternity to the other European colonizing powers through a new wave of Italian imperialism in new colonial contexts.

Besides the debacle suffered at Adwa, another reason that pushed the Italian government to pursue other colonial enterprises was the continuing mass emigration of Italians (mainly from the South) to the American continent and Northern Europe that characterized the first decades of unified Italy. Italian ruling classes saw the emigration of lower-class Italians as another large-scale national shame and another relevant factor in the process of Othering of Italians in

other Western nation-states, particularly the United States (Verdicchio 1997, 27).<sup>14</sup> The need for significant strata of the Italian population to emigrate to other countries due to poverty and lack of economic growth, which the Italian government had not been able to solve for half a century, was another indicator of the shortcomings of the young nation-state. For these reasons, it was a fundamental geopolitical goal for the Italian ruling classes to colonize territories where lower-class Italian farmers could work and sustain themselves without emigrating to other countries where they would have been Othered. Moreover, the mass emigration of Italians to other countries meant a substantial demographic loss for such a young country as Italy.

Senator Antonino Di San Giuliano stated in the Italian parliament in 1905 that "we should not forget that the attempts at colonizing territories should be made where there is no danger that the Italian emigrants lose their 'Italianness:' our colony Eritrea, Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Benadir [a region of modern-day Somalia]."<sup>15</sup> Besides the already colonized Eritrea and Somalia, Di San Giuliano points to the two regions that comprise modern-day Libya as the only remaining territories left by other European nations' "Scramble for Africa" that could have stifled mass emigration and elevate Italy's name as a colonizing country after Adwa. The other territory on which Italy had held hopes of colonization, which many Italian emigrants already inhabited, Tunisia, was lost due to the protectorate already installed by the French government in 1881 (Montalbano 2019). Hence, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica represented the only viable option for Italy to reignite its geopolitical and colonial aspirations while at the same time curbing mass emigration with settler colonialism.

---

<sup>14</sup> On the racialization of Italian immigrants in the late 1800s to mid-1900s United States, see the works of Gabaccia (2000) and Luconi (2011; 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Relazione di Antonio Di San Giuliano, Camera Dei Deputati, 1 luglio 1905.

## *The Colonization of Libya and the Poetics of Nationalism*

The colonial enterprise in Libya was a unique chance for the Italian ruling classes to combine different discursive and geopolitical needs. As Proglione (2016, 73) argued, Libya had a particular symbolic value that could have been instrumental in the process of "invention of tradition" that Italians could rally behind. The territories that constituted modern-day Libya had been, in fact, under Roman rule for centuries in antiquity, and the Italian colonial elites were careful to construct the Cyrenaican and Tripolitanian territories under Ottoman rule as legitimately Italian due to their history. When Italian colonialist circles started circulating ideas regarding the colonization of the Libyan territories by the Ottoman Empire, they referred to Cyrenaica and Benghazi as a location "abundant with waters and crops and green with trees and gardens," although it was presently a desert due to the "inertia of the local population" (Segrè 1974, 22). It is evident in this passage how the laziness, inertia, and backwardness that characterizes Italian Southerners is projected onto the racialized Libyans, effectively attempting to shift the focus from the internal Other to the external one. Southerners did not stop being racialized, but the population inhabiting the soon-to-be new Italian colony shifted the focus away from the country's internal divisions. The Italian colonizers and settlers aimed to re-establish the historically legitimate Roman rule over the territory.



*Figure 2. Italian troops' landing in Tripoli, October 11, 1911.<sup>16</sup>*

---

<sup>16</sup> October 11, 1911. The royal (Italian) army arrives in Tripoli. Source: Archival Photos, Il Sole 24 Ore. License: Copyright-free.

Poets were essential in imagining the nation and "inventing tradition" through evocative words that could boost the nationalist rhetoric surrounding colonialism's bolstering effect on the Italian national formation. An example of the poetics of nationalism conveyed by the Libyan colonial enterprise can be found in this passage:

"We left signs there that not even the Berbers, the Bedouins, and the Turks could erase; signs of our humanity and civilization, signs that make it clear that we indeed are not Berbers, Bedouins, and Turks. We are coming back."

This excerpt is taken from Italian poet Giovanni Pascoli's famous speech *La grande proletaria si è mossa* [The great Proletarian has risen] made on November 26, 1911, at a theater in Barga, Tuscany. Pascoli was a poet, public speaker, and political activist closely connected to the colonialist circles that supported the Italian colonization of Libya. Pascoli's interventionist stance was not unique in Italian intellectual circles. His rhetoric, similar to that of Enrico Corradini and Gabriele D'Annunzio, which I will discuss later in this section, "helped to shape the public mind and to create feelings of patriotism, of fraternal pride, and of a shared destiny in a still emotionally divided nation" (Baranello 2011, 1). The theme of the Roman cultural heritage still left in the Libyan regions functioned in the speech as a precise discursive tool to describe the invasion of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica as a legitimate action.

Moreover, in the oration, the poet framed the invasion as an opportunity to show the world Italy's greatness and overcome the country's internal differences. Interestingly, Pascoli used a socialist term such as "the proletarian" to describe the colonizing Italian nation, conflating the socialist struggle with the imperialist one. In the poet's view, no social class divisions and struggles can overpower the strong sense of unity in the project of civilizing the colonial Other. As written by historian Arturo Carlo Jemolo (1951, 10), "the Libyan enterprise brought together men of very different tendencies because they could see in it not a simple form of oppression, but the principle of a construction in which even the socialists, even the trade

unionists, could contribute." In Jemolo's view, men of different political and social extractions could unite behind this new "construction" of a more united and powerful Italy.

These two literary examples testify to how the colonial enterprise in Libya pervaded the Italian intellectual and media circles. This widespread popularity shaped a colonial discourse that promoted widespread approval for the colonization of Libya that had not been seen for earlier enterprises in Eritrea and Somalia. Such success can be attributed to the fact that the support for the colonial war percolated from colonialist circles into a growing and more literate middle class through the exponential growth of mass media that characterized the first decade of the twentieth century (Re 2010, 24). Opinions such as those conveyed by Pascoli and Jemolo became extremely popular across the country, crushing territorial and class divisions and uniting the country under the banner of nationalism and imperialism. A new inclusive Italian identity was about to replace the racialized differences among Italians that had been the main discursive explanation for the socio-economic divisions of the country.

Up to this point in Italian national history, the development of nationalist sentiments had always been framed as a men's matter. However, creating a new racial Italian identity bolstered by the colonial enterprise in Libya did not only involve men. Women were very much involved in the process of national homogenization, even though up to the invasion of Libya, their image had been discursively conflated with more "primitive peoples" due to their alleged irrational and impulsive nature, as argued by anthropologists Lombroso and Laschi (1890, 228). Conversely, Italian masculinity was built in opposition to this representation of women, as "inferiorization of women in Italy was a way for men to define their own Italian identity by opposition and to give a gendered as well as racially and socially higher meaning to male citizenship" (Re 2010, 5). The invasion of Libya in 1911 allowed the public discourse to refashion the role of women as an integral part of the new nationalist project.

According to the historian Papa (2009, 43), the colonization of Libya created a link between the extension of voting rights to women and the "national challenge" to elevate Italy as a colonizing power. While for the colonization of Eastern Africa, the Italian feminist emancipatory movement had taken a pacifist stance following the position of British feminist movements (Papa 2009, 37), the invasion of Libya signaled an adherence to the colonialist rhetoric. The participation of the suffragist movement in the war effort happened practically by providing medical aid and supplies to the soldiers fighting in Libya and politically by participating in the colonialist propaganda through the feminist movement's official magazines (Papa 2009, 158). Papa (2009, 43) explained the adherence to the invasion of Libya as "the first occasion to experiment the civil militancy in the war as a way to 'exercise' the citizenship that was still denied [to women] on the political terrain." This "exercise of citizenship" did not entail political rights, which were not granted to Italian women until 1946, but a chance to be a political agent in the colonial effort, to be included in the nationalist project of construction of a white, modern Italian Self engaged in the colonization of racialized Others.

In the new, more unified Italy ready to colonize Libya, women would not be the Other to the masculine, Northern, Italian Self, but part of that Self vis-à-vis the colonial Other that was being fought on the coasts of North Africa. This is not to say that women and Southerners were no longer framed as subalterns in public discourse after the invasion of Libya, but only that the focus of public discourse regarding Italian national identity shifted from inside to outside the body of the nation. Going back to what Pascoli and Jemolo wrote then, it can be argued that when they mentioned a "new construction" that could involve all strata of Italian society, they referred to a greater, more powerful Italy that would have equated itself to other European colonial powers. Beyond that, however, they also referred to the construction of a new national identity, where the self-definition of Italians as one homogenous community could reach its fulfillment.

The crucial role of the invasion and colonization of Libya was ultimately related to a new idea of "Italianness" that began to be inextricably related to notions of whiteness. So close to the motherland and linked to the nation's glorious past, the new colony was discursively framed as a necessary step toward expanding Italy, giving it that "fourth shore" dreamt by Italian colonialist circles for decades. Its colonization, however, entailed creating a colonial society in which "the colonial subjects could not be that much different from Southern Italians from a skin color standpoint" (Proglione 2016, 136). This situation, in turn, meant that Italian racial hegemony had to be created and policed from a discursive standpoint before it could even be materially enforced in the colony. Conceptions of racial difference in the new colony had to be constructed upon cultural signifiers that could define Italian superiority over racialized subjects that lacked visible skin color differences from a significant part of the colonizing population. Ideas regarding Europeanness, progress, modernity, civilization, and Christianity characterized a definition of whiteness constructed in contrast to racialized Libyans.

### *The Racialization of Islam as a Justification for the Colonization of Libya*

Christianity and the racialization of Islam in Italian public discourse played a central role in creating a discourse on racial differences. An example of how religion was used in public discourse during the first months of the Italian occupation of the coastal areas of Libya were the poems *Canzoni delle gesta d'Oltremare* [Songs of Overseas Deeds] written by poet Gabriele D'Annunzio. As the war against the Ottoman and Libyan resistance raged in Tripoli and Benghazi, the poet published ten poems in which he framed the war and the atrocities committed against the Turks and the Arabs as a righteous battle to restore Italian and Christian greatness in the *Mare Nostrum*.<sup>17</sup> Besides referring to myths of "*Romanitas*" and the superiority

---

<sup>17</sup> *Mare Nostrum* ("Our Sea," in Latin) was the expression used to refer to the Mediterranean Sea by Romans during the imperial age.

of the Christian God, D'Annunzio explicitly goes to lengths to racialize Islam and characterize it as "inhuman" when compared to the "humanity" of Christianity, using a clear crusaders rhetoric. As noted by Re (2010, 28), D'Annunzio conflated Arabs and Turks under the same racialized category by calling them either "Muslims" or "Infidels" and detailing their inferiority through racial slurs. D'Annunzio frames the Italian colonization of Libya and the fight against the anti-colonial resistance as a "crusade" to win back the Mediterranean Sea from racialized Muslims that "have tainted it with their inferior level of civilization." Notably, D'Annunzio includes Italian Southerners within the holy body of the Christian nation that fights against the infidels. D'Annunzio's mention becomes even more significant if we consider that the publication of the poems in the most important Italian newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*, between October 1911 and January 1912, replaced news of the riots that were happening in Southern Italy at that time (Re 2010, 26). The most circulated Italian newspaper chose to publish poems exalting the unifying factor of the colonial war in Libya over the news regarding the problems that still afflicted a divided Italy. The colonial enterprise in Libya unequivocally entailed a new discourse over the national identity of Italians: not anymore divided territorially and socio-economically, but united in a new conception of Italianness that encapsulated notions of modernity, Christianity and civilization vis-à-vis the racialized Muslim Libyans.

Public discourses on the Italian invasion of Libya portrayed a united, stronger Italy exerting its power as a modern white, European Christian nation on a racialized Muslim population. This discourse, in turn, managed to insert Libya and its population within the national cultural field. With the nearby colony gradually being conquered by the Italian army and its populations incorporated into the discourse regarding Italy's identity as a racially defined nation, Libyans soon became the most represented Other to Italy's white Self. As Said (1994, 106) wrote, "representations of what lay beyond insular or metropolitan boundaries came, almost from the start, to confirm European power." Within this framework, the descriptions of Libyans and

Turks provided by the nationalist novelist and essayist Enrico Corradini in his novel *L'ora di Tripoli* [The time of Tripoli] can be understood as the description of Italy's civilizational greatness written through the negative of the colonized populations. A report of a trip that Corradini undertook just months before the invasion of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, *L'ora di Tripoli* portrays a literary assertion of colonial dominance. Specifically, *L'ora di Tripoli* intended to take hold of the representations of Libyans as an integral part of the discourses on Italy as a superior colonizing power. Corradini describes the Libyan population as "not even part of a nation, but just individuals tired of the death of their ethnic unity and for this reason belonging to an almost savage condition" (1911, 11). Italy, and the discourse that portrayed it as a unified national power ready to compete with other colonizing powers, can be the solution to the decadence of the Libyan populations. Corradini himself states that it is "Italy's duty" (1911, 206) to bring back to these degraded regions and populations the old Roman greatness lost in centuries of "Arab inertia" (1911, 203). The racialized, lazy, feminized Tripolitanians and Cyrenaicans and their supposed inferiority vis-à-vis the colonizers are represented as the confirmation of Italy's power as a unified colonizing nation that had been able to defy its divisions and shortcomings.

Within the discourse of the Italian nation as a united and powerful colonizing power, Corradini and D'Annunzio deny the meanings and identities that characterized Libyan populations prior to the Italian colonial enterprise. In their view, they were savages and infidels, a racialized negative to the growing influence of Italy as a white and modern civilization. The incorporation of Libya and Libyans within discourses on the nation not only went on to create discursive legitimization for the exertion of military power and violence over the colonized population but also to elevate Italy and Italians on the world stage of colonialism. Libya and the discourses surrounding its colonization created for the first significant time in Italian national history an

Italian racial hegemony, a discursive structure in which the power to classify the colonial Other could strengthen the notion of Italianness.

As Libya and its populations became so central in the Italian public discourse's portrayal of Italians as white and European, the ways in which intimate racial boundaries were constructed and enforced in the colony can shed light on the construction of Italian whiteness. However, before analyzing such regulations, it is still necessary to map the Italian discourses regarding the colonial sexual imagination that framed the Italian army's presence in the colony. As more soldiers were deployed to fight against the Libyan anti-colonial resistance, a specific literary discourse regarding Libyan women and mixed intimacies in the colony began developing. The following section aims to analyze colonial literature on the Libyan context to shed light on the Italian masculine colonial imagination that framed the intimate colonial encounter during the first years of the Italian presence in the region.

#### **4.4 Libyan Women, Mixed Intimacies, and the Italian Colonial Imagination**

##### *The Italian Masculine Imagination on the Colonies and Their Women*

This chapter has focused on detailing the discursive *topoi* that used colonialism, particularly in Libya, to unify the Italian population under a masculine, white identity that was strengthened by processes of altero-referential determinations of racial difference (Guillaumin 1995, 51). This section moves from this analysis toward how such discursive mechanisms of identity construction were culturally reproduced through the depiction of mixture and the colonial imagination. To this end, colonial novels and travel reports are analyzed to understand how imaginaries of the intimate colonial encounter and Libyan women shaped Italian men's self-

perception as white and masculine during their presence in the colony. Representations of Libyan women as both exotic, sexualized, feminine, lazy and inferior served as discursive tools to signify the superiority of Italian men's white masculine identity vis-à-vis the racialized Other. In a somewhat contradicting way, representations of the intimate colonial encounter as exoticized and adventurous helped normalize such relationships and the colony as an idealized destination where Italian men could unbridle their sexual fantasies. In addition to colonial novels that conveyed Italian men's experience in the colony, this chapter analyzes one of the only travel reports written by an Italian woman during her stay in the colony. The analysis of her perspective is intended to add complexity to the racializing gaze and colonial imagination that framed the encounter between Italians and Libyans in the colony.

Ever since Italian colonialists first started to conceptualize the possibility of forming a colonial empire, and then subsequently throughout the Italian colonial presence in the Horn of Africa, colonial novels depicted the colonial territories as a land of sexual conquest for Italian men. The Italian discourse on the African continent revolved around its identification with exoticized and available women's bodies. As written by Campassi and Segal, "the black woman became the symbol of Africa (and therefore its availability underpinned the availability of Africa towards European conquest), and the relationship between the white man and the black woman is the exemplification of the relationship between the colonizing nation and its colony" (Campassi and Segal 1983, 55). Hence, African women were described as available to Italian men's desire, as if they inherently possessed a sort of unbridled erotic charge inherent to their inferior, and therefore feminized, "native" culture. The Eastern African women's bodies were dehumanized, objectified, and framed as ready to be used at the colonizers' will.

However, as underlined by Ann Laura Stoler in her *Carnal Knowledge*, "sexual domination of women" was more than a "discursive symbol, instrumental in the conveyance of other meanings," but rather a part of its very "substance" (Stoler 2002, 44-45). As we can see in this

excerpt of a letter sent by an Italian military to consul Piacentini in 1911, the mentioned imagination had clear implications for the expectations that Italian men had regarding the sexual accessibility of local women in Eritrea:

Another colonist, returning from Keren, was dazzled by Bilen [one of the main ethnicities that comprised the colony's population] girls' provoking figures. These girls are regarded correctly as the most beautiful in the country; they are aware of that and demand at least 100 Maria Therese Thalers for their virginity. The colonist told me he was shocked that in a conquered territory like Eritrea, the white ruler could not possess these girls with violence or that a much smaller fee was not asked.<sup>18</sup>

In this account, Italian settlers appear to consider the Eritrean colony a place where they can unleash their masculinity without restraints, a common trope regarding the sexualizing gaze that European men bestowed upon women belonging to colonized populations.

#### *Italian Men's Gaze in Colonial Novels Set in Libya*

Regarding Libya's colonization, the colonial space had a similar characterization as a feminine, sexualized frontier where Italian men could thoroughly realize their sexual desires. In the Italian male imagination of Libya, Arab women had a similar role to Eritrean women only a few decades earlier. As I will show in this section, they were framed as hypersexualized objects hidden from the colonizer's male gaze by a "backward" and feminized "native" culture. Moreover, by the time of Italy's invasion, Arab women had a particularly central role in Italian culture, as they dominated the Italian exotic literary imagination even more than Eastern African women (Stefani 2007, 102).

While Italian literary representations of African and Arab women were focused on their hypersexuality, the Libyan women's concealment of their sensuality behind the veil and their

---

<sup>18</sup> ASMAI, Archivio Eritrea, *Letter to consul Piacentini*, July, 1, 1911, published in Goglia and Grassi, *Il colonialismo italiano*, 136.

reclusion within inaccessible harems stimulated Italian male fantasies. Indeed, as written by Said in his analysis of Nerval's work, "the Orient is *'le pays des rêves et de l'illusion'* [the land of dreams and illusion], which, like the veils he sees everywhere in Cairo, conceal a deep, rich fund of female sexuality" (Said 1978, 183). The veil represents the concealment, and therefore enhancement, of Italian men's consuming fascination for Libyan women, concealment that exemplifies the colony itself: feminine, deceiving, and sensual. Like the veil, the harem "was a titillating but pitiful emblem of the aberrant sexuality and despotic power that characterized all that was wrong with the non-Christian Orient" (Lewis 2004, 13). Together, these representations of Arab women created a specific image that accompanied the Italian soldiers since the beginning of the colonization of Libya, shaping the colonial encounter and the gender relations in the territory.

At the same time, as I will show in detail in Chapter 5, Italian men did not find the material realization of their sexual fantasies in Libya. The patriarchal structure of Libyan society, the importance of Islamic institutions, and the Italian administration's need to ingratiate themselves with local patriarchal elites to quell the anti-colonial resistance created a context in which Italian men hardly had unrestricted access to Libyan women, as some of the novels that will be analyzed might suggest. At the same time, it might be argued that the very societal structures that made Libyan women hidden from the colonizers' gaze sparked colonial sexual fantasies and the sexualization and exoticization of local women (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 74).

A relevant example of how the Libyan colonial space inhabited Italian men's imagination is the semi-autobiographical novel *Il deserto della Libia* (The Desert of Libya), published by Mario Tobino in 1952. Tobino was a poet, writer, and psychiatrist deployed on the Libyan front during World War II. The novel follows the experience of a fictional medical officer named Marcello, who is based on the author himself. Initially fascinated by the romantic colonialist discourse

that depicted Libya in a fashion resembling a Thousand-and-One-Nights atmosphere, the author describes the protagonist's impressions in a particularly exoticizing fashion.

There is an open courtyard in the middle of Arab houses, with the stars shining above it; there are benches around such courtyards' walls in Arabian pleasure houses. Soft and black women dressed in mottled, golden silk long dresses had in the delicate part of their forearm's tattoos, and on the upper lip, another tattoo in the shape of a triangle [...] In the interior rooms, when I showed up at night at the entrance, there were one, two, or three Arab women, their arms wrapped in bracelets. The air was tinged with henna. The silence was motionless; a velvety hell flowed from the sky, a joy that made my heart bump in my chest (Tobino 1952, 101).

Marcello describes brothels as charged with an explosive sexual energy that causes his heart to pound, definitely in anticipation of the fulfillment of all his sexual desires. This description fits in those discourses defined by McClintock as the "porno-tropics for the European imagination" or "a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears (1995, 22)." Marcello becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the Libyan women he encounters and their accessibility in the following narrative. He speaks of the desired young Arab girls as:

They are always enclosed and protected by their families, whereas the old Libyan women continually meet in public and often do not have the veil covering their faces. This habit makes it possible to notice the boogers dripping from their eyes, the lower lip hanging, and the expression of the whole face on which dwells only hate and pleasure at slaughtering babies" (Tobino 1952, 60).

As Barrera wrote in her work on colonial Eritrea, the sexist and ageist negative description of colonized women found alongside racist and sexualizing images of colonized women's bodies is not exceptional. As a matter of fact, "placing erotic images side by side with negative

stereotypes was neither rare nor contradictory: savagery and sensuality were represented as complements to each other in Italian images of African women" (Barrera 1996, 13).

Finally, at a later stage of his adventures, Marcello meets a teenage girl with some unspecified illness that he could potentially visit as a doctor and manages to convince her uncle to allow him to see her. The description that follows reveals the sexualizing gaze of the protagonist, who sees his curiosity and desire finally fulfilled:

As usual, Marcello was captivated by the hand that held the veil before her face, the fingers twitching uncontrollably. Fatma opened her hand and let the fabric fall. She appeared before him, completely naked. She had a beautiful face, and she was laughing gently. One of her hands remained for a moment along her slender naked side, while the other hung in the air at the height of her young chest (Tobino 1952, 67).

In this description, the eroticism of the atmosphere described by Tobino is clearly in the foreground, and the protagonist's desire appears evident by the minute description of the girl's body and gestures. Particularly relevant is the captivation for the hand that keeps the veil in front of the girl's face, representing for Italian men's gaze a marker of difference in a body that should be unmarked, uncomplicated, and accessible. The symbolism of the veil and the European men's gaze bestowed upon it, in turn, also defines a specific political doctrine of colonial and patriarchal power.

The deep sexuality concealed by the Orient is ubiquitous in Italian colonial literature, as we can see in another famous piece of Italian colonial literature: *Un medico in Africa* (translated into English as *A Cure for Serpents*) by Alberto Denti di Piranjo, published in 1955. The book accounts for the twenty-five years Denti di Piranjo spent in Libya and Eritrea as the Duke of Aosta's doctor. Throughout the book, it is evident that the author has a deep fascination for the bodies of the African women he encounters, illustrated by this account of a visit to a Berber noblewoman in her tent:

The girl's face so fascinated me that I almost failed to notice the odor of her unwashed body [...]. Her adolescent body – soft and supple as a cat and stained all over with indigo – did not seem to belong to the chrome-yellow face. Her arms were slender but not thin; her breasts, stained with blue, were like variegated marble, rose-tipped. Her waist was so tiny that she could enclose it within her two hands, but her hips curved like an amphora and her legs were long, slim, and straight, right down to the short feet with their rows of neat toes diminishing evenly in size like tiny organ pipes. After examining Tahûk from head to foot, I concluded that I had rarely found a human organism in such perfect condition. When I told her so, she was not at all pleased. For a moment, she began to sulk, but immediately her eyes lit up with a mischievous smile. She lay on her back, completely naked, with her head resting on my knee. She threw me an upward glance of interrogation – but I was watching her fabulous hair, fearing that at any moment a procession of lice might emerge from that gold and copper jungle and begin to swarm all over me (Denti di Pirajno 2005, 120).

Denti di Pirajno sees the Berber woman Tahûk as an objectified vehicle of uncontrollable lust and a racialized, abhorrent subject. As for Marcello's case, when entering the pleasure houses in Tobino's novel, the physical feeling of astonishment is framed as an unrestrainable form of sexual energy circumscribed by a sense of racial superiority. In Denti di Pirajno's eyes, the woman takes every chance she has to express her desire for lust, and the emotional turmoil he feels is caused by the conflicting emotions of desire and disgust that we also found in that passage from Tobino's novel quoted earlier.

The Italian imagination in this context appears no different from all the tropes portrayed in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth-century European colonial and travel literature: the Orient represents the Other, and the Other represents the feminine, and the vehicle for desire, as entirely explained by many scholars of cultural history (Kabbani 1994; Said 1978). After all, "the physiology of the Oriental female, the secretive manner of her life, her submissiveness,

her passivity, and even her assuming the role of a phallic female, excited the Western sense of the exotic, seductive, sensual, and erotic Orient" (Ouejian 2006, 12).

Besides the exoticization and sexualization of the colonized woman, this text also relies on the discursive tool of racializing Libyan women to assert Italian men's European masculine identity. As argued by Casales (2020, 444), "through the narrative opposition to subaltern characters, the virtues of the dominant ones were defined as (universal) moral and political models." The almost inhuman fashion in which Denti di Piranjo describes the Berber woman can therefore be framed as a discursive underscoring of the author's humanity and superiority. The two almost opposing descriptions of Tahûk – exotic and sensual on one side, inhuman and inferior on the other – are part of the same narrative depiction of Libyan women as the embodiment of the colony in the eyes of the male colonizers.

The trope of the sexualized, feminine Orient was not portrayed only in the contrasting idealized and racialized fashion that the works of Tobino and Denti di Pirajno have described. Particularly in the first decades of the twentieth century, the fascination for colonized women became translated into literature with the fictionalized interracial romance. Although never officially sanctioned nor endorsed in the Libyan context until 1939, mixed intimacies started being portrayed and somewhat exalted in Italian colonial literature for their symbolism regarding the intimate colonial encounter.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the depiction of a mixed relationship in which the Italian male burned for love for a faithful, lustful, and beautiful colonized woman was the perfect vehicle to reproduce the image of an eroticized Orient that was available to the totality of the Italian males' desires.

The most relevant example of colonial fiction set in Libya with mixed romance as its central *topos* is the semi-autobiographical *Piccolo amore beduino* (Little Bedouin Love), written by

---

<sup>19</sup> The first official body of legislation that regulated all kinds of mixture in Italian Libya was law 1939-XVII n. 1004. See Chapter 3 for more detailed reference.

Mario Dei Gaslini. Winner of the first competition for colonial novels organized by the Fascist regime in 1926, *Piccolo amore beduino* is the story of an Italian officer in Tripolitania in the years that preceded the First World War. The novel portrays the impossible love between the officer and a Bedouin woman named Nica in a dramatic fashion.

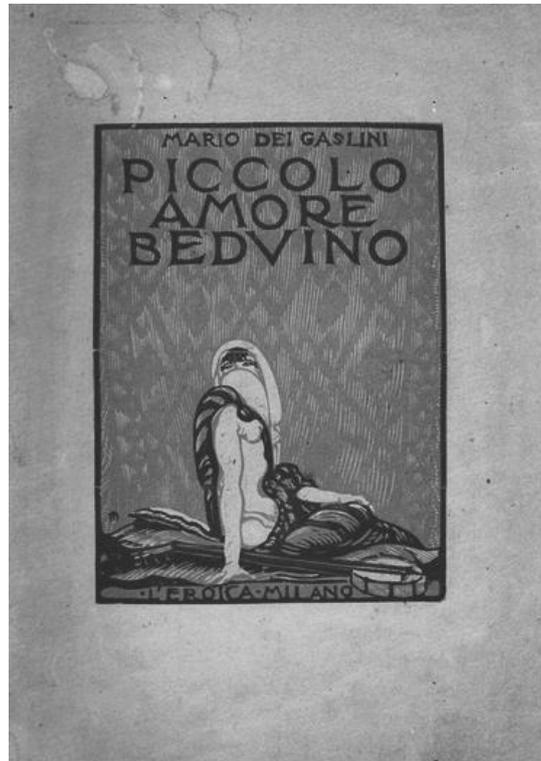


Figure 3. The original cover of “*Piccolo amore beduino*,” by Mario Dei Gaslini, 1926.<sup>20</sup>

Like the works analyzed earlier in this section, *Piccolo amore beduino* resorts to overly sexualized images of Libyan women, going as far as describing women’s bodies as pure instruments of lust, specifically designed to fulfill men’s desires:

Fatma got out of the tent with her legs and chest wholly naked and started singing and dancing while three other young girls, wearing the same revealing clothing, thumped their feet. They were fifteen, maybe sixteen years old, although that was not the most crucial detail. She danced while seducing men in a barbaric way, [...] showing her almost naked body in all of her promises (Dei Gaslini 1926, 55).

---

<sup>20</sup> The copy of the book photographed in the figure belongs to myself, the author of this research.

In this excerpt, it is evident that the imperial harem's *topos* reverberates into the topless Bedouin dancers' image that expresses their will of seduction in a "barbaric way" through the impersonation of what they think the Italian men desire from them. Once again, Libyan women symbolize sexual desire on one side and the inferiority of the colonized population on the other. However, the stereotype of colonized women as sexualized and erotic objects is not the only one that transpires from Dei Gaslini's pages. As we can see in the following quote, he dwells on another typical trope of colonial novels: the colonized woman as a defenseless victim of the barbaric patriarchy of colonized societies.

The Arab woman is a silent prisoner who has no weapons against her passions: the first man can kidnap her: the first dream can win her over: but she can shut herself within her silence in order to hide poorly behind a large veil or in great pain. Even to the harshest pains, the woman agrees quietly because her destiny as an imprisoned queen is still this: to be a little soul who obeys shyly (Dei Gaslini 1926, 12).

Here, Dei Gaslini conflates the inner sexualized nature of Arab women to their role within their societies: they are prisoners, both of their uncontrollable desire and the societal norms that want them submissive and quiet. Victims of the relentless patriarchal discrimination inherent to the primitive colonized societies, Arab women were portrayed as the opposite of white men and white women, whose emancipation within "more civilized" Western societies put them in an opposite discursive trope to the one occupied by colonized women. This mechanism was described by Asciti and Mangiaracina (1986, 276) regarding black women, but with a framing that applied to Libyan women as well:

The African woman produces antithetical concepts to those inherent to "white culture," thus establishing a binary opposition, a scale in which the white woman is the opposite [of the black woman]. She is, for example, wild (while the white woman is civilized). She is available for sexual relations, often lustful (while assuming that the white woman is not). She is submissive to

her husband, who beats her, often relegates her to the humblest values, and who, so to speak, “objectifies” her (while the white woman’s role is participatory, executive, etc.). These dichotomies produce a vertical rift between the African and European worlds.

*Piccolo amore beduino* adds to the typical tropes of colonial novels a specific intimate relationship between the officer and a girl. The former's erotic obsession with the latter becomes a metaphor for Italy and Libya's power relations. In the first four pages of the novel, the young protagonist shows his "lack of experience" by falling in love with a Bedouin girl he has never seen, Nica. The intense passion for the girl overcame the insurmountable boundaries between the colonizer and colonized. The author says that "love is a stranger knocking at your door" and that "only with love it is possible to build great and superb things" (Dei Gaslini 1926, 4). In reality, however, the relationship between the protagonist and Nica is not an equal and romantic one but rather an uncontrollable desire on the Italian male's part towards the stoic, almost inanimate figure of the Bedouin girl. The protagonist knows that his love for Nica has to be interrupted for prestige reasons, even though relations between Italians and Libyans were not criminalized until 1939. However, he reflects on the impossibility of their love only after consuming his burning desire for the girl:

It is because this love is built on clay, on clouds, on impossible truths. A white officer cannot love a black woman: how ridiculous he would appear! An order would immediately stop the sweet dream (Dei Gaslini 1926, 166).

On his last love night with Nica, the protagonist refers to the end of their love's inevitability. A fate that "resonates with the fascist rhetoric of obedience at the same time as it ventriloquizes the Muslim mandate to submit to God: ['One must obey what it is written' - 'Insha'Allah' answered the girl.] Submission to Allah is thus married to submission of colonial order of things" (Spackman 2017, 205). The protagonist's inner conflict between his European values as an officer and his desire for the sexualized East is resolved by a racialized fatalism attributed

to the feminized Orient, one that first captivated the protagonist into abandoning his responsibilities as a white colonizing officer, but that then pushes him to return to the correct colonial order of things.

### *A Florentine Countess's Perspective on Libyan Women*

A somewhat different but complementary perspective on Libyan women can be analyzed in the pages of the travel diary written by the Florentine countess Onorina Bargagli Petrucci during her trip to Tripolitania and Fezzan in 1932. A travel and botany enthusiast, countess Petrucci writes with a clear nationalist sentiment reinforced by the conviction of Italy's right to colonize and "civilize" Other populations. Her loyalty to Fascism is evident, with frequent mentions of the improvements made by the colonial government to the territory. Her work for the party would become even more direct after the travel to Fezzan, with the Fascist Institute of Italian African in Florence charging her with the organization and direction of the preparatory courses for women's lives in colonies. Besides her political convictions, her class status also characterizes the descriptions of the people and places she encounters. In particular, a preference for describing the homes, clothing, and jewelry of well-off Libyan women and disdain in her description of lower-class people and neighborhoods indicates her classist bias in choosing the subjects of her narration. Her political and classist biases notwithstanding, her diary is a rare example of an Italian woman's perspective on the Libyan population and how such biases influenced her framing of race and gender relations in the colony.

The countess is interested in Libyan women and spends many pages describing their customs and positions in Libyan society. Similar to the rhetoric portrayed by Dei Gaslini, Petrucci describes Libyan women as "unfortunate, imprisoned in the impenetrable harems by the prevarication of men and Qur'anic laws" while despising them for their tendency to commit

adultery (Petrucci 1934, 48). In this passage, as in many others of the diary, Petrucci seems to mix a sense of sympathy toward Libyan Arab women experiencing the "backward" oppression of Libyan patriarchy with the need to distance themselves from their "abhorrent" sexuality. This stance appears to align with many other feminist authors who wrote about colonized women, such as Carrie Catt and Aletta Jacobs, in their writings on South East Asia (Bosch 1999). Of particular interest is how Petrucci describes the beauty of some Libyan women and how they manage to use it in the colonial context. She mentions that "the more beautiful the woman, the more she is allowed to have many men without tarnishing her reputation" (Petrucci 1934, 83). The countess uses this framing of sexual liberty to describe and justify that some beautiful Libyan women were offered as concubines to middle-to-upper-class Italian officers, receiving a great deal of prestige in the process.<sup>21</sup> Petrucci sexualizes Libyan women to explain episodes of mixture, underlining the privilege of Libyan women who can engage in relationships with Italian officers. Differently from her description of Libyan women "imprisoned in harems," Petrucci does not comment in any way on the oppression that Libyan women might have experienced as "gifts" to be given to the colonial army's officers. The dismissal of episodes of mixed relations follows a straightforward colonial logic: Libyan women are sexualized objects of desire, and therefore their relationship with Italian officers is a common expression of colonial power that does not need explanation.

In her descriptions of Libyan women, the countess adopts a "form of voyeurism that is revealing of a certain inquietude and the need to classify and maintain at a distance destabilizing types of femininity" (Spadaro 2010, 6). This stance emerges from the over-sexualization of the Libyan women she describes, a sensuality that, in her view, is excessive to the point of becoming of little interest to Italian men who have their "tropical adventures" almost only not to offend the Libyan hosts who had offered them (Petrucci 1934, 85). The

---

<sup>21</sup> On the practice of colonial concubinage in Libya, see Chapter 5.

banalization of Libyan women's sexuality, as much as their objectification, is a way for the countess to create a clear distance between Italian white women and racialized Libyan women. The countess actively sexualizes Libyan women to emphasize racial differences in a classic Orientalist fashion. Yeğenoğlu (1998, 102) argued that "the declaration of an emancipated status for the Western woman is contingent upon the representation of the Oriental woman as her devalued other, and this enables the Western woman to identify and preserve the boundaries of self for herself." Libyan women are both deviant sexualized subjects and victims of a backward patriarchal society, depending on how the countess represents her position within the colonial encounter. She is writing in her diary a self-portrait, a description of herself characterized by the contrast to racialized women. Through the racialization, sexualization, and objectification of the Libyan women she encounters, the countess can exert her power and affirm her whiteness.

While signifying her modern, Western femininity in contrast to the racialized, over-sexualized Libyan women, Petrucci's account is also a means to supplement the Italian masculine imagination with descriptions of the only places occluded to the Italian men's gaze. As Yeğenoğlu argued (1998, 74), "despite his ability to freely enter the Orient and move in and out as much as he wishes, the Western subject is frustrated by the closure of the space of the Oriental woman; he had no option but to speculate on the details of harem life, its mysteries, and the lascivious sexuality the other-sex enjoys behind that closed curtain." The pictures of the harem that Petrucci includes in her book fulfill and make men's narratives more coherent, strengthening them in their patriarchal view of the colonized society. Unsurprisingly, Petrucci directly explains that harem means "sin" (Petrucci 1934, 48), meaning that it is a sin for foreign men to witness its nature and workings. Petrucci momentarily breaks the curtain – and metaphorically also the veil – that separates Muslim women from the gaze of Italian men,

taking photos of the harem of the *qadi* and supplementing the masculine Orientalist knowledge of the Libyan population.

From the analysis of these colonial works, it appears clear how in the Italian colonization of Libya, the colonial discourse and practices of hypersexualization and commodification of colonized women were an essential tool of power exertion that followed race and gender dynamics. Moreover, the publication and diffusion of colonial novels set in Libya contributed to cultural appropriation and dissemination processes that constructed Libya's colonization within the Italian public imagination through the use of erotic themes (McLaren 2006, 117). Within this framework, on the one hand, intimacies such as the one described by Dei Gaslini in *Piccolo amore beduino* represented the epitome of the realization of Italian masculinity, one that exceeded the boundaries of pure sexual desire and went as far as symbolizing the power relations that Italians were trying to construct in the Libyan colony. On the other hand, the analysis of countess Petrucci's travel diary has shown how some upper-class Italian women also participated in the process of Otherization and sexualization of Libyan women, actively shaping their white Self in opposition to the racialized colonial Other (Narayan 1995, 133). Moreover, the analysis of these texts has provided a link between discursive mechanisms of whiteness, modernity, and masculinity identity construction and the depiction of mixed intimacies in the Italian masculine imagination. The depiction of Libyan women as hypersexualized but racialized and inferior served as a cultural reference to highlight the superiority of Italian white men's identity while providing an exoticized depiction of the colony. Such conflicting discourses inserted themselves in the continuum of material and representational violence that characterized the construction of Italian whiteness while providing the discursive framework for policing colonial boundaries that is the subject of this dissertation.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided the discursive framework that encloses this dissertation's analysis of the regulation of intimate racial boundaries in Italian Libya. By detailing the representational continuum that characterized the Italian national and imperial formation, this chapter analyzed how the racialization of internal and external subaltern social groups was instrumental in developing the Italian Self as white and modern. The racialization of Southern Italians in the decades that followed Italian unification served to represent the Northern Italian elites as worthy of belonging to European modernity. At the same time, colonialism functioned as a means to overcome such differences under the banner of nationalism and whiteness. The colonial enterprise in Libya, in particular, functioned as a momentous event in this process, with the growth of mass media and nationalist politics fueling a widespread supremacist and revanchist sentiment that found an outlet in colonial power politics. On the same trajectory, the racialization and exoticization of Libyan women and mixed intimacies in the colony strengthened Italian white masculine identity vis-à-vis the racialized colonial Other, highlighting the highly gendered nature of the construction of whiteness in colonial contexts.

This chapter aimed to build upon the literature on Italian national formation and racial identity construction while connecting the dots linking the nation-state's birth to the colonial enterprise in Libyan territories. Moreover, the discursive continuum recognized in the literature was connected to mixed intimacies in Libya and their representations in the Italian colonial imagination. This connection provides this dissertation with the representational trajectory that fueled the need to regulate mixed intimacies in the context of colonial Libya. The construction and enforcement of notions of Italian whiteness was the central factor that shaped the regulatory responses to mixed intimacies in the colonies. Moreover, the analysis of how they

were imagined and inserted within the narrative of Italian whiteness and national identity represents a valuable addition to understanding the colonial echoes that still characterize understandings of racial differences in the Italian context.

In the next chapter, I discuss the intimate colonial encounter framed by the discourses outlined in this chapter. In particular, I analyze how Italian administrators regulated the relationships between Libyan women and the Italian soldiers and officers who comprised most of the Italian population in Libya until the early 1930s. In a militarized social space due to the fierce Libyan anti-colonial resistance, the romanticizing and exoticizing discourses outlined in these pages faced the geopolitical reality of establishing colonial rule in a complex social environment.

## **5. Concubinage and Prostitution in Militarized Colonial**

### **Libya (1911-1932)**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

It is May 1924, and the anti-colonial resistance in the interior of Cyrenaica, in modern-day Libya, is still raging even though Italian troops secured the region's coasts more than twelve years before.<sup>1</sup> To boost the military efforts against the Cyrenaican militias, the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele III signs the R.D. n. 983, effectively increasing the deployment of troops to the Northern African colony.<sup>2</sup> Article 3 of the decree states a mandate that clarifies the stance of the Italian government regarding the intimate life of its deployed officers:

The reserve officers [that will be sent to Cyrenaica] who have a wife will have to explicitly commit themselves to leave their families in Italy for the whole duration of their stay in the colony.

The decree clarifies the Italian Fascist government's decision not to allow the army personnel's wives in the colony. In 1926, the Italian government reiterated this policy by promulgating another decree, which mandated that all troops deployed in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica had to be bachelors or widowers.<sup>3</sup> As shown in this chapter, the implications of these decrees and similar ones that preceded and followed them impacted the foundations of the relationship

---

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is a slightly modified version of my article “*Mabruchismo: Concubinage and Colonial Power in Italian Libya (1911–1932)*,” published in the journal *Modern Italy* 26, n. 4 (2021): 409–24.

<sup>2</sup> ASSME, N-11, b. 4025, *R.D. 1 maggio 1924, n. 983*, May 1, 1924.

<sup>3</sup> ASSME, N-11, b. 4025, *R. D. 3 settembre 1926, n. 1608. Nuovo ordinamento militare nei Regi corpi di truppe coloniali della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.*

between the colonizing power and the colonized society. As no Italian female partners were allowed in the colony, colonial troops and officers often looked for Libyan women as sexual and domestic partners. During the first twenty years of the Italian presence in Libya, the intimate colonial encounters were characterized by a mainly military male Italian population engaging in intimate relationships with local women. How these forms of intimacies were regulated was exemplificatory of the centrality of gender and sexuality in the construction of racialized colonial boundaries.

This chapter focuses on the regulation of mixed intimacies in the Italian colonial context, especially in the Libyan colony, where mixed intimacies' role has yet to be fully assessed. In particular, this chapter investigates how Italian military administrators regulated concubinage relationships (known as *mabruchismo* in Libya) and prostitution between 1911 and 1932, when the colony was still militarized because of the anti-colonial resistance.<sup>4</sup> The chapter focuses on these two kinds of mixed intimacy because they both directly involved the regulatory hand of the Italian army. The other mixed intimacy discussed in this dissertation, marriage, is discussed separately and in the last chapter of this thesis due to its continuous presence throughout the Italian colonization of Libya and the direct involvement of other regulatory institutions such as the church. Finally, in this chapter, I also aim to insert the Libyan context within a broader analysis of the regulation of mixed concubinage and prostitution in the Italian colonies. Doing so will further the academic debate on these liaisons' role in developing the gendered and racial categories typical of Italian colonial societies.

Providing sex to armies has always been a primary concern of military administrations. This axiom was true also for colonial contexts, as explained by Bryder (1998, 815): "the general

---

<sup>4</sup> The term *mabruchismo* found its origin in the Arabic name *Mabroukah*, one of the most common first names given to Libyan women. This chapter focuses solely on concubinage and racially unsegregated prostitution, not on mixed marriages. As marriage regulations involved more political actors and issues related to religion, national belonging and citizenship, they will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 8.

belief persisted that men, particularly soldiers, required an outlet for their (hetero)sexual energies and that the army must provide them with 'safe' sex." One such "outlet" provided to upper-class officers was colonial concubinage.

Concubinage was widespread in various colonies on different continents and at different times.<sup>5</sup> As for the Italian context, much has been written on *madamato*, the concubinage relationships between Italian officers and Eastern African women. From its inception and inclusion in juridical (Sòrgoni 1998) and colonial discourse (Iyob 2000; Campassi 1987) to the role it played in shaping public and private spheres in the colony (Barrera 2004) and the agency it provided colonized women (Ponzanesi 2012), concubinage in Eritrea is an extensively researched topic. Moreover, other works (Trento 2011) have included the Ethiopian context in the broader debate over concubinage in the Italian colonies.

While upper-class officers engaged in colonial concubinage, the military commands provided troopers with state-sanctioned racially unsegregated prostitution (Bryder 1998, 814). As for concubinage, the regulation of prostitution has been studied in many colonial contexts.<sup>6</sup> The ground-breaking works of Teraud (2003) on colonial prostitution in French Northern Africa, of Kozma (2006) and Bernstein (2012) respectively on colonial prostitution in Egypt and Palestine, as much as the more recent research conducted by Pastor (2017) on the regulation of prostitution in colonial Syria and Lebanon, belong to the scholarship to which this chapter aims to contribute. Regarding the Italian colonial contexts, most of the literature on colonial prostitution and its regulation is centered on the Eastern African context. Pankhurst's work on the history of prostitution in Ethiopia (1974), as much as the works of Sòrgoni (1998) and

---

<sup>5</sup> See the research on the Dutch (Ming 1983; Stoler 2002), Spanish (McKinley 2014), and English (Ballhatchet 1980; Hyam 1986) colonial contexts.

<sup>6</sup> The first and most influential works on the regulation of colonial prostitution were on the context of the British colonial empire: Ballhatchet (1980), Hyam (1986), Levine (1994, 2003), and Banerjee (1998). For works on colonial prostitution on other contexts see Stoler (1997), Dunne (1994), Teraud (2003), Warren (2003), Phung (2010), and Kozma (2017).

Locatelli (2010) on Italian Eritrea, are all essential precursors for the analysis of prostitution in Libya conveyed in this chapter. Their findings on the relevance of the regulation of prostitution in the establishment of colonial boundaries across different Italian colonial contexts represent a central point of departure for the discussion of prostitution in Italian Libya.

Regarding the specific context of Italian Libya, the study of mixed intimacies and sexuality is still in its early stages, with the notable recent efforts provided by Yeaw (2018a) and Spadaro (Yeaw and Spadaro 2020). The dissertation of Yeaw and the volume she edited with Spadaro focused on highlighting Libyan women's voices and experiences as agents of anti-colonial resistance while removing them from "the margins of nationalist and colonial narratives" (Yeaw 2018b, 3). This chapter outlines the regulations that framed the experiences analyzed in these recent works, specifically focusing on how the Italian colonial administration reacted to Libyan women's intimate relations with Italian officers and troopers. By doing so, this chapter aims to shed further light on Italian colonial discourse and practices regarding intimacy and mixture and, therefore, how the regulation of Libyan women's bodies directly influenced shifting conceptions of racial purity and colonial prestige.

This chapter accounts for the structural relations of power that shifted in reaction to their relationships with Italian men. By analyzing Italian military elites' speeches, internal orders to the army ranks, military circular letters, medical treaties, and official legislation, this chapter maps the Italian administrations' shifts in attitude toward Libyan society and its private sphere before the colony transitioned from a militarized space to being the object of state-sponsored demographic colonization.

The chapter is structured into three main sections following the historical development of mixed concubinage and unsegregated prostitution regulation in Libya. The first section details how the first Italian administrations negotiated jurisdiction over the Libyans' private sphere with the local elites by condemning mixture discursively while allowing it in practice. The

second section traces the regulatory shift regarding mixture that accompanied the transition of Italian Libya from a militarized space to a settler colony. The third section details the regulation of racially unsegregated colonial prostitution in Tripoli, completing the picture of the class-based management of mixed-sex and intimacy during the first phase of Italian colonial presence in the region. In conclusion, this chapter argues that the regulation (or lack thereof) of mixture in Libya followed the specific needs of the colonizers' political agenda, drawing and erasing boundaries according to colonial administrators' ideological and strategic needs.

## **5.2 "Proper Restraint Towards the Natives": The Italian Discursive Stance Towards Libyan Women in The First Years of Colonization**

On October 9, 1911, on the same day the invading Italian army secured the perimeter of Tripoli after one week of battle with the Libyan and Ottoman troops, the commander-in-chief Carlo Caneva issued the following circular order to all Italian troops and officers:

Arabs have a lively and profound religious sentiment and strictly observe their religious practices, which differ from ours. For this reason, maximum respect and tolerance towards everything that regards Muslim rites are essential [...]. Libyan women are usually kept away from public life, and the indigenous are proudly jealous of them. Thus, everyone must abstain from any act towards them, including even looking at them.<sup>7</sup>

This statement's primary goal was to avoid conflicts between the invading army and the local population, as the grip on the Libyan territory appeared to be all but easily securable. However,

---

<sup>7</sup> ASSME, L-8, b. 220, *Norme di contegno verso la proprietà, la religione, gli usi ecc. Degli indigeni*, October 9, 1911.

even if intended as a preventive measure, the circular order reveals three relevant issues for the analysis of early Libyan colonial society. First, we find a reference to Islam as a defining category for the colonized population. In the sources used for this chapter, religion often acts as a signifier of difference that justified and complemented racial hierarchization between the Italian and Libyan populations. The terms "Arab," "indigenous," and "Muslim" are often used interchangeably by the Italians as categories to signify the colonized Other. These terms were used to connote the Arab and Berber Muslim populations, and the entirety of the sources analyzed in this chapter directly refer to such populations as the primary source of concern for Italian administrators. Second, by stressing "the maximum respect and tolerance for Muslim rites," Caneva hints at the necessity of ingratiating the local population to quell the anti-colonial resistance.

Moreover, his words are the first hint of a plan to establish a form of indirect rule based on the respect of the traditional local structures of power, and that could have taken advantage of the local elites' dissatisfaction with the secular and modernizing Ottoman rule.<sup>8</sup> Third, it refers to Muslim women and their role in Libyan patriarchal society. Caneva stresses the importance of the Libyans' patriarchal management of women's societal roles and forbids Italian soldiers from even looking at Libyan women, let alone trying to engage in intimate relationships with them. In fact, "Muslim authorities during the Ottoman period strictly policed the sexual behavior of Muslim women" (Yeaw 2018, 53), and Italians did not want to antagonize the Libyan population by unleashing the invading army's sexual violence. This danger was exemplified by the Orientalist discourse surrounding Libya and its populations before the territory's invasion. As argued in Chapter 4, the Italian imagination of the colony framed Libya as a feminized frontier where Italian men could realize their sexual desires. The realization of

---

<sup>8</sup> For a thorough analysis of the first Italian colonial administrations' efforts at establishing a form of indirect rule over Libya, see Ryan (2012).

Italian men's fantasies had to be curbed at least discursively if the colonial administrations were to stabilize the partially conquered territory.

The Italian colonial administrators' will to crush the resistance and curry favor with the local population was still present in 1916 when top colonial administrators in Tripoli continued to convey their goodwill and respect for Muslim tradition to the Libyan ruling class. In this excerpt of an official negotiation between three Libyan notables (Farhad Bey, Ahmed Bey, and El Taieb Effendi) and a high-ranking Italian officer (Castoldi) regarding the proclamation of a new mixed legislative commission for the city of Tripoli, we see the eagerness of the Italians to comply with the will of the Libyan elites and to prove themselves willing to respect local traditions:

FARHAD BEY: I have a few ideas to include in the proclamation.

Cap. CASTOLDI: It will be best if you state them at once.

AHMED BEY, EL TAIEB Eff.: It shall be best to state everything minutely. [...]

Regarding customs, the inviolability of domicile, prohibition for Muslim women to marry men of other religions.<sup>9</sup>

In this excerpt, the emphasis on the demarcation of Libyan women as men's patriarchal property is put forward by the Libyan notables themselves, who list the prohibition for Muslim women to marry men of other religions as a strict priority. This stance seems to hint that Libyan patriarchal ruling classes were proponents of sexual segregation between colonizers and colonized, to be enforced through religious lines. Simultaneously, the Italians were primarily interested in portraying themselves as respectful of Libya's religious traditions to strengthen their indirect rule plans through a complacent Libyan elite class. Nonetheless, besides the different motivations that moved the Libyan and Italian elites, this convergence of intents can

---

<sup>9</sup> ASMAI, Vol. II, b. 126.1, *Colloquio avvenuto tra ufficiali Italiani e delegati Arabi in Tripoli*, 1916.

arguably point to a similarity to Barrera's argument on a possible "patrilinear convergence" (2013, 98) in Eritrea that worked to reinforce prohibitions of mixture from both colonizing and colonized societies. Unfortunately, the sources I collected in Italian state archives do not clarify the stance of both parties on matters regarding mixed descent, patrilineality, and relative issues regarding citizenship and affiliation. Further research conducted in Libyan archives might add depth to this analysis and assess the role of Libyan patriarchal power structures in this scenario. As another statement of the official Italian rhetoric on the respect of Libyan women, it is notable to mention an order issued in 1918 by the colony's Governor Vincenzo Garioni to all Italian civil servants:

In some offices where Muslim women appear, the habit of asking them to unveil their faces has created nuisances in the indigenous environment. A fact of such sort is contrary to our political action since it violates an Islamic religious precept and constitutes an act of disrespect towards Muslim women, and it is in contradiction to the Caneva order of 1911.<sup>10</sup>

The document acknowledges Italian civil servants' habit of asking Muslim women to unveil their faces, relying on their power over the Libyan population, particularly women. However, the Governor's office warns that this practice is against Caneva's 1911 official order quoted at the beginning of this section. It was so because it "constitutes an act of disrespect towards Muslim women" and, therefore, "contrary to our political action."

Attempts of colonizing powers to portray themselves as respectful of local traditions, particularly regarding the private sphere of colonized societies, were not unique to the Italian context. For instance, after occupying Algeria in 1830, the French allowed the local population to practice the Islamic faith freely and attempted to portray themselves as protectors of the

---

<sup>10</sup> ASMAI, Vol. II, b. 114.1 *Donne mussulmane, prot. N. 7780*, September 29, 1918

Islamic legal system for personal status and the role of women within colonial society (Clancy-Smith 1998). As in Italian Libya, this attitude was engineered to soften some of the patriarchal local elites towards the colonial rule and show how respecting traditions in private matters could balance the colonizers' modernizing impulse regarding the public sphere. Simultaneously, the rhetoric and practice of "respect" for local traditions were used to understand, frame, and enforce modes of difference and socio-political hierarchies between colonizers and colonized. In particular, the Italians used the Islamic personal status of Libyans throughout their presence in the region as a sign of incompatibility and backwardness of the Libyan population vis-à-vis the modernizing Italian colonial rule and legal system.

The rhetoric of respect towards the Libyan population transpired in some Libyans' legal status policies. To quell the rebellion straining the Italian army after the First World War, the Italian administration issued the *Statuti*, which granted all Libyans a form of colonial citizenship with civil and political rights.<sup>11</sup> Such concession of rights to Libyans, which never happened towards their Eastern African counterparts considered on a lower step in the colonial hierarchies, was part of the colonial ideology of Italian Liberal administrations regarding Libya, who sought to portray their rule as enlightened and respectful.

In the first years of the Italian presence in Libya, as exemplified by the sources quoted in this section, the colonial administrators initially tried to convey a discourse related to the role of women within the newly created colonial environment, one that took into account the political need to ingratiate themselves with the local population. However, as I will show in the next section through the analysis of the actual practices of regulation of mixed intimacies within the colony, there was a gap between the colonial discourse regarding the treatment of Libyan women and the actual regulatory practices. Even after 1922, which marked the rise of Fascism

---

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of the Italian colonial policies on the legal status of Libyans, see Chapter 7.

and the end of a period that saw attempts at establishing a system of indirect rule, the regulation of sexuality unfolded in two opposing paths: one that followed colonial discourses and one that followed colonial practices.

### **5.3 *Mabruchismo*: Libyan Concubines for Italian Officers**

#### *Concubinage in a Militarized Colony: Institutional Discourse and Practice*

Scholarship on colonial concubinage has found that concubinage was tolerated or prohibited depending on colonial administrations' perceptions of the vulnerability of European supremacy in colonial contexts (Ming, 1983; Stoler, 2002). Colonial powers shifted their regulatory attitude towards concubinage according to their political needs: this also appears true for the Italian colonial context. The phenomenon of concubinage between Italian men and colonized women was widespread in the Italian Eastern African colonies well before Italy started the colonization of Libya, as studied in the mentioned research of Iyob (2000), Sòrgoni (1998), and Barrera (2002). Barrera argued that during the Liberal period, in colonial Eritrea, "concubinage was regarded as a relationship that took place within the individual private sphere" and that, therefore, "Italian authorities did little to regulate it, especially if the Italian individual involved was one of their peers: that is, a white, middle-class man" (Barrera 2004, 159). By analyzing archival sources of the time, we can see that colonial authorities, at the beginning of the Italian colonial rule in Eritrea, went as far as encouraging Italian officers to take concubines: "general Baldissera had issued a circular letter telling officers that they should take a *madama* as soon as they landed in the colony" (quoted in Barrera 2004, 161).

Two reasons led Italian authorities to tolerate and even encourage concubinage between Italian officers and Eritrean women. First, Italian authorities might have considered their racial superiority not to be "vulnerable" in such a context and therefore did not mingle in the private lives of the Italian army officers. Since the colony's Italian population was mainly comprised of male army members and not civilian settlers and women, it is possible that Italian administrators were confident that episodes of mixed intimacies would not have compromised the "racial prestige" of Italians in Libya. Second, concubinage represented a more "dignified" form of sexual outlet for Italian officers, who, in this way, did not have to "meddle" with lower-class troopers in state-sanctioned brothels. As a confirmation of such reason, it is sufficient to read an excerpt from the memoirs of Alessandro Sapelli, an Italian officer deployed to Eritrea at the time:

[Officers] regarded it as harmful to their dignity to encounter their subordinates or other natives in the so-called horse-shoes, even if the natives were careful about vacating the premises when a white man entered them. So, the system of permanent relationships was initiated, and the officer had a house built for the woman he had chosen [as a concubine]. (Sapelli 1935, 197).<sup>12</sup>

Since colonial authorities encouraged concubinage in colonial Eritrea during the Liberal period, it would be safe to assume that the same regulatory framework (or lack thereof) applied to the first years of colonization of Libya, as there had been no change of political regime in the metropole between the two colonial enterprises. However, Italian authorities in Libya adopted a different approach regarding the regulation of social relations between the colonizers and the colonized: one that kept into account the "maximum respect and tolerance towards everything that pertains to Muslim traditions regarding their religious rites and women" as the

---

<sup>12</sup> The state-sanctioned brothels in Eritrea were colloquially referred to as horse-shoe, given their shape.

previously quoted order from Caneva clarified.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Eritrea, which fell under Italian colonial control in a little over two years, Libya was far from being under the political control of Italian colonial authorities, who still regarded it as fundamental to portray Italian rule as respectful of local customs.

However, the Italian official rhetoric regarding the "proper restraint towards the natives" was hardly followed by the colonizing troops' actual practice, particularly in sexual and emotional relationships. Indeed, Italian officers started to engage in concubinage soon after the first colonization of Cyrenaican territories.



Figure 4. Libyan "Mabruca," or concubine, as depicted in a 1912 Italian postcard.<sup>14</sup>

Given the discourses on respecting local traditions, colonial administrators could not endorse a type of intimacy outside the reach of state control, such as concubinage, which could entail

---

<sup>13</sup> ASSME, L-8, b. 220, *Norme di contegno verso la proprietà, la religione, gli usi ecc. Degli indigeni*, October 9, 1911.

<sup>14</sup> The postcard depicted in the image is property of myself, the author of this research.

forms of affection, as was the case for Eritrea. At the same time, they did not have any legislation prohibiting concubinage they could refer to, as the only law addressing mixture in Libya was to be the 1939 law that prohibited "any relationship of a conjugal nature between metropolitan citizens and natives of Italian Africa."<sup>15</sup> Cases of concubinage were happening throughout the region, and, as I will show, even if military commands did not actively punish the officers involved, they still maintained strict posturing on the matter. Although without a specific law to invoke, military administrators tried to maintain their official position regarding mixed intimacies by emanating circular letters to all officers in which they strongly condemned the practice of concubinage, even though without making any substantial threat of criminal prosecution:

I have reason to believe that some officers have hired indigenous women as concubines by either allowing them to live in their own houses, settling them in a dwelling nearby, or allowing them to still live with their families. Either way, they always agree on a salary with such women in exchange for a regular and exclusive working performance. The military discipline regulation deems unacceptable any form of concubinage. Such prohibition must be followed even more strictly in the colonial environment for obvious reasons regarding the officers' decorum and the efficacy of our current political action in the colony.<sup>16</sup>

This circular was sent directly to all officers stationed in the colony by the Governor of Cyrenaica, General Giovanni Ameglio, on February 24, 1916. Regulations regarding the Italian military's discipline applied in different ways according to the context in which the army was operating. Indeed, concubinage was allowed, if not encouraged, in Eritrea, where political concerns regarding the local private sphere were not as pressing as in Libya, given that the

---

<sup>15</sup> R.D. n. 1004 of June 29, 1939, *Sanzioni penali per la difesa del prestigio di razza di fronte ai nativi dell'Africa Italiana*. A thorough analysis of the political shift that brought to formal prohibitions of mixture in the empire is conveyed in Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>16</sup> ASMAI, Vol. II, b. 146.1. *Concubinaggio*, February 24, 1916.

Eastern African colony was firmly in control of the colonizers. Moreover, the circular stresses the importance of prohibiting such relationships as they would harm the "efficacy of [the Italians'] political action in the colony." This statement seems to align with the arguments made earlier in this chapter. More pressing for colonial administrators was not to enforce military discipline but to maintain the image of a colonizing power careful to the local traditions regarding the private sphere. As the Sanusiyya-led rebellion was gaining momentum in the internal parts of Cyrenaica, the Italian Governor could not afford to see the image of the colonizers damaged by the Italian officers' behavior.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, only three days after the emanation of the first circular, the Governor sent an additional warning to the Italian army officers, which further stressed the importance of respecting Libyan society's private sphere.

His Excellency, the Governor, renovates the absolute prohibition regarding all forms of concubinage and warns the officers that he is taking substantial disciplinary measures against anyone who disobeys his orders. Moreover, he warns that he might take the extreme measure of deferring the ones found guilty to the Military Tribunal on insubordination charges in case of disobedience.<sup>18</sup>

The reiteration of the circular order speaks of a total prohibition, leading to martial law consequences if infringed. This stark prohibition is striking not only for its contrast to the attitude towards the same forms of relationships that were still happening in those years in Eritrea but also because it anticipates the harsh racist legislation implemented by the Fascist regime in the colonies from 1936 onwards.

This firm stance may also be connected to the previously quoted argument regarding the connection between concubinage regulation and the colonizers' imagined racial superiority vis-à-vis the Libyan population (Stoler 2002, 51). Italian authorities in Libya might not have been

---

<sup>17</sup> For more background on the Sanusiyya and its role in Cyrenaican society, see Chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup> ASMAI, Vol. II, Pos. 146.1. *Concubinaggio*. February 27, 1916.

as confident in their racial superiority as in Eritrea and strived to separate the settlers and the local population more carefully. After all, Libya occupied a special place in Italian public discourse, being that "fourth shore" soon to be juridically incorporated in the body politic of the nation itself (Segré 1972, 151). Moreover, the ambiguity regarding the racial difference between Italians and Libyans, with the latter being "considered racially closer to their European masters than sub-Saharan Africans" (Casales 2020, 443), might have prompted the administrators to enforce stricter regulations to emphasize colonial boundaries.

Here, we can see a discursive coherence of Italian colonial elites regarding the attitude to be taken in the Libyan territories toward the locals' private sphere and, particularly, Libyan women. Patriarchal control over women's bodies and sexuality was fundamental for the Libyan ruling class. The Italian administrators, striving to portray themselves as protectors of local customs, created a discourse in which any form of sexual and/or affective relationships between Italian men and Libyan women were utterly unacceptable.

Based on my review of sentences of the Italian Military Tribunals of Benghazi and Derna (the tribunals responsible for the troops deployed in Cyrenaica) preserved in the Italian Central State Archive, the threat pronounced by Governor Ameglio was not followed by convictions of officers found guilty of engaging in concubinage. According to available archival records, no Italian officer ever faced prosecution on the grounds of "insubordination" for not following the order on the prohibition of concubinage. Since we do have confirmation that officers defied Caneva's order up until five years after its promulgation, it is unlikely, albeit possible, that officers suddenly stopped engaging in such relationships due to the Governor's subsequent circular orders. However, I suggest it may hint at a gap between the official rhetoric regarding concubinage prohibition and its policing.

Despite all the proclamations regarding Muslim traditions and Libyan women, officers engaging in concubinage were not formally punished until the 1930s. This timelapse meant

that not even the rise of Fascism in metropolitan Italy in 1922 brought an actual prohibition of the practice. The rhetoric and the policies of the first years of Fascist rule in Libya closely resembled the ones of the Liberal years, and colonial administrators kept trying to portray themselves as protectors of Libyan traditions. Meanwhile, the Fascist military engaged in brutal military operations to repress the anti-colonial resistance still particularly fierce in Cyrenaica. In the end, due to the brutal military tactics of General Rodolfo Graziani, whose war effort would grant him the title of Vice-governor of the colony, coupled with the heavy use of chemical weapons (Salerno, 2005), the resistance was wholly crushed in both Tripolitania (1924) and Cyrenaica (1932). Subsequently, the regime started the process of settler colonization of Libya, signaling a change in the way Italian administrators dealt with instances of colonial concubinage.

#### *Regulating Mabruchismo: New Policy for A Settler Colony*

It is no coincidence that the first military punishments against concubinage occurred only in 1931 when Cyrenaica's militarization started to subside due to reaching the end of the repression of the resistance. The year 1932 would see the first enactment of Italy's plans for Libya's mass demographic colonization, which entailed the deportation of Cyrenaicans who inhabited fertile lands to concentration camps in the desert and the arrival of many Italian civilian settlers, including a considerable number of Italian women.<sup>19</sup>

The arrival of Italian women was pivotal in the Italian administrators' change of attitude, as "European women created a new and less flexible domestic colonialism exhibiting concern with the sexual accessibility and vulnerability of women, and with corresponding notions about the need for spatial and social segregation" (Beidelman 1982, 13). For these reasons, the need

---

<sup>19</sup> For a thorough analysis of the different stages of the Italian demographic colonization of Cyrenaica, see Cresti (2011).

for stricter norms regarding the separation between Italians and Libyans would become more pressing, bringing colonial administrators to enforce for the first time the circular order issued by Governor Ameglio fifteen years before.

In a circular letter addressed to all officers and dated May 10, 1931, the Chief of Staff of the Italian troops in Cyrenaica, Guglielmo Nasi, listed all the punishments of officers deployed to the concentration camps in previous months. The circular was intended to warn other officers about the consequences they could face if they engaged in the same behavior. Among those, the command dealt with two instances of concubinage with utmost severity:

A garrison commander in charge of a concentration camp for indigenous people found two officers engaged in romantic relationships with two indigenous women. Although he acted rightfully by ending them swiftly, he failed to report to his superior such facts, which are detrimental to the uniform's dignity.

An officer on duty in a concentration camp negotiated with an indigenous woman over the price to be paid for her daughter's favors, acting in a manner detrimental to an officer's dignity. After paying the agreed sum, the officer kept the girl as a concubine, hosting her in a tent next to his.<sup>20</sup>

Another circular letter sent on the very same day and in the same way to all the officers stationed in Cyrenaica speaks of a very similar case:

While on duty near a concentration camp, an officer started negotiating the price for his daughter with a captive indigenous man. He did this in a way that did not consider that such behavior was detrimental to the dignity of his officer's uniform.<sup>21</sup>

In all three cases, Nasi deemed the officers highly irresponsible because by either engaging in, attempting to engage in or failing to report forms of concubinage, they had put the uniform's

---

<sup>20</sup> ACS, Fondo Rodolfo Graziani, b. 11, *Circolare 4189*, May 10, 1931.

<sup>21</sup> ACS, Fondo Rodolfo Graziani, b. 11, *Circolare 4190*, May 10, 1931.

dignity at risk. If it was an extreme "detriment to the officers' uniform," an act worthy of deportation from the colony, how is it possible that these are the first documented sanctions of this kind ever inflicted in Libya? Had officers only started to seek out concubines at the beginning of the 1930s, when first deployed to concentration camps? Were these indeed the first instances of concubinage in colonial Libya?

We can find direct answers to these questions in another circular letter sent by General Rodolfo Graziani. It was May 17, 1932, only four months after the release of the official statement by Governor Badoglio that confirmed the end of the resistance in the last regions of Cyrenaica, when Graziani finally decided to clarify the actual practice regarding concubinage.

I have repatriated four officers in a little over one year because they made financial transactions to acquire indigenous women to keep them as concubines. This *mabruchismo* is one of the plagues that infested the colony. There are still some traces of it, or better still, some nostalgia; however, I intend to eradicate it. [...] Of course, the sacrifice regarding the lack of women is required of the colonies' officers. However, it is a sacrifice that, first of all, must not be exaggerated because it is not absolute; secondly, it is a known fact, and therefore it must be considered before the deployment, which, in any case, is not long. On their side, the command of the troops and the regional authority will ensure that they also meet these needs by establishing other brothels in all the places that still lack them.<sup>22</sup>

This letter is central to understanding the phenomenon of concubinage in Libya for several reasons. First, Graziani refers to the sanctions inflicted by Chief of Staff Nasi, and he claims to be the hand behind those punishments, implying the gravity of the act since the Vice-governor of the colony dealt with it in person. Secondly, he mentions the term *mabruchismo*, the expression Italians used to refer to concubinage relationships in Libya. This mention, alongside

---

<sup>22</sup> ACS, Fondo Rodolfo Graziani, b. 11, *Circolare* 2935, May 17, 1932.

Graziani's characterization of the phenomenon as "one of the plagues that have infested the colony," suggests that the repatriated officers were not the first to have concubines in the colony but only the first to be punished after years of tolerance toward the practice. Such development was arguably due to the colony becoming less of a militarized, male-dominated space, which, given the increasing presence of civilians and hence Italian women, entailed the need for the Fascist administrators to be less tolerant towards mixed cohabitation relationships. Third, Graziani's lead role in the anti-colonial resistance crackdown in Libya and Ethiopia and the almost parallel prohibition of concubinage in both contexts point to the centrality of the man's role in enforcing Fascism's colonial racism. While his role in enforcing Minister Lessona's racial segregation policy in Ethiopia is already documented (Ceci 2019, 34), this chapter sheds new light on his centrality in this regard in the Libyan context, highlighting a thread of connection between the two contexts. Finally, Graziani clearly states that the new practice regarding the crackdown on *mabruchismo* would have to be followed by opening an additional number of brothels for the officers who would have to sever the relationships with their concubines.<sup>23</sup>

This last point shows that not all forms of mixed intimacies were deemed unacceptable, even by the increasing segregationist Fascist administration's standards. As shown in the following section on the regulation of prostitution in Tripoli, racially unsegregated prostitution was tolerated, regulated, and eventually encouraged by Fascism for officers as a viable alternative to the "plague of *mabruchismo*."

---

<sup>23</sup> The part of Graziani's circular letter ordering the opening of new brothels is a direct execution of Lessona's order of August 5, 1936, in which he ordered the general to enforce a stricter prohibition of mixed sex (Rochat 1973, 188).



*Figure 5. The Soluk concentration camp in Cyrenaica, 1932.<sup>24</sup>*

As I will show in the next section, Italian prostitutes were not allowed in Libya, with French prostitutes comprising the majority of the few white prostitutes working in the colony. However, European prostitutes had always comprised a minority in Libya (Salerno 1922, 55), and although we have evidence that Fascism pushed for more to work in other Italian colonies (Pankhurst 1974, 177), their number was still relatively low (Yeaw 2018a, 74). For this reason, particularly in the proximity of isolated concentration camps, racially unsegregated prostitution remained the primary option to discipline soldiers' and officers' sexuality in the colony. During the Liberal and Early Fascist periods, there were no Italian women in the colonies, and the use of brothels by the army was framed along class lines, as the "dignity" of the officers could not be tarnished by using the same form of "sexual outlet" as their subordinates (Sapelli 1935, 191). Graziani, however, by referring to the need for "additional brothels" to curtail concubinage, directly negates that the same was valid for 1930s Libya as well, at least for the new settler colony that Fascist administrators were trying to build. For the Cyrenaican colonial

---

<sup>24</sup> ASMAI, Vol V (materiale recuperato al nord), b.5. *Foto campi indigeni Cirenaica*, 1932.

government, concubinage was a worse option than unsegregated prostitution, state-controlled or not, for reasons I will soon clarify.

Fascist elites' dislike of concubinage in the 1930s, among other forms of mixed intimacies, is evident in the first official regulation of mixed relationships in the Italian empire, specifically targeting concubinage between Italians and Eastern Africans.<sup>25</sup> Amid the racist ideological shift that accompanied the empire's proclamation, the Fascist government promulgated R.D. n.880 with the clear intent of curtailing forms of concubinage and not any other form of mixed sexual relationships. Notably, not even marriage was initially included. The reasons for this choice are complex and involve the regime's relationship with the Vatican. Hence, I will discuss them in-depth in Chapter 8, where the relationship between the Italian state and the Catholic Church is fleshed out through the regulation of marriage.

In the debate that ensued among Fascist jurists on the *ratio legis* behind the R.D. n. 880 prohibition, initially, most of them agreed that the reason was to protect the colonizers' racial superiority from racial promiscuity, which could, in turn, lead to the birth of mixed offspring (De Napoli 2009, 77). The jurist Berlindo Giannetti, however, pointed at the fallacy of the argument and criticized the law by stating that the birth of mixed children was possible with any sexual relationship between Italians and colonial subjects and that, therefore, with a prohibition of concubinage alone, "the lamented inconveniences regarding the possible creation of mixed children persist" (Giannetti 1939, 164). Once again, we can see a gap in the representation of colonial ideology and its practical enforcement. No punishment was inflicted on Italian citizens for engaging in other forms of mixed intimacies, hinting that what was really at stake was not the mixed sexual act and its possible offspring but the possibility of the

---

<sup>25</sup> R.D. n. 880, April 19, 1937, see Chapter 3 for a more detailed explanation of the decree's contents.

emotional connotation that forms of cohabitation could develop. As written by Olindo de Napoli with regards to the Italian eastern African context (2009, 78):

[The law 1937 n. 880] was the prescription for the indigenous woman's objectification: she could not receive or give affection, but she had to be used as an object. This was because, within the constraints of colonial life, while waiting for a more significant influx of Italian women to reach the colony and with the absence of brothels with white women only, the regime understood that the Italian male citizens residing in the colony needed a sexual outlet. Therefore, there was no punishment if the indigenous woman was treated as an object, a mere vehicle to achieve sexual gratification.

The issue is the prohibition of possible affection between a white Italian male subject and a racialized female object. The intent to portray the colonized population as inferior by the Fascist administrators, with the final goal of achieving complete racial segregation in Italian Eastern Africa, could not afford the public presence of affective relationships involving two members of the two main racial groups in the colony.

This analysis of the actual *ratio legis* behind the promulgation of R.D. n. 880 can also be applied to the Libyan context, and the circular of Rodolfo Graziani quoted earlier in this section. The only acceptable forms of mixed intimacy in Libya, a colony that was transitioning from a militarized space to a segregated, settler colony, were the ones that kept colonizers and colonized on two distinct, hierarchical levels. Graziani is clear: colonial administrators were willing to build one brothel for every military outpost in the colony, but concubinage, which could have led to emotional relationships, was no longer tolerated in any way. Moreover, although outside of the scope of this inquiry, it needs to be stressed that concubinage entailed an easier path for the recognition of mixed-race children. Prostitution, on the other hand, entailed the quasi-impossibility of ascertaining the paternity of children, leading the Fascist authority to prefer it as a form of mixed intimacy. If mixed relationships had to happen in the

few areas of the colony that were still militarized, the regime opted to encourage those that were less of a peril for the enforcement of the boundaries set to protect the purported racial superiority of Italians. The Fascist regime was increasingly characterizing the Italian national identity as intrinsically linked to whiteness: anything that could tarnish the sense of racial superiority of the Italians, including mixed intimate relationships that could have been not intrinsically exploitative, had to be eradicated in its entirety.

What I have argued in these pages does not imply that all concubinage relationships in Libya were characterized by affection, but only that the Fascist administrators wanted to take no chances in that regard. Although not recordable through the voices of Libyan women absent from the Italian archives, the exploitative character of concubinage in Libya is clear from the sources used in this chapter. The analyzed sanctions to the officers explicitly mention that some women's parents sold them to the Italians in exchange for sexual and domestic favors for money. Even if such a practice might hint at a temporary marriage agreement similar to the Eritrean *demoz* (Sòrgoni 1998), the colonial power dynamics at play point to an unbalanced power relation that put Libyan women in a condition of inherent subalternity. Even if we have no direct sources on how Libyan communities perceived *mabruchismo*, we can assume that it was frowned upon by the Libyan ruling classes, particularly from the efforts that the Liberal colonial administration made in the 1910s and early 1920s to reprimand it discursively. Moreover, we know that in neighboring Algeria, *qadis* (or shar'ia law judges) punished women who engaged in sexual relationships with Europeans (Dunne 1994, 27) and that Muslim women might have experienced violence from community members if they violated communal boundaries (Yeaw 2018a, 89). Similar experiences might have happened to Libyan concubines, who, pushed by economic necessity or coercion, faced the violence of both the colonizers' objectification and the local communities' social hierarchies.

While Italian officers could use the freedom unofficially granted by the military leadership due to their higher-class position to take Libyan women as concubines until the 1930s, Italian troopers' sexuality was treated by the army command in a more hands-on approach. As a more objectifying and controllable form of mixed intimacy, prostitution was regulated and encouraged even when the political and ideological conjuncture in the Italian empire did not allow concubinage relationships anymore. The next section of this chapter will analyze how prostitution was regulated in colonial Libya, its relationship with the colonial army and other forms of mixed intimacy, and its repercussions on Libyan women.

#### **5.4 State-Regulated Prostitution in Colonial Tripoli**

##### *Regulating Prostitution in the Italian Colonial and Metropolitan Contexts*

Bryder (1998, 815) wrote that "whenever large numbers of troops went overseas, [...] the provision of prostitutes was considered necessary to prevent rape and homosexuality." As this quote shows, European armies systematically instituted regulated prostitution to manage the troops' sexuality when deployed in colonial settings. Denying soldiers a sexual outlet altogether was considered detrimental to their physical and mental health, with dire consequences awaiting, such as homosexuality. Philippa Levine notably explained how English military commands believed that in colonial contexts, "without available women, soldiers unable to control their passions in the tropical heat of the East would turn to [...] one another" (Levine 1994, 596).

Class played a role in military elites' assumptions regarding the sexuality of mostly working-class soldiers. Italian colonial administrators hence regarded prostitution as necessary for Libya

and the Eastern African colonies. At the same time, they considered it detrimental to the image of higher-class officers, who were unofficially allowed, at least until the stabilization of the colony in the 1930s, to engage in more stable relationships such as concubinage. James Warren has identified the same class framing of prostitution in colonial settings for the South-East Asian context, specifically in Singapore. There, "senior colonial officials argued that prostitutes were needed for the mostly lower-class British soldiers and sailors who could not afford to support wives and family in the colony, and yet had neither the education nor the self-restraint to keep away from the brothels" (Warren 2003, 104).

In Libya, dominant classes regarded working-class male sexuality as unrestrained and perilous for the empire's stability. For this reason, it needed to be in the hands of the state. Within this framework, it is also important to stress how the military command of the Italian army in Libya, as much as any other European colonial army, considered the regulation of prostitution fundamental to the army's health. This concern was exemplified by the fact that "for much of the nineteenth century, VD [venereal disease] was the largest single cause of hospital admissions among European soldiers" (Arnold 1993, 86). Therefore, the regulation of prostitution and the surveillance of prostitutes' health was essential for the success of any colonizing mission. The regulation of prostitution and the regular examinations that prostitutes had to undergo "placed the health and readiness of soldiers over the rights of women" (Yeaw 2018a, 72). In contrast, the fact that only the prostitutes, and not the soldiers, were subjected to regular examinations confirms that the system of compulsory treatment of venereal diseases "was fundamentally flawed by gender bias" (Lewis and Bamber 1997, 6).

Regulations of prostitution in metropolitan Italy also applied to Libya, with some adjustments related to the colonial context. The first regulation of prostitution promulgated by the Italian government is as old as the Italian nation. It was 1860 when the First Italian Prime Minister Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, signed a regulation that had previously instituted state-

controlled prostitution houses for the French army helping the Piedmontese fight against the Austrian Empire (Gibson 2000, 23). The regulation forced prostitutes to work in the *case chiuse* [brothels], placing them under the control of *madame* while forcing them to undergo vaginal check-ups at a *sifilicomio* [hospital for sexually transmitted diseases], modeled on the French Napoleonic system of *Réglementation* [regulation]. The regulation aimed to stem the surging rate of venereal diseases in the ranks of the Italian army, even though it soon became a tool in the hands of the authorities to surveil and control prostitutes. The first article stated that the main objective of the regulation was to "surveil prostitutes." Moreover, it provisioned that the *case chiuse* were under the jurisdiction of both the office of public hygiene for vaginal examinations and the office of public security for policing measures, therefore making clear the "continuous weaving of state-controlled hygiene and police repression" (Antonini and Buscarini 1985, 83) in the regulation of prostitution. The Cavour Regulation was followed in 1888 by the Crispi Regulation and in 1891 by the Nicotera Law, which both tightened the sanitary protocol for prostitutes through stricter surveillance of their activities. The Nicotera Law was the regulation in place at the time of the Italian colonization of Libya (Gibson 2000, 54).

The highly surveillance-based regulatory system of prostitution was transposed from the metropole to the colonies with even stricter criteria. As soon as the Italians set foot in Massawa, Eritrea, in 1885, the army command issued the first regulation of prostitution for the area, and only a few months later, they instituted the first *sifilicomio* in the colony.<sup>26</sup> Under this regulation, prostitutes were under the Italian military police control and segregated in specific areas. As in Italy, they had to undergo biweekly medical examinations, and if found sick, they were confined in the hospitals for venereal diseases. The Italian colonial government issued

---

<sup>26</sup> ASMAI, Vol. I, b.120. f. 2, *Disposizioni di massima emanate da questo Comando circa la prescrizione per il servizio della prostituzione nei presidi di Massaua, Moncullo e Otumlo comunicate a tutte le autorità civili e militari Egiziane ed Italiane in Massaua*, no specific date (between January and June 1885).

new prostitution regulations in Italian Eastern Africa in 1892, 1903, 1916, and 1925, but the surveillance and public hygiene regulations remained fundamentally the same (Barrera 2004, 160). Similar events applied to Libya, with the authorities regulating soldiers' access to local prostitutes in 1913 (Salerno 1922). However, compared to the Eastern African context and the British or French ones in other parts of Northern Africa, fewer archival sources on such regulations make a thorough analysis of prostitution in Libya somewhat more challenging.

### *Tracing Prostitution in Tripoli in the Writings of an Italian Medical Official*

The primary source on the legal and societal context of prostitution in Libya is the essay *La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli* [The policing of morals in Tripoli], published in 1922 by Luigi Salerno, an Italian doctor deployed in Tripoli as Commissioner of Public Security at the time of the redaction of the piece. Although loaded with racist, sexist, and classist stereotypes regarding prostitutes' habits and geographically limited to Tripoli, Salerno's essay represents a valuable source of Italian authorities' views on prostitution and how they regulated it. At the same time, it provides a valuable albeit biased sketch of the identities and the lives of the Tripoline prostitutes as he saw them.

Most indigenous prostitutes are lower-class and lead miserable lives in brothels frequented by soldiers and the poor. Muslim prostitutes are not very attractive due to their lack of hygiene, being vicious smokers, and often leaning to drunkenness. Although there are undoubtedly very young and attractive women among them, they soon become generally repulsive due to the lack of assiduous personal care, the filth in which they live, and the alcoholism that often brutalizes them (Salerno 1922, 51).

In this description, Salerno sees Libyan women's "youth and attractiveness" as irremediably ruined by the poverty and lack of morals that purportedly identify them. While Salerno limits

his description of state-run-brothels prostitutes to their physical appearance, he depicts clandestine prostitutes from a different, and possibly even more racist, level:

Among clandestine prostitutes, filthy and ugly women predominate even more. The ugliness of their faces, made worse even more precociously by the life they lead and the environment in which they dwell, makes these women especially repulsive. [...] Only the unsatisfied sexual appetite of drunk and perverted men can justify the mating with such women, who frequently couple their misfortunes with venereal disease. Homeless girls, also dirty and ragged, are not attractive either, but these have at least the sad advantage of their young age, which is an incentive for those who let themselves be carried not only by their sexual appetite but also by an irrepressible lust (Salerno 1922, 52).

Here, the racist and classist explanation of clandestine prostitutes' appearance coalesces with an assumption of moral and physical inferiority. Salerno's notions on the connection between the prostitutes' appearance and their inferior moral standing seem to be informed by the then-popular theories promulgated by physician and anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, particularly in his work *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (2004), originally published in 1893. Among clandestine prostitutes, a large percentage of young girls, in Salerno's view, used their young age to appeal to the perverted working-class sexuality of Italian soldiers. Salerno's classist views on prostitution include both clandestine prostitutes and Italian soldiers: only a working-class, perverted soldier can conceive of having a sexual relationship with racialized, marginalized subjects such as the Tripoline illegal prostitutes. In his view, they both are a perfect example of the deviance represented by racial mixture in the colony.

Salerno gives a more technical description of prostitution in Tripoli, describing the brothels active in the city during the Italian invasion. He states that in 1911 there were only twenty-four brothels in Tripoli, which was "insufficient for the number of soldiers that populated the city

at that time. Impatient soldiers seeking available women were always crowding the narrow streets of the city center so that the families that inhabited those alleys had to write 'honest house' on their doors to avoid the invasion" (Salerno 1922, 45). Salerno sees the soldiers' sexuality as unrestrained and dangerous. He refers to them as "those people," as if they inhabited a separated space in the colony from the ruling elites of which he is part. Salerno then describes the brothels, which in his words were "rickety, filthy, smelly and dark" (Salerno 1922, 46), and that for these reasons had to be demolished and then rebuilt by the city administration in 1913. After that, the number of brothels in the city remained at around twenty units, of which fifteen hosted Libyan Arab women while the remaining five hosted either Jewish Libyan or French women.<sup>27</sup>

Notably, no brothel in the city regularly hosted Italian prostitutes, as, since 1911, the Italian government forbade them from working in the Libyan colonies. However, such prohibition did not stop them from reaching the Libyan shores in disguise (Salerno mentions that they would pose as theater artists, singers, or housemaids) to look for work in Tripoli (Salerno 1922, 54). The colony's government forced the repatriation of all Italian clandestine prostitutes in 1920, given that Italian prostitutes "certainly did not ask for a citizenship certificate to their customers." Salerno ironically points out that Italian prostitutes had no problem accepting Libyan customers, creating a gender-specific mixed intimacy unacceptable for the colonizers. While Italian soldiers having sexual relationships with Libyan women was tolerated, sexual relationships between Italian prostitutes and Libyan men were entirely unacceptable for Italian colonial administrators. This attitude points to the crucial role played by Italian women in the construction and enforcement of colonial boundaries erected to defend Italians' whiteness in the colony, as I discuss more in-depth in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

---

<sup>27</sup> Salerno mentions that the only European prostitutes present in Libya were French, and that they had been working in Tripoli before the arrival of the Italians. Their number decreased during the Italian colonization of the territory (Salerno 1922, 114).

As "the number of European prostitutes in the city's brothels was never higher than fifteen" (Salerno 1922, 55), the Italian administration indirectly endorsed mixed sexual relationships between Italian soldiers and Libyan prostitutes. The colonial administrators' rhetoric and practice differed as they had been for concubinage. While the administrators stated that "the government intended that Europeans should not come into contact with indigenous prostitutes and that indigenous men should not come into contact with European prostitutes" (Salerno 1922, 55), they all but guaranteed racially unsegregated prostitution by not allowing Italian prostitutes in a city that counted only fifteen European prostitutes. Salerno acknowledges the unfeasibility of the government's intentions: "the unbalance between the number of Italian soldiers and European women made the application of the principle [of racial segregation] absurd" (Salerno 1922, 55). This incoherent approach was a stark difference from French Algeria, where "prostitution increasingly became a racially segregated system, reflecting the polarization of colonial society," and where "after 1854, registered European prostitutes generally outnumbered registered indigenous prostitutes" (Dunne 1994, 27). Libya was still heavily militarized, and Italian women posed too high a risk to racial hierarchies in an unstable colony. For the Italian administration, colonial prostitution was a necessary evil to condemn rhetorically and condone in practice.

Salerno proceeds to provide the reader with an outline of the regulations in place at the time. As mentioned, the Nicotera law was the regulation in effect in colonial Libya concerning state-sanctioned prostitution.<sup>28</sup> The law, which in its denomination was aimed at "regulating prostitution in the interest of public order, public health, and good morals," was a return to a more surveillance-based framework after the Crispi law, which, for a short time, abolished mandatory registration for prostitutes under the rhetoric of "giving back freedom to prostitutes"

---

<sup>28</sup> R.D. n. 605, October 27, 1891, referred to as "*Regolamento sul meretricio nell'interesse dell'ordine pubblico, della salute pubblica e del buon costume*".

(Morale 1909, 170).<sup>29</sup> The Nicotera law forced Libyan prostitutes in Libya to be subjected to the constant surveillance of the Italian military police while being examined in a *sifilicomio* to ascertain their health at least three times a week. If prostitutes did not comply with these measures, it was within the military police's powers to shut down the brothel.

As for the *madame*, the Libyan women who managed the brothels, to obtain and keep a license, they had to force the women who worked in their business to follow a set of tight rules. First, the madams had the responsibility to register the women who worked in their brothels by taking them to the police headquarters and by providing, if they were European, a birth certificate to make sure that they were not minors and, if they were Libyan, a doctor's certificate to ascertain their "eligibility" to work (Salerno 1922, 44). Second, the madams had to make sure that the women would not "stand by the door of the brothel to lure customers in," that they would not "attend public events and places, they would not travel in open cars, and that they would not show themselves around after sunset" (Salerno 1922, 44). Last, the madams were responsible for paying for both the medical examinations and the eventual cures for venereal disease, and if they did not follow such regulations, they were stripped of their licenses and even criminally prosecuted (Salerno 1922, 45).

These provisions were oppressive for prostitutes on many different structural levels. First, the provision that forced madams to provide a birth certificate only for European prostitutes while allowing Libyan minors to work in brothels following the sole medical certification of "eligibility" shows a racist differentiation of the measures taken by the Italian administration to prevent minors' exploitation. To justify this notion, Salerno writes that "Arabs, when allowed to be useful in ascertaining the Libyan prostitutes' age due to material impossibility but also to apathy and fatalism, refused to engage the issue" (Salerno 1922, 41-42). Libyans' purported

---

<sup>29</sup> R.D. n. 5332, March 29, 1888.

lack of morality, alongside their dullness and fatalism, is why Salerno thinks it is impossible to enforce the age limit on Libyan prostitutes. Moreover, as argued in studies of other colonial contexts (Essop Sheik 2020, 210), debates on legislation regarding mixed sex in the colonies were marked by "the supposed sexual permissiveness of Native men, and the early sexual maturity and promiscuity of Native and Indian women." Salerno's view of Libyan prostitutes seems to be aligned with this widespread rhetoric. In Salerno's view, the fatalism of Libyan men, as much as Libyan women supposed precocity, justified the colonizers' avoidance of setting an age limit for Libyan prostitutes.

On another note, it seems evident how the city's administration charged the madams and the prostitutes with full responsibility for preventing and containing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. As in any other colonial context and any social context in general, men were never blamed for spreading STDs. This dynamic was true also in Libya, where soldiers, and even more officers, were rarely held accountable in this regard, as testified by the fact that "the only category of men subjected to regular examinations and compulsory treatment for venereal diseases were the lower ranks of the Italian military" (Yeaw 2018a, 72). This assumption was by no means a practice confined to colonial contexts only: women working as prostitutes were almost always considered responsible for spreading venereal disease (Leonardo and Chrisler, 1992). The deeply gendered framing of the responsibility for the public health of the Italian military, with the classist exception of lower-class Italian soldiers, clearly prevented other sources of infection from being identified. Bryder wrote that "if you were female, colored and working class, you were likely to be held responsible for the spread of disease and to be subjected to medical surveillance" (Bryder 1998, 821).

### *Finding Libyan Prostitutes' Agency in the Archives' Silences*

Although Libyan prostitutes were victims of a system of oppression, surveillance, and structural blaming run by the Italians, it would be misleading to think that they did not resist such colonial, patriarchal measures. Even if there are not many traces of their agency in the archive, Libyan prostitutes did resist colonial surveillance with the limited means at their disposal. Salerno mentions that many Libyan prostitutes refused to be subjected to the military police's surveillance and continued their activity clandestinely (Salerno 1922, 59). Some others refused to comply with the health regulations by not showing up to the weekly checks, a form of resistance that often caused them to "spend their days between forced examinations and prison" (Salerno 1922, 61-62).

Studies of prostitution in other colonial contexts confirm that "the data on nineteenth- and twentieth-century prostitution reveal a very different picture from the generalizations about degradation and victimization" (White 2009, 7). For example, Luise White has argued that "prostitutes in Nairobi did not wish to abandon prostitution to join the ranks of respectable society – many did not make that distinction – they wanted to become rich" (White 2009, 225). In the Dutch East Indies colonial context, prostitution provided some women with "relative autonomy and financial independence" (Van der Sterren, Murray and Hull 1997, 210). Philippa Levine argued that in the British Empire, "always vilified as a fertile source of disease and infection, [prostitutes] defied the law as well as the census in their concern to remain anonymous and unlabeled" (Levine 2003, 210).

Libyan prostitutes also attempted to improve their living conditions by defying the Italian administration's surveilling practices. One of the only accounts of Libyan women vis-à-vis the Italian systems of control on prostitution is provided by the Italian military doctor Alberto Denti di Pirajno in his autobiographical chronicle of the years he spent in Libya and Italian

Eastern Africa. While serving as a medic in Tripoli, Denti di Pirajno recounts how he had to check on the sexual health of the city's prostitutes:

I called them in by name. One at a time, they entered, undressed, and mounted the bed, letting fall their sandals one after the other. Before lying down, the more daring among them would blow a kiss in the direction of the speculum in my hand as though to propitiate it. With their savage humor, they called it *zebb el hukûma* – the phallus of the government – of the government which subjected them to this control. (Di Pirajno 1985, 72).

Libyan prostitutes saw their agency circumscribed by discriminatory assumptions about their role in the Tripoline colonial society. Any attempt at using their subaltern position to their advantage could represent an act of "normal resistance" (Scott 1985, 28) or everyday acts of defiance toward forms of power that oppressed them on multiple structural levels. It is essential not to exaggerate or overestimate the space for prostitutes' agency. However, even if coming from extreme poverty and having to dwell in extremely marginalized social fields in the colony, the prostitutes of Tripoli might still have tried to exert that little leverage they had to turn circumstances to their advantage.

In the Italian institutional archives, I could not find sources on Libyan prostitutes' lives and motivations behind the circumstances that led them to sell sex to Italian soldiers. If we rely on sources related to neighboring colonial contexts to Libya, however, we can ascertain that economic needs were the main reason behind Northern African women's choice of prostituting themselves, and it was often not a life choice but a circumstantial expedient to survive the hardships inherent to colonial societies (Dunne 1994; Largueche 1996). Social marginality and economic need might have been the main factors pushing women towards the activity that could give them the most economic leverage in a sexist and racist colonial society. In a colonial society that used their bodies as a commodity for the sexual benefit of the army, Libyan women

might have used the power at their disposal to improve their condition and navigate the racist, classist, and patriarchal structures that oppressed them.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a step toward filling the gaps of scholarly knowledge on concubinage and state-regulated prostitution in colonial Libya, one that directly addresses the top-down regulatory approach of the Italian colonial government and the political motivations that moved it. Very little is known about these topics in the Libyan context, although Deplano's (2017) recent works for the first and Yeaw's (2018a) for the second hint at promising further research avenues. The analyzed sources showed how regulations (or lack thereof) of concubinage and prostitution in the Libyan context were highly indicative of how the two sides of the colonial encounter negotiated power over the private sphere of the colony's population.

The findings of this chapter align the context of the Italian colonization of Libya to how concubinage and prostitution were regulated in Italian Eastern Africa. Far from being a colonial environment where the boundaries between colonizers and colonized were maintained by cultural and religious differences between the two populations, Italian Libya saw multiple phases of regulation of mixture that varied according to shifting political and ideological contexts. The tolerance or prohibition of mixed intimacies followed the political economy of Italian rule in Libya, with the transition from a militarized colonial to a settler colony representing the main watershed for the regulatory treatment of such relationships. Political and ideological shifts notwithstanding, in the sources analyzed in this chapter, the regulation of intimacy proved to be a central factor in the organization of the relationships between the

colonizing state and the local population. While concubinage provided a stable relationship for higher-class Italians during the first years of colonization, it became unsustainable for a colony transitioning toward a settler space. Prostitution, on the other hand, remained an option due to its more significant degree of state control and objectification of the women involved. These relationships and how they were regulated provide a great analytical tool to understand colonial relations and the race, gender, and class axes of power that characterized them.

In this chapter, I outlined how the intimate colonial encounter during the militarized phase of the Italian colonization of Libya mostly involved Italian militaries and Libyan women, creating specific regulatory dynamics. In the next chapter, I depart from this context to dwell on how the transition from militarized space to settler colony changed the management of mixed intimacies in Libya. The reason for this change, I argue, is strictly related to the increase of Italian women in the colony, whose role in the enforcement of racial boundaries brought a profound restructuring of colonial Libyan society.

## **6. Regulating Mixture while Building a Settler-Colonial**

### **City: the Case of Benghazi**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

Cyrenaica is a country of sure agricultural future and Italian settlement [...]. It will contribute to Italy's power in the Mediterranean by helping it become a true manifestation of a civilization spreading and affirming itself as Rome once did. I was thinking of this inevitable future when I placed the first stone of the Cathedral in the land of Benghazi and felt around me the soaring heartbeat of the national population (Teruzzi 1931, 346).

With these words, Fascist general Attilio Teruzzi ended *Cirenaica Verde* [Green Cyrenaica], the memoir of his two years as Governor of Cyrenaica (1926-1928). After two years of fighting against the anti-colonial resistance in the colony's interior, Teruzzi felt confident that the end of the hostilities was near.<sup>1</sup> The rebels were being pushed further and further away from the more fertile and inhabited coastal areas, which, in turn, had allowed a somewhat more consistent trickle of Italian settlers to establish themselves in the Northern African Italian colony. Of course, the days of the *ventimila* (20,000) settlers brought by future Governor Italo Balbo were still some years ahead in the future.<sup>2</sup> However, Teruzzi's military operations had made the colony significantly more stable, making him feel optimistic about Cyrenaica's future

---

<sup>1</sup> The vicissitudes of the war between the Italian colonial army and the Libya resistance are summarized in Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> Italo Balbo, a famous aviator and Blackshirt leader, started a process of mass settler colonization after being nominated Governor in 1934. He famously organized the immigration of 20 000 settlers (*ventimila* in Italian) in a single mass convoy in 1938. For more information on Balbo's stint as governor and colonization plans see Segrè (1990), but also the next chapter of this dissertation.

as a settler colony. Thus, Teruzzi's efforts were the first significant steps into making Cyrenaica a "pacified" colony and the start of a decade-long process of settler colonization.

This chapter focuses on the transition from a militarized space to a settler colony that invested the capital of Cyrenaica, Benghazi, and how this transition modified the Fascist colonial elites' regulatory attitudes toward episodes of mixture. In particular, this chapter looks at how the city's social landscape changes and the arrival of a more significant number of Italian women in the city at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s prompted Italian administrators to police the racial boundaries within the city. The sources analyzed in this chapter show how administrators swiftly dealt with individual cases of Italian women who engaged in intimate relationships with Libyan men while making plans to enforce stricter racial segregation in the city. These policies point to the shifting regulatory framework that invested the colony during the transition to a settler colony and how such a framework contributed to the racist paradigm shift that characterized the Fascist Italian empire in the mid-1930s.

A vast body of literature on mixed intimacies in colonial contexts has focused on relationships between European men and women from colonized territories, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis. As analyzed in previous chapters, the unbalanced gender ratio that characterized most European colonies and the academic interests in citizenship issues, patrilineality, and colonial patriarchal violence have created a research landscape in which this specific gender dynamic in mixed intimate relationships is thoroughly investigated. Since the 1990s, the scope of inquiry on mixture in the colonies has expanded, with postcolonial feminist scholarship recognizing that white women served as "potent symbols of civilization throughout the imperial world" (Perry 1997, 502). Moreover, it has been recognized how they held a liminal place between "upholding racial hierarchies by emblemizing the supposed superiority of white morality" and "threatening to subvert these hierarchies by behaving in ways deemed

inappropriate for their race and gender" by, among other things, "engaging in sexual relations with black men" (Zacek 2009, 333).

Given the recognition of their centrality in enforcing racial boundaries, white women's role in colonial societies and how their presence was socially understood and regulated have been researched in different contexts.<sup>3</sup> Regarding European women's intimate relationships with colonized men, research has focused chiefly on perceived anxieties around the movement of white prostitutes in different colonies and on the broader discourse on the "black peril" that involved most British and French colonies at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars have also looked at mixed intimacies between European women and Arab men in colonial contexts, although the literature on this specific dynamic is somewhat smaller than others. Above all, the research conducted by Brown (1994) on literary representations of mixed relationships between Westerners and Middle Easterners, by Kholoussy (2003) on mixed marriages and identity formation in colonial Egypt, and more recently by Phipps (2021) on mixture in colonial Morocco, are relevant contributions to the field in which this chapter situates itself. In particular, this chapter bridges the mentioned scholarship to the Italian context, focusing on how the Fascist authorities reacted to the possibility of sexual relationships that defied colonial assumptions regarding intimate colonial boundaries. In this way, regulations of mixture in Benghazi are understood as an exertion of colonial, patriarchal state power that affected the individual sexual and affective agency of both Italian women and Libyan men.

Research on Italian women and intimacy in colonial contexts has faced hurdles, and because of this, it is still in an early stage compared to other geographical contexts. As testified by

---

<sup>3</sup> Among others see for example Kennedy (1987), Chaudhuri and Strobel (1992), Gouda (1993), McClintock (1995), Findlay (1999), Bagnall (2002), Haggis (2017), Schettini (2019), and Allen (2020).

<sup>4</sup> On the "white slave trade" see for example Camiscioli (2019); for research on prostitution in colonial contexts see Taraud (2003) and Levine (2003). Academic literature on the "black peril" includes, among others, Hyslop (1995), McCulloch (2000), Anderson (2010).

Sòrgoni (2006, 250-251) in one of the only comprehensive articles on the experiences of Italian women in the Eastern African colonial context, "the Italian case is even poorer [than other contexts] in sources in this regard. It is so both because the Italian women who went to the colony were often not literate and because - unlike other colonial powers - the Italians did not consider it appropriate or relevant to provide any education to their subjects, and the memoirs produced during colonialism are therefore very scarce." Due to this lack of sources on the experiences of working-class Italian women in the colonies, the only first-hand sources are travel diaries of upper-class women, such as countess Petrucci's travel diary analyzed in Chapter 4.

Whereas there is research on Italian women and their intimate encounters with colonized men in the Eastern African context, the Libyan context has been only partly researched.<sup>5</sup> Recent scholarship on gender in colonial Libya has focused on Libyan women and their experiences (Yeaw 2018a; Yeaw and Spadaro, 2020) but not on Italian women and their role in settler-colonial society. For this reason, this chapter aims to be a first step toward filling this gap by analyzing cases of working-class Italian women who engaged in intimate relationships with Libyan men and how the colonial administration reacted to them.

Building on the mentioned academic works on the role of European women in the twentieth-century colonial environment and Fuller's work on urban segregation in colonial Tripoli (2006), this chapter paints a picture of an evolving intimate colonial landscape amid a reorganization of the city's hierarchies along racial and class lines. To the end of assessing the role that mixture and its regulation played in shaping racial and gendered boundaries in a changing colonial environment, this chapter connects instances of expulsions of Italian women who engaged in mixed intimacies to the urban segregation policies that invested the city of Benghazi during the

---

<sup>5</sup> Beyond the mentioned work of Sòrgoni (2006), also Stefani (2004) has researched how gender and race intersected with intimacy and sexuality in the Eastern African context.

same period. The two policies are not necessarily in a cause-and-effect relationship but are two related outcomes of a shifting social environment characterized by an increase of settler presence, which attracted the enforcement of forms of colonial state power to police the city's racial boundaries.

These changes are assessed by analyzing official government sources I collected in Italian state archives. For the women expelled from the colony, archival folders mix the procedural steps that served as their punishment with the complaint and plea letters sent to the government by the women themselves. The variety of voices gives a more rounded view of the exertion of colonial power and its effect on the women involved. Concerning the racial segregation planning of the city, the letters, memoranda, and city plans analyzed here clearly indicate the evolution of colonial power and ideology in the city regarding the regulation of mixture.

The first section of this chapter outlines the ideological framework that encompassed the shift of the Libyan colony from militarized space to a settler colony and the consequences it had on the lives of Italian women who were in intimate relationships with Libyan citizens. The second section adds to the backlash that such couples had to endure the stricter enforcement of the city's racial segregation, detailing how the unique experiences of mixed couples were part of a larger scheme of preservation of the racial purity of Italians in the colony.

## 6.2 Mixture in the City: Racial Boundaries and Gendered Regulation of Public Morality

### *The Dangers of Certain Mixed Intimacies in a Settler-Colonial City*

In the Italian colonies, the Fascist regime asserted the racist ideology that increasingly characterized its nationalist discourses by consolidating the settlers' racial identity through policy and discourse. The regime elevated Italians' awareness and consciousness of their whiteness by racializing colonial subjects in what can be called a colonial "logic of encampment." The "logic of encampment" (Gilroy 2000) identifies the process through which European nations conflated the notions of race, culture, and nation during colonial times into a rigid, material, and symbolic field within which standards of racial and national identity were then built. In conjunction, this discursive *milieu* was deployed in the colonies by creating, via discourse and policy, an identification by contrast, through which Italians were supposed to identify themselves as white and European in opposition to the racialized colonized population.

The imperative to enforce the racial divide for the Fascist administration was relevant for the Eastern African colonial subjects as much as for Libyans, even though the latter dwelled at a higher level in the Italian colonial hierarchies exemplified by their "colonial citizenship" status.<sup>6</sup> Islam was, without a doubt, a primary marker of racialization for the Libyan population, as confirmed by the many institutional sources analyzed throughout this dissertation that identified essentialized cultural and religious differences between the settler and colonized population as racially constituted in the process of racialization of the Libyan population. The

---

<sup>6</sup> For the political reason of creating a complacent class of Libyan notables and also out of coherence with the ideology of the "Mediterranean race," the Italian Liberal and Fascist administrations conceded different kinds of colonial citizenship to the Libyan population. An analysis of the various legal statuses of Libyans during Italian colonialism and how they were used instrumentally by the colonizers can be found on Chapter 7.

colonial administrations had to actively protect colonial boundaries erected to circumscribe such essentialized differences, with mixed intimacies being one of the biggest threats to the fragile colonial hierarchies that organized the evolving social landscape of Benghazi. The defense of essentializing categories that defined and elevated Italians in opposition to the Libyan population had to be more closely monitored in a social space characterized by increasing proximity between colonizers and colonized.

With regards to mixture and the colonial racial divide, the colonial city "functioned as a means of and reason for social control and segregation" (Beverley 2011), embodying the space in which colonial regulations concerning "the logic of encampment" found their most immediate practical application. This ideological framework became highly relevant when the colony transitioned from military space to a settler colony. Mixed intimacies such as concubinage, which Italian military administrators had condoned for twenty years to provide sex, domestic help, and comfort to the army officers deployed in the colony, became a clear threat to racial hierarchies in the colony once the Fascist government allowed and fostered the presence of Italian women in a "pacified" colony (Spadaro 2010, 42). This shift revolutionized Benghazi's social landscape, which saw its Italian settler population grow exponentially in only a few years, transforming it from a military outpost town into a proper colonial city.

Until the second half of the 1920s, Benghazi had been a small and secondary city in the Italian colonization plans for the region. Its relative importance resided only in its role as the leading military outpost in the "pacification" war against the Sanusi-led resistance. For most of those years, Benghazi had no more than 16,000 inhabitants, composed mainly of Arabs and Berbers and a small Jewish minority. The Italian citizens present in the city were mainly soldiers, colonial administrators, clergy, and civil servants, usually unaccompanied by their families.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> As stated in R.D. n. 983, May 1, 1924, troops and officers were not allowed to bring their families to the colony. For more information on this policy, see chapter two of this dissertation.

The small number of Italian settlers never pushed colonial administrators to seriously reshape the city's geography in the first stages of the Italian colonization of the region, although administrators designed the first master plan for the city in 1914. Even if racial segregation existed as an undeveloped idea (Di Paola 2010, 196), this first plan never really enforced any actual segregation, as later master plans explicitly stated the necessity to segregate the city inhabitants.

This situation did not change for the entire duration of the war, including the first years of Fascist rule after its power seizure in 1922. Everything changed with the war's end and the demographic colonization process that followed it. Between 1927 and 1939, Benghazi's population grew sharply, reaching 66,200 inhabitants, of whom 20,628 were Italian civilians and the rest military.<sup>8</sup> This change was due to the arrival of settler families, which, in turn, meant a higher number of Italian women in the colony. This evolving context strengthened the Benghazi colonial administrators' urgency to enforce a stricter policing of racial boundaries in the city.

In order to provide a qualitative picture of the social and regulatory shift that invested the city of Benghazi, this section analyzes two stories of mixture found in the Italian colonial archives, involving two Italian women and two Libyan men. Both women were recent inhabitants of Benghazi who ended up on the radar of Fascist administrators because of their intimate involvement with local men. Their stories ended with the women's expulsion from the colony in both cases. The specific gender and class dynamics of these stories and the reactions they aroused in the city leaders show how the arrival of more significant numbers of European women in every colonial context was typically followed by attempts to draw stricter racial boundaries in colonial society by the colonial ruling class.

---

<sup>8</sup> Touring Club Italiano, "Censimento 1939, Libia", in *Le vie d'Italia - Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano*. Milano, 1939.

In contrast to this regulatory stance, there is evidence that relationships of concubinage (known as *mabruchismo* in colonial Libya) between Italian military officers and Libyan women were tolerated for the longer part of the Italian presence in the region. As analyzed at length in Chapter 5, Vice-Governor of Cyrenaica General Rodolfo Graziani acknowledged the existence of the phenomenon of *mabruchismo* in the colony in 1932, deprecating the tolerant attitude that previous administrators had had towards it.<sup>9</sup> Graziani, however, was adamant in expressing the need to stop the practice and enforce stricter racial boundaries in the colony.

This change in attitude can be understood as a direct result of the ideological shift – which I discuss more in-depth in Chapter 7 - that gradually invested the Fascist party and moved it toward more racist and segregationist policies that found their culmination with the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936. Simultaneously, as I will soon show, it can also be partly attributed to the material changes that started affecting the colony, with an increase in Italian women, resulting in a swifter regulation of all kinds of mixed intimacies discussed in Chapter 5. Therefore, by looking specifically at Italian women in mixed relationships, it is possible to analyze the increase of racial anxiety caused by their presence and locate the different gender dynamics that played a role in constructing the Italian racial identity in the colony. What follows is an analysis that situates individual instances of mixed intimacy within the regulatory framework of colonial racial boundaries in Benghazi. Accordingly, the assessment of such regulations conveys a depiction of colonial life in the city that puts the spatialized relations of its inhabitants at the forefront.

---

<sup>9</sup> General Rodolfo Graziani condemned the practice of mixed concubinage in a circular letter to all officers stationed in Cyrenaica. As a reminder to the reader, Graziani mentioned that “this ‘mabruchismo’ is one of the plagues that infested the colony. There are still some traces of it, or better still some nostalgia of it, however, I intend to eradicate it.” ACS, Fondo Rodolfo Graziani, b. 11. *Circolare* 2935, May 17, 1932.

*Italian Women and Libyan Men: Public Morality or Racial Purity?*

The two cases of mixed relationships analyzed in this chapter are preserved in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive within folders containing papers on Libyan subjects' expulsions from the colony. The period of the ordeals experienced by the two women ranged from 1927 until 1933. The colony's government and the Ministry of Colonies handled the collected cases individually, relying on discretionary power and police surveillance of the women involved. In both cases, the colonial police arbitrarily expelled and repatriated the women, basing their actions on accusations of prostitution and immorality and never accompanying the decision with juridical references.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to know the consequences for the Libyan men who had intimate relationships with these women. As Phipps writes regarding research on Moroccan men and French women (2021, 13), the archives "do not contain traces of Muslim men, meaning that we can only speculate on the masculine motivations behind these affairs." Various emotions, including affection, or what Fanon called the "satisfaction of being the master of a European woman" (1968, 52), might have moved Libyan men to engage in relationships that crossed racial boundaries in the colonial city. However, the lack of sources directs this chapter's scope away from the experiences of Libyan men and toward the object of the anxieties of the colonial administrations: Italian women. The two cases are outlined in this section using the colonial administrators' official reports and rulings and the women's reactions.

The first folder mentions Francesca, who moved to Benghazi in January 1927 with her mother, husband, and five children.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after they arrived in the city, for reasons related to the husband's violence, the couple filed a request for consensual separation with the Benghazi regional tribunal and obtained it relatively quickly. As a separated woman in the colonial

---

<sup>10</sup> The folder related to the case of "Francesca" can be found in ASMAI Vol. II, b. 150.27.

environment, Francesca was instantly subjected to strict surveillance by the colonial police, which resulted in a report sent to the government of Cyrenaica on August 25, 1928. The report stated that:

Francesca, legally separated from her husband, conducts a notoriously marital life with Abdel. She gives herself to Italian, Jewish, and indigenous men in his absence. Some time ago, Francesca went to a shoe store where the mentioned Abdel bought her a present, and she was heard explicitly stating her affection for him. In another instance, she accompanied Abdel to a friend's wedding. [...] Many metropolitans who happened to be there strongly criticized her behavior on this occasion. [...] This report is intended to depict Francesca's moral conduct, who deserves some punishment.<sup>11</sup>

Some Italian settlers saw Francesca behaving "immorally" in the company of a local man, Abdel, which caused the police to suspect that she might be engaged in a "marital relationship" with him. The interest of nearby Italian settlers in Francesca and Abdel represents a critical mechanism of informal social control that can be defined as an indirect regulation of non-acceptable intimacies. Italian settlers knew that what Francesca was doing was unacceptable behavior for an Italian female settler and, therefore, "strongly criticized her." This dynamic seems consistent with what was argued by Barrera (2002, 335) for the Eritrean context, where "the white community shared a common colonial ethos, and by and large settlers did not need the colonial government - or even less the central government from Rome - to tell them how to run their sexual lives without endangering racial hierarchies."

Besides the policing of Francesca's behavior by other settler community members, it is also relevant to underline how the police accused her of prostituting herself to other men. This language resonates with the early-twentieth-century widespread assumption that white women

---

<sup>11</sup> ASMAI, Vol. II, b. 150.27, *divisione autonoma dei carabinieri di Bengasi, report n. 124/55/III*, August 25, 1928

who had sexual relationships with racialized men had to be either sexually deviant or prostitutes. As Lucy Bland (2005, 36) wrote regarding miscegenation in Britain in the interwar period:

The press and the authorities had difficulty explaining why there were white women prepared to act in a manner 'repugnant to all our finer instincts.' The racist assumption that darker races were physically attracted to the fairer, but not vice versa, was a given to many. The press sought to understand the enigma by declaring such women 'loose,' 'of a low type,' or 'of a certain class,' that is, prostitutes or akin to such. The nineteenth-century claim that prostitutes were atavistic and on a par with 'primitive' races may also have implicitly informed their judgment: the women were simply attracted to their 'own kind.'

As Francesca started an intimate relationship with Abdel, the police immediately connected her behavior to prostitution which was - as said earlier - forbidden for Italian women in Libya and, therefore, worthy of punishment. Given the damning report provided by the police, the government unequivocally ruled in favor of the woman's swift expulsion from the city.

Given the report provided by the police on the moral conduct of Francesca, the undersigned Vice-Governor learned that the woman in question had behaved immorally for a metropolitan citizen, as she is engaged in a marital relationship with the native Abdel. She did not even have the decency to hide her affair from the public. [...] This government rules that the abovementioned Francesca, *for reasons related to prestige and morality* [my emphasis], shall be swiftly expelled from the colony and repatriated to her metropolitan city of origin.<sup>12</sup>

The sources make clear that as soon as Francesca was seen in the company of a Libyan man in public, she raised suspicions of immorality and the colonial government accused her of endangering the nation's prestige. The mentions of prestige and morality should be understood here as a mere will to enforce public order and proper morality in the city by punishing a woman

---

<sup>12</sup> ASMAI, b. 150.27. *Governo della Cirenaica, protocollo n. 4032*, May 10, 1929.

guilty of adultery rather than specific anxiety regarding the violation of racial boundaries through the intimate encounter. However, when colonial powers resorted to the language of morality and prestige when addressing European women and their intimate relationship with colonized men, it was always done to demarcate racial boundaries. As Stoler argued (1989, 644), "those concerned with issues of racial survival and racial purity invoked moral arguments about the national duty of French, Dutch, British, and Belgian colonial women to stay at home." The same seems to apply here to the government of Cyrenaica. As shown in Chapter 5, morality was never invoked in the first years of the Italian presence in Libya for cases of *mabruchismo* involving Italian men and Libyan women. While the Italian population was low in numbers and comprised mainly of military males, racial purity was not in danger, and therefore issues of morality were not raised. As the colony transitioned to a settler-colonial space with more women, the biopolitical stakes of maintaining colonial boundaries became more pressing.

When Cyrenaica started transitioning to a settler colony and the number of Italian women increased, morality and prestige became a primary concern. As in the case of *madamato* in Eritrea (Barrera 2002), it can be argued that concubinage arrangements were tolerated as one of many means to penetrate the colony (McClintock 1995, 233) when male militaries almost totally comprised the settler population. Everything changed with the demographic colonization of the colony and the arrival of Italian women. Beidelman (1982, 13) argued that "European women created a new and less flexible domestic colonialism exhibiting concern with the sexual accessibility and vulnerability of women, and with corresponding notions about the need for spatial and social segregation."

Desperate to come back to her property in Benghazi to retrieve her belongings and possibly to reunite with Abdel secretly, Francesca wrote a letter to the colony's government in May 1929:

As I separated from my husband because of his violent behavior, following the authorization of the local authority of Public Security, I have been able to rent a room out in my house to sustain

my and my family's livelihoods. Moreover, I would also wash and iron the clothes of my clients and help some local doctors as a nurse. As those doctors can confirm, among the tenants of my rooms, there was Abdel, captain of a troop of Libyan *askari* [the battalions comprised solely by soldiers belonging to colonized populations that for the Italian army]. The presence of this person began slanderous persecution towards me, and I was accused of having an illicit relationship with that man. Upon learning of such slanders, the police obtained a paid-off testimony, which resulted in my expulsion from the city under immorality imputations. [...] I would like to know what motivated the decision that prompted my expulsion, which resulted in me losing all my property and belongings. I am convinced that I would be able to confute these accusations and demonstrate the iniquity of the colony's government if compared to the one of Rome. I declare that these accusations are groundless and hope His Excellency the Governor will hear my remarks.<sup>13</sup>

Francesca addresses the colony's government in firm terms, denouncing the iniquity of their decision and defending her innocence. Moreover, she counters the accusation of prostitution moved against her by underlining how she busies herself with numerous jobs that provide her with an income. By countering each point of the police's accusations, Francesca proclaims her innocence and declares her right to build a life for herself and her family. Her defiant attitude and behavior did not resonate well with the city's and colony's administrators, who deemed her not fit for life in the colony. Francesca's appeal was rejected, with a dismissal of the content and form of the complaint as void and irrelevant. She and her children were sent back to their hometown in Italy.

While no law prohibited mixed relationships in Cyrenaica by the time of the woman's expulsion, Francesca talks of being accused of having an "illicit relationship." Although this characterization of the relationship could refer to the fact that it was not sanctioned by official marriage, the fact that it involved an Italian woman and a Libyan man was a danger not only

---

<sup>13</sup> ASMAI, b. 150.27. *Lettera a S. Ecc. il Ministro delle Colonie*. May 1927.

to morality but also to racial prestige and, therefore, a danger to both the patriarchal and colonial power of the Italian government. Given the language used by the Italian authorities, the decision to expel Francesca can be seen as part of a changing regulatory context related to the constitution of Libya as a settler colony that also went on to include the spatial segregation policies that will be analyzed in the next section of this chapter.

The second instance of an Italian woman who defied the standards of "morality," or rather racial purity that characterized colonial Benghazi, is the one of Gabriella.<sup>14</sup> She first arrived in 1928 with four children to join her husband, who had moved to the colony in 1926. Two years after her arrival, her presence started arousing suspicions in Benghazi's colonial police ranks, as testified by this 1933 document, written by the Vice-Governor of Cyrenaica Rodolfo Graziani himself:

The aforementioned metropolitan citizen adopted a scandalous behavior as she engaged in an intimate relationship with the Arab Muhammad, a driver, with whom she was even seen strolling around in a carriage through the streets of this city. An investigation started, but seeing that trouble was brewing, the woman fled the colony with her children in February 1930, leaving her husband behind. In November of the same year, she reappeared in the city, and even if the police warned her about adopting a better moral standard, she started seeing Muhammad again. They were the cause of great concern for the city administration as Gabriella and Muhammad exploded in fits of jealousy on more than one occasion, mainly since Muhammad had chosen an Arab mistress alongside her. The police intervention was necessary, and the husband of Gabriella was consequentially reprimanded and warned that if he did not restrain his wife, she would be expelled from the city. Only then did Gabriella's husband suggest that she depart immediately.

---

<sup>14</sup> The folder related to the case of "Gabriella" can be found in the ASMAI, b. 150.27.

Given all the outlined circumstances, this government suggests that the Ministry of Colonies never allows the woman back into the colony again.<sup>15</sup>

One week before Graziani sent this report to General Emilio De Bono, the Italian Minister of Colonies, the same Ministry had received a letter from Gabriella, an event that prompted the Ministry to ask for information on the woman. Unlike Francesca, Gabriella does not deny the accusations of being involved in an intimate relationship with Muhammad. However, she begs the Minister to overrule Graziani's decision to ban her from the colony for life, as she swears that she will never fall back to such immoral behavior. She says that everything is now "forgiven and forgotten" and that she would put "the strongest effort into keeping a restrained demeanor and avoiding any accident that could interfere with the domestic peace."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the folder on Gabriella does not contain any additional information on the outcome of her request, leaving a gap in the complete assessment of her case and the authorities' reaction to her pleas.

As in Francesca's case, Gabriella was deemed guilty of defying racial boundaries in the colony by showing herself in public in the company of a Libyan man, and the issue of morality and prestige is brought forward as cause for concern. Once again, the reliance on the language of "morality" when discussing the role of women in colonial environments is a recurring discursive tool used by Fascist administrators to stigmatize episodes of mixture. Stoler (2002, 81) argued that "the focus on moral unity joined the imagining of European colonial communities and metropolitan, national entities in fundamental ways. Both visions embraced a moral rearmament, centering on the domestic domain and the family as sites in which state authority could be secured or irreparably undermined." In constructing a normative standard of Italian whiteness in its colonies, Fascism relied heavily on creating sexual boundaries and the

---

<sup>15</sup>ASMAI, Vol. II, b. 150.27. *Report n. 65074, from Cyrenaica's Vice Governor Rodolfo Graziani to the Ministry of Colonies*, June 29, 1933.

<sup>16</sup> ASMAI, Vol. II, b. 150.27. *Letter to Minister De Bono*, June 22, 1933.

demarcation of racially segregated spaces by imposing a "moral imperative" along gender lines to reassert an ethnically defined, patriarchal national and cultural identity. In this process, women were invested by patriarchal power structures to establish clear boundaries between the racialized Other and the European Self.

Before they were even allowed in the colonies, women played a central role in developing Fascist notions regarding Italians' national identity in the metropole. Italian women were the link that connected Fascism's ambivalence regarding modernity and tradition. As testified by the historiography on Italian Fascism and gender (De Grazia 1993; Gori 2004; Willson 2002, 2007), women embodied the contradictory stance of the regime regarding gender politics, as it strived to frame Italian society as a modern European power while maintaining the traditional social order, particularly in the private sphere. Women were central to Fascism's demographic policy, and as such, their primary social role was to be traditional wives and mothers.

With the regime's 1930s turn toward racist ideology and eugenic understanding of race, Italian women's role became even more central in ensuring that the Italian race increased in numbers to "defend the race" on the global imperial world stage.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the ideal Fascist woman was supposed to combine her total devotion to her role in the family with the strenuous defense of Fascism's ideals and interests in all its conjugations. This understanding of women's role in the regime in metropolitan Italy meant that Italian women were held to an even higher standard as bearers of Italy's morality and racial integrity in the colonies. As written by Spadaro in her work on women in Italian imperial discourse, "the opening of colonial horizons to women became an opportunity to harden gender differences, imposing a model of femininity centered on the reproductive tasks of white women, making women ideal guardians of racially pure families" (Spadaro 2010, 29). Gabriella's and Francesca's stories insert themselves within

---

<sup>17</sup> Mussolini himself, in the famous "Discorso dell'ascensione" in 1927 spoke of the need for a "demographic whip" that would allow the Italian race to keep up in numbers with the other European powers.

this framework and testify to the policing their bodies were subjected to due to their perceived role in the colonies as bearers of morality and guardians of racial purity.

In both analyzed cases, it is evident that Italian women were subjected to strict control of their movements within the city, as the colonial police were able to identify their breach of racial boundaries and "moral standards" in a matter of months from their arrival. The policing exerted over the bodies of white women in Benghazi was a recurrent form of patriarchal control that was common in most colonial environments. In English Rhodesia, for example, white women were not allowed to leave their homes or white enclaves, even though no "incident" of mixture was ever reported (Gartrell 1984, 168). Moreover, English colonial administrators warned European women in Kenya about the dangers of staying home and farming their lands alone (Kennedy 1987). In these cases, as in many others, control over white women in colonial contexts was instrumental in defending the racial boundaries between the settler and the colonized populations.

Moreover, mixed intimacies involving white women were a source of particular concern because such relationships "did not follow established patterns of European male sexual domination of 'colonized' peoples" (Phipps 2021, 17). As in the case of Gabriella's husband, European white masculinity was inherently threatened and humiliated by the sexual agency of white women that engaged in intimate relationships with racialized men. By engaging in sexual relationships with men that belonged to an Other, racialized population, Gabriella and Francesca actively "betrayed" the settler community and "humiliated" white masculinity.

The intimate relationships shown in this section reinforce the notion that "the imperial agenda shaped gender ideology and practice for both colonizers and colonized" (Chaudhuri and Strobel 1992, 4). Moreover, juxtaposed to the analysis of intimacies discussed in Chapter 5, they indicate that specific instances of mixture were considered more dangerous than others. Mixture was a primary cause of concern for the Fascist administrators of the city only when

"European identity and supremacy were thought to be vulnerable" (Stoler 2002, 51). Benghazi was never spatially segregated when Italian men, primarily soldiers, comprised most of the settler population.

The cases of Francesca and Gabriella were dealt with by the city's Fascist administrators swiftly on an individual level by expelling women who were found guilty of "immorality." The following section draws on the structural policy response that invested Benghazi at the dawn of the transition from a militarized space to a settler-colonial society. Since some Italian women defied colonial expectations of the woman's role as the defender of racial purity, their vicissitudes may be part of the same context that brought colonial administrators to react to instances of "promiscuity" on a regulatory level. Consequently, the next section will analyze how the city government planned to organize Benghazi following the swelling numbers of Italian settlers arriving in the city.

### **6.3 Plans of Racial Segregation in Benghazi**

#### *Fears of Racial "Promiscuity" Within a Class-Divided City*

The Fascist administrators had to respond to the dangers that relationships between Italian women and local men could pose to perceived ideas of public morality and racial purity. In this section, I suggest that the master plans for the city of Benghazi can be seen as part of the same policy framework as the regulation of mixture in the city: namely, the city enforcement of racial purity in the colony. Benghazi was the epicenter of the demographic colonization of Cyrenaica, and as the main colonial city in the region, it represented the core of the new settler society while simultaneously being the frontier between the Italian and Cyrenaican populations.

Michel Foucault (1984, 241-242) wrote that "the model of the whole city became the matrix for the regulation of the whole state [...] One can understand the city as a metaphor or symbol for the territory and how to govern it." Foucault's analysis applies with particular emphasis to colonial cities and the colonial state, particularly in cities transitioning to a settler-dominated space. In this regard, Edmonds (2010, 131) wrote that settler-colonial cities "were developing urban frontiers, equally charged and often-violent contact zones of racialized spatial contestations. Such urbanizing frontiers were mosaic-like, mercurial, transcultural and, importantly, intimate and gendered."

The configurations of colonial state power in such urbanizing frontiers found a primary object of regulation in the relations between settlers and colonized populations, particularly if intimate. The development of settler-colonial cities such as 1930s Benghazi into racially segregated spaces reflected colonial anxieties about preventing mixed intimacies, particularly if involving white women. According to Edmonds (2010, 7), in the settler-colonial city, "bodies and spaces were rapidly reconfigured, and racial partitions were amplified in the colonial landscape." Given the configuration of colonial power, the regulation of Benghazi's social spaces is understood in this chapter as directly correlated with the regulation of the intimate colonial encounter and how city administrators framed it in the 1930s.

The Italian colonial state's urgency to enforce stricter control over the separation of the "indigenous" from the newly arrived Italian settlers during the city's transition toward a settler space appears particularly evident from the 1932 master plan for the extension of the city:

Since it is necessary to avoid too great of an expense for the Municipal administration, it is necessary to circumscribe the construction of infrastructure to the Italian quarters, as the indigenous habits do not make it necessary to implement new ones in the native quarters. [...]  
The newly arrived Italian settlers need to be encouraged to build their property in the assigned lots and abandon the indigenous neighborhoods they have too often dwelled, creating reproachful

promiscuity with the indigenous element. To this end, we have tried to make clear that this new masterplan attempts to separate, as strictly as possible, the indigenous part of the city from the one that is or should be inhabited by the metropolitans.<sup>18</sup>

First, we can see that the redactors of the report mention the need to build infrastructure solely in the Italian quarters, as the municipality has to contain costs and “the indigenous habits do not make it necessary to implement new ones in the native's quarters.” This reasoning hints at a racializing logic behind the urban planning for the city, with the “natives” not needing improvements for the spaces they inhabit due to “their habits.” Moreover, it shows how Italians, due to the start of the demographic colonization plans, had initiated a claim to space for the spatial expansion of the settler community. As argued by Njoh (2009, 304), “the physical and spatial structure of the colonial towns, especially the European districts, was developed to do more than achieve the widely acknowledged objective of ensuring the comfort of Europeans in the colonial territories.” The racial segregation of the city went hand in hand with the amelioration of the settler areas of the city to claim its space as inherently belonging to the “civilized” settlers and not the racialized Libyans.



Figure 6. Piazza Cagni (now known as Maydan sl-Shajara), in the settler portion of Benghazi, 1935.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> ACS, MAI, b. 114, f. 2: *Relazione sul nuovo piano regolatore della città di Bengasi*, p.6, Giugno 1932.

<sup>19</sup> Piazza Cagni during colonial rule in Benghazi (now known as Maydan sl-Shajara). Source: Italian colonial postcard owned by the author.

On another relevant note, the "reproachful promiscuity" that the colonial administrators refer to seems extremely important to the urban development that the Fascist political elites envisioned for Benghazi. On more than one occasion, they reinforced the absolute need to keep the new Italian settlers separated from the "indigenous element." The importance of this excerpt is twofold. On the one hand, it informs us that, as the stories of Francesca and Gabriella testify, Italians had already mixed in Arab neighborhoods, disproving the notion that "the Arab population itself was very isolated" (Pergher 2017, 197). On the other hand, it shows the Fascist administrators' increasing anxiety regarding the racial promiscuity that the physical proximity between colonizers and colonized could lead to.

In the case of the planned segregation of Tripoli, Mia Fuller states that "the planners themselves affirmed that segregating Tripoli was impossible, barring costly interventions" (Fuller 2006, 171). Benghazi's history seems to diverge from Tripoli's on this issue, as city planners and colonial administrators never mentioned such endeavor's unfeasibility in the documents still preserved in the Italian Central State Archive. The difference between the two cities' colonial administrators' hopes for a stark racial demarcation seems primarily historical. As Tripoli and the region around it had had a history mostly devoid of fighting for over twenty years, the city had seen a more significant and gradual influx of Italian settlers throughout the Italian colonization of Libya, and its inhabitants had not been subjected to spatial segregation until late in the colonial domination. On the other hand, Benghazi had had a primarily military Italian male population confined to its bases and only a few civilians that did not cause too much concern, with the bulk of the Italian settler presence having arrived in the city after 1932.

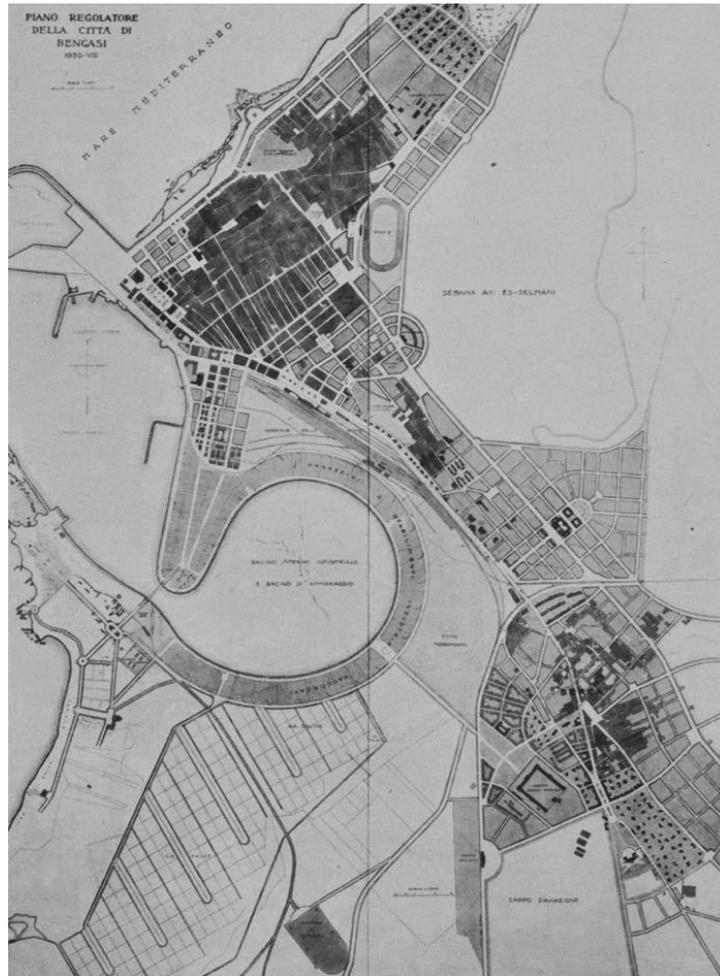


Figure 7. Master Plan for the city of Benghazi drawn by Fascist administrators and highlighting the different zonings of the city, 1930.<sup>20</sup>

These differences notwithstanding, the firm desire of Benghazi's city planners to enforce strict spatial segregation between metropolitan citizens and colonial subjects did not have a swift and efficient outcome. Much like in Tripoli, the political and physical distancing was not consequential, and what was planned often did not have satisfactory material outcomes. The report that the city architects Alpagò, Novello, and Cabiati wrote in 1935 as a comment on the updated version of the urban master plan that was to be published that same year seems to confirm this hypothesis:

The necessity of the strictest separation between the metropolitan and indigenous neighborhoods, keeping the latter as intact as possible, made us assess the demarcation lines proposed in 1932. It

<sup>20</sup> ACS, MAI, b. 114, f. 2, *Piano regolatore della città di Bengasi*, 1930.

appears that since the first master plan never had actual legal effectiveness, such lines do not correspond anymore to the reality of the city. The margins of the indigenous neighborhoods, especially the ones in the old city center, have been eroded by the new metropolitan settlements, so a large portion of the southwestern area of the city should now be considered as belonging to the metropolitan quarters.<sup>21</sup>

The real issue that the Fascist administration encountered for the city of Benghazi was that they sought to create a clear demarcation along racial lines in a short time. In contrast, the city's inhabitants, both Libyan locals and Italian settlers, tended to dwell in different parts of the city along class lines. Much like in Tripoli's "oases of ambiguity" that Mia Fuller describes as the "clusters of available labor dispersed throughout the city" (Fuller 2006, 174), Benghazi's liminal neighborhoods between the segregated areas were inhabited by a significant number of lower-class Cyrenaicans and Italians. The plans for the demographic colonization of Libya had brought several working-class Italian settlers to the coast of Cyrenaica that soon became involved in the class-based social segregation of the city. As in the case of the French administration of Rabat (Abu-Lughod 1980), the government of Benghazi appeared to be backhandedly segregating Cyrenaicans through economic barriers within the urban environment. Proof of this is the previously quoted master plan drafted in 1932: "It is not excluded that in the new metropolitan neighborhoods, wealthy natives could eventually move in, particularly if they show to be willing to adhere to our lifestyle."<sup>22</sup> By accepting only a few wealthy "natives" in the metropolitan areas, colonial administrators excluded those who did not comply with these socio-economic criteria, which was the vast majority of the Libyan population of the city. The class-based, racial segregation of the city was a significant factor in shaping colonial Benghazi. Even before the publication of the first city master plans, the wealthier Libyan

---

<sup>21</sup> ACS, MAI, b. 11, *Municipio di Bengasi, Piano Regolatore, relazione degli architetti Alpago, Novello e Cabiati*, 1935.

<sup>22</sup> ACS, MAI, b. 114, f. 2: *Relazione sul nuovo piano regolatore della città di Bengasi*, p.6, June 1932.

inhabitants of Benghazi were already included in the metropolitan administrators' neighborhood. This inclusion indicates a disruption of the racial segregationist discourse concerning the region's cities. This normative framework does not entail that class was a more significant segregation factor within the city than race. However, it does signify the intersectional character of the assertion of colonial power within the city. As Anthony King wrote, "the colonial city is that urban area in the colonial society most typically characterized by the physical segregation of its ethnic, social and cultural component groups, which resulted from the process of colonialism" (King 1976, 17). This notion implies that the planned segregation between colonizers and colonized was deployed in the social reality of the city in a way that discursively underlined the settler/native divide but that, in its material realization, also implied a class-based logic. This class-based, racialized segregation of the city created areas and spaces where Italians and Libyans belonging to lower social status could intermingle and articulate a complex social reality proper to colonial Benghazi.

#### *Fascism's Racist Shift and the Totalitarian Enforcement of Segregation*

The "promiscuity" that characterized the city's lower-class neighborhoods concerned Benghazi's urban planners and administrators, as shown by the quoted report written by the city architects, but also by the subsequent relation on the new master plan drafted in 1935 by the General Inspector of the Public Infrastructure office of the city:

There is no doubt that considering its position, the triangular neighborhood between Corso Italia, Via Tripoli, and Via Aghib is part of the center of the metropolitan city. For this reason, it is inadmissible to tolerate the promiscuity that exists there at the moment. Except for the buildings on Corso Italia, the rest of the neighborhood is constituted by old Arab houses inhabited by

Italians, in which metropolitans often welcome, in deplorable promiscuity, the indigenous element.<sup>23</sup>

Once again, colonial administrators spell out the undeniable need to separate the city's different neighborhoods along the settler/Libyan axis. They do so by stating their preoccupation with cases of "deplorable promiscuity" that resulted in unsegregated colonial life, which was in clear breach of Fascist discourses over the role of the empire in the construction of Italians' racial consciousness. Moreover, the emphasis on the cases of metropolitans "welcoming the indigenous element" within their homes appears to give significance to the administrators' particular anxiety about the possibility of intimate interactions between Libyans and Italians. Unsurprisingly, when the Italian police spotted both Francesca and Gabriella in the company of their Libyan lovers, it was in that "triangular neighborhood" described by the General Inspector, justifying the administrators' anxiety regarding the racial "promiscuity" of the area. Thus, up until the mid-1930s, it is evident that Fascist colonial administrators responded to the beginning of the demographic colonization of Cyrenaica with a series of planned segregation master plans for the city of Benghazi. They intended to interfere with mass-scale "racial promiscuity" and intimate interactions between metropolitans and colonial subjects. In 1934, a single colony named Libya was created out of the two colonies, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, thanks to the efforts of Governor Italo Balbo. The unification of the colony was the first step in the plan of "provincialization" of Libya to make it an internal province of metropolitan Italy for geopolitical and demographic reasons.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the Fascist regime was embracing a more racist ideology that framed the Italian people no more as "Mediterranean" but as "Aryan." This shift, which coincided with the Italian empire's declaration and the subsequent promulgation of racist policies in both the colonies and the metropole (De Napoli

---

<sup>23</sup> ACS, MAI, b. 114, *Parere sul nuovo piano regolatore di Bengasi*, 1935.

<sup>24</sup> For an analysis of Balbo's "provincialization," or territorial annexation, plan, see Chapter 7.

2012, 110), influenced the enforcement and policing of colonial boundaries and took it toward a more segregationist approach. We see at this point a tighter totalitarian grip on the enforcement of racist legislation and racial segregation throughout the Italian empire. The promulgation of the anti-miscegenation decrees of 1937, 1938, and 1939, as much as the urban segregation policies approved in Italian Eastern Africa in 1937, clearly indicate how the regime tightened its regulatory grip on the issue of racial purity in the empire. Benghazi, as much as other cities and towns in Libya, was no exception.<sup>25</sup>

During Balbo's stint as governor, with the "racist shift" of the regime well underway, the colonial administration began to relocate Cyrenaicans from the fertile Jebel hills to the concentration camps in the south of the colony to speed up the transformation of the colonial environment into a settler one, a process in which the local population had no part.<sup>26</sup> As Balbo said in 1937, "the entire area along the coast must be transformed into an Italian zone, in which the Arabs will be steadily reduced to an unimportant minority, by gradually moving them towards the interior of the colony."<sup>27</sup> The resettlement of the inhabitants of the Jebel to concentration camps, the spatial segregation in the city, and the enforcement of strict racial boundaries became more effective, and the totalitarian organization of the empire became more efficient than ever. In the second half of the 1930s, "segregationist theory and practice had begun to mirror each other" (Fuller 2006, 177).

---

<sup>25</sup> The segregation policies enacted by the Fascist government in the Italian colonial territories are discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of the forceful relocation of the Cyrenaicans from the fertile regions of the Jebel to the concentration camps in the southern desertic regions of the colony, see Cresti (1996) and Di Sante (2017).

<sup>27</sup> Archivio Storico Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale (hereafter ASINPS), Carte Colonizzazione Libica (hereafter CCL) b. 129, 1937.



Figure 8. *The Soluk concentration camp, 200 kilometers southeast of Benghazi, 1932.*<sup>28</sup>

The increase of effectiveness in the practical development of planned racial segregation in the city of Benghazi is made evident by the different documents, reports, and notes on the new master plan published in 1938. Most of the documents drafted during these years mention the necessity to maintain strict boundaries between Libyans and settlers, but they mention this need as if it had already been met. Particularly telling is the note written by the Head of the Cabinet for the city planning of Benghazi, who mentions the future need to "study a way to remove the few remaining indigenous zones that are currently delimited by green areas, in order to carry out the last remnants of our policy of decontamination."<sup>29</sup> In this quote, the explicit reference to a practice of "decontamination" in the process of urban segregation emphasizes the conflation of racial purity with public health and of racial otherness with dirtiness that characterized Fascist Italy during the 1930s. Lombardi-Diop (2013, 178-179) states that "the connection between the protection of race and health prophylaxis pervaded many aspects of Italy's racial culture of the mid-1930s." It is also relevant to note that the Head of the Cabinet explicitly refers to one of the "few remaining indigenous zones" already bordered by green

---

<sup>28</sup> ASMAI, Vol V (materiale recuperato al nord), b.5. *Foto campi indigeni Cirenaica*, 1932.

<sup>29</sup> ACS, MAI, b. 114, *Piano Regolatore e di Ampliamento di Bengasi*, nota 40931, December 22, 1938.

areas to increase physical separation. While this implies that the city may have been racially segregated, it does not mean that the Fascist administrators of Benghazi managed to create a wholly segregated city. Instead, it testifies to the shift in approach to segregating the urban colonial environment, one that aligned itself to the mass resettlement of Libyans into concentration camps and the progressive increase of exclusion of Libyans from the colonial society through the proclamation of Libya as an Italian province (Pergher 2017, 194).

## **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter described the regulatory shift in the city of Benghazi as Cyrenaica transitioned from a militarized space to a settler colony. The analysis of this colonial policy change has pointed to the colony's gender-specific organization of racial boundaries. Moreover, this chapter has shown the relationship between the ideological shift that characterized Fascism in the mid-1930s and how it influenced the social organization of Benghazi. The regulation of mixture provided the chapter's analytical framework with a looking glass suited to understanding anxieties related to racial difference and gender roles in a colonial environment that was changing from an ideological as much as material standpoint.

The analysis conveyed in this chapter showed that Italian Libya was a context in which the intimate colonial encounter was no rarer than in other settings. As in other colonial contexts, white women's intimate relationships with racialized men in the colony posed a threat to established colonial hierarchies organized according to race and gender structures. Moreover, by crossing established boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized, women like Francesca and Gabriella undermined the very nature of patriarchal colonial power. While

racially unsegregated prostitution was officially endorsed and concubinage between Italian officers and Libyan women was tolerated for the first twenty years of the Italian presence in Libya as necessary practices to consolidate colonial power in the region, the opposite gender dynamic in a settler-colonial context posed an existential threat to the very same power structuration.

Furthermore, it needs to be underlined that the documented cases of white women involved in mixed intimacies in Libya were close to insignificant in number. Regarding a city of close to 70,000 inhabitants, only two folders of the same kind discussed in this chapter are preserved in the Italian archives. Such a small number might point to the irrelevance of these cases in a colonial city that mostly abided by racial segregation standards. However, the strong reaction of the city's ruling class underlines the centrality that these few cases embodied for the colonizing society. The swift expulsion of the women is a testament to their centrality in colonial society and their role as ramparts of the increasingly racially defined national character of Italians. For these reasons, their involvement in cases of mixture was unacceptable for a regime that was steadfastly moving towards a complete racial characterization of the Italian national character.

As Fascism's inched closer to a racist and segregationist social organization of the metropole and the colonies, mixture posed a tangible threat to the construction of Italian whiteness in the context where it mattered the most: the empire. The threat that mixture posed to Fascism's racial consciousness construction project is also visible in the increasing segregationist master plans for Benghazi. The many public works for the settler areas of the city that the regime mentioned in the master plans, as much as the mentioned need to increase urban segregation, were part of the same transformation of the city landscape into an Italian space made for settlers. As Fascism proceeded in its grand plan of demographic colonization, the urban spaces

and how they were organized gradually became a testament to the message that Italians and their racial superiority had laid claim to the colonial space as their own.

In the next chapter, I describe the next phase in the transformation of Italian Libya into a settler colony operated by the Fascist regime. To do so, I discuss the debates within the Italian Fascist Party regarding the annexation of Libya into the Italian body politic and the legal status that the Libyan population was supposed to have within this new juridical context. As I will show through the analysis of archival records, the issues of juridical belonging intersected with the regulation of mixed marriages amid the ideological restructuring of the Fascist regime toward a “biologically” racist framing of Italianness.

## **7. Fascism's debate on the Legal Status of Libyans and the Issue of Mixed Marriages (1938-1939)**

### **7.1 Introduction**

One of the fundamental dimensions of colonial state-building was the development of different legal frameworks to govern colonized populations, as they closely linked to the creation of boundaries between settlers and local populations.<sup>1</sup> In particular, regimes of colonial citizenship and subjecthood directly related to colonial states' power over the definition of the kinds of intimacies that strengthened or weakened the separation between settler and colonized populations. According to Loos (2006, 27), “[colonial] administrations defined and interpreted racial belonging, citizenship, and the kinds of intimate practices that solidified or challenged the line between rulers and ruled.” Italian colonial administrations also used the colonial populations' legal status to enforce regimes of belonging and segregation that impacted the intimate sphere of the colonial societies under their jurisdiction. Italian colonial states deployed different citizenship and subjecthood regimes depending on various political and ideological factors at different times and places. While colonial administrations kept a clear legal separation between Italian citizens and colonized subjects throughout Italy's colonial rule over its Eastern African territories, it adopted an evolving, at times contradictory strategy for Libya. Between 1911 and 1943, the legal status of Libyans changed from a straightforward

---

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is a slightly modified version of my article "A 'catastrophic consequence': Fascism's debate on the legal status of Libyans and the issue of mixed marriages (1938–1939)," published in *Postcolonial Studies* 25, no. 4 (2022): 527-544.

subjecthood to one of the most inclusive forms of citizenship in global colonial history, only to evolve again into a form of “colonial citizenship” that placed Libyans into a juridical grey area.

Academic scholarship has looked at the questions of citizenship and race in the context of the Italian colonization of Libya and how colonial dynamics of belonging were interlinked with broader Italian, European, and supranational discourses on citizenship. Ahmida's work (2005) focused on the roles of class, region, tribe, and state formation in conditioning Libyans' role in colonial society, including questions of belonging. Labanca's comprehensive monograph (2002) is also worth mentioning as a sweeping view of the contradictions between colonial discourse and practice on the management of colonial societies. On the specific matters of citizenship, subjecthood, and belonging in Italian Libya, the works of Renucci (2005), De Donno (2006), and Bassi (2018) successfully mapped all the contradictions and inconsistencies that characterized the legal status of Libyans under Italian colonial rule. More recently, a rich body of studies on the connections between colonial regulations of belonging and contemporary citizenship regimes in the Italian context has emerged. Hom's monograph (2019) linked Libyans' treatment during colonialism to modern echoes of racism and legal exclusion that characterize modern-day Italy. Pesarini and Tintori (2020) have “critically considered to what extent ‘race’ is at the core of the legislative and discursive foundation of Italian national identity and citizenship.” Finally, Ballinger's recent book (2020) conveyed a comprehensive, critical analysis of colonial citizenship in Libya and its relation to other citizenship regimes in the Italian empire while connecting them to broader discourses and practices that inform legal frameworks remaining in place today.

Building on the vast literature on issues of citizenship and race in the context of Italian Libya, this chapter aims to connect the legal status of the Libyan population with one of the primary signifiers of the production of colonial categories: the regulation of mixed marriages or the

aspiration to segregate the population along racial lines in order to avoid it. The regulatory framework of intimate practices such as concubinage and prostitution has been assessed in Chapter 5. The sources analyzed in this chapter revolve around marriages between Italians and Libyans. More specifically, this chapter aims to assess whether the possibility of marriage between Italian settlers and Libyans played a role in developing a new legal system status for Libyans in the 1930s.

As the Fascist administration managed to repress the anti-colonial resistance that had destabilized the colonial state's control over the territory since the first landing of Italian troops in Tripoli, the colony's government faced the issue of creating a coherent political regime for Libya. Governor Italo Balbo pushed for the demographic colonization of the territory while coupling it with a juridical annexation of the colony within the metropolitan body politic. In his view, these two policies would allow the development of a long-term plan of "Italianization" of the colony, with the Italian settlers progressively outnumbering the already decimated Libyan population. When it reached its final legislative stages, Balbo's plan had to face the opposition of Mussolini and other party leaders that steered the ideology of Fascism towards a more racist connotation of the Italian national identity after the birth of the Italian empire in 1936. The debate that emerged around Balbo's plan was decidedly framed around the need to keep the Libyan and settler populations segregated to avoid mixed marriages since the Fascist government was fostering the racial consciousness of Italian citizens in the colonies with particular zeal.

This chapter details the disagreement between Governor Balbo and two top party officials of the Ministry of Italian Africa, who conveyed the position of the Fascist party leadership about the need for racial segregation in the empire. It does so by assessing the relevance of Fascism's anxiety towards mixed marriages in the development of a demographic colonization plan for Libya and the legal status of the people who inhabited it. As the new settler colony was

characterized by complex race and class relations between Libyans and working-class Italian settlers, the regime discursively and juridically constructed a clear racial divide between the Italian and local populations.

The debate's analysis relies on historical sources from the Italian institutional archives that preserved the voices of the protagonists. The concessions and removals of rights to the Libyan population are then analyzed vis-à-vis the late racist ideology of the Fascist regime to assess the role that concern mixed marriages had in the debate about the juridical status of Libyans in the second half of the 1930s.

## **7.2 Connecting the Legal Status of Libyans to the Regulation of Mixed Marriages**

### *Overview of the Juridical Status of Libyans Under Italian Rule*

For the Italian Fascist government, the colonial enterprise in Africa and the demographic colonization of the conquered territories represented one of the cornerstones of the process of construction of a racially defined Italian national identity. Within this process, the Italian settlers played a crucial role, as they embodied the quintessential rampart of the “interior frontier” (Balibar 1990) erected to defend the essence of the nation. Thus, the difference in legal status between the colonized populations and the Italian settlers was, at times, essential in creating an ideological and material basis for managing different racial groups’ boundaries in colonial settings. Since the stint as governor of Giuseppe Salvago Raggi in 1906-1907 (De Napoli, 2021), liberal and Fascist colonial administrations imposed a subjecthood status on the

Eritrean and Somalian colonized populations. The short-lived anti-colonial resistance (Barrera 2002, 35), coupled with a history of racial segregation that dated back to the early years of Liberal Italian colonization (Barrera 2002, 52), allowed the Fascist administration to enforce and police racial boundaries to defend Italians' racial consciousness (Del Boca 1999, 117). After the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936 and the birth of the Italian empire, the colonial administration of the region set out to defend the “interior frontier” in Eastern Africa with particular emphasis as the racist rhetoric of the regime intensified.

Concerning the regions of modern-day Libya, the socio-legal context proved to be very different from its Eastern African counterpart. Due to political reasons related to quelling anti-colonial resistance and organizing racial hierarchies within the empire, some political rights were conceded to the colonized population, only to be revoked and granted again. Until 1936, Italians and Libyans were connected ideologically by the “Mediterranean” racial theory mentioned earlier; as such, laws were enacted to elevate their legal status above Eritrean and Somalian colonial subjects. This ideological framework was consistent in allowing the promulgation of Italian-Aegean citizenship for the colonized populations inhabiting the Italian colonies in the Italian islands of the Aegean in 1925 (Ballinger 2020, 140).<sup>2</sup> Until the racist shift of 1936 that attributed a new “Aryan” racial characterization to the Italian population, colonial boundaries in Libya were not strictly framed on phenotypical racial terms but racialized differences interpreted in cultural and religious terms. This discursive framework, in turn, allowed the promulgation of somewhat inclusive citizenship forms for the Libyan population, at least until Fascism's rise to power.

After the R.D. n. 315 of April 6, 1913, which characterized Tripolitanian and Cyrenaican “natives” as colonial subjects, the liberal Italian government promulgated two decrees that

---

<sup>2</sup> The Italian islands of the Aegean are that group of Dodecanese islands that were occupied by Italy during the Italo-Turkish War in 1912 and formally annexed through the Treaty of Lausanne from 1923 until 1947.

detailed an inclusive framework for the juridical status of Libyans.<sup>3</sup> These decrees, called *Statuti* [Charters] or *Legge Fondamentale per la Tripolitania e la Cirenaica* [Fundamental Law for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica], formulated a “colonial citizenship for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica” that entailed civil and political rights for the Libyan population. Among the rights conceded to Libyans, there was the “warranty of individual freedom,” the “inviolability of domicile and property,” the “warranty of religious freedom,” and the “right to refuse military service.” Most notably, the laws allowed the inhabitants of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica to request and obtain a form of Italian “semi-citizenship” that gave them some rights while still not allowing them to emigrate to the metropole, somewhat replicating the French assimilationist policy in Algeria (Blévis 2003, Cooper 2014). To some extent, the decrees of 1919 even surpassed French assimilationist policies, conceding total freedom of the press, assembly, and representation.<sup>4</sup> Libyans, who had been categorized as colonial subjects since 1911, were now considered colonial citizens (Bassi 2018, 227).

The concession of the colonial citizenship status to Libyans was a choice of rupture taken by Italian administrators: Eritrean or Somalian colonial subjects never benefited from such status, nor did Ethiopians after 1936. This choice points to a clear hierarchy between colonies, with Libyans enjoying a middle ground between the citizenship status of metropolitan Italians and the subjecthood status of Eritreans, Somalians, and Ethiopians. Again, such categorization showed the link between the rights awarded to a colonized population and its ascribed “level of civilization.” Fascism maintained this hierarchical structure of nominal juridical status among the different Italian colonies, even if it worked to gradually curtail the rights given by the 1919 *Statuti* at the same time. After Fascists took power in 1922, the explicit goal of the

---

<sup>3</sup> R.D. n. 931, June 1, 1919, *che approva le norme fondamentali per l'assetto della Tripolitania*, in *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del Regno d'Italia*, 1919, vol. 2, p. 1844-1852 and R.D. n. 2401 October 31, 1919, *che approva le norme fondamentali per l'assetto della Cirenaica*, *ivi*, vol. 6.1, p. 5702-5712.

<sup>4</sup> Art. 4, R.D. n. 2401, October 31, 1919.

new colonial administration became to “remove all the rights related to the colonial citizenship approved in 1919 and isolate the native within their personal juridical status” (Renucci 2005, 319). In the Fascist administrators’ view, the great mistake made by the Italian Liberal government in 1919 was having conceded too many rights and not having shown the iron fist of colonizing powers, leading the Libyans to believe that they were dealing with a weak colonial state. As a result, the Libyan resistance to the Italian administration was still very much alive, if not emboldened.

The Fascist colonial administration officially overturned the 1919 *Statuti* in 1927 with a completely new legal framework. The new Organic Law for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica abolished all local parliaments and forms of representation.<sup>5</sup> Equality before the law between metropolitan and colonial citizens was substituted by equality among colonial citizens.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the law canceled all civil and political rights, except the right to property and freedom of movement within the colony. Although the Fascist colonial administration continued to use the nominal “Italian-Libyan citizenship” status for the local population, it practically equated the juridical status of Libyans to the subjecthood of their Eastern African counterparts. The law rescinded all powers from local institutions, with the explicit intention of underlining the metropolitan authoritarian control over its colonies.<sup>7</sup>

In an evident totalitarian restructuring of the regime’s colonial policy, the Fascist administration coupled the cutting back of rights previously awarded to Libyans with the brutal repression of the anti-colonial resistance (Vandewalle 2006, 30). As Gabriele Bassi wrote, “Fascism underwent this shift to have complete freedom of action over its colonial subjects, depriving them of all political rights and creating a starker juridical separation between

---

<sup>5</sup> R.D. n. 1013, June 26, 1927.

<sup>6</sup> Art. 35, R.D. n. 1013, June 26, 1927. This decree would put the Libyan ‘colonial citizens’ on a middle level between the Italian metropolitan citizens and the Eastern African colonial subjects.

<sup>7</sup> The annulment of the representative and autonomy rights conceded by the 1919 laws were the focal point of the new Fascist decree.

metropolitan settlers and Libyan natives” (Bassi 2018, 237). The plan to create a more robust division between Italian settlers and Libyans, especially from a juridical standpoint, shows the intention of the Fascist elites to characterize Italian identity in racial terms. In conclusion, while liberal and Fascist governments attempted to repress the resistance to colonial rule, the liberal government opted for a concession of rights to mitigate the local resistance. In contrast, the Fascist administration chose to remove the citizenship status with the clear intent of isolating Libyans within the colony while coupling it with the relentless repression of the resistance and use of illegal chemical gas (Salerno 2005).

#### *Mixed Intimacies and the Legal Status of Libyans*

When the Libyan resistance was “pacified” in 1932, the Fascist government started to govern a more stabilized colonial society, and the debate over the juridical status of the Libyan population became entangled with other ideological motives. A particularly significant reason for reorganizing racial boundaries between settlers and Libyans was the growing concern regarding mixed intimacies that characterized the Fascist ruling class in the 1930s (Ceci 2019, 28). Mixed marriages and “relationships of a marital nature” posed a particularly relevant threat to the segregationist Fascist colonial administration, as they entailed respectively either a legalized or a possibly sentimental characterization of the relationship between Italian settlers and Libyans. The expression “relationship of a marital nature” is a direct referral to the language used by Italian legislators to refer to the many different kinds of concubinage and cohabitation that sprouted in the Italian colonies since the first arrival of Italian colonizers in Eritrea in the 1880s. Notably, as mentioned further in the chapter, the expression was used in the two laws aimed at curbing mixed relationships in Eastern Africa and the whole empire.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> These decrees are the mentioned R.D. April 19, 1937, n. 880 and R.D. June 29, 1939, n. 1004. See Chapter 3 for reference.

Conversely, as argued in Chapter 5, prostitution was never racially segregated in Italian Libya, and it was often encouraged as a better option than more stable and less objectified relationships such as marriage and concubinage. Relationships characterized by sentimental attachment, such as forms of cohabitation or even legalized unions like marriage, went against the post-1936 Fascist ideology of racial superiority of the Italians vis-à-vis the racialized colonial Other (De Napoli, 2009, 78).

The use of the regulation of mixed intimacies as an analytical category to identify the Fascist political reasoning behind the engineering of the legal status of the colonized population is new to the Libyan context. While for the Eritrean context, we have in-depth analyses of mixed relationships in both liberal and Fascist eras (Barrera 2002) and the relations between the regulation of mixture and the juridical discourse (Sòrgoni 1998), the same cannot be said for colonial Libya. Regarding the Libyan context, scholars have analyzed how the liberal and Fascist administrations instrumentally used the legal status of Libyans for their political projects (Renucci 2005; Bassi 2018) and how social relations between Italians and Libyans unfolded (Cresti 1996, 2011). However, the role of mixed marriages in the debate concerning the latter's juridical inclusion has hardly been thoroughly analyzed. As mentioned in the introduction, studies on the Italian empire have, at times, downplayed the relevance of mixed intimacies in colonial Libya altogether. This chapter challenges these assumptions by detailing how mixed marriages and their regulation were central factors that shaped the discussion on the future developments of Libya as a settler colony.

After the conquest of Ethiopia and the declaration of the birth of the empire in 1936, Fascism opted for a well-documented “racist shift” in their colonial policies (De Donno 2006; De Napoli 2012). This shift entailed segregationist policies consequential to the new “Aryan paradigm” regarding the racial identity of Italians. The “Aryan” racial paradigm rested on the purported superiority of the Italian race over its colonial subjects and the need to keep the two social

groups segregated to maintain racial purity. Within this discursive context, in 1934, the Fascist administration unified the two colonies, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, under the name “Italian Libya,” directed by the colony's Governor, Italo Balbo. While Fascist elites in Rome were positing racial segregation as one of the pillars of the new Italian racially-conscious society, Balbo pushed for a plan that put this ideological shift at risk. Mixed marriages stood at the crossroads of these two views, their role in shaping colonial categories and power relations being pivotal for the legal status of the colony and its inhabitants.

### **7.3 Settler Colonialism and a New Racial Paradigm: Italo Balbo's Plan**

#### *Governor Balbo and the Administrative Restructuring of the Colony*

Much has been written about Italo Balbo, a devoted Fascist official, celebrity aviator, and at times source of envy and resentment from Mussolini himself.<sup>9</sup> Balbo saw his appointment as governor as a sort of “exile” carried out by Mussolini, who increasingly saw the Ferrarese *gerarca* [“member of hierarchy” in Italian, a higher officer of the Italian Fascist Party] as a political rival due to his exploits as a transatlantic aviator and reformer of the Italian Air Force. Upon arriving in the colony, Balbo said to his predecessor, “Dear Badoglio, your sorrow at leaving is nothing compared to mine at arriving” (De Luna 1974, 129). Disregarding his reserves and complaints, Balbo put himself to work with the energy that made him famous and undertook a series of programs to develop the now “pacified” colony from an economic and administrative standpoint. His first goal was to unify Tripolitania and Cyrenaica under a single

---

<sup>9</sup> The biography written by Segrè (1990) stands out as the most complete historical account of Balbo’s life as a Fascist politician, aviator and colonial governor.

administrative entity. This endeavor had been deemed premature by his predecessors, but Balbo “overwhelmed [Mussolini] with a flow of words” (Segrè 1990, 294), and the dictator gave in to Balbo by issuing R.D. n. 2012 of December 3, 1934, officially creating Italian Libya. Balbo saw the unification of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica as the “first step towards the annexation of Libya as an Italian province.”<sup>10</sup> The creation of Italian Libya, coupled with a new ad-hoc legal system that allowed some Libyan men to obtain metropolitan citizenship, seemed to elevate Libyans' legal status as quasi-metropolitan citizens.<sup>11</sup> Italian propaganda would eventually refer to this new colonial era that started in 1934 and peaked with the juridical annexation of Libya as “the period that saw the most significant concessions in favor of Libyans” (Ambrosini 1940, 311). The political annexation of Libya proposed by Balbo, or the “provincialization” plan, was complementary to the grand scheme of demographic colonization that the governor himself had started through the institution of the *Ente per la colonizzazione della Libia* [Authority for the Colonization of Libya] and that has been described by Segrè (1974; 1990) and Ertola (2016). Balbo saw the significant number of arrivals of Italian settlers, along with a *de jure* assimilationist policy concerning the status of Libyans, as the best way to “Italianize” the region and make it the empire's stronghold in Northern Africa. By the beginning of the Second World War, over 100,000 Italians settled in Libya through the work of the *Ente* (Metz 1990).

A letter from Balbo himself, sent in 1938 to the undersecretary of the Ministry of Italian Africa, Attilio Teruzzi, spoke of formally granting Italian citizenship to the Libyan population as a necessary step towards the greater annexation scheme of the region.

With the proclamation of the Libyan territories as provinces of the Kingdom, and with the speeding up and enlargement of our plan of mass demographic colonization of the region, it is

---

<sup>10</sup> ASMAI, Fondo Affari Politici (1934-1955), b. 5, f. 30, *Ordinamento politico amministrativo per la Libia: Telegramma di Balbo a Lessona*, February 20, 1936.

<sup>11</sup> *Ordinamento organico per l'amministrazione della Libia*, R.D n.2012, December 3, 1931.

necessary, as the only possible solution to the problem [of the juridical status of the natives], to approve the concession of full citizenship in the terms that were anticipated by myself during the last *Gran Consiglio* [the Colonial Council of Fascism]. [...] Once we have made Libya an Italian region, we can only make the Arabs citizens or slaves. Nobody, I imagine, intends to enslave them; hence, it is necessary to make them full citizens.<sup>12</sup>

The colonial army had just repressed the rebellion, and the first mass-scale arrival of settler colonialism began creating a new colonial environment in which power relations needed some form of stabilization. The Fascist colonial administrators fought with every means available against the contestation of Italian sovereignty by Libyan rebels, including, as mentioned earlier, chemical weapons and the deportation of Libyans to concentration camps in the desert (Del Boca 1998; Salerno 2005).

For these reasons, the process of demographic colonization, as much as Balbo's proposal of annexation, can be seen as a way for the Fascist regime to increase its political grip on the territories. By the end of the “pacification” of the resistance, the Fascist colonial army had decimated the local population through illegal warfare. The vacuum left gave way to the mass of Italian settlers who took control over the region and who, in Balbo's view, were to outnumber Libyans to irrelevance. Although it might seem from his letters that Balbo was endorsing a full inclusion of the Libyans within the metropolitan body politic, he still envisioned a form of colonial control over the region. First of all, Balbo intended to concede the “province” status only to the coastal areas (Tripolitania and Cyrenaica) while maintaining a military-run administration in the southern lands of the colony (Fezzan). Secondly, the more populated coastal areas that were to be granted the status of “province” were still to be ruled by a governor (who happened to be Balbo himself). This provision allowed Balbo to retain the colonial administrative structure and not grant Libya the same status as the metropolitan provinces.

---

<sup>12</sup> ASMAI, Gab., b. 167, *Cittadinanza ai Libici, Letter*, November 21, 1938.

Balbo's plan involving Libya's "provincialization" and the consequent concession of full citizenship to Libyans must be understood as a strategic move to reaffirm Italian sovereignty over the region.

Even if Balbo appeared open to a nominal inclusion of the colonized population within the metropolitan body politic, he never once spoke of equality between the Italian settlers and the Libyan citizens. Several scholars (Wolfe 2006; Morgensen 2011; Veracini 2010) argued that when a colonial power resorts to settler colonialism, it increases the rhetoric of racial difference between settler and colonized populations. This rhetoric creates clear boundaries based on European presumed civilizational and "biological" superiority. In particular, as the envisioned majority of the new settlers in the Libyan colony belonged to lower socio-economic classes, the need to delineate the racial divide between settlers and locals became particularly pressing. In a colonial context where the constructed differences between settlers and colonized could not be delineated in terms of wealth, social status, and color (Casales 2020, 443), the enforcement of strict racial boundaries became essential to the organization of the settler society.

### *Fascism's Racist Shift: Segregation in a Settler Colony*

Once the colonial army had crushed the rebellion, the rhetoric of racial difference inherent to settler colonialism, as much as the enforcement of such inequality in legal and political terms, increased dramatically. Mamdani argues that in the context of settler colonialism,

Direct rule meant the reintegration and domination of natives in the institutional context of semiservile and semicapitalist agrarian relations. For the vast majority of natives, that is, for those uncivilized who were excluded from the rights of citizenship, direct rule signified an unmediated – centralized – despotism (Mamdani 2018, 17).

Even though the hammering *propaganda filomusulmana* [pro-Muslim propaganda] orchestrated by Balbo attempted to convey all the advancements brought by the new regime, it is clear that Fascism was establishing a system of direct rule in which the separation between Italians and Libyans was central. However, despite the explicit instrumental nature of the concessions envisioned by Balbo, a significant portion of the Fascist elites back in Rome were still firmly against any formal equation of the white Italian settler population and the racialized Libyans. The characterization of the Fascist ideal of Italian national identity had reached its peak after 1936, and the colonies represented the frontier where racial boundaries needed to be enforced resolutely. Any blurring of this separation would have entailed many risks, including dangers for the portrayed racial purity inherent to the Fascist idea of the Italian nation.

The pushback against the Libyan colony's proposed “provincialization” was framed along “indispensable” separation lines. However, before analyzing the pushback against Balbo's proposal, it is necessary to briefly examine the political discourse regarding race relations within the colonies after the racist turn of the regime in 1936. As a result of the shift in Fascism's ideological stand, the political discourse regarding the role of the Italian nation in its empire changed. Politicians, intellectuals, and scholars began to conflate the “civilizing mission” with the notion of protecting Italians' racial purity. Within the same year of the declaration of the empire, writer and racial theorist Giulio Cogni published the first book of Italian racist propaganda, *Il Razzismo* (1936), which called for the “defense of our race” and for “the need to bring Rome's light to the world.” Moreover, Cogni argued that the new Fascist, racist ideology was not “a doctrine bound to the politics of only one civilization: it has the universal duty of glorifying the highest values of Indo-European civilization” (Cogni 1937, 5). As De Donno wrote, “during fascism, race ideology and practice, together with the idea of empire, primarily served the purpose of empowering nationalism” (De Donno 2006, 409).

Another particularly telling source on the racist shift that followed the declaration of the empire is a conference report that professor and political writer Angelo Piccioli wrote in 1938. Piccioli, the superintendent for education in Tripolitania in 1922, was a resolute defender of a form of colonial consciousness that underlined the importance of the “civilizing responsibility” of European colonial powers. In this document, written after the “racist shift” of the regime, we can see how the racial characterization of nationalism had taken root in his thought.

Fascism, which gets its most profound meaning in being the most powerful manifestation of the Italian race, with a series of rigorous policies, has proven to give the proper importance to race in the empire. In the lands conquered by the Italians, Italians need to remain as pure as ever: this is a dogma of undeniable evidence. [...] In those nations with a lack of race consciousness, colonization could not have other results than a dangerous decaying of their ethnic values. For these reasons, the policies adopted by the regime after the conquest [of Ethiopia], which prohibit relationships of a marital nature between whites and people of color, will never be lauded enough.<sup>13</sup>

Piccioli directly engages with the many themes of this chapter. Initially, he underlines the centrality of racial consciousness in the construction of Fascist nationalism. On a second note, he refers to the actual implementation in the colonies of such racial consciousness that was the seed of cohesive and Fascist Italian national identity. The decree he refers to is the R.D. n. 880 of 1937, which represents the first explicit policy regarding the prohibition of mixed relationships, and it is unequivocally applied only to the colonies of Italian Eastern Africa.<sup>14</sup> Piccioli applauded the decree as the necessary “political action” that would have strengthened the nation's racial consciousness in the colonies. Indeed, this measure indisputably drew sharp

---

<sup>13</sup> ASMAI, Gab., b. 70, *La razza e l'Impero*, Angelo Piccioli.

<sup>14</sup> R.D. n. 880, April 19, 1937, see Chapter 3 for more details on the contents of the decree.

boundaries between settlers and “natives” in the place where the racialized Other was closest to the “racially conscious” white Fascist Italian: the colony.

As seen in the sources above, the tropes of the “Italian Aryan Race” and “racial consciousness” grew increasingly relevant in the Italian and colonial contexts after 1936.<sup>15</sup> Italians did not belong to the “Mediterranean race” envisioned by anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi anymore, but to the “Aryan race,” albeit still with a “Mediterranean” inflection. It is no surprise that this discursive climate also affected the Libyan context, particularly regarding the debate around Balbo's proposal on the colony's annexation and the juridical inclusion of the Libyan population within the Italian national community. Although the decree that prohibited concubinage in Italian Eastern Africa did not directly address the Libyan context, Balbo's proposal of legal inclusion of the local population provoked concern in the high spheres of the Party. The following section will detail how Fascism's “racist shift” influenced the debate over the concession of full citizenship to Libyans towards notions of racial purity and the related concern regarding the possibility of mixed marriages between Italian settlers and Libyans.

#### **7.4 Fascism's Reaction to Balbo's Plan on the Juridical Inclusion of Libyans**

##### *A Debate at the Core of Italian Fascism's Colonial Policy*

In September 1938, Italo Balbo submitted his annexation bill to the Ministry of Italian Africa. As expected, it collided from the start with Mussolini's new racist paradigm that had found

---

<sup>15</sup> For a complete analysis of the shifts in the racial connotations of the discourse on the Italian national identity and related policies during Fascism, see De Donno (2006).

complete realization with the 1938 racial laws.<sup>16</sup> Party officials in Rome saw it as “one of Balbo's many protests against Mussolini's racist policies,” as “to discriminate against the Jews but not against the Libyans made no sense to the fascist hierarchy” (Segrè 1990, 329). Objections came from all over the Party's leadership, as stated by Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano: “It is easy to recognize a flat contradiction in our racial policy here. The real party men, such as Farinacci, Starace, and Alfieri, do not hesitate to oppose the proposal. Nor do I.”<sup>17</sup> Notably, two high officials of the Ministry of Italian Africa, Martino Moreno and Attilio Teruzzi, bluntly expressed their skepticism toward Balbo's proposal, citing as the main reason against its feasibility the risk of increasing instances of mixed marriages in the colony.

Martino Moreno was the Head of the Department of Political Affairs within the Ministry at the time of Balbo's proposal. A veteran of the Italian colonial administration, Moreno started his career in Tripolitania in 1914 as an Arabic language and culture expert. After having spent twenty years in the colonies, he returned to Rome in 1934, where he moved up in the ranks of the Ministry until he was promoted to director of the Political Affairs Department. Known for his competence and versatility within the administration, Moreno was one of the most zealous supporters of the racist policy of the regime in the colonies (Giorgi 2008, 198). Given his history in the regime's colonial administration, it is not surprising that Moreno fiercely opposed Balbo's bill. In his view, the most relevant reason for his opposition was racial purity and the separation between settlers and Libyans. Moreno's objection directly addressed the issues of anxiety regarding mixed marriages, particularly the ones between Libyan men and Italian women, and the legal boundaries in place to prevent them:

Annexing the Libyan provinces to the metropole would entail full Italian citizenship to the Libyans. This fact, in turn, would involve the danger of Libyans being able to marry Italian

---

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 3 for more information on the Fascist Racial Laws.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Segrè (1990, 329).

women, a fact that would be in direct contrast with Mussolini's directive to avoid any racial promiscuity.<sup>18</sup>

Of particular interest in Moreno's words is the direct referral to the gender dynamic that created the biggest threat to Mussolini's instruction to avoid any racial promiscuity. Moreno does not speak of mixed marriages in general terms but rather marriages between Italian women and Libyan men. As detailed in Chapter 6, Italian women's increase in number following the beginning of the demographic colonization of Libya caused concern for possible mixed relationships with Libyan men. Moreover, Moreno's words point to the fact that white women were considered "the object of male patriarchal authority" (Jones 2003, 198) and that the control over their bodies was one of the pillars of white patriarchal power, particularly in the colonies. Italian women in the colony were instrumental in creating clear boundaries between the racialized Other and the European Self, and the slightest possibility of them being able to "marry out" in the colonial environment was utterly unacceptable.

Moreno refers to this specific racialized gender dynamic as the primary type of marriage that could cause severe fears for the integrity of the nation's racial purity in the colony. Moreno's explicit statement reveals the regime's growing anxiety regarding the swelling numbers of Italian women in the Northern African colony. As shown in Chapter 5, during the anti-colonial resistance (1911-1932), when the Italian population in Libya was almost totally comprised of male soldiers, unsegregated prostitution was endorsed, and both Liberal and Fascist administrations unofficially tolerated concubinage. At the same time, as I will show in Chapter 8, some marriages between Italians and Libyans were officiated by Catholic authorities in the colony before the 1930s. However, the separation between religious and civil marriages, which will also be discussed in the same chapter, did not leave much choice to colonial authorities.

---

<sup>18</sup> ASMAI, Fondo Affari Politici (1934-1955), b. 56, f. 36. *Nota di Moreno per il sottosegretario di Stato in risposta ad corrispondenza antecedente riguardo i confini interni della Libia*. April 1938.

With the stabilization of the colony and the arrival of large numbers of Italian civilian settlers that included women, the Fascist regime pushed for a “moral re-armament” of the Italian settler community to be exerted through the policing of the bodies of white Italian women.

Additionally, given that Moreno had been an expert on colonial matters since the Liberal era, it might be plausible that he did not consider it proper for a government official to constrain men’s rights to marry whomever they desired. As argued by Kundrus (2014, 227), “to lessen conflicts with the white male population is maybe the most important reason why the majority of colonial authorities were very hesitant to implement marriage prohibition.” However, we cannot be sure of Moreno's stance on this issue, given the lack of archival sources on the matter.

The other objection to the proposed plan of full citizenship for Libyans came from the undersecretary in the Ministry of Italian Africa, soon to become Minister himself, Attilio Teruzzi. Teruzzi was the epitome of the Fascist man, a man who was hard to compete with “in terms of ambition and roughness” (Del Boca 1991, 92). He was nominated Governor of Cyrenaica by Mussolini in 1926, given “the regime's necessity to have a trusted and undoubtedly Fascist man in Cyrenaica at a challenging moment,” with anti-colonial resistance rampaging in the colony (Del Boca 1991, 107). He held the position for two years, considerably speeding up the repression of the rebellion. From Teruzzi's notes, we can learn that he was aware of “the inevitable violence of the occupation” and that while he advocated for the start of the social and economic development of the colony, he was convinced of the necessity of basing it on the superiority of the colonizers over the colonized (Giorgi 2008, 190).

Teruzzi wrote a memoir of his time as a Governor titled *Cirenaica Verde* (1931), in which he clarified his stance on the treatment of Libyans. Contrary to what could be inferred from his opinion on the undeniable inferiority of Libyans, Teruzzi stated, “I have always thought that it is opportune to use tolerance toward the indigenous and their intimate feelings toward our rule” (Teruzzi 1931, 48). From these words, it is clear that Teruzzi in 1931 had a nuanced view of

Italian colonial power in Libya, one that acknowledged the complexity of colonial rule while underscoring its centrality “in renovating the Italian consciousness” vis-à-vis the colonial Other (Teruzzi 1931, 15). In Teruzzi's view, colonialism was the primary means to create a racially conscious Italian identity and, simultaneously, a complex and nuanced endeavor whose success rested on enlightened management of the colonized populations' prerogatives.

Fast-forward to 1938, and Teruzzi has thoroughly embraced the Party's racist policy. Contrary to what transpired of his opinion on the Libyan population from the pages of *Cirenaica Verde*, Teruzzi is harshly critical of Balbo and his plan. As “Balbo's major critic” (Segrè 1990, 315), Teruzzi highlights his disapproval of this plan in a memo he wrote from his office in Rome. Granting citizenship to Libyans could have a “catastrophic consequence” besides being in defiance of what the party stood for. More than revealing his shift in attitude and dislike for Balbo, however, Teruzzi's memo is highly telling of the anxieties that the regime felt towards the “promiscuous” legal system Balbo had in mind.

Balbo's proposal says that 'What we will have in Libya will not be a distinction between the dominators and the dominated, but between Catholic Italians and Muslim Italians, both constitutive elements of the powerful Fascist empire.' These words confirm the project's intent to put Semite Arabs and Aryan Italians on the same juridical level [...]. Giving Italian citizenship to Libyans, besides being an act in defiance of the explicit racist ideology of the regime, could also bring catastrophic consequences, first among them the possibility of marriage between Aryans and Semites.<sup>19</sup>

Teruzzi, like Moreno, refers to the “explicit racist ideology” of the regime, which had now fully embraced the “Aryan racist paradigm” with the promulgation of the 1938 racial laws. In Teruzzi's view, the new ideology was in danger of being overlooked if Libyans could enjoy

---

<sup>19</sup> ASMAI, Gab., b. 167, *Nota di Teruzzi per il sottosegretario di Stato in risposta ad corrispondenza*. November 10, 1938.

full citizenship status. As the racial law n.1728 of November 17, 1938, prohibited marriages between Italians and people of other races, Teruzzi was afraid that a juridical inclusion of Libyans within the Italian body politic would have made the enforcement of the law problematic. In his view, the first and most dangerous consequence of such an inclusive act would be the possibility of “marriage between Aryans and Semites.” Interestingly, Teruzzi does not differentiate marriages along gender lines as Moreno did. In this memo, Teruzzi underlines the gravity of the “catastrophic consequence” legally sanctioned racial mixing could bring to Italians' hard-won racial consciousness, disregarding nuances and differentiations related to different gender dynamics.

Teruzzi refers to the breach of the boundaries that protected that “racial consciousness” so central in constructing the white, Fascist Italian Self vis-à-vis the racialized colonial Other that had permeated his thought since the times of *Cirenaica Verde* (1931, 15). Moreover, the referral to “marriages between Aryans and Semites” clarifies that the scope of the prohibition includes both Arab and Jewish populations, the latter counting 30,387 members by the eve of World War II (Roumani 2008, 28). Research conducted on the Jewish people of Libya (De Felice 1978, Roumani 2015) has shown that the 1938 racial laws were not enforced in the colony until after the death of Balbo in 1940. Nevertheless, the memo by Teruzzi shows us how by the end of the 1930s, the Jews of Libya were included in the concern for mixed marriages that pervaded the Fascist elites regarding Italian women in the colony. While in previous memos, the colonial boundary between Italian settlers and Libyans solely referred to the Arab majority, by this point, the defense of the Aryan race from the danger of mixed marriages started to include the increasingly racialized Jewish community as well.

*The Party's Final Stance on Mixed Marriages in Italian Libya*

The words of Moreno and Teruzzi are a product of the previously outlined political discourse on racial purity that had permeated the legislation of Fascist Italy and its colonies since 1936. Both officials refused to envision a progressive inclusion of the Libyan population within the Italian national community, as it would have been against the new Fascist policy and discourse regarding the racial connotations of the Italian nation. The debate over the concession of citizenship to Libyans coincided with the promulgation of the 1937 decree that prohibited cohabiting relationships between Italians and Eastern African colonial subjects. For the first time, this law spelled out the explicit prohibition of mixed marriages and concubinage in the Italian empire. Even if the decree did not specifically mention Libyan colonial “citizens,” as they were formally one step ahead in the colonial hierarchies of the empire, the memos of Moreno and Teruzzi seem to hint at a *de facto* application of the decree in the Libyan territories as well. Although the law was formally applied *de jure* only to Eastern African colonial subjects, there is no complete certainty whether the 1937 prohibition of mixed relationships of a marital nature was *de facto* enforced in Libya. Both legal scholars of the time (Sertoli Salis 1938) and contemporary historians and postcolonial scholars have disagreed over its *de facto* validity in the Northern African colony.<sup>20</sup> However, it is certain that the fear of mixed marriages was not limited to the Eastern African colonies.<sup>21</sup> There, the legal conditions of the colonized population were characterized by subjecthood and, therefore, more directly segregated. As the words of Teruzzi and Moreno clearly show, the “interior frontier” of the Italian race and nation needed protection from risks of mixture at all costs, even for the “more civilized” Libyan

---

<sup>20</sup> Donati, in her *A Political History of National Citizenship* (2013, 191), affirms that the law was extended to Libya in 1939, therefore after Moreno’s memo. Pergher, in her *Mussolini’s Nation-Empire* (2018, 197), states there is little to no research on whether the 1937 law had any effect on Libya.

<sup>21</sup> In the end, the ambiguities were eliminated by the promulgation of the mentioned R.D. 1939, n. 1004, which prohibited any type of relationship of a conjugal nature between metropolitan citizens and “natives” of Italian Africa.

“citizens.” Without a doubt, this provision had priority over the long-term geopolitical project for the region.

Finally, the Italian government issued the bill concerning the “provincialization” of Libya at the beginning of 1939, and the four administrative subdivisions of coastal Libya (Tripoli, Benghazi, Misrata, and Derna) went on to become Italian “provinces,” realizing the plan of Balbo at least in its strictly administrative conjugation.<sup>22</sup> However, given the Fascist Great Council's reluctance to concede a full citizenship status to Libyans, no extension of rights to the local population accompanied the annexation of the territories. The decree created a new “Italian-Libyan citizenship” that maintained the same juridical status for the Libyans as in the 1927 law. With this new decree, Arab Libyan citizens could only hope for a “special citizenship” that would combine the social rights of the metropolitan citizenship with the Muslim personal and inheritance status. As for the Jewish population, whose position in the racial hierarchy had always been somewhat interstitial in the colony, no matter their citizenship (most held British, French, or Libyan citizenship), it increasingly started to experience racial discrimination as envisioned in the 1938 racial laws.<sup>23</sup>

Angelo Del Boca described the 1939 decree as a “watered-down” (Del Boca 1991, 240) version of Balbo's project. Giorgio Rochat stated that the law conveyed “a form of discrimination entirely in line with the racist policy of the regime, which aimed at developing and rewarding the Arab elites without putting them on the same level as the Italian dominators” (Rochat 1986, 263). This decree successfully made Libyans foreigners in their land since they formally lived in Italy without being Italian citizens, a dynamic that resembled what was found by Elson (2005) regarding the Dutch East Indies context. This new legal context enforced a starker

---

<sup>22</sup> R.D. n. 70, January 9, 1939.

<sup>23</sup> The citizenship held by the Jewish population living in Libya became an extremely prominent issue in 1942, during the Northern African battles of World War II. The Libyan Jewish community was accused of supporting the British enemy, and consequently Mussolini started his campaign of ‘*sfollamento*,’ with which the Jewish people of Libya were deported in concentration camps in different locations according to their citizenship.

boundary between settlers and “natives” and was engineered to prevent mixed marriages and concubinage without explicitly prohibiting them in the law. As sustained by many jurists of the time, although the law did not mention any racial barrier, “that does not mean that [Muslims'] access to public rights equals the rights of metropolitan citizens. The limitations for accessing the metropolitan juridical status are intrinsically racially framed. Metropolitan citizenship is, in any case, prohibited for Libyans, precisely for racial reasons” (Sertoli Salis 1938, 40). Balbo's dream of coupling the annexation of Libyan territories with a *de jure* inclusion of the local population as part of a plan of “Italianization” of the region only became a nominal territorial annexation, normative incorporation of Libyan territories that did not change the “colonial citizenship” status of the population. This “compromise” represented a solution to the debate that realized some of Balbo's aspirations without infringing Mussolini's order to end all “racial promiscuity” in the colony.

In coherence with the official legislation, the Fascist propaganda hailed the territorial annexation and the new legal status for Libyans as another step in elevating their conditions under the Fascist regime. The propaganda continued to convey the image of a protected colonized population whose social, political, and civil rights were continually improving. However, as written by Bassi, “the insistence of the propaganda on the new legal status included in the 1939 decree was engineered to hide the will to bestow a positive evolution of the social conditions of the natives in place of the actual regression of their juridical status” (Bassi 2018, 245). Even Balbo, who until 1938 “had assumed a dissident position on the racial laws that criticized the overly zealous application of German-style norms” (Ballinger 2020, 145), finally fell in line with the majority of the upper party echelon that had accepted the regime's imperative to keep the two populations as segregated as possible. Balbo's acceptance of the Party's position over the exclusion of the Libyans is evident in this telegram sent to Mussolini only two days after the approval of the decree on January 11, 1939.

I just finished my round of inspections in the new settlers' villages, during which I spoke to settlers of both genders, 18 years old or older [...]. I answered all questions while delineating the guidelines of colonial life. I underlined with particular emphasis the need to categorically avoid any form of promiscuity and familiarity with the Muslim populations.<sup>24</sup>

Balbo sent this telegram in response to a letter that reached him at the beginning of January from the cabinet of Mussolini himself. The telegram urged Balbo to take swift measures regarding the “concerning” increase in promiscuous relationships between settlers and Libyans that followed the massive influx of Italian settlers in 1938. Balbo complied with the *Duce's* disposition, having seen his ideas of instrumental inclusion now defeated by Mussolini's reluctance to endanger the purity of the Italian race in the colonies. He did so by stating in the telegram that the “interior frontier” protecting the racial purity of the Italian nation was not in danger in his colony.



Figure 9. Villaggio D'Annunzio, one of the settler villages built by the “Ente per la colonizzazione della Libia” in the Jebel region, 1938.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> ASMAI, Gab, b. 70, *Telegramma n.672 da Balbo per il Duce*. January 11, 1939.

<sup>25</sup> Libya town of Al Bayyada (D'Annunzio) in 1938. Source: Documentario fotografico della 1. Migrazione in massa di coloni in Libia per il piano di colonizzazione demografica intensiva, Maggio 1938 Tripoli. License: Copyright-free.

As its racist rhetoric and practice intensified, the Fascist government adopted new measures to ensure segregation between the “Italian Aryans” and other racialized populations. Less than six months after the promulgation of the decree that annexed Libya and created the new “special citizenship,” the Mussolini government approved a new decree: a piece of legislation specifically designed to create clarity on the stark separation between Italians and colonized peoples.<sup>26</sup> This decree left no room for discussion on its application all over the empire as it stated that “the metropolitan citizen who engages in a relationship of marital nature with a native of Italian Africa will be punished with imprisonment for up to five years” (art. 10). It also stated that “the citizen who, in the territories of Italian Africa, habitually hangs around in public spaces reserved to the natives, will be punished with imprisonment for up to six months” (art.12). This decree erased any possible doubt or disagreement regarding the application in the Libyan territories of the 1937 law prohibiting mixed relationships of a marital nature in Eastern Africa. With this new law, any “Aryan” citizen who was found guilty of being engaged in either marriage or concubinage with a “native of Italian Africa” (including Libya) was to be harshly punished, therefore formally prohibiting stable mixed relationships in the empire. In all the mentioned laws, the individual to be punished is always the Italian “Aryan citizen,” as Italians had the duty to protect the purity of the race from forms of “racial contamination” (Nardocci 2019, 488). The racial characterization of the Italian national identity had reached its peak, and the purity of the Italian nation, particularly in front of the colonial Other, was protected unequivocally by racist legislation that left no room for interpretation.

---

<sup>26</sup> R.D. n. 1004, June 29, 1939. See Chapter 3 for more information.

## 7.5 Conclusion

This chapter showed how the Fascist party's top officials' view on the ways in which mixed marriages could affect the racial consciousness of Italians played a role in the debate on the juridical inclusion of Libyans in the late 1930s. Before that, concessions given to the Libyan population regarding their juridical status had been consistently instrumental and tuned to the evolution of Italian geopolitical plans for the region throughout the Italian colonial control over the Libyan territories (1911-1942). With the “pacification” of the anti-colonial resistance and the concurrent start of the demographic colonization of the Libyan territories, the Fascist regime dealt with a more stable colony and a higher number of Italian settlers in its regions. This new context framed a debate internal to the Fascist party on a new legal status for the local population. Such discussion entailed one of the most significant sources of concern for the increasingly racially defined Fascist national identity: the fear of mixture. While most of the party advocated for more explicit juridical boundaries between the local population and the settlers, Italo Balbo, governor of the newly unified Libyan colony, saw things differently. He advocated for the Libyan territories' annexation to the Italian Kingdom and a juridical inclusion of Libyans as steps towards a long-term plan of Italianization of the colony.

After the conquest of Ethiopia and the Italian empire's birth in 1936, the Fascist regime sharply increased the racist rhetoric regarding the character of the Italian national identity and the status of the colonial subjects of the empire. This chapter disclosed how the Fascist officials concerned about Balbo's plan illustrated the hypothetical danger of mixed marriages allowed by equating Libyans' legal status to the Italians'. This development was a turn of events that the Fascist colonial administration could not allow, as it would have been in direct contrast with the regime's new ideology regarding the racial boundaries of the Italian nation. The debate

between the opposing sides of the party also showed that even a totalitarian regime such as Fascist Italy did not have a univocal political plan for its colonies. Different understandings, experiences, and convictions created a contested power landscape in which colonized populations were mainly framed as a means to pursue political goals that transcended the mere organization of colonial societies.

This chapter demonstrated that concerns regarding possible mixed marriages between Italian settlers and racialized Libyans wielded some influence in dismissing the long-term geopolitical plans for the Italianization of the region. This fear of mixed marriages shows the extent to which Fascism gave importance to safeguarding the Italian racial identity. While the role that anxieties regarding marriages between Eastern African subjects and Italians has been broadly documented, this chapter adds complexity to the literature on this issue by including the often-underestimated colonial context in Libya. As I will show more in detail in the next chapter, mixed marriages in Libya did happen, and although their numbers were close to irrelevant, this chapter has shown that they still were causes of concern for some of the highest-ranking officers in the Italian Fascist Party.

In the next chapter, I look at mixed marriages outside the framework of citizenship and belonging and as a social institution at the core of managing the colony's inhabitants' private sphere. Given its inherent connection to religious affiliation and jurisdiction, the discussion of mixed marriage in the Libyan context has to go hand in hand with the history of the Catholic Church in the colony and its conflicting relationship with the Italian state. While both state and Church acted as agents of empire in the colony, they each pursued different strategies and competed for complete jurisdiction over the private sphere of Italian settlers. As such, mixed marriages and their regulation in Libya represent an issue at the crossroads of religion, nationalism, and race.

## **8. Regulating Mixed Marriages in Colonial Libya: At the Crossroads of Religion, Nationalism, and Race<sup>1</sup>**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter maps the regulatory context of mixed marriages between Libyans and Italians during Italian colonial rule over the Northern African territory. To do so, it analyzes the regulations and discourses regarding marriage in colonial Libya and the relations between the state and the Catholic Church regarding marriage. As a social, cultural, and legal institution, marriage has a peculiar history within the modern Italian context. It is deeply rooted in the relationship between the Italian nation-state born in 1861 and the Catholic Church, whose influence on the modern-day Italian population endured for centuries. This relationship evolved drastically during the years of Italian rule over Libya (1911-1943), going from the clear opposition of the Vatican to the Italian nation-state during the years of liberal governments (1861-1922) to the reapproaching of the two institutions during Fascism (1922-1943).

A focal point of the troubled relations between the Italian state and the Catholic Church was jurisdiction over marriage and its cultural and juridical implications. During the years of liberal rule and particularly following the promulgation of the first Italian Civil Code in 1865 and the Law of Guarantees in 1871, the Italian State and the Catholic Church had no diplomatic

---

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is a slightly modified version of my article: "The Regulation of 'Mixed' Marriages in Colonial Libya: At the Crossroads of Nationalism, Religion, and Race," published in the journal *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 23, no. 4 (2022): 497-517.

relations.<sup>2</sup> This state of affairs is reflected in the regulation of marriage in the peninsula. From 1865 onwards, the Italian state enacted civil marriage as an institution in direct opposition and competition with the Catholic sacrament of marriage.<sup>3</sup> This separation lasted until 1929, when the Fascist regime and the Holy See signed the Lateran Pacts, ending the antagonism between State and Church and giving a civil value to religious marriage. This succession of events affected Catholic Italians' lives and significantly impacted the regulation of mixed marriages in the colonies. This chapter aims to analyze such implications in the specific context of colonial Libya.

Catherine Hall (2006, 460) noted that marital regulation was “a critical aspect of governing strategies and population in colonial contexts.” Moreover, marriage regulations stood at the center of nation-building, representing the most tangible intervention of state power within the individual's private sphere. This notion is particularly true for the regulation of mixed marriage since it “involves the making and remaking of notions of race, gender, and culture in individual lives, as well as at the level of social and political policy” (Pascoe 1991, 5). In colonial contexts, marriage regulation meant state interference in one of the pillars of colonial society, namely white men's prerogatives, particularly their rights over property and children.

The analysis of different colonial contexts reveals that mixed marriages between European men and colonized women were considered desirable to expand European control over the colonized populations.<sup>4</sup> Colonizing powers recognized the incentive to establish mixed marriages to boost economic and political networks in the colonies while accruing “cultural capital” through direct knowledge of the colonized societies. At the same time, for colonized

---

<sup>2</sup> The *Legge delle Guarentigie* [Law of Guarantees] was a law approved by the Italian parliament on May 13, 1871, which regulated the relationship between the Italian state and the Holy See. Although the law formally “guaranteed” some sovereign prerogatives to the pope after the annexation of the Papal State by Italy in 1870, the Vatican refused to accept the law and considered the Italian state a foreign usurper until 1929.

<sup>3</sup> The civil marriage was instituted in 1865 as part of the first Civil Code of the newly born nation state. The provision was listed in the Book I (People), Heading V (Marriage), articles 53-158, 02/04/1865 n. 2215

<sup>4</sup> For example, see, among others, the works conducted on the English colonial context (Freeman 2005), French (Van Kirk 2002), Dutch (Stoler 2002), Spanish (Mangan 2013), and Portuguese (Mata 2007).

women, “such unions held out the promise of heightened prestige, economic prosperity or new freedoms” (Kundrus 2014, 222). Of course, these hints at a relative openness to mixed marriages involving white men did not entail a granitic stance by European colonial societies on the matter. Anxieties related to “marrying out” of one’s social group were widespread on both ends of the colonial encounter. Specifically for European colonial authorities, there was the fear that widespread intimate proximity to colonized populations would undermine colonial authority (Saada 2012, 60). Moreover, especially in European societies, racial mixedness was debated continuously, as explained in detail by Young (1994).

Regarding mixed marriages in colonial contexts, Catholic and Protestant Christian missionaries played a central role. Christian missionaries had another function in colonial contexts besides the much-documented symbiotic relationship between European colonialism and religion regarding logistical support and justification for domination (Etherington, 1999; Carey, 2008). It has been proven in multiple contexts that Christian missionaries, in particular, allowed all marriages as long as both the groom and bride belonged to Christianity. This dynamic was exemplificatory of the relationship between colonial states and the Church, as argued in works on the French empire in Louisiana (DuVal 2008) and Canada (Van Kirk 2002), on the Dutch empire in the East Indies (Steenbrink 2007; Posada et al. 2020; Derksen 2021) and also on the British empire (Carey 2011). The marrying of Europeans into the local population implied the conversion of the non-European partner to Christianity, a practice that helped the Church’s evangelization plans and the colonizing power’s grip on the colonized societies. Moreover, the Church represented one of the critical ideological tools to frame colonialism as a “civilizing mission” since the justification for colonial ventures always relied on the “White Man’s Burden’s” three C’s: civilization, commerce, and Christianity.

There are two comprehensive pieces of research on the context of Italian Libya, the Catholic missionary presence in the region and the power relationship between the Church and the

colonial state. Ianari (1995) wrote the first detailed historical monograph on the Catholic missionary presence in Libya and its relationship with the Italian state. Ryan's dissertation (2012) dealt more specifically with how the Italian state and Catholic church negotiated power with the Sufi order of the Sanussiyya in Cyrenaica, detailing how nationalism and religion intersected in the Italian Colonial project in Libya. However, no scholarly work has yet analyzed how the Catholic missionaries and the colonial state negotiated power and jurisdiction over the private lives of the colony's inhabitants, particularly concerning the regulation of marriages.

To fill this gap, this chapter analyzes the presence of Italian missionaries in Libya, their relationship with the local population, and the colonizing Italian state while inserting them into the broader and complex relationship between Italy and the Holy See, Italian nationalism, and Catholicism. As an analysis of colonial power in its Church and state conjugations, this chapter's scope is not to ascertain the power structures of Libyan society and Muslim institutions but to ascertain the Italian-specific conjugation of regulation of mixed marriages in colonial Libya. This chapter attempts to do so through a socio-legal analysis (Schiff 1976, 287) of institutional sources preserved in Italian state archives and Vatican missionary and Order of Frati Minori archives. In particular, circular letters, legislation, juridical debates, and personal correspondence are used to assess the clashes between the Italian colonial state and the Libyan Catholic Church on the issue of mixed marriages.

The chapter's first section delineates the Catholic Church's role in spreading colonialist ideas in the Italian public discourse while detailing how the Italian missionaries in Libya became agents of empire. The following section analyzes mixed marriages in the colony and how the Italian mission managed them within the separation regime between civil and religious marriages. Next, the chapter describes the groundbreaking force that the Lateran Concordat had on the regulation of marriages and the impact it might have had on mixed marriages in

Libya. Finally, the last section recounts the Fascist regime's turn to racist ideology and white supremacy and the impact that such an ideological turn had on marriages both in the metropole and the colony.

## **8.2 The Catholic Church in Libya: Between Proselytism and Nationalist Support of Colonialism**

### *The Catholic Mission of Libya before Italian Colonization*

According to Vittorio Ianari (1995), the first presence of Catholic missionaries in Libya dates back to the seventeenth century. In 1668, the Vatican congregation responsible for all the Catholic missions in the world, Propaganda Fide, entrusted the Tripoli mission to Northern Italian friars belonging to the Order of Minori Friars, or Franciscans. Ever since that moment, most friars in the Libyan missions had been inhabitants of those states that comprised the territory that is modern-day Italy, a fact that played a particularly relevant role in the Italian aspirations for Libya in the first decade of the twentieth century. The mission was under France's protection for roughly one-hundred-and-fifty years, but the tide changed at the end of the 1800s. An increased Italian interest in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica caused by the establishment of a French protectorate in Tunisia in 1881, coupled with the end of all French protection towards missionaries in 1899, pushed the Italian missionaries in Libya to officially ask for protection from the Italian government, which was granted in 1906. The friars had always kept a suspicious eye on the French government, not because of some form of nationalism, but because they recognized that France would have preferred a French religious order to run the mission to propagate French culture in the region. The Italian friars took a

defensive stance towards all the French missionaries sent by the French government to increase the Catholic presence in the region (Ianari 1995, 4).

It is important to stress that the tensions between the Italian missionaries in Libya and the French government were minor and considered irrelevant by France (Ianari 1995, 4). The Libyan regions were of little strategic importance and did not catch the major European powers' attention until the twentieth century. Moreover, the mission had practically no ambition to enact an effective practice of proselytism in the region, characterized by the religious and political influence of the conservative Sufi order of the Sanusiyya.<sup>5</sup> After all, the mission was initially established to help free enslaved Christians traded in Tripoli and evolved into a minor Church for the few hundred mostly Italian and Maltese Catholics present in the region.<sup>6</sup> Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the Franciscan mission was a minor player in Libyan society, albeit content to preserve its function and identity as an independent mission. This state of affairs radically changed with Italy's growing interest in making Libya its "fourth shore" due to France's creation of a protectorate in Tunisia, a country where thousands of Italians had already emigrated (El-Houssi 2012).

The colonization of Libya that Italian colonialist intellectual circles had advocated for decades gained momentum in the first decade of the 1900s and involved all the Italian population's different strata. It was indeed "the culmination of a racial process of self-definition by Italians as ethnically "one people," through which the profoundly disintegrating internal differences of race, gender, class, and religious belief that threatened the very notion of a united Italy were at

---

<sup>5</sup> Proselytism, or the act addressed to the conversion of individuals to one's faith, has always been one of the main duties for the Catholic clergy. As recorded in the final verses of the Gospel of Matthew: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." As missionaries, the Libyan clergy was directly under the jurisdiction of the biggest proselytism congregation in the world: the *Propaganda Fide* congregation in the Vatican.

<sup>6</sup> On the Barbary slave trade, the slave markets on the coasts of the Ottoman provinces of Algeria, Tunisia and Tripolitania that happened between the sixteenth and mid-eighteenth century, see Davis (2004).

once repressed, forgotten, and surpassed” (Re 2010, 10).<sup>7</sup> Among the differences that “disintegrated” under the force of the enthusiasm for the Italian expansion in Libya, there was also the rupture between the Italian state and the Catholic Church. Indeed, the popularity of the expansionist project in Libya among the predominantly Catholic Italian middle and lower classes is seen as the leading cause of increasing Catholic participation in national politics. Such involvement would eventually culminate in 1913 with the election of Luigi Federzoni, an anti-mason nationalist with strong Catholic support, to the Italian parliament (Bosworth 1979, 43).<sup>8</sup> The Vatican's interests and investments in Northern Africa, coupled with the political reapproaching between the liberal elites and the Catholics in an anti-socialist alliance, made the Italian Catholic Church one of the main actors in propagating expansionist ideas in the Italian public discourse.<sup>9</sup> The Italian Catholic press, in particular, was central in selling the idea of the invasion of Libya as a civilizing mission with a religious connotation, signaling the growing discursive conflation of the Italian population's national identity with its Catholic one.

#### *From Mission to Colonial Church*

The Italian political elites slowly reapproaching the Catholic Church in Italy made their influence felt in Libya. Although the Italian government still had some reserves about missionaries proselytizing in a colonial context where the main objective was to appeal to the Muslim population, it started looking at them from a different perspective at the turn of the century. In 1893, the Italian consul in Lebanon characterized the missionaries in Libya as “an element of power and influence for our country, as their influence is even greater than the

---

<sup>7</sup> The role of the colonization of Libya in the process of Italian national formation is thoroughly discussed on Chapter 4.

<sup>8</sup> Luigi Federzoni was one of the founders of the Italian Nationalist Association (ANI), an interventionist, colonialist extreme-right party that was incorporated by the Fascist party in 1923. Federzoni eventually became Minister of Colonies for the fascist government between 1922 and 1924 and again between 1926 and 1928.

<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of the financial stakes that the Vatican had in an Italian colonial expansion in Libya, see Pollard (2005).

soldiers’.”<sup>10</sup> The comparison between the missionary and the soldier is not coincidental nor uncommon, as testified by research conducted on other contexts (Platt 1987; Daughton 2008). In the years leading up to the Italian invasion of Libya, the Italian missionaries in the region became the perfect synthesis of the Italian nationalist and Catholic identity. This synthesis was enhanced by the rhetoric on missionaries and military chaplains as *milites Christi*.<sup>11</sup> By working to “civilize” Libyans through Italian culture and Catholicism, the missionaries had been doing for centuries what Italy ought to do through its colonialist agenda: express Italian culture’s superiority leading the Libyan population towards civilization. This excerpt from the nationalist newspaper “Rassegna Nazionale” from 1912 (that was also a strong supporter of a conciliation between the Italian state and the Vatican) gives us an idea of the growing patriotic charge invested in the missionaries:

The first missionaries in Libya left their birthplace to face the unknown and, as Catholics, face death in a Muslim region. They were trying to create new ideals in that African population dedicated to indolence and made sick by religious fanaticism. [...] If the first disciples of Jesus in Libya had seen it as their only goal to convert Muslims to Catholicism, the missionaries now in Tripolitania have another, greater hope. They know that there are the remains of the ancient Italian civilization among the ancient ruins on the Libyan beaches and that it would be glorious for us to take back those lands. To make them fertile again, to give birth under the shadow of our flag, to a civilization whose only current remains is corruption.<sup>12</sup>

In this article, we can see not only the “soldier missionary” who, alongside the actual military soldiers, fights to spread Italian civilization to the “indolent” Libyans but also the champion of a new colonial society built on the glorious remains of the Roman Empire. By the time of the redaction of the article in 1912, we can see that the colonialist circles in Italy had understood

---

<sup>10</sup> ASMAI, Serie Politica (1891-1916), b. 558, *Rapporto del 4 aprile 1893 per il ministero degli Affari Esteri del console a Beirut*, April 4, 1893.

<sup>11</sup> A thorough analysis of the role of Italian military chaplains as “soldiers of Christ”, see Della Rocca (1980).

<sup>12</sup> Benso, Giulio. “La Tripolitania e i soldati di Cristo.” *Rassegna Nazionale*, May 1912.

that the potential of the Italian friars in Libya was not only related to their proselytist action in the colony. Above and beyond that, colonialists understood the role that they would have played in the settler society envisioned for Libya. If the new colony were to become the Italian “fourth shore,” with a growing influx of Italian settlers planned as a way to stop the Italian emigration to other European and American countries (Choate 2008, 31), then they would have needed a Church, and the missionaries were essential in this project. Moreover, in the first years of colonization of the region, they could have provided colonial administrators with a reliable and cheap education and health care source.

Unlike the clergy in the metropole, the missionaries initially saw the Italian invasion with suspicion. They were well aware of the Italian government's opportunistic eye and feared that increased Italian pressure on their missionary practice might have jeopardized their independence. Conversely, as written by Ianari (1995, 29), “far away from their homes, having to wrestle with the Ottoman government, antagonized by France, the Italian missionaries found themselves often pervaded by a general and vague sense of patriotism.” Although never in opposition to their attachment to the mission and the Franciscan Order, the missionaries’ mild patriotism was, without a doubt, stirred by the ramping nationalism invested into the colonial expansion in Libya that had seeped through the ranks of the Catholic Church. When the Italian troops landed on the Tripoli shores on October 4, 1911, the prefect of the Libyan mission, Bonaventura Rossetti, mobilized the friars and nuns of the mission to assist field hospitals. This action boosted the rhetoric of the missionaries as agents of empire, as underlined in a chronicle of the Libyan mission written in fascist times by the priest Costanzo Bregna:

The Franciscan missionaries, sentinels of civilization and religion who had been waiting for our soldier on these beaches for three hundred years, finally did not see the children of Italy coming down from our mighty ships dragging a meter of a chain but saw instead, their free and robust

grandchildren that with generosity and valor claimed the tears and blood of their ancestors (Bergna 1924, 172).

This pompous account of the missionaries' feelings towards the Italian troops' landing in Libya perfectly summarizes the patriotism attached to the mission's religious identity. The missionaries could finally see the Catholic sons of Italy return to those shores as free and strong agents of empire to make the Libyan lands Italian and Catholic. Within this new context, the missionaries embodied the perfect synthesis of a Catholic nationalist Italian agent of empire, who had the merit of having maintained a Catholic and Italian presence in a territory hostile to them, but that would soon fall into the hands of an influential Italian nation invested in the colonizing mission. Moreover, within the grand plan of colonization of the region, they played an even more significant, practical role: they were the stones upon which the Italian rule over Libya would have built a true Church for the thousands of Italians to settle in the region. In 1911, a small and marginal Catholic mission in a Muslim land took its first step towards becoming a colonial Church, increasing its size and scope according to the Libyan region's new colony status.

### **8.3 The Libyan Catholic Church before the Lateran Pacts: The Issue of Mixed Marriages**

#### *A New Challenge for a Growing Church*

By the time of the Italian invasion of the territory in 1911, the Italian mission in Libya had been present in only four coastal towns: Tripoli, Benghazi, Derna, and Homs. This lack of a consistent presence on the territory was mainly due to the small number of Catholics who

represented the main reason for the existence of a mission with little hope of proselytizing to the local population. By the time the Italian troops landed, the Catholic population had comprised only four thousand people.<sup>13</sup> When Italy joined World War One, the colony's Catholics were almost 16,000 (Ianari 1995, 43). Although the majority of the increase in the Catholic population was caused by the significant number of Italian soldiers that were fighting the local anti-colonial resistance, it is still an indication of things to come for the Libyan mission: the growing number of Catholics in the region needed to be addressed by the Vatican. In 1912, when the worst of the fighting between the Italian troops and the anti-colonial resistance had moved away from the more populated coastal areas, prefect Bonaventura Rossetti asked for funding from both the Church and the Italian government in order to expand the mission's reach to Misrata, Tobruk, and Zlitan.<sup>14</sup> The granted increase in funding, coupled with the Libyan prefecture's elevation to a vicariate, testified to the Vatican and the Italian government's alignment concerning the new colony's Italianization and Catholicization. This alignment of interests between the Italian colonial authorities and the Libyan mission is testified by the prefect Rossetti himself, who, in his correspondence with his superiors in Rome, expressed his excitement for the state programs of settler colonization.<sup>15</sup> Although religious and colonial authorities had their differences in the years to come, the mission kept seeing an increase in funding from the Italian state, which still regarded the mission as a valuable source of social services and Italian culture in the region.

After the initial enthusiasm for the new colony that pervaded both the Church and colonial government in Libya in 1912, World War I and the Libyan resistance's counteroffensive scaled back the plans for the colonization of the territory and the growth of the mission. As the war

---

<sup>13</sup> ASOFM, f. 474. *Relazione annuale del prefetto apostolico*. Tripoli di Barbaria, 1911. In 1911 the prefect Bonaventura Rossetti counted 4 000 Christians on a population of over 1 250 000. Of those 4000 only 818 were Italians, with the great majority of the population being comprised of Maltese citizens.

<sup>14</sup> Archivio Storico Propaganda Fide, NS Vol. 520, Rub. 141/1912, *Bonaventura Rossetti to Cardinal Gotti*, March 12, 1912.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

ended and the resistance was pushed away from the colony's coastal areas, the number of Catholics in Libya started rising again, reaching 18 000 people in 1921.<sup>16</sup> With the growing presence of Italian settlers, which started to comprise most of the colony's Catholic population, the Franciscan friars completely reconceptualized their actions. As described by Ianari (1995, 72), the Franciscans "had to rethink their identity, which was progressively becoming one of missionaries without a mission." The friars had never doubted the reality of an Islamic population that was not likely to convert to Catholicism. As Bergna wrote some years later, "it was useless to worry about some rare and sporadic conversion of an unfaithful, when there were so many of our brothers who, because of a lack of religious education or Christian practice, lost the sacred heritage of faith given to them by their mothers."<sup>17</sup> After centuries spent tending to the needs of a few hundred Catholics in Muslim territory, the Franciscans in charge of the Libyan mission finally saw their role increase in importance dramatically: the need was not to be a mission anymore but a "Church of the settlers" (Ianari 1995, 73).



Figure 10. The Catholic Church of the settler village "Luigi Razza," 1935.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> ASOFM, f. 474. *Relazione annuale del vicario apostolico*, Tripoli di Barbaria, 1921.

<sup>17</sup> Bergna, Costanzo. *Le missioni nei rapporti del problema coloniale italiano*, in "Famiglia Cristiana," maggio 1934.

<sup>18</sup> Church of Massah (Luigi Razza Town) (1940). Source: National Library of Australia. Author: Hurley, Frank, 1885-1962.

With Fascism rising to power in 1922, the relations between the colonial authorities and the Catholic Church in Libya became even more substantial. As analyzed in depth by the vast literature on the relationship between Catholicism and Fascism, the regime actively pursued a conciliatory policy toward the Vatican and appropriated some traditional Catholic values, particularly regarding family doctrine (Ginsborg 2014, 254).<sup>19</sup> The new governor of Tripolitania, Giuseppe Volpi, who was close enough to Mussolini to maintain his position as governor (1921-1925) through the transition from liberal to fascist rule, saw the Franciscans' role as more central than his predecessors. His government considered the Catholic Church in Libya "an important cultural and affective reference for Italian settlers," as Libya was surely moving towards a new "image as a settler colony" (Ianari 1995, 112) envisioned by the Fascist government. As the Church of Libya assumed a more central role in the colony, the new vicar started constructing a cathedral in Tripoli in 1923 and another fifteen churches across the colony, spreading the Church's influence on the Libyan territory.<sup>20</sup> By building churches and cathedrals in the most important Libyan cities, the Catholic Church actively claimed space for the rights of Catholics to live and worship in the colony as they did in the metropole.

As the Church gained influence, it was eventually faced with the Catholic settler populations' relationships with the local Muslim ones and the colonial boundaries that separated them. While until 1936, Italians and Libyans were connected by the "Mediterranean race" theory as promulgated by Giuseppe Sergi, Italian colonial administrators still strived to regulate the colonial boundaries that separated Italian settlers from racialized Libyans. As it will become apparent by the analysis conveyed in this chapter, in the absence of clear and visible racial differences between the two populations, colonial administrators and Catholic authorities constructed colonial boundaries over other markers of difference that separated the colonizing

---

<sup>19</sup> On the relationship between Fascism and the Catholic Church see, among others, Malgeri (1994), Ceci (2010, 2014) and Sale (2011).

<sup>20</sup> ASOFM, Libia, *Relazione di Tonizza a Marrani*, May 20, 1932.

society from the colonized one. Religion played a significant role in this regard, with Islam becoming an essential marker of racialization for Libyans while Catholicism increasingly identified as a national trait of the Italian population. Marriages between the two social groups stood at the center of the construction of racialized boundaries in the colony, as they involved issues of mixture from both a racial and a religious standpoint.

Chapter 5 explained that the colonial authorities had tolerated non-marital relationships between Italian officers and Libyan women in the first years of rule over the northern African territory. As the colony was still a heavily militarized space due to the fierce anti-colonial resistance, officers were encouraged to engage in concubinage relationships with local women to prevent them from bringing their wives with them in a “racially promiscuous” colonial environment and from having homosexual relations among themselves. Conversely, concubinage relationships rarely ended up being sanctioned by religious marriage without one of the partners converting to the other’s religion. Catholicism’s canon laws did not allow interreligious marriage, while Islamic institutions did not allow women to marry outside of their religious community, and the conversion of the partner was necessary to officiate a marriage. Moreover, in the case of Catholicism, even if one of the two partners decided to convert to the other’s religion and get married by one’s religious authorities, which was rare given the centrality of the respective religions in the two populations’ cultures, that did not mean that marriage would have had civil value for the Italian state.

Civil and religious marriages ran on parallel paths for the Italian Civil Code, and the latter had no juridical value. The first Civil Code of the Italian state, approved by the parliament in 1865, instituted civil marriage as a secular institution. For the anti-clerical liberal governments of the time, the civil marriage contract was an alternative, competitive institution to the marriage sacrament of the theological/juridical tradition of the Catholic Church. Although the only legally sanctioned union for the Italian Civil Code, it was competitive because it maintained

the structure of religious marriage: monogamous, indissoluble, and heterosexual. In some cases, this state of affairs had the majorly Catholic Italian population marrying twice, once with civil servants to make the union legally sanctioned and another time within the Church for religious reasons. In most cases, however, Catholics showed “a marked diffidence towards accepting a marriage without God” (Passaniti 2011, 265), resulting in many individuals rejecting civil marriage and engaging in a union sanctioned by Catholic canon law only.

In Libya and the Italian colonies in general, the situation was somewhat different from the metropole, although the articles of the code regarding marriage formally applied to the colonies. Marianna Scarfone (2015, 55) wrote that in Italian Libya, “the formalization of marriages between Italians and locals was not envisaged, as it would have undermined the ‘prestige’ of the colonizer.” There was no doubt that, unlike the widely tolerated forms of concubinage, mixed civil marriages were inconceivable, as “it would be a matter of legalizing a union between a national and an indigenous [...], a representative of political power and culture who would like to be hegemonic and a subordinate by race, gender, class, culture, moral standing” (Scarfone 2015, 55). Although not formally prohibited in Libya until 1938, colonial authorities did not tolerate marriages between Italians and Libyans, which pushed Italian soldiers and officers to engage in unsanctioned intimacies such as concubinage and prostitution, as discussed in Chapter 5. Libya's Franciscan missionaries played a relevant role in the colonial government's intolerance for legally sanctioned mixed marriages. Although partners were not allowed to make their marriage legal in the eyes of the colonial administration, that did not mean that they could not turn to religious authorities and ask to be married in the eyes of God. Within this context, the Italian missionaries in Libya had the power to subvert the colonial order of things regarding the regulation of intimacy.

Until the Lateran Pacts in 1929 and the recognition of the civil value of religious marriage discussed below, missionaries could marry settlers and locals, disregarding the colonial

administration's preference. Therefore, the issue of mixed marriages became partially religious, as according to Catholic canon law established by the decree *Ne Temere*, the only impediments to marriage were kinship proximity and religious disparity.<sup>21</sup> Although only with a specific gender dynamic, the same applied with regards to Muslim canon law, according to which "the impediment due to the difference of religion" is central: in particular, "the Muslim woman, by undisputed rule, cannot marry a non-Muslim" (Aluffi Beck Peccoz 2006, 199). All that was necessary for a mixed couple to get married in Libya was to belong to the same religion, as missionaries allowed all marriages as long as this criterium was fulfilled. On the other hand, this impediment made couples wishing to fulfill it extremely rare, given the cultural attachment to religious practices that characterized Catholic and Muslim populations. Unfortunately, Italian institutional archives do not contain sources on the exact number of marriages between Italian settlers and Libyans officiated by the Libyan church. However, the archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in the Vatican have preserved qualitative sources on a few cases of colonial marriages and the role that missionaries and religion played in the lives of mixed couples.

### *Mixed Marriages and the Role of the Church*

Both cases analyzed here involve missionaries asking for counsel from the Prefect of the Congregation in Rome concerning the proper procedure for marrying Libyans to Italian settlers. The missionaries describe the couples' vicissitudes in detail to substantiate their request, thereby giving us a cross-section of the colony's social life. The first case is dated December 1919 in Tripoli and concerns a rare case of a Libyan man asking to convert to Catholicism and

---

<sup>21</sup> The decree *Ne Temere* was issued by the Roman Catholic Congregation of the Council in 1907 and it directly regulated the canon law of the Catholic church regarding marriage for Catholics.

marry a young Italian girl. The missionary appears to be unsure about what to do and asks for advice from the Head of the Propaganda Fide Congregation, Cardinal Willem van Rossum:<sup>22</sup>

While attending a brothel run by Christians, a Libyan Arab *askari* met a Christian girl of about fifteen years sent there by her unworthy mother. The Arab fell in love with the girl and took her into his house with her mother's consent. He wants to marry her according to the Catholic rite and become a Christian. He has a wife and seems to have done some paperwork with the Cadi for a divorce. Feeling uncertain about how I should act in this and other similar cases, I humbly pray that your Eminence tells me how to proceed safely.<sup>23</sup>

The relevance of this case is fourfold. First, the missionary mentions that he is uncertain about how he should act “in this and other similar cases,” hinting, therefore, at the fact that requests for mixed marriages did occur on more occasions than the one described. Second, it involves an Italian girl sent to work in a brothel by her mother. As described in Chapter 5, Italian girls were rarely permitted to work in brothels, and most of the white prostitutes in Tripoli were French or Libyan Jewish (Salerno 1922, 54). Third, the document mentions that the girl is fifteen years old, which points to the Catholic Church's policy regarding the marriage age for women, which was and still is fourteen years old, making the “age impediment” inapplicable in this case.<sup>24</sup> Fourth, the prospective groom is a Libyan Arab military who wants to marry an Italian woman, a relationship that colonial administrators utterly condemned. If the man is willing to relinquish his affiliation to Islam and convert to Catholicism, however, there is no formal impediment to the union, as underlined in the bishop's response to the missionary:<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> The Dutch cardinal Willem Marinus van Rossum was Prefect of Propaganda Fide from 1918 until his death in 1932.

<sup>23</sup> Archivio Storico Propaganda Fide, N.S. Vol 651, Rub. 39 (61-65), Tripoli, December 11, 1919.

<sup>24</sup> Codice di Diritto Canonico. Libro IV, Parte I: *I sacramenti*. Titolo VII: *Il matrimonio*, Capitolo 3, Canone 1083.

<sup>25</sup> The age impediment for marriage according to Catholic canon law used to be 16-years-old for males and 14-years old for girls. Therefore, in this case, no age impediment was applicable as the girl was 15-years-old.

Take care to admonish the military Arab that the administration of the Holy Baptism would not nullify his first marriage contracted in infidelity but would only grant him the privilege of going to a second marriage if the first wife refused to live with him.<sup>26</sup>

The cardinal's concern regards the man's first Muslim marriage and the danger of taking the Italian girl into a polygamous relationship. Such concerns appear relatively common in many other colonial settings with a Muslim majority local population, as De Hart (2017) argued for the Dutch context, and are directly related to Catholic canon law regarding marriages. Although the civil authorities did not view mixed marriages involving Italian women as tolerable in the colony, to the Holy See, the only potential impediment to marriage is, in this case, "disparity of belief." Once the impediment is removed via the Muslim partner's conversion to Catholicism, nothing can stop the couple from defying colonial assumptions regarding legalized unions and uniting in the sacrament of marriage.

A similar outcome applies to the next case, dated June 10, 1927:

The priest of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Tripoli sends the request, which I enclose here, with which he asks for the dispensation from the impediment of religious disparity between Conversano Edoardo Salvatore and Fatma, daughter of Mohammed. Conversano is a 67-year-old man born in Tunis and has been a resident of Tripolitania for several years. In 1921, when the last Arab revolt took place, he was in Misrata with three other Italians. The Arabs, having broken off relations with the government, imprisoned all four of them. Conversano, who could be called a Christian only due to his baptism, seeing the mistreatment they were subjected to, believed he could free himself from everything by becoming a Muslim and marrying Fatma. Once we reoccupied Misrata, he returned to Tripoli, advised by others, and tried to have the three children from his union baptized. Now they are baptized, and the oldest is with our Brothers and the little girl with the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary. The third child, about two years old, stays

---

<sup>26</sup> Archivio Storico Propaganda Fide, N.S. Vol 651, Rub. 39 (61-65), Tripoli, December 11, 1919.

with her parents. Conversano, who now feels old and in debt towards our brothers and sisters that took care of his child, would like to return to the womb of the Holy Mother Church, abjuring Islam, and religiously regulate his marriage. His wife's religion is a serious obstacle to this. She is not against embracing Christianity, but for now, her conversion is made impossible by her ignorance and roughness, and it would take a long time and patience to educate her, at least summarily. If Your Eminence could grant the requested dispensation, it would clear the conscience of Conversano, who, the older he gets, the more he finds himself distressed because of his repeated blunders.<sup>27</sup>

From this excerpt, it is clear that Conversano had made the best out of his vicissitudes and joined Islam to improve his conditions within the resistance-controlled city of Misrata, only to swap allegiance again once the tide turned in favor of the Italian army. His wife was Libyan and Muslim, and as a settler, the only way to maintain the relationship valid from a Catholic standpoint within an Italian-controlled city was to turn back to the religion of his homeland and bring his family with him. The priest mentions that Conversano wished to “return to the womb of the Holy Mother Church” because of a change of heart caused by his late age and gratitude towards the friars and nuns who helped raise his children. Although such gratitude was plausible, it seems evident that the change of power relations within the city played a significant part in the man's decision. In the newly pacified Tripolitania, where the Catholic mission slowly but surely turned into a “Church for the settlers,” an Italian settler was better off as a Catholic than a Muslim.<sup>28</sup>

The response of Cardinal van Rossum is affirmative also in this case; the couple can get married if both partners relinquish their previous religious affiliation and decide to convert to Catholicism. However, it is noteworthy that he does not express any concern regarding the

---

<sup>27</sup> Archivio Storico Propaganda Fide, N.S. 921, Rub. 39 (216-219), Tripoli, June 20, 1927.

<sup>28</sup> The Italian troops defeated the anti-colonial resistance and gained control of the whole of Tripolitania between 1923 and 1925. In Cyrenaica, on the other hand, the fighting came to an end only in 1932. See Chapter 3 for a detailed account of the Italian crackdown of the Libyan anti-colonial resistance.

Libyan woman who is to receive the sacrament of marriage as he did in the previous case. He replies to the priest's letter with the canonic Latin formula used in these cases without mandating any particular course of action.<sup>29</sup> Not even the doubts and concerns of the priest regarding the lack of Catholic education of the woman are central to the cardinal: as long as the woman relinquishes her former beliefs, there is no impediment to their union. Conversely, the cardinal expressed concerns regarding the Libyan man back in 1919: there was a danger that the man would want to force an Italian Catholic woman into a polygamous relationship, and the Church had to make sure that this would not happen.

This difference in attitudes does not come as a surprise, as Western discourses on Muslims were often characterized by concerns about polygamy, exemplified by the trope of the harem: "Muslim men imprisoned their wives, who had nothing to do except beautify themselves and cater to their husbands' huge sexual appetite" (Hoodfar 2001, 426). While an Italian man who switched religion multiple times according to his convenience does not require particular attention from the Libyan Church, the danger posed by a Libyan man marrying an Italian woman and purportedly coercing her into an assumed polygamous relationship cannot be ignored by the religious authorities. This case shows how configurations of colonial power unfolded along gender lines and how the Church had an active role in perpetuating racializing discourses on the colonized population while maintaining power structures related to gender roles, property, and patrilineality.

These two examples of how marriages between Italian settlers and Libyans were dealt with by the Catholic Church provide us with a view of the intimate colonial encounter and how couples worked around and with the regulations. While the colonial administration forbade marriages between Italians and locals, the Catholic Church, the Qadi, and the Muslim authorities allowed

---

<sup>29</sup> Archivio Storico Propaganda Fide, N.S. 921, Rub. 39 (216-219), Tripoli, June 20, 1927.

mixed marriages as long as both partners belonged to the same religion.<sup>30</sup> This state of things is particularly evident in Conversano's and Fatma's case, who could marry first under Islam, then convert and marry again as a Catholic. Although null in the Italian state's eyes, their marriage was sanctioned by the colony's religious authorities and therefore made valid in the eyes of the religious population of the colony.

As the religious and civil marriages still ran on parallel lines and each authority did not recognize the other's prerogative to sanction a union, the Catholic Church in Libya held power to defy colonial assumptions regarding mixture and its regulation. Of course, this power did not entail an anti-segregationist stance by the Libyan mission. As the analysis of the responses to the two analyzed marriages shows, the clergy still held prejudices concerning Muslim partners and showed apprehension regarding the possible exploitation of Catholic women. This stance is a testament that the Italian clergy and colonial administrators shared prejudices against the colonized population, although divided by a history of conflicts. Both Church and state were perpetrators of colonial discourses regarding the superiority of the Italian-Catholic civilization and firm proponents of colonialism to civilize populations in the name of superior moral values and secular modernity.

The Fascist regime and the Holy See signed the Lateran Pacts in Rome in 1929, when the Italian troops were bringing the anti-colonial resistance in Libya to an end. The document's signature, which regulated the relationship between the Italian state and the Vatican bilaterally for the first time in seventy years, made its consequences also felt in Italian colonial contexts. The Pacts signaled the highest point of proximity between the regime and the Catholic Church, and among the concessions given to the Vatican by Fascism was a new recognition of the legal value of the sacrament of marriage.

---

<sup>30</sup> Marriages, as much as personal status law and all other relations of private law inherent to the Libyan population were left to the discretion of Muslim legislation and tribunals.

## 8.4 The Lateran Pacts and Their Impact on Mixed Marriages

### *The Regime's Rhetoric on Catholicism*

The Italian Fascist Party was the principal architect of the Vatican and the Catholic Church's reapproaching of the Italian nation-state. Disregarding its anti-clerical past, the Party recognized Catholicism's central role within Italian society and began conflating Italy's Catholic identity with its growing nationalism to strengthen the regime's grip over the country.<sup>31</sup> We can witness the direction that the Party was moving towards from one of the first speeches that Mussolini made in the Italian parliament, while the Fascist Party was still an opposition party and roughly one year before the March on Rome:<sup>32</sup>

I affirm that Rome's Latin and imperial tradition is best represented by Catholicism today. [...]

The development of Catholicism in the world and the growth of the 400 million people that look toward Rome from every corner of the world is of central interest and pride for us Italians.<sup>33</sup>

In Mussolini's words, we can already see his nationalist rhetoric conflating Rome's past glory with the country's Catholic tradition. The invasion of Libya had been the starting point of the unification of Italy's different identities under one nationalistic imperial banner. Fascism exploited such discourse and brought it to the next level, creating an idea of a nation deeply rooted in Rome's imperial glory and Catholicism's tradition.

This rhetorical stance found a regulatory output soon after King Vittorio Emanuele III appointed Mussolini as Prime Minister in October 1922. One of the first decrees issued by the Mussolini government concerned the teaching of Catholic doctrine in Italian elementary

---

<sup>31</sup> In the embryonal Fascist party's program of 1919, the seizure of the material possessions of the Catholic Church was one of the points of the "de-Vaticanization" of the country that Mussolini hoped for.

<sup>32</sup> The *Marcia su Roma* [March on Rome] was a mass demonstration held in October 1922 that resulted in the Fascist Party's ascension to power in the Kingdom of Italy.

<sup>33</sup> Tipografia Camera dei Deputati, Camera dei Deputati – Sessione 1921, *Tornata del 21 giugno 1921*, p.97.

schools: “As a foundation and coronation of elementary education, there is the teaching of the Christian doctrine in the form received by the Catholic tradition.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the Party issued two other decrees, the first to make the exposition of the Catholic cross mandatory in every public office and the second to persecute every news media found in contempt of the state religion.<sup>35</sup> These first policies hinted at the regime’s real objective: to create the conditions necessary for Fascism to reapproach the Vatican. The language used in the decrees, mentioning a “state religion” *de jure*, signaled the end of Cavour’s formula describing a “free church in a free state.”

*“To Have Article 34, We Were Willing to Negotiate with Beelzebub in Person”*

With the ground already prepared by the regime’s new rhetoric on the role of Catholicism within Fascist Italy, the Lateran Pacts were signed by both parties on February 11, 1929.<sup>36</sup>



*Figure 11. Mussolini poses among a group of Vatican and Italian government notables at the Lateran Palace before the signing of the Pacts, 1929.<sup>37</sup>*

---

<sup>34</sup> R.D. n. 2185, October 1, 1923, art. 3.

<sup>35</sup> R.D. n. 965, April 30, 1924 and R.D. n. 3288, 15 July 1923.

<sup>36</sup> For an account of the stages that brought to the signature of the Lateran Pacts see, as an historical source, the chronicle written by one of the protagonists, the Holy See’s lawyer and the Pope’s brother Francesco Pacelli (1959). For a more contemporary analysis see Rabani and Corchia (2014, 70-162).

<sup>37</sup> Foto d’archivio di Benito Mussolini con prelati in Vaticano per la firma dei Patti Lateranensi. February 29, 1929. Source: Ansa, Foto D’Archivio. License: Copyright-free.

During the Pacts' negotiations, one of the points that the Vatican was unwilling to negotiate was the issue of the civil value of religious marriage, which was dealt with in the Concordat part of the Pacts.<sup>38</sup> As a testament to the importance that marriage held for the Vatican, it is only necessary to read what Pope Pius XI declared during the negotiations for the Pacts: "in order to have this article 34 [the article regarding the civil value of Catholic marriages] of the Concordat, we were willing to negotiate with Beelzebub in person."<sup>39</sup> As a means to analyze what the Lateran Concordat entailed for the regulation of mixed marriages in the colonies, let us lay out the relevant subparagraphs of article 34 of the Lateran Concordat:

Art. 34

1. The Italian state, wanting to give back a dignity proper to the Catholic tradition of its people to the institution of marriage that is the basis of family, recognizes the civil effects of the sacrament of marriage, which is regulated by canon law. [...]
4. The causes concerning the nullity of marriages and the dispensation from marriages that have been sanctioned but not consummated are reserved to the ecclesiastical tribunals' and ministries' jurisdiction.

Article 34 of the Concordat has the groundbreaking force of radically changing Catholic marriages' juridical value, making them not a private matter anymore but equivalent to civil marriages contracted in front of civil authorities. The article established that every Catholic marriage had to be transcribed into civil registers within five days to automatically give it a civil value. Moreover, the article explicitly recognizes marriage's "sacramental nature" as much as "the Catholic traditions" of the Italian people. Therefore, the first subparagraph sets the tone for a profound restructuring of the relationship between civil law and canon law on the grounds

---

<sup>38</sup> The Lateran Pacts were comprised of three main parts: The Treaty (which established the sovereignty of the Holy See and of the Vatican), the Financial Agreement (which established the fiscal relationship between the Vatican and the Italian state), and the Concordat (which defined the civil and religious relations between the Italian government and the Church).

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Carulli (2011, 3).

of marriage: the state recognized an intrinsic juridical value to a sacrament. Although the law that implemented the Concordat's marriage component into the Italian Civil Code did not specifically mention the term "sacrament" because Italian lawmakers deemed it inappropriate to include a theological term into the state's Civil Code, Italian law recognized its juridical value fully.<sup>40</sup> As Rabani and Corchia (2014, 105) wrote, "we cannot doubt the conformity of the marriage law [n. 847] to the Concordat, as the law itself was redacted based on an agreement between the Holy See and the state." More than any other part of the Concordat, this subparagraph speaks of the confessionalization of the state enacted by the Fascist regime: Catholicism and its tradition are now not only part of the public discourse on the national character of Italy but also its body of laws.

The second subparagraph of Article 34 is perhaps even more relevant to the issue of mixed marriage regulation. The state relinquishes the power to nullify marriages contracted under canon law to the Catholic Church. Del Giudice (1964, 313) wrote that "the reservation to ecclesiastical jurisdiction of causes concerning the nullity of transcribed marriages, which have become civilly effective with the transcription, is absolute and concerns all marriages contracted with canonical discipline and transcribed in the civil state registers." This absolute power was also reaffirmed in the mentioned executive decree n. 847, in which the only prohibitions enforced by the state regarding marriages concerned partners who were already engaged in a civil marriage or partners who had been found mentally ill. These juridical conditions gave the Church, which officiated almost the totality of marriages in the Italian context, supreme sovereignty over the validity of marriages and the conditions that could bring their nullification.

---

<sup>40</sup> R. D. n. 847, May 27, 1929.

This development was crucial for the future regulation of mixed marriages in the colonies. As the Catholic Church recognized as an impediment to marriages only religious disparity and kinship proximity, all the mixed marriages that had been officiated in the colonies religiously but had no value for the state could now be turned into legalized unions. Unfortunately, we do not have the number of marriages officiated by the Libyan Church after the Pacts' signature. However, we know that the beginning of the 1930s coincided with the end of the Libyan anti-colonial resistance in Cyrenaica and the start of the mass settler colonization that increased the number of Italian settlers to almost 120,000 by 1939.<sup>41</sup> As explained in previous chapters, this turn of events entailed an increase in policing racial boundaries in the colony, with colonial administrators aspiring to bring all mixed intimate relationships to an end. It is safe to assume that the plans of urban segregation in the cities and the deportation of Libyans from the prospective settler lands in Cyrenaica contributed to diminishing chances for Italians and Libyans to engage in marriages that were now legally sanctioned by the Church. However, the new marriage policy sanctioned by the Pacts could have put at risk the increasing segregationist colonial policy of the regime.

Fascism did not have a change of heart regarding its plans of settler colonization in Libya and the relative racial segregation it had envisioned for the colony. Mussolini and the other Fascist officials had made a reasoning of a purely political nature. The Lateran Pacts had elevated Mussolini as the "Man of Providence" who had had the merit to re-establish the long-awaited religious peace after the vicissitudes that had pitted the Church and the state against each other" (Sale 2011, 8). Moreover, following the reasoning of one of the most important "clerical-fascist" writers of the time, Francesco Paoloni (1929, 20), Mussolini "brought the consciousness of the nation towards transcending the conflict between clericalism and anti-

---

<sup>41</sup> On the demographic colonization of Libya, see the introduction and Chapter 7 of this dissertation, and also Cresti (2011).

clericalism, and glorified [Catholic] religion as the sacred garrison of the moral value of the race." By including the Church's moral authority within the Fascist project of constructing a racially defined national consciousness, Mussolini incarnated the national hero figure that had been able to unify the nation under the Fascist banner.

The *conciliazione* [conciliation], as it is still widely known in Italian public discourse, was one of Mussolini's most significant political victories. As it was clear that most of the Italian population shared Catholicism's moral principles, a totalitarian project such as Fascism had to incorporate Catholicism and make it part of that Fascist "national character" that the regime was constructing in opposition to the old secular liberal regime. Many parts of the Italian clergy, particularly the Italian episcopal association, saw, for this reason, Fascism in a highly positive manner, going as far as endorsing and celebrating the war-crime-ridden invasion of Ethiopia (Ceci 2010). However, the tremendous political victory of the *conciliazione* did not entail a future subordination of the regime to the Church in social and cultural matters. Indeed, two years after the Pacts signing, the Pope and Mussolini started clashing again on education issues and marriage. As the regime was steadily heading toward its racist turn and the cooperation with Nazi Germany, the political opportuneness that brought the Fascist government to relinquish its sovereignty over marriages only a few years earlier seemed less and less acceptable.

## 8.5 The Vatican and the Regime after 1936: The Fascist Reaction to Mixed Marriages

### *The Clash between Fascism and the Pope over the Regulation of Mixed Marriages*

Fascism culminated its transition to a radically racist ideology in 1936, with the invasion of Ethiopia and the promulgation of a series of policies that, in the words of the Italian minister of Propaganda Galeazzo Ciano, were aimed at ensuring that “the Italian race maintained its purity” (Sarfatti 2000, 108). The Vatican, which had already clashed with the regime on the issue of the youth's education (Rabani and Corchia 2014, 136), took a firm stance against Nazi and Fascist racism, particularly in the person of the Pope himself. In March 1937, Pius XI issued the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*, which condemned the Nazi ideology as “anti-Christian neopaganism” and spoke against “the so-called myth of race and blood.” Expectedly, Hitler retaliated against such a condemnation of his Party's ideology and censored the encyclical throughout Germany. The following year a group of Fascist intellectuals that included anthropologist Lidio Cipriani published the infamous “Manifesto of racist scientists,” in which they affirmed the Aryan character of the Italian race and its superiority toward other races, including the colonized people of the empire and the Jewish Italians of the metropole. The Pope, who had not yet taken a direct stance against the racist turn of the Italian regime, in July 1938 reacted harshly to the “Manifesto” and spoke anti-racist words to the students of the Propaganda Fide boarding school:

We forget that humankind, all of humankind, is one universal human race. The expression humankind connotes in itself the human race. [...] Therefore, we can ask why Italy had to

imitate Germany disgracefully. [...] The Latin people did not have a word for race or anything resembling it.<sup>42</sup>

The Pope's refusal to turn a blind eye to the growing racism and antisemitism was not shared by the rest of the Roman Curia or the Italian bishops, who were reluctant to endorse the Pope's view out of caution and deference to the regime.

In the meantime, the regime did not take the Pope's attacks lightly, and it showed irritation toward the Pope's stance but an eagerness not to damage its relationship with Catholicism. Mussolini appeared quite angered by the Pope's attacks and commented that "on the issue of race, we will hold firm. To say that Fascism imitated someone or something is simply an absurdity."<sup>43</sup> Conversely, the eagerness not to cut ties entirely with the Church appears palpable from the legislation that constituted the main object of this dissertation's analysis: the prohibition of mixture in the colony. The often-mentioned R.D. n. 880 of 1937, or the first explicit prohibition of mixture in the Italian empire, had a specific language related to the regime's relationship with the Church after 1936. The law read as follows:

The Italian citizen who, in the territory of the Kingdom or the Colonies, engages in a relationship of conjugal nature with a subject person of Italian East Africa or a foreigner belonging to a population that has traditions, customs, or juridical and social concepts similar to those of the subjects of Italian East Africa, is punished with imprisonment from one year to five years.<sup>44</sup>

The law prohibited "relationships of a conjugal nature," meaning forms of concubinage between Italian men and Eastern African women, not all relationships per se, including marriage. The law mentioned the Eastern African colonies only because the colonial subjects of that territory inhabited a lower step in the Italian empire's racial hierarchies and because

---

<sup>42</sup> Pio XI. *Discorso del 28 luglio 1938 agli alunni del collegio di Propaganda Fide*. In "L'Osservatore Romano," 30 luglio 1938.

<sup>43</sup> Mussolini pronounced these words during a visit to a training camp for Fascist vanguardists. Quoted in Martini (1963, 184).

<sup>44</sup> R.D. n. 880, April 19, 1937.

instances of concubinage and mixed children were much more frequent than in Libya. However, the debate surrounding the choice of language of the law involves the regulation of marriages throughout the empire, which is also relevant to the Libyan case. When the law came into effect, many commentators wondered whether it would be applied implicitly to marriages and whether that meant that marriages were legally allowed before its promulgation. Italian jurist Mario Manfredini did not seem to doubt it, arguing that “since marriage is a sacrament also in the Italian Civil Code, [...] it seems utterly daring to suppose that a prohibition of marriages could be implicit in any law” (Manfredini 1938, 10). In Manfredini's view, if the regime had wanted to regulate marriage specifically, it would have done so. The point is reiterated by another eminent jurist of the time, Luigi Forlivesi:

The text of the decree n. 880 does not mention marriage and not even conjugal relationships, but it deploys a different and unusual expression for our legislation, designating the punished acts as "relationships of a conjugal nature." [...] Why did the legislator not explicitly mention marriage and adopt another expression if it meant prohibiting all kinds of conjugal relationships? (Forlivesi 1938, 482)

Forlivesi's hypothesis regarding the regime's reasons behind the ambiguous language choice for the law touches the heart of the issue of the relationship between Fascism and the Catholic Church:

It is not out of place to suppose that one of the main difficulties [in the choice of language for the decree n.880] dwells in the religious policies pursued by Fascism also in the colonies, a policy of respect and understanding for the Church's interests (Forlivesi 1938, 484).

As a confirmation of the jurists' suspicions regarding the choice of words for R.D. n. 880, we have the direct words of the Undersecretary of State for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Giuseppe Bastianini. On February 28, 1939, Bastianini wrote to Mussolini about expanding the prohibition of mixed intimacies to Libyan citizens and mentioned that “the policy [n.880]

concerns only cases of concubinage and willingly excludes from the prohibition regularly officiated marriages. This choice was made because the legislator thought that [a prohibition of marriage] would have clearly contrasted with the spirit that informed the Lateran Pacts."<sup>45</sup> Article 34 of the Concordat was arguably one of the most critical points of the agreement for the Vatican, which considered its jurisdiction over the nullification of marriages vital to its influence over Italian society. The Fascist government tried to push forward with its racist legislation without damaging its hard-won ties with the Vatican. Therefore, the law's ambiguous wording must be read as a weak and ill-fated attempt for the regime to have it both ways.

#### *Fascism's Unequivocal Embrace of Racism and Its Effect on Colonial Libya*

The tide changed dramatically in the second half of 1938. Alongside Hitler's growing influence on Mussolini and the regime's racist ideological turn, the Pope's hostile words pushed Mussolini to disregard the final doubts he had about seizing the jurisdiction on the conditions of marriage fully from the hands of the Church. Mixture had to be prohibited throughout the empire to ensure Italians' racial purity; diplomatic doubts were now an issue of second order. On October 6, 1938, Mussolini presented to The Great Council of Fascism the *Dichiarazione della Razza* (declaration on race), which detailed specific and clear-cut legislation on marriages in the metropole and the empire, making clear "the prohibition for Italians to marry elements belonging to the Hamitic, Semitic races or any non-Aryan race."<sup>46</sup>

As expected, the Vatican reacted strongly to the news of a new law prohibiting mixed marriages throughout the empire, which was to be approved by the Fascist government within the year.

---

<sup>45</sup> ASMAI, Fondo Affari Politici. Gab., b. 70. *Promemoria per il Duce. Matrimoni fra cittadini metropolitani e sudditi dell'A.O.I. o cittadini libici*. February 28, 1939.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Sarfatti (1994, 187).

On November 4, 1938, Pope Pius XI sent a letter to Mussolini explaining how "the new law [on the prohibition of mixed marriages] damages the Concordat's solemn pact. [...] We send you here our desire to maintain the legislation on marriages as it is, in the hope that it will be fulfilled by your wisdom that has been already able to discern the importance of regulating marriages following the laws of the Religion, which is also the religion of the state."<sup>47</sup> Seeing his request unanswered, the Pope wrote to King Vittorio Emanuele III and asked him to intercede with Mussolini to change the law and allow mixed marriages if both partners were Catholic.<sup>48</sup> Mussolini promptly replied to the King, explaining that there was no way to modify the law according to the Pope's requests, as this change would have made the law too vulnerable. The regime had already made its choice, and Mussolini was convinced that its racist turn was unstoppable. The requests of the Vatican fell on deaf ears.

On November 17, 1938, the Italian government issued the R.D.L. n. 1728, which prohibited mixed marriages between Italians and people of any other race. This decree, which has to be considered the first comprehensive law to ban a form of mixture throughout the Italian empire, breached the Lateran Concordat on two fundamental points. First, it directly breached the essence of article 34, which aimed at giving back total jurisdiction over marriages to the Catholic Church. Second, the decree nullified the contents of article 34, subparagraph 4 of the Concordat, which relinquished the right to nullify a marriage to the Church. Indeed, article 6 of law n. 1728 made it clear that all religious marriages in breach of Article 1 of the same law could not be transcribed in civil registers, making them legally void. Fascism and the Vatican's relationship was irremediably severed with this final affront to the Pope's will.

The events that pitted the Church and the state against each other in the metropole had a clear connection to the vicissitudes of the empire, including Italian Libya. The Libyan missionaries,

---

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in De Felice (1961, 564).

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in De Felice (1961, 565).

who at that point were no missionaries at all but merely the clergy that composed the Catholic Church of Libya, distanced themselves even more from the local population and served almost exclusively the Italian settler population. The Libyan clergy's status as agents of empire and supporters of settler colonization of the region increased even further with the nomination of Camillo Vittorino Facchinetti as the apostolic vicar of the colony in 1936. An openly declared fascist, bishop Facchinetti went as far as discouraging conversion to avoid the risk of reducing the proper distance between settlers and Libyans (Bonaiuti 1982, 438). The proximity of the Libyan clergy to the Fascist imperial plans, as much as colonial administrators' efforts to keep the settler and local populations segregated, paint us a picture of a social context in which mixed marriages were sporadic, even more than before the signature of the Lateran Pacts. However, as in neighboring French Algeria, where the exiguous numbers of mixed marriages still caused widespread debates on patrilineality and belonging (Surkis 2019, 186), colonial and Church authorities still used their power to regulate the intimate colonial encounter.

Before the Lateran Pacts, the non-validity of religious marriage allowed couples to at least get the sacrament of marriage without defying colonial authorities' informal prohibitions of mixed marriages. In the Concordat regime, however, the collaboration between the Fascist colonial administrators and the Libyan clergy contributed to an increasingly hostile environment for mixed couples wanting to get married in the eyes of both God and the state. This finds confirmation in the words of the undersecretary for Italian Africa, Attilio Teruzzi: "legitimate [mixed] unions have never happened in our colonies under Fascism."<sup>49</sup> This convergence of intents by the colonial state and the Catholic Church seems to be consistent with what was argued by Ceci (2013) regarding the Italian Eastern African contexts. As stated by Cardinal Jorio in 1937, 'the Church will be able, and even will have to within the right limits, through

---

<sup>49</sup> Teruzzi pronounced these words during a speech to the Italian senate on March 31, 1938. Quoted in Forlivesi (1938, 484)

the Missionaries, to lend the invoked work of persuasion to prevent such hybrid unions for the wise hygienic-social reasons intended by the State.’<sup>50</sup>

Even if some couples might have slipped through the cracks of colonial administrators' policy and the clergy's collaboration with the regime, Italian institutional archives do not contain sources that testify to their experiences. The lack of evidence of mixed marriages during the Concordat marriage regime might hint at how the collaboration between the Libyan Church and the colonial administration increased the colony's segregation drastically along racial lines. After 1936, with the regime heading steadily towards a racist connotation of national belonging, marriage segregation in the metropole and the colonies could no longer be informal. Although mixed marriages were close to irrelevant in terms of numbers, the regime legislated to make mixture illegal in all its forms throughout the empire, choosing to enforce its new ideology over maintaining the formal agreements with the Vatican.<sup>51</sup> The regulation of marriages, which had done so much to reconnect the Italian state to the Church, eventually became one of the leading causes of the new relationship's rupture. For a regime that had been characterizing its nationalist discourse in racial terms for years, the issue of mixed marriages was not negotiable anymore.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

This chapter thoroughly analyzed the social institution of marriage in colonial Libya and how religious and civil authorities dealt with it. Given its centrality in governing populations and

---

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Ceci (2013, 199-200).

<sup>51</sup> The regulatory iron fist of the Italian government with regards to mixed marriages in spite of their extremely low numbers is consistent with what found by De Hart (2015, 176) with regards to the Dutch East Indies context.

their intimate sphere, the regulation of marriages involved discourses and strategies of both the Italian state and the Catholic Church. In the Italian context, the history of marriage is deeply rooted in the complex relationship between the Italian state and the Catholic Church and their competition for moral authority over the Italian population. For these reasons, this chapter switched focus between Libya and the metropole, the discursive clashes between the Vatican and the state in Italy, and colonial administrators' relationship with the missionaries in Libya. The picture that emerges from the analysis conveyed in this chapter is complex and contradictory, with the state and the Church's representatives often clashing but always complicit in the enforcement of colonial power over the local population. Both agents of the empire, the Italian colonial elites and the missionaries shaped the lives of the couples who attempted to see their relationship sanctioned by religious and civil law.

By detailing the institution of marriage's history in the Italian colonial context, this chapter attempted to clarify how the different projects of the colonial and religious administrations impacted the lives of mixed couples in colonial Libya. This chapter mapped the institution's history within the Libyan context and how it intermingled with struggles over secular and religious sovereignty regarding the institution of marriage in the metropole. By building upon the scholarship on the institution of marriage in the Italian context, this chapter added complexity by analyzing its specific conjugation in the Libyan context.

In Libya, where racialized religious differences characterized the boundaries between the colonizers and colonized, marriage played a significant role in regulating mixed intimacies. This chapter was able to link the institutional struggle in the metropole to the colonial power formations that emerged and clashed during the forty years of the Italian presence in the region. As they related to belonging, offspring, and property, mixed marriages stood at the center of the Church's and the state's interests. The conflicts and collaborations they caused are a testament to colonial governments' need to regulate their citizens' and subjects' private spheres

according to their discursive and political projects. The Catholic Church, which portrayed itself in opposition to the state as a moral authority for so long, quickly fell in line with the Fascist regime once it started including its traditions in a more comprehensive nationalist project.

Undeniably, mixed marriages in Libya were insignificant in numbers, with only a few couples' vicissitudes being preserved in archival sources. Even though they were statistically irrelevant, the colonial administrations in Libya went to great lengths to make it difficult for Italians to marry Libyans by outright banning mixed marriages with specific legislation. Once again, the relevance of mixture in the Libyan context did not seem to originate from its incidence but rather from its qualitative meaning for structuring the settler-colonial society envisioned by Italian administrators. By the latter stages of the development of the demographic colonization plans for the colony and the increasing number of settlers that followed, the threat posed by mixed marriages became more significant than any political consideration. As a white colonizing population, Italians had to be separated from other races to protect the racial consciousness developed over a fifty-year colonial enterprise. For the Fascist regime, racial segregation had become the policy to be enforced with the highest priority.

## **9. Conclusions**

This dissertation sought to answer the main research question: *Were mixed intimacies between Italians and Libyans regulated by Italian colonial authorities? If so, what role did such regulations play in the racialization of Italy's national identity as white?* In this dissertation, I deployed a socio-legal historical analysis of Italian official archival sources to prove how Italian administrators regulated mixture in Libya and to ascertain such regulations' role in developing notions of Italian whiteness. My research has found that not only Italian colonial administrators carefully regulated mixed intimacies between Italians and Libyans, but also that the motivation to do so was intrinsically connected to the projects of construction of Italy's national identity as inherently linked with notions of whiteness. In this conclusion, I dive into the implications of this study's results for understanding the role of Italian colonialism in Libya in the historical development of Italian whiteness. To do so, I first outline notions of race and mixing specific to the Libyan colonial context. In particular, I describe how Italian colonial administrators understood and enforced racial differences in the specific context of the colonization of Libya and how it differed from the other Italian colonial contexts in Eastern Africa. Next, I describe this research's findings on the characteristics of mixed intimacies in colonial Libya, along with the thirty years of Italian colonization and how their regulations worked to create processes of racialization of Libyan people while strengthening the identification of Italian settlers as white. Finally, in the last section of this conclusion, I outline some general remarks on the political economy of the colonial regulation of mixed intimacy in Libya, focusing on the various phases that characterized the exertion of Italian colonial power during the colonization of the territory. This final bird's-eye view over the longer declinations

of Italian colonial power regarding intimacies in Libya will allow me to draw the final overarching conclusions of my research and their implications for future developments.

## **9.1 Mixture and Race in the Libyan Colonial Context**

When I started my archival research and stumbled upon the first cases of mixed intimacies being regulated by Italian colonial administrators in Libya, I faced the methodological challenge of determining what was being mixed in the intimate relationships whose regulations represented the central subject of this research. As I explained in the introduction of this thesis, mixture is framed in this research as the act of intimate coupling of two individuals perceived by themselves and others in their social context as belonging to two different races. This definition of the field of inquiry posited the challenge of ascertaining whether Italians and Libyans were indeed understood to belong to two distinct racial groups and if this framework of racial difference was a cause for the regulation of mixed intimacies in the colony. In other words, the problem was to ascertain whether the regulation of mixed intimacies was motivated by a specific understanding of racial difference and hence policing of its boundaries or rather by a vaguer need to uphold the "prestige" of the colonizers in a land that they spent decades trying to conquer.

This methodological hurdle sprouted from the notion that, at least in the early 1900s, in Italian racial theory and anthropology circles, Italians were connected to Libyans by the theory of the "Mediterranean race." Anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi developed this theory to characterize Italians as directly linked to the Mediterranean's great ancient civilizations. It gained popularity in Italian intellectual and political circles at the turn of the century as a pushback against

Northern European Aryanist racial theories. Its ideological purpose was to create a narrative of "racial regeneration" for the Italian population, which up to that point had been deemed as "racially degenerated" by French and German racial theorists when compared with Northern Aryan races (De Donno 2006, 396).

However, the emergence of the "Mediterranean" racial paradigm in intellectual and political elites did not entail a complete, widespread alignment of racial ideas to the ideology. Both liberal governments and Fascist ones did not impose a single line of thought concerning racial ideologies. Interestingly for a dictatorship, Fascism even encouraged the theorization of several viewpoints, and Mussolini changed his rhetoric on the features of the Italian "race" many times throughout his rule. Racial theorists, consequently, were presented with a slew of ideological conflicts as they tried to conform to current political realities. This complex ideological scenario entailed a conflicted understanding of racial differences in Libya throughout the Italian colonial presence. Indeed, while in archival sources, colonial elites often framed the local population as "racially close" (Casales 2020, 443) to Italians, in many other documents, the Libyan population was understood as belonging to an "Arab race" inherently and "biologically" different from the Italians. These conflicting ideologies that pervaded the Italian ruling classes' understanding of racial differences in Libya are evident in the plethora of laws and policies regarding the juridical status of Libyans discussed in Chapter 7. As the colonial boundaries between Italians and the Arab and Berber ethnic majority in Libya were not as phenotypically evident as in the Eastern African contexts, the juridical status of Libyans changed according to the political interests of the Italian colonial elites. At the same time, Eastern Africans remained colonial subjects without political rights throughout Italian colonialism.

The complexity and uncertainty regarding canonical racial ideologies in the Libyan population were not confined to the scientific and political circles. The historian Roberta Pergher (2017,

166) wrote that during the Fascist rule of Libya, there were divergent views on whether the critical markers of difference between settlers and colonized populations were racial, religious, or cultural. For Italian intellectual and political elites, as for commonly shared understandings of colonial difference of the time, race in Libya was a complex issue. This complexity, in turn, meant that shared understandings of racial differences were not as reliant on purported “biological factors” as in the Italian Eastern African colonies. The concept of race in Italian Libya was inextricably linked to processes of racialization based on cultural and religious peculiarities aimed at creating and enforcing boundaries between the local and settler populations.

The various racial theories and shared epistemologies on race in the Libyan context make for a context riddled with complexities, nuances, and continuous change, particularly if processes of racialization are analyzed through the lens of the regulation of mixed intimacies. The many sources I analyzed throughout this dissertation often mentioned that the motivations that brought Italian colonial administrations to regulate mixture were based on factors such as prestige, religious and cultural differences, and political opportuneness. Including these sources within a broader analysis of the construction of Italian whiteness brought me to the conclusion that such factors were all co-opted into a broader process of racialization of Libyans and the “whitening” of the Italian settler populations. Therefore, what was being mixed in intimate relationships that involved Italians and Libyans were distinct racial categories built upon essentialized cultural and religious traits that emphasized the colonial boundaries between the two categories of people. This racialization process was not static but evolved according to the many social and political changes that Libya went through during the thirty-year-long Italian colonization of the territory.

While race as a subjugation category is never about ideologies on “biological” race and phenotype only but always rooted in racialization processes (Haney-López 1996, 126), the

context of the Italian colonization of Libya saw this dynamic unfolding in an accelerated manner. Italians, who had been racialized for centuries by other European powers, had a stronger need to define themselves as a white nation, and this need was particularly relevant in Libya, where the “Mediterranean” racial ideology blurred racial boundaries that might have been more immediately identifiable in a context such as Eastern Africa. As such, Libya represented a unique racialization laboratory, where the construction of Libyans as racially Other was intrinsically connected to the identification of Italians as white.

In Chapter 4, I argued how fragile the self-identification of Italians as white was during the first fifty years of the Italian nation-state. Racialized by Northern European and American intellectual and political elites as a "degenerated" race that could not live up to their glorious past, Italians used the colonial enterprise not only as a form of capitalist expansion but also as an endeavor to increase national prestige and therefore construct themselves as belonging to European whiteness. In particular, Italians strived to identify themselves with that modern, white, western Christian identity that characterized all European colonial powers.

The process of “whitening” the Italian population through the colonial enterprise happened in intrinsically different ways in Italian Eastern Africa, where colonial boundaries were based on “biologically” framed racial differences, and Libya, where this was not the case. Given the connection between Italians and Libyans provided by the "Mediterranean" racial ideology, the racial boundaries in Libya could not be based on pseudo-scientific "biological racist" doctrines but had to rely on processes of racialization that essentialized Other features of Libyans (Arab, Muslim, nomads, or semi-nomads) and Self features of Italians (modern, European, Catholic and white). D'Annunzio's referrals to Libyans as racialized Muslims and Libyan women's descriptions in colonial novels analyzed in Chapter 4 shows how the Italian imagination of Libyans was already charged with racializing logic before the start of the colonization. These processes were only strengthened during the actual colonial presence in the region, as testified

by the official sources on mixed intimacies. From Doctor Salerno's description of Tripoline prostitutes to the referrals to Libyan men who engaged in intimate relationships with Italian women, all the way to the descriptions of Libyan grooms and spouses conveyed by the Italian Catholic missionaries in Libya, it appears clear how the regulation of mixture in Libya was deeply connected to the racialization of the colonized population. The object of the regulators' attention was the mixing of two differently racialized groups, the "white, modern, Christian" Italians on one side and the "Arab or Berber, Muslim" Libyans on the other.

It is now time to shift the focus to the mixed relationships themselves. What were the peculiarities of mixed intimacies in Libya? How did their regulation compare to other Italian contexts? What were the differences in the regulations between the liberal and Fascist regimes? The following section outlines the conclusions regarding these questions and topics.

## **9.2 The Regulations of Mixed Intimacies in Colonial Libya**

From a broader point of analysis, the mixed intimacies analyzed in this dissertation can be divided into the following groups: concubinage, prostitution, intimate extramarital affairs, and marriage. While they were all present throughout the Italian colonial presence in the Northern African territory, these relationships were regulated differently according to the evolving political context that characterized the colony. Before diving into such political phases and how they shaped colonial regulations of the intimate sphere, it is necessary to outline the characteristics of said kinds of relationships and their similarities and differences to similar intimacies analyzed in other colonial contexts.

## *Concubinage*

Concubinage in Italian Libya, or *mabruchismo*, as the Italians called it, was a widespread intimate colonial encounter that made its first appearance in the colony in concomitance with the invasion of the Italian army in 1911. As in basically every other colonial context (Stoler 1989, 2002; Barrera 2002; Conklin 1997; Hyam 1986; Widenthal 2001; Ming 1983), Italian colonial administrators in Libya had an evolving stance toward cases of concubinage, tolerating it or even endorsing it at times while discouraging or even prohibiting it at others. Alongside prostitution, concubinage was the primary form of mixed intimacy during the first twenty years of the Italian presence in Libya, when the colony was heavily militarized due to the anti-colonial resistance. As a general consideration of the practice, concubinage in Libya followed the same class organization noted by Barrera (2004) regarding the Italian Eastern African context. As officers and soldiers were not allowed to bring their wives to the colony, the military administration created state-controlled brothels for soldiers while unofficially allowing them to take Libyan women as concubines to separate them from the troops. As shown in Chapter 5, the early Italian administrations in Libya had a somewhat ambiguous stance toward concubinage, condemning it officially to show themselves respectful of local customs while allowing it in practice to provide stable relationships to their officers. As with other forms of mixed intimacy, the transition from a militarized space to a settler colony boosted by Fascism's grand demographic colonization plans brought a restructuring of racial boundaries in the region. In particular, concubinage was wholly prohibited in Libya, first via individual punishments to the Italian officers involved and finally with the 1939 official legislation prohibiting the practice throughout the empire.

Although not as frequent as *madamoto*, its counterpart in the Eastern African colonial context, *mabruchismo* was a relevant form of colonial intimacy that played a vital role in developing the power relations between the Italian colonizing elites and the Libyan population. Moreover,

the reference to payments to the parents of the women involved suggests a form of temporary marriage agreement along the lines of the Eastern African *demoz* (Sòrgoni 1998). Future comparative research on the two practices might help fully assess the continuities and discontinuities between them. Moreover, future developments of this chapter's inquiry, if able to rely on sources preserved in Libyan archives, may broaden the understanding of the Italian Libyan context to the direct experiences of Libyan women and mixed children.

### *Prostitution*

Prostitution was the other widespread form of mixed intimacy that characterized militarized colonial Libya. While concubinage represented a private arrangement between higher-class officers and lower-class Libyan women, the Italian military instituted state-sanctioned prostitution to control working-class soldiers' sexuality. Consistently with research conducted in other colonial contexts (Ballhatchet 1980; Baneerjee 1998; Levine 1994; Warren 2003), Italian administrators deemed it necessary to strictly regulate lower-class soldier sexuality to stabilize the relations with the colonized population. Soldiers' sexuality was considered perilous to leave unrestrained as it could have led to rape and (even worse in the administrators' eyes) homosexuality, and it was strictly regulated since the onset of the Italian colonization of Libya. However, unlike French Algeria (Dunne 1994; Taraud 2003), state-sanctioned prostitution was not segregated along racial lines in Libya. While French authorities actively brought French prostitutes to the colony to enforce racial segregation in brothels, their Italian counterparts prohibited Italian prostitutes from going to Libya and actively repatriated those who did despite the ban. This approach all but guaranteed the widespread existence of mixed sex in brothels. Although not an ideal situation in the administrators' eyes, racially unsegregated prostitution was considered necessary throughout the militarized phase of the Italian colonization of Libya.

Unlike concubinage, unsegregated prostitution was never prohibited in Libya. Conversely, as concubinage was steadily phased out in the 1930s due to the shift toward settler colonialism, prostitution remained the mixed intimacy of choice in all those parts of the colony that were still militarized. This dynamic was confirmed in all the areas where the local populations were resettled in concentration camps to free up fertile lands for settlers. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, during the 1930s, officers were discouraged from taking concubines in these areas but were otherwise pushed to attend racially unsegregated brothels. This finding aligns with the Eastern African colonial context (De Napoli 2009), where Fascist colonial elites increasingly antagonized concubinage due to its domestic and possibly less exploitative character. While the political phases that invested colonial Libya and their effects on intimacy regulations will be discussed more in-depth in the following section of this conclusion, it is central to stress here that the regime's settler colonization policies had a central function in this restructuring of the roles of concubinage and prostitution in the colony. With the racial imperative becoming increasingly central in the Fascist regime's ideology, the exploitative character of prostitution became a much-preferred option to concubinage, which, although also framed by unequal power relations, may have been characterized by a form of domesticity deemed unacceptable for the racial segregation policy framework of the regime.

### *Italian Women and Mixed Intimacies*

Up to now, I have discussed the main findings of this research regarding the most widespread forms of mixed intimacy in colonial Libya, both of which involved Italian men and Libyan women. This gender composition was caused mainly by the near absence of Italian women that characterized Libya's first twenty years of colonization. After the anti-colonial resistance was broken at the beginning of the 1930s, more Italian women started living in the colony, posing for the first time the risk of white women being in the position to engage in intimate

relationships with racialized Libyan men. As testified by the literature on white women in various colonial contexts (Kennedy; 1987; Gouda 1993; Findlay 1999; Bagnall 2002; Haggis 2017; Allen 2020), European women were considered the bearers of white morality in the colony, in addition to their material role in the “biological” reproduction of race and were, therefore, more closely monitored by colonial states with regards to mixed intimacies. For what concerns Italian Libya, the same framework was present. As the Italian women who migrated to the colony were primarily wives of workers sent to Libya by the regime, the primary type of mixed intimacy in which they were involved was extramarital relationships. As testified by the cases discussed in Chapter 6, the Italian women who were punished by the police for engaging in intimate relationships with Libyan men fell in this category.

As in other contexts (Bland 2005; Anderson 2010), Italian women who engaged in intimate relationships with racialized Libyan men were considered sexually deviant and often assumed to be prostitutes. Moreover, Italian women who engaged in sexual relationships with Libyan men actively defied consolidated patterns of sexual domination over colonized populations, which always involved a clear patriarchal dynamic on the colonizers' side. These findings are in line with what was argued in other Northern African contexts (Phipps 2021), as white women were often framed as "betrayers" of the settler society for their choice to engage in "intimate" relationships with racialized men over their official marriage with settler men. While it could be argued that the relationships analyzed in Chapter 6 might have been particularly problematic because they entailed an extramarital dynamic, the choice of words of the authorities quoted in the sources, with their constant referral to "prestige" in connection to "morality" point to a precise racializing dynamic of the partner of the Italian women. The women in question were, in fact, guilty not only of defying the moral norms that supported marriage but also of tarnishing the colonizers' racial prestige and "mortifying" Italian men's patriarchal power.

### *Mixed Marriages and Questions of Belonging*

The last mixed intimacies discussed in this work were marriages between Libyans and Italians. In Chapter 7, I discussed the implications that the assimilation plans for Libya envisioned by Governor Italo Balbo had for the regulations of mixed marriages in the colony. Through the analysis of correspondence internal to the Fascist Party, I was able to demonstrate that the possibility of mixed marriages was an important source of concern in the highest spheres of the party, so much so that it went on to influence a significant policy such as the assimilation of Libya and its populations within the Italian body politic. As mixed marriages were positioned at the core of juridical status and belonging issues, the findings of Chapter 7 provide new insight into the relevance of colonial Libya for these matters in the broader academic discussion of Italian imperialism and Fascism. Moreover, they dispel the notion that mixed intimacies were numerically irrelevant in Libya and did not arouse the policymakers' interest or concern.

Given its centrality in religious canon law, to thoroughly assess marriage in colonial Libya, I researched state archival sources and religious ones, particularly Vatican ones. The central focus of Chapter 8, in which I discussed how the Catholic Church in Libya regulated mixed marriages, was the relationship between the Italian state and the Catholic Church in the colony. The two institutions had had a conflicting relationship since the birth of the nation-state in 1861, with particular emphasis on the jurisdiction over the private sphere of Italians and hence also marriage. This conflict transposed in the Libyan colony, where the Catholic Church had had a missionary presence since the 1600s. Even though the missionaries endorsed the Italian colonial enterprise in the region and expanded their power relative to the increase of Italian settler presence over the years, the Church in Libya still held the power to defy state provisions regarding mixed marriages. As religious and civil marriages ran on parallel lines until the

signature of the Lateran Pact in 1929, religious authorities could marry under canon law people that could not under state law.

The centrality of the Libyan Catholic Church in managing marriages is consistent with research on the same topic in other contexts (DuVal 2008; Van Kirk 2002; Steenbrink 2007; Carey 2011; Posada et al. 2020), which found that religious authorities often married people across colonial boundaries as long as the partner of the European spouse converted to Christianity. This point represents the most relevant finding of this research regarding marriages. Italian missionaries in Libya allowed Libyan men or women to marry Italians as long as they converted to Catholicism, effectively defying the state's power to sway over who could marry whom in the colonies. This framework had implications for processes of categorization in the colony, as religious belonging, which state actors, as much as the general colonial society, considered a racializing marker of difference, had the potential to become the very category that allowed individuals to marry "outside" of their racial group. While religion acted as a marker of racialization when racial boundaries in the colony were based on "biologically" understood differences (Emerson, Korver-Glenn, & Douds 2015, 201), the possibility of conversion allowed religious affiliation to defy colonial rule boundaries.

The resolution of the conflict between the Catholic Church and the Italian state in the metropole in 1929 coincided with a realignment of the two institutions on the management of marriages, with the Fascist regime elevating Catholicism to the role of state religion and the Church accordingly falling in line with the regime's late 1930s segregationist project in the empire. The relationship between the state and the Church in Libya shows how, even if they had a conflicting relationship due to their power struggle, the two institutions represented a different face of the same colonial power exerted over the colonized population. By managing mixed marriages and the conversion of Libyan partners, the Church held material and representational

power over the couples in question, and missionaries were active agents in the racialization of Libyans.

As a final note on the relationship between the Catholic Church and Fascism, it must be stressed that the Vatican did oppose the final racist turn of the regime, at least in the person of Pope Pius IX. However, I have argued that this mild opposition happened as a reaction to the loss of jurisdiction over marriages that the anti-miscegenation Fascist laws imposed over the Italian and imperial territories, effectively rolling back the concessions granted to the Church in 1929. The analysis of the complex, conflicting relationship between the Italian Fascist state and the Catholic Church in Libya adds another tassel to the already rich research mosaic of the historical relationships between these two historical institutions (Malgeri 1994; Ceci 2010, 2013, 2014; and Sale 2011). Colonial Libya was a context where religion was central to establishing boundaries between the local and the settler populations. For this reason, the issue of mixed marriages, and hence the Catholic Church's role in the regulation of belonging and intimacy, is a particularly relevant topic that further research will need to expand.

Overall, this research has proved that mixed relationships did happen during the Italian colonization of Libya, disproving the notion that “the Arab population was very isolated and did not seek interaction with the Italians” (Pergher 2017, 197). This finding is important for our current understanding of intimacies within the framework of Italian colonialism, as it furthers the study of this topic beyond Eastern Africa, the only Italian colonial context that had solid academic research in this regard. With this research’s findings, the colonization of Libya can now be considered another essential piece in mapping the political economy of intimacies in the Italian context.

Moreover, this research has dispelled the notion that “in the Libyan colonies [...] there was not a consistent and widespread anxiety regarding mixture [...] as it instead was in Eritrea first and Ethiopia next” (Spadaro 2013, 31). These pages have proven that mixture was a significant

cause of concern for colonial administrators, who often reacted disproportionately to the small number of mixed intimacies in the colony. This point is arguably the most important conclusion of this research: mixture in Libya was relevant not because of its statistical incidence but because of the regulatory reactions it aroused in a context where racial differences were purportedly less stark than in Eastern Africa. This finding shows that the motivation behind policies such as those discussed in this dissertation often relies on ideological foundations and that mixed intimacies in colonial contexts involved more than simply cracking down practices that represented a danger due to their statistical relevance. Mixture threatened processes of categorization that lay at the heart of the colonial subjugation of Libyans and the representation of Italians as superior due to their whiteness. As such, the regulations of mixture discussed in this dissertation are a crucial part of Italian history, as they point to bi-directional processes of racialization in a complex context such as Libya, where Italians had to actively construct their racial superiority to justify their purported right to colonize.

While this research still leaves some questions on mixture in Libya unanswered, first among them an assessment of policies regarding mixed children, it represents a stepping stone that could further the understanding of processes of racialization in the Italian context. Future research will be able to build on the findings on mixed intimacies described in these pages and paint an even clearer picture of how Italians understood and enforced racial difference in an understudied context such as the colonial Libyan one.

### **9.3 Mixed Intimacies and the Political Economy of the Italian Colonization of Libya**

The Italian colonization of Libya was characterized by various phases that reflected the political context both in the Italian metropole and in the colony itself. These phases directly influenced the many ways in which mixed intimacies were regulated over thirty years. Within those thirty years, Italy went through the First World War, the ascension of Fascism, the proclamation of the Italian empire, and the start of the Second World War. These broader geopolitical and regime changes entailed radical shifts in how the Libyan colony was managed, both in the military efforts to secure its political control and the administrative choices to organize the colonial society and the relations between Italian settlers and the local population. In this final part of the conclusion, I look at the patterns that characterized the consistencies and inconsistencies in the exertion of colonial power over the intimate sphere of the Libyan colonial society.

The first evident major political shift was the regime change that saw the liberal administration replaced by the Fascist dictatorship led by Benito Mussolini in 1922. While at first glance it might appear as possibly the most significant factor in a colonial policy change, my dissertation, as much as other works on Italian colonialism (Barrera 2002, Sòrgoni 1998; De Napoli 2009), finds the first decade of Fascist colonial policy to be a continuation of the liberal years. Mainly for the representation of colonized populations and their treatment regarding colonial policy, Fascism adopted a different strategy only in the 1930s. As argued by Barrera (2002, 288), while during the liberal period, the African populations were represented as inferior but ready to be “civilized” by Italians, in the 1930s, Italians started defining them as “biologically” inferior, and hence doomed to remain in their state of inferiority forever.

One of this dissertation's most significant conclusions is the overarching project of creating the consciousness of whiteness that all colonial administrators attempted to foster in the Italian population in Libya. For what concerns the specific topic of this research, this common theme is evident in how mixed intimacies were regulated or, instead, who was punished or deemed responsible for breaching intimate racial boundaries in the colony. In the archival sources I analyzed, who was officially punished for engaging in mixed intimacies was always the Italian partner and rarely the Libyan one. This dynamic was true for the officers who took Libyan women as concubines and the Italian women caught by the police while having an illicit relationship with Libyan men, as described in Chapter 6. While it is not surprising that the military administrations would punish officers for tarnishing "the uniform's dignity," to use the words of the punishments quoted in Chapter 5, the same cannot be said for the cases involving Italian women discussed in Chapter 6. Indeed, one of the women in question was in an "illicit relationship" with a Libyan *askari*, a member of the Italian colonial army, and still, the individual who was punished was the Italian woman. This dynamic seems to align with what Stoler (2002, 79-111) found regarding the Dutch East Indies, where she found a clear double standard in legal and cultural norms that punished white women for mixing with indigenous men but not white men. Notably, it also aligns with what Phipps (2021, 2) recently found regarding French women being punished in colonial Morocco for having intimate relationships with local men. Phipps found that French women were swiftly repatriated if found guilty of mixing with Moroccan men, as they represented an immediate danger to the French's racial prestige (Phipps 2021, 3).

The regulatory choice to punish Italians who mixed with colonized individuals and not the other way around is also evident in the official racial segregation legislation approved by the Fascist government from 1937 onwards. The mentioned R.D. n.880 prohibiting concubinage in Italian Eastern Africa, as much as the empire-wide R.D. n. 1004 prohibiting all kinds of

mixture had in them the provision to punish the Italians who engaged in mixed intimacies with long periods of incarceration. As much as the empirical cases discussed in this dissertation, these regulatory choices point to the overarching whiteness-creation project in the colony that characterized both liberal and Fascist governments, disregarding political, geographical, and ideological nuances. The imperative to foster a national consciousness steeped in the category of whiteness as connected to ideas of civilizational and racial superiority over colonized populations transcended the liberal/Fascist ideological shift and was an integral part of the Italian colonial ethos in Libya throughout Italy's colonization of the region.

If both liberal and Fascist colonial administrators shared the same colonial ethos regarding the racialization of Libyans as a means to elevate Italians' national consciousness as inherently white, what were the differences between the two regimes? After all, as argued in Chapter 7, the liberal administration promulgated progressive status laws for Libyans in 1919, and while it tried to discursively portray its ethos as focused on the protection of Italians' racial prestige, it did little to prohibit mixture in Libya if compared to the late Fascist governments. However, Fascism only really started to enforce racial segregation in the intimate sphere by the 1930s, with the first ten years of Fascist colonial administrations' policies similar to the liberal ones.

With the end of the repression of the anti-colonial resistance and the possibility of increasing the settler population in the colony due to the stabilization of Italian colonial rule, the civilizing mission envisioned by the liberal colonialist elites changed in its very nature. The colony did not need to be militarized, and the increase in Italian civilians and, therefore, Italian women brought a restructuring of the colony's social relations and increased regulations regarding the private sphere. Military commands were not the sole source of regulations in the colony, as, by the early 1930s, military personnel did not represent the majority of the Italian population in Libya. Cases of concubinage and mixed marriages could not be tolerated or ignored due to the

militarized space that characterized the colony. Libya had started its transition toward a settler society, and more regulations were needed to enforce colonial boundaries.

The plan of demographic colonization of Libya, first envisioned by Balbo, was part of a change in colonial policy that characterized the Fascist empire to its very core. As much as for Italian Eastern Africa, the colonization of Libya became a biopolitical project of expansion of the Italian race into new lands to be colonized for the greatness of the Fascist Empire. The creation of settler villages in the more fertile areas of Libya alongside the deportation in concentration camps and the juridical isolation of Libyans discussed in Chapter 7 were all part of the same biopolitical project of expansion of the Italian race's *spazio vitale* [vital space] described by Bernhard (2017, 209). Fascists wanted a racially homogenous empire in which the local populations were to be steadily marginalized to make space for the ever-expanding Italian race in the form of the millions of white colonists that Fascism hoped to resettle in the colonies.

The fundamental shift that invested the Libyan colony was not the rise of Fascism of 1922 but the colony's transition from a militarized to a settler-colonial space, alongside the evolution of the ideology's regime toward scientific racism and white supremacy. This evolution brought the complete realization of the Italian national identity as inherently white and "biologically" superior to colonized populations, including Libyans. 1930s Fascism represented the hegemonic moment of Italian nationalism as racially codified. In 1936, with the conquest of Ethiopia and the promulgation of the racial segregationist laws that followed, Fascism reached the peak of racial identification of Italianness, a project that had started more than seventy years before with the birth of the Italian nation-state. As mentioned in Chapter 4, with the Fascist empire, racism and nationalism hegemonized the "terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses is actually formed" (Hall 1986, 20), creating a completely new policy concerning racial categorization and segregation both in the metropole and the colonies.

The demographic colonization of Libya was a significant step in this process, with the colonization of the land through the expansion of the Italian race representing one of the final stepping stones in the hegemonic moment of Italian racism. I have argued that the beginning of the demographic colonization of Libya was the actual revolutionizing factor for what concerned the regulation of racial boundaries with regard to the intimate sphere. The harsher punishments for Italians that breached these boundaries, the planning of urban segregation in all Libyan cities, the deportation of Libyans in concentration camps, and the crackdown on the mixed marriages officiated by the Church were all part of the same new phase of Italian colonialism. In this new phase, the main objective was not to continue fostering a sense of "whiteness" as strictly related to Italianness anymore but to expand the vital space of an already "biologically" established superiority of the Italian race in the territories of the empire.

While for the liberal and early Fascist administrations, the regulation of mixture was strictly related to multiple factors such as political opportuneness, the morale of the army, and enforcement of racial prestige within the context of a "civilizing mission," with the late Fascist regime it became a focal point in the enforcement of its biopolitical plan of racial expansionism. Mixture became not only a practice able to unbalance the racial consciousness of Italians in the colonies and tarnish the racial prestige of the colonizers, but a real threat to the purported "biological" right of Italians to claim their rightful path to build an empire based on the superiority of Italian whiteness.

## **10. Epilogue - Colonial Echoes on Mixture in Republican**

### **Italy**

In this epilogue, I go beyond the timeframe of this dissertation and the material and discursive regulations of mixture to connect the colonial echoes just outlined to post-war and contemporary Italian society. Therefore, this analysis is not intended as an integral part of the argument sustained by this dissertation but rather as a *coda* [the concluding musical section that is formally distinct from the main structure of the composition], a sketch of this dissertation themes' echoes that were still present after the end of colonialism and Fascism and that are still audible in contemporary Italian society. As echoes, they do not have the same resounding, material power as the original colonial regulations and discourses, but they are equally pervasive and telling of the latter's influence on Italian people's epistemologies. This epilogue is intended as a final reflection on the power that colonial categories still hold on contemporary cultural meanings, on the tangible outcomes of a past that is forgotten but does not stop making its influence relevant.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I asserted that the main objective of this research was to trace patterns of the construction of the modern concept of Italian whiteness through the looking glass of the colonial regulations of mixed intimacies in Libya. The chapters of this thesis have underlined how, in colonial times, the policing and regulation of intimate racial boundaries played a central role in constructing collective understandings of belonging and Otherness, shaping discourses on Italian national identity as intrinsically related to evolving notions of whiteness. This work has argued that this process of self-representation of Italians

as white and European by contrast to internal Others first and colonial Others next was progressively embraced by liberal and Fascist governments, peaking with the 1936 proclamation of the Italian empire and the racist legislation that followed it. During the history of Italian colonialism, the policing of colonial boundaries played an instrumental role in developing ideas of whiteness as grounded in the racial difference of the colonial Other, peaking with a total embracing of white supremacy and institutional racism by the late Fascist empire.

Given this context, the results of the analysis carried out for this research clash with another discursive process mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, namely the "foreclosure of race and racism" (Spivak 1999, 6) that characterized and still characterizes Italian society. As Del Boca (2005) explained, Italians mostly think of themselves as *brava gente* [good people]. Moreover, the country's dominant collective understanding is that the Italian national formation was not characterized by the racialization of internal and colonial Others. Hom (2019, 15) explained that "as *brava gente*, Italians could imagine their colonial experiences as positive and productive, not grave or gruesome like those of the French or British," effectively removing colonial atrocities from the country's public memory.

Such colonial amnesia, primarily nurtured by a widespread unwillingness to connect the country's rebirth as an anti-Fascist republic to the crimes committed by the regime both in Italy and the colonies, still pervades vast strata of Italian society. This epilogue positions itself within the wake of a substantial academic scholarship that has refuted and unpacked such colonial amnesia in all its societal implications.<sup>1</sup> To do so, I sketch some colonial echoes that characterized the first decades of postcolonial republican Italy and still characterize contemporary Italian society. While unequivocally proving the connection between the

---

<sup>1</sup> Many authors have pointed to the pervasive colonial amnesia in contemporary Italy. Among others, see Del Boca (1998), Ben-Ghiat (2006), Fogu (2006), Mellino (2013).

regulation of mixture in colonial times and contemporary racist practices goes beyond the scope of this epilogue, this short reflection aims to contribute to the established academic refusal of the notion of an apparent rupture that characterized the transition from Fascism to Republican Italy. Specifically, it aims to show the continuities in the Italian political class's discursive representation of mixture between Italians and the few Libyans present in Italy after the fall of Fascism. Analyzing what Italian policymakers thought and did regarding these types of intimacy will help trace the coloniality (Quijano, 2007) of the symbolic and material power that connected colonial and postcolonial Italy, forming the substratum upon which colonial categories still echo in contemporary Italy.

### **10.1 The Rejection of Mixture in the First Years of Postcolonial Italy**

Italian policymakers attempted to keep people from colonized territories away from the metropole throughout the country's colonial history, with the only notable exception of the Libyan dissidents imprisoned in various Italian high-security prisons (Di Pasquale 2018; Hom 2019). Valeria Deplano wrote that "if seen with the eyes of a colonized person, Italy looked like an almost impenetrable fortress at the eve of World War II: juridical and cultural barriers had been erected over the years by both liberal and Fascist governments." (Deplano 2017, 24). The segregationist laws in the colonies discussed at length in this dissertation, and the policy against Jews in Italy had created an idea of "Italianness" that was strictly conflated with essentialized notions of racial purity. The policies that attempted to keep Libyans and Eastern Africans away from the metropole were part of an ideological structure in which racialization

of the colonial Other was central to constructing a formalized racial consciousness of the Fascist Italian people.

With the fall of the regime and the issue of the new Republican Constitution in 1948, the new democratic Italy explicitly rejected its racist past. Article 3 of the Republican Constitution states that "all citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, personal and social conditions."<sup>2</sup> This new stance reflected a new "approach that was meant to herald a new definition of the concept of 'Italianness,' with a more inclusive view of national belonging" (Deplano 2018, 396). However, although theoretically opposed to the racist ideology of Fascism, the new ideals of the Republic had to be tested by the reality of a country that had seen its framing of racial diversity as intrinsically linked to colonial rule throughout most of its national history. The sudden change of political regime, as much as the sudden formal reversal of the country's racist ideology, was still framed by the legacy of colonialism and Italy's will to re-establish its international prestige.

As Lombardi-Diop (2012, 177) wrote:

In the postwar period, as Italy came to regard itself as clean, sanitized, homogeneously white, and ordered according to principles of modernizing rationality, many contradictory aspects of its uneven national cohesiveness were partially reconciled. [...] The removal of the memory of the colonial experience, marked by high levels of mixed sociality [...], was made possible by a modernization that promised a different temporality, a fresh and novel start, a blank slate.

With the horrors of Fascism and colonialism left behind, Italians could create a new country based on new laws and discourses that could ignore how its nationhood was grounded in colonial categories. However, the discourses portraying Italy as a nation reborn from the ashes

---

<sup>2</sup> Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana, Articolo 3.

of Fascism and colonialism did not go hand in hand with a discernible change in the "terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses is formed" (Hall 1986, 20). Political regimes can change in the blink of an eye, but the people that supported them and the categories that structure shared societal frameworks of understanding do not.

A clear example of how colonial categories echoed in imperial formations after the empire's fall is how the new Republic's political class treated former colonial soldiers sent to Italy after World War II. In 1943, a few hundred Eastern African and Libyan prisoners of war who had fought for Italy against the Allied forces in World War II were sent to Italy by the British Allies forces. This group represented the first significant number of non-incarcerated, colonized people who had close ties to the Italian state in the metropole. As explained in Chapter 3, the askari were the Libyan and Eastern African troopers that fought under the Italian banner in racially segregated battalions and had never been formally allowed in the metropole during colonial times. With the Allies sending former colonial troops to Italy, the country was confronted with colonial racial boundaries within the nation's body. Archival sources dated to 1948 confirm 183 *askari* veterans in the Italian Army's "Mixed Colonial Depot" unit in Naples, of which eighty-two were Eastern African and 101 were Libyan.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the other unit of former *askari* of the "Mixed Colonial Depot," located in the buildings of the CRAL in Acqua Acetosa near Rome, scholars have estimated the total number of former *askari* in Italy to be around 300 at the end of the war (Deplano 2018, 397).<sup>4</sup> Although still not welcome, their presence was seen by the Ministry of Italian Africa's officials as necessary due to their potential to re-establish relationships with the former colonies through

---

<sup>3</sup> ACS, MAI, b. 2042, *Elenchi personale in forza alla data del 1° novembre 1948*, November 1, 1948.

<sup>4</sup> CRAL is the acronym for *Centro Ricreativo Assistenziale Lavoratori* (Workers' Recreational and Welfare Center), an association for the social organization of afterwork activities for workers of the public sector.

Italy's involvement in the decolonization process.<sup>5</sup> Even if worried about racialized men mixing with the Italian population in Naples and Rome, Italian officials decided to accept their presence as a means to achieve a greater geopolitical goal.<sup>6</sup>

In 1949, Italy's hopes of relevance in the international postcolonial stage were crushed, with the UN General Assembly unequivocally rejecting Italy's involvement in the decolonization processes of its former colonies. With this new development, the *askari's* presence in the metropole could no longer be justified by geopolitical plans, and it was seen increasingly as problematic by the Italian Republic's political class. In particular, anxieties regarding the possibility of intimate mixed relationships between former colonial subjects and Italian women started to arise among government ranks. In 1949, Foreign Affairs undersecretary Giuseppe Brusasca issued a circular letter to the Ministry's officials regarding the former *askari* stationed in Naples. It concerned him that they had started integrating within the local society, a state of affairs that ran the risk of them engaging in intimate relationships with Italian women.<sup>7</sup> He explained his preoccupation as grounded on the risk that the former *askari* would have been extremely hard to repatriate if they married an Italian citizen. Brusasca saw mixed relationships as inconveniences on the route toward the repatriation of all the former colonial subjects. As they did not have a political function anymore, there was no reason for them to remain in a country that viewed them as culturally and racially Other and, therefore, unwelcome.

Eventually, by 1952 the Ministry of Italian Africa discharged all the former *askari* regimented in Naples. In Rome, the remaining former Libyan *askari* that dwelled solely in the buildings of

---

<sup>5</sup> For a thorough research on the *askari* that were deported to Italy and the ways in which they were instrumentally used by the Italian government to build diplomatic relationships with the former colonies' governments see the works of Morone (2008, 2013, 2015) and Deplano (2018).

<sup>6</sup> The government counselor Belli lamented the general tendency of the former *askari* "to integrate into Italian society by mixing themselves with the locals and looking for occupations." In ACS ,, b. 2096, *Relazione sulla missione eseguita presso il Deposito misto speciale di Napoli e i distaccamenti di Capua e Nola nei giorni 16-18 ottobre 1951*.

<sup>7</sup> The 1949 circular of Brusasca is mentioned in 1951 Belli's report on the "Mixed Colonial Depot" of Naples, see note 6.

the CRAL were seen with increased concern by the association's management and the Italian clients. On October 21, 1952, the president of the CRAL sent a letter to Brusasca complaining that "the Italian officials that use the facilities of the association are increasingly concerned about the presence of indigenous people, who do not excel in morality or hygiene. The promiscuity of the Africans with Italian citizens has been alienating many regular clients of the CRAL."<sup>8</sup> The director of the CRAL stated that the complaints came from some association's clients, who were deserting it due to the former askari's presence and familiarity with other Italians. This complaint underlines how the racist colonial assumptions and stereotypes regarding former colonial subjects were shared by government officials and civilian Italians alike. By this point, their presence was arousing hostile sentiments in the local society transversally, as their integration into the former metropole was considered impossible by both the Italian population and the government.

This sketch of the short experiences of former colonial subjects in the new Republican Italy shows that colonial categories did not evaporate with the dissolution of the Italian empire and that the country did not start anew from a "blank slate" (Lombardi-Diop 2012, 77). Only a few years had passed from the end of colonialism and Fascism, so it might appear self-evident that colonial categories would persist in Republican Italy. However, what is relevant to this epilogue is not to point to the persistence of colonial categories of difference over a short period. One of the objectives of this work, as mentioned in this dissertation's introduction, is to point to the colonial echoes that have pervaded Italian society to this day while acknowledging the "foreclosure of racism" and the colonial past's disavowal that represented one of the foundations of the new democratic regime. Italy was a country that had only recently experienced the horrors of colonialism, Fascism, and World War II and that, therefore, deeply

---

<sup>8</sup>ASMAI, Fondo affari Politici, b. 864, *Lettera del presidente del CRAL al Ministero dell'Africa Italiana*, October 21, 1952.

needed to reinvent itself upon legislation such as Article 3 of the Constitution. It needed a new founding myth, a new "imagined community" (Anderson 1983), to sweep colonial understandings of racial difference under the carpet. As shown by the story of the Libyans and Eastern Africans who lived in Italy during the first years of Republican Italy, the founding myth of a nation where colonial discourses and practices were only a thing of the past was nothing other than that: a myth.

## **10.2 Colonial Echoes in Contemporary Italian Society**

More than seventy years have passed since the birth of the Republic, and the negation of the relevance of colonial categories in Italians' understanding of racial difference is still very much alive. It is so because, as Mellino (2013, 91) points out, "the more evident the racial material constitution of Italian society becomes, the more violent its discursive foreclosure will be, both within and outside the institutional domain." While Italy has always been an immigrant destination (Colombo and Sciortino, 2004), during the past three decades, the country has seen increasing immigration of racialized people within its borders. This shift has, in turn, highlighted the echoes of colonial categories and epistemological frameworks still used to understand and enforce racial differences in the country through discourse and policy. As argued by Hom in her work on Italy's immigration and detention crisis (2019, 60):

Migrants [arriving in Italy] not only become conscripted into the apparatus of the Italian state but also live out the same categories, identifications, and classifications that define that process of conscription. And this is little different from the world of European colonial imperialism.

The ways in which racialized migrants are treated by the state and by a large share of the Italian population itself "carry the weight of specific political histories and the categories linked to them" (Hom 2019, 60). The recent crisis of immigration and detention is a testament to the colonial nature of the defense of the nation's physical borders from the arrival of racialized people.<sup>9</sup> The detention of immigrants on the island of Lampedusa has been described by Joseph Pugliese (2009, 664) as "inscribed by overlapping racialological histories of whiteness, colonialism, and empire, and attendant anxieties about securing a nation's borders." The exertion of state power over racialized bodies, justified by the need to protect the nation's boundaries from undesirable Others, reflects society's colonial understanding and organization that characterized the empire's policy and the epistemological categories that supported them. Consequently, the colonial character of the enforcement of immigration management policies rests on a substratum of discursive categorization mechanisms that informs and is informed by them.

Alongside material imperial formations resurfacing in regulations and policies related to immigration, discourses on immigration are also heavily characterized by colonial echoes. Next to the coloniality regarding the immigration crisis in popular and media culture (Ponzanesi 2017), it is important to underline how Italian political discourse is still characterized by colonial echoes regarding racialized migrants and their integration into Italian society. For immigrants arriving from Muslim-majority countries, such cultural incompatibility discourses often use colonial tropes revolving around the policing of intimate boundaries and the defense of the institution of marriage from its assumed patriarchal extremism proper of Muslim culture. Such concerns reflect the typically colonial framework of focusing on relationships between Italian white women and racialized men. For example, the center-right former Member of

---

<sup>9</sup> On the coloniality of the Italian government's recent immigration policy see, besides the mentioned work by Hom (2019), Pugliese (2009), Giuliani (2017), and Ricciardi (2020).

Parliament Souad Sbai said in an interview that "The Qu'ran considers the woman an inferior being. If she is Christian and Western, she is worth even less. In ancient wars, [Muslims] applied the rule that authorized taking the females of the enemy."<sup>10</sup> Quoting the very same interview given by Sbai, a councilwoman for Italy's most prominent right-wing party *Lega* in the city of Forlì, released the following statement:

Sbai and many other authors confirm that the Qu'ran considers the woman inferior. In the mentality of many Muslim men, if the woman is Western and Christian, she is worth even less [...]. Over the years, numerous testimonies have emerged, including those of Italian women married or companions of Muslim men, which confirm this [...] The so-called dialogue with the Islamic world must not justify any tacit concession to a religion/law that denies women rights, equality, and dignity.<sup>11</sup>

In this politician's view, Muslim culture is an inherent threat to Italian women and, therefore, to the intimate boundaries of the nation. Muslim men are a danger to the values of Western modernity incarnated by Italian women, mainly if they engage in a mixed marriage. In 2007, the leader of the Family Commission of the Italian Congregation of Bishops (CEI) expressed a similar view on mixed marriages involving Muslim men:

However, these unions do not always have positive outcomes, especially when the partner is Muslim, who soon in marriage is led to imposing his culture and traditions, both towards his wife and children's education. For this reason, the Italian Bishops' Congregation invites mixed couples to think twice before taking the big step.<sup>12</sup>

Resonating with the concern expressed by Cardinal van Rossum to the missionary analyzed in Chapter 8, the Bishop expresses concern for Muslim men marrying Italian women. In his view,

---

<sup>10</sup> Souad Sbai gave this interview to the Italian newspaper *Il quotidiano* on January 8, 2016. <https://www.quotidiano.net/blog/bianchi/560-42.560>

<sup>11</sup> The councilwoman Andrea Cintorino was quoted on February 9, 2018 by the newspaper *Forlì Today*. <https://www.forlìtoday.it/politica/islam-e-violenza-sulle-donne-cintorino-lega-basta-con-l-approccio-buonista-giustificazionista.html>

<sup>12</sup> La Rocca, Orazio. "Matrimoni misti, altolà dei vescovi." *La Repubblica*, January 16, 2007.

the assumed imposition of incompatible cultural norms on Italian women and children makes mixed marriages highly undesirable and directly discourages couples from seeking marriage.

Besides politicians and religious leaders, mainstream media also play a central role in reinforcing colonial tropes on the dangers for Italian women men embodied by racialized Muslim men. A prominent journalist for the national newspaper *Il Giornale*, for example, wrote that "the worst of Islamic countries arrives in Italy: [Muslim men] think they can do whatever they want, even be polygamous, and marry Italian women out of interest, to obtain citizenship in a short time. They are not obligated to learn the language, the Constitution, the equal rights between the two sexes."<sup>13</sup> In another, more recent piece, the same newspaper published an even more direct opinion on the relationship between Muslim men's supposed culture and the effect it has on the Italian women who marry them:

The despotic character of sharia for women married to a Muslim who must accept all the dictates of the husband without exception. Including polygamy. [...] In the family, the first building block of society, the Muslim man hardly adapts to the way of life of his Catholic wife. Instead, it is he who wants to override his wife's culture and impose his own.<sup>14</sup>

The discourses on unions between Muslim men and Italian women reiterated by politicians, religious authorities, and national newspapers show that colonial tropes on mixed intimacies analyzed in this dissertation are still widely used in Italian political discourse. The legacy of colonialism is evident in the ways categories attached to Muslim cultural norms regarding the private sphere influence discourses on Muslim immigrants' incompatibility with Italian society. The public figures quoted in this chapter clarify that colonialism lives on immigrants' bodies and how they are racialized in Italian public discourse. The need to protect Italian cultural

---

<sup>13</sup> Maglie, Maria Giovanna. "Nozze miste. Le donne italiane sono delle schiave in casa." *Il giornale*, March 1, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Aldrighetti, Antonella. "Cattolici e musulmani, matrimoni impossibili: dopo tre anni è già flop." *Il giornale*, September 17, 2017.

institutions such as marriage from Muslim immigrants shows how relevant the themes explored in this dissertation still are. Such discourses on racialized men show that colonial categories persist in how Italians understand cultural differences and frame integration into their country. The mentioned politicians, religious leaders, and journalists catalyzed widespread conceptions still deeply ingrained in Italian society, showing the extent to which colonialism still influences contemporary shared understandings of racial and cultural differences.

While members of his party reiterate colonial racist tropes about racialized populations' cultural traits, the *Lega* party leader Matteo Salvini publicly stated that "racism is an invention of the left; Italians are good people."<sup>15</sup> His words point to the very much alive foreclosure of racism in Italian public discourse and the extent to which the myth of *Italiani brava gente* is still widespread in all strata of Italian society. Most Italians consider colonialism a marginal event in Italian history, an inconsequential albeit unfortunate experience that had no repercussion on an otherwise intrinsically non-racist society (Fogu 2006, 147). Salvini himself is famous for calling explicitly racist statements on immigrants "simply common sense," a self-evident description of reality rather than an expression of the persistence of colonial categories in contemporary Italy.<sup>16</sup> As the crisis of immigration and detention rages on, the racial material constitution of Italian society becomes more evident, and consequently, its discursive foreclosure increases in intensity (Mellino 2013, 91).

Given the discourses and practices outlined in this epilogue, it is evident that a reflection on Italy's colonial past is still desperately needed outside academic circles to create a clearer social understanding of racial relations and the discourses surrounding them. As the sources on the former *askari* showed, the birth of the Republic and the liberal laws accompanying it did not

---

<sup>15</sup> Buzzanca, Silvio. "Salvini: 'L'allarme razzismo è un'invenzione della sinistra'. E tace sul spari e violenze contro gli immigrati." *La Repubblica*. July 28, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Salvini, Matteo (@matteosalvinimi). "Io sono accusato di cattivismo, razzismo, fascismo, ma voglio bloccare il traffico degli scafisti." Twitter, January 10, 2019. <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1083314082315411456>

entail a change in shared understandings of racial difference in the general populations. Even if temporally close to the end of colonialism, the colonial discourses that still pervaded the first years of Republican Italy show the rootedness of epistemological categories in the public consciousness. Colonial echoes reverberated in the 1950s as they do now, creating an uncomfortable unwillingness to pinpoint how colonialism negatively affected contemporary Italian society. This dissertation was intended as an additional scholarly step toward recognizing the relevance of colonial categories in the Italian nation's history. The regulatory defense of the intimate racial boundaries of the nation from forms of mixture portrayed in these pages has direct ties to discourses on racial difference and cultural incompatibility throughout Italian history, including contemporary discourses on immigration and integration. Analyses of racial relations and racist practices and discourses in contemporary Italian society have to consider the *long durée* of the country's colonial past and the categories that still influence shared epistemologies of racial difference and belonging.

## **Archives**

Archivio Storico Ministero Africa Italiana (ASMAI), managed by the Archivio Storico Ministero Affari Esteri (ASMAE), Rome, Italy

Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome, Italy.

Archivio Storico Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (ASSME), Rome, Italy.

Archivio Storico Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale (ASINPS), Rome Italy.

Archivio Storico "De Propaganda Fide" – Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli (Archivio Storico Propaganda Fide), Vatican City.

Archivio Storico Frati Minori (ASOFM), Rome, Italy

## **List of Illustrations**

Cover: Master Plan for the city of Benghazi drawn by Fascist administrators and highlighting the different zonings of the city, 1930. Source: ACS, MAI, b. 114, f. 2, *Piano regolatore della città di Bengasi*, 1930

Figure 1. The three provinces of Libya, March 10, 2012, Via De Gasperi. Source: Copyright-free map edited by the author to show the three historical regions. License: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

Figure 2. October 11, 1911. The Royal (Italian) army arrives in Tripoli. Source: Archival Photos, Il Sole 24 Ore. License: Copyright-free.

Figure 3. Original cover of “Piccolo amore beduino,” by Mario Dei Gaslini, 1926. Source: Original novel owned by the author.

Figure 4. Libyan "Mabruca," or concubine, as depicted in a 1912 Italian postcard. Source: Italian colonial postcard owned by the author.

Figure 5. The Soluk concentration camp in Cyrenaica, 1932. Source: ASMAI, Vol V (materiale recuperato al nord), b.5. *Foto campi indigeni Cirenaica*, 1932.

Figure 6. Piazza Cagni during colonial rule in Benghazi (now known as Maydan al-Shajara). Source: Italian colonial postcard owned by the author.

Figure 7. Master Plan for the city of Benghazi drawn by Fascist administrators and highlighting the different zonings of the city, 1930. Source: ACS, MAI, b. 114, f. 2, *Piano regolatore della città di Bengasi*, 1930

Figure 8. The Soluk concentration camp, 200 kilometers southeast of Benghazi, 1932. Source: ASMAI, Vol V (materiale recuperato al nord), b.5. *Foto campi indigeni Cirenaica*, 1932.

Figure 9. Libya town of Al Bayyada (D'Annunzio) in 1938. Source: Documentario fotografico della 1. Migrazione in massa di coloni in Libia per il piano di colonizzazione demografica intensiva, Maggio 1938 Tripoli. License: Copyright-free.

Figure 10. Church of Massah (Luigi Razza Town) (1940). Source: National Library of Australia. Author: Hurley, Frank, 1885-1962.

Figure 11. Foto d'archivio di Benito Mussolini con prelati in Vaticano per la firma dei Patti Lateranensi. February 29, 1929. Source: Ansa, Foto D'Archivio. License: Copyright-free.

## **List of Referenced Legislation**

Royal Decree (*Regio Decreto* in Italian, hereafter R.D.) n. 5332, March 29, 1888.

R.D. n. 605, October 27, 1891.

Governor's Decree (*Decreto Governatoriale* in Italian, hereafter D.G.) n. 814, December 19, 1908.

R.D. n. 839, September 19, 1909.

D.G. no. 1909, January 21, 1914.

R.D. n. 1510, December 10, 1914.

R.D. n. 931, June 1, 1919.

R.D. n. 2401, October 31, 1919.

R.D. n. 3288, 15 July 1923.

R.D. n. 2185, October 1, 1923.

R.D. n. 965, April 30, 1924.

R.D. n. 983, May 1, 1924.

R.D. n. 1013, June 26, 1927.

R.D. n. 847, May 27, 1929.

R.D. n. 880, April 19, 1937.

R.D. n. 620208, June 12, 1937 .

R.D. n. 12723, July 1, 1937.

R.D. n. 41675, July 19, 1937.

Law n. 2590, December 30, 1937.

R.D. n. 1728, November 17, 1938.

R.D. n. 70, January 9, 1939.

R.D. n. 1004, June 29, 1939.

## **Bibliography**

- Abu-Lughod, Janet. *Rabat, Urban Apartheid in Morocco*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Acker, Joan. "Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations." *Gender & Society* 20, no. 4 (August 2006): 441–64.
- Ahmida, Ali Abdullatif. *The Making of Modern Libya. State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Ahmida, Ali Abdullatif. *Forgotten Voices: Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Ahmida, Ali Abdullatif. "From Tribe to Class: the Origins and the Politics of Resistance in Colonial Libya." *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 63, no. 2 (2008): 297-310.
- Alatri, Paolo. "Le condizioni dell'Italia Meridionale in un rapporto di Diomede Pantaleoni a Marco Minghetti (1861)". *Movimento Operaio* 5-6, (1953):750-792.
- Allen, Willow Samara. "Learning to Become White Girls in a Settler Colonial Context: Exploring the Racial Socialization of White Euro-Canadian Women." *Settler Colonial Studies* 10, no. 3 (2020): 378-402.
- Aluffi Beck Peccoz, Roberta. "Il matrimonio nel diritto islamico." In *Il matrimonio. Diritto ebraico, canonico e islamico: un commento alle fonti*, a cura di Silvio Ferrari (2006): 181-246. Torino: Giappichelli.

- Ambrosini, Gaspare. 'Lo statuto dei nativi dell'Algeria e della Libia', in AA.VV. *Scritti giuridici in onore di Santi Romano, Vol. III - Diritto internazionale. Diritto coloniale. Diritto corporativo*. Padova: CEDAM, Casa editrice dott. A. Milani, 1940.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Books, 1983.
- Anderson, David M. "Sexual Threat and Settler Society: 'Black Perils' in Kenya, c. 1907–30." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 38, no. 1 (2010): 47-74.
- Antonini, Claudia, and Marilena Buscarini. "La regolamentazione della prostituzione nell'Italia postunitaria." In *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 14. 1 (1985): 83-115.
- Arnold, David. *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993.
- Asciuti Claudio and Flavia Mangiaracina. "La donna, la danza e il sesso dell'Africa Nera nei resoconti dei viaggiatori: realtà e simulazione, in *Miscellanea di Storia delle esplorazioni XI*, (Genova, Bozzi Editrice, 1986.
- Bagnall, Kate. "Across the threshold: White women and Chinese hawkers in the white colonial imaginary." *Hecate* 28, no. 2 (2002): 9-32.
- Balbo, Cesare. *Le speranze d'Italia*. Torino: Utet, 1925.
- Baldinetti, Anna. *The Origins of the Libyan Nation. Colonial Legacy, Exile and the Emergence of a New Nation-State*. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Balibar, Etienne. "Fichte et la frontière intérieure. A propos des Discours à la nation allemande." *Le Cahiers des Fontenay: Philosophie et politique en Allemagne, XVIIIe-XXe Siècle* Nr. 59 (1990): 57-82.

- Balibar, Étienne, and Immanuel Wallerstein. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Ballhatchet, Kenneth. *Race, Sex, and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and Their Critics, 1793-1905*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980.
- Ballinger, Pamela. *The World Refugees Made Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020.
- Banerjee, Sumanta. *Under the Raj: Prostitution in Colonial Bengal*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Banerjee, Amrita. "Race and a Transnational Reproductive Caste System: Indian Transnational Surrogacy." *Hypatia* 29, no. 1 (2014): 113-128.
- Baranello, Adriana M. "Giovanni Pascoli's 'La grande proletaria si e' mossa': A Translation and Critical Introduction." *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011).
- Barrera, Giulia. 2002. "Colonial affairs: Italian men, Eritrean women, and the construction of racial hierarchies in colonial Eritrea (1885--1941)." Ph.D. diss. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002.
- Barrera, Giulia. "The Construction of Racial Hierarchies in Colonial Eritrea." In *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, edited by Patrizia Palumbo (2003): 81-118. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barrera, Giulia. "Sex, Citizenship and the State: The Construction of the Public and Private Spheres in Colonial Eritrea." In *Gender, Family and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy, 1860- 1945*, edited by Perry Wilson, (2004): 157-172. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Barrera, Giulia. 'Patrilinearity, Race, and Identity: The Upbringing of Italo-Eritreans during Italian Colonialism.' In *Italian Colonialism*, edited by R. Ben-Ghiat and M. Fuller, 97-108. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Barrera, Giulia. "Sessualità e segregazione nelle terre dell'Impero." In *L'Impero fascista. Italia ed Etiopia (1935-1941)* edited by Riccardo Bottoni (2008): 393-414. Bologna: Il mulino.
- Bassi, Gabriele. 'Il diritto come strumento di politica coloniale nella Libia italiana (1911-1943).' *Quaderni fiorentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico moderno* 47, no. 1 (2018): 207-255.
- Beidelman, Thomas. *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Bell, Derrick. *Race, Racism and American Law*. Philadelphia: Aspen Publishers, 1970.
- Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. "Modernity is Just Over There: Colonialism and Italian National Identity." *Interventions* 8, no. 3 (2006): 380-393.
- Bergna, Costanzo. *La missione Francescana in Libia*. Tripoli: Stab. Nuove Arti Grafiche, 1924.\
- Bernstein, Deborah S. "Gender, Nationalism, and Colonial Policy: Prostitution in the Jewish Settlement of Mandate Palestine, 1918–1948." *Women's History Review* 1.1 (2012): 81–100.
- Bertazzini, Mattia Cosma. *The Economic Impact of Italian Colonial Investments in Libya and in the Horn of Africa, 1920-2000*. PhD diss., The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2019.

- Beverley, Eric Lewis. "Colonial Urbanism and South Asian Cities." *Social History* 36, no. 4 (2011): 482-497.
- Bland, Lucy. "White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War." *Gender & History*, 17 (2005): 29-61.
- Blévis, Laure. 'La citoyenneté française au miroir de la colonisation.' *Genèses* 4 (2003): 25-47.
- Bonaiuti, Cesare Marongiu. *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano (1882-1941)*. Milano: Giuffrè Editore, 1982.
- Bonnett, Alastair. "A White World? Whiteness and the Meaning of Modernity in Latin America and Japan." In *Working Through Whiteness: International Perspectives*, edited by Cynthia Levine-Rasky. Albany: State University of New York Press, (2002a): 69-105.
- Bonnett, Alastair. "The Metropolis and White Modernity." *Ethnicities* 2, no. 3 (2002b): 349–66.
- Bosch, Mineke. "Colonial Dimensions of Dutch Women's Suffrage: Aletta Jacobs's Travel Letters from Africa and Asia, 1911-1912." *Journal of Women's History* 11, no. 2 (1999): 8-34.
- Bosworth, R. J. B. *Italy the Least of the Great Powers: Italian Foreign Policy Before the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Force of Law: Toward a Sociology of the Juridical Field." *Hastings Law Journal* 38, no. 5 (1987): 814-853.
- Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London: Routledge, 1996.

- Briggs, Laura. *Reproducing Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Brown, Christy. "Literary Images of Intercultural Relationships Between Westerners and Middle Easterners." In *Inside the Mixed Marriage: Accounts of Changing Attitudes, Patterns, and Perceptions of Cross-Cultural and Interracial Marriages*, edited by Walton R. Johnson and D. Michael Warren. Lanham: University Press of America, (1994): 95–114.
- Bryder, Linda. 'Sex, Race, and Colonialism: An Historiographical Review.' *The International History Review* 20. 4 (1998): 806-822.
- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Byrne, Briget. *White Lives: The Interplay of 'Race', Class and Gender*. Oxon: Routledge, 2006.
- Calchi Novati, Giampaolo. *L'Africa d'Italia: una storia coloniale e postcoloniale*. Roma: Carocci, 2011.
- Camiscioli, Elisa. "Coercion and Choice: The "Traffic in Women" between France and Argentina in the Early Twentieth Century." *French Historical Studies* 42, no. 3 (2019): 483-507.
- Campassi, Gabriella. "Il madamato in Africa Orientale. Relazioni tra italiani e indigene come forma di aggressione coloniale." *Miscellanea di storia delle esplorazioni* 12 (1987): 219-260.

- Campassi, Gabriella and Maria Teresa Segà. "Uomo bianco e donna nera. L'immagine della donna nella fotografia coloniale". In: *Rivista di storia e critica fotografica* 5.IV (giu. 1983), p. 55.
- Carey, Hilary M. "Introduction: Empires of Religion." In *Empires of Religion*, edited by Hilary M. Carey, (2008): 1-21. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Carey, Hilary M. *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801–1908*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Carulli, Ombretta Fumagalli. "Libertà religiosa e riserva di giurisdizione della Chiesa sui matrimoni concordatari: sentenze canoniche e ordinamento civile." *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale* (2011).
- Casales, Francesco. "Purezza e meticcio: the Italian Colonial Novel and the (Re) production of Italian Whiteness." *Modern Italy* 25, no. 4 (2020): 439-454.
- Ceci, Lucia. *Il papa non deve parlare: Chiesa, fascismo e guerra di Etiopia*. Bari: Laterza, 2010.
- Ceci, Lucia. *L'interesse superiore: il Vaticano e l'Italia di Mussolini*. Bari: Laterza, 2013.
- Ceci, Lucia. "Church and Fascism. New Paradigms and New Sources." *Studi Storici* n. 55, (2014): 123-137.
- Ceci, Lucia. 'Separare e punire: il razzismo nell'Impero fascista.' In *Le leggi razziali. Prima e dopo la Shoah: modelli, pratiche ed eredità*, edited by IHRA Italian Chairmanship 2018, 25-38. Rome: Fondazione per le Scienze religiose, 2019.
- Charrad, Mounira. *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Chaudhuri, Nupur, and Margaret Strobel. *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Choate, Mark. *Emigrant Nation. The Making of Italy Abroad*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Clancy-Smith, Julia. 'Islam, Gender and Identities in the Making of French Algeria, 1830-1962', in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, edited by Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, 154-174. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1998.
- Clancy-Smith, Julia Ann, and Frances Gouda. *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998.
- Cogni, Giulio. *Il razzismo*. Milano: Bocca, 1937.
- Colombo, Asher, and Giuseppe Sciortino. "Italian immigration: the origins, nature and evolution of Italy's migratory systems." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 49-70.
- Conelli, Carmine. "Razza, colonialità e nazione: il progetto coloniale italiano tra Mezzogiorno e Africa." *Quel Che Resta Dell'impero: La Cultura Coloniale degli Italiani*, edited by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (2014): 149-167. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mimesis.
- Conklin, Alice L. *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.

- Cooper, Frederick. *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Crenshaw Kimberle. "A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Law and Politics." In *The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique*, edited by David Kairys. New York: Pantheon, (1990): 195–218.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-299.
- Cresti, Federico. *Oasi di italianità: la Libia della colonizzazione agraria tra fascismo, guerra e indipendenza (1935–1956)*. Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1996.
- Cresti, Federico. *Non desiderare la terra d'altri: la colonizzazione italiana in Libia*. Rome: Carocci Editore, 2011.
- Dainotto, Roberto M. "A South with a View: Europe and Its Other." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 2 (2000): 375-390.
- Dal Lago, Enrico "Italian Unification and the Mezzogiorno: Colonialism in One Country?" In *The Shadow of Colonialism on Europe's Modern Past*, edited by Róisín Healy and Enrico Dal Lago (2014): 57-72. New York: Palgrave.
- Davis, Robert C. *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Daughton, James Patrick. *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- De Donno, Fabrizio. 'La razza ario-mediterranea: Ideas of Race and Citizenship in Colonial and Fascist Italy, 1885–1941.' *Interventions* 8.3 (2006): 394-412.
- De Felice, Renzo. *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*. Torino: Einaudi, 1961.

- De Felice, Renzo. *Ebrei in un paese arabo : gli ebrei nella Libia contemporanea tra colonialismo, nazionalismo arabo e sionismo (1835-1970)*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1978.
- De Felice, Renzo. *Jews in an Arab Land: Libya, 1835-1970*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.
- De Francesco, Antonino. *La palla al piede: una storia del pregiudizio antimeridionale*. Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2012.
- De Grazia, Victoria. *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922 – 1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- De Hart, Betty. "The morality of Maria Toet: Gender, citizenship and the construction of the nation-state." *Journal of ethnic and migration studies* 32, no. 1 (2006): 49-68.
- De Hart, Betty. *Unlikely Couples. Regulating Mixed Sex and Marriage from the Dutch Colonies to European migration Law*. Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2014.
- De Hart, Betty. "Regulating mixed marriages through acquisition and loss of citizenship." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 662, no. 1 (2015): 170-187.
- De Hart, Betty. "Protecting Dutch Girls from the Harem: Premarital Counselling for Mixed Marriages with Muslim Men." *Journal of Migration History* 3, no. 1 (2017): 78-103.
- De Luna, Giovanni. *Badoglio: un militare al potere*. Milano: Bompiani, 1974.
- De Napoli, Olindo. *La prova della razza. Cultura giuridica e razzismo in Italia negli anni Trenta*. Florence: Le Monnier, 2009.
- De Napoli, Olindo. "The Origin of the Racist Laws Under Fascism. A Problem of Historiography." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 1 (2012): 106-122.

- De Napoli, Olindo. "Between Governmentality and Indeterminacy: The Birth of the Legal Category of Subjecthood (1882–1909)." In *Citizens and Subjects of the Italian Colonies*, edited by Simona Berhe and Olindo De Napoli, (2021): 3-24. New York: Routledge
- Dei Gaslini, Mario. *Piccolo amore beduino*. Milano: Tipografia dei Fratelli Magnani, 1926.
- Del Boca, Angelo. *Gli italiani in Libia. Tripoli bel suol d'amore (1860-1922)*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1986.
- Del Boca, Angelo. *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1991.
- Del Boca, Angelo. "Il colonialismo italiano tra miti, rimozioni, negazioni e inadempienze." *Italia contemporanea* 212 (1998): 589-603.
- Del Boca, Angelo. *Italiani, brava gente?* Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2005.
- Del Giudice, Vincenzo. *Manuale di diritto ecclesiastico*. Milano: Dott. A. Giuffr  Editore, 1964.
- Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013.
- Della Rocca, Roberto Morozzo. *La fede e la guerra: cappellani militari e preti-soldati (1915-1919)*. Roma: Studium, 1980.
- Denti di Pirajno, Alberto. *A Cure for Serpents*. London: Eland Books, 2005.
- Deplano, Valeria. "Within and Outside the Nation: Former Colonial Subjects in Post-War Italy." *Modern Italy* 23, no. 4 (2018): 395-410.
- Derksen, Aleeida Maaik. "Embodied Encounters: Colonial Governmentality and Missionary Practices in Java and South Dutch New Guinea, 1856-1942." *PhD dissertation Radboud University*. Nijmegen: Impskamp Printing, 2021.

- Di Paola, Antonluca. "Bengasi (Benghazi). La città nei piani urbanistici dell'Italia coloniale." *Quaderni PAU*, No. 37-40 (2009/2010): 193-200.
- Di Sante, Costanzo. "I campi di concentramento del fascismo in Libia: tra politica di controllo delle popolazioni e repressione." In *Il controllo dello straniero: i campi dall'Ottocento a oggi*, edited by Eliana Augusti, Antonio M. Morone, and Michele Pifferi, (2017): 106-119. Rome: Viella.
- Dickie, John. *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900*. New York, Springer, 1999.
- Donati, Sabina. *A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy, 1861–1950*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Dunne, Bruce. "French Regulation of Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Algeria." In *The Arab Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (1994): 24-30.
- DuVal, Kathleen. "Indian Intermarriage and Métissage in Colonial Louisiana." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 2 (2008): 267-304.
- Edgar, Adrienne Lynn. "Marriage, Modernity, and the 'Friendship of Nations': Interethnic Intimacy in Post-War Central Asia in Comparative Perspective." *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (2007): 581-599.
- Edmonds, Penelope. "Unpacking Settler Colonialism's Urban Strategies: Indigenous Peoples in Victoria, British Columbia, and the Transition to a Settler-Colonial City." *Urban History Review* 38, no. 2 (2010): 4-20.
- Edmonds, Penelope. "The Intimate, Urbanising Frontier: Native Camps and Settler Colonialism's Violent Array of Spaces Around Early Melbourne." In *Making Settler Colonial Space*, edited by Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, (2010): 129-154.

- Edwards, Rosalind, Suki Ali, Chamion Caballero, and Miri Song. *International Perspectives on Racial and Ethnic Mixedness and Mixing*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- El Houssi, Leila. "Italians in Tunisia: Between Regional Organisation, Cultural Adaptation and Political Division, 1860s–1940." *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 19, no. 1 (2012): 163-181.
- Elakkary, Sally, Barbara Franke, Dina Shokri, Sven Hartwig, Michael Tsokos, and Klaus Püschel. "Honor Crimes: Review and Proposed Definition." In *Forensic Science, Medicine, and Pathology* 10, no. 1 (2014): 76-82.
- Eley, Geoff. 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century.' *Culture/power/history: A reader in contemporary social theory* 318 (1994): 297-335.
- Elson, Robert E. "Constructing the Nation: Ethnicity, Race, Modernity and Citizenship in early Indonesian thought." *Asian Ethnicity* 6, no. 3 (2005): 145-160.
- Emerson, Michael O., Elizabeth Korver-Glenn, and Kiara W. Douds. "Studying Race and Religion: A Critical Assessment." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 3 (2015): 349-359.
- Ertola, Emanuele. "'Terra promessa': migration and settler colonialism in Libya, 1911–1970." *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 3 (2016): 340-353.
- Essop Sheik, Nafisa. "Cultures of Sex, Laws of Difference: Age of Consent Law and the Forging of a Fraternal Contract on the Margins of the Nineteenth-Century British Empire." *Law and History Review* 38, no. 1 (2020): 201–18.
- Etherington, Norman. "Missions and Empire." In *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Historiography*, edited by Robin Winks, vol. 5. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1999): 303-315.

- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York, Grove Press Inc., 1967.
- Fields, Karen, and Barbara Fields. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. London: Verso, 2012.
- Findlay, Eileen J. Suárez. *Imposing Decency*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Fogu, Claudio. "Italiani brava gente: The legacy of Fascist historical culture on Italian politics of memory." In *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, edited by Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, (2006): 147-176. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Foucault, Michel, and Colin Gordon. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4. (1982): 777-795.
- Foucault, Michel. "Space, Knowledge, and Power." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, (1984): 239-256.
- Frankenberg, Ruth. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Freeman, Victoria. "Attitudes Toward 'Miscegenation' in Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia, 1860-1914." *Native Studies Review* 16, no. 1 (2005).
- Forlivesi, Luigi. "In tema di rapporti coniugali fra cittadini e sudditi dell'Impero." *Rivista di diritto matrimoniale e dei rapporti di famiglia* n.9 (1938).
- Fubini, Guido. "Introduzione all'antisemitismo dei poveri." *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 45, no. 4/5 (1979): 188-197.
- Fuller, Mia. "Preservation and Self-Absorption: Italian Colonisation and the Walled City of Tripoli, Libya." *The Journal of North African Studies* 5.4 (2000): 121-154.

- Fuller, Mia. "Oases of Ambiguity: On How Italians Did Not Practice Urban Segregation in Tripoli." *La Libia tra Mediterraneo e mondo islamico*, edited by Federico Cresti, (2006): 163-181.
- Gabaccia, Donna R. *Italy's Many Diasporas*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Gabrielli, Gianluca. "La persecuzione delle 'unioni miste'(1937-1940) nei testi delle sentenze pubblicate e nel dibattito giuridico." *Studi piacentini*, 20 (1996): 83-140.
- Garrone, Giuseppe. 'Pinotto al Padre. Tripoli 14 febbraio 1915', in *Lettere e diari di guerra, 1914-18* ed. E. Garrone. Milano: Garzanti, 1974.
- Gartrell, Beverley. 1984. "Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?" In *The Incorporated Wife*, edited by Callan Hilary and Adener Shirley, 165-186. London: Croom Helm.
- Ghosh, Durba. *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Giannetti, Berlindo. 'Diritto penale e difesa della razza (III). *Rassegna sociale dell'Africa Italiana* II (9), 1939.
- Gibson, Mary. *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860-1915*. Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2000.
- Gigante, Claudio. "'Fatta l'Italia, facciamo gli Italiani'. Appunti su una massima da restituire a d'Azeglio." *Incontri. Rivista europea di studi italiani* 26, no. 2 (2011): 5-15.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Between Camps. Nations, Culture, and the Allure of Race*. London-New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

- Ginsborg, Paul. *Famiglia Novecento: vita familiare, rivoluzione e dittature, 1900-1950*. Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2014.
- Giorgi, Chiara. "I funzionari dell'Oltremare: tra autorappresentazione e realtà del governo coloniale." *Le Carte e la Storia* 14, no. 2 (2008): 187-204.
- Giuliani, Gaia. "L'italiano Negro: The Politics of Colour in Early Twentieth-Century Italy." *Interventions* 16, no. 4 (2014): 572–87.
- Giuliani, Gaia, and Cristina Lombardi-Diop. *Bianco e nero. Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani*. Firenze: Le Monnier, 2013.
- Giuliani, Gaia. "The Colour(s) of Lampedusa". In *Border Lampedusa*, edited by Gabriele Proglione and Laura Odasso, (2018): 67-85. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Giuliani, Gaia. *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy. Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2019.
- Goldberg, David Theo. *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. Oxford, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993.
- Goldman, P. Robert "Indologies: German and Other." in *Sanskrit and 'Orientalism': Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750-1958*, edited by Douglas T. McGetchin, Peter K.J. Park, and Damodar SarDesai. New Delhi: Manohar, (2004): 27-40.
- Gori, Gigliola. *Italian Fascism and the Female Body. Sport, Submissive Women, and Strong Mothers*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Gouda, Frances. "Nyonyas on the Colonial Divide: White Women in the Dutch East Indies, 1900–1942." *Gender & History* 5, no. 3 (1993): 318-342.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *La questione meridionale*. Roma: Editori riuniti, 1991.

- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selection from the Prison Notebooks* (edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith). New York: International Publishers, 1971.
- Gross, Ariela. "Beyond Black and White: Cultural Approaches to Race and Slavery." *Columbia Law Review* 101 (2001): 640-690.
- Guerri, Giordano Bruno. *Il sangue del Sud*. Milano: Edizioni Mondadori, 2010.
- Guha, Amalendu. "The Indian National Question: A Conceptual Frame." *Economic and Political Weekly*. 17, no 3 (1982): 2-12.
- Guillaumin, Colette. *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Haggis, Jane. *White Women and Colonialism: Towards a Non-Recuperative History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017.
- Hale, Dana S. *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.
- Hall, Stuart. "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 5-27.
- Hall, Catherine. "Commentary." In *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, edited by Ann Laura Stoler, (2006): 452-468. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hamilton, James. *Wanderings in North Africa*. London: John Murray, Albemarle St, 1856.
- Haney-López, Ian. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- Harding, Sandra. *Whose Science/ Whose Knowledge?* Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991.

- Harding, Sandra. "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is 'Strong Objectivity?'" *The Centennial Review* 36, no. 3 (1992): 437-470.
- Hartmann, Wolfram. "Making South West Africa German? Attempting Imperial, Juridical, Colonial, Conjugal and Moral Order". *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture* No. 2, (2014): 51-84.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, New York and London: Routledge, 1990.
- Hoodfar, Homa. "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women." In *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*, edited by Elizabeth A. Castelli, (2001): 420-446. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Hom, Stephanie Malia. *Empire's Mobius Strip: Historical Echoes in Italy's Crisis of Migration and Detention*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019.
- Hyam, Ronald. "Concubinage and the Colonial service: the Crewe Circular (1909)." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 14, no. 3 (1986a): 170-186.
- Hyam, Ronald. "Empire and Sexual Opportunity." In *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 14, no. 2 (1986b): 34-90.
- Hyslop, Jonathan. "White Working-Class Women and the Invention of Apartheid: 'Purified' Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation against 'Mixed' Marriages, 1934-9." *Journal of African History* (1995): 57-81.
- Ianari, Vittorio. *Chiesa, coloni e Islam. Religione e politica nella Libia Italiana*. Torino: SEI, 1995.
- Iyob, Ruth. "Madamismo and beyond: The Construction of Eritrean Women." *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 22, no. 2 (2000): 217-238.

- Jameson, Anna. *The Diary of an Ennuyée*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1858.
- Jemolo, Arturo C. *Italia tormentata: 1946-1951*. Bari: Laterza, 1951.
- Jones, Cecily. "Contesting the Boundaries of Gender, Race and Sexuality in Barbadian Plantation Society." *Women's History Review* 12, no. 2 (2003): 195-232.
- Kabbani, Rana. *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient*. London: Pandora, 1994.
- Kennedy, Dane Keith. *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.
- Kholoussy, Hanan. "Stolen Husbands, Foreign Wives: Mixed Marriage, Identity Formation, and Gender in Colonial Egypt, 1909-1923." *Hawwa* 1, no. 2 (2003): 206-240.
- King, Anthony. *Colonial Urban Development. Culture, Social Power and Environment*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976.
- Kozma, Liat. *Global Women, Colonial Ports: Prostitution in the Interwar Middle East*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2017.
- Kozma, Liat. *Policing Women in Egypt*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006.
- Kundrus, Birthe. "Transgressing the Colour Line. Policing Colonial 'Miscegenation'." In *Gender History in a Transnational Perspective: Networks, Biographies, Gender Orders* edited by Oliver Janz and Daniel Schönpflug. New York: Berghahn Books, (2014): 219-242.
- Labanca, Nicola. *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002.
- Labanca, Nicola. *La guerra italiana per la Libia: 1911-1931*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012.
- Lake, Marilyn, and Henry Reynolds. *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality*. Melbourne: Melbourne Univ. Publishing, 2008.

- Largueche, Dalenda. "Confined, Battered, and Repudiated: Women in Tunis Since the Eighteenth Century." In *Women, the Family and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, edited by Amira El Azhary Sonbol, 259-276. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996.
- Lea, Virginia. "Scientific Racism." In *Encyclopedia of Critical Whiteness Studies in Education*, edited by Zachary A. Casey, (2020): 585-595. Leiden: Brill Sense.
- Lentin, Alana. "Race." In *The Sage Handbook of Political Sociology*, edited by William Outhwaite and Stephen Turner. London: Sage Publishing, (2017): 860-877.
- Leonard, Pauline. "Organizing Whiteness: Gender, Nationality and Subjectivity in Postcolonial Hong Kong." *Gender, Work & Organization* 17, no. 3, (2010): 340-358.
- Leonardo, Cecilia, and Joan C. Chrisler. "Women and sexually transmitted diseases." *Women & Health* 18, no. 4 (1992): 1-15.
- Levine, Philippa. "Orientalist Sociology and the Creation of Colonial Sexualities." *Feminist Review* 65, no. 1 (2000): 5-21.
- Levine, Philippa. *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Levine, Philippa. *Gender and Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Lewis, Milton James, and Scott Bamber. "Introduction." In *Sex, Disease, and Society: a Comparative History of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific*, edited by Milton James Lewis, Scott Bamber, and Michael Waugh. Santa Barbara, Greenwood Press, 1997.

- Locatelli, Francesca. " Beyond the Campo Cintato: Prostitutes, Migrants and Criminals in Colonial Asmara (Eritrea), 1890-1941". In *African Cities*, edited by Francesca Locatelli and Paul Nugent. Leiden, The Netherlands, (2009): 219-240.
- Locher-Scholten, Elsbeth. 2000. "Monogamous Marriage and Female Citizenship in the Dutch East Indies 1898-1938." In *En vaderland voor vrouwen*, edited by In F. Dieteren & M. Grever, Leeuwarden: Stichting Beheer.
- Lombardi-Diop, Cristina. "Postracial/Postcolonial Italy." In *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, edited by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, (2012): 175-190.
- Lombroso, Cesare. *L'uomo delinquente: in rapporto all'antropologia, alla giurisprudenza ed alle discipline carcerarie*. Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1896-1897.
- Lombroso, Cesare and Rodolfo Laschi, *Il delitto politico e le rivoluzioni in rapporto al diritto, all'antropologia e alla scienza di governo*. Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1890.
- Loos, Tamara. "A History of Sex and the State in Southeast Asia: Class, Intimacy and Invisibility." *Citizenship Studies* 12, no. 1 (2008): 27-43.
- Luconi, Stefano. "Discrimination and Identity Construction: The Case of Italian Immigrants and Their Offspring in the USA." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 32, no. 3 (2011): 293–307.
- Luconi, Stefano. "Italian Immigrants, Whiteness, and Race: A Regional Perspective." *Italian American Review* 11, no. 1 (2021): 4–26.
- Malgeri, Francesco. "Chiesa cattolica e regime fascista." *Italia contemporanea* 194 (1994): 53-63.

- Mamdani, Mahmood. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Manfredini, Mario. "Il delitto di madamato." *La scuola positiva XLVI, n.1*, (1938).
- Mangan, Jane. "Moving Mestizos in Sixteenth-Century Peru: Spanish Fathers, Indigenous Mothers, and the Children In Between." *William & Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2013): 273-294.
- Mann, Michael. *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Marchetti, Sabrina. *Le ragazze di Asmara. Lavoro domestico e migrazione postcoloniale*. Roma: Ediesse, 2011.
- Martini, Angelo. *Studi sulla questione romana e la Conciliazione*. Roma: Cinque Lune, 1963.
- Massad, Joseph A. *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Mata, María Eugénia. "Inter-racial Marriage in the Last Portuguese Colonial Empire." *E-Journal of Portuguese History* Vol. 5 No.1 (2007).
- Matos, Patrícia Ferraz de. *The Colours of the Empire: Racialized Representations during Portuguese Colonialism*. New York: Berghahn, 2013.
- McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*. New York, Routledge, 1995.
- McCulloch, Jock. *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902-1935*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- McLaren, Brian. *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya. An Ambivalent Modernism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.

- McKee, Heidi A., and James E. Porter. "The Ethics of Archival Research." *College Composition and Communication* (2012): 59-81.
- McKinley, Michelle A. 'Illicit Intimacies: Virtuous Concubinage in Colonial Lima.' *Journal of Family History* 39.3 (2014): 204–221.
- Mead, William Edward. *The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914.
- Meer, Nasar, and Tariq Modood. "Refutations of Racism in the 'Muslim Question'." *Patterns of prejudice* 43, no. 3-4 (2009): 335-354.
- Mellino, Miguel. "De-Provincializing Italy. Notes on Race, Racialization and Italy's Coloniality" In *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, edited by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, (2012): 83-99.
- Metz, Helen Chapin, and Library of Congress. Federal Research Division. *Libya: A Country Study*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O, 1989.
- Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Ming, Hanneke. 'Barracks-Concubinage in the Indies, 1887-1920.' *Indonesia* 35 (1983): 65-94.
- Moe, Nelson. *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Montalbano, Gabriele. "The Making of Italians in Tunisia: A Biopolitical Colonial Project (1881-1911)." *California Italian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2019).
- Monteleone, Salvatore, and Benedetto Torrisi. "Geographical Analysis of the Academic Brain Drain in Italy." *Scientometrics* 93, no. 2 (2012): 413-430.

- Morale, Antonio. *Studio della prostituzione nella storia del diritto e nella legislazione vigente*. Vasto: Tipografia editrice Anelli, 1909.
- Morgensen, Scott Lauria. 'The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now.' *Settler Colonial Studies* 1.1 (2011): 52-76.
- Morone, Antonio. "Ascari, clandestini e meticci: mobilità fisica e sociale nel secondo dopoguerra." In *Governare l'Oltremare. Istituzioni, funzionari e società nel colonialismo italiano*, edited by G. Dore, C. Giorgi, A.M. Morone, e M. Zaccaria, (2013): 203-217. Roma: Carocci Editore.
- Morone, Antonio. "La nuova Italia e le ex colonie nell'opera e nelle carte di Giuseppe Brusasca." In *I sentieri della ricerca* 7-8 (2008): 205-240.
- Morone, Antonio. "L'Italianità degli altri. Le migrazioni degli ex-sudditi coloniali dall'Africa all'Italia." In *Altreitalie* 50, (2015): 71-83.
- Mosse, George Lachmann. *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
- Nani, Michele. *Ai confini della nazione. Stampa e razzismo nell'Italia di fine Ottocento*. Roma: Carocci, 2006.
- Narayan, Uma. "Colonialism and Its Others: Considerations On Rights and Care Discourses." *Hypatia* 10, no. 2 (1995): 133-40.
- Nardocci, Costanza. "Dall'invenzione della razza alle leggi della vergogna: lo sguardo del diritto costituzionale." *Italian Review of Legal History* 5 (2019): 481-525.
- Niceforo, Alfredo. *Italiani del Nord e italiani del Sud*. Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1901.
- Njoh, Ambe J. "Urban planning as a tool of power and social control in colonial Africa." *Planning perspectives* 24, no. 3 (2009): 301-317.

- Oriani, Alfredo. *Fino a Dogali*. Milano: Libreria Editrice Galli, 1889.
- Oueijan, Naji. "Sexualizing the Orient." In *Essays in Romanticism* 14, no. 1 (2006): 7-25.
- Pankhurst, Richard. "The history of prostitution in Ethiopia." *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 12 no. 2 (1974): 159-178.
- Paoloni, Francesco. *Da Costantino a Mussolini. Note di un fascista sulla conciliazione*. Napoli: Giovanni Mazzone Editore, 1929.
- Papa, Catia. *Sotto altri cieli. L'Oltremare nel movimento femminile italiano (1870-1915)*. Roma: Viella, 2009.
- Pascoe, Peggy. "Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* Vol. 12, No. 1 (1991): 5-18.
- Pascoe, Peggy. *What Comes Naturally. Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Passaniti, Paolo. *Diritto di famiglia e ordine sociale: il percorso storico della società coniugale in Italia*. Milano: Giuffrè Editore, 2011.
- Pastor de Maria Campos, Camila. "Performers or Prostitutes? Artistes during the French Mandate over Syria and Lebanon, 1921–1946." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 13.2 (2017): 287-311.
- Phung, Vu Trong. *Lục Xi: Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Colonial Hanoi*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010.
- Patriarca, Silvana. *Italianità: la costruzione del carattere nazionale*. Roma: Laterza, 2002.
- Patriarca, Silvana. *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

- Patriarca, Silvana, and Lucy Riall, eds. *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Pergher, Roberta. *Mussolini's Nation-Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Perry, Adele. "'Fair Ones of a Purer Caste': White Women and Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia." *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 501-524.
- Pesarini, Angelica, and Guido Tintori. "Mixed Identities in Italy: A Country in Denial." In *The Palgrave International Handbook of Mixed Racial and Ethnic Classification*, edited by Zarine L. Rocha and Peter J. Aspinall. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, (2020): 349-365.
- Phipps, Catherine. "'Disgusting and Intolerable': Sexual Relationships between European Women and Moroccan Men in French Morocco in the 1940s and 1950s." *Gender & History* (2021): 1-21.
- Platt, Tristan. "The Andean Soldiers of Christ. Confraternity Organization, the Mass of the Sun and Regenerative Warfare in Rural Potosi (18th-20th Centuries)." *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* (1987): 139-191.
- Podestà, Gian Luca. "I censimenti nei domini coloniali come fonte per la storia sociale." *Annali di Statistica*», s. XII 161, no. 2 (2012): 253-279.
- Pollard, John. *Money and the Rise of Modern Papacy: Financing the Vatican, 1850-1950*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Ponzanesi, Sandra. 'The Color of Love: Madamismo and Interracial Relationships in the Italian Colonies.' *Research in African Literatures* 43.2 (2012): 155-172.
- Ponzanesi, Sandra. "Queering European Sexualities Through Italy's Fascist Past: Colonialism, Homosexuality, and Masculinities." In *What's Queer about Europe?: Productive*

- Encounters and Re-enchanting Paradigms*, edited by Mireille Rosello and Sudeep Dasgupta, (2014): 81-90. New York, USA: Fordham University Press.
- Ponzanesi, Sandra. "Connecting Shores: Libya's Colonial Ghost and Europe's Migrant Crisis in Colonial and Postcolonial Cinematic Representations." In *Border Lampedusa*, edited by Gabriele Proglia and Laura Odasso, (2018): 119-135. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Portelli, Alessandro. "The Problem of the Colorblind: Notes on the Discourse on Race in Italy." In *Crossroutes – The Meaning of Race for the 21st century*, edited by Paola Boi and Sabine Broeck. Hamburg and London: LIT, (2003): 29-39.
- Posada, Ricardo Vargas, Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, and Dicky Sofjan. "The Alliance to “Civilize” the East Indies Government and Catholic Missionaries in Manggarai-Flores." *Jurnal Kawistara* 10, no. 2: 133-144.
- Pugliese, Joseph. "Crisis Heterotopias and Border Zones of the Dead." *Continuum* 23, no. 5 (2009): 663-679.
- Quijano, Aníbal. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 168-178.
- Rabani, Maurizio, and Luca Corchia. *Lo Stato e la Chiesa dall’Unità d’Italia agli Accordi di Villa Madama. La questione politica e sociale degli effetti civili del matrimonio canonico*. Pisa: Arnus University Books, 2014.
- Re, Lucia. "Italians and the Invention of Race: The Poetics and Politics of Difference in the Struggle over Libya, 1890-1913." *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010).
- Renucci, Florence. ‘La strumentalizzazione del concetto di cittadinanza in Libia negli anni Trenta’. *Quaderni fiorentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico moderno*, n°33-34, (2005): 319-342.

- Reynolds, Henry, and Marilyn Lake. *Drawing the Global Colour Line*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2018.
- Ricciardi, Toni. "The Transition from Colonialism to the Migration Policies in Europe." In *Europe Between Migrations, Decolonization and Integration (1945–1992)*, edited by Giuliana Laschi, Valeria Deplano, and Alessandro Pes, (2020): 28-38. London: Routledge, 2020.
- Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1999.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance*. London: Pluto Press, 2019.
- Rochat, Giorgio. *Il colonialismo italiano*. Torino: Loescher, 1973.
- Rochat, Giorgio. *Balbo*. Torino: UTET, 1986.
- Rodríguez-García, Dan. "Considérations théorico-méthodologiques autour de la mixité." *Enfances, Familles, Générations* 17 (2012): 41-58.
- Rossetto, Piera. "'We Were all Italian!': The construction of a 'sense of Italianness' among Jews from Libya (1920s–1960s)." *History and Anthropology* (2021): 1-27.
- Roumani, Maurice M. *The Jews of Libya: Coexistence, Persecution, Resettlement*. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008.
- Roumani, Maurice M. *Gli ebrei di Libia: dalla coesistenza all'esodo*. Roma: Castelvechi Editore, 2015.
- Ryan, Eileen. *Italy and the Sanusiyya: Negotiating Authority in Colonial Libya, 1911-1931*. PhD diss., Columbia University Press, 2012.

- Saada, Emmanuelle. *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient*. New York, Pantheon, 1978.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Sale, Giovanni. *La chiesa di Mussolini. I rapporti tra fascismo e religione*. Milano: Rizzoli, 2011.
- Salerno, Luigi. *La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, con cenni storici sulla prostituzione*. Lugo: Tipografia Editrice Trisi, 1922.
- Salerno, Eric, *Genocidio in Libia: le atrocità nascoste dell'avventura coloniale italiana (1911-1931)*. Roma: Manifesto Libri, 2005.
- Sarfatti, Michele. *Mussolini contro gli ebrei: cronaca dell'elaborazione delle leggi del 1938*. Torino: Zamorani, 1994.
- Sarfatti, Michele. *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione*. Torino: Einaudi, 2000.
- Sapelli, Alessandro. *Memorie d'Africa (1883-1906)*. Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli Editore, 1935.
- Scarfone, Marianna. "Genere, razza e psichiatria coloniale. Voci e silenzi nel caso clinico di una donna libica (1939)." *DEP. Deportate, esuli, profughe*, n. 27, (2015): 48-71.
- Schettini, Laura. *Turpi traffici. Prostituzione e migrazioni globali 1890-1940*. Roma: Biblink editori, 2019.
- Schiff, David N. "Socio-legal theory: social structure and law." *The Modern Law Review* 39, no. 3 (1976): 287-310.

- Schneider, Jane. "Introduction: The Dynamics of Neo-Orientalism in Italy (1848–1995)" in *Italy's 'Southern Question': Orientalism in One Country*, edited by Jane Schneider. New York: Berg Publishers, (1998): 1–26.
- Scott, James C. *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Scott, Joan. 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.' *The American Historical Review* 91, no 5. (1986): 1053-1075.
- Segrè, Claudio. "Italo Balbo and the Colonization of Libya" *Journal of Contemporary History* 7.3 (1972): 141-155.
- Segrè, Claudio. *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Segrè, Claudio. *Italo Balbo: a fascist life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Sertoli Salis. 'Il nuovo satuto libico'. In *Il Diritto Fascista* (1938).
- Shields, Stephanie A. "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective." *Sex Roles* 59, no. 5 (2008): 301-311.
- Simon, Rachel. *Change within Tradition among Jewish Women in Libya*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992.
- Sòrgoni, Barbara. *Parole e corpi: antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interraziali nella colonia Eritrea; 1890-1941*. Napoli: Liguori, 1998.
- Sòrgoni, Barbara. "Donne in colonia tra definizione giuridica e immaginario di genere." In *L'Oltremare, Diritto e istituzioni dal colonialism all'età postcoloniale*, edited by Aldo Mazzacane. Napoli: CUEN, (2006): 235-254.

- Spackman, Barbara. *Accidental Orientalists: Modern Italian Travelers in Ottoman Lands*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Spadaro, Barbara. "Corpi coloniali. Uomini e donne in Libia tra le due guerre mondiali." In *V Congresso della Società Italiana delle Storiche. Nuove frontiere per la storia di genere*. Naples, 2010. [http://www.cdlstoria.unina.it/storiche/Relazione\\_Spadaro.pdf](http://www.cdlstoria.unina.it/storiche/Relazione_Spadaro.pdf).
- Spadaro, Barbara. "Intrepide massaie. Genere, imperialismo e totalitarismo nella preparazione coloniale femminile durante il fascismo (1937-1943)." *Contemporanea* 13.1 (2010): 27-52.
- Spadaro, Barbara. *Una colonia italiana incontri, memorie e rappresentazioni tra Italia e Libia*. Firenze: Le Monnier, 2013.
- Spivak, Gayatri. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Steenbrink, Karel. "Chapter XI: Catholicism in Late Colonial Indonesia: Civil and Spiritual Aspects of a Distinct Community." In *Catholics in Indonesia, 1808-1942*. (2007): 421-443. Leiden: Brill.
- Stefani, Giulietta. *Colonia per maschi: italiani in Africa orientale, una storia di genere*. Verona: Ombre corte, 2007.
- Stefani, Giulietta. "Bianchi e no. Promiscuità e commistione razziale tra italiani e indigeni nell'impero coloniale fascista." *Studi culturali* 7, no. 1 (2010): 103-124.
- Steijlen, Fridus. "Moluccans in the Netherlands: From Exile to Migrant." *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 44, no. 1 (2010): 143-162.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. 'Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (1989): 134-161.

- Stoler, Ann Laura. "Educating Desire in Colonial Southeast Asia: Foucault, Freud, and Imperial Sexualities." In *Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, edited by Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly, 27-47. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies." *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 829-65.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Storrs, Debbie. "Whiteness as Stigma: Essentialist Identity Work by Mixed-Race Women." *Symbolic Interaction* 22, no. 3 (1999): 187-212.
- Stovall, Tyler Edward, and Georges Van den Abbeele. *French Civilization and Its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003.
- Strazza, Michele. "Faccetta nera dell'Abissinia. Madame e meticci dopo la conquista dell'Etiopia." *Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012): 116-133.
- Surkis, Judith. *Sex, Law, and Sovereignty in French Algeria, 1830–1930*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019.
- Taddia, Irma, and Uoldelul Chelati Dirar. "Essere africani nell'Eritrea italiana." In *Adua. Le ragioni di una sconfitta*, edited by Angelo Del Boca, (1997): 231-253. Bari: Laterza.
- Taraud, Christelle. *La prostitution coloniale: Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc (1830-1962)*. Paris: Éditions Payot, 2003.
- Teruzzi, Attilio. *Cirenaica Verde*. Milano: Casa Editrice A. Mondadori, 1931.

- Thompson, Debra. "Racial Ideas and Gendered Intimacies: The Regulation of Interracial Relationships in North America." *Social & Legal Studies* 18, no. 3. (2009): 353-371.
- Tobino, Mario. *Il deserto della Libia*. Torino: Einaudi, 1952.
- Torrise, Benedetto, and Giuseppe Pernagallo. "Investigating the Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Academic Brain Drain: the Italian case." *Scientometrics* 124 (2020): 925-952.
- Trento, Giovanna. "Madamato and Colonial Concubinage in Ethiopia: A Comparative Perspective." *Aethiopica* 14, no. 1 (2013): 184-205.
- Van der Sterren, Anke, Alison Murray, and Terry Hull. "A History of Sexually Transmitted Diseases in the Indonesian Archipelago Since 1811." In *Sex, Disease, and Society: a Comparative History of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific*, edited by Milton James Lewis, Scott Bamber, and Michael Waugh. Santa Barbara, Greenwood Press, 1997.
- Van Kirk, Sylvia. "From 'Marrying-in' to 'Marrying-out': Changing Patterns of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal Marriage in Colonial Canada." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 3 (2002): 1-11.
- Vandewalle, Dirk. *A History of Modern Libya*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Veracini, Lorenzo. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Verdicchio, Pasquale. *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora*. New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997a.

- Verdicchio, Pasquale. "The Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy." In *Revisioning Italy National Identity and Global Culture*, edited by Beverly Allen and Mary Russo. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, (1997b): 191-212.
- Vestal, Theodore M. "Reflections on the Battle of Adwa and its Significance for Today." *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism* (2005): 21-33.
- Virga, Anita. "African "Ghosts" and the Myth of "Italianness": the Presence of Migrant Writers in Italian Literature." *Tydskrif vir letterkunde* 56, no. 1 (2019): 102-112.
- Ware, Vron. *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*. London: Verso, 1993.
- Warren, James Francis. *Ah ku and karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore, 1870-1940*. Singapore, NUS Press, 2003.
- Wekker, Gloria. *White Innocence*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- White, Luise. *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- White, Owen. "The Decivilizing Mission: Auguste Dupuis-Yakouba and French Timbuktu." *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 3 (2004): 541-568.
- Willson, Perry. *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: the Massaie Rurali*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Willson, Perry. "Empire, Gender and the 'Home Front' in Fascist Italy." *Women's History Review* 16, 4 (2007): 487-500.
- Wilson, Carter G. *Racism: From Slavery to Advanced Capitalism*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication, 1996.

- Wilson, Kathleen. "Empire, Gender, and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century." In *Gender and Empire*, edited by Philippa Levine. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2004): 14-45.
- Wildenthal, Lora. " Race, Gender, and Citizenship in the German Colonial Empire." In *Tensions of Empire*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, (1997): 263-284. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wildenthal, Lora. *German Women for Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Wolfe, Patrick. *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*. London: Cassell, 1999.
- Wolfe, Patrick. 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.' *Journal of genocide research* 8.4 (2006): 387-409.
- Wong, Aliza. *Race and the Nation in Liberal Italy, 1861-1911: Meridionalism, Empire, and Diaspora*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Wright, John. *Libya: A Modern History*. Kent: Croom Helm, 1982.
- Yeaw, Katrina Elizabeth Anderson. *Women, Resistance and the Creation of New Gendered Frontiers in the Making of Modern Libya, 1890-1980*. Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2018a.
- Yeaw, Katrina Elizabeth Anderson. "Gender, Violence and Resistance under Italian Rule in Cyrenaica, 1923–1934," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 23 no. 5 (2018b), 791-810.
- Yeaw, Katrina Elizabeth Anderson and Barbara Spadaro. *Women in the Modern History of Libya: Exploring Transnational Trajectories*. New York: Routledge, 2020.
- Yeğenoğlu, Meyda. *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. "Gender and Nation." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 4 (1993): 621-632.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13, no. 3 (August 2006): 193–209.

Zacek, Natalie A. "Searching for the Invisible Woman: The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Britain's West Indian Colonies." *History Compass* vol.7 no.1 (2009): 329–341.

Ziadeh, Nicola A. *Sanūsīyah; a Study of a Revivalist Movement in Islam*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958.

Zocchi, Benedetta. "Italian Colonialism in the Making of National Consciousness: Representations of African Natives." *Storicamente* 15 (2019).

## **Summary**

The study of the regulation of mixed intimacies between Italian settlers and people that fell under Italian colonial rule can clarify processes of racialization of subaltern social groups while pointing at the construction of Italian whiteness in the colonial environment. However, research on mixed intimacies during Italian colonialism has focused solely on the Eastern African colonial contexts, namely, how such relationships unfolded and were regulated in Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia during Italian colonial rule. This research aimed to broaden the study of mixed relationships to the context of the Italian colonization of Libya (1911-1942), to assess whether Italian colonial administrators regulated intimacies between Italians and Libyans. Moreover, this research linked the study of regulations to the discursive construction of racial categories to ascertain whether they played a role in the racialization of Libyans and the identification of Italians as white. As part of the “Euromix” project, whose aim is to challenge the assumption of a colorblind Europe that never prohibited mixed relationships, this research challenged such assumption in the Italian colonial context. It aims to do so by debunking the still-existing myth of Italian colonialism as marginal and irrelevant in the history of the Italian nation and the development of a well-defined Italian national and racial identity.

In order to answer this dissertation’s research questions, I used a socio-legal approach to the analysis of official archival sources collected in the Italian state, Vatican, and Missionary congregations' archives. Through such an analysis, the regulations of mixed intimacies collected in the archives were juxtaposed to the social changes that influenced and were influenced by the policing of intimacy in the Libyan colonial context. The main finding of this research is that Italian colonial administrators regulated mixed intimacies throughout their colonial presence in Libya to establish and reinforce the category of "whiteness" on the settler

population while racializing Libyans as Others. In particular, this research found that the racialization of the colonial Other through the regulation of mixed intimacies was a significant factor that allowed a modern, white, European subjectivity to emerge and represent itself as a signifier of Italian identity in the empire. Regulating mixed intimacies coincided with keeping control of categorization processes that affected both colonizing and colonized societies, therefore representing an untapped resource in understanding the historical production of racial categories in the Italian colonial context.

In this thesis, I have shown how Libya's colonization represented a unique racialization laboratory for Italy, where the construction of Libyans as racially Other was connected to the identification of Italians as white. This argument was further strengthened by how racialization processes happened in Libya, connected to Italy by the “Mediterranean” racial paradigm and where racial differences were discursively constructed on cultural and religious differences. Given these peculiarities related to the Libyan context, the ways in which Italian authorities understood and regulated mixed intimacies in colonial Libya pointed to how racial differences were constructed throughout the time of the Italian colonization of Libya (1911-1942), both in the empire and in the metropole.

This thesis demonstrated that regulations of mixture were an essential factor in shaping racial categories in the Italian colonial context by analyzing archival sources. First, in Chapter 4, I showed how Italian colonialism was an essential stage in the formation of the Italian national and racial identity. The discursive construction of Italians as “one people” carried out by the Italian political and cultural elites was an arduous path due to cultural differences crystallized in internal (North-South divide) and external (Northern European gaze on Italians) racializing logics. The colonial enterprise in Africa represented a uniting factor for the Italian population, a chance to prove that the young Italian nation was worthy of participating in the colonization of the African continent carried out by other European powers. In particular, the colonial

enterprise in Libya was a turning point in this process, with the advent of mass media and nationalist politics feeding revanchist and supremacist feelings that found expression in colonial power politics. Similarly, the racialization and exoticization of Libyan women and mixed intimacies bolstered Italian white masculine identity in relation to the racialized colonial Other, underscoring the highly gendered aspect of whiteness production in colonial contexts.

With the discursive and representational context laid out in Chapter 4, the following Chapters of this research displayed the archival material supporting the hypothesis that mixed intimacies between Italians and Libyans did happen throughout the Italian occupation of the region and that colonial administrators carefully regulated them. Moreover, the analysis conveyed in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 linked the mentioned regulations to specific concerns related to racial prestige and consciousness as much as proving that the regulation of mixture was always connected to the establishment of racial boundaries and organized along intersectional axes of power.

In Chapter 5, I have shown how the militarization of the colony due to the anti-colonial resistance brought to an organization of the Italian army members' sexual interactions with Libyan women that unfolded along class lines. Lower-class soldiers, whose sexuality was considered hard to control, were provided by military commands with access to unsegregated brothels. At the same time, middle to upper-class officers were encouraged to take local women as concubines to preserve the decorum of their uniforms. This mixed intimacies organization persisted until the resistance against Italian colonial rule was broken by the Fascist regime in the early 1930s. In this dissertation, I argue that the transition from a militarized space to a settler colony was the main factor in changing Italian administrators' attitudes toward mixed intimacies. When the Italian population in the colony was mainly composed of male army members, mixture was not prohibited and, at times, even encouraged to provide sex to army members who were prohibited from bringing their Italian wives to a militarized colony. Once

the resistance was broken and the projects of demographic colonization of the colony began, mixed intimacies started being prohibited throughout the colony, with the sole exception of prostitution in those parts of the colony where the settler presence was minimal. In the early 1930s, more domestic intimacies such as concubinage started being prohibited, and the officers who engaged in it were punished after almost twenty years of tolerance of the practice.

The regulatory shift that interested the colony at the onset of the transition of Libya toward a settler-colonial space was also evident in the analysis of sources conveyed in Chapter 6. In particular, the chapter dwelled on the case of Benghazi, Libya's second-biggest city and capital of Cyrenaica. In Benghazi, the transition toward a settler-colonial space also brought a reorganization of the intimate racial boundaries. As Cyrenaicans were forcibly interned in concentration camps in the colony's interior to make room for Italian settlers in the most fertile regions, the local-to-settler ratio became much more balanced than during the years of the anti-colonial resistance. The increase of settlers, including the arrival of a substantial number of women that had been very few up to that point, brought a restructuring of the interactions between Italians and Libyans in the city. On the one hand, the sources analyzed in Chapter 6 showed that Italian women were policed by Italian authorities and expelled from the colony when found guilty of engaging in intimate relationships with Libyan men. On the other, Italian administrations also changed the city's spatial organization, giving increasing importance to racial segregation in the zoning of Benghazi, an attitude that had been absent throughout the prior twenty years of primarily military Italian colonial presence in the city.

The centrality of settler colonialism in developing a more segregationist regulatory framework regarding mixed intimacies was also evident in the analysis carried out in Chapter 7. As Fascism drew plans to turn Libya into a settler colony able to sustain increasing Italian settlers, in 1938, the then governor of Libya, Italo Balbo, pushed for Libya's administrative inclusion within the Italian state's borders. Balbo's program, alongside the invasion and conquest of

Ethiopia, signified the culmination of Fascism's imperial policy of demographic colonialism and expansion of the Italian race in an ever-growing empire. These ideological objectives notwithstanding, Balbo's plan faced the opposition of important Fascist Party figures who deemed it irresponsible to include Libya within the Italian body politic, as it would have increased the chance of Libyans obtaining Italian citizenship and hence being able to marry Italians. These dynamics internal to the Fascist party showed the culmination of the dynamics described in previous chapters, with the transition to settler colony representing the main factor in creating and enforcing regulations of mixed intimacies in Libya. As the colony became more of a settler space, the identification of Italians as white and "Aryan" increased under the efforts of the Fascist party, bringing a more vital need to racialize the colonized population and separate it from Italians.

Chapter 8, the final empirical discussion of this dissertation, completed the argument carried out throughout the thesis by outlining an overview of mixed marriage in Libya and how colonial administrators and religious authorities regulated them. As the sacrament of marriage had been a field of contention between the Italian state and the Catholic Church, the chapter accounted for the Catholic missionary presence in Libya and how it managed the few cases of mixed marriages that were brought to their attention. The sources showed that the Church, although acting as a colonial agent and as an institution created to support the Italian population of the colony, allowed mixed marriages as long as the Libyan partner converted to Catholicism. This dynamic showed how religion and race intersected in the Libyan colonial context and how the Church and the Italian state clashed over the sacrament of marriage and, hence, over Italians' private sphere. The signature of the Lateran Pacts and the conciliation between the Vatican and the Fascist regime brought an alignment of the two institutions, with Catholicism being co-opted by the Fascist Party as an integral part of the strengthened racial consciousness of Italians both in the metropole and the colonies. This shift entailed a total prohibition of

mixed marriages, with the Vatican not holding any relevant jurisdiction on the issue but merely falling in line with Fascism's totalitarian project of racial expansionism.

This dissertation found that the various stages of the demographic colonization of Libya were the most significant factor that shaped regulations of mixture in the Libyan context. The presence of Italian settlers determined the need to enforce racial boundaries to create and protect a sense of racial superiority characterized by an identification with the category of whiteness and opposition to the racialized Otherness of Libyans. The process was visible in how colonial administrators regulated mixed intimacies from the years of militarization to the start of the demographic colonization of Libya. The colonization of the land through the expansion of the Italian race represents one of the final stepping stones in the hegemonic moment of Italian racism.

Moreover, this dissertation found that the start of Libya's demographic colonization was the tipping point for regulating racial boundaries concerning the intimate sphere. The next phase of Italian colonialism included tougher sanctions for Italians who crossed these lines, the design of urban segregation in all Libyan cities, the deportation of Libyans to detention camps, and the crackdown on mixed weddings sanctioned by the Church. The fundamental goal of this new phase was to expand the vital space of an already "biologically" proven dominance of the Italian race across the empire's borders rather than continuing to create a sense of "whiteness" as purely tied to Italianness.

While the regulation of mixture was strictly related to multiple factors such as political opportunism, army morale, and enforcement of racial prestige within the context of a "civilizing mission" for the liberal and early Fascist administrations, it became a focal point in the enforcement of the late Fascist regime's biopolitical plan of racial expansionism with the late Fascist regime. Mixture became a real threat to the purported "biological" right of Italians to claim their rightful path to build an empire based on the superiority of Italian whiteness, as

well as a practice capable of unbalancing the racial consciousness of Italians in the colonies and tarnishing the racial prestige of the colonizers.