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Women, Resistance and the Creation of New Gendered Frontiers in the Making of Modern Libya, 1890-1980

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Abstract

Women, Resistance and the Creation of New Gendered Frontiers in the Making of Modern Libya, 1890-1980 examines the gendered transformation in the territory that became Libya from the late Ottoman period until after independence. Questioning the official version of Libyan nationalism that understood colonialism as a masculine, and at times violent, interaction between male Italian colonists, soldiers, and administrators and colonized men, I demonstrate the multi-faceted ways in which Libyan women interacted with the modernizing Ottoman, Italian and later British states, whether through the introduction of new forms of education, the policing of community boundaries, or through the military suppression of armed resistance. I found that European colonial governance dismantled existing local institutions including the Ottoman education system. Consequently, Italian policies undermined previous Ottoman attempts at modernizing reforms while distorting many of the existing social structures. My dissertation utilizes a variety of Arabic and Italian sources from archives in Italy, the US, and the UK. In addition, it incorporates oral history interviews collected by the Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli. Chapter One investigates attitudes about sexual relationships between European men and Libyan women through an analysis of cases that came before Italian military tribunals in Tripoli and Benghazi. Chapter Two on Italian state education for girls analyzes the way the Italians dismantled the existing Ottoman education system for women while excluding women from Italian schools. Chapter Three focuses on missionary education for girls and its support of racial segregation in the colony. Chapter Four combines studies of institutional colonial violence with gender theory to analyze the ways in which women opposed Italian practices. Finally, Chapter Five evaluates the way in which the colonial period was remembered by Libyan women through a reading of postcolonial Libyan female writers.
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<td>ASMAE</td>
<td>Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome.</td>
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<td>ASMAI</td>
<td>Archivio Storico del Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Rome.</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSME</td>
<td>Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Rome.</td>
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<td>TNA</td>
<td>The National Archives of the United Kingdom, London.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANT</td>
<td>Archives Nationales de Tunisie, Tunis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USNA</td>
<td>U.S. Department of State, National Archives, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSCPF</td>
<td>Archivio Storico della Sacra Congregazione de Propaganda Fide, Vatican City.</td>
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<td>ASANMI</td>
<td>Archivio Storico dell'Associazione Nazionale per Soccorrere i Missionari Italiani, Rome.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frati Minori</td>
<td>Archivio Storico dell’Ordine dei Frati Minori Lombardi, Milan.</td>
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<td>ASSFME</td>
<td>Archivio Storico delle Suore francescane Missionarie d’Egitto, Rome.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

In 1817, Miss Tully, the sister-in-law of the British Consul, Richard Tully, published her reflections on her ten-year residency in Tripoli, describing the social customs and habits of the local population. In Tripoli, she described the “Moorish” women of the city:

None of the ladies belonging to the royal family ever walk in the streets, except when they go to their mosques, to fulfill a vow, or make an offering, which they frequently do on various occasions, but with the greatest circumspection. They go out as late as eleven or twelve o'clock at night, attended by a considerable guard from the castle… Women of a middle station of life generally go out on foot, but hardly ever without a female slave and attendant. They are then so completely wrapped up, that it is impossible to discover more about them than their height, not easily even their size. They have a covering called a baracan, which is about one yard and a half wide, four or five in length. This conceals them entirely, and they hold it so close over their face, as scarcely to leave the least opening to see their way through it.¹

Framing her account as an objective observer, she highlighted the difference between Europeans and the indigenous (urban) population, especially in terms of dress. Miss Tully could not have realized that she was describing Tripoli on the eve of a dramatic change in the balance of power between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Only 13 years after publishing her account the French would invade and occupy Algiers. While some of these changes were already underway, they would accelerate dramatically over the course of the nineteenth century and culminate in the establishment of formal colonialism in North Africa, first in Algeria in 1830, followed by Tunisia in 1881, Libya in 1911 and Morocco in 1912.

My dissertation examines the gendered transformations in the territories that became modern Libya from the late Ottoman period until the early 1980s. Questioning the official

¹ Tully, Narrative of a Ten Years' Residence at Tripoli in Africa; From the Original Correspondence in the Family of the Late Richard Tully, Esq., the British Consul. Comprising Authentic Memoirs and Anecdotes of the Reigning Bashaw, His Family, and Other Persons of Distinction; Also, an Account of the Domestic Manners of the Moors, Arabs, and Turks (London: Printed for H. Colburn, 1817), 5-6.
version of Libyan nationalism that understood colonialism as a masculine, and at times violent, interaction between male Italian colonists, soldiers, and administrators and colonized men, I demonstrate the multi-faceted ways in which Libyan women interacted with the modernizing Ottoman, Italian, British and later Libyan states, whether through the introduction of new forms of education, the policing of community boundaries, or the military suppression of armed resistance.

While the bulk of this study addresses the colonial period (1911-1951), it charts shifts in power over a much longer period, from the Ottoman reforms and changing power dynamics in the Mediterranean in the late nineteenth century through direct colonial rule to the emergence of Libya as an independent state and the economic and the political changes that emerged post-independence. This project does not attempt to cover the entire period in an exhaustive way. Instead, it is a social history of institutions that affected the lives of women from the introduction of modernizing reforms in the late nineteenth century through independence as well as the way in which women remembered these transformations. The study is anchored by its emphasis on gender as the primary analytical lens through which to evaluate reforms and modernization. The colonial period, understood as both a radical break in governance but also a continuation of larger modernizing processes, remains at the center of the study as a defining era of Libyan history.

**Gender and Empire**

Gender played a substantial role in shaping colonial powers’ perceptions of the local population and, by extension, their policies in the colonies. Gender was central to understanding modes of difference, and colonial powers adopted teleological notions of history through which
societies’ advancement could be charted from the primitive to the advanced. Within this context, the degradation of women was associated with “savage” peoples of the world. In Egypt, the British colonial bureaucracy focused on Egyptian gender relations, domestic space, and child-rearing practices as representative of the backwards nature of Egyptian society and demanded the implementation of reforms before Egypt would be eligible for self-rule.

Despite these criticisms of local customs, colonial powers have tried to portray their supposed respect for cultural difference and local custom as a cornerstone of their rule at least since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, for either ideological or practical reasons. After occupying Algeria in 1830, the French established the principle of the free practice of the Muslim religion within the territory. Central to this policy was the preservation of Islamic law and its legal system, which was viewed as inseparable from the Muslim faith, especially in relation to cases dealing with issues of personal status (marriage, divorce, rights of the spouses

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and inheritance). Therefore, the French upheld the basic framework of family law, fearing that changes would foster resentment among the local population.

Along with shaping perceptions of the local population, Ronald Hyam has argued that the impetus for colonial expansion was to provide an outlet for what he describes as a kind of martial, British, masculine, sexual energy. While Hyam and others often overstate the


5 French historian Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison has also argued that French colonial law developed regimes of exception during the imperial period for indigenous peoples, in contradiction to the Enlightenment principles of universal human rights and Republican ideals. These contradictions were justified by the need to retain order in the colony and by the claim that “natives” were too “backward” for these legal principles to apply to them. These measures were introduced as temporary policies in Algeria in the 1840s but resulted in a legal distinction between French settlers, who were “citizens”, and native Algerians, who were “subjects” of the French government. By the period of the Third Republic, these measures became firmly established in the colonial state and were supported by the development of the “colonial sciences” and the emergence of the International Colonial Institute in the late 19th century. For more information, see Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, “The Exception and the Rule: On French Colonial Law.” *Diogenes* 53 (40) (Nov. 2006), 37-39.


relationship between sexuality and empire, it is clear that sexual regulation and prohibitions were central mechanisms of colonial rule. Through debates about sexuality and gender, agents of the colonial state confronted each other’s visions and assumptions about the nature and goals of empire. Gender was central to conflicts over modes of governance and imperial policy that reflected differing assumptions about imperial power and role of women in the colonial sphere. The study of gender and empire addresses a wide range of issues from prostitution, concubinage, and miscegenation to colonial medicine and education.

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8 While there is a growing body of literature on the relationship between gender and empire, the field remains dominated by historians of the British Empire, especially those focusing on colonial India. There is a small number of historians who have expanded the scholarship to address other colonial situations, including the French, Dutch, German and Belgian empires. Julia Clancy-Smith has argued that this lack of scholarship on gender in the French Empire is the product of the weakness of imperial French historiography overall, due to the fact that French public was apathetic about imperial adventures until at least World War II, and of the late arrival of gender analysis to the French academy. Answering the call of historians such as Frederick Cooper for a more comparative approach to empire that rejects the narrative of the triumph of the nation-state, there are also several historians taking up the call to incorporate the history of non-European empires into the larger locus of imperial history. For more information, see Clancy-Smith, Julia. “Changing Perspectives on Colonialism and Imperialism: Women, Gender, Empire” in Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century. eds. Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer, and Y. Hakan Erdem. (Seattle, Wash: University of Washington Press, 2006), 75; Frederick Cooper, Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 154.


The study of gender and empire is not only about the histories of women. Joan Scott argues in her seminal article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” that “gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”

Concepts of gender structure access to resources, both material and symbolic. The study of gender illuminates the radical changes in the organization of social relations that took place during the transitions of North Africa and the Middle East from modernizing regions of a religious, dynastic empire to modern nation-states. Concepts of masculinity and femininity as well as ethnicity and race were central to the creation of the social order in colonial societies, signifying community boundaries and access to the resources of the state.

Historians have been receptive to the shifting dynamics of gender over the period of European expansion abroad. Early encounters on colonial frontiers tended to be characterized by a great deal of fluidity and, at times, by breaks with established practices and norms. Katherine Wilson defines these locations as “gender frontiers” where “two or more culturally specific systems of knowledge about gender and nature” confronted one another, albeit in situations of unequal power.

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12 Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” 1069.
the perceived instability of colonial frontiers and the fact that women were seen as unsuited for
the climates and localities where colonial conquests took place. In the absence of European
women, indigenous women often played the role of the cultural brokers through relationships,
sexual and otherwise, with European men. Owen White argues that sexual relationships
represented an important point of contact between French men and African women after France
established trading outposts in Africa at the end of the seventeenth century.\(^\text{15}\) In the Italian
colonial sphere, the Libyan territories retained many of the aspects of a gender frontier until
well into the 1930s when attempts were made to normalize colonial rule after the defeat of the
armed resistance. It was only then that greater divisions were established between the local
population and the European population.

By the end of the nineteenth century, local elites in the colonies began to address many
of the criticisms of colonial officials about women in their societies in many parts of the Middle
East and North Africa. This resulted in the development what has been called the “Women
Question” in the Middle East, a series of debates around a number of interconnected issues
including marriage, divorce, seclusion, veiling, female education and women’s employment.
Intellectual figures like Murqus Fahmī and Qāsim Amīn argued that their country's progress was
hindered by the oppression of women in the family and called for the development of a
bourgeois domesticity through a series of reforms that included the end to seclusion,\(^\text{16}\) the reform
of polygamy and divorce and greater education for women.\(^\text{17}\) Beth Baron argues that these

\(^{15}\) Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in

\(^{16}\) Murqus Fahmī, *al-Mar’a fī al-Sharg* (Miṣr: Maṭba fī al-Sharqiversit); Qāsim Amīn, *The
Liberation of Women; and the New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian
Feminism* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005).

\(^{17}\) Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*
debates cannot be divorced from the actual social transformations that were taking place in the Egyptian society that made changes to the family structure and the abolition of harem slavery more appealing to male elites.\textsuperscript{18} Pollard views these debates as central to the construction of the modern Egyptian nation and as well as a process through which men and women were domesticated and transformed into Egyptian citizens.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Gender in Colonial Libya}

Officially, Italy adopted a policy similar to that of the French, claiming that non-interference in local cultural practices was necessary for maintaining their rule in Libya. Therefore, the Italian government had an official policy of “absolute respect for indigenous customs, religion and women.”\textsuperscript{20} General Graziani, who was responsible for the “pacification” of Cyrenaica, went so far as to claim that “the natives had the immediate feeling that the government, while acting strongly, would never allow abuses of any kind” to take place in Libya.\textsuperscript{21} Under this official guise of respect for Islam and protection of Islamic law and local customs, the Italian colonial period effectively reversed the Ottoman administration’s drive towards standardization and harmonization of state-promulgated “ruler’s law” (\textit{qanun}) and Islamic law (\textit{shari`a}) by instead limiting state power over religious law.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} Beth Baron, \textit{Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 34.
\textsuperscript{20} Per poco che si sia vissuto in colonia, emerge la necessità assoluta del rispetto agli usi indigeni, alle religione, alle donne. Graziani, \textit{Cirenaica Pacificata}, 74.
\textsuperscript{21} Gli indigeni ebbero così l'immediata sensazione che il Governo, pur agendo fortemente, non avrebbe mai permesso abusi di sorta, e li avrebbe ripresi senza riguardi se essi si fossero verificati. Graziani, \textit{Cirenaica Pacificata}, 74.
\textsuperscript{22} Rudolph Peters, “From Jurists‘ Law to Statute Law or What Happens When the Shari‘a is Codified.” \textit{Mediterranean Politics} 7(3) (2002): 82-95. It should be noted that in actual practice
By the mid-1930s, the Italian government was attempting to package the idea of its respect for Islam in Libya for foreign consumption in an effort to move into French North Africa, endeavoring to win the approval of the Algerian ‘ulama’ and to situate Italy as an alternative to British and French colonialism. During an official state visit to Libya in 1937, Benito Mussolini was presented with the “Sword of Islam,” and had himself declared the “protector” of Islam as part of this propaganda effort. During the ceremony, he declared that:

A new year had dawned in the history of Libya... fascist Italy intends to guarantee the Muslim people of Libya and Ethiopia peace, justice, well-being, respect for the laws of the Prophet and it wishes, moreover, to demonstrate sympathy towards Islam and towards Muslims the world over. Soon, with its laws, Rome will show how anxious it is for your future welfare.

However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful and the ‘ulama’ remained skeptical of Mussolini's intentions, especially due to his brutal repression of the tribes in Cyrenaica.

Within the larger claim of respecting local culture, Libyan women held an ambiguous place within the Italian colonial sphere. Giulietta Stefani has pointed out that Arab and Turkish women in general, more than the women from Italian East Africa, occupied the Italian literary imagination during the 1920s and 1930s due to the European fascination with the harem and the influence of French orientalists in Italian art and literature. In her study on the relationship between the women's movement and Italian colonialism, Catia Papa found comparisons in

the Ottoman state had far less influence over Libya than it did over other parts of the Middle East, especially after Muḥammad ʿAlī came to power in Egypt in 1805. For more information, see Lisa Anderson, "Nineteenth-Century Reform in Ottoman Libya." International Journal of Middle East Studies. 16 (3) (1984): 325-348.


women's magazines between the condition of Italian women and that of other women around the world, a common trope of feminist literature of the period. Despite the prominent role of Arab women within the Italian imagination, a cursory reading of the documents in the now defunct *Ministero dell'Africa Italiana* (Ministry of Italian Africa) and many of the memoirs of colonial officials and colonists would lead one to believe that Libya was a land almost devoid of women. Those women who do emerge in their accounts primarily serve as material for male fantasies: public women who appeared to be sexually available to European men. The ethos of colonialism as primarily a man’s world has been criticized by feminist scholars since the 1980s and termed “double colonialism” to expresses the way in which colonized women were denied a place within the colonial sphere and within the colonial imagination.

Despite the marginalization of women, women not only interacted with the colonial state but also shaped its configurations. In particular, two specific institutions interacted with women in Libya on a consistent basis and therefore left documents related to these interactions. One of these institutions, the military, utilized physical means of coercion against sections of the indigenous population through both military engagements and its policing functions. While this

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institution did not interact with the majority of local women, it did intervene in the lives of those considered by the colonial state to be unruly or sources of disorder: sexually available women, especially prostitutes, and resistance fighters or mujāhidāt. Both types of women were potentially disruptive to the creation of an orderly colony, the first because they transgressed communal boundaries by forming intimate relationships with colonial officials and soldiers and the second because they remained outside the control of the state. The second of these institutions, the lay and religious educational systems, attempted to utilize coercive power in order to create new colonial subjects. While women’s education was neglected during the colonial period, some girls did attend schools operated by the colonial state or missionary organizations. Although these schools were not completely divorced from physical means of coercion, they were the most prominent institution interacting with local woman in any meaningful way that did not involve military force.

After invading Libya, the Italians struggled to establish a well-ordered colony and to create cohesive modes of governance. In comparison to the Ottoman Empire, the Italian colonial administration was both more coercive in terms of its utilization of state-violence and less coherent in terms of developing an educational system in order to create modern subjects among Libyan women. While all states regularly claim the exclusive right to the morally defensible use of coercive force, and the Ottomans did put down a series of internal rebellions during the nineteenth century,²⁹ the Italians’ use of violence violated internationally accepted standards of conduct as well as Italy’s treaty obligations, in particular through the use of poison gas. ³⁰ At the

same time, European colonial governance dismantled existing local institutions, including the
Ottoman education system. Consequently, Italian policies undermined previous Ottoman
attempts at modernizing reforms that provided opportunities for Libyan women, while
simultaneously distorting many of the existing social structures. This process of gendered
domination did not go unopposed and women were active agents in the struggle against Italian
rule.

A Concise History of Modern Libya

From 1551 to 1911, the Ottoman Empire ruled the coastal region today known as Libya
as the Eyalet of Tripolitania (Eyālet-i Trâblus Gârb). The Ottomans primarily governed the
major coastal territories of the region, only making halfhearted attempts to penetrate into the
hinterland in order to collect taxes. In 1711, the Governor of Libya, Aḥmad Bey Karamanli,
seized control of the region from the Ottomans and the Karamanli dynasty ruled Tripoli as a
semi-autonomous dynasty under Ottoman auspices from 1711 to 1835, taking the title of Bashas

31 For Ottoman reform during the nineteenth century see, Anderson, Lisa. "Nineteenth-Century
Reform in Ottoman Libya." International Journal of Middle East Studies 16, no. 03 (1984): 325-
348; Roderic H. Davison, Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876 (Princeton University
Press, 2015); Ussama Makdisi, "After 1860: Debating Religion, Reform, and Nationalism in the
Ottoman Empire." International Journal of Middle East Studies 34, no. 04 (2002): 601-617;
Nora Lafi, Une ville du Maghreb entre ancien régime et réformes ottomanes. Genèse des
institutions municipales à Tripoli de Barbarie (1795-1911) (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2002); Selim
Deringil, "‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the
Emine Önhan Evered, Empire and Education under the Ottomans: Politics, Reform, and
Resistance from the Tanzimat to the Young Turks (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012);
Mostafa Minawi, The Ottoman Scramble for Africa Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and
of Tripoli. After the French invasion of Algeria in 1830, the Ottomans reasserted direct rule in Libya, ruling it as the *Vilâyet-i Trâblus Gârb*.  

By the late nineteenth century, a revivalist Sufi religious movement had developed in Eastern Libya, in the region of Cyrenaica, known as the Sanûsiyya. Founded by Muḥammad bin ‘Alī al-Sanūsī, often called the Grand Sanūsī (al-Sanūsī al-Kabîr), the Sanûsiyya established a number of zawāya (lodges) in equatorial Africa during the nineteenth century. The teachings of the movement, which emphasized a pure and austere version of Islam, found supporters among the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes of Eastern Libya. They have been described as “an Islamic phenomenon, religious in its fundamentals, social in its effects, and political in its consequences.” The movement provided not only religious guidance but also social services and security over trade routes, offering a form of social and economic organization to the hinterland of the Libyan territories. Ali Ahmida has characterized the system of Sanûsî zawâya as providing state functions in the absence of a centralized state. By the early-twentieth century, they increasingly became political in orientation, opposing French encroachment near Lake Chad in 1900 and later the Italian invasion of the Libyan territories in 1911.

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33 Muḥammad bin ‘Alī al-Sanūsī was born at al-Wâṣita, near Mustaghānim, in the Department of Oran, Algeria in the late-eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The exact date of this birth is matter of debate among historians. For more information see, Nicola A. Ziadeh and R. J. I. ter Laan, *Sanûsiyyah: A Study of a Revivalist Movement in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 35.
Starting in the 1880s, Italy began to seek Libya as a sphere of influence after Tunisia became a French colonial possession, basing its claim to the territory on its history as a former Roman colony and its strategic importance for Italy’s control of the Mediterranean. However, the Italians’ invasion of Ethiopia delayed their colonial aspirations in Arab North Africa.\footnote{Anna Baldinetti, \textit{The Origins of the Libyan Nation: Colonial Legacy, Exile and the Emergence of a New Nation-State} (New York; London: Routledge, 2010), 34.} In September 1911, Italy sent an ultimatum to the Ottoman government, declaring its plan to invade the regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and demanding that the Ottoman government issue orders that the occupying forces should not meet opposition from the Ottoman representatives in the region.\footnote{Nicola Labanca, \textit{La guerra italiana per la Libia: 1911-1931} (Bologna: Il mulino, 2012), 15.} Although the Ottoman government attempted a conciliatory approach, promising to protect Italian interests in the region, Italy declared war on the empire on September 29.\footnote{Timothy W. Childs, \textit{Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War Over Libya, 1911-1912} (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 69.} In spite of Ottoman and local objection, Italy announced its complete annexation of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in November 1911.\footnote{Lisa Anderson, “The Development of Nationalist Sentiment in Libya, 1908-1922” in \textit{The Origins of Arab Nationalism}. Ed. Rashid Khalidi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 229.}

Libya turned out to be a difficult territory to subdue. In 1911, the Ottoman government sent a number of prominent officials to organize opposition to the Italian invasion, which included two local notables, the future head of the Sanūsiyya movement Aḥmad al-Sharīf and the Tripolitanian politician Sulaymān al-Bārūnī, as well as a young Turkish army officer by the name of Mustafa Kemal (not yet Atatürk), the future founder of modern Turkey.\footnote{Anderson, “Nationalist Sentiment in Libya,” 229.} Along with the Ottoman officials, two Ottoman parliamentarians, al-Bārūnī and a French educated urban
notable, Muḥammad Farḥāt al-Zāwī,⁴⁴ were central in coordinating local opposition and helping to recruit between 20,000 and 30,000 volunteers in Tripolitania. In Cyrenaica, another 20,000 individuals volunteered under the leadership of the Ottomans and the Sanūsiyya. ⁴⁵ The resistance, therefore, represented a coalition of local and Ottoman forces resisting the Italian invasion and occupation.

By the summer of 1912, Ottoman support for the Libyan resistance was fading as their attention shifted to other regions of the empire, particularly because of the deteriorating situation in the Balkans. The Empire opened negotiations with Italy and signed the Treaty of Lausanne in October 1912, officially bringing an end to the Italo-Turkish War. ⁴⁶ However, the Ottomans did grant the regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan their formal independence upon withdrawal from the war. ⁴⁷ Despite their formal political withdrawal from the region, the Ottomans continued to have political influence in the Libyan territories through the nomination of judges and direct control over religious affairs. ⁴⁸ Notwithstanding ending their official support for the resistance, the Ottoman government continued to aid the resistance in covert ways, including providing money to the families of those who had been captured or killed in battle. ⁴⁹

Some of the local leadership refused to acknowledge the Treaty of Lausanne, and al-Bārūnī soon emerged as one of the leaders of the Conference of ‘Aziziyya, a gathering of local

⁴⁶ Nicola Labanca dates the end of the Italo-Turkish War to 1913 rather than the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1912. For more information, see Labanca, *La guerra italiana per la Libia*, 53.
⁴⁷ Anderson, “Nationalist Sentiment in Libya,” 229.
⁴⁸ Labanca, *La guerra italiana per la Libia*, 111.
⁴⁹ Simon, *Change within Tradition Among Jewish Women in Libya*, 104.
leaders who convened to decide upon a response to Italy’s decision to annex these territories.\textsuperscript{50} Not all of the leaders were in agreement and some elites, including Muhammad Farḥāt al-Zāwī, advocated submitting to Italian rule, arguing that Italy would respect the independence of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania.\textsuperscript{51} In contrast, al-Bārūnī urged the leaders to defend Tripolitania and stand firm against the Italian invaders in spite of the resistance’s unenviable prospects of success.

After the Conference of ʿAziziyya, al-Bārūnī fled to the Ibāḍī stronghold of Jabal Nafūsa, and rallied several thousand men to his support. He then called upon the Italians to recognize him as the head of an independent state in Western Tripolitania with a capital at the town of Yafran.\textsuperscript{52} Al-Bārūnī took it upon himself to design the banner for this new self-declared government on which two Qur’anic passages were embroidered on the top and bottom: “God has promised you many gains that you shall acquire” (48:20) and “victory from God is near” (61:13). In addition, it depicted Africa and a crescent moon with the name of Tripoli inscribed on it, establishing an Islamic identity for the government.\textsuperscript{53} While this government portrayed itself as the rightful ruler of Tripolitania, it only controlled a small percentage of its overall territory, and its control of even this area was short-lived. In March 1913, Italian troops under the command of Clemente Lequio overcame al-Bārūnī's forces, driving them over the border into the French colony of Tunisia at the battle of al-Asab’a.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} Baldinetti, \textit{The Origins of the Libyan Nation}, 57.
\textsuperscript{51} Berhe, \textit{Notabili libici e funzionari italiani}, 110.
\textsuperscript{52} John Wright, \textit{A History of Libya} (London: Hurst and Company, 2010), 144.
\textsuperscript{54} “Advance of Italian Army to Jefren, 5 April 1913,” RFSP, CP, Tripoli, Libya, RG 84, vol. 051, pos. 114/820, NACP.
During the First World War, the Libyan resistance benefited from the fact that Italian attention was directed towards Europe as well as from the scarcity of Italian forces left to defend the territory.\(^{55}\) In November 1918, a nationalist convention announced the establishment of the Tripolitanian Republic (\textit{al-Jumhūriyya al-Ṭarābulusīyya}), establishing the first nominal republic in any Arab country, albeit under Italian colonial rule. The Republic’s government was comprised of an Advisory Council of representatives elected from each region, which in turn elected the ‘Ulama’ Council. A commander-in-chief of the troops and a treasurer were also selected and al-Bārūnī was appointed to a four-person council of notables who became the spokesmen for the Republic.\(^{56}\) Despite the fact that the Republic was a major step towards overcoming regional and tribal divisions within the region of Tripolitania, it was short-lived due to conflicts within its leadership.\(^{57}\) Two movements developed among the leadership, with one demanding an agreement with Italy for complete independence, while the other favored a conciliatory position towards the Italians. The first policy was adopted at a gathering at Ghariyan in November 1920.\(^{58}\)

The people of Cyrenaica accepted the leadership of the \textit{Sanūsiyya} while retaining their own tribal affiliations. Due to the continued resistance in the region and their weakened political position, the Italians struck a compromise with the local elites and granted them some autonomy. In 1916, the \textit{Sanūsiyya} order, led by Sayyid Muḥammad Idrīs al-Mahdī al-Sanūsī, opened

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\(^{55}\) Simon, \textit{Change within Tradition Among Jewish Women in Libya}, 239.


\(^{57}\) Baldinetti, \textit{The Origins of the Libyan Nation}, 44.

negotiations with Italy through British intermediaries in Cyrenaica. These negotiations resulted in two related agreements between the Italians and the Sanūsiyya: the pact of Al-Zuwaytina in April 1916 and the Treaty of Akrama in April 1917. The end result was that the Sanūsiyya recognized Italian control over the coast and the Italians recognized Sanūsiyya control over the hinterland, free trade was guaranteed between the two and Sanūsiyya lands were exempted from taxation.59

In October 1920, the Accord of al-Rajma was reached between Idrīs al-Mahdī al-Sanūsī and the Italians which granted him the largely ceremonial title of Amir of Cyrenaica and a stipend from the Italian government as well as other payments to the Sanūsī family. In addition, the Italians agreed to pay for the administration of Sanūsiyya lands as well as the salaries of tribal leaders. In return, the Sanūsiyya agreed to give up their weapons.60 However, not all of the members of Sanūsiyya agreed with this accommodation with the Italians: 'Umar al-Mukhtār, the eventual leader of the resistance in Cyrenaica, and Ahmad al-Sharīf refused to surrender their weapons. The truce between the people of Cyrenaica, as represented by some of the leadership of the Sanūsiyya, and Italy was far from permanent and diplomatic relations broke down. Idrīs al-Mahdī as-Sanūsī went into exile in Egypt.

After the Fascist takeover of the Italian government, Mussolini rejected the Liberal government's policy, in place since 1911, of collaborating with local Libyan elites. Mussolini’s first Minister of Colonies, Luigi Federzoni, pushed for what they considered the riconquista of the territories in early 1923 to make it into a space open for Italian demographic colonialism. By 1924, they had defeated the Republic of Tripoli and subdued the majority of Tripolitania.61 By

59 Ahmida, The Making of Modern Libya, 123.
60 St. John, Libya, 69-71.
61 Berhe, Notabili libici e funzionari italiana, 256.
1928, the leader of the Sanūsiyya order had submitted to Italian rule in Cyrenaica. In 1929, the Italian government united Tripolitania and Cyrenaica under a single governor with the capital in Tripoli. However, the resistance continued under the leadership of 'Umar al-Mukhtār, who had been appointed as the military commander of the Sanūsiyya order upon Idrīs al-Mahdī al-Sanūsī's exile. In 1931, 'Umar al-Mukhtār was captured and executed by the Italian regime. Marshal Badoglio declared the rebellion broken and the war, which had started three decades before, officially over in January 1934.

The “pacification” of Libya allowed Italy to turn its attention to Ethiopia in 1935 and utilize Libyan troops in order to annex Ethiopia during Second Italo-Ethiopian War, which resulted in the foundation of Italian East Africa (Africa Orientale Italiana). This act was in violation of the League of Nations' article 10, which stipulated that members of the League were responsible for maintaining the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the League of Nations. The invasion further eroded Italy's reputation and resulted in the League of Nations imposing economic sanctions in November 1935. In May 1936, Mussolini declared Italy an “Empire.” However, these military victories were short lived, with Italian rule lasting only another seven years in Libya and only five years in Ethiopia.

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63 Ahmida, The Making of Modern Libya, 137.
65 Labanca, La guerra italiana per la Libia, 202.
Libya became one of the first African nations to receive its independence from foreign rule. The Allies conquered Cyrenaica in January 1943 and western Tripolitania in February 1943 as part of the North African campaign during the Second World War. After the Axis Powers surrendered in Tunisia in May 1943, a British military administration governed Cyrenaica and Tripolitania while France governed Fezzan. During the war, the Sanūsiyya allied themselves with the British and formed five battalions that fought on the side of the Allies, called the Libyan Arab Force.\textsuperscript{68}

Ultimately, the Second World War effectively ended Italian colonial rule in Libya. In the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, Italy relinquished its claim to Libya in addition to ceding southern Istria, Eritrea and Somalia. Libya would gain its independence under the auspices of the United Nations. The future of Libya during this period was closely linked to the post-war balance of powers in the Mediterranean. Originally, France, Great Britain and the United States supported the Bevin-Sforza plan, which would have placed the Libyan territories under French and British trusteeship for 10 years.\textsuperscript{69} Having failed to obtain the General Assembly’s approval of this plan by a single vote, the French and British agreed to Libyan independence, while continuing to exert considerable influence on the future of the nation. In November 1949, the United Nations created a platform and timetable for Libyan independence by enacting United Nations Resolution 289 (IV), which stipulated that complete independence would be achieved no later than January 1, 1952.\textsuperscript{70} The resolution did not provide for the form of the future government; rather, it recommended that this be determined by the inhabitants of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan

\textsuperscript{68} Baldinetti, \textit{The Origins of the Libyan Nation}, 108.
\textsuperscript{69} Ronald Bruce St. John, \textit{Libya and the United States: Two Centuries of Strife} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 52.
through a National Assembly. The process brought about a federal government ruled by the Sanūsī monarchy with Sayyid Idrīs al-Sanūsī (1889-1983) as the first (and only) King of Libya. Libya approached independence devastated by the decades of conflict and war, with the lowest standard of living in the Arab World. On December 24, 1951, Libya officially became an independent nation.

King Idrīs ruled Libya from 1951 to 1969. In 1959, oil was discovered in a commercial quantity and within six years Libya became the sixth largest non-Soviet exporter of petroleum in the world. While King Idrīs was governing a newly prosperous nation, the period of monarchal rule in Libya was characterized by political instability and the inability of King Idrīs to form a state that appealed to the majority of Libyans. In 1969, Mummar el Gaddafi led a bloodless military coup d’état, which deposed King Idrīs while he was out of the country for medical treatment. A devoted follower of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Gaddafi declared a Republic, changed the orientation of the country away from the West, and supported the Libyanization of the economy. Gaddafi would govern the nation for the next 42 years until he was captured and executed by forces loyal to the National Transitional Council (al-majlis al-waṭanī al-intiqālī) in 2011.

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The Population of Libya

The social complexity of the Libyan territories can be difficult to capture. Italian documents from the period include references to the arabi (Arabs), mori (moors), turchi (Turks), negri (“Blacks”: individuals of sub-Saharan origin who were slaves or the descendants of slaves) in the cities. The interactions of these populations resulted in the creation of a number of indigenous creole communities that included the kuloğlu (the offspring of Turkish men, often members of the Janissary core, and local Berber or Arab women in North Africa) and the fezzanesi (individuals of mixed African and Arab heritage). By the early twentieth century, the term mori (moors) had largely fallen out of usage to be replaced by arabi (Arabs). Among the rural populations, there were berberi (Berbers) of the Jabal Nafūsa region in the Western Tripolitania and beduini (Bedouins) of the hinterland as well as the Tebu (Tubu) and Tuareg people of Southern Libya. Often times, the Italians placed the local population under the umbrella term of indigeni (natives).

In addition to the local population, there was a sizeable European population, who were often referred to as europei (Europeans) in documents or by their country of origin (Italians, Spaniards, Greeks, Maltese, etc.). Much like among the local population, generations of interactions had blurred some of these lines, creating a creole European community. Creole Europeans were those born in the Libyan territories of European descent, who had established lives there and differed from the newly arrived immigrants, more transient migrants or later colonial settlers in the regions. Julia Clancy-Smith has argued that this distinction is useful in challenging the idea of nationality as the sole source of identity and helps to problematize the
notion of “European” as a stable category. Along with the creole communities, the region had a sizable number of crypto-Europeans, who were either Christian Ottoman subjects such as Greeks or Serbians or individuals granted protégé status by capitulations (the majority of these individuals in Libya being Jews).

In addition to these ethno-linguistic and national categories, there were also the major religious communities. The majority of the local population was Sunni Muslims, but there was also a significant number of Ibāḍīs among the Berbers of Jabal Nafūsa. The major cities had sizeable Jewish populations, making up one-fifth of the population of Tripoli and one-tenth of the population of Benghazi. There were also Christians from the Greek Orthodox and Catholic churches and occasionally from Protestant denominations, the majority of whom were of Europeans or of European descent. In addition, there were occasional converts, mostly from Christianity to Islam, but also occasionally from Islam or Judaism to Christianity.

Even this level of complexity fails to capture the true diversity of the Libyan territories, and the distinctions between groups were at times hazy. Jews in particular would have an ambiguous place in Libyan society under Italian colonialism. During the first decades of Italian colonial rule, the Italian administration attempted to assimilate Jews into the European community by sending them to metropolitan schools. The result was that marriages between Tripolitanian Jewish women and Italian Christians were common until the 1940s. However, the Italian government implemented the Italian Racial Laws (*Le leggi razziali fasciste*) between

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1938 and 1943, which severely restricted the role of Jews in public life in Italy. Italo Balbo, the Fascist governor of Libya, opposed the implementation of these laws in Libya and his initiative resulted in the fact that Jews of Libya were spared the harshest aspects of the laws that were applied against their co-religionists in the metropole. In June 1940, Italo Balbo was killed by friendly fire in Tubruq in Eastern Libya. After his death, more draconian measures were taken against the Jewish population including internment of Cyrenaican Jews in the Giado concentration camp, located 235 kilometers from Tripoli.

In this dissertation, the terms “local population” and “indigenous” are used interchangeably as umbrella terms to denote the people who lived in Libyan territories who were not of European descent when more precise terms such as Arab or Berber are not appropriate. The term indigenous is not without its problems in colonial historiography. Abbè Raynal first used the term to describe Native Americans in North America as a weak and possibly disappearing population due to the influx of European settlers. Within five years of the French occupation of the Algeria, the local population became known as *indigène*, which is often translated into English as native. Benjamin Claude Brower argued that the terms allowed the French to speak of Algerian inhabitants “not as a people but as a *population*.” Algériens (Algerians) was used to denote European settlers rather than the local populations.

Despite these drawbacks, we are often limited by the language available. I rejected the use of the term Libyan to describe the local population before independence since it posits both a

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kind of political unity, which did not exist until the Italians unified the three regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan in 1929, as well as a nationalist ethos among the population. Therefore, the term indigenous seems a more appropriate and less loaded term than the others available to us as historians.

Sources and Methodology

This dissertation focuses on the policies of colonial governments towards Libyan women and on their reactions to these policies. As a consequence, it is about the operation of the colonial system as reflected in the nature of European archives but also in the writing and memories of Libyan women. In a time of increased violence in the Middle East and North Africa, accessing sources for the study of the history of the region remains a challenge. Libya is just one of many countries in the region that is inhospitable or inaccessible to researchers. This has forced historians to be creative when locating archives. Ideally, this dissertation would have incorporated a wider range of Libyan documents, but the realities of civil war and its aftermath prevented me from accessing the rich collection of documents housed at the Libyan state archives in Tripoli or national library in Benghazi.

Instead, I turned to the archives of organizations that operated abroad in the Italian colonies and interacted in some way with indigenous women, including the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, Associazione Nazionale per Soccorrere i Missionari Italiani and the Association of Moral and Social Hygiene and as well as various missionary archives. The Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith), which was founded by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 and was tasked with spreading the Catholic faith and directing the activity of the church in other parts of the world that did not have a regular
ecclesiastical hierarchy. Its archives contain letters that reached the Propaganda Fide from both the Franciscans, who administered the Christian population’s spiritual needs, and from missionaries operating in the Libyan territories. The Associazione Nazionale per Soccorrere i Missionari Italiani (The National Association for Assistance to Italian Missionaries) was founded in Florence in 1886 by Senator Fedele Lampertico and Professor Ernesto Schiaparelli with the explicit goal of spreading the Italian language and culture abroad by funding missionaries from Italy. The Association of Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH) was founded in London in 1915 and traced its origins back to two older organizations: The Ladies’ National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (LNA), headed by Josephine Butler, and the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The AMSH sought to repeal solicitation laws, the series of statutes used by police to control street prostitution. While it operated primarily in Great Britain, members did report regularly on repeal efforts abroad including within the Italian Empire. In terms of missionary archives, this dissertation includes materials from the archives of the Ordine dei Frati Minori Lombardi, Suore francescane Missionarie d’Egitto and Suore francescane Missionarie di Maria. These were supplemented by documents from state archives in Italy, Tunisia, Great Britain and the United States.

In addition to European archives, this dissertation utilizes published Arabic sources including oral history interviews gathered by the Libyan Studies Center in the 1980s. The Libyan

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Studies Center was founded in Tripoli in 1977 by Mohammad Jerary, a Libyan historian educated in the United States. Coordinated by African historian Jan Vansina, the Center gathered interviews with former mujāhidīn and their relatives in order to preserve individual memories of the colonial period and incorporate them within the historical memory of the Libyan nation. As of 2011, the Center had published the oral narratives in forty-three volumes under the title of Mawsu‘at riwāyāt al-jihād (Oral Narratives of the Jihad) of which one volume is specifically dedicated to the role of women within the Jihad. Drawing on oral history theory, these interviews are utilized to both capture the lived experiences of women, who participated in the anti-colonial resistance, as well as their memories’ role in constructing the historical memory of Libya. In addition to these interviews, memoirs, novels, poems and other Arabic sources are employed to expand on the experiences of Libyan women and their memories of the colonial period.

The Libyan Studies Center utilized oral tradition and personal narratives as primary sources through which to analyze the colonial period, preserving individual memories in order to incorporate them within the historical memory of the Libyan nation. Jan Vansina spent six months in Tripoli in 1978, training fourteen researchers on methods for conducting oral history interviews. Vansina and his researches divided Libya into fourteen districts and sent out researchers to each district in order to identify mujāhidīn. Eileen Ryan points out that these sources are not without their challenges and that the choice of possible interview subjects was an “inherently political act” as researchers tried to distinguish between resistance fighters and

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collaborators. The goal was to interview all of the surviving veterans of the war in the whole
country and to that end over 15,000 interviews were conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s,
primarily in Libyan dialect of Arabic. The interviews were originally recorded on tape
recorders and a portion of them were later transcribed. The first published volume of the
interviews appeared in 1983.

As Alessandro Portelli writes, for historians the utility of oral narratives is “not so much
in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes
reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives, and set the
interview and the narrative in their historical context.” Despite this, the Libyan Studies Center's
original goal was to help supplement the lack of local archival sources on the colonial period and
construct a national history through the narrative of jihad against the Italians and of anti-colonial
resistance. The interviewers were especially interested in reconstructing individual battles and
the accounts of the mujāhidīn who took part in and perished in them. This is apparent from the
methodological approach of the editor, Muṣṭafā Sa‘d al-Hayan, who outlined in the introduction
to these volumes some of the issues he faced in terms of methodology, of which half address the
question of accuracy. He is particularly concerned with the attempt by some of the narrators to

85 Eileen Ryan, Religion as Resistance: Negotiating Authority in Italian Libya (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2018), 174.
86 Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition as History (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985),
59.
87 al-Mabrūk Sā‘idī, Khalīfah Muḥammad Duwaybī, and ‘Alī Būṣīrī, Mawsū‘at riwāyāt al-jihād
(Ṭarābulus, al-Jamāḥīrīyah al-‘Arabīyah al-Libīyah al-Sha‘bīyah al-Ishtirākīyah: Jāmi‘at al-
90 The other issues are as follows: “1. The inability of some the narrators to understand the goal
of studying and recording oral narratives and their fear that the analysis of their accounts might
damage or hinder the study. 2. The problems of publishing and the difficulty of receiving
aggrandize themselves or their tribe by attributing “events to their tribe or group or to some individuals despite the fact it is known that they were undertaken by others.”

While historians should not make their research conform to a particular reading of the past for purely ideological reasons, historians who use oral history sources have had particular difficulty coming to terms with the questions of “truth” and “authenticity” and grappling with the subjective nature of these sources. Jan Vansina has argued that:

Oral traditions are documents of the present, because they are told in the present. Yet they also embody a message from the past, so they are expressed of the past at the time. They are the representation of the past in the present. One cannot deny either the past or the present in them… Traditions much always be understood as reflecting both past and present in a single breath.

In the case of Libya, they hold both the nationalist goals of the Libyan government to create a cohesive historical memory and the history of the colonial period within a single frame, which is not always an easy relationship when it comes to the stories told by women who survived the colonial period. I follow an approach to oral histories developed by Italian historian Alessandro Portelli, who argues that the strength of oral history lies in the fact that “it tells us less about events rather than about their meaning.” While this research evaluates the interactions of answers to many of the questions he had about the events. 3. The difficulty of playing the old recordings due to the lack of necessary equipment. 4. The incorrect assumptions of some that the events of the jihad will not be published after they were recorded in spite of the attempt by the interviewer to assert the contrary and inform them that were being gathered by a research center.”

93 Vansina, Oral Tradition as History, xii.
women with institutions of colonial rule, it also captures the way in which they constructed an understanding of colonial rule through an evaluation of their memories of the period.

Finally, the efficacy of writing the national history of a country from the outside remains an issue that is subject to debate. However, as researchers are barred from countries in the region, more creative solutions will need to be found in order to write histories of the region. Historians of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen grapple with similar problems.95

Why Gender Libyan History?

My dissertation is an embodiment of the particular contribution that gender history has to make to the history of Libya. Under modernizing states in the late-nineteenth and the twentieth century, gender was one of the primary distinctions, along with nation of origin, which determined an individual’s role within the family, their access to the public sphere and their access to the resources of the state. During Italian colonial rule, local women would find themselves disadvantaged both by local patriarchal values as well as European masculine assumptions. Drawing on a feminist framework, this project specifically addresses the gendered nature of colonial violence, both the horrific and the mundane, in order to demonstrate how this violence disrupted existing ways of being in Libyan society.

With notable exceptions, gender history in the field of Middle East and North African studies coincided with the cultural turn in historical studies. As Beth Baron has argued, this rapid turn towards cultural history resulted in an emphasis on urban middle-class discourses rather than lived experiences, especially of non-elite women. While this dissertation is influenced by the development of gender history over the past thirty years, it places gender history in


conversation with the social history of women in the Middle East and North Africa. It attempts to capture the lived experiences of women in the colonial sphere, from prostitutes to students and resistance fighters, and the way in which they interacted with the modernizing states in the region.

An extension of the lack of social history of women in the Middle East and North Africa is the lack of influence of subaltern studies within the discipline. Subaltern studies seeks to provide an antidote for histories written about elites that ignore the majority of the population. Instead, they view the “agency of change is located in the insurgent or the ‘subaltern.’” In recent years, there has been discussion of the way in which subaltern studies could contribute to our understanding of the role of workers, peasants, nomads, slaves, migrants and bandits in the history of the region. Contributing to the scholarship on women, nomads and opposition to

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state power and centralization, my dissertation provides an analysis of the involvement of nomadic women in anti-colonial resistance. With the exception of C. R. Pennell’s article on women in the Rif mountains of Morocco, it is the only major research on the role of nomadic women in anti-colonial resistance in North Africa.\(^{102}\)

While gender provides a valuable lens through which to evaluate the history of the region, Libya is a historical outlier among other nations in the Middle East and North Africa. Tripoli shared some political and economic characteristics in common with other port cities in North Africa like Algiers and Tunis during the eighteenth and nineteenth, century but the Libyan territories were substantially different. Despite the fact that their effective political control was limited to the coastal regions, both Tunis and Algiers had some kind of political centralization and territorial continuity, with each city and its hinterland becoming a single *Eyalet* (providence) of the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century. Both Tunis and Algeria became French possessions in the nineteenth century. In the case of Tunis, the Husaynid dynasty governed the region from 1705 until 1957 when the monarchy was abolished (1881 to 1956 under the French protectorate) as the Beys of Tunis. Despite the fact that the Libyan territories were governed as a single *Eyalet* from Tripoli during the Ottoman period, the Ottomans struggled to extend their political influence into Cyrenaica and Fezzan, often ruling these regions through independent

governors. Whatever continuity existed under Ottoman rule was destroyed when the territories became an Italian colony during the twentieth century. The Italians eventually unified the three regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan under a single government in 1929. After the collapse of Italian rule during the Second World War, they would again fall under different administrations with the French administering Fezzan and the British governing Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. After independence, Libya was governed by a federal system, which was not abolished until 1963, a reform made necessary by the need for economic integration with the discovery of oil in the 1950s. Libya would struggle with a lack of political integration and regionalism throughout the twentieth century. An analysis of the history of Libya adds complexity to our understanding of the process of state-building in North Africa.

In most parts of the Middle East and North Africa, state-building and movements for women’s rights developed alongside of each other, inexorably linking the two issues within the political cultures of countries in the region. Libya provides an alternative model of the connection between women’s rights and state-building. At independence, even jobs traditionally held by women in conservative countries such as nursing and teaching were largely off limits to Libyan women. Women achieved the right to vote in 1963, but their economic and political participation in Libyan society remained limited. It was only after Gaddafi overthrew the monarchy in 1969 that there was a substantial improvement in women’s status. He supported a

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107 One of the most striking aspects of the Gaddafi regime was his use of female body guards officially named the Revolutionary nuns (*al-rāhibāt al-thawriyyāt*) but called the Amazonian Guards in the western media. After the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, wide scale sexual abuse
form of state feminism which included improvement in women’s education, making it compulsory up to the intermediate level, as well as reform of the personal status laws with the enactment of Law no. 58. In 1975, he created the General Women’s Federation (GWF), which offered support to women in areas of education, hygiene and childcare, but also placed women’s activism under the strict control of the state.

My dissertation points to the contribution Italian imperial history has to make to the study of colonialism in North Africa more generally. It furthers our understanding of European colonialism by using Libya as an informative case study. Historians have often taken the ideological claims of colonial powers about their civilizing missions at face value. This has resulted in historians such as Charles-Robert Ageron, as well as authors Albert Camus and Emmanuel Roblès, characterizing the failure to bring about reforms in colonies such as Algeria as an occasion manquée, a missed opportunity, for France to end the economic, political and cultural domination by the white settler minority. Even among historians who are critical of French policies in Algeria, this remains a salient strand within French historiography. An evaluation of colonial policies in Libya reveals the limitation of colonial ideologies, especially in

by Gaddafi and the top echelons of the government. For more information, see Annick Cojean, and Marjolijn De Jager, Gaddafi's Harem (New York: Grove Press, 2013).


relation to the role of the civilizing mission. In most colonial situations, colonial ideologies ran into colonial realities, and few colonial territories looked the way their framers imagined them on the ground. In the colonial context of Libya, where Italy struggled to craft effective institutions capable of governing the majority Muslim population, colonial ideology appears especially hollow. Despite the lofty rhetoric of colonial administrations, granting political and economic equality to colonized subjects was impossible under the existing colonial institutions, as James McDougall has argued in the context of Algeria.\footnote{James McDougall, \textit{History of Algeria} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 177.} Beyond the study of European colonialism in the region, my dissertation also adds to the scholarship analyzing the role of the Ottoman Empire as a modern colonizing power in North Africa which sought to modernize its subjects using techniques similar to those of later European colonial powers.\footnote{Selim Deringil, \textit{The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909} (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998); Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate.” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History} 45, no. 2 (2003): 311-342; Karen M. Kern, \textit{Imperial Citizen: Marriage and Citizenship in the Ottoman Frontier Provinces of Iraq} (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Minawai Mostafa, \textit{The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz} (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016).}

\textbf{Western Historiography}

Any discussion of Libyan history must begin with mentioning the limitation of existing western scholarship in comparison with other regions in North Africa and the Middle East. While there is plenty of research to be done on other regions, Libya, in particular, has largely been neglected by historians of both Italy and North Africa. This is not the case when looking at scholarship that addresses the 1969 revolution to the present, of which the majority of studies focus on the individual personality and regime of Muammar el Qaddafi and have been
undertaken by political scientists. And even the existing scholarship varies greatly in quality. This neglect is particularly true of the period known as the Second Ottoman Occupation (1825-1911) for which there are few developed studies, outside of a few political histories. Social histories are almost completely absent. The major exception is Nora Lafi's _Une ville du Maghreb entre ancien régime et réformes ottomanes: Genèse des institutions municipales à Tripoli de Barbarie (1795-1911)_ which looks at Tripoli's autonomous municipal organization during the period and is the first work by a Western academic to be based on a thorough analysis of documents housed in Tripoli's Municipal Archives.

Until the 1970s and 1980s, there was also almost a complete lack of work addressing the political, social and economic aspects of the Italian colonial period, and this still remains the most understudied period of Italian national history. Just as German crimes on the European continent have overshadowed their colonial policies, Italy has been slow to come to terms with its imperial past. Since end of the Second World War until today, there has been a pervasive myth in Italian culture of _Italiani brava gente_. At its root, this myth is based on the idea that Italian fascism was less racist, and by extension less brutal than its German counterpart. The myth was instrumental in defending not only the Italians’ colonial rule but also their continued economic and political control over their colonies after decolonization. This has resulted in a

116 Dirk Vandewalle, _A History of Modern Libya_, x.
118 For more information on the relevance of Nora Lafi's study see Mia Fuller, Review of _Une ville du Maghreb entre ancien régime et réformes ottomanes. Genèse des institutions municipales à Tripoli de Barbarie (1795-1911)_ by Nora Lafi, _H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences_, January 2003, 1.
form of colonial amnesia, especially in terms of the mass murder committed against the Libyan population between 1929 and 1934, and has allowed those crimes that were committed to be blamed on the fascist regime.\textsuperscript{119} In fact, there remains a committed minority of nostalgics and revisionists in Italy who attempt to defend the colonial period as well as Italy's Fascist past.\textsuperscript{120} In recent years, a number of historians have attempted to deconstruct the myth of \textit{Italiani brava gente} through a careful analysis of the Italian colonial period including Angelo Del Boca, Giorgio Rochat and Nicola Labanca.\textsuperscript{121}

There is considerable debate among academics about the cause of this absence of scholarship and the failure to 'decolonize' Italian history. Angelo Del Boca argues that the Italian government itself is a major advocate of the revisionist position regarding the colonial period, which has included the issuing of the fifty volume \textit{L'Italia in Africa} (Italy in Africa), highlighting the exceptionalism of Italy's colonial experience.\textsuperscript{122} Others have argued that this selective amnesia resulted from the fact that a large percentage of Italian academics during the first

\textsuperscript{119} The construction of Italian fascism as benign was largely due to the fact that the antisemitism of the regime was milder and there was no ethnic genocide carried out in metropolitan Italy like in Nazi Germany. For a critical review of the intellectual construction of Italian Fascism see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “A Lesser Evil? Italian Fascism in the Totalitarian Equation” in \textit{The Lesser Evil: Moral Approaches to Genocide}. Ed. Helmut Dubiel and Gabriel Motzkin (New York: Routledge, 2004), 137-53; Angelo Del Boca, \textit{Italiani, brava gente?: un mito duro a morire} (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2005); Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, \textit{Forgotten Voices: Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya} (New York: Routledge, 2005), 35-41.

\textsuperscript{120} For more information on revisionism in Italy more generally see Angelo Del Boca, “The Obligation of Italy Towards Libya” in \textit{Italian Colonialism}. Ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 195.


\textsuperscript{122} In the 1980s, the collection stopped being released before all of the volumes were published. For information see Angelo Del Boca, “The Obligation of Italy Towards Libya,” 195-6, 202; \textit{L'Italia in Africa} (Rome: Ministero dell'Estero, 1955-).
decades after Libyan independence had been involved with the colonial project and they, therefore, had little interest in challenging the official narrative of colonialism.123 Others have attributed this lack of scholarship to limited access to archival sources in Libya by European scholars as well as the fact that not all the documents in the National Archives, the Military Archives and the defunct Ministry of Italian Africa were easily accessible to historians.124

In spite of this colonial amnesia, the fields of Italian colonial and Libyan studies have grown substantially in the last several decades thanks to the scholarship of a few committed Italian academics, who were motivated partially by debates within Italian history about its own national and colonial past and more recently by the central role of Libya in contemporary discussions of immigration to Europe. During the 1970s and into the 1980s, a number of studies were published on the Italian colonial period, the majority of which were based on Italian source material. They largely focused on the first phase of the Italian occupation (1911-1912)125 or on

124 Del Boca, “The Obligation of Italy Towards Libya,” 196.
examining the Italian presence in Libya. Of these, Claudio G. Segrè’s the *Fourth Shore* remains one of the most cited works on the history of Italian colonialism in Libya. There are also a number of works that addressed more specific aspects of colonialism and the colonial experience. In terms of my research, Enzo Santarelli, Gorgio Rochat, Romain H. Rainero and Luigi Goglia’s research on the conquest of Libya and repression of resistance, and Vittorio Ianari’s study of the role of the church are the most relevant. However, the vast majority of these studies look at this period from the Italian perspective and attempt to place events within the national history of Italy rather than that of Libya. In addition, they largely draw on Italian sources and archival material while completely ignoring Libyan historiography. In addition, Patrizia Palumbo has noted that post-colonial theory and studies came relatively late and were not completed absorbed into Italian historiography concerning colonialism.

Before the 1980s, the majority of scholarship by Western academics on Libyan history was undertaken by Italian scholars, but increased attention was paid by non-Italian academics starting in the 1980s with many of them utilizing Arabic sources to analyze the foundation of the

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Libyan nation. They will be discussed in the next section. Outside of the foundation of the Libyan nation-state, the other area that has received considerable attention is Italian urban planning during the colonial period, which has been studied by Adnan Ali Husnein, Mia Fuller, Brian L. McLaren and Krystyna Clara von Henneberg. In recent years, well-established Italian historians such as Federico Cresti and Nicola Labanca have placed increased emphasis on the crimes of the Italian state in Libya and the “pacification” of the Libya during the fascist period, but they have continued to work almost exclusively from Italian documents.

There has been growing interest in the last several years in the experience of women under Italian rule in Italian East Africa, known as Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI), influenced by the growth of gender history and the question of gender and empire. Research on the


experience of women under Italian colonial rule in Libya remains in its infancy. Italian historian Barbara Spadaro has been the major contributor to this field with her work on bourgeois culture, gender and race in colonial Libya. However, there remains considerable work to be done on female missionaries, educators, prostitutes, nurses and travelers in Libya.

While there is a growing body of literature on Arab women in the Italian imagination, the actual ways in which Italian colonialism was experienced by Arab, Berber and Jewish women are yet to explored by western historians. In fact, there is little literature on women in Libya during any historical period. The notable exception is Rachel Simon’s pioneering work on the experience of Jewish women. The difficulty of studying the experiences of women in colonial Libya remains a salient issue for academics of gender due to the inability to undertake research in Libya at this time and the lack of references to Libyan women in the Italian colonial archives. In spite of these challenges, a new generation of academics is attempting to bring the experiences of Libyan women to light.


135 Barbara Spadaro, Una colonia italiana: incontri, memorie e rappresentazioni tra Italia e Libia (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2013).


137 Barbara Spadaro and Katrina Yeaw, Memory and History of Libya: Transnational and Feminist Approaches. Special Issue: Journal of North African Studies. (forthcoming)
Arabic Historiography

During the rule of King Idrīs, the questions of the colonial period and resistance were largely avoided in order to sidestep questions of complicity during the period of Italian rule. Instead, the majority of accounts were produced in order to legitimize the rule of the Libyan monarchy. Egyptian historian Muḥammad Fu’ād Shukrī (1904-1963) is responsible for the authoritative account of the Sanūsī struggle from this period, which was influenced by his personal relationship with members of the Sanūsī movement and other nationalist figures as well as his involvement in Libyan politics. In 1940s, he would become a political advisor to the nationalist leader Bashīr al-Sa'dāwī before being expelled by the British administration. His first account of Libyan history, entitled al-Sanūsiyya: din wa-dawla (The Sanūsiyya: Faith and State) mainly focused on the origins of the Sanūsī movement and its role in resisting Italian colonialism. His most complete narrative of the nationalist struggle was published in two volumes in 1957 under the title of Milad dawla Libiya al-haditha, Watha’iq tarikhīha wa-istiqlāliha (The Birth of the Modern State of Libya: Documents of its Liberation and Independence), which also focuses on the Sanūsīs as well as the role of Bashīr al-Sa'dāwī in the nationalist movement. Placing the anti-colonial struggle as a central theme of accounts of the


140 Muḥammad Fu’ād Shukrī, al-Sanūsiyya: din wa-dawla (Cairo: Dar al-fikr al-'arabi, 1948).

Sanūsī movement is also a major theme of the work of Sanūsī author Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib ibn Idrīs Ashhab and other Arab writers such as the Lebanese historian Nicola Ziadeh.  

The historical narrative changed drastically after Gaddafi came to power in 1969. The colonial struggle and issues of national identity remained a central theme of historical accounts but Gaddafi tried to obliterate and demonize the role of Sanūsīs in the national narrative. The Libyan armed forces released three volumes of documents exposing the Sanūsī family’s ties to international organizations, highlighting their betrayal of the Libyan nation for their personal gain.

The Gaddafi government used the state apparatus and popular culture in order to foster their own image of the nation including championing the figure of ’Umar al-Mukhtār as symbol of the national resistance against the Italians.  

The Libyan Studies Center has played a central role in the writing of Libyan national history since it opened in 1978. With branches in Tripoli and other provincial cities, it was sponsored by Gaddafi himself. Originally, the center was named Markaz buhuth wa-dirasat al-jihad al-libi (Research and Study Center of the Libyan Jihad), which reflected its original mission of decolonizing history and as well as constructing a national history through the narrative of Jihad as anti-colonial resistance, which sought to place the colonized at the center of the historical narrative. The goal of the center as expressed by Anderson is to create “a cohesive, nationalist, anti-imperialist society, loyal to its Arab and Muslim culture, opposed to Western

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political and cultural domination, and actively participating in world history.” Overall, this approach highlights the revolutionary role of the people in the creation of the Libyan nation and downplays regional differences, a position consistent with Gaddafi's own revolutionary ideology.

The area in which the Center has been most successful is in collecting oral history sources to supplement the lack of local sources on the colonial period. Starting in the 1970s, it began gathering interviews with former mujāhidīn (veterans of the anti-colonial struggle) and their relatives, which was coordinated by the African historian Jan Vansina, who was a pioneer in the use of oral sources in African history. The center published a collection of oral narratives in forty-three volumes under the title of Mawsū‘at riwāyāt al-jihād (Oral Narratives of the Jihad), but a larger percent of the narratives still remain to be transcribed. Along with these oral history sources, the center gathered over 15,000 recorded interviews, 70,000 photographs and 1,000,000 documents, the majority of which are photocopies of documents found in foreign archives. They have also translated a large number of documents in Turkish and Western languages into Arabic, which have been collected in a series under the title al-Wathā'iq al-tārīkhiyya (Historical Documents). In addition, they have translated a number of studies by European academics under the series Dirāsāt mutarjama (Translated Studies).

In the 1990s, there was a shift within Libyan historiography towards a more transnational approach to history that included collaboration with Western historians, especially Italian

149 Baldinetti, The Origins of the Libyan Nation, 22.
historians, to write a joint history of the colonial period. Since this time, the Libyan Studies
Center has expanded its mission to deal with other parts of Libyan history, changing its name to
Markaz jihād al-lībīyīn li-l-dirāsāt al-tārīkhīyya (The Center of the Libyans’ Jihad for
Historical Studies). There has also been a shift in the history produced by the Center with a
reevaluation of the historical memory of the colonial period through the rehabilitation of
politicians connected to the early period of Libyan independence as well as the publication of
several local histories on the Ottoman Empire and increased attention given to the Jewish
population of Libya, the most significant minority population before the colonial period.

Since the 1990s, a number of western historians have utilized Arabic sources housed at
the Libyan Studies Center as well as other archives in the region in order to produce major
research on the history of Libya in European languages, particularly English. The area of Libyan
history that has received the most attention is the founding of the modern Libyan nation state and
its origins in the colonial period. However, there still is not a systematic body of work on
Libyan nationalism. The three academics who must be mentioned in terms of the development of
this scholarship are Lisa Anderson, Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, and Anna Baldinetti. The other

150 Manshurat markaz jihād al-lībīyīn lil-dirāsāt al-tārīkhīya. Online. Available: <
151 Muḥammad al-Kawni Balhajj, al-Ta’lim fi madīnat Ṭarābulus al-Gharb fi al-‘Ahd al-
‘Uthmānī al-Thānī 1835-1911, wa-اثاره ‘ala mujtama‘ al-wilāyah (Tripoli: Markaz jihād al-
lībīyīn lil-dirāsāt al-tārīkhīya, 2000); Mukhtar Muḥammad Amir, Milkiyyat al-ard wa-
istighlahluha fi wilayat Tarabus al-Gharb khilal al-‘ahd al-‘uthmani al-thānī, 1835-1911 (Tripoli:
Markaz jihād al-lībīyīn lil-dirāsāt al-tārīkhīya, 2006); Khalīfah Muḥammad Sālim Aḥwāl, Yahūd
madīnat Ṭarābulus al-Gharb taḥta al-ḥukm al-Īṭālī, 1911-1943 (Ṭarābulus, al-Jamāḥirīyyah al-
al-Tārīkhīya, 2005).
152 For a general overview of Libyan history see Dirk Vandewelle, A History of Modern Libya
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ronald Bruce St. John, Libya: From Colony to
153 Lisa Anderson, The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980
notable piece of scholarship is Knut Vikør’s monograph about Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Sanūsī and the Sanūsī movement. ¹⁵⁴

**Western and Arabic Historiography in Conversation**

In the last decade, there has been a new generation of academics attempting to bring Western and Arab historiography into conversation while utilizing both Arabic and European sources. Displaying a high level of aptitude with Arabic sources from Libyan archives as well as other archives throughout the Middle East, Italian political scientist Anne Baldinetti’s well-researched history of the roles of exiles in the formation of Libyan national identity points to a new direction in the history of Libya in which Libyan and Italian national histories are intertwined. ¹⁵⁵ Since the publication of Baldinetti’s monograph in 2010, both Simona Berhe and Eileen Ryan have added to this trend in the historiography of colonial Libya. ¹⁵⁶ Despite these promising developments, lack of access to Libyan archives makes the production of additional projects utilizing sources from Libyan archives difficult. Rather than approaching the question of women and gender from either the Western or Arab historiographical traditions, this dissertation exemplifies an attempt to examine the Italian colonial period in Libya from the perspective of both Italian and Libyan national histories by drawing upon these historiographies as well as

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Organization

This dissertation evaluates the relationship between gender and colonialism in five vignettes: intimacy and prostitution, state-sponsored education, missionary education, violence and resistance, and nationalism and memory. Chapter one explores intimate relationships that transgressed boundaries between the majority Muslim community and the European population, drawing on recent scholarship on both prostitution and concubinage under European rule. It argues that Libyans and Italians shared similar assumptions about sexuality and intimacy as well as the legal and informal framework that governed sexual relationships. Yet, the shift in power relations from the Muslim and Ottoman authority to European dominance was mirrored by a shift in sexual relations. Over time, European men would replace many of the local elites and in turn were granted sexual access to Muslim women. During the first two decades of colonial rule, the Italian authorities increasingly regulated intimate interactions: mostly prostitution, and to a much lesser extent concubinage and marriage. Starting in the 1930s, there was a larger attempt to regularize the colony which went hand and hand with stricter divisions between the local population and Europeans. However, European men continued to have sexual access to Muslim women.

Chapter two evaluates state-sponsored education in Libya from the late-Ottoman period until independence. Prior to the Italian occupation, education in Ottoman Libya was a field characterized by multiple spheres of influence, which included schools sponsored by the Ottoman government for Muslim girls. While some of this educational pluralism would continue
into the colonial period, the Italian administration would increasingly control education, derailing previous reform attempts of the Ottoman government. The Italians would limit girls’ education to vocational training for most of their rule in order to avoid alienating conservative local elites. In the 1930s, the Italian authorities would have more resources to devote to education and adopt a more authoritarian version of the civilizing mission, which resulted in a modest growth in vocational education for girls including training for nurses.

Chapter three evaluates the area of education most open to Libyan girls: missionary education. Since the nineteenth century, girls had been educated in Libya by missionary organizations. After the beginning of Italian colonial rule, there was a shift in the focus of missionary education for girls from an integrated system that educated girls regardless of religious faith to segregated system. Missionaries focused their attention to educating the most indigent sections of Libyan society, such as abandoned children, Bedouins and manumitted slaves, who were more likely to embrace Christianity. The segregation became even more pronounced after 1920, when they began focusing on the Italian settler population rather than on proselytizing to the indigenous population.

Chapter four contributes to the scholarship on the role of women in anti-colonial resistance in the Middle East, combining studies of institutional colonial violence with gender theory to evaluate the ways in which women opposed Italian ideology and practice. Illuminating the multiplicity of roles played by women in the anti-colonial struggle, this chapter reveals that reductionist interpretations of women’s experiences have obscured the way gender operates during combat and that women were a central part of the resistance against the Italian invasion, risking their lives and facing great hardships - hunger, internment and torture – to defend their homes and family. This chapter captures the voices of subaltern women through a reading of
their own accounts of the occupation.

Chapter five evaluates the way in which the colonial period was remembered by Libyan women through a reading of postcolonial Libyan female writers. Challenging the “double colonialism” which marginalizes women from histories of colonialism and the official version of Libyan nationalism, this chapter attempts to expand the gendered analysis of post-colonial Libya by exploring the ways in which Libyan women remembered Libya’s past, particularly Italian colonial rule between 1911 and 1943. It addresses the role of oral poetry, short story writing and finally the introduction of oral history narratives in the construction of the past.
Chapter 1: Intimacy in Libya from the Late-Ottoman Period to the Collapse of Empire

In 1911, Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti, the Italian poet, editor and founder of the Futurist movement, was a war correspondent for a French newspaper during the Italo-Turkish War. In his writing about the war, he combined images of the invasion with those of the belly dancers of Tripoli:

Machine guns! Beautiful machine guns! Accompany the raised sands with your inebriating castanets, frenzied dancers of the desert, and their belly dance that the cannons exasperate by striking their heavy iron hands.

An avid supporter of the Italian invasion, Marinetti celebrated war as “the only hygiene of the world and the only morality that educates.” He described the Italian machine guns as “frantic dancers of the desert,” mixing together images of militarism with eroticism that became hallmark of Futurist writing. The eroticism of oriental dance would become part of a larger attempt to create an authentic experience for European tourists visiting Tripoli. “Oriental dance” or belly dance was itself a colonial invention, the term originating with the Orientalist _dance di ventre._

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157 Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1876 to Italian parents cohabiting more uxorio.
158 Mitragliatrici! Belle Mitragliatrici! Accompagnate dunque con le vostre inebrianti nacchere le sabbie sollevate, frenetiche ballerine del deserto, e la loro danza del ventre che i cannoni esasperano battendo le pesanti loro mani di ferro. F. T. Marinetti, _La battaglia di Tripoli (26 ottobre 1911)_ (Padova: Tipografia "Elzeviriana", 1912), 39-40.
159 Marinetti, _La battaglia di Tripoli, [front matter]._
160 Orientalist images would continue in his writing including his descriptions of Futurist dance. He described Middle Eastern dance as the “sudden spasmodic starts and hysterical convulsions of the belly dance; the huge, violent leaps of Sudanese dances. They are all variations on a single theme, that of a man sitting cross-legged and a half-naked woman who, with knowing movements, tries to persuade him to make love.” For more information, see Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Futurist Dance” in _Critical Writings: New Edition_ (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 208.
162 The ethnographer John Alexander Hammerton described oriental dancing in Tripoli as follows: “very graceful posturing is the chief feature of the scarf dance of Libyan dancing girls,
melding traditional indigenous forms of dance with the eroticism demanded by western audiences and adapted for cabaret settings in Egypt in the 1920s.\footnote{Stavros Stavrou Karayanni, \textit{Dancing Fear & Desire: Race, Sexuality and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance.} (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 26.}

The ability to transform a traditional art form in order to correspond to sexual desires of European men was just one aspect of the shift in power during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This chapter will address the profound effects of this shift on sexual relationships in North Africa. While a number of historians have looked at these issues during the pre-colonial or colonial periods individually, no historians to date have critically looked at these issues during the precolonial and colonial periods, viewing the colonial period as a continuation of much longer process of political and social change rather than a rupture in the history of the region.

The study of sexual relationships, whether sanctioned through the legal and social framework of marriage or illicit relationships for love or money, raises important questions about the policing of boundaries between communities and the configuration of other forms of power within societies. Who is allowed to have sexual contact with whom reveals a great deal about the organization of status within a given society and its division along lines of class, caste, religion, ethnicity or race, or country of origin.

As societies which were both based on patriarchal social systems, Libya and Italy shared the assumption that women’s sexuality should be controlled and that those considered sexually deviant should be punished. Extra-judicial punishments or killings of female members of the family for perceived sexual transgression, often referred to as honor crimes (\textit{delitti d'onore} or \textit{jarīmat al-sharf}) were sanctioned socially and legally in both countries until recently. Honor

\footnote{Sir John Alexander Hammerton, \textit{Peoples of All Nations; Their Life To-Day and the Story of Their Past.} (London: The Fleetway House, 1922), 3113.}
crimes were legitimized and codified in Italian law by Article 587 of the Rocco Codes, the revised penal code formulated between 1926 and 1931 under the guidance of Nationalist jurist Alfredo Rocco,\textsuperscript{164} which reduced the penalty for murdering a female family member or lover found in an “illegitimate carnal relationship (la illegittima relazione carnale)” that is an “offence to his honor or that of his family (dall'offesa recata all'onor suo o della famiglia)” from twenty-five years to only three to seven years.\textsuperscript{165} This legally-recognized defense to the crime of murder was only repealed in 1981. Rape was also dealt with as a crime of honor for which a man could rectify the damage done to the honor of the victim’s family by marrying his victim instead of facing criminal penalties.\textsuperscript{166} While honor crimes are not common in Libya, the penal code still allows for reduced sentences for a man who kills his wife or female relative who is caught in unlawful sexual relations,\textsuperscript{167} and it is possible for the perpetrators of rape or sexual assault to escape punishment if they marry their victim.\textsuperscript{168}

In contrast to the policing of women’s sexuality, men, especially elite men, had access to a variety of women outside of the marriage bed, whether they be servants, slaves, courtesans, concubines, prostitutes, mistresses, lovers or a combination of these. With these women, they formed a variety of temporary and lasting bonds based on cohesion, necessity, lust and at times affection. The individuals who made up this ruling elite and the types of women to whom they

\textsuperscript{165} Codice penale. Gazzetta Ufficiale Repubblica Italiana. 26 ottobre 1930, n. 251.
\textsuperscript{166} De Grazia, \textit{How Fascism Ruled Women}, 90.
had access shifted dramatically over during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mirroring other changes in the organization of power and prestige.

This chapter argues that although Muslim authorities during the Ottoman period strictly policed the sexual behavior of Muslim women, elite Muslim men had access to sexual relationships with a variety of women, including European women. The shift in power relations from Muslim/Ottoman to European dominance that eventually culminated in formal colonialism was mirrored by a shift in sexual access. Over time, European men would replace many of the existing native elites and in turn were granted sexual access to Muslim women, while the Italian authorities increasingly policed European women’s behavior to prevent them from forming illicit relationships with indigenous men. During both the Ottoman and colonial periods, similar assumptions about gender, sexuality and intimacy shaped the rules, both legal and informal, that governed sexual relationships. For the purposes of this chapter, I will primarily focus on relationships that crossed community boundaries, which means that certain aspects of the colonial period must necessarily be overlooked. For example, the experience of European prostitutes, after the ban on their emigration was lifted, has largely been neglected.

A central theme of this chapter will be the way in which colonial ideology conflicted with colonial practices. During the 1930s, the Italians would attempt to strengthen the legal regime enforcing segregation between Europeans and the native population in order to formalize their rule, which included attempts to prevent intimate relationships across communal lines. These attempts were motivated not only by the racial ideologies of the period but also by a desire to create a modern colony by systematically excluding what Italian authorities deemed to be unmodern or pre-modern elements. However, these efforts were mostly unsuccessful, and strict segregation remained largely an ideal rather than a reality.
Sexual regulations and prohibitions were a central mechanism of colonial rule, and there is a growing amount of literature addressing a variety of topics related to sexuality, intimacy and empire. Most studies before the 1980s focused on public and private movements to control or eliminate prostitution and relied on previously published materials. Recent scholarship on the subject has tried to move away from dealing with prostitution as an abnormality or deviant sexual behavior to look at the way in which commercial sex functioned within a variety of social relations in metropolitan areas, especially after 1800.169 The study of prostitution has also been integrated into the larger history of the working class, recognizing the fact that many women engaged in sex for money as both as a profession and in times of economic hardship.170

In terms of prostitution in the British Empire, the majority of the scholarship focuses on India, including the work of Kenneth Ballhatchet, David Arnold, Ashwini Tambe and Sumanta Banerjee.171 Philippa Levine has produced the largest history of prostitution in the British Empire, a comparative study of four important British colonies: Hong Kong, India, Queensland and the Strait Settlements. Levine's scholarship focuses on British administrators’ attempts to protect soldiers from transmissible diseases in the colonies between 1850s and the 1880s. She argues that starting in 1850s contagious disease (CD) legislation was the primary way through

which prostitution was controlled.\textsuperscript{172} In place in most of the British colonies by the 1870s, this legislation was part of the larger field of colonial medicine which sought to impose imperial power through its own definition of modernity.\textsuperscript{173} Although far larger in scope, Levine draws conclusions that are similar to historians such as Kenneth Ballhatchet, arguing that this policing became a central issue in the nineteenth century because sexual contact between people of different races threatened to destabilize the dichotomies upon which the imperial system was built.\textsuperscript{174}

In recent years, a number of historians have moved away from the study of prostitution as primarily a problem of communicable disease and instead evaluated the relationship between prostitution and labor. Heather J. Sharkey argued that regulation of prostitution in the Sudan was part of a larger attempt to control the movement of labor after the British abolished the slave trade in 1899.\textsuperscript{175} In terms of the French empire, Christelle Taraud published a landmark study on prostitution in North Africa, one of the first to move away from the colonial paradigm of exploited female sexuality.\textsuperscript{176} Taraud has argued that prostitution was much less socially marginalized under the Ottomans but that the French administration organized a coercive system aimed at controlling, regulating, concentrating, imprisoning, and capitalizing prostitution in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The earliest CD ordinances pre-dated the Contagious Disease Act of 1864 by eight years, pointing to one of the ways in which colonial notions of sexuality influenced domestic policies. However, the registration of prostitutes in the metropole was confined to port towns. Philippa Levine, \textit{Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire} (New York: Routledge, 2003), 40.
\item Levine, \textit{Prostitution, Race, and Politics}, 9.
\item Levine, \textit{Prostitution, Race, and Politics}, 37.
\end{enumerate}
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North Africa as soon as the French entered Algeria in 1830. Barkahoum Ferhati has analyzed colonial discourses on the famed Ouled Naïl, a generic term which included the status of courtesan, concubine, dancer and prostitute.

Developing the overall scholarship on concubinage, Alice Conklin and Ann Laura Stoler's works on sexuality in colonial French West Africa and colonial Java, Sumatra, and French Indochina, respectively, have been instrumental in shaping the field of imperial history and sexuality. While the practice was discouraged in French North Africa, a region where female settlers arrived relatively early, European men living with indigenous women in a state of concubinage was the dominant domestic arrangement in many colonial cultures until the twentieth century, including French West Africa, French Indochina, Dutch East Asia, Italian East Africa and British East Africa. Ann Laura Stoler has argued that concubines were seen as both a healthier and politically more stable alternative to prostitution. In addition to providing companionship, these women also supplied free domestic labor for which men would have otherwise had to pay. This allowed male wages to be artificially kept low while avoiding the creation of an impoverished underclass of poor whites who could be a source of political

177 Taraud, La prostitution coloniale, 97.
181 Conklin, A Mission to Civilize, 76.
182 Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power, 44.
instability in the colony.\textsuperscript{183} As the colonies became more formalized, a shift towards European lifestyles and toward a new etiquette of racial difference took place in a wide variety of colonial contexts in Africa and Asia during a similar period.

The scholarship on prostitution and intimate relationships in the Italian Empire focuses almost exclusively on Italian East Africa. Giulia Barrera, Giovanna Trento and Ruth Iyob have all contributed to the analysis of concubinage, known as \textit{madamismo} or \textit{madamato}, in Italian Ethiopia and Eritrea.\textsuperscript{184} Giulia Barrera argued that concubinage was tolerated in Eritrea during the Liberal period, but with the shift from Liberalism to Fascism, the government began intervening in areas that had previously been considered part of the private sphere and outside of government control. Not only in Italian Eritrea but across the Western world, governments during the 1920s and 1930s became more interventionist in attempt to shape the social mores of their citizens.\textsuperscript{185}

While providing an opportunity for comparison between attitudes about sexuality in Italian East Africa and Italian Libya, this chapter moves away from dealing with the colonial period as a radical break from the pre-colonial in terms of policy. Instead it looks at shared practices and attitudes about sexuality and prostitution between the modernizing Ottoman and Italian governments during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Through this approach, it reveals the ways in which sexual access was a reflection of greater dynamics of

\textsuperscript{183} Stoler, \textit{Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power}, 48.
\textsuperscript{185} Julia Barrera, “Sex, Citizenship and the State,” 159.
power and privilege within the colony.

**Sexual Boundaries in Ottoman North Africa**

When Miss Tully visited Tripoli at the end of the eighteenth century, she found a hybrid elite made up of Ottoman officials drawn from around the empire, local urban notables, and tribal leaders. Slaves formed a central part of elite households in North Africa under Ottoman rule, including both black slaves from sub-Saharan Africa and white slaves from other parts of the Empire and Europe. White male slaves, known as *mamālīk* (sing. *mamlūk*), as well as female concubines were often enslaved Europeans from the Italian peninsula, Malta, Greece, France and Spain. These women at times played important roles in the politics of elite households, including those of the ruling dynasties of North African states.

During the rule of the semi-autonomous Karamanli dynasty, Miss Tully recounted the purchase of a Greek slave of considerable beauty with long, black hair named Mariuma by “Mahmute Hogia,” a member of the Karamanli elite and brother to the ambassador to Spain, whom he married and who bore him several children. After Mahmute Hogia was stricken by the plague, his first wife turned Mariuma out of the house, but she was taken in by the wife of Yusuf ibn Alī Karamanli, the Basha of Tripoli. The Basha’s household also contained numerous European and Circassian concubines. Beyond harem slavery, women who were members of the creole community of Europeans also formed alliances with the ruling elites and became

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188 Tully, *Narrative of a Ten Years' Residence at Tripoli in Africa*, 115-16.
integrated into household networks. In the 1770’s, a mechanic and watchmaker named Gian Battista was given to ‘Alī Bey of Tunis to maintain the palace clocks after being captured by the merchant marines. He married a French woman and his daughter Elena-Grazia converted to Islam and married Mustafa Bey. Beyond European women who became part of European households, prostitution was also tolerated in the port cities of North Africa, and the presence of European women added to the creole character of sex for hire.

While the number of white slaves and captives declined with the rising power of European navies that resulted in the virtual elimination of piracy in the Mediterranean during the nineteenth century, many Europeans continued to come to North Africa as merchants, artisans, fishermen, laborers, travelers, prostitutes and soldiers of fortune. Between the 1820s and 1880s, port cities in North Africa such as Tunis, Algiers and Tripoli experienced the full extent of the trans-Mediterranean mobility of the nineteenth century with an influx of migrants from the islands of France, Italy, Greece and the island nation of Malta, who settled in the population centers of the western Ottoman Empire. These “island peoples” fled political upheaval, war or revolution in their home countries to find residence on the other side of the Mediterranean.

With this influx of Europeans, relationships of love, desire or commerce were bound to form between Muslim men and European women (or women under European protection),

190 Kallander, *Women, Gender, and the Palace Households in Ottoman Tunisia*, 58.
192 During the nineteenth century, Capitulations (*imtiyazat*), bilateral agreements between the Ottoman Empire and European government that were originally intended to grant extraterritorial privileges to foreign merchants, exempted foreign citizens and protégés from the jurisdiction of Ottoman courts and from taxation. By the mid-nineteenth century, the legal regime established by these agreements had expanded and European countries granted citizenship or protégé status to many local Christians, Jews and occasionally Muslims, a practice which served to expand the
outside the elite halls of power. These subjects are difficult to research due to the lack of documents addressing sexual behavior. Julia Clancy-Smith has argued that this is due to the fact that shameful or illicit sexual encounters were often dealt with through informal notes rather than official stationary and that coded language was employed. From the existing documents it can often be difficult to determine whether the young women in question were engaged in sex for hire or simply relationships of love that violated community boundaries. In either case, consulates were forced to repatriate women that had been accused of illicit sexual activities, an issue that this chapter will address in more detail as it relates to the colonial period.

One such relationship of star-crossed lovers came to the attention of the Franciscan mission in Tripoli in 1910. A woman named Maria Galea had married a Muslim Albanian, with whom she had a child. Although the Catholic authorities would ordinarily attempt to dissolve such marriages through annulment, in this case annulment was not an option because the couple had a child. Instead, Maria petitioned the authorities to convert her husband to Catholicism, and he was baptized by the Catholic mission. However, there was fear about the danger faced by Maria and her husband, as well as the Catholic mission as a whole, if the conversion was discovered by Turkish authorities. The Catholic mission was also concerned about the influence of European powers within the Ottoman Empire. For more information, see Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-century Palestine* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2011), 62.

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194 The archives of the Frati Minor and the Propaganda Fide are full of cases of Catholic women seeking special dispensations for marriages to non-Catholics, mostly members of the Greek Orthodox Church. The arguments made in favor of these marriages were usually that the women were poor spinsters, often with children, who were unlikely to find suitable husbands. However, marriages between Catholics and Muslims were exceptionally rare in the documents of both archives. It can be assumed that most such relationships and marriages never came to the attention of the religious authorities or were not discussed in official correspondences.
implication of granting her a special dispensation for a marriage between two individuals of different faiths (*Disparità di Culto*), fearing the precedent might create “great moral and material misery” in these kind of countries. Unfortunately, we know little else about the relationship of Maria and her husband or what eventually became of them, except that the Catholic mission in Tripoli felt that it might be necessary to relocate them for their protection. This case was unusual since it involved a conversion of a man from Islam to Christianity, but one can assume that such relationships were not unheard of, especially among the creole European population of North Africa.

From the perspective of the Ottoman authorities, the major concern was not sexual relationships between Muslim men and European women, but instead between Muslim women and Christian men. While prostitution was largely tolerated and at times regulated by the ruling authorities in North Africa, transgressing communal boundaries could have serious repercussions for Muslim women and, to a lesser extent, their non-Muslim partners. In Tripoli, brothels were segregated by community, and brothels where Muslim women worked could only be accessed by Muslim men. The ban was so strict that Jewish hawkers passing through the street of Sīdī ‘Umran, where the majority of Muslim brothels were located, had to bargain in the doorways of the street since they were forbidden from entering the houses. Europeans and indigenous Jews were limited to frequenting brothels in Zangat Bū Ra’s, which was where French, Maltese, and Jewish prostitutes worked. Unregistered Muslim prostitutes were also common. Although

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196 Angelo Quarta Rizzato, *Il matrimonio per disparità di culto tra cattolico e musulmano* (Roma: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 2002)
forbidden from having illicit relationships with non-Muslim men, this did happen on occasion
and at times resulted in serious consequences for both parties.  

In Tunisia, the conventional punishment for women accused of unlawful sexual
relationships, especially with non-Muslims, was drowning in the Lake of Tunis. Later on,
women who were found guilty of sexual misconduct were exiled to an uninhabited island near
the city of Sfax, 270 km southeast of Tunis, that served as an open-air prison for fallen
women. After 1856, the death penalty was lifted for Christian and Jewish men caught in
flagrante delicto with a Muslim women. In spite of this, local communities could be equally
swift and lethal in enforcing sexual boundaries, and so many men chose a hasty departure by
ship, an option not open to most local women.

There were occasionally cases in which European men converted to Islam and married
indigenous women in Tripoli. In 1896, the Italian authorities questioned the nationality of a man
named Giuseppe Valpreda and his sons. Giuseppe had converted to Islam in Derna, which could
be interpreted as a renunciation of his European nationality in favor of placing himself under the
protection of the Ottoman government, which would mean that the Italian government would
consider his sons, who were born abroad, foreign. However, the Italian Foreign Ministry
concluded that converting to a different religion did not result in the automatic loss of nationality
according to the Italian Civil Code. Giuseppe had retained Italian nationality, and, according to
Article 4 of the Civil Code, which provides that the son whose father is a citizen is likewise a

198 Luigi Salerno, *La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, con cenni storici sulla prostituzione* (Lugo:
Tip. Editrice Trisi, 1922) 55-56
citizen, 202 Giuseppe’s sons must be considered Italian citizens.203 This case raises questions about the connection between religion, identity and citizenship on the eve of the twentieth century and illustrate how a change in religious identity could call into question an individual’s membership in the national community. These categories of belonging would become increasingly solidified during the course of Italian rule in Libya and into the Fascist period.

The late nineteenth century witnessed a decisive shift in the centers of power from the Ottoman Empire and its North African vassals to the European imperial capitals of London, Paris and to a lesser extent Rome, that would dramatically change the exogamous sexual relationships between Muslim North Africans and Europeans in societies south of the Mediterranean. Patterns of migration would also experience major shifts as Europeans would no longer come as migrants, laborers or captives but instead as colonial administrators, settlers and soldiers in colonial armies. While the beginning of colonialism is often treated as an abrupt rupture in the history of North African societies, this change in power relations in fact took place over a much longer period during the course of the nineteenth century as power moved north towards Europe, precipitated by the growth in European economic and military power. As a result of this shift, European men who a century before would have fled for their lives after being discovered in a relationship with a Muslim woman might now fear condemnation from military superiors or the European community but probably did not concern themselves much with the opinions of the Libyan community. At the same time, the Italian colonial government would punish European

women that violated cultural boundaries and decorum by having illicit relationships with Muslim men.

**Imagined Love: Ideas about Sexual Relations in Colonial Libya**

After the Italian invasion, the colony became the location for Italian fantasies. Mario Tobino was a writer and psychiatrist who worked in Libya under Italian colonial rule from 1940 to 1941. In his semi-autobiographical novel *Il deserto della Libia (The Desert of Libya)*, which adopts the documentary viewpoint of travel literature, Mario Tobino highlights the strong connection between sexuality and Libya in the Italian popular imagination:

To me, the oasis means dates, cool evenings, swaying palms, maize bleached pale by the sun, dry sand which trickles through your fingers and disappears like dust. The scattered houses are like so many little temples of love, their doors flanked by Arabesques of worn and weathered marble. Inside, generations of Arabs have made love. Libya frees the imagination: here even death has no sadness. You watch the tall slender palms gently swaying, and everything seems simple. The secret of life is love. Politics, religion – nothing else matters: only love. No wonder the Arabs hate outsiders.

In Tobino’s novel, the desert is imagined as both barren and fruitful and as a place where time has no meaning, like the sand through an hour glass. The swaying of the palm trees in the desert seems to mirror the idea of a woman’s body, both tall and slender. Tobino’s depiction evokes a kind of innate sexual energy, but also a place where his own romantic fantasies can be realized. Reusing tropes popularized by Orientalist writers of the previous centuries, the Libyan dessert becomes place of timeless passion and adventure for Tobino.

The romanticizing of the desert landscape was coupled with an obsessive fascination with the women of Libya. The Italian doctor Alberto Denti came to work in Libya in 1924. His

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204 Mario Tobino, *Il deserto della Libia* ([Milano]: A. Mondadori, 1964)
account of his time in Libya and Eritrea was published under the title *Un Medico in Africa* (translated in English as *A Cure for Serpents*). Displaying an often-unnerving obsession with women’s bodies, he describes them in great detail, with special attention placed on women’s breasts. His description of a six-year-old named Selima bent Nuri et-Turki, who he treated at the dispensary at Buerât el-Shun near Misrata on the Gulf of Sirte, as having all “the grace and coquetry of a woman” highlights how even a small child fell under his sexualized gaze. As Edward Said and a number of other writers have argued, western literature has consistently associated the Middle East and North Africa with sex. Within this framework, the Middle East is epitomized by “sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies.” Libya was no exception.

While actual relationships between Libyan women and colonial men would have been met with anything from indifference to condemnation, and could become increasingly problematic with the introduction of racial laws in 1937, such relationships were celebrated for their erotic potential in Italian colonial literature. The most famous example of this eroticized depiction of indigenous women is Mario dei Gaslini’s *Piccolo amore beduino*, which was written under the auspices of a literary competition organized by the Ministry of Colonies in 1926. The cover shows an Arab woman sitting languidly with an ‘oud next to her, naked from the waist up except for a baracan (a white over-cloak), and with only her eyes visible. Both

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demure and titillating, she stands in for all Arab women as well as a Libya conquered by Italy’s martial masculinity.

Written in autobiographical style, the novel tells the story of the doomed love affair between a Bedouin woman named Nica and an Italian soldier on the eve of the First World War. Half One Thousand and One Nights, half erotic adventure fantasy, the novel’s Libya is a land where, as knights with a cause, soldiers reaffirm their masculinity.211 The protagonist’s relationship with Nica is never one of love between equals but rather an erotic obsession with her as a beautiful but almost silent figure, who he refers to as a “beautiful maiden prisoner” and his “little love slave.”212 The trope of bondage with him as master highlights the unequal power relationship between him as an Italian soldier and her as a Muslim woman, well as between Italy and Libya.

Widely unrealistic about the social world of the Bedouin, the trope of the imperial harem featured in colonial literature is transformed into a Bedouin tent complete with topless dancing girls, and Nica becomes a reimagining of Flaubert’s Kuchuk Hanem from Voyage en Orient.213 Besides his Europeanness, the appeal of the protagonist to Nica is almost completely unexplored, but her passivity seems to be part of her allure in his eyes. The novel hints at her eventually tragic fate due to the fact that she has violated Arab societal norms by beginning a relationship with an Italian soldier. In the end, the protagonist abandons her for his military duty. As is the fate of all fallen women, she dies after a bomb explodes in the Arab quarter of the city, which almost seems to be a kinder end than to live as an outcast among her own people. The conflict

211 Dei Gaslini. Piccolo amore beduino, 66
212 Dei Gaslini. Piccolo amore beduino, 22.
between duty as a masculine, European value and sensual desire, as epitomized by Nica and by the “East,” is at the heart of the novel. Not coincidentally, concerns that local women may cause men to abandon their responsibilities would be a key concern of military officials attempting to stamp out the “plague” of concubinage in the colony.

Brian McLean has argued that erotic literature was one of the ways in which Libyan culture was appropriated and disseminated by the Italians. After Piccolo amore beduino was published, this kind of literature was very influential in Italian culture, especially the work of Dei Gaslini. He published additional novels that explored similar themes, as well as opening his own publishing house and editing a journal, Esotica, beginning in 1926. The journal included an installment of his own serial novel “Le Ombre dell’Harem” (The Shades of the Harem), which narrated the life of two young Arab women living with their father in Benghazi. These themes were mirrored in published materials related to colonial travel during the period.214 While McLean makes an excellent point about the use of erotic themes in the popular imagination, the actual treatment of sexual relationships between indigenous women and colonial men was somewhat more complicated than the imagined reality of the colonial novel.

Love for Hire: Arab Prostitution in Colonial Libya

In the centre of every Arab house is a courtyard open to the sky, and in the brothels, there were benches all around the walls. The air was fragrant with henna. The women, soft and dark, wore long robes of sequined silk. They had tattoos on the soft skin of their forearms, and little triangles tattooed on their upper lips; some even had them on their foreheads. In the dim blue, light the hall was often empty and silent for many hours of the night. The women sat round, quiet and reserved, their silk and gold shimmering in the still night air, their thighs gleaming like moonlight on the oasis. By day, though, they would laugh and chatter like innocent children.

After I had made friends with the owner of one these houses, a handsome woman with bright brown eyes, she used to invite me up on to the terrace among the stars, which hang

214 McLaren, Architecture and tourism in Italian colonial Libya, 116-117.
so low that you can almost touch them. The girls and their mistress had no ambitions, no fear for the future – they seem passive and contented. When I came through the doorway into the courtyard at night, there would be two or three girls sitting round the hall, their arms covered with bracelets. All was still and silent muffled by the velvety darkness; and I would feel my heart beat with delight as my girl held out her arms to me – two snakes, two doves…

This was Tripoli, the ancient city on the shore of the Mediterranean.  

Here Tobino imagines the city of Tripoli as a brothel with its beautiful but passive inhabitants, silent at night but bustling in the daytime. It was a city that he as a European could possess in the “velvety darkness.” The image of these women as soft, dark beauties, lightly tattooed, both exotic and his for the taking, mirror his attitudes about Libya as a whole. This, like the erotic novel, is also a male fantasy of sexual conquest where women come willingly with their arms outstretched to him. Despite his time in Libya, it is unlikely that Tobino ever interacted with a Libyan woman who he did not pay for her company. Prostitutes were the only women that many European men had consistent access to, since Libyan women generally only appeared in public wearing a *baracan* and a face veil, and most descriptions of the country treat it as if women were almost completely absent.

Soldiers arrived in Tripoli singing the patriotic song “Tripoli bel suol d'amore” (Tripoli, Beautiful Land of Love), which depicted Tripoli as a paradise for male conquest. The influx of men meant a new demand for sexually available women. After the 1830 invasion of Algeria, an entirely new organization of sexual relations came into being, as an international trade in women developed to service the needs of the French army. A similar trade sprung up after the Italian invasion in 1911. Military officials largely saw prostitution as a necessary evil that was

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215 Tobino, “The Deserts of Libya” 244.
preferable to other unnatural sexual outlets for men.\textsuperscript{217} While there are many imaginative accounts, there are surprisingly few archival sources on prostitution in Libya in comparison to similar colonial adventures in French North Africa or the British Empire. This is partially due to the fact that the Italian military controlled prostitution but many of the military documents for the colonial period remain inaccessible.

While a century earlier the divide between forbidden love and commercial sex between a Muslim woman and European man could often be blurred, the Italians attempted to root out this form of ambiguity in favor of a state-controlled system of prostitution. While prostitution was tolerated, women were forced to place themselves under the control of police and doctors. Contagious disease regulations were adopted throughout Europe, starting in France in 1804 and rapidly spreading across the continent. The origins of the regulation of prostitution in metropolitan Italy date back to the founding of Italy as a modern nation state. Camillo Cavour, the politician who engineered the unification of Italy, introduced the regulation of prostitution in 1860 under what became known as the Cavour Regulation, viewing this regulation as a way of modernizing and civilizing Italy. It encouraged women in the sex trade to take up residence in so-called closed houses, \textit{case chiuse}, placing women under the control of madams, and dictated that women undergo twice weekly vaginal examinations for venereal diseases.\textsuperscript{218} While these laws varied slightly from country to country, the registration, regulation and enclosure of prostitutes became the primary means of controlling the spread of disease among the populace. Some reforms were made in Italy in the policing and registration of prostitutes with the Crispi

\textsuperscript{217} Levine, \textit{Prostitution, Race, and Politics}, 292.
Regulation of 1888, the Nicotera Regulation of 1891 and the Health Regulation of 1905 that ended the registration of individual prostitutes, but brothels remained legal and police were still allowed to register them and put them under surveillance.\textsuperscript{219}

The regulation of prostitution was not unique to Europe. Prostitution was largely tolerated across North Africa as long as it did not threaten public order and tranquility. Much like in Europe, it was subjected to state regulations during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, at times for monetary purposes.\textsuperscript{220} In Tunisia, for example, until Mustafa Bey abolished the office in 1836, the mizwar policed urban prostitutes and courtesans. The office was purchased from the ruler for a fixed annual rate and women in the profession were required to pay a certain percentage of their earnings to him. It operated similarly to tax farms (lizma) organized around the production and distribution of other illicit substances such as alcohol.\textsuperscript{221} In Tripoli, the town council (Jamā‘at al-bilad) and Chief of the Town (Shaykh al-bilad) supervised prostitution through a system of registration and control, but is unclear if they took a commission like in Tunis. During the same period that Mustafa Bey abolished the mizwar, modernizing reforms were introduced in Tripoli that included new methods of policing and the introduction of new systems of control. In the municipal chronicle, prostitution became criminalized and prostitutes began to be referred to as al-niswan al-fasidāt (corrupted women).\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{219} Gibson, Prostitution and the State in Italy, 52.


\textsuperscript{221} Clancy-Smith, Mediterraneans, 184.

\textsuperscript{222} Nora Lafi, “Toward a Historical Anthropology of Ottoman Tripoli: Finding Women and Gender in the Sources.” The Journal of North African Studies (forthcoming)
The European system of licensed prostitution that had been implemented in metropolitan Europe since the 1860s was exported to the colonies and was in place by the mid-1870s throughout the British Empire.\textsuperscript{223} Italy first established settlements in Eritrea in 1882, the same year that Britain occupied Egypt, and it became a formal colony in 1890. At first the licensing of prostitutes only applied to European women in Eritrea. However, two years later, on May 20, 1892, General O. Baratieri issued a decree that attempted to institute stricter surveillance of the profession.\textsuperscript{224} Similar to the French \textit{maisons tolérées}, the Italians organized prostitution through state-controlled legal brothels known as \textit{case di tolleranza}. This mode of surveillance was also implemented in colonial Libya. Prostitution in Tripoli was governed by Regulation No. 605 of October 27, 1891, also known as the Nicotera Regulation, with some changes that were by considered necessary due to local needs.\textsuperscript{225}

The regulation of prostitutes in effect placed the health and readiness of soldiers over the rights of women. The spread of venereal disease among troops was an issue of serious concern for military authorities since disease generally killed more soldiers than combat. Between 1815 and 1855 alone, the death of soldiers from disease in India cost the British government ten million pounds.\textsuperscript{226} For much of the nineteenth century, venereal diseases, especially syphilis,  

\textsuperscript{223} The modern history of military prostitution in Europe dates back to the Napoleonic wars on the continent. In 1802, Napoleon I initiated the inspection of prostitutes following his army in an attempt to control the spread of venereal diseases among his troops. Several European countries adopted this policy, including Belgium whose laws became a model for those regulating prostitution in Italy.


\textsuperscript{225} Luigi Salerno, \textit{La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, con cenni storici sulla prostituzione} (Lugo: Tip. editrice Trisi, 1922), 40.

\textsuperscript{226} David Arnold, \textit{Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 64-65.
were the single largest cause of hospitalizations for European soldiers. The only category of men subjected to regular examinations and compulsory treatment for venereal diseases were the lower ranks of the Italian military. However, military discipline restricted the rights of men during military service so they represented a very different class of people than civil servants or colonial subjects.

When the Italians arrived in Tripoli, there were twenty-four brothels in the city, with all but two located in either Zangat Bū Ra’s and Sīdī ‘Umran. Luigi Salerno, who wrote the most influential piece on prostitution in Libya, entitled La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, con cenni storici sulla prostituzione, argued that:

Many and varied are the causes of prostitution in civilized countries and the most populous centers. Among the main causes include the corrupt environment in which you live, the most exciting immoral pleasures, the frivolity for luxury, the rapacity of procurers, pornography, degeneration, urbanization, misery and alcoholism... In Libya, there are several origins of prostitution and its existence, if not supervised and restrained, constitutes an attack on public morals and above all health. Special account must be taken of the Arab element, its customs, and its religion since it (prostitution) rises to the importance not only of a social problem to be dealt with, but sometimes also a political problem.

He described the brothels as existing in deplorable conditions in the early years of the Italian occupation and as being often unsafe, dark and foul-smelling. On the advice of the municipal technical office, it was ordered that the majority of brothels in the city be partially or totally demolished in 1913 and subsequently rebuilt. After this, the number of brothels in Tripoli remained approximately twenty, fifteen of which housed Arab women while the others were operated by French or Jewish madams. Until 1919, the Italian government prohibited Italian

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227 Arnold, Colonizing the Body, 83.
228 Gibson, Prostitution and the State in Italy, 24.
229 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 45.
230 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 38-39.
231 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 46.
prostitutes from coming to Tripolitania to practice their profession because they feared that Libyans interacting with such women would damage Italy’s prestige in the eyes of the local population.\textsuperscript{232} In 1920, the Italian state renewed the ban and Italian prostitutes were forcibly repatriated back to Italy. This all but guaranteed sexual relations between European men and indigenous women due to the limited number of European prostitutes and small number of other Italian women.

In this way, the system of prostitution in Libya differed substantially from the French regulation of prostitution in Algeria. In practice, the French system of registration applied to all women in the colony, much as it did in Libya, but in practice only European women fell under this disciplinary scheme. Over time, the maison de tolerance or registered brothels came to be found in the European quarter. Of the 14 public brothels in Algiers in 1856, none were establishments where Algerian women worked. Algerian prostitutes were mostly confined to the native quarter of the city, operating out of café maure or closed houses. This meant that registered European prostitutes generally outnumbered registered indigenous prostitutes in Algiers.\textsuperscript{233} While the Italians, at least according to their own rhetoric, sought to create a market for sex that was as segregated as the one the French had created in Algeria, they never completely succeeded, partially due to the continued instability in the colony which limited the immigration of Italian women until the 1930s. Here colonial ideology ran up against and ultimately lost to colonial practice. In the view of the Italian authorities, intermingling between the colonized and colonizer was preferable to the other alternatives.

\textsuperscript{232} Salerno, \textit{La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli}, 54.
\textsuperscript{233} Dunne, “French Regulation of Prostitution in Nineteenth-century Colonial Algeria,” 27.
The Political Military Office nominated a commission composed of a senior medical official, an official from the Political Military Office and a functionary from the police to study the problem of prostitution in Libya, particularly in light of the prevalence of unlicensed prostitutes, and to draft better regulations of the profession to ensure public morality and curb the spread of venereal disease.\textsuperscript{234} The military exerted considerable control over the lives of women who worked in \textit{casa di tolleranza}. In order to open a brothel, the madam (Italian law did not allow brothels to be run by men) had to hold a license issued by the Italian authorities.\textsuperscript{235} In Tripolitania, women working as prostitutes were required to undergo weekly examinations at the Civil Hospital in Tripoli, and those found with venereal diseases were forced to undergo treatment in “lock hospitals.” Alberto Denti, who performed these examinations in Misrata, claimed that the women sarcastically referred to the speculum as the “\textit{zib al-ḥakūma}” (a crude way of saying “the penis of the government”).\textsuperscript{236} Starting in 1918, the madam of a brothel was required to pay for medical expenses at these hospitals at a rate of three liras per day if one of the brothel’s prostitutes required treatment.\textsuperscript{237}

In addition to forced examinations and treatment, the military also controlled the hours and working conditions of women. These regulations had two major goals from the Italian perspective: 1) reducing the immediate visibility of prostitutes; 2) minimizing public disruption in and around brothels. However, they must have seemed rather onerous for the women who lived under them. All brothels were required to close by 10pm between the months of October and March and by 11pm between April and September. Women were prohibited from standing

\textsuperscript{234} Salerno, \textit{La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli}, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{235} Salerno, \textit{La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli}, 40.
\textsuperscript{236} Denti, \textit{A Cure for Serpents}, 84.
\textsuperscript{237} Salerno, \textit{La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli},
in the entrance of brothels for any reason and the windows were required to remain permanently closed. Prostitutes were forbidden from leaving brothels after sunset as well as from riding in open-top cars. No games, sounds, chants, shouts or celebrations of any sort were allowed in the houses. Prostitutes could neither store nor consume any wine or alcohol and they were forbidden from playing musical instruments. These forms of regulation sometimes met resistance, either overt or clandestine, from Libyan women.

There is very little information about the lives of indigenous women who worked in brothels in Libya, either as madams or prostitutes, since the documents available rarely capture the voices of women, a fact that has been highlighted by other historians of prostitution in North Africa and elsewhere. According to Salerno, most of the indigenous prostitutes were from the lower classes of Libyan society and worked in brothels frequented by soldiers and the poorer sections of the population. In comparison to Tobino’s elegant, romantic picture of prostitution, Salerno describes the women as “generally poorly dressed with simple slippers and a few gilded pieces of native silver jewelry, which was often borrowed.” Almost all the women had tattooed faces and hands and feet decorated with henna. While he admitted that there were attractive and beautiful women among them, their lack of cleanliness, smoking and propensity for drunkenness quickly robbed them of their appeal. While Tobino uses prostitutes to develop his own oriental fantasy, Salerno employs his description to set up the cultural superiority of Europe by depicting indigenous prostitutes as just another group in need of the moral uplift provided by western civilization.

238 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 44.
239 Clancy-Smith, Mediterraneans, 184.
240 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 51.
241 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 51.
The reasons that women joined the profession are equally difficult to ascertain. Colonial officials in French North Africa often blamed the high rate of divorce in Arab society and the loose morals of Arab women for their descent into prostitution.²⁴² Rather than pointing to individual moral failings, Salerno blamed “the very constitution of the indigenous family, the character of the race, the poor sentiment of affection… and lack of morality” for the abandonment of girls who would grow up in the “corrupted nursery” of the street and who eventually turned to prostitution.²⁴³

Rather than any moral failing or particular characteristic of Libyan society, economic necessity was the largest factor that contributed to women’s entrance into the profession (much as it was for European women), at least at the lower ends of sex work, and women often turned to prostitution as a temporary measure.²⁴⁴ The social upheaval of the colonial period weakened women’s status and contributed to a range of circumstances that could push women into commercial sex, including displacement, early widowhood, divorce, repudiation, expulsion from a family due to an early or out of marriage pregnancy, extreme poverty, rape or sexual abuse or a combination of all these factors. In the case of widows, it was a common practice for a woman to marry a male relative as a form of protection against harassment, rape and then prostitution.²⁴⁵ The high rates of mortality that were exacerbated by the Italian invasion and contributed to the

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²⁴³ Salerno, *La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli*, 69.
²⁴⁵ Lafi, “Toward a Historical Anthropology of Ottoman Tripoli: Finding Women and Gender in the Sources.”
number of widows and orphaned children in Libya most likely resulted in not only these kinds of marriages for protection but also the number of women who became sex workers.

The only first-hand account of the circumstances that led to prostitution is recounted by Alberto Denti and is therefore mediated through his perceptions. A Touareg woman named Damesca ult Adu from Taitok clan, who was born in the Algerian Sahara during a period of turmoil caused by the French invasion, gave him a detailed account about her experiences in French Algeria and metropolitan France. After her family was killed by colonial troops, she was kidnapped by a French sergeant who brought her to Algiers. He was a drunken, violent and ill-tempered man. She escaped his abuse when one of his superiors, a lieutenant, claimed her and brought her to Rabat in Morocco. Despite her lack of agency in this relationship, she seemed to have felt genuine affection for this man, who brought her to Oran but was eventually sent back to France. After this man departed, she made her way to Algiers where she worked in a brothel run by a Spanish woman. There she met an impresario who brought her to Marseilles for a colonial exhibition, probably in 1906, as “a desert princess.” Bored with the exhibition, she left but fell into the hands of a young man who pimped her out in brothels and dancehalls in Marseilles until she was eventually arrested and deported back to Algiers. At which point, destitute and lacking tribal or familial protection, she made her way to Libya where she joined the Teghehe n’abbar from the clan of Tara iskaan. While the story may have been embellished or even invented by Denti, it nonetheless contains all the elements of the way in which the upheaval and instability caused by colonialism could result in a woman turning to prostitution, including loss of familial and tribal protection, displacement, abduction, rape, and concubinage.

In metropolitan Italy, the state legally defined the age of minority. Originally, the state registered women over the age of sixteen but this changed with the implementation of the Crispi (1888) and Nicotera Regulations (1891), which allowed the police to only register women over the age of twenty-one. In practice, this meant that more women practiced prostitution clandestinely, as is confirmed by the records of venereal disease clinics of the period. In Libya, the Italian state never set a fixed minimum age for prostitutes, claiming that it was impossible to strictly apply the provisions of the regulations, given the local conditions. Instead, the state preferred to register women who were already members of the profession, regardless of their ages, requiring these women to undergo medical examinations and to be photographed by the police. There was at least one case of a girl as young as fifteen working in state brothels, which drew considerable local outrage. The Italians justified her registration because she had been practicing the profession illegally for several years and had repeatedly been found suffering from venereal diseases. While there were undoubtedly some younger women working in the profession, Arab prostitutes were generally between the age of 21 and 25. Most of the specific information on individual women who worked in these brothels during the early years of Italian colonialism comes from cases in which women ran afoul of the colonial authorities. For women who were identified in documents of the period, it was common to include her name, place of birth, the name of her parents and her age.

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247 Gibson, Prostitution and the state in Italy, 92-93.
248 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 41.
249 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 40.
250 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 41.
251 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 41.
252 Her name appears as Heria bent Muhammad in the original complaint. ACS. Tribunali Militari Coloniali Tripoli, Tripolitania. Sentenze. 1914. N° 164.
Some women came to attention of the colonial authorities for relatively minor infractions or due to personal conflicts. In 1914, Huriyya bint Muḥammad, an illiterate prostitute who lived in Zuara. Huriyya had been playing cards in the brothel with some soldiers, zapitè and police. After complaints of being harassed by the men, a Major Francisco told her to “stop being bitter.” In response, she said some choice words in Arabic about the man’s mother. The tribunal found that, while rude, this phrase did not reach the level of an “attack on the honor and the reputation of the armed forces,” so the charges against Huriyya were dropped.

Although the colonial military authorities generally considered prostitution to be a necessary evil, they were generally less than sympathetic to Arab women in the profession. In June 1914, a 22-year-old illiterate sailor by the name of ‘Alī bin Ḥāmid bin al-Masʿūd was accused of attempting to rip a silver bracelet off the wrist of prostitute named of Fāṭima bint Muḥammad. ‘Alī was eventually acquitted of the crime, partially due the fact that the court did not find Fāṭima credible as a “woman of easy virtue notoriously devoted to the exercise of prostitution.” It seems that her profession alone was grounds for questioning her reliability as a witness. Given the response that women received, it is probable that many chose to simply avoid the Italian authorities, even when they were victims of crimes.

These new regulations of brothels met resistance from indigenous women working as both madams and prostitutes over a range of issues, including registration, medical examinations, and the payment of fees. Some women simply chose not to submit to the compulsory examinations and payments and chose to practice their profession clandestinely, although they

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254 In the original compliant, his name appears as Ali ben Hamid ben Ummussad and her name is Fatma bent Muhammad.
255 ACS. Tribunali Militari Coloniali Tripoli, Tripolitania. Sentenze. 1914.
risked arrest by the Italian authorities.\textsuperscript{256} It is difficult to ascertain the actual number of clandestine prostitutes in Libya, but in Algeria it was estimated that four times as many clandestine prostitutes operated as registered prostitutes.\textsuperscript{257} This number may have been slightly lower in Libya, since the Italian authorities registered indigenous as well as European women. The Italian authorities were particularly concerned about clandestine prostitution because they linked it to the spread of venereal diseases. In spite of this, the percentage of unregistered prostitutes affected by venereal diseases was relatively low for an era before the use of prophylactics by sex workers. Between January and October 1919, 26\% or 114 out of 435 clandestine prostitutes examined by the Italians carried a venereal disease.\textsuperscript{258}

The Italian authorities identified two categories of clandestine prostitution that posed a particular problem. First, women sometimes operated out of private homes, often owned by former madams, with certain agreed upon hours for customers. This form of prostitution that relied on informal brothels or private homes was particularly difficult for the Italians to curtail since the authorities could not generally enter Arab homes. The second category included women who were never primarily prostitutes but instead supplemented their existing income by engaging in sex for money, possibly a few times a month or even a year. In Italy, this was a common practice among servants or other women of the lower classes. In Tripoli, nomadic women occasionally engaged in prostitution in various parts of the city, especially in Dahra.\textsuperscript{259} The economic misery brought on by the Italian occupation may have served to increase the prevalence of rural women engaged in the sex trade.

\textsuperscript{256} Salerno, \textit{La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli}, 61.
\textsuperscript{257} “French Regulation of Prostitution in Nineteenth-century Colonial Algeria,” 27.
\textsuperscript{258} Salerno, \textit{La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli}, 61.
\textsuperscript{259} Salerno, \textit{La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli}, 41.
Prostitution was more prevalent among certain North African tribes, especially those further from the political centers and orthodox Islamic beliefs. Mathéa Gaudry found in her study of rural Algerian women that prostitution was accepted among certain tribes, including the famed Ouled Naïl, since their earnings were central to their survival, and that divorced or windowed women had a considerable amount of independence, often declining to remarry.²⁶⁰

Unfortunately, there is no similar study on rural Libya but Alberto Denti witnessed the prevalence of the practice called asri among the Touareg of southern Libya, who still maintain pre-Islamic matrilineal influences.²⁶¹ A woman who has reached puberty went through a ceremony after which she could declare herself to be in asri, a period of courtship and freedom before marriage.²⁶² While she is in a state of asri, she could play the imzad, a single-string bowed instrument, in public, paint her face and have intimate relationships with men.²⁶³ Despite this more permissive attitude towards women’s sexuality, there is no direct evidence about the acceptance of prostitution among the Touareg of southern Libya, but their connections to tribes with permissive attitudes about prostitution in Algeria, as well as the difficult economic situation in Libya during the colonial period probably meant that some of these women exchanged sex for money, possibly at times outside of state controlled brothels.

In other cases, opposition to Italian polices came in more overt forms. In June 1915, two women by the names of Khadija bint Mansur and Jamila bint Mas’ud were brought before a

²⁶¹ Denti refers to the Taureg as matriarchal which is incorrect. Denti, *A Cure for Serpents*, 126.
military tribunal. On June 18, 1915, they were arrested for verbal assault against a carabiniere, a member of the Italian gendarmerie, and a zaptiè, a member of the locally raised gendarmerie, who they told “Go away! You do not command anything! cuckolds and pimps!... Go and do it in the ass!” Such expressions were distinctly heard by two soldiers, and although they were spoken in Arabic, were well interpreted by Mumtāz ‘Alī bin Muḥammad Zīrī. The two women were arrested for insulting the “honor and decency” of public officers. It appears that the conflict started when the officers requested documentation on the brothel from the madam. Women objected to the intrusive oversight of their activities by the Italian authorities, which included forced registration, examination and treatment for venereal diseases. They expressed their displeasure with this surveillance of their activities by overtly insulting the officers charged with monitoring them. Even this simple act of rebellion against the Italian system of military prostitution carried a hefty penalty of imprisonment for four years. This may have discouraged other women from expressing their opposition, at least in an overt public manner.

While Italian writers wrote a great deal about prostitution, especially in Tripoli, these accounts rarely capture the reality of the profession. Indigenous women who worked in brothels were often the victims of violence, including acts perpetrated by Italian soldiers. On April 3, 1915, three soldiers in the Italian infantry by the names of Claudio Massera, Carlo Gerla and Paolo Abbadati were arrested after they left their barracks without permission in Tripoli and

264 In the original document, their names were given as Hadigia bent Mansur and Jmila bent Messaud.
265 The word zaptiè is derived from the Turkish zaptiye (Arabic dabitiyyah); a term which was used to refer to the Ottoman Empire's gendarmerie prior to 1923. For more information, see Alessandro Gasparinetti, L’uniforme italiana nella storia e nell’arte l’esercito (Roma: Edizioni Universali, 1961), 215.
266 His name appears as Mumtaz Ali ben Muhammad Ziri.
267 Gibson, Prostitution and the state in Italy, 159.
climbed into a brothel, where they attacked a prostitute named Salīma bint Muḥammad and tried to break down the door of the madam, Fāṭima bint ‘Alī, after she refused to open it. The cries of the women drew the attention of a police patrol. Upon arrival, the police officers tried to calm the situation and escort the men to the police station. They pretended to obey but in Via Ettera attempted to make a hasty escape so they would not be identified. They were eventually apprehended. While the authorities were willing to intercede in these kind of incidents, the military did not charge any of the men with the attack on the women.\textsuperscript{269} Claudio Massera, Carlo Gerla and Paolo Abbadati were eventually sentenced to seven years and four months imprisonment for insubordination and disobedience,\textsuperscript{270} but not for the assault or attempted assault on Salīma and Fāṭima.\textsuperscript{271}

One other possibility for contact between the local population and the colonizer was male-male sexual relationships. One of the most famous depictions of this type of relationship is in Youssef Chahine’s film \emph{Iskanderiyya… lih?} (Alexandria…Why?) in which an English soldier

\textsuperscript{269} There were rare cases in which a soldier could be charged with an attack on a prostitute. In 1915, Salīm bin Suwaysī Lasānī (Salem bin Suessi Lasani in the original complaint), a 30-year-old Muslim from “Zawia” (probably Zāwiya), serving in the second company of the 5\textsuperscript{th} Libyan Battalion, was accused of beating a prostitute, hitting her in the head with a blunt object. At the time, he had been drunk and had hit her in the head with the handle of a knife after she had replied to him in an arrogant tone. While this kind of assault could carry a sentence of 5 years, he was eventually sentenced to 12 months in military prison. It is a bit unclear why Salīm was charged with this assault while the other men were not in similar cases. It may have been due to the severity of the head injury that prostitute received. Assaults that resulted in serious bodily injury may have been prosecuted while more minor acts of violence against women were ignored. ACS. Tribunali Militari Coloniali Bengasi, Cirenaica. Sentenze. 1915.

\textsuperscript{270} ACS. Tribunali Militari Coloniali Bengasi, Cirenaica. Sentenze. 1915. N. 12

\textsuperscript{271} Before European rule in North Africa, women in the sex trade often sought protection from the local authorities from men who threatened or assaulted them. In 1864, a woman named Sāliha bint Muṣṭafā al-Turkī, described in the police record as a prostitute, appealed to the \emph{Dabitiyyah} (Gendarmerie) in Tunisia when two men attempted to rape her. The men were imprisoned and she was released. ANT. Daily Reports 1864, Doc. 142 (#32) 7 Jumādā al-Thānī 1281, Case 8.
has a brief sexual encounter with a wealthy Arab in his lavish home. In Libya, the colonial authorities hoped to prevent these kinds of encounters by making prostitutes available to soldiers stationed in Libya. This was never as successful as the Italians hoped, since the Arab world had long been the site of male fantasies of pederastic relationships, and some Europeans traveled to the Middle East and North Africa specifically for this purpose.272

While the prevalence of pederasty and other male-male sexual contact was a matter of concern for colonial authorities, it did not receive the same kind of attention as prostitution.273 Exceptions were made for cases of same-sex contact that were linked to venereal diseases among the troops. One such case came to the attention of military authorities in Misrata during the first months of 1915 after there was an outbreak of venereal disease among the troops. The medical authorities could not explain this outbreak, due to the fact that prostitutes were all subjected to medical examinations and those with communicable diseases were isolated. The authorities began to be concerned that street children were connected to the outbreak among the troops after several children were found to be suffering from venereal diseases. It is unclear whether the soldiers were European troops or zaptiè but it appears that some of the soldiers were paying the street children with as little as a loaf of bread for sexual services. Ten men presented with symptoms that the medical authorities felt were tied to these “abhorrent practices” and were held in a courtyard adjacent to the prison for treatment. While these kind of arrangements clearly raise questions about soldiers, whether European or colonial, exploiting minors, the accusation of “sexual perversion” seemed to bother the authorities more than the age of the boys involved.274 It is unclear how widespread this kind of prostitution was, along with other kinds of male-male

272 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 77.
274 Salerno, La polizia dei costumi a Tripoli, 76.
sexual relationships, but a certain percentage of men will seek out sexual contact with each other in any homo-social situations, whether it is their preferred or primary sexual outlet or situational. The colonial authorities were dedicated to putting an end to these kind of activities, unlike their toleration of heterosexual commodified sex.

The lives of female prostitutes, including Arab prostitutes, would become even more difficult with the rise of the fascist government in 1922 and the introduction of draconian new laws policing prostitution in 1925, an issue that will be addressed more fully later in this chapter. With the beginning of Italian colonialism, Arab women working as prostitutes became one category of people among many whose freedom would be curtailed by the new colonial arrangements, and were the only specific category of Muslim women that the Italian government kept under scrutiny. The previous system of private, nocturnal prostitution in which women may have had a great deal of discretion was replaced by a system that was semi-public and state-controlled. Women would come to live under a system of surveillance that included doctors, police and the colonial state. Regulationism involved invasive medical examinations and strict control by state authorities in which women’s bodies became the locus of intensive efforts to discipline and quarantine. Those who attempted to work outside or oppose this system faced long jail sentences.

Forbidden Love: Concubines in Colonial Libya

While prostitution was the most common context for liaisons between Libyan women and European men, men did at times form more permanent relationships in a grey area between prostitution and marriage. In Libya, these types of relationships were referred to as concubinaggio or mabruchismo, both of which were a form of concubinage. Anne Stoler defines
concubinage as “a domestic arrangement based on sexual services and gender inequalities which “worked” as long as European identity and supremacy was clear.”

When either of these categories was challenged, there could be moves towards marriage with European women as the preferred domestic arrangements in the colonies, especially during the beginning of the twentieth century. As the Italians were latecomers to the colonial scramble, the formalization of sexual relationships did not come until much later, in the 1930s, and there were limitations to how thoroughly Italy could regularize domestic arrangements in its colonies.

The practice of concubinage was widespread in Italy’s East African colonies, especially in Eritrea, from the Italians’ arrival in the 1890s. Unlike in Eritrea, the colonial authorities in Libya discouraged the practice from the beginning of Italian rule. The prohibition in Libya partially stemmed from preserved cultural differences between East and North Africans. In Libya, the colonial authorities seemed to be concerned that such relationships would create conflict with the local population. A central ideological component of Italian rule in Libya was the claim that the colonial authorities would respect the Islamic religion, the shari’a and the sanctity of Muslim women.

A similar policy was adopted in Algeria in principle. This was consistent with the royal decree that implemented the Treaty of Lausanne, which proclaimed the principle of religious freedom and guaranteed complete respect for all Muslim practices and local customs, including promises not to interfere with the awqāf (religious endowments) and the ‘ulama’.

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275 Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, 60-61.
Beyond concerns about creating conflict with the local population, the Italian authorities may have also never have been as confident in their superiority as they were in other parts of Africa, given some of the cultural similarities between Italy and North Africa. Ann Stoler argued that during the early periods of European colonial conquest concubinage was tolerated, or even encouraged in certain colonial situations such as Dutch East Asia. This system “worked” as long as European superiority was clear, but, if it was jeopardized, colonial elites would move to reinforce divides between the indigenous and European community.²⁷⁸ Given the social background of many of the Italian colonists, the claim to cultural superiority was shaky at best, requiring constant vigilance to maintain the divide.

In 1916, the colonial authorities raised concerns about official residents in the colony taking into their service indigenous women who were in fact concubines. These men provided a residence and income for the woman, who either lived in the man’s home, in separate housing, or was granted permission to continue to live with her relatives. According to colonial officials, the maintenance of proper discipline required that concubinage had to be prohibited since it affected the “dignity and decorum” of the officer and the effectiveness of Italian policies in the colonies.²⁷⁹ During the same period, the governor of Tripolitania, Battista Ameglio, renewed the absolute prohibition of all forms of concubinage and warned that strict disciplinary measures would be taken against anyone who continued the practice, including but not limited to referral to a military tribunal for insubordination when the circumstances permitted.²⁸⁰ Despite this prohibition, the practice continued at least into the 1930s and there do not appear to be any cases

²⁸⁰ ASMAE; ASMAI, *Libia, pos*. 146/1, fasc. 3. Circolare N° 47. Concubinaggio. 27 Febbraio 1916.
of men actually being referred to military tribunals. In 1932, General Rodolfo Graziani, vice-
governor of Cyrenaica, sent officers a letter expressing his intention to eradicate the “plague” of
“mabruchismo.”

We know next to nothing about the kind of women who engaged in these more permanent relationships. Were they victims of kidnapping? Former prostitutes looking to leave the profession? Or former slaves? Widows or divorcees who had not remarried? Were they relationships based on affection? Desire? Economic necessity? Or coercion? It can be assumed that a mixture of these motivations drove women into illicit relationships with European men. There is also no information on the ways in which such arrangements were perceived by other Libyans. While women were not subjected to the draconian punishments of the previous century for entering into sexual relationships with non-Muslim men, and European men were largely insulated from the perceptions of the local population, there were times in which qadis in North Africa punished Muslim women for sexual relations with European men even into the colonial period. Muslim women could also experience extrajudicial or vigilante punishments from family or other members of the community for violating communal boundaries. Many of these women found themselves passed between men. After these arrangements dissolved, these women likely found themselves in difficult circumstances in which prostitution might have been one of the few economic options.

While concubinage was one of the possible domestic relationships for Italian men, some Italians did marry or attempt to marry Libyan women. While the colonial administration discouraged these marriages, there may be as many as 10,000 individuals living in Libya who are

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the descendants of intermarriage between Italians and Berbers or Arabs. Oral history accounts of
the period mention that the Italian sometimes took indigenous women by force, marrying them
without a proper Islamic contract like they were slaves. It is impossible to ascertain whether
all these women were in fact subjected to forced marriages by Italian men or whether some of
the women entered them voluntarily, given the condemnation of such relationships by the local
population, and there are no Arabic documents that talk about these illicit connections in detail.

Military officers might use their positions to try to coerce a particularly beautiful woman
into marriage. A woman named Masʻūda al-Tawaf ʿAbdullah, who was born in 1911, was asked
to be the wife of a military officer. The story goes that she was taken prisoner by the Italians
after returning from Egypt. When the hated military commander Col. Barilla of the ʿAqila
concentration camp saw her, he asked her to marry him. However, she refused and was sent to
prison with her father's wife. This rare recounting of this type of relationship from the Libyan
perspective is highlighted as evidence of Masʻūda’s commitment to the Libyan cause, which she
did not abandon to avoid imprisonment. It can be assumed that high ranking Italian military
officers had quite a bit of discretion when it came to their treatment of Libyan women, especially
once concentration camps were established in the 1930s.

From the Italian perspective, attraction to or even marriage with an indigenous woman
was often portrayed as kind of temporary insanity driven by lust for a beautiful Arab woman and
by the overall environment of Libya. In the novel Il deserto della Libia, the protagonist’s

(Ṭarābulus, al-Jamāhīrīyah al-ʿArabīyah al-Lībīyah al-Shaʿbīyah al-Ishtirākīyah: Jāmiʿat al-
(Ṭarābulus, al-Jamāhīrīyah al-ʿArabīyah al-Lībīyah al-Shaʿbīyah al-Ishtirākīyah: Jāmiʿat al-
superior, Lieutenant Marcello, becomes obsessed with a young Arab woman who he sees in the street. He describes her as “unbelievably beautiful, her face uncovered, and she laughed, and stared unashamedly…as he stood there in front of her.” This one brief sighting results in the Lieutenant haunting her doorway in hopes of getting another glimpse of her. When all his efforts fail, he eventually is forced to abandon his hopes, although it is unclear what he would have achieved in the event that he did find her again, given the unlikeliness of her family permitting such a marriage.

Despite the fact that marriage and concubinage shared many similarities in practice, they were treated differently by the colonial authorities. In many ways, a full marriage to a Libyan woman was a more problematic in their view, since it violated existing cultural boundaries. A Libyan woman, who was a colonial subject (or citizen after 1919), was granted metropolitan citizenship. For those wishing to obtain Italian citizenship, they had to meet a number of strict conditions including 1) have reached the age of 21; 2) be monogamous or single; 3) not to have been convicted of a crime leading to the loss of political rights; 4) have five years of proven residency in Italy or Tripolitania or Cyrenaica. In addition, they had have met at least one of the following special conditions a) served faithfully and with honor in Army, Navy or other State military body; b) have successfully completed Italian elementary school; c) to have served a government function d) to have been invested with an elective public mandate; e) to hold an honorary title or distinction from the Italian government. These conditions made it virtually impossible for a Libyan woman to gain metropolitan citizenship through any means besides marriage. After 1938, Libyan citizens could no longer obtain metropolitan citizenship through naturalization. Instead, the Gran Consiglio del Fascismo (Fascist Grand Council) decided to grant some Libyans “special” citizenship (cittadinanza italiana special), which would only be exercised in Libya or Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI). Muslim men that had somewhere served the Italian state, primarily as colonial soldiers but also as civil servants, were eligible for this special citizenship. This allowed Muslim “citizens” to serve as podestà, or mayor, of Libyan-

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286 Those born in Libya who were neither Italian metropolitan citizens or citizens of another state were deemed “natives.” Starting in 1913, they were considered to be Italian subjects and termed sudditanza degli indigeni della Libia (SIL). In 1919, their status changed from SIL to cittadinanza italiana in Tripolitania e Cirenaica (CITC) as part of a move to strengthen colonial rule through granting Libyans colonial citizenship under the assumption that it would make the local populations more invested in the colonial project overall. In 1927, the name changed to cittadinanza italiana libica (CIL). Only a small percentage of Libyans ever gained Italian citizenship.
citizenship upon her marriage to a colonizer.\textsuperscript{287} There was also a greater potential for children to be born who could claim Italian citizenship through their father. From 1913 until 1940, children born of a mixed union in Libya could, in theory, inherit the citizenship of their father as long as the father claimed the children as his legitimate offspring.\textsuperscript{288} However, a child born to a concubine or mistress was far less likely to be claimed as a legitimate offspring than a child born in formal marriage since colonial men often viewed these arrangements as temporary, simply abandoning any children born from these unions and returning to Italy.

In particular, the Italian authorities were anxious about men who converted to Islam. It was perceived that they had betrayed any “sense of racial dignity” and had lowered themselves to the same moral and material level as the indigenous population.\textsuperscript{289} While this had not been completely uncommon under Ottoman rule, it was now viewed by the Italians as damaging the reputation of the nation-state. The option for a European to adopt a creole or hybrid identity was now closed in the eyes of colonial officials. Converting to Islam and marrying a local woman was viewed as a dangerous form of “going native.”

While “colonial cross-dressing” could be prompted by desires to form marriages or other intimate relations across perceived cultural boundaries, it often went hand in hand with violations of other norms, particularly political norms. Those few Europeans who converted to Islam and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{287} ASMAE; ASMAI, \textit{Libia}, pos. 176, fasc. 391. Fratelli Conversano (date unknown).
\bibitem{288} Donati, \textit{A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy}, 129.
\bibitem{289} Donati, \textit{A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy}, 129.
\end{thebibliography}
married indigenous women often joined the opposition to colonial rule.\textsuperscript{290} A man by the name of Iorio Carmine deserted from the Italian army in 1916 and converted to Islam. He eventually became known as “Yusuf al-Musulmani,” married a local woman with which he had several children, and served the Sanūsī family until he was captured by the Italians in Eastern Libya in 1928.\textsuperscript{291} It is difficult to ascertain whether men like Iorio/Yusuf chose a hybrid identity because of their sympathy with the local population and opposition to colonial rule, due to a profound religious conversion, or in order to formalize an intimate relation with a local woman.\textsuperscript{292}

**Dangerous Love: European Women and Muslim Men**

While there is ample evidence of relationships between Italian men and indigenous women, there are few examples of relationships between indigenous men and European women. While the precolonial period of Libya has its own history of non-conformists and female explorers,\textsuperscript{293} they are largely absent from the available sources on the colonial period. There is no equivalent of a figure like Isabelle Eberhardt, who joined a Sufi order in Algeria and

\textsuperscript{290} From a religious perspective, there is no issue with a Muslim convert marrying a Muslim woman. This was not always the case in practice.

\textsuperscript{291} ASMAE; ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 150/22, fasc. 94. Disertore Carmine Iorio detto “Iusef el-Musulmani” sul Gebel. 13 giugno 1928.

\textsuperscript{292} Another famous example of cultural hybridity was Knud Holmboe, a Danish journalist who eventually converted to Islam and wrote extensively on Italian atrocities in Libya. However, there is no evidence that he married a local woman. For more information, see Knud Holmboe and Helga Holbek, *Desert Encounter; An Adventurous Journey through Italian Africa* (New York, G.P. Putnam, 1937).

eventually married an Algerian soldier named Slimane Ehnni, during the colonial period in Libya.\textsuperscript{294} However, Eberhardt was an exceptionally unusual figure during the colonial period.

This does not mean that women did not violate cultural boundaries, both sexual and otherwise. These cases were the cause of great anxiety for the colonial state and authorities. We have already briefly discussed the way the Ottoman authorities dealt with women who they believed to be sexually deviant, which could take the form of banishment or even execution. European governments had their own solutions to these problems, including the dumping of undesirable women in colonies like Australia by the British.\textsuperscript{295} Other solutions included cases in which women were confined to prisons, work houses, state-run brothels, asylums, hospitals and convents.\textsuperscript{296} By the time the Italians came to power in 1911, the administration would enact harsh penalties against women even suspected of forming relationships with indigenous men and thereby violating racial boundaries. These punishments became even more draconian after the ban on interracial relationships by the Fascist government in 1937. Women in \textit{Africa Orientale Italiana} (AOI) who were discovered to have had relationships with African men were publicly whipped and sent to concentration camps.\textsuperscript{297}

While men were usually expelled from Italian colonies for political crimes, including concerns about antifascist or communist sympathies, women were most often expelled for perceived lapses in morality or for being unlicensed prostitutes. A woman named Anna Maria

\textsuperscript{295} Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, \textit{Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press., 2010), 51.
\textsuperscript{296} Clancy-Smith, \textit{Mediterraneans}, 184.
\textsuperscript{297} Ruth Ben-Ghiat, \textit{Fascist Modernities Italy, 1922-1945} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 129.
Odin arrived in the city of Benghazi in February 12, 1936, taking accommodation at the local Grand Hotel. The Italian authorities described her as “an adventuress prone to easy loves, who immediately made her mark with the elegance of her dress and her tendency to approach officers.” The Italian authorities suspected her of suspicious activity but there was no concrete evidence and she therefore was repatriated back to Italy on charges of being an unlicensed prostitute. Forbidden love or forbidden desire, even towards European men, could place a woman in the grey area between general sexual misconduct and prostitution and result in repatriation back to Italy. The accusation of an illicit relationship with an indigenous man was even more problematic.

In many cases, it is unclear whether such a relationship actually existed. In the policing of cultural boundaries, the mere accusation of an illicit sexual relationship between a European woman and an indigenous man could be a powerful tool to wield against an undesirable woman. In 1932, a nurse by the name of Dolores Guina was expelled from Tripolitania after being accused of loose morals, drunkenness and prostitution. While the origins of these accusations seem to have been a conflict with her superior at the municipal clinic in the city of Barqa, she was accused of being seen riding a bicycle with Italians and also with Arab men. The mention of her keeping such company was used as evidence that she was also engaged in unlicensed prostitution and deployed to have her repatriated back to Italy. Even though she petitioned Mussolini personally and wrote several letters refuting the accusations, she was denied

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299 ASMAE; ASMAI, Libia, pos. 150/27, fasc. 26. Odino Anna Maria fu Giuseppe e di Varese Rosa nata a Serrevalle Scrivia l’8-2-1902. 28 luglio 1937
300 ASMAE; ASMAI, Libia, pos. 150/27. Fasc. 128. On. Ministero delle Colonie. 31 ottobre 1932.
permission to reenter Tripolitania on the grounds that she was morally unfit.\textsuperscript{301} Much in the case of Anna Maria Odin, the accusation of prostitution seemed to have been utilized as a euphemism for general sexual misconduct as well as an effective way to besmirch the reputation of a woman in an environment in which sexual morality and boundary policing were of the utmost importance.

In 1927, a woman named Angela Gambi, who was 37 years old,\textsuperscript{302} born in Camerino in central-eastern Italy, and a resident of Benghazi, came to the attention of the Italian authorities. Sixteen years prior she had married a man named Leopoldo Boracci who worked as linemen for the postal administration in Benghazi and with whom she had a daughter. By all accounts, it was an unhappy marriage due to Leopoldo’s violent character, poor health and drunkenness. Leopoldo’s conduct left the family in dire financial straits and their furniture, being their only property, had been seized to pay his debts. Due to the impossibility of continuing the marriage, Angela sought a legal separation from Leopoldo Boracci from the colonial authorities, which was granted.\textsuperscript{303} After separating from her husband, she supported herself by renting out rooms in her home and by working as a laundry woman and nurse for local doctors. Among her tenants, along with various officers, was a man named Ramaḍān al-Qritlī,\textsuperscript{304} who worked for the Military Command of Cyrenaica and was the head of a mounted band of Libyan Ascari.

Angela’s problems did not end with her separation from Leopoldo. In 1928, she was accused of conduct that was morally reprehensible for a metropolitan woman, namely

\textsuperscript{301} ASMAE; ASMAI, \emph{Libia}, pos. 150/27. Fasc. 128. Guina Dolores. Tessera 43201. Anno X. Fascio femminile. 12 dicembre XI.
\textsuperscript{302} In 1927, her age is listed as 37 but in 1929 the documents listed her age as 45.
\textsuperscript{303} ASMAE; ASMAI, \emph{Libia}, pos. 150/27. Fasc. 128. Una lettera al Signor Presidente del Tribunale Regionale di Bengasi. 13 gennaio 1927.
\textsuperscript{304} In the original source, his name appears as Ramadan al-Gritli.
cohabitating with Ramaḍān al-Qrīṭlī. In addition to this offense, it was alleged that she carried on a number of illicit relationships with several indigenous Muslims. One day, two of these men came to blows outside of her home. For reasons of “morality and prestige,” she was ordered to leave the colony.\textsuperscript{305} Here the case gets more complicated. It appears that the mere presence of Ramaḍān, who was disliked by many, was the origin of the initial accusation of an illicit relationship, made by a neighbor. Angela wrote the colonial authorities asking that measures be taken to return her to her home in Benghazi, thus saving her from complete ruin. She also raised the possibility of reconciliation with her husband, possibly because she hoped it would make her a more sympathetic figure.\textsuperscript{306} Although the authorities debated the legality of her expulsion and were initially predisposed to grant her request, her ex-husband claimed he was convinced of her guilt and that their daughter was the product of an adulterous relationship between Angela and a man named Valentini. Therefore, the government decided to oppose her reentry into the colony.\textsuperscript{307}

Working out whether or not Angela Gambi had illicit relationships with Muslim men or was in fact an adulteress is almost impossible. This case illustrates the pernicious nature of rumors that could be weaponized against women in the colonies. It seems likely that the original target of the smear campaign may have been Ramadan and that she was simply caught in the crossfire. Someone wishing to undermine a women’s credibility needed only to accuse her of sexual impropriety, especially across cultural or ethnic lines, in a society in which women served as defenders of cultural borders between different groups. In the end, the Italians and North

\textsuperscript{305} ASMAE; ASMAI, \textit{Libia}, pos. 150/27. Fasc. 128. Informazioni. 25 agosto 1928.
\textsuperscript{307} ASMAE; ASMAI, \textit{Libia}, pos. 150/27. Fasc. 128. Gambi Angela. 20 agosto 1929.
Africans shared many fundamental assumptions about the role of women’s sexuality in liminal spaces. Anna Maria Odin, Dolores Guina and Angela Gambi were just three of many women who were forcibly repatriated back to their home country due to concerns about their immoral sexual behavior in the colony.

**Love under Fascism: Sexuality and Racial Laws**

By the 1930s, the sexually-charged colonial erotica of the last decade was no longer acceptable under the prevailing ideology. The central female colonial figure was no longer a Bedouin woman or an indigenous prostitute in Tripoli but had been replaced by a European woman. In the film *Bengasi*,308 one of the protagonists, Fannie/Maria, played by Laura Redi, is a prostitute – a somewhat odd choice for a fascist propaganda film given the fascist emphasis on motherhood as the primary role for women in Italian society.309 However, she is an ambiguous figure in the film as both a fallen woman and a sympathetic character worth of redemption, who hides an Italian soldier from the British authorities. A kind of illicit sex in which male sexual demands are given almost free reign remains central to the colonial imagination but it is no longer acceptable, even in artistic expressions, for these demands to violate cultural boundaries (at least in official ideology).310 The reality, however, would be somewhat more complicated.

This ideological shift was part of a larger attempt to regularize the Italian colonies during the 1930s, which culminated with the birth of the Italian Empire in 1936. By the end of the 1930s, the number of Italian colonists living in Libya had grown, due to increased stability in the

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308 *Bengasi*, dir. Augusto Genina (Italy, Bassoli Film, 1942).
309 *De Grazia, How Fascism Ruled Women*, 137.
colony after the defeat of the armed resistance by 1934. On 9 January 1939, the colony of Libya was incorporated into metropolitan Italy and thereafter considered an integral part of the nation. Italians in Libya numbered 108,419 (12.37% of the total population) in 1939, mostly concentrated in the coastal regions near Tripoli and Benghazi.\textsuperscript{311} The growth of settler colonialism in the colony resulted in an increase in the number of Italian women who worked and lived in Libya. Historians previously often blamed European women for disrupting early close relationships between colonists and the local population and for being more racist, jealous and petty than European men. However, a number of historians of gender and colonialism have recently challenged this narrative, Ann Stoler that women were introduced in the colonies in order to create more formal colonial arrangements and solidify the divide between the colonizer and the colonized.\textsuperscript{312}

This attempt to create more formalized colonial relationships went hand and hand with the implementation of a new comprehensive set of racial laws mobilized against Jews in North Africa as well as against other Africans after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-1936. The Fascist Government declared relationships with colonial subjects of the \textit{Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI)} illegal in 1937, and miscegenation became a criminal offense punishable by 5 years in prison.\textsuperscript{313} Despite the threat of long jail sentences, the practice continued and the number of concubines might have actually risen during the last decade of Italian rule due to the increase in the number of Italian men in the colonies during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{314} In AOI, this resulted in an attempt


\textsuperscript{312} Stoler, \textit{Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power}, 51-111.

\textsuperscript{313} Ben-Ghiat, \textit{Fascist Modernities}, 129.

\textsuperscript{314} Barrera, \textit{Dangerous Liaisons}, 3.
to suppress the results of these liaisons, mixed race children or métis. However, there were major contradictions involved in this policy, since métis who had received an Italian education and displayed good moral and civil conduct could be eligible to gain Italian citizenship. Therefore, culture even more than race determined who could and could not be considered Italian. These changes in policy had profound effects on the organization of sexual relationships in the colonies.

Attempts were made to prevent intermingling, and the new racial laws made the marriage of “an Italian citizen of Aryan race with person of another race” illegal in the colonies and punishable sexual relations included those between Libyans and Italians starting in 1939. The colonial authorities hoped that appropriate directives regarding “defense of the race” would prevent “regrettable incidents” from occurring in the future involving the children of mixed parentage. Despite this fact that children inherited their father’s citizenship in theory until 1940, the citizenship of a child could be challenged if they were deemed not sufficiently European, as happened in the case of the children of a man named Eduardo Conversano in the 1930s. Born in the city of Gallifia, Tunisia in January 1860, Eduardo converted to Islam in Misrata, taking the name ‘Abdullah and marrying a woman named Fāṭima bint Muftà. While the Italian authorities provided no information on the reason for the conversion, it is possible that his

315 Barrera, Dangerous Liaisons, 33.
316 Barrera, Dangerous Liaisons, 35.
317 In metropolitan Italy, racial laws were primarily used against Jews. By the end of 1938, Jews were forbidden from marrying non-Jews, were excluded from the government, military and most professions, and dispossessed of much of their property. In addition, they were banned from all aspects of Italian cultural and public life. For more information, see Michele Sarfatti, The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy: From Equality to Persecution (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 128-31; Donati, A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy, 191; Barrera, Dangerous Liaisons, 32.
affections for Fāṭima were at least a contributing factor. Fāṭima and ‘Abdullah eventually had five children. The first three children (two boys and a girl) had taken Arab names, Muftà bin ‘Abdullah, Salīm bin ‘Abdullah and Maryam bint ‘Abdullah, but were also registered under the Italian names Edoardo, Salvatore and Maria Conversano. His daughter, Maryam or Maria, married an Arab, according to Islamic rites, at the age of 12. Eduardo had enlisted as a volunteer in the 1° Reggimento Genio Colonale as an Ascari while his brother, Salvatore, was required to appear for conscription. The authorizes were concerned that while the two brothers technically had Italian citizenship, they had been educated according to Muslim customs, wore Arab dress and knew very little Italian.  

The Italian authorities debated what should be done about the two brothers and Maria. It was thought that there was no solution for Salvatore and Maria since they were Muslim and had adopted Arab habits. Edoardo might be able to perform military service and, perhaps, be re-educated and in course of time possibly convert to Christianity. It was eventually decided that the situation, which constituted “a serious decline in the prestige” of their “race,” could “no longer be tolerated” and two brothers could not perform military service with metropolitan troops. The Government, therefore, proposed that Salvatore, Edoardo and Maria Conversano be stripped of their Italian citizenship on the grounds that they had damaged the prestige and good name of Italy (RD 31, 1926 No. 108). 

In the case of Libya, colonial officials raised concerns about prestige of the Italian race but, unlike in East Africa, racial markers between Italians and Libyans were more obscure,

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319 ASMAE; ASMAI, Libia, pos. 176, fasc. 391. Conversano Edoardo e Salvatore. 12 Agosto 193_.
320 ASMAE; ASMAI, Libia, pos. 176, fasc. 391. Fratelli Conversano (date unknown).
321 ASMAE; ASMAI, Libia, pos. 176, fasc. 391. Conversano Edoardo e Salvatore. 12 Agosto 193_.

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which meant that other markers of identity were even more essential. The authorities concentrated on culture, as defined by language, education, dress, and religion. The possibility of education in Italian culture in the military and conversion was raised in the case of Edoardo but eventually abandoned due to the fact he had always lived in a Muslim environment. The question of whether a Muslim could ever truly be European was a salient question for Italian officials. However, the two youngest children of Fāṭima and ‘Abdullah appeared to have retained their citizenship due to the fact that they had received a European education and therefore were sufficiently European. In 1940, the colonial authorities put an end to this ambiguity, deeming all children of mixed European-Libyan heritage to be automatically native and therefore ineligible for Italian citizenship.322

While the Italian authorities attempted to come up with an official policy towards métis children already in the colony, they also had planned to institute ethnic or racial segregation between Europeans and natives in Tripoli during the 1930s, which led historians to assume that these segregation plans were enacted and that a kind of apartheid-like system was in fact created. However, Mia Fuller has argued that plans drawn up in the 1930s for racially segregated residential arrangements were never implemented and that laws dictating various forms of social segregation were never consistently applied.323 In Tripoli, there were many overlapping areas of residential space and commercial activity between the resident Europeans and the rest of the population, with clusters of residential areas located next to each other.324 In spite of the adoption of racial laws in 1937 and corresponding plans to institute stricter segregation, the city...

322 Donati, A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy, 191.
324 Fuller, "Oases of Ambiguity," 166.
did not change radically, since instituting such a change would have required demolishing most of the city.\footnote{Fuller, "Oases of Ambiguity," 177.} It should be noted that segregation policies were more successful in some areas of Libya. For example, Benghazi had a native quarter that was separated from the European area, although planners complained that not all Italians avoided it.\footnote{Fuller, "Oases of Ambiguity," 178.} The failure of urban planning to maintain strict segregation illustrates the conflict between colonial ideology and colonial practice. This lack of segregation meant that Italians and the rest of the population of Libya would continue to interact and at times form intimate relationships.

While other colonial powers had some success in regularizing their colonial arrangements, the French and Dutch in Indochina and the British in India to name a few, the Italians never really succeeded in implementing these policies as evidenced by their failed attempts at executing urban segregation in Tripoli. Italy was too poor a country to establish the kind of utopian settler society that would make Libya the Fourth Shore of Italy. In fact, more Italians lived in the French settler colonies in North Africa than ever lived in Libya. This was partially due to the short duration of the Italian Empire which only really existed from 1936 until the Second World War, in comparison with other periods of colonial rule. However, this emphasis on duration somewhat misses the point. While it is easier to argue that the British or French implemented their colonial missions than to make this argument about the Italians, few colonies ever looked the way their framers imagined them.

In 1930s, the colonial authorities reaffirmed their bans on concubinage, raising concerns about children born of unions between indigenous women and European men. It was their hope to staff their brothels with European women in Italian African colonies. In 1936, the Fascist
paper *L’Azione Coloniale* published a statement by Maurizio Rava, the former governor of Italian Somaliland from 1931 to 1935, that stated that it would “be necessary to regulate in all centers of the Italian African colonies *a sufficiently large and often renewed supply of white women* of another quality than honest women. *They must be white but not Italians*” (emphasis in the original). The authorities wanted to prevent sexual liaisons between European men and non-European women but at the same time feared that a large number of Italian prostitutes in the colony would damage the prestige of the Italian Empire. The solution was to find other European women willing to work in Italian brothels, an organization like the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH), which was founded in London in 1915 in opposition to the state control of prostitution, described as human trafficking.328

Despite these attempts to prevent miscegenation, sexual relationships between European men and indigenous prostitutes continued. The fascist period did result in more draconian policing of prostitutes, who were required to carry special passbooks with records of their vaginal examinations for venereal diseases, and some sections of the new Public Security Laws in metropolitan Italy were aimed at stamping out clandestine prostitution.329 Many of these policies were implemented in the colonies, since military officials were concerned about the role of unlicensed prostitution in the spread of venereal disease, especially from Arab women of “loose morals.”330 The military command recommended regular health monitoring as well as better supervision of military discipline among the troops to combat this threat.331

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327 Maurizio Rava as quoted in letter from Alison Neilans to the Secretary of State for War. 20 March 1941. AMSH. 3AMS/B/07/26. Armed Forces. 1941-1944. Folder 1.
328 AMSH. 3AMS/B/07/26. Armed Forces. 1941-1944. Folder 1. Letter from Alison Neilans to the Secretary of State for War. 20 March 1941.
330 AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Casa di tolleranza. 1 aprile 1942.
331 AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Casa di tolleranza. 1 aprile 1942
With the large number of troops stationed in Libya during the Second World War, including Italian, German and later British and American forces, the existing system of military-sanctioned brothels expanded to service the needs of troops. The military granted permission for the establishment of new brothels in 1941, with new brothels opening in ‘Ayn al-Ghazala on October 5, el Agheila on October 23 and Bardia on November 10.\textsuperscript{332} By 1942, there were Italian military-sanctioned brothels in Tripoli, Derna, El Agheila, Barqa (Marj), Benghazi, Bardia, ‘Ayn al-Ghazala, Beda Littoria (Bayda), Sallum, Agebabia (Ajdabiya), and Marsa Matruh that catered primarily to the needs of Italian soldiers and to a lesser extent other men in the colonies. While officials continued to raise the threat of miscegenation in the colonies, the gender imbalance between men and women in the Italian colonies all but guaranteed sexual contact between colonizers and colonized.

Brothels in Libya became separated into five categories and segregated along racial and national lines. They were further demarcated by the military rank of those who frequented them. Ordinance number 7/38 affirmed that the brothels with Italian women were reserved for citizens of the “European race” only, which included first, second and third-class brothels. Fourth-class brothels employed Muslim women but were reserved for citizens of the “European race” (officers, non-commissioned officers, troops or civilians). The other brothels with Muslim women were designated as fifth-class and reserved for native men.\textsuperscript{333}

The military continued to exert considerable control over the lives of women. The Intendenza set the price for each client based on the category of the brothel and the rank or background of the customer. During the Second World War, European women who worked at

\textsuperscript{332} AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Casa di tolleranza – El Aighela, Ain el Gazala e Barida. 7 novembre 1941.
\textsuperscript{333} AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Ordinanza n. 7/35. 28 giugno 1942.
first-class brothels, which were exclusively for officers, were paid 50 lire (about $.50 in US
dollars). European women who worked in second-class and third-class brothels were paid
between 20 lire for enlisted soldiers and 40 lire for officers and civilians.\textsuperscript{334} Muslim women in
fourth-class brothels were paid 25 lire for officers and civilians, 20 lire for non-commissioned
officers and 15 lire for enlisted soldiers. Native men who frequented fifth-class brothels paid 12
lire.\textsuperscript{335} Therefore, a Muslim woman commanded at most half the price of a European prostitute
working in a first-class brothel and 10 lire less than women working in third-class brothels for a
liaison with a military officer. These prices were also paid directly to the madam of the brothel
and not to the individual woman, who might collect as little as one-fourth.\textsuperscript{336}

The colonial administration dictated the working conditions of prostitutes, the hours that
brothels were open, and who could frequent them at any given time, as well as controlling the
movement of prostitutes. For Italian men, brothels were open from 9am to 12noon, from 3pm to
8pm and 9pm to midnight. Fifth-class brothels for Muslim men were from 9am to 12 noon and
from 2pm until 7pm.\textsuperscript{337} Women, including Arab women, wishing to open new brothels had to
receive special permission from the military. For example, a woman by the name of Mabrūka
bint Muḥammad Ageli from Tripoli had been regularly requesting permission to set up a brothel
in El Agheila in 1942.\textsuperscript{338} Prostitutes also needed authorization to move between brothels.\textsuperscript{339}
European women who failed to live under the strict rules of the military authority often faced

\textsuperscript{334} AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Ordinanza n. 7/35. 28 giugno 1942.
\textsuperscript{335} AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Ordinanza n. 7/35. 28 giugno 1942.
\textsuperscript{336} Gibson, Prostitution and the State in Italy, 31.
\textsuperscript{337} AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Ordinanza n. 7/35.
\textsuperscript{338} AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Una lettera all’Intendenza A.S. Direzione Tappe dal Tenente
Comandante la Tappa, Antonio Castelreggio. 6 ottobre 1942.
\textsuperscript{339} AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Autorizzazione. 30 giugno 1942; L-3 Busta 290. Una lettera
tagli’Intendenza A.S. Direzione Tappe dal Tenente Comandante la Tappa, Antonio Castelreggio
Antonio. 6 ottobre 1942.
expulsion. A prostitute by the name of Paola Pegorini, who was born in Gropparello, Piacenza in 1916, was repatriated to Italy after she left her brothel without permission to join her lover, a soldier, in a local hotel.\textsuperscript{340} It seems that the Italian authorities had no use for such clandestine love affairs. The way in which the Italian authorities dealt with Arab women in similar cases is unclear, since expulsion from the colony was generally not used in these cases. However, they often faced arrest by the Italian authorities.

The Italians ultimately lost control of Libya over the course of the North African campaign during the Second World War, which had begun in June of 1940. The Italians attempted a number of offenses across Libya into Egypt, which were accompanied by a mobile brothel that traveled with the troops.\textsuperscript{341} The conflict reached a turning point in the Second Battle of El Alamein in late 1942, when Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery's British Eighth Army drove Axis forces all the way from Egypt into Tunisia. The Italian authorities had already evacuated the majority of Italian civilians from Cyrenaica to Tripolitania.\textsuperscript{342} All remaining Axis troops surrendered in Tunisia in May of 1943, ending the Campaign for North Africa.

Upon capturing North Africa, Libya fell under the administration of the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (O.E.P.A). The British established a system of brothels which very closely resembled the Italian system. The commander of the British army authorized private brothels in Libya and classified them into those for officers, for warrant and non-commissioned

\textsuperscript{340} AUSSME. L-3 Busta 290. Rimpatrio di prostitute. 28 maggio 1942.
\textsuperscript{341} George Forty and Anne Forty, \textit{They Also Served: A Pictorial Anthology of Camp Followers Through the Ages} (Speldhurst: Midas Books, 1979), 28.
officers, for white soldiers and for non-white soldiers, much as the Italians had done.\textsuperscript{343} The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH) decried the fact that British authorities allowed the continuation of these “moral evils,” comparing the tolerance of prostitution to accepting cannibalism or the consumption of illicit substances in areas under their jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{344} However, despite the objections of reform groups in the metropole like the AMSH, brothels continued to operate in the Libyan territories under the British administration.

\textbf{Conclusion}

A European observer, like Miss Tully, living North Africa at the beginning of the nineteenth century would not have known that she would soon witness a seismic shift that happened over the course of the nineteenth century in the relationship of power between Europeans and Muslim rulers. Local elites would become colonial subjects. Lower-class Italian immigrants would no longer come to North Africa as refugees and laborers, but instead as colonists and soldiers in the new colonial order. This shifting political order would have a lasting impact on the organization of sexual relations in the region. In spite of their differences, Italians and North Africans shared fundamental assumptions about women and about the central role played by women’s sexuality in the policing of community boundaries. Both attempted to prevent women in their own community from engaging in sexual liaisons with men of a different community, whether defined by confessional group, ethnicity or country of origin. Those who violated these boundaries sometimes faced steep penalties.

\textsuperscript{343} Hayashi Hirofumi, "Japanese comfort women in Southeast Asia." \textit{Japan Forum} 10 (2) (1998), 211-219.
\textsuperscript{344} AMSH. 3AMS/B/07/26. Armed Forces. 1941-1944. Folder 1. Letter from Bishop Llewellyn Gwynne to Miss Turner. 8 July 1943.
While Libya was a place of male fantasies of sexual conquest, prostitution or monetized sexual relationships were the most common form of intimate contact between indigenous women and colonial men. The Italian government replaced the previous Ottoman system of prostitution, which was private and nocturnal, with a state-controlled, public system. Prostitution became governed by Regulation No. 605 of October 27, 1891, also known as the Nicotera Regulation. These regulations sought to police prostitutes and their places of employment and included the establishment of a monopoly of state-controlled brothels and the use of invasive physical examinations, placing prostitutes under the surveillance of doctors, police and military officials. Driven by concerns over venereal disease, prostitutes were the only specific category of Muslim women that the Italian government sought to systematically control through institutions and laws. In addition to prostitution, Italian men also formed other kind of semi-permanent and permanent relationships that included concubinage and at times marriage despite continued concerns about these kinds of arrangements.

Despite the free reign of male sexual fantasies in the empire, European women never had the kind of sexual freedom that was afforded to European men. Both the Ottoman authorities and European governments had a long history of punishing women who were considered sexually deviant, with punishments ranging from imprisonment to banishment or execution. In colonial Libya, the mere claim of sexual impropriety was enough to get a European woman expelled from the colony out of fear that such women would damage the reputation of colonial authority. Policing women’s sexuality was important for maintaining divisions between Europeans and non-European throughout the colonial period.

Italian policies would shift in the 1930s as a result of an attempt to create a more lasting colonial empire and to incorporate Libya into metropolitan Italy. As in many colonial situations,
attempts to regularize the colony went hand and hand with greater segregation between European men and local women. In 1930s, the colonial authorities reaffirmed their bans on concubinage and were increasingly concerned about children born of unions between indigenous women and European men. Despite attempts to create a more orderly colony, this racial segregation never applied to prostitution, although the fascist period did result in more draconian policing of prostitutes, who were required to carry special passbooks, and new efforts to do away with clandestine prostitution.

While sex is an expression of existing sexual relationships, it also creates the means through which new power relationships are formed and reproduced. State regulatory efforts served to legitimize Italian colonial rule by creating at least the appearance of an orderly colony in which contact between the colonial subjects and Europeans was minimized. The goal of which was to prevent clandestine intimate relationships that could undermine the prestige of Italian rule by damaging the appearance of Italian cultural superiority. At the root of this anxiety was the fear that Italian colonists drawn from the “Island people” of the Mediterranean were not so culturally dissimilar from parts of the Libyan population and that Libyan notables were culturally superior to the Italian lower classes. Therefore, the European and non-European divide had to be rigidly defended in order to justify Italian rule.

The authorities attempted to normalize their rule in Libya in the 1930s after the defeat of the anti-colonial resistance. Despite these attempts to implement policies of segregation that would prevent intermingling and the formation of intimate relationships, these policies were selectively implemented or not implemented at all. Italian men continued to have sexual access to indigenous women until the collapse of Italian rule in 1942. It may be easier to take the French or British colonial rhetoric more seriously, but a careful comparison between colonial ideology
and colonial policy reveals many inconsistencies, even in the practices of these longer-lasting empires. The harsh realities of dominance and economic exploitation inherent in colonialism required that the majority of colonial policies were the result of political necessity rather than lofty ideals.

Studies of sexuality raise a number of important questions that cannot be answered by the available sources, which only deal with state-regulated intimate interactions: mostly prostitution and to a much lesser extent concubinage and marriage. They rarely capture the subjectivity of the women involved in these interactions, and it is impossible to write a history of sentiment from the available sources. While this is a history of sexual relationships that involved exploitation, violence and control between people with unequal access to power, both in regard to their country of origin and their gender, it is nonetheless possible that these relationships also involved desire, affection, and maybe even love. The voices of men generally only capture sexual attraction and sometimes obsession. We know nothing, however, about the way the women viewed the Italian men.

While many Italian colonists had been repatriated back to Italy during the Second World War, and refugee camps were established in Italy for those who had been evacuated from the colonies, some colonists wished to return to Libya in order to be reunited with loved ones, or to regain property or continue economic activities. The British attempted to control the reentry of Italians into the former colonies, and those caught attempting reentry clandestinely faced arrest and deportation. In order to return to Libya after the war, some Italian women arranged
marriages of convenience with Libyan citizens. This practice represented new strategic use of marriage that would have been impossible under Italian colonial rule.

By the late 1960s, there were still an estimated 45,000 Italians living in Libya. After the military coup d'état that deposed King Idrīs in 1969, the revolutionary government instituted a dramatic new policy towards the remaining Italians in Libya, and the revolutionary council issued a law on July 21, 1970, requiring all Italians to leave the country by October 7, 1970 and confiscating their property. It is estimated that approximately 20,000 Italians and 37,000 Jews were expelled from the country as a result of this law. Before this expulsion, Italians and Libyans had continued to live together for 27 years after the collapse of colonial rule in 1943, a period of time almost as long as Italian rule itself. What policies shaped the engagement of Italians and Libyans during this period? How did these reflect the prevailing power relationships? This is a history that remains to be written.

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In 1922, Giuseppe Volpi appointed Angelo Piccioli as superintendent of education in Tripolitania. Believing that assimilationism was a utopian fantasy, piccioli would be responsible for establishing the direction of education policy in the Libyan territories until the mid-1930s. In this article, “La conquista morale: La scuola e le istituzioni educative,” he argued the Arab-Berber problem was:

To provide indigenous people with the means to be able to develop their activity, with less difficulty than in the past, and to urge this development with material support in order to bring about the necessary productivity, taking care to maintain their thoughts and habits in the ways that are suitable (for their environment): In a word, vivify without eradicating, enlightening without disorienting, and leaving the impression that we want to protect their interests at least as much as we want to look after ours (emphasis in the original).

While Piccioli argued that local institutions were responsible for perpetuating the primitive habits of the local population, any attempt to simply introduce European habits would have disastrous consequences. His solution was to “transform the soul” of the local population through education while strengthening the “harmonious bonds” that united the indigenous population to their cause despite their “resistance to any progress.”

Of the thirty-four pages dedicated to the question of education in the Libyan territories, only four short paragraphs address the question of the education of Muslim girls, since Piccioli argued “the education of women, in Muslim countries, strikes against difficulties that have deep roots in the customs and traditions of indigenous peoples.”

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347 Angelo Piccioli, “La conquista morale. La Scuola e le istituzioni educative” in La Rinascita della Tripolitania. Memorie e studi sui 4 anni di governo del Conte Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata (Milano: Mondadori, 1926), 286.
central feature of the education system in colonial Libya: the deliberate exclusion of Muslim girls from all but the most rudimentary forms of education. Piccioli, and others like him, justified this policy, claiming to be respecting local traditions and customs. Colonial officials argued that the establishment of schools for female Muslim pupils would arouse opposition since the education of girls was seen as contrary to Islam. Based on these justifications, for most of the colonial period the Italian authorities limited state-sponsored education for girls to vocational schools that focused on “womanly” arts and the production of textiles. It was only in the 1930s that education for girls was slightly expanded with the 1936 opening of the Princess Maria Pia school, where girls received training as nurses. This chapter explores the basic assumptions of the Italian colonial project related to gender and education. What role did education play in the Italian colonial project? What did Italian education policies towards girls reveal about Italian attitudes about Libyan women?

While there has been an increasing number of studies of education under Italian colonialism in Libya, there is very little literature on girls’ education, possibly due to the lack of sources, since most of the Italian documents available discuss girls’ education only in passing. There are no monographs on the subject of girls’ education, either in Libya or in the rest of North Africa. Historian Julia Clancy-Smith argues that this is due to the fact that this subject does not

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352 Julia Clancy-Smith, “Envisioning Knowledge: Educating the Muslim Woman in Colonial North Africa, c. 1850-1918” in Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of
fit within a “nationalist trajectory” of state formation and thus has “been consigned to collective forgetfulness.” Political scientist Federico Cresti’s article, “Per uno studio delle ‘elites’ politiche nella Libia indipendente: la formazione scolastica, 1912–1942,” and political scientist Francesca Di Pasquale’s unpublished thesis, *La scuola per l’Impero. Politiche educative per gli arabi di Libia in epoca fascista (1922–1940)*, both touch on girls’ education but focus primarily on the *Scuola Principessa Maria Pia*, which was founded in 1936 to train Muslim nurses.

Prior to the Italian occupation, education in Ottoman Libya was a field characterized by multiple spheres of influence, which included schools sponsored by the Ottoman government, private religious schools for various confessional communities, and schools sponsored by foreign European governments, including by the end of the nineteenth century, the Italian government. In this multi-polar world, the Ottoman state was the largest sponsor of education, especially Muslims girls’ education, as part of their ethos of reform following the Tanzimat period. This chapter argues that some of this Ottoman-era pluralism would continue into the Italian period, but that the Italians would increasingly attempt to monopolize the field of education, placing schools under state control as part of their effort to create a centralized colony. Previous reform efforts implemented by the Ottomans were derailed by the 1911 Italian invasion, and the Italians largely neglected girls’ education during their rule of Libya, supposedly to avoid alienating conservative elites.

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Education in Ottoman Libya

The period of Ottoman rule from 1551 to 1911 witnessed an expansion of largely male religious education in Libya. The first Ottoman governor of Tripolitania, Murad Agha, built a mosque complex that included a madrasa in the city of Tajura, which is still known today as the Murad Agha mosque and became a center of Islamic learning in the region. After the death of Murad Agha in 1556, his successor Ṭurghud ‘Alī Raʾīs, the famous corsair known as Dragut in the West, constructed a mosque and school in Tripoli along with other notable public buildings including a hamam and mausoleum. Ottoman governors continued the tradition of constructing mosques and religious schools, founding institutions such as the Madrasa of 'Uthmān Pasha, Madrasat al-Kitāb and Madrasa of Aḥmad Pasha in Tripoli. Several schools were also founded by renowned religious scholars of the fifteenth century in the Libyan hinterland, including Madrasat Sīdī ‘Abd al-Salām in Zliten, named for ‘Abd al-Salām Al-Asmar, and Madrasat Sīdī Zarrūq in Misroute, named for Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Isa, known as Aḥmad al-Zarrūq, which were tied to North African tradition of the murābiṭ (plural murābiṭīn), individuals perceived to have special spiritual authority in the community whose role was somewhat similar to that of a “saint” in Western traditions. These mosque schools concentrated on Arabic language and Islamic religious instruction, and were only open to

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354 Laurent-Charles Féraud, Nora Lafi, and Augustin Bernard, Annales tripolitaines (Seine-Saint-Denis: Bouchene, 2005), 75.
355 Amal Obeidi, Political Culture in Libya (Richmond, Surrey [England]: Curzon, 2001), 57-58 n12.
356 Murābiṭīn often founded brotherhoods that followed a particular tariqa or “way.” During their lives Murābiṭīn also acted as local leaders, participating as spiritual leaders of political and religious movements. For more information, see Martin Stone, The Agony of Algeria (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 12.
boys. At the local level, the majority of children in the Muslim community who received a formal education attended local primary religious schools known as *kutāb*.

From 1711 to 1840, the Karamanlı (arabized as Qaramānli) dynasty ruled Libya as a semi-autonomous Ottoman territory. Under the rule of Aḥmad Karamanlı Pasha (1686–1745) and his successor, Yusuf Karamanlı Pasha (1796-1832), Libya experienced unprecedented independence and influence in the Mediterranean. However, the final years of the dynasty were characterized by economic turmoil and political unrest during which education and other public institutions suffered.

After the French invasion of Algeria in 1830, the Ottomans reasserted direct rule of the Libyan territories and attempted to improve educational, judicial and medical services. This period witnessed an expansion of state-sponsored schools as well as of religious and private educational opportunities for the creole European community and Jewish minority, resulting in competition between multiple spheres of influence in the fields of education among different national and confessional communities in Ottoman Tripoli.

Under Maḥmūd Nadīm Pasha (1860-67), the judiciary along with the education system was reorganized in accordance with the 1864 Ottoman Provincial Reform Law, with Libya

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357 Ahmed Karamanlı Pasha was a *kuloğlu*, which literally means the “son of a slave.” Generally, *kuloğlu* referred to a Janissary who was the son of a Janissary but in North Africa it came to denote someone who was the product of a union between a Janissary and local woman. Minawai Mostafa, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016), 23.


representing one of the first parts of the Ottoman Empire in which the new law was applied.\textsuperscript{361} Maḥmūd Nadīm Pasha founded the first newspaper to be published in Tripoli and utilized its pages to encourage families to send their sons to school. This period witnessed a growth of local schools and an Arts and Crafts School (\textit{Mekteb-i Sana’i}) was founded in Tripoli in 1867 to teach trades to boys, and later girls, from poor families.\textsuperscript{362} Boys were educated in religious studies, the Arabic and Turkish languages, history, geography, music, and drawing and in practical skills including the spinning of silk, wool and cotton, carpet weaving, carpentry, leatherworking, blacksmithing, and architecture and construction.\textsuperscript{363}

During the reign of Abdüllhamid II (1876-1909), the Ottomans began their own ambitious modernizing and civilizing project in the more remote parts of the empire; education was a central pillar of this project. As Selim Deringil argues, the purpose of Ottoman education “was to produce a population which was obedient, but also trained into espousing the values of the center as its own.”\textsuperscript{364} This was in line with the goals of other centralizing national governments, such as the French, which sought to spread a “French identity and set of values, radiating from Paris into the uttermost depth of each peasant village” through a modern education system.\textsuperscript{365} After 1895, Tripoli had a primary and a \textit{rüşdiye} (upper-level primary school) for boys, a primary and a

\textsuperscript{361} Harvey E. Goldberg, \textit{Jewish Life in Muslim Libya: Rivals & Relatives} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 42.
\textsuperscript{365} Deborah Reed-Danahay, \textit{Education and Identity in Rural France: The Politics of Schooling} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 110.
rüşdiye for girls, a teacher’s training school (Dār al-Mu‘ālimān), a military ‘idādiyya academy and the School of Arts and Crafts. There were also rüşdiye schools in Homs, Benghazi, Derna and Murzuq.\footnote{al-Jarari, “L’istruzione in Libia prima e dopo il 1911,” 66.} In 1901, a secondary school for boys and a secondary school for girls (al-‘irfān) opened for the children of civil servants and military officers.\footnote{Evered, Empire and Education under the Ottomans, 177.} The Empire also accepted children from Tripoli for its Imperial Tribal School (Mekteb-i Aṣiret-i Humayun) in Istanbul.\footnote{Evered, Empire and Education under the Ottomans, 177.} Despite attempts by the Ottoman officials to improve the level of education in Libya, part of a larger policy to promote sedentarization and development in the region, the number of children attending Ottoman schools remained relatively small and most students attended private religious schools. In particular, their efforts were hampered by the limited tax base in Libya. In 1903, there were 12,375 students in Tripoli out of a population of 500,000. Benghazi, which had a population of 300,000 people, had 1,638 students, representing about 1.7 percent of the total population.\footnote{Evered, Empire and Education under the Ottomans, 177.}

Outside of the Ottoman education system, kutāb schools provided the majority of primary education at the local level. However, Hoda A. Youssef has argued that the goal of these schools was primarily the consumption of religious texts through memorization rather than improving literacy.\footnote{Hoda A. Yousef, Composing Egypt: Reading, Writing, and the Emergence of a Modern Nation, 1870-1930 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017), 59.} Cyrenaica was also the center of the Sanūsī order. According to Lisa Anderson, in spite of the growth of Ottoman schooling on the coasts, Sanūsī-sponsored schools were the fastest growing area of male education in pre-colonial Libya.\footnote{Lisa Anderson, “Nineteenth-Century Reform in Ottoman Libya.” International Journal of Middle East Studies. 16 (3) (1984): 332.} Each Sanūsī zāwīyya had a
school attached to it which taught reading, writing, mathematics and religious subjects to upwards of 15,000 students across the region.\textsuperscript{372} Along with their zāwiyyas, the Sanūsīs established mobile schools in order to reach the nomadic tribes in which teachers traveled with the nomadic populations. These mobile schools probably educated another 15,000 students.\textsuperscript{373} The madrasa schools also continued to operate for young men seeking an Islamic religious education beyond the primary level. Those students showing promise might continue their education (depending on their sectarian identity or regional and familial connections) at the Sanūsiyya university at the eastern oasis of Jaghbub, at the center of Ibāḍī learning at Mzāb in Algeria, at Zaytūna in Tunisia or at al-Azhar in Cairo.\textsuperscript{374}

Beyond the Muslim population, the rise in immigration from Southern Europe and the Mediterranean created a new community of Europeans that also required education. There was a growth in educational opportunities, especially for boys and often along religious lines. The Alliance Israélite Universelle operated a school for boys and a school for girls for the Jewish population of Tripoli.\textsuperscript{375} Europeans and a small number of indigenous (both Jewish and Muslim) children also attended a missionary school founded by the sisters of Buon Pastore in 1846 and subsidized by the Franciscan Mission. By 1902, the Franciscan Mission and a number of female teaching orders, including the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Franciscan Sisters, operated schools

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{373} Minawi, \textit{Ottoman Scramble for Africa}, 37.
\textsuperscript{374} Anderson, “Nineteenth-century Reform in Ottoman Libya,” 332.
\textsuperscript{375} ASMAE, ASMAI, \textit{Africa III}, b. 36, fasc. 3. Elargizione fatta dell'Amministrazione Saline a favore delle scuole colonie 1921-1922. Le Prime Scuole Italiane in Libia.
\end{footnotesize}
in Tripoli, Benghazi and Derna. Missionary education will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter.

Before the 1911 invasion of Libya, the Italians used education to set the groundwork for their colonial involvement in Libya, especially in the coastal cities of Tripoli, Benghazi and Derna. Starting in the late 1870s, the Italian government began opening schools in Libya as part of an attempt to further their interests in the region. Gianetto Paggi opened the first private secular Italian school in Tripoli in 1876 and two years later founded a school for girls, both under the purview of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Italian government also opened a technical and commercial institute the same year. At the time of the Italian occupation in October 1911, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs operated four schools in Tripoli: a technical and commercial middle school with 35 students, a boys’ primary school and a girls’ primary school, both with 200 students, and a nursery school with 120 students. There was also a boys’ primary school in Homs and a boys and a girls’ school in Benghazi. In addition to schools for the Italian population of Libya, the Italians operated a technical and commercial institute for Arab students from 1904 to 1910, arousing the hostility of the Ottoman authorities, who correctly viewed it as an attempt at further penetration into their domain by spreading Italian political

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influence along with Italian language and culture.\textsuperscript{382} There was also a French school for boys and a French school for girls in Tripoli and two schools in Benghazi.\textsuperscript{383}

**Girls’ Education in Ottoman Libya**

Prior to Italian rule, girls’ education was going through a period of incremental reform. Daughters, particularly those of literate parents, might be sent to *kutāb* schools to study alongside boys,\textsuperscript{384} but girls’ education generally ended at around age 10, when stricter gender divisions were enforced.\textsuperscript{385} In some cases, their instruction was limited to recitation of the Qur’an, without instruction in reading and writing.\textsuperscript{386}

The introduction of women’s education was a central aspect of the Ottoman civilizing mission in Libya. As Selçuk Akşin Somel argues, the Hamidian administration ignored traditional opposition to girls’ education in the empire, “considering the promotion of female

\textsuperscript{382} Evered, *Empire and Education under the Ottomans*, 180.
\textsuperscript{383} While the majority of European schools abroad were established by religious orders, European governments also supported lay education, primarily for their citizens. The Italians operated schools in French-ruled Tunisia. There were also lay schools for British, American, French, Italian and Greek children under British-ruled Egypt. The major difference between Egypt and Tunisia was that the community of Europeans in Egypt never reached the population density of the foreign residents of Tunisia. Julia Clancy-Smith, “Ruptures? Governance in Husaynid-Colonial Tunisia, c. 1870–1914” in *Colonial and Post-Colonial Governance of Islam: Continuities and Ruptures*. Eds. Marcel Maussen, and Veit-Michael Bader (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 84: 15; Roderic Donald Matthews, and Matta Akrawl. *Education in Arab Countries of the Near East: Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1949), 111; Taysīr Bin Mūsā, *al-Muṭṭama‘ al-‘Arābī al-Lībī fī al-‘aḥd al-‘Uthmānī: dirāsah tārīkhīyah ijtīmā‘īyah* (Ṭarābulus, al-Jamāhīrīyah al-‘Arabīyah al-Lībīyah al-Ša‘bīyah al-Ishtirākīyah al-‘Uzmā‘: al-Dār al-‘Arabīyah lil-Kitāb, 1988), 92.
\textsuperscript{386} ASMAE, ASMAI, *Africa III*, b. 36, fasc. 2. Scuole Libia 2. Le Scuole in A.I.
education as crucial for raising future potential mothers capable of bringing up children with sound religious and moral views and inculcating them with patriotic values.\textsuperscript{387} Embracing the idea of women as “Mothers of the Nation,” only children raised by educated mothers would become proper Ottoman subjects. The Ottomans opened a rüşdiye school for girls in 1898 in Tripoli, which was the first academic girls’ elementary school in North Africa, and then another girls’ rüşdiye school in Benghazi.\textsuperscript{388} The program for the girls’ rüşdiye school was four years and included instruction in the religious sciences, Arabic, Turkish and Persian languages and literature, composition, home economics, history and geography, arithmetic, drawing, sewing, and music (optional).\textsuperscript{389} In 1904, the Ottomans opened a ‘idādiyya middle school for girls that completed a rüşdiye education, which was open until 1910. The girls’ program was designed to be three years and the curriculum included instruction in the Qur’an and religious subjects, advanced Turkish, Arabic, Persian, French, engineering, accounting, history, geography, handwriting, natural sciences, drawing, embroidery, sewing, and piano.\textsuperscript{390}

In addition to this more academically-oriented education, some girls also attended vocational schools. Girls, mostly indigent orphans, at the School of Arts and Crafts were educated in spinning, weaving and home economics along with academic subjects. The graduation ceremony of the school was attended by local notables and graduation records indicate that in 1907 students by the name of Fāṭima, Zakiyya, and Halîma graduated and were presented a monetary prize and a wooden loom.\textsuperscript{391}

\textsuperscript{387} Selçuk Akşin Somel, \textit{The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline} (Leiden [u.a.]: Brill, 2001), 185.
\textsuperscript{388} al-Jarari, “L’istruzione in Libia prima e dopo il 1911,” 66.
\textsuperscript{389} Evered, \textit{Empire and Education under the Ottomans}, 212.
\textsuperscript{390} Balḥağg, \textit{at-Ta’lim fi madīnat Tarābulus al-Ğarb}, 79.
\textsuperscript{391} Balḥağg, \textit{at-Ta’lim fi madīnat Tarābulus al-Ğarb}, 88.
During the 1910-1911 scholastic year, 175 female students, according to Italian estimates, attended Ottoman schools in Tripoli. During this year, a total of 40 girls attended a technical school, 80 girls attended primary schools, 30 girls attended the School of Arts and Crafts, and 25 girls, mostly the daughters of indigenous elite and a few Ottoman officials, attended a nursery school.\textsuperscript{392} In addition, a few hundred girls, mostly Jews and Europeans, were educated in the private religious schools of their confessional communities.

Families with greater means, especially in larger coastal cities, might hire a private tutor to educate their daughters at home.\textsuperscript{393} In the Ottoman provinces of the Middle East, there was a long tradition of educating women of upper class families. Women were often taught to read Arabic, Turkish and Persian by an elderly shaykh, but often not taught to write.\textsuperscript{394} From the mid-nineteenth century, it was common practice among elite households in other parts of the Ottoman Empire to provide their daughters with European governesses or teachers.\textsuperscript{395} Girls’ education was expanded to include European languages, as well as Arabic and Persian, embroidery and music. Along with the daughters of elites, female (as well as male) slaves in elite households might also receive an education since they were expected to become the consorts or wives of educated men.\textsuperscript{396}

\textsuperscript{392} In terms of boy’s enrollment in Ottoman schools, 65 students attended a technical course, 280 students attended a primary school, 120 students attended the School of Arts and Crafts and a nursery school with 80 boys. In addition, 400 students attended the military school, the majority of whom were Turkish. Ministero dell'Africa italiana, \textit{Relazione sulla situazione politica economica ed amministrativa delle colonie italiane: presentata dal ministro delle colonie (Colosimi) nella tornata del 23 febbraio 1918} (Roma: tip. della Camera dei deputati, 1918), 207; \textit{Sulle scuole italiane in Tripoli}, ACS, Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri -Tripolitania, 1912, fasc. 1.2.219.
\textsuperscript{393} Tucker, \textit{Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt}, 124.
\textsuperscript{395} Clancy-Smith, “Envisioning Knowledge,”103.
\textsuperscript{396} Russell, \textit{Creating the New Egyptian Woman}, 20.
In Libya, there was also a tradition of private school for girls. The first of such schools was founded in May 1847 (Jumādā al-Thānī 1263 A.H.) by a woman named Fāṭima, who emigrated from Alexandria, Egypt to Tripoli, where she taught the Qur’ān and religious studies in her home.\(^{397}\) By the end of the nineteenth century, there was a growth in private schools referred to as *al-‘arīfa*, which were similar to *kutāb* schools for boys in urban areas. Daughters of the urban bourgeoisie attended these schools from age 3 or 4 until they reached puberty, when stricter forms of segregation were enforced. The curriculum was divided into religious and practical education. The religious section of the curriculum was limited to the memorization of the Qur’ān and moral instruction related to religious duties, since reading and writing were in general not taught to girls. The practical curriculum included “feminine” crafts and skills such as sewing and embroidery, as well as a diverse set of domestic skills that were viewed as necessary to play the role of a good wife and mother.\(^{398}\) This was similar to the concept of *Dār al-Muʿālimāt*, (not to be confused with the teacher training school by the same name in Istanbul) in other parts of North Africa where an indigenous *muʿalima*, or teacher of middle class background, taught domestic skills to girls between the ages of 5 and 12. Julia Clancy-Smith argues that the female domestic art produced in these schools adopted aesthetics from across the Mediterranean, even before the rise of formal colonialism, with the increased influence of European consumer fashions contributing to the development of a kind of hybrid cultural expression.\(^{399}\)

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397 Balḥaḡ, *at-Ta‘lim fi madīnat Ṭarābulus al-Ḡarb*, 69.
In addition to the expansion of educational opportunities, this period also saw the founding of the first women’s charitable society, L’Étoile du Croissant (The Star of the Crescent) or the Patriotic Association of Ladies of Turkey, in 1909 by the French writer Jeanna Kieffer Ghazala, better known by her nom de plume Guy d’Aveline, who was the wife of a French-educated Ottoman doctor, Dr. Sulaymān Ghazāla. The motto of the organization was “Instruction, Patrie, Charité (Education, Homeland, Charity)” and the wife of the Governor General of Tripolitania, Hussayn Husni Pasha, served as its president. The organization founded a school by the same name, which was similar to an al-‘arīfa and provided courses in the domestic sciences, child raising, cooking, embroidery, ironing and weaving. Along with the intellectual and moral education of middle class girls, the organization was also involved in other charitable works including providing aid to wounded soldiers and assistance to the poor in Tripoli.

Beyond the opportunities provided by formal state-sponsored, religious, or private education, mothers educated their daughters in a range of tasks that were viewed as necessary to the operation of a successful household. Outside of a few coastal cities, the majority of the population of Libya was nomadic or semi-nomadic. In rural areas, there were few schools for

403 Guy d'Aveline, La guerre à Tripoli, par un témoin oculaire (Paris: Libr. Vic et Amat, 1912), 103.
404 Balḥaḡ, at-Ta’lim fî madīnah Ṭarābulus al-Ḡarb, 92.
either boys or girls.406 Girls learned from an early age to spin wool, grind flour, fetch water, chop firewood, cook, milk animals, weave carpets and to help care for younger siblings.407 From as early as age 8, a girl would raise goats and might help her father with plowing or harvesting. Since girls generally were married in their early to mid-teens, often to a male relative, her education would often continue at the hands of her mother-in-law or other women in the family.

Education under Italian Colonialism

The Italians defended their invasion of Libya by claiming that they had a civilizing mission in Africa, similar to other European nations, and, as the rightful heirs of the Roman Empire, that they had a right to political control of the Mediterranean.408 According to Paolo De Vecchi,409 who wrote in defense of the Italian invasion, the goal of civilizing mission was to break Libya out of its four and half centuries of corrupt Ottoman rule so that it might be exposed to the advances happening in Europe:

It is surprising that a Nation of less than 25,000,000 inhabitants, averaging only 25 to the square mile, could have existed in a sort of stationary state of semibarbarous military rule, under the worst form of theocratic absolute Monarchy, for four centuries and a half, in continual contact with a world struggling for its advancement in civilization, and that such a Nation should not have felt in the least the influence of the French revolution, the social, political, intellectual evolution that followed all through Europe.410

409 Paolo De Vecchi was born near Turin in 1847 and fought with Giuseppe Garibaldi in the struggle for the unification of Italy and with Italian troops in the Franco-Prussian War. He eventually immigrated to California where he was the founder of San Francisco’s St. Joseph Hospital and published extensively on medicine and surgery as well as in defense of Italy’s invasion of the Libya. Brian McGinty, Toast to Eclipse Arpad Haraszthy and the Sparkling Wine of Old San Francisco (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 218: 93.
410 Paolo De Vecchi, Italy's Civilizing Mission in Africa (New York: Brentano's, 1912), 63.
Despite this claim of liberating the Libyans from the Ottoman rule, the Italian public soured on the local population when it became clear that there would be fierce opposition from the local population to Italian rule, and Italian nationalists began calling for sterner measures to put down the resistance.\footnote{Timothy Winston Childs, \textit{Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya, 1911-1912} (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 174.}

and identities. In contrast, association recognized the variations between different civilizations and attempted to guide natives towards integration gradually.\textsuperscript{414} As Alice Conklin points out the goal of associationist education policy was to create individuals who “love their own country and France simultaneously.”\textsuperscript{415} Universal claims of the civilizing mission always ran into the particularities of individual colonial situations. Arguing the assimilationist policies in French-rulled Algeria had failed,\textsuperscript{416} Italian administration would embrace associationism after 1922 due to the perceived differences between Italian and Libyan cultures,\textsuperscript{417} which was similar to the French policy in Morocco under Marshal Louis-Hubert Lyautey.\textsuperscript{418}

With the Italian invasion and the end of Ottoman rule, all of the Ottoman schools were closed. The new colonial administration attempted to come up with a strategy for educating the local population.\textsuperscript{419} Rather than expanding or reforming the existing education system of local schools and state-sponsored institutions, the Italians chose to create a new system that was based on racial and religious difference, giving students access to different forms of education depending on whether they were European or indigenous Muslims. The indigenous Jewish population was generally considered to be European enough to attend metropolitan schools in Libya. Federico Cresti argues that Italian officials feared that educating the local (Muslim) male population would result in the development of Arab nationalism in Libya, but the Italians needed to form an alliance with the Muslim elites in order to solidify their rule, which would have been

\textsuperscript{414} Abi-Mershed, \textit{Apostles of Modernity}, 9.
\textsuperscript{415} Conklin, \textit{A Mission to Civilize}, 137.
\textsuperscript{416} McLaren, \textit{Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya}, 7.
\textsuperscript{417} Piccioli, “La conquista morale,” 296.
\textsuperscript{418} Martin Evans, \textit{Empire and Culture: The French Experience, 1830-1940} (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 14.
\textsuperscript{419} Cresti, "Per Uno Studio delle "Elites" Politiche nella Libia Indipendente,” 128.
impossible without the development of an education system. During the first decade of colonial rule, the Italians experimented with assimilationism for male Libyans, creating a school system modeled on the French education system in Algeria. It offered only basic education, adapting the curriculum of the Italian school system to what the Italians perceived as local needs. Italo-Arab schools were created to co-exist alongside the indigenous system of *kutāb* schools.

In 1914, this strategy was formalized with the Royal Decree of January 14, 1914. It established a three year program that provided elementary Italian along with Qur’anic studies.

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Italy’s longest standing colony was Eritrea, which it ruled from 1889 until 1941. During Italian colonial rule, the Italians largely excluded women from education since educating women was not deemed necessary to secure their political rule. While failing to develop girls’ education, Italian colonialism instituted a segregated education system with two different curricula, one for Italian and other for indigenous Eritreans. Generally, male Eritreans were educated up to the fourth-grade level. This was considered sufficient to appreciate the benefits of civilization as well as instruct Eritreans in the basics of hygiene and discipline. A handful of state vocational schools were also established to train boys as noncommissioned officers, artisans, clerks, male nurses, and plantation workers. Fearing the spread of anti-colonial sentiments, post-primary education was minimal. After the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, they continued with a similar policy as the one in Eritrea, creating two parallel education systems with rudimentary education for boys while largely ignoring girls’ education. After fifty years of Italian colonization in Eritrea, only a small, predominantly male segment of the population could claim rudimentary schooling, and only a minority with "assimilated status" were given the opportunity to pursue secondary or higher education. For more information, see Richard Pankhurst, "Education in Ethiopia During the Italian Fascist Occupation (1936-1941).” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5 (3) (1972): 366-67; Asgedet Stefanos, "Women and education in Eritrea: A Historical and Contemporary Analysis." *Harvard Educational Review* 67, no. 4 (1997): 658-689.

424 Regio decreto. 14 gennaio 1914, n. 56, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
and elements drawn from the Italian school curriculum.\textsuperscript{425} In addition, the decree provided for a school of Islamic culture, but this institution would not open until 1935.\textsuperscript{426} By the end of 1914, there were thirteen Italo-Arab schools in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, educating a total of 1,300 students.\textsuperscript{427} In addition to the Italo-Arab schools, the Italians re-opened the Ottoman Arts and Crafts School (Mekteb-i Sana‘i), renamed the \textit{Scuola di arti e mestieri di Tripoli}. It represented the only Ottoman educational institution to survive into the Italian colonial period and would remain a vocational school for boys throughout Italian rule, promoting Libyan handicrafts.\textsuperscript{428} The majority of the Muslim population would continue to attend the \textit{kutāb} schools, which did not change their pre-colonial curriculum significantly. The schools were overseen by a committee of Muslim notables headed by a \textit{qadi} to inspect the \textit{kutāb} schools.\textsuperscript{429} The schools had to meet certain levels of hygiene, a set number of students, and standards of instruction that included Arabic language and elementary arithmetic as well as religious studies.\textsuperscript{430} In 1919, there were 25 such schools in Tripolitania.\textsuperscript{431}

While the Italians attempted to devise a strategy to educate the male children of their new subjects, they largely excluded girls from the new education system. With the closing of the

\textsuperscript{425} Articolo 18 del Regio decreto. 14 gennaio 1914, n. 56, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
\textsuperscript{426} Articolo 25 del Regio decreto. 14 gennaio 1914, n. 56, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
\textsuperscript{428} For more information on the \textit{Scuola di arti e mestieri di Tripoli}, see Francesca di Pasquale, "La Scuola di arti e mestieri di Tripoli in epoca coloniale (1911-1938).” Africa: Rivista Trimestrale Di Studi E Documentazione. (3) (2007): 399-428.
\textsuperscript{429} Articolo 22 del Regio decreto. 14 gennaio 1914, n. 56, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
\textsuperscript{430} Articolo 23 del Regio decreto. 14 gennaio 1914, n. 56, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
Ottoman sponsored primary and rüşdiye schools for girls, there were few options for formal schooling for girls in Libya. The Italian government chose to ignore the existing education system established by Ottomans that at least provided primary and secondary education for girls, in addition to the Arts and Crafts School, as part of the Ottoman attempt to foster development in Libya. Instead, the conservatism of the Italian authorities aligned with the conservatism of some Libyan elites on the subject of girls’ education. Unwilling to implement policies that might result in opposition from prominent families and uninterested in the assimilation of the female population, the Italians made no attempts to further the development of education for Muslim girls in Libya. When schools did finally open for Muslim girls, Italian authorities continued the policy of segregation between the Arab and Berber Muslim population and the Italian colonists that was the most salient feature of boys’ education.

The first colonial elementary school in Tripoli that educated indigenous girls did not admit Muslim girls but instead sought to educate Jewish girls in Libya. Prior to the Italian occupation, some Jewish girls, mostly the daughters of Jewish elites who were influenced by European customs through commercial interactions or who were of European origin, had attended Italian schools. After the Italian invasion, Jewish girls would continue to attend Italian metropolitan schools, rather than the indigenous system for Libyans. The Italian orientalist Aldobrandino Malvezzi de’ Medici argued that the Jewish portion of the population

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432 Italo Balbo, who was Governor-General of Italian Libya from 1934 to 1940, claimed that the only schools in Libya prior to the Italian invasion were Kutāb and zawiyya schools. Italo Balbo, “La politica sociale fascista verso gli arabi della Libia” in Convegno di Scienze Morali e Storiche (1938, Roma): Tema: L'Africa. 2. (Roma: Reale Accad. d'Italia, 1939), 740.

was not “a slave to prejudice in this field, and the girls go to school willingly.”

In February 1912, the Italians opened a school for indigenous girls, Margherita di Savoia, which was reserved for the Jewish population. Due to the high concentration of Jewish families in some areas of Tripoli, for example the old city of Tripoli, the majority of students in some metropolitan schools were Jewish.

While expanding education for indigenous Jewish girls, the Superintendent of Schools for Cyrenaica argued that the education of Muslim women should be limited:

> The education of women in Muslim countries comes up against difficulties that have deep roots in the customs and traditions of the indigenous peoples. Even in the major cities where the indigenous element has had long contact with Europeans… the establishment of girls' schools for Muslim pupils arouses opposition especially among those most loyal to tradition, for which educating women means something contrary to religion. Only instruction of a professional character that allows a woman to contribute to the greater well-being of her family, imparted without creating women the same type as ours, not agreeing with the education we give to our young girls since they are destined to live in an environment so different from ours. It is, therefore, necessary that, at least for the moment, the Arab girls' school is limited to a practical curriculum to make the pupils good housewives and addressing not only the economic matters, but also hygiene and domestic morality.

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435 The colonial authorities mobilized similar rhetoric about the need to civilize Jewish indigenous girls. Festa on the first day of a new term at Margherita di Savoia said the following: La missione della maestra s’inizia. A mezzo di qualche interprete (una bambina delle classi superiori, di regolar) si riesce a stento a tirar fuori le indispensabili generalità. Poi le prime raccomandazioni Dille che si lavi le gambette e la camicia, che si tagli le unghie, che si faccia ben pettinare dalla mamma) e qui, con gesto istintivo, occorre coltrarsi con disgusto dall'altra parte per non vedere ancora in quei riccioli arruffati!) altrimenti non sarà accettata... È la prima conquista. Andrea Festa, *Scuole per indigeni in Tripolitania* (Tripoli: Maggi, 1930), 27.


This statement highlighted the concern that the education of girls would be opposed by the local population. The only kind of education that the Italians could implement would be that of a practical nature that they could argue would have positive economic benefits. Despite this goal, he revealed that the only role that he thought were proper for Libyan girls was that of a housewife, an assumption not unique to the Italians during this period. In addition, he highlights the need to improve hygiene, which would be a central component of the Italian education and civilizing mission.

There were indeed sections of the Libyan population that opposed girls’ education. Mabrūka ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Khālid, who was born in 1920 to a family that opposed Italian rule, remembered that during the colonial period “women would not go to school because society’s view towards them was deficient; they looked at her as if she was only fit to be a housewife and was not fit for anything but the house and its duties.” Inkhīla Mukhār Muḥammad, who fought the Italians, added that “for the Bedouin there were no educational institutions during the period of the Italian occupation. There were in cities schools that taught the Italian language but seldom did the children of Bedouins attend these schools in the city because they taught in Italian. As for girls, they were confined in the home and denied an education. They did not attend schools.” Both Mabrūka and Inkhīla point to some of the obstacles to introducing girls’ education to Libya especially as an occupying, foreign power. Significantly, these women were both from rural families, the section of Libyan society least likely to educate their daughters.

While there were sections of Libyan society that opposed sending girls to school, especially in rural areas, this was by no means the universal opinion. The Italians chose to ally

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with the most conservative sections of Libyan society and adopt a conservative understanding of local culture. While Libya had been one of the farthest reaches of the Ottoman domain, it had been influenced by reformist trends within the empire, partially due to the fact that Sultan Abdülhamid II used it as a “Saharan Siberia” where his more reform-minded political opponents were exiled.442 Girls’ education had been a pillar of the Ottomans’ own civilizing mission during the late nineteenth century.

In addition to the Ottoman legacy of reform, the Italian authorities also ignored debates and reforms happening in other parts of the Middle East during the early twentieth century. After the publication of the Egyptian scholar Qāsim Amīn’s controversial The Liberation of Women in 1899,443 a heated debate about women’s education erupted in the region, with nearly 100 books published for and against his position. While number of historians have attributed the intellectual debate that followed in Egypt to a multitude of different factors, Hoda Yousef argues that it was a new core of writers and public intellectuals that allowed the debate about women’s rights to come to forefront of discussions about the future of the nation.444 As a remote section of the Empire, Libya lacked the same kind of intellectual culture as Egypt but most educated families in Libya, many of whom had family members with educations from the great religious institutions of the region, would have been aware of these debates happening in the rest of the Arab world. By the early twentieth century, most ‘ulama’ agreed by that at least basic women’s education was permissible, and those opposing all education were a minority.445

443 Qāsim Amīn’s works are available in translation. Qāsim Amīn, The Liberation of Women; and the New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005).
444 Yousef, Composing Egypt, 79.
445 Tucker, Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, 125.
Much of the opposition to attending Italian schools may have been due to the fact that they were run by a hostile Christian power rather than based on mere blanket opposition to girls’ education. Despite this obstacle, various attempts were made to improve the educational level of girls under colonial rule in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. The first academic primary school under colonial rule in North Africa that departed from the handicraft schools model of the Dār al-Muʿalimāt opened in Tunis in 1900 and was called Ecole Louise Millet.\textsuperscript{446} The school was founded by Louise-René Millet, the wife of the resident general, and was overseen by Charlotte Eigenschenck, the widow of a colonial official. Combining a religious kutāb school with a French education,\textsuperscript{447} the school taught girls Arabic, Islamic studies, French, history, and math as well as the domestic arts.\textsuperscript{448} In other parts of the Middle East, girls’ education had progressed significantly further; for example, in Egypt, the first school for girls opened in 1873, named al-Suyufiya,\textsuperscript{449} and 37 percent of Egyptian students were female by 1913.\textsuperscript{450} While there were some pedagogical similarities to other areas of the Middle East and North Africa in terms of the curriculum for girl’s education, an academic primary school without

\textsuperscript{446} Julia Clancy-Smith argues that it was the first academic elementary school for girls in North Africa, but that distinction actually belongs to the Ottoman schools in Tripoli. Clancey-Smith, “Educating the Muslim Women in North Africa,” 106.

\textsuperscript{447} Clancy-Smith, “Educating the Muslim Women in North Africa,” 108.

\textsuperscript{448} This was very similar to the education provided to girls in Egypt during the same period. Placing kutāb schools under state control, the Ministry of Education in Egypt converted coeducational schools into girls’ schools and introduced practical subjects such as cooking and needlework in order to make girls good, modern housewives, mothers and servants. Tucker, \textit{Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt}, 126.


\textsuperscript{450} Tucker, \textit{Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt}, 126.
a vocational component for Muslim girls would not be founded in Libya during the period of Italian rule.\footnote{In 1970, thirty-three percent of all students at the secondary level in Egypt were women while women made up only eighteen percent of secondary students in Libya. Nadia H. Youssef, “Education and Female Modernism in the Muslim World.” \textit{Journal of International Affairs} 30 (2) (1976): 197.}

Despite these advances in girls’ education in the region, the Italians were not the only colonial power in North Africa nervous about the backlash that girls’ education might cause. Even the French in Algeria, who officially supported the assimilation of the indigenous population, were hesitant about the effects of girls’ education.\footnote{Jeanne Bowlan, “Civilizing Gender Relations in Colonial Algeria: The Paradoxical Case of Marie Bugeja, 1919-1939” in \textit{Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism}. Eds. Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998),175-92.} The Italians were simply unwilling to chance a backlash when they saw few tangible benefits in educating Libyan girls.

The Italians were slow to develop any policy for girls’ education and even slower to devise a unified policy for all of Libya. The Royal Decree of 1914 that approved the first colonial educational system for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica did not include any provisions for schools for indigenous Muslim girls.\footnote{Regio decreto. 14 gennaio 1914, n. 56, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.} When the Italians did implement an educational policy for girls, they decided against the creation of an entirely new education system as they had done for indigenous boys. Instead, they founded a vocational school called the \textit{Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione} (Girls’ Schools of Work and Education), an institution that was an amalgamation and reinvention of parts of the most basic educational institutions for girls in Tripoli: \textit{al-‘Arīfa}, and the Ottoman Arts and Crafts School (\textit{Mekteb-i Sana‘i}). The \textit{Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione} provided a basic academic education while training girls in
vocational skills of weaving and embroidering.\textsuperscript{454}

The first \textit{Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione} (Girls’ School of Education and Work) opened in 1912 in Tripoli,\textsuperscript{455} a year after the Italian invasion. The curriculum included two classes, one elementary and the other vocational. In the latter, two indigenous teachers named “Zakkiya Sciama” and “Fatma Defairi” taught carpet weaving and embroidery in silk and gold while an Italian teacher by the name of Angelina Sonnino taught the elementary classes.\textsuperscript{456} The curriculum was far from set during the first years of colonial rule and would continue to evolve from two classes in 1912 to a six-year program in 1928. In 1912, the Italian authorities considered the necessity of introducing drawing to the curriculum in order for girls to develop their design skills in weaving and embroidery, an existing part of the Ottoman curriculum since the 1860s, and this decision was formalized in the colony by the Royal Decree of 1922 that approved the school system for Muslim citizens of Tripolitania.\textsuperscript{457}

A continuing concern was the lack of adequate space for the school, since the location was cramped and not suitable for a vocational school. Two solutions to this problem were proposed, the first being to move the school to one of two buildings in Via Misran which were occupied by a male elementary school. The other option was to move the girls’ vocational school

\textsuperscript{454} The Italian authorities considered the possibility of combining the Italian girls’ vocational schools with the Arts and Crafts School but decided against it due to the different social origins of the students and the need to have a school for girls that catered to Middle Class families. Ministero dell'Africa italiana, \textit{Relazione sulla situazione politica economica ed amministrativa delle colonie italiane}, 212.
\textsuperscript{455} ASMAE, ASMAI, Africa III, b. 36, fasc. 2. Scuole Libia 2. Le Scuole in A.I.
\textsuperscript{456} ASMAE, ASMAI, \textit{Africa II}, Pos. 113/1, fasc. 6 Scuole (1913). Relazione sulle Scuole della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica. Parte 1°, 12.
\textsuperscript{457} Evered, \textit{Empire and Education under the Ottomans}, 212; Regio decreto 14 settembre 1922, n. 11, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico per i cittadini musulmani della Tripolitania.
to the School of Arts and Crafts and provide a separate entrance for female students.\textsuperscript{458} This issue would again come up in 1918, since the location of the Girls’ School of Education and Work was considered less than ideal for the needs of the school, requiring that a single classroom be used for academic subjects and professional subjects, which meant that frames used for carpet weaving had to be set up and broken down daily. The location was also too distant from the Arab neighborhoods. There was hope that the following year the school would be able to move to new venue that was more suitable for the school and was also more centrally located, which might increase the number of pupils attending the school.\textsuperscript{459}

In 1918, the \textit{Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione} was located on the first floor of a building on El Machina Street in Tripoli, which also housed the Princess Mafalda nursery school. The curriculum had progressed in the intervening six years, with the program expanding to last four years. The first year was preparatory and sought to create more refined pupils who were accustomed to the frequent use of soap and a comb and had a basic understanding of spoken Italian and good work skills. It appears that it was not uncommon for girls to repeat the preparatory class, which the school felt was useful for improving the girls’ Italian and work habits.\textsuperscript{460} After the preparatory section, students began three years of vocational training that focused on making items for a woman’s trousseau as well as the study of drawing and embroidery in silk, white, gold and silver thread, and the weaving of burnooses and Turkish-style

\textsuperscript{458} ASMAE, ASMAI, \textit{Africa II}, Pos. 113/1, fasc. 6 Scuole (1913). Relazione sulle Scuole della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica. Parte 1°, 12-13.
The Italians viewed the school as a way of disciplining and civilizing young Libyans while acclimatizing them to European values of cleanliness and order, European standards of cleanliness being a marker of civilization for many colonizing powers. The girls were described as “little savages” when they first began attending the school, who were both “fearful and hostile at the same time.” They were not accustomed to criticism, so they would leave school after the slightest reproach. It required all the patience and all the skill of the director and teachers to inspire any love for school and especially “to get them used to cleanliness and order and to overcome their natural reluctance… to listen to advice and reproaches.” Among the skills taught during the first year of the instruction was the use of soap and a comb.

The school continued to face a number of setbacks. The students did not attend classes consistently and often missed classes for family events. The school also faced difficulties in locating the required work materials for the weaving of carpets, especially colored wool. Although local dyers provided colored wool, school authorities complained about the poor quality and the high price. Despite these setbacks, the authorities were pleased by the progress made by the students. The students in the level three class knew the Italian language quite well, reading the language and expressing themselves clearly and correctly. Of the 97 students at the

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school, 37 were considered promising and their work was admired by many visitors to the school.465

The Italians were not alone in limiting the education of girls in North Africa in colonies established during the twentieth century. Having moved away from the assimilationist policies implemented in Algeria, the French applied a remarkably similar policy to girls’ education under their colonial rule in Morocco, seeking to establish handicraft schools modeled on Dār al-Mu’alimāt.466 The French first took over an existing institution run by a local Moroccan woman named Slimana in Salé and sought to transform students to reflect Western values of discipline, rationality and hygiene, all values that the Italians were also eager to instill in their new urban elite of Libya.467 However, the girls’ schools in Morocco remained mainly workshops and focused more on the domestic “feminine” art of embroidery rather than on vocational training or providing an elementary education. French was not introduced as a subject of instruction until 1916, and then only orally. During 1917, the French also opened three state-run schools in the cities of Mogador, Mazagan and Safi and the number of girls educated rose to 450.468

In Tripoli, the girls who attended the Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione were from varying social backgrounds, but authorities claimed the students were mainly the daughters of local elites and wealthy individuals.469 It is difficult to confirm the exact social background of the female students who matriculated at Italian schools since no details on enrollment are available. Spencer D. Segalla has argued that French authorities struggled to attract girls, except

466 Clancy-Smith, “Envisioning Knowledge,” 102
467 Segalla, The Moroccan Soul, 51.
468 Segalla, The Moroccan Soul, 52-53.
from the lowest classes, to new schools in Morocco, since elite families were unwilling to risk their reputations by sending their daughters to foreign schools so they could learn embroidery, while this was considered a reasonable decision for lower class families. If the Italians were more successful than the French in attracting students, it might have been due to the fact that schools had previously existed in Tripoli and other parts of Libya for the daughters of the local elite. The fact that the schools did also provide some limited academic instruction might have made them more appealing to elite families than the workshop model in Morocco. Unfortunately, this curriculum did not go much beyond a basic elementary education. In the end, the goal of the school was to create alliances with elite families that were necessary for solidifying Italian rule in the major coastal cities rather than furthering women’s education as an end in itself. The Italians claimed that this was “not inconsequential in countries where setting an example can be powerful, (especially those) which come from the top of society.”

A contradiction existed between the expressed purpose of the school and the composition of the student body. Despite the largely elite background of the students, the Superintendent of Schools in Tripolitania claimed that one of its goals was to provide opportunities for girls to contribute to their families’ economic well-being. For most of the students, the education they received would have been useful in terms of household management and learning bourgeois female crafts, such as embroidery. Since they would become the educated wives of the new elites, they would not be expected to contribute financially to their families. A small number of girls from the lower classes might have been able to improve their economic situation by

470 Segalla, The Moroccan Soul, 53.
becoming seamstresses or weavers, primarily doing piecemeal work inside of the home for extra income. However, this was probably the exception rather than the rule.

Liberal Reforms and the End of the Liberal Era

In 1922, the Italian administration reformed the existing education system under the guidance of Angelo Piccioli, who the Italian governor of Libya, Giuseppe Volpi, appointed as superintendent of education. Angelo Piccioli rejected assimilationism as a basis for education in Libya, establishing associationism as the direction of indigenous education until the mid-1930s. These changes were adopted into law by the Royal Decree of the 5th of February 1922 (n. 368). The new school system provided that the kutāb schools would serve as preparatory schools, teaching memorization of the Qur’ān, and moral and religious principles. In addition, writing and arithmetic was later added to the curriculum. Elementary schools would replace the Italo-Arab schools. The curriculum was a three-year program that taught both Arabic and Italian as well as religion and morality, arithmetic and geometry, penmanship, and various subjects (history, geography, agriculture, hygiene, etc.). A middle school (‘idādiyya) was added for boys with a four-year curriculum that included Arabic, Italian, religious studies, history and geography, arithmetic and geometry, physical and natural sciences, penmanship,

474 Angelo Piccioli, “La conquista morale, la scuola,” 296.
475 Articolo 2 del Regio decreto 5 febbraio 1922 n. 368, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico per i cittadini musulmani della Cirenaica.
476 Articolo 3 del Regio decreto 5 febbraio 1922 n. 368, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico per i cittadini musulmani della Cirenaica.
bookkeeping, education, and agriculture. After the first two years, there were two tracks: one for the preparation of merchants, accountants and indigenous officials while the other branch prepared teachers for *kutāb* schools. The middle schools would only continue to operate until 1928. During the 1921-1922 school year, there were 25 schools for Muslims, including 12 *kutāb* schools subsidized by the Italian government, as well as eight elementary schools, two middle schools in the cities of Benghazi and Derna and three vocational schools for girls.

The Italian authorities expanded the educational system for boys and also formulated an official policy towards girls’ education. Despite the fact that the vocational school had been operating in Tripoli for almost ten years, no Royal Decree addressed girls’ education until 1922. The two Royal Decrees of 1922 provided differing guidelines for girls in the two major regions, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, while Fezzan was not mentioned. In 1922, a Royal Decree for Tripolitania provided for the founding of the *Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione* to teach girls traditional crafts. In Article 4, the legislation outlined a detailed teaching program for girls that provided for a five-year primary education. The first year was preparatory, during which students would focus on academic subjects. The academic curriculum was similar to the Ottoman curriculum but with a greater emphasis on Italian rather than on Islamic languages and included religious studies, the Arabic and Italian languages, arithmetic, geometry, drawing,

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477 Articolo 5 del Regio decreto 5 febbraio 1922 n. 368, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico per i cittadini musulmani della Cirenaica.
478 Articolo 5 del Regio decreto 5 febbraio 1922 n. 368, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico per i cittadini musulmani della Cirenaica.
479 Piccioli, “La scuola e le istituzioni educative,” 1144.
481 Regio decreto 14 settembre 1922, n. 11, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico per i cittadini musulmani della Tripolitania.
music (optional), gymnastics and domestic sciences.\footnote{Articolo 4 del Regio decreto 14 settembre 1922, n. 11, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico per i cittadini musulmani della Tripolitania.} In the following years, girls would learn traditional crafts including carpet weaving and embroidery. This decree therefore mostly codified the education girls were already receiving in Tripoli. In contrast, the legislation for Cyrenaica stated in Article 7 that schools would provide instruction in reading and writing in both Italian and Arabic only to pupils whose families request it.\footnote{Articolo 7 del Regio decreto 5 febbraio 1922 n. 368, che approva l’ordinamento scolastico per i cittadini musulmani della Cirenaica.} Therefore, Cyrenaica would officially still provide no formal educational training for girls.

Despite the lack of any official policy for girls’ education in Cyrenaica, there were two \textit{Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione} in the cities of Benghazi and Derna, beginning in 1920. The first year eight students attended the school in Benghazi, which eventually grew to 80 pupils, and more students would have enrolled if the capacity of the school facility had allowed. Angelo Piccioli argued that:

This result was undoubtedly reached following the effort made by the Government in establishing these institutions without losing sight of the essential traditions of teaching and of the life of the Muslim family. The young students in such schools find not a cold school environment but the warm hospitality of family. Also, the families know that their children have the opportunity to educate themselves and learn those feminine skills that are central to Arab custom. Until this (introduction of Italian school), girls were not taught in any school.\footnote{ASMAE, ASMAI, \textit{Africa III}, b. 36, fasc. 1. Scuole Libia I. Fondo Volpi. Sovraintendenza Scolastica. Governo della Cirenaica. Bengasi, aprile 1922}

The fact that the primary goal of the school was vocational training was reflected in the fact that out of a total of 25 hours per week, 15 were dedicated to work related skills while five were set aside for Arabic and religious studies and the other five for the Italian language. Piccioli also promoted the level of access provided by the school’s teachers to otherwise inscrutable Arab
households, writing that two of the school’s most talented teachers displayed the “cunning shrewdness” it took to run a school for girls and to productively interact with Arab families. In fact, the Italians viewed gaining access to the domestic spaces of Arab homes as one of the major goals of their girls’ schools. He argued that after only two years the school had proved its value to some of the most important Arab families in the city, which was evidenced by the success of an exhibition of the students’ work.

The girls’ school in Benghazi was housed in a factory at Via Osman Bakek No. 69 and consisted of five rooms in addition to the kitchen and other small rooms, a large courtyard and a terrace. For the 1921-22 academic year, the school made arrangements for the expansion of the premises, and decided to rent an adjacent building that had been recently built. In the future, however, school administrators foresaw moving to a more suitable venue on land owned by the “Beni Wacuf” just north of the current location on the same street, Osman Bekek. They deemed it inappropriate to move far from the current location since it was centrally located near the most populated Arab neighborhoods. The school of Derna was located in a building sufficient for the current needs of the school and would be able to expand by building additional rooms on state-owned land in front of the school or on adjacent land, which was private property.

The school in Benghazi had two Arab teachers, “Hamida Lanesi” and “Badiha Surur Bej” and three Italian teachers, one of whom was made the director of the school, a Mrs. Lyta Lebboron. The school in Derna was slightly smaller with a Muslim teacher, “Halima bin Bahri,”

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and two assistants and an Italian teacher named Nella Matini. Some of the Arab teachers had received their training under the Ottoman education system at Dār al-Muʿalimāt, the teacher training school in Istanbul.

A photo from the school in Benghazi 1923 shows young students in indigenous clothing, a striped dress or caftan belted at the waist with a scarf known as an ‘asaba tied around the hair. Many of the students also wear a heavy woven veil over the ‘asaba, which covers their head and shoulders but leaves their face uncovered. In the middle of the photo, the three Italian teachers are clearly visible in European dress surrounded by a handful of girls in European dresses. In the back of the photo stand the Arab teachers and possibly some of the older students. Rather than the white haik traditionally worn by women in public in Libya, they wear all black garments similar to an abaya, including gloves and full-face veils that completely obscure them from the photographer. Another photo shows three students spinning wool and weaving a carpet. Images such as these were commonly utilized to further the Italian claim to be civilizing the local population.

In regard to school supplies, books, notebooks and various other stationery items were distributed to the students free of charge. In addition, all the supplies required for the learning of crafts such as fabrics, silk, cotton and other kinds of haberdashery were provided by the schools, with the understanding that at the end of the year the pupils would be able to claim their work by

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paying the value of the raw materials. Only in cases of proven poverty would the work be released to the students free of charge.\textsuperscript{490}

Besides the attempt to civilize girls through the teaching of a vocation and hygiene, the schools provided health monitoring, especially in Benghazi, where Doctor Tria of the Health Bureau earned “the admiration of the families of the students.”\textsuperscript{491} The administration claimed that health service had been one of the appeals of the school in Benghazi for Arab families.\textsuperscript{492} There were a number of conditions that were widespread among the student population, especially trachoma,\textsuperscript{493} a highly contagious infection of the eyes that may result in blindness and that affected almost half of the students in the female vocational schools.\textsuperscript{494} There were also problems with pediculosis, ringworm and other eye diseases.\textsuperscript{495} Access to medical care was one of the appeals of the school even though a significant number of the students’ mothers were women who “had never taken advantage of the means of medical assistance available to the Government.”\textsuperscript{496} This fact is not surprising considering that most Arab women probably avoided colonial doctors, who were not only foreigners but also men.

\textsuperscript{492} ASMAE, ASMAI, \textit{Africa III}, b. 36, fasc. 1. Scuole Libia I. Fondo Volpi. Relazione finale 1922-23 della Sovraintendenza Scolastica Governo della Cirenaica.”
\textsuperscript{493} The disease was so widespread that the authorities decided to establish of a specific school to treat European children suffering from this disease called Niccolò Tommaseo. In contrast, indigenous Muslim children would be treated at their own schools.
\textsuperscript{494} ACS, MAI, IS, b. 156, fasc. 1, sottofasc. \textit{Relazione ed allegati alla relazione finale del R. Soprintendente scolastico per il 1929-1930}.
\textsuperscript{495} Di Pasquale, \textit{La scuola per l’Impero}, 110.
\textsuperscript{496} ASMAE, ASMAI, \textit{Africa III}, b. 36, fasc. 1. Scuole Libia I. Fondo Volpi. Relazione finale 1922-23 della Sovraintendenza Scolastica Governo della Cirenaica.”
Fascism and Colonial Education

In October 1922, the Liberal government in Italy collapsed and was replaced by a Fascist government, with Mussolini as the new Prime Minister, who would govern Italy until April 1945. The new Minister of the Colonies, Luigi Federzoni, along with many members of the new Fascist government, declared their intention to make radical changes to Italian colonial policy in Libya, declaring an end to the conciliatory approach of their predecessors that sought to rule through an alliance with the Libyan elites. The focus on the military reconquest of Libya meant that the further development of educational policy was neglected and was not officially reformed until 1928 with the Royal Decree of 21 of June 1928, n. 1698. The new law of 1928 reproduced in its broad outlines the Decree of 1922 for Tripolitania with the introduction of the Italian language as a compulsory subject. \(^{497}\)

\(^{497}\) Kutāb schools remained preparatory schools and the system of elementary education remained intact but the project of middle schools (‘idādiyya) was done away with, limiting the education of the indigenous population to male elementary schools, Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione and night classes for illiterate adults, all at the elementary level. \(^{498}\)

Beyond the changes made in the field of boys’ education, the Royal Decree did finally provide a detailed plan for girls’ education that applied to the majority of the Libyan territories, excluding Fezzan, a full 17 years after their invasion. Again, this Decree was primarily a reflection of policies already in place on the ground rather than a prescription for the future organization of girls’ schooling. Article 6 of the Royal Decree of 1928 further outlined the curriculum for the Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione, which would be slightly expanded

\(^{497}\) Cresti, "Per Uno Studio delle "Elites" Politiche nella Libia Indipendente,” 143.
\(^{498}\) Regio decreto 21 giugno 1928, n. 1698, Norme riflettenti l'istruzione primaria per i musulmani della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
to include a two-year preparatory course, a three-year vocational course and a one-year advanced course. The preparatory curriculum included Arabic, Italian, religious studies, arithmetic and elementary geometry, drawing and penmanship, various subjects (history, geography, physical and natural sciences, home economics, hygiene), “womanly work” and singing. The vocational training included embroidery with white and colored thread in the Arabic style and silver embroidery on satin and velvet according to the local artistic tradition; tailoring, production of carpets and weaving burnooses. It also stipulated that the *Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione* would be set up only in the major cities of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania and only when a suitable number of pupils could be assured. In the beginning these schools were found only in the cities of Tripoli, Benghazi and Derna but additional schools would be opened, especially after 1936.

Despite the claims by the Italian authorities to success in educating girls, the number of girls attending Italian schools was low and such schools faced opposition both due to attitudes about girls’ education and the fact that they were operated by a foreign power. Khadija al-Jahmi, who would become a champion for women’s literacy in Libya, was born in Benghazi in 1921 and received her earliest education at an Italian school. Her account of the period highlights the fact that few girls of her generation attended Italian schools. When she was seven years old, her father, a poet who worked for a publishing house operated by the Italian authorities, saw the

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499 Articolo 6 del Regio decreto 21 giugno 1928, n. 1698, Norme riflettenti l’istruzione primaria per i musulmani della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
500 Articolo 7 del Regio decreto 21 giugno 1928, n. 1698, Norme riflettenti l’istruzione primaria per i musulmani della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
501 Articolo 6 del Regio decreto 21 giugno 1928, n. 1698, Norme riflettenti l’istruzione primaria per i musulmani della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
necessity of her enrolling in the Italian education systems. Because of him, she received an 
elementary education through the vocational school in Benghazi, but most of the female students 
were not Libyan but instead had mothers of Cretan or Tunisian origin. There were only three 
girls of Libyan origin in the school, two sisters, named Bahīja and Sakīna Mīlād al-ʿArādī from 
Tripoli whose father worked as a judge in the eastern part of the country, and herself.⁵⁰³ Many 
people rejected her going to school and stood in a position of animosity towards her father who 
they called “shameful!... sending his daughter to learn with the Christians… How does he not 
fear that his daughter will become Christian?!”⁵⁰⁴ 

It is also unclear the extent which girls who enrolled in vocational schools used their 
training in embroidery and weaving upon completing their education. There was never an 
expectation that Libyan women would join the workforce under colonial rule. It appears that 
least some women did piecemeal work at home using the skills that they learned at the vocational 
school. From an educated middle-class family, Khadīja al-Jahmī wove wool to make an 
undergarment called a Fānīlīāt. For this type of garment, which would cost a frank, she would be 
paid 4 guineas due to the quality of her work. This resulted in Italians referring to her as 
Signorina Sarta (Miss Seamstress). However, it is clear both from the type of training provided 
and the attitude of the Italians that this kind of work was intended to supplement a family’s 
income at the very most rather than provide women with any kind of professional or economic 
independence.

In addition to the Italian state education system, some limited opportunities for further 
education remained available to women and provided opportunities for private education during

⁵⁰³ Usṭā, Anā Khadijah al-Jahmī, 98. 
the colonial period. Similar to the precolonial period, girls from elite families received tutoring at home from a shaykh, who was hired as a private tutor.\textsuperscript{505} \textit{Al-‘arīfa} schools continued to operate, including two schools in Tripoli. The curriculum continued to include practical and religious training but reading and writing were also added. In the two schools in Tripoli, one of the teachers was educated by the Italians while the other received her education in Istanbul under the Ottoman system.\textsuperscript{506} In addition to \textit{al-‘arīfa} schools, there were also other private elementary schools for girls. Hamīda Muḥammad Ṭarākhān al-‘Unayzī, who became a champion of women’s education in Libya, opened the first academic elementary school for girls during the Fascist period. Born in Benghazi in 1892 to a family of Turkish-Libyan origin, Hamīda al-‘Unayzī attended the \textit{rüşdiye} school in Tripoli before continuing her education for four years in Istanbul, learning to speak Turkish, French, Greek and Italian as well as Arabic.\textsuperscript{507} Between 1917 and 1924, she operated a private academic primary school for Libyan girls in her home.\textsuperscript{508} In 1924, when the Italian government opened the \textit{Scuola Mussulmana Femminile di Lavoro e Istruzione} in ‘Uthmān Street in the Old City of Benghazi, she was hired to teach Arabic and Qur’an.\textsuperscript{509} She would continue to work in the realm of girls’ education until her death in 1982.

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\textsuperscript{505} Khadijah al-Jahmī, who become an advocate for women’s rights in Libya, received private tutoring in Arabic and religious subjects from a number of shaykhs during her childhood. Muṣṭafā Uṣṭā, \textit{Anā Khadijah al-Jahmī}, 103-104, 198.
\textsuperscript{506} Cerbella, “L’arifa, secolare scuola delle fanciulle tripoline,” 415-16.
\textsuperscript{508} Bin ‘Āmir, \textit{al-Mar’ah al-Libīyah ibdā’ wa-ish‘ā‘}, 32.
\textsuperscript{509} Bin ‘Āmir, \textit{al-Mar’ah al-Libīyah ibdā’ wa-ish‘ā‘}, 33.
The other major advocate for women’s education during the colonial period was al-Khūja Badīʿa Falīfla, the wife of reformer Ḥusayn Falīfla.510

While the Italians attempted to establish a stable colony in Libya, they fought a long and bitter battle against the local population for control of the hinterland during the first years of Fascist rule. While Tripolitania was under Italian control by 1929, the Italians would continue to fight a bitter war of "pacification" against the population in Cyrenaica until the mid-1930s. The defeat of the resistance was achieved only after the Italians implemented brutal military tactics against the local population, including the deportation of more than 100,000 to concentration camps, about half of the population of Cyrenaica,511 Angelo Del Boca estimates that forty percent or more of the population of the camps perished under detention.512 The details of these policies as well as women’s involvement in the resistance to Italian colonial rule will be addressed in a subsequent chapter.

While rural Libyans, especially girls, generally did not attend Italian schools, there was one exception, the so-called “Youth Camps” (i campi ragazzi).513 During the repression of the resistance in Cyrenaica, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who was governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, later Italian Libya, from 1929 to 1933,514 attempted to provide educational opportunities for the children of the nomadic and semi-nomadic population who were imprisoned

512 Angelo Del Boca, Gli Italiani in Libia. 2. (Bari: Laterza, 1988), 189.
513 For the most detailed explanation of the “Youth Camps,” see Francesca Di Pasquale, La scuola per l’Impero. Politiche educative per gli arabi di Libia in epoca fascista (1922–1940) (Tesi di Dottorato in Storia, istituzioni e relazioni internazionali dei paesi extraeuropei, Università di Pisa, 207), 60-63.
514 Alessandro Alemanno, Pietro Badoglio: biografia per immagini (Cavallermaggiore (Cuneo): Gribaudo, 2002), 64.
in the concentration camps in Cyrenaica. These “Youth Camps,” which were organized within each of the concentration camps, were primarily designed to educate the many children in the camps who had been orphaned or abandoned due to the repression of the resistance and to indoctrinate them into the Fascist ideology. These “Youth Camps” provided a military education primarily to boys, and many of the children would later fight on behalf of the Italians during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War (1935-1936). These camps became the predecessor of the Gioventù Araba del Littorio (GAL), the Arab Youth of the Lictor, the indigenous Fascist youth movement in Libya created by Italo Balbo in 1935.

The first of these “Youth Camps” was constructed in the Sīdī Aḥmad al-Magrūn concentration camp in 1931 in order to educate orphaned or abandoned children between the ages of 6 and 15. After the opening the first camp, the Italians built additional “Youth Camps” in the concentration camps in Suluq, Tubruq, Ajdabiya, Marj (Barca), Shahhat (Cyrene) and Kufra along with other additional sports camps that educated a total of 2829 children by 1934, which Di Pasquale estimates represented 17 percent of the Libyan children who were enrolled in the Italian education system that year. In terms of boys’ education, boys received an hour of military education, an hour of physical education and as well as vocational and agricultural training as masons, blacksmiths, carpenters, repairmen, shoemakers, tailors and nurses. Sīdī Aḥmad al-Magrūn also had a Crafts School that taught carpentry, mechanical repair,

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515 Di Pasquale, La scuola per l’Impero, 60.
516 Gioventù Araba del Littorio (GAL) was established by governmental decree n. 8416 of 7 August 1935. For more information on the Gioventù Araba del Littorio, see Di Pasquale, La scuola per l’Impero, 188-196.
517 ACS, Carte Graziani, b. 11, fasc. 14, sottofasc. 9. Situazione generale della Colonia alla data odierna. 18 aprile 1934.
518 Di Pasquale, La scuola per l’Impero, 190.
blacksmithing, tin-smithing, shoemaking, and tailoring. Other boys were trained at the infirmary of the camp. At Suluq, the training was primarily agricultural, and each student was assigned a 100 square meter lot of land. The irony of this practice is that a large number of Libyan farmers in Cyrenaica would be displaced by the Italian program of demographic colonialism, the most spectacular being the so-called *Ventimila* in which 20,000 colonists were transported to Libya in a single convoy in 1938. The Italian authorities argued that “from this training ground of Italian culture and civil and military education, will arise the first nucleus of a new generation of Libyans.” In effect, the Italians were attempting to create a group of children removed from their nomadic and semi-nomadic roots who could become new farmers, skilled workers or soldiers in the Italian colony.

For the first time since Piccioli was appointed as the Superintendent of Education in 1922, the Italian administration moved away from associationism towards experimenting with a more authoritarian and militarized version of assimilationism for some male Libyans. The majority of the children educated at these camps were boys, highlighting the Italians’ emphasis on creating a new class of Libyans as well as the desire to indoctrinate young Libyans with Fascist ideology. Free of familial ties, they were the ideal targets for a more aggressive civilizing mission. More interventionist policies towards the local population would come to characterize Fascist education policy during the mid-1930s.

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521 ACS, Carte Graziani, b. 11, fasc. 14, sottofasc. 9. Situazione generale della Colonia alla data odierna. 18 aprile 1934, 30.
522 Cresti, *Non desiderare la terra d'altri*, 179.
523 ACS, Carte Graziani, b. 11, fasc. 14, sottofasc. 9. Situazione generale della Colonia alla data odierna. 18 aprile 1934, 30.
The Fascist government had no interest in indoctrinating girls and there was no female equivalent of the GAL. However, the Youth Camp at Suluq also educated girls. Along with 534 boys, the camp included 34 girls in addition to another 120 boys from the Auaghir tribe, who were residents of Suluq, all 688 of whom were educated at a cost of 500,000 lire annually. The camp had a girls’ school for sewing that during 1934 manufactured 4000 pairs of pants, 200 jackets, 400 shirts, 200 pairs of stockings and 48 pairs of wool socks, providing clothing to the camp. With the patriarchal authority of the family replaced by the Italian state, teaching girls to sew was in line with the Italian attitude of providing vocational training for girls that would allow them to provide economically for their families, or in this case for themselves. While the standard vocational schools provided some elementary education as well as skill training in female domestic arts befitting a middle-class education, the schools in the camps only trained girls to be seamstresses, relegating former nomadic and semi-nomadic girls to the urban proletariat. Whether any of these girls ever worked as seamstresses is unclear.

Fascist Intervention and Teaching Girls to be Nurses

With the final defeat of the Libyan resistance in 1934, the Italian authorities would have more resources to devote to education and the civilizing mission. This period marked both a more intrusive attitude towards intervening in local cultural practices and also an intensification...
of demographic colonialism which would result in the displacement of large sections of the Libyan population. At least in rhetoric, the Fascist government would break with the liberal policy of associationism that had guided the Italian education policy since 1922. Italo Balbo, the Fascist governor-general of Libya from 1934 to 1940, argued that “it is not for nothing that Italy, the mother of civilization, has always considered education to be a valuable instrument for the social elevation of the indigenous element” of Libya.\textsuperscript{526} Despite this shift, the gap between words and deeds was enormous, as with much of Fascist policy, and the administration was slow to make any fundamental changes to the education system for Libyans.

In 1935, there was some growth in vocational education for indigenous girls with the construction of two schools, one in Derna with a capacity of 300 and one in Misrata, where girls were trained in carpet weaving.\textsuperscript{527} Until 1935, Muslims were restricted to primary schools for boys and vocational schools for girls since the closing of middle schools for boys in 1928. Those boys wishing to continue their education in the Italian system could receive vocational training at the School of Arts and Crafts.\textsuperscript{528} In 1935, the \textit{Scuola Superiore Islamica}, which had originally been proposed in the Royal Decree of 1914, opened in Tripoli to provide a religious education in Libya so that students did not need to travel to Al-Azhar in Cairo where they might be exposed to dangerous ideas and therefore to keep the new religious elite under the control of the Italian state.\textsuperscript{529} The Royal Decree of 1936 expanded education to allow a smaller number of Muslims

\textsuperscript{526} Balbo, “La politica sociale fascista verso gli arabi della Libia,” 740.
\textsuperscript{527} Di Pasquale, \textit{La scuola per l’Impero}, 185.
\textsuperscript{528} F. Contini, “Storia delle istituzioni scolastiche della Libia,” 56.
\textsuperscript{529} Cresti, "Per Uno Studio delle "Elites" Politiche nella Libia Indipendente, 155.
who sought a European-style education to attend Italian middle schools. It also provided for the first professional training for girls, the Princess Maria Pia Boarding School in Tripoli.\footnote{Regio decreto-legge 24 luglio 1936, n. 1737 che Approvazione dell'ordinamento scolastico per le Colonie}

In 1936, the Italian authorities decided to offer the first opportunity for Libyan Muslim girls to receive training that provided for the possibility of a professional career. Italo Balbo, governor general of Libya, claimed:

A matter of particular delicacy, given the backwards mentality of the older generations and the ancient customs, is the instruction of women… In Tripoli, not without a long discussion within a meeting of Qadi and ‘Ulama’, it is possible to create an instruction, that will represent a remarkable step in the evolution of the Libyan Muslim woman: a boarding school…which will prepare and train indigenous girls in healthcare in a manner that will allow for its diffusion among the Muslim women the precepts of hygiene and will be indispensable for the civil elevation of the Arab family.\footnote{Balbo, “La politica sociale fascista verso gli arabi della Libia,” 742.}

Pursuant to this policy, the Italian government made a decision to open a school for training nurses called the Princess Maria School. The Italian authorities argued that the Princess Maria Pia School was:

So innovative as to appear almost revolutionary…In fact, it is known the level of inferiority that holds Muslim women in Libya, rooted in ancient customs, overtaken by the spirit of the new times, which attempts to exclude the Arab women from all professional activity. But the government clearly could not ignore the modern agitation bursting forth now in the Islamic world, including with regard to the life and education of women. Certainly, it could not admit that Libya remained foreign to this movement of civil evolution and social elevation. Instilling in Libyan Muslims a consciousness of the higher social function of the woman certainly represents a decisive step to achieve a higher degree of civilization by our subjects.\footnote{ASMAE, ASMAI, Africa III, b. 36, fasc. 1. Scuole Libia I. Fondo Volpi. “Le istituzioni scolastiche in Libia” (a stampa): note ad uso dei giornalisti, in occasione viaggio Dice inaugurazione litoranea, p 21.}

They went on to argue:

With the establishment of the new school, Marshal Balbo intended to call the Muslim woman to one of the noblest and highest tasks: to defend the health of the girls, fighting all forms of morbidity and protecting with attentive care the future of childhood. In this

great battle of humanity, which in Libya is so necessary, the Arab woman must not be absent. The school is set up and adequately prepared to provide as a civilizing mission and social defense health care in villages, in the Cabile… and even among the nomads, providing loving care to the sick, assistance to children and hygienic protection for all.533

While the Italians heralded the opening of the Princess Maria Pia as a revolutionary step towards improving the status of women in Libya, women had worked as midwives in the Middle East since the Middle Ages, and schools to educate women as medical professionals had existed in the region since the early nineteenth century. The first government educational institution exclusively for women in the Middle East was the School of Midwifery, founded in Egypt in 1831-32 under the authority of Muḥammad ‘Alī.534 Recruitment for the school was initially difficult due to the reluctance of many families to send their daughters to modern schools. This problem was initially solved by recruiting Sudanese and Abyssinian slaves from the Cairo slave market and enlisting ten orphaned Egyptian girls.535 The social instability created by Muḥammad ‘Alī’s extensive use of forced conscription and corvée labor increased the appeal of the School of Midwifery, since it provided monetary support for the students along with free housing, food, clothing, and tuition.536 In terms of higher education for women in the Middle East, the American University of Cairo admitted its first female student in 1928 and would have its first five female graduates in 1933, a full three years before the nursing school opened in Tripoli,

although female enrollment in universities in Egypt would remain low until the 1960s. A university would not be established in Libya until 1955.

The Princess Maria Pia school was established in the former villa of a Pasha in Zavia (probably Zāwiya) Street in Tripoli. Like the School of Agriculture, which had previously been established for boys, the Institute for Health Studies was a boarding school, with the obligation for students to reside in the adjoining college. The training of nurses was consistent with the ideas of the Fascist state that supported a growth of women’s employment in so-called “helping-professions,” including nursing and teaching. In Italy, nursing had traditionally been the provenance of nuns and aristocratic volunteers. In 1925, however, nursing was professionalized with the introduction of statutes regulating the training of the profession. Between 1925 and 1936, the number of nurses in Italy had risen substantially.

The nursing school was administered by the City of Tripoli, while the professional training and the technical-medical training was provided by the Directorate of Hospitals and the Superintendent of Schools provided general supervision. Technical-medical training included anatomy and physiology, hygiene, nutrition, and practical care of patients, which was taught by doctors at the Hospital. The cultural curriculum was taught at a local school by an Italian and a Muslim instructor. The curriculum for the school included two courses: one preparatory and one professional. The preparatory training, which ended at the age of fourteen years, placed a strong emphasis on instilling Western cultural values through home economics and physical education.

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537 Donald M. Reid, Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 106.
539 Di Pasquale, La scuola per l’Impero, 186.
After completing the preparatory training, the students began a two-year course of professional training, assuming that they were deemed to know a sufficient amount of Italian and to be able to complete such a course. The students could also attend local public middle schools, especially R. Istituto Magistrale, and one student enrolled in the nursing program after completing the admission exam.

In January 1936, 16 girls enrolled in the nursing school, 2 of whom were from outside of the colony. The enrollment grew to 25 the following year. By 1940, the school educated 166 female Arab students, 5 of whom were from outside of the colony. It was the authorities’ hope that in time the girls would be trained to be competent assistants, qualified in first aid and medical techniques that would contribute to the “health of the race.”541 The Italians primarily highlighted the need for medical intervention in the domestic realm, which could not be entered by male colonial doctors. In effect, the Italians were trying to create a new medicalized domestic space that centered on civilizing the Libyan family through better hygiene. This was achieved by reforming local customs through the control of female bodies with modern medicine. The intervention of colonial governments and missionaries into female medicine was not unique to the Italians. The Medical Imperialism of the British in Sudan focused on colonial health and education programs and particularly on the practice of female genital cutting (FGC) and midwife practices, seeking to “reform individual dispositions” in order to prevent a decline in birth rates among the Sudanese Arab population in order to provide labor for the colonial economy.542

At the end of Italian rule in Libya, there were a total of 1,163 girls being educated in fourteen vocational schools in Libya, with locations in Tripoli, Souq al Juma’a, Tajura, Zanzur, Agelat, Zuara, Ghariyan, Tigrinna, Mizda in the region of Tripolitania; Misrata, Homs and Zliten in the region of Misrata; along with Derna and Benghazi in 1940. There were no girls’ schools in the desert regions of Libya or in Fezzan. In spite of the growth of vocational training during Italian rule, with schools operating in fifteen of the largest cities in Libya, the Italians never opened regular academic elementary schools or middle or secondary educational institutions for girls during the period of their rule, consistently blaming the conservativism of the local population and its opposition to education for not providing further educational opportunities for girls and women.

The End of Italian Rule and the British Occupation

In June 1940, Italy entered the Second World War on the side of the Axis Powers. The state of emergency in Libya declared in 1940, followed by the outbreak of open hostilities, impacted the operation of the education system. As early as 1940, many civilians, including 12 thousand Italian children between the age of 6 and 14, were evacuated from North Africa back to Italy on navi bianche (white ships) operated by the Red Cross. On January 15, 1941, government schools in Cyrenaica were closed, and those in Tripolitania were closed on February

545 Contini, “Storia delle istituzioni scolastiche della Libia,” 76.
11 of the same year.\footnote{Contini, “Storia delle istituzioni scolastiche della Libia,” 76.} During the 1941-42 academic year, the Italian education system remained shuttered. The eventual military defeat of Italy in 1943 would mark the end of the Fascist regime in Libya and by extension Italian control over the education of the local population.

After the collapse of the Italian regime in Libya, most of Libya fell under British administration, while Fezzan was placed under French rule. The British-French administration divided the Libyan education system into three separate sections. The French in Fezzan implemented the French-Tunisian curriculum while the British implemented the Egyptian curriculum in Cyrenaica and the curriculum from British Mandate Palestine in Tripolitania. After the Libyan population opposed the lack of a uniform education systems under British administration, the British adopted the Egyptian system for all of Libya under their administration.\footnote{Amal Obeidi, \textit{Political Culture in Libya} (Richmond, Surrey [England]: Curzon, 2001), 36.} Under the British administration, schools reopened for the 1943-1944 academic year in October 1943. Due to the agricultural and pastoral nature of the Libyan economy, particularly in Cyrenaica, the British authorities argued that there was “still time to save it from the disaster which has overtaken other Arab countries…developing secondary education mainly on academic lines.”\footnote{TNA, FO 1015/481, Report on Visit to Cyrenaica by Dr. A E. Morgan, Educational Controller, British Council, 7-13 April 1950, p 2.} Therefore, secondary education should not be “regarded only for clean-handed jobs.”\footnote{TNA, FO 1015/481, Report on Visit to Cyrenaica by Dr. A E. Morgan, Educational Controller, British Council, 7-13 April 1950, p 3.}

There were some modest improvements in women’s education under the British administration but the British, like the Italians before them, viewed the primary goal of women’s
education as “preparation of enlightened wives and mothers.” They expressed sentiments consistent with the ideas of women as “Mothers of the Nation,” arguing that “the home has a greater educational influence than the school, and until mothers are educated the school education of boys is to a considerable extent frustrated.” While the British administration cited the challenges of educating girls in Libya, they nonetheless acknowledged that there was an increase in the desire of Libyan families to send their daughters to school, especially in the coastal cities, where boys’ education had made inroads. Of the fourteen schools for girls operating in 1940, nine reopened under the British occupation, educating 928 pupils in reading, writing, arithmetic, the Qur’an and practical skills. In April 1944, the British appointed the wife of an army officer who had taught in Egypt to oversee girls’ education. Under the Italian administration, no schools were headed by Arabs. Ḥamīda al-ʿUniayzī was appointed the first Libyan director of a girls’ school, the Madrasat al-Amīra, under the British administration.

In addition to the changes implemented at the beginning of the British occupation, Dr. A. E. Morgan from the British Council visited Cyrenaica in 1950 to evaluate the educational system. He made additional recommendations for the furthering of girls’ education, including the introduction of leisure activities for adolescent girls. Due to the lack of qualified local teachers

552 TNA, FO 1015/566, Educational Facilities in Tripolitania, Improvements in Libyan Education in Tripolitania, 27 February 1950, 3.
555 Dr. A E. Morgan also advocated leisure activities for adolescent boys such as Scouting, study groups for adult education of a simple character in the fields of social and institutional organizations, translation of appropriate literature in Arabic, development of a system of pupil-teacher training, training college for teachers, and training teachers who spoke English in the
he argued that teachers should be brought from other Arab countries and that qualified teachers should be sent to Egypt for additional training, viewing this as a temporary solution, since Libya would need to be able to staff its own educational services.\footnote{TNA, FO 1015/481, Report on Visit to Cyrenaica by Dr. A. E. Morgan, Educational Controller, British Council, 7-13 April 1950, p 3-8.} As part of the introduction of the Egyptian curriculum, the British added English in place of Italian as the foreign language of instruction. At the center of the proposed reforms was the improvement in the level of instruction in primary schools through the opening of a Teachers Training College in Tripoli in the fall of 1950 with one class to train female teachers, attended by 30 girls, which was taught by three teachers and principal from abroad.\footnote{TNA, FO 1015/566, Educational Facilities in Tripolitania, Improvements in Libyan Education in Tripolitania, 27 February 1950, 3.} Ten female teachers also attended a summer program in Benghazi to train local teachers in English in 1950.\footnote{TNA, FO 1015/481, Letter from Dr. A. E. Morgan, The British Council to Brigadier J.P Benoy, Foreign Office Administration of African Territories, 12 June 1950.}

In January 1951, the Italians took back control and financial responsibility for the Italian secondary schools in Libya. The British administration continued to pay the salaries of the personnel until March 1951. The previous policy of discrimination was ended and “pupils of any nationality, who possess the prescribed qualification for Italian students” were admitted to the school.\footnote{TNA, FO 1015/843. Letter to the sig. Travere Robert Blackley, C.B.E. Amministratore Capo della British Administration, Tripolitania, Tripoli. 9 January 1951.} At the time, approximately 350 Arabs and Berbers and 2,200 Jews were enrolled in Italian schools.\footnote{TNA, FO 1015/843, Letter to the Dept. of Civil Administration from the Headquarters of the British Administration, Tripolitania, 22 February 1951} The opening of any additional schools in Tripolitania was subject to the
approval of the British administration. Arab schools remained under the control of the Ministry of Education in Tripoli, which was overseen by the British administration. The transfer of Italian primary schools was a more delicate matter due to the large number of facilities involved, but Italian elementary schools were eventually transferred in September 1951.

The Legacy of Women’s Education under Italian Colonial Rule

It is difficult to assess the lasting impact of Italian schools on women in Libya. When asked about girls’ education during the colonial period, women from rural areas often claimed that it did not exist. Sadīna ʿAbd al-Sitār Maʿayūf, who was born in al-ʿAwayliyya in 1919, remembered that:

Education was not good, and Italian was the language that they studied, it being the official language and there were no girls who studied at that time. As for boys, there were those who were able to continue their studies and some who could not. This depended on circumstances, for example, his father helps in his tasks, being supportive of him. Education in the end was only at the primary level and they did not study Arabic.

It is of course true that the women interviewed by the Libyan Studies Center were largely from rural areas and often from Bedouin families and therefore represented the least likely section of the population to have attended Italian schools during the colonial period, with the exception of orphaned or abandoned children who attended “Youth Camps” in the concentration camps. However, these women were aware of the existence of boys’ schools. In contrast, their complete

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562 TNA, FO 1015/843. Minutes. Italian Primary Schools. 9 March 1951.
563 TNA, FO 1015/843. Minutes. 13 April 1951.
564 TNA, FO 1015/843. Draft Agreement for the handing over of the Italian Primary Schools in Tripolitania to the Italian government.
lack of knowledge that girls’ schools even existed during the colonial period points to the lack of influence of these schools in the larger Libyan society.

At the end of Italian rule, there were 107 Italian elementary and vocational schools reserved for Muslims, educating just over 10,000 students. Out of a population of approximately 800,000, about 1.2 percent of the population attended Italian-sponsored schools and another 1.6 percent attended local indigenous schools, while the government spent an average of 0.16 Lira per student. The number of students who received a secondary education, either through one of the madrasas in Libya or through an Italian school, was probably fewer than 200, although exact numbers are difficult to ascertain. Fewer than twenty students had obtained diplomas from Italian universities throughout the colonial period; another twenty were still attending Italian universities during the Second World War. At independence, 91% of the Libyan population was illiterate. This compares to a city like Cairo, in which as much as a third of the population was literate during the eighteenth century.

The statistics are even more stark for girls’ education. If we assume that women made up approximately 50 percent of the Libyan population, only a quarter of one percent of women received an education through the Italian system, as compared to 2.4 percent of the male population. At independence, less than one percent of the women in Libya were literate. The Princess Maria Pia School was the only school for female medical professionals in the entire country. The first women did not receive high school diplomas until the 1950s, one of the first

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566 TNA FO 1015/566 Educational Facilities in Tripolitania, Improvements in Libyan Education in Tripolitania, 27 February 1950, 2.
567 Cresti, “Per Uno Studio delle "Elites" Politiche nella Libia Indipendente,” 156.
569 Yousef, Composing Egypt, 28.
570 St. John, Historical Dictionary of Libya, 92.
being Khadija Şadqī 'Abd al-Qādir in 1956, who became a well-known Libyan writer. This means that Libya had one of the least educated populaces in the entire Middle East and North Africa upon independence.

The life of Khadija al-Jahmī provides some insight into the lasting effects of girls’ education under Italian rule. She attended one of the vocational schools for girls under Italian rule and then continued her education under private tutors during the colonial period. With few other options, she had wanted to attend the Princess Maria Pia School when it opened in Tripoli in 1936 but her mother refused. During the British occupation, she taught at the school run by Ḥamīda al-'Unayzī. After Libyan independence, she continued her secondary education at Madrasat ‘Aābidīn al-Layliyya in Egypt, graduating in 1956. Along with Ḥamīda bint ṬAmīr, she became one of the first female radio broadcasters and went on to found a number of women’s publications in Libya. Due to the fact that she had a father dedicated to her education and to her tenacious desire to continue her own schooling, Khadija took advantage of the educational opportunities available in Libya during her childhood despite their inherent limitations. There are a probably a small number of less prominent examples of women who went through the Italian education system, but this system was generally inferior to the educational options that had existed prior to Italian rule. The fact that Khadija worked with Ḥamīda al-‘Anīzī, who was herself a product of the Ottoman education system and proponent of women’s literacy, was also probably central to her intellectual development, as was the time that she spent in Cairo. In fact, both of the earliest advocates of women’s rights and literacy in Libya,

571 Diana, La letteratura della Libia, 138.
572 Usṭā, Anā Khadijah al-Jahmī, 102.
574 ṬAmīr, Khadijah al-Jahmī, 28.
educator Ḥamīda al-ʿAnīzī and writer Zaʾīma Sulaymān al-Bārūnī, were products of the Ottoman education system and not the Italian. Women who were among the next generation of women writers and activists, Rabāb Adham, Mājida al-Mabrūk and Jamīla al-Izmīrlī were educated after independence in Lebanon or Syria before returning to Libya.⁵⁷⁵

Lacking both the political authority of the Ottomans or the political will to continue the Ottoman reforms, the Italians left little lasting influence on the development of women’s education, representing instead a rupture in these previous reform efforts. Many Libyans opposed the education of their daughters in institutions run by the Italian administration as an outside colonizing, Christian power, and the Italians were unwilling to challenge these conservative elements, especially when the colony stood on such unstable ground. At the same time, their attempts to create a unified, centralized system resulted in the destruction of many aspects of the pluralistic system that had existed before colonial rule, while robbing women of the greatest champion for women’s education in the region at the time, the Ottoman Empire. This new system created by the Italians was based on strict segregation between Arab and Berber Muslims and European children at all levels until the 1930s.

It was only after the Italians had secured their military control of the colony with the defeat of the resistance did they make any attempts to expand girls’ education in any way. Between 1936 and 1943 there were some modest gains in the scope of women’s education but few opportunities for further advancement beyond training as a nurse. At the end of colonial rule, there were fourteen Scuole femminili di lavoro e di educazione operating in Libya along with the Princess Maria Pia Nursing School, educating just over a thousand girls, compared with the approximately 175 girls that attended Ottoman schools by Italian estimates. There are no

⁵⁷⁵ Diana, La letteratura della Libia, 138.
statistics on attendance in other indigenous schools from the precolonial period. The major
difference between the two eras is that while the Italians limited education to vocational training,
the Ottomans operated academic schools for girls starting in the 1890s, including two upper level
elementary schools as well as a middle school. Under the Ottoman system, girls also had the
opportunity to continue their education in Istanbul, while no Libyan girls would be sent abroad
under the Italian system. It was only after the colonial period that Libyan girls would find the
opportunity to advance their education beyond the most basic level and seek further educational
opportunities outside the country.

The Italians took the most conservative approach to women’s education possible, an
approach shared by other colonial powers, including the French in Morocco. Despite claiming
that education was part of the “moral conquest” of Libya, they viewed the risk to be too great
while the gains to be insufficient to warrant any policy that would antagonize the conservative
male Libyan population. Opportunities for women were sacrificed in the name of political
expediency and respect for local custom. In the end, colonial regimes, especially those that were
not established until the twentieth century, did little to improve the status of women in Middle
Eastern countries and many times undermined those indigenous or local initiatives that already
existed.

A critique of women’s exclusion from the “moral conquest” of Libya raises broader
questions about whether a more aggressively modernizing approach would have been salutary or
whether that would merely have constituted a more intrusive and disruptive form of
imperialism. Much of the Libyan population faced the arrival of capitalist markets, bureaucracy,
science and technology and mass communication without experiencing the promise of
emancipation from old forms of domination or gaining access to any new opportunities. Rather,
new forms of domination simply overlapped with existing ones. Even the colony's greatest single symbol of modernity, the *Litoranea Balbo* or coastal highway, like the improvements that were made to other roads, were, as Laleh Khalili argues, part of a larger project to impose regimes of security and economic dominance on local populations.\(^{576}\) For most Libyans, the symbol of Italian modernity was the tank and prison cell rather than the pen and classroom. For middle and upper-class women, greater levels of education coupled with economic growth might have provided the possibility of women’s entrance into the public sphere and some economic independence, which could have lessened the traditional patriarchal control of male family members, whether they be husbands, fathers or brothers. Instead, the Italian state preserved traditional forms of patriarchy while introducing new forms of authoritarian modern control.

Any discussion of the salutatory nature of modern institutions under colonialism raise the issue of the “lost opportunity” brought about by the failure of a colonial governments to grant greater rights or equal status to the indigenous population. The most famous example of this phenomenon is the inadequacy of the Blum-Viollette proposal (named for French premier Léon Blum and Maurice Viollette, the former governor-general of Algeria) introduced by the French Popular Front government in 1936, which granted a minority of French Algerian full French citizenship while allowing them to remain subject to Muslim customary law.\(^{577}\) The proposal never passed the Chamber of Deputies due to opposition from the settler population of French-ruled Algeria, but even if it had, it would have failed to do away with the settler regime of minority rule. James McDougall argues that these reforms, which would have elevated the


contradiction inherent in French rule, did not simply represent a “missed opportunity” but instead “a structural impossibility.” 578 While the Italian colonial regime could have certainly introduced a more aggressively modernizing approach, the nature of colonialism, which was founded on minority rule, prevented them from establishing an education system based on full equality between the local population and the European settlers.

Chapter 3: The Abandoned, the Manumitted and the Mobile: Girls’ Missionary Education in Colonial Libya

In 1919, a Bedouin girl of about ten years of age, who had been educated in the missionary school for Bedouin children in the concentration camp outside of Tripoli was baptized by the Franciscan Sisters as a Christian. The Sisters claimed that, as she lay dying in a civilian hospital, she asked to become a Christian, wanting to join the religion of her teacher. Eight days later she passed away. She was one of many, particularly dispossessed, children to come in contact with the Italian civilizing mission through Christian religious institutions run by Catholic women. Catholic missionary organizations educated both indigenous and European children from the beginning of the nineteenth century and continuing into the colonial period as well as after Libyan independence. Evaluating the shifts in colonial and church policies that affected the access of Libyan girls, whether Jewish, Arab, Berber or black, to education during the course of Italian colonial rule (1911-1943) and later British military administration (1943-1951), this chapter argues that the female Catholic teaching congregations made significant contributions to the colonial educational project.

Because the Ottoman authorities refused to allow direct proselytizing among the Muslim population of the empire, missionaries instead turned to education prior to Italian rule. Missionary schools in many cities were the only academic educational opportunities available to

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579 ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 634, Segue Rub. n° 141/1919, Circa una eventuale domanda delle Suore Missionarie Francescane d'Egitto per aprire una case e Scuola a Zuara (1918)
girls, regardless of religious faith, and some elite Muslim and Jewish girls attended classes alongside members of the small creole European and crypto-European community, especially before the establishment of Ottoman schools. Missionaries viewed their work in a holistic manner as a process of civilizing those in need of moral uplift through education while saving souls. Despite this approach, intractable conflicts developed between these two goals during the colonial period. After the Italian invasion in 1911, female religious orders would increasingly shift their activities to bring them in line with the goals of the colonial state. They transitioned from operating integrated elementary schools for girls to educating the most indigent sections of Libyan society, such as abandoned children, Bedouins and manumitted slaves, who were more likely to embrace Christianity. Many other missionary schools, especially in major cities, adopted the segregated educational system supported by the colonial state, especially after 1920, when they began focusing on the Italian settler population rather than on proselytizing the indigenous population. This segregated missionary education provided to indigenous girls was in many cases inferior to even the state-sponsored professional schools, focusing almost exclusively on domestic skills and the study of the Qurʾan.

Despite the perception of the civilizing mission as a secular project, Christian religious institutions, including female religious orders, helped shape the configuration of the European colonial project. Rather than a purely secular project, colonialism was the product of

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negotiations between secular and religious authorities and, correspondingly, the civilizing mission was neither entirely secular nor entirely religious. In the Libyan territories, Italian missionaries proclaimed their support for the colonial project but often ran into conflicts with Italian colonial officials on the ground, especially during the first decade of colonial rule. During the 1920s, when the Italian administration moved away from collaborating with local elites and missionaries turned their attentions towards the settler population, these conflicts would begin to dissipate.

As with other aspects of colonial rule, ideals always ran into the particularities of individual colonial situations. Missionary projects were no different. As Heather Sharkey argued, the activities of missionaries produced vastly different responses and consequences in different parts of the world. Under some circumstances, individuals embraced Christianity and incorporated their own cultural traditions, while at other times and in other places missionary activities served to galvanize anti-colonial nationalists. Even within the same colonial context, differences in gender, status, ethnicity, or religion changed the impact of missionary activities. Di Pasquale argued that the phenomenon of Muslims enrolling in Catholic schools in the Libyan territories had two salient features. During the colonial period, Catholic schools provided


582 Daughton, *An Empire Divided*, 8.
educational opportunities at a higher level than the guaranteed education from government schools for Arabs. Missionary schools were also a space of intermixing between Muslim students and Italian students, which was opposed to the official Italian educational policy for Arabs and Berbers. While both of these points are salient for boys’ education, the study of girls’ education reveals the heterogeneity of colonial rule, since girls’ education did not always provide education at a higher level than state-sponsored schools or provide opportunities for intermixing between the local population and Europeans.

There are a number of challenges to writing about missionary education in colonial Libya, and the presence of Muslims, including Muslim girls, in these institutions is an aspect of the history of education in Libya that has been little studied. There has been some recent interest in the use of missionary archives for the study of Italian colonialism. Vittorio Ianari wrote on the role of the Catholic Church in the Libyan territories, drawing on the archives of the Ordine dei Frati Minori Lombardi and the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide as well as Italian state archives, but he fails to place religious politics within the larger framework of Italian colonial history. Eileen Ryan’s excellent unpublished thesis, *Italy and the Sanusiyya: Negotiating Authority in Colonial Libya, 1911-1931*, addresses the relationship between the Franciscan mission, the Sanūsī order and the colonial state but does not focus on education in particular. Francesca Di Pasquale’s unpublished thesis, *La scuola per l’Impero: Politiche educative per gli arabi di Libia in epoca fascista (1922–1940)* mentions missionary education of girls in passing.

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but she is hindered in drawing any substantial conclusions by her reliance on the archives of the \textit{Ordine dei Frati Minori Lombardi}, which lacks many documents about female religious orders for the colonial period.  

Despite this valuable work utilizing missionary archives, missionaries remain largely confined to the margins of our understanding of Italian colonial rule.

While there has been an expansion of literature related to missionaries and empire in general, the absence of attention on the question of female religious organizations’ relationship to colonialism is not unique to the Italian Empire. In French historiography, Sarah Curtis argues that literature on the French Empire has largely “neglected women whose imperial motivations have been primarily religious in origin; most of those individuals were Catholic nuns, founders or members of religious orders dedicated (in whole or in part) to overseas evangelization, with a small subset of French Protestant women missionaries.” These individuals appear invisible in women’s history due to their religious identities and invisible in religious history because of gender. In Italian historiography, where there are only a handful of studies utilizing missionary documents at all, female missionaries are invisible to the point that I was unable to find a single article on female missionary activities in the Italian Empire in any language.

Unlike male religious orders, many female religious missions do not grant researchers access to their rich private archives, or allow only limited access. Due to these limitations, this chapter draws primarily on the documents of religious institutions and state institutions that oversaw missionary activities or interacted with female orders in Libya: the \textit{Sacra Congregatio}

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\item 587 Francesca Di Pasquale, \textit{La scuola per l'Impero. Politiche educative per gli arabi di Libia in epoca fascista (1922–1940)} (Tesi di Dottorato in Storia, istituzioni e relazioni internazionali dei paesi extraeuropei, Università di Pisa, 2007).
\item 589 Curtis, “The Double Invisibility of Missionary Sisters,” 135.
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de Propaganda Fide (Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) at the Vatican, the Associazione Nazionale per Soccorrere i Missionari Italiani (The National Association for Assistance to Italian Missionaries), Ordine dei Frati Minori Lombardi (Order of Friars Minor of Lombardi also known as the Franciscans) in Milan and the Ministero Africa italiana (Ministry of Italian Africa), whose documents are now housed at the Ministeri di Affari Esteri (Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome). While these archives are valuable sources, they tend to house correspondence between missionary houses abroad and the religious institutions or state institutions in Italy that focus on descriptions of their overall work, administration, yearly reports and budgets rather than impressions and day-to-day work that might be found in correspondences with the motherhouse. This allows for an overview of missionary activities but makes drawing any conclusions about the day-to-day operations of schools in Libya almost impossible.

I did have the privilege of visiting the private archives of the Suore francescane Missionarie d'Egitto and Suore francescane Missionarie di Maria in Rome. Unfortunately, both of their holdings that are open to researchers are somewhat limited and often reproduce documents located in other archives. What exactly became of the rest of their archives from the colonial period remains unclear. It seems that many documents were destroyed in aerial bombardments during the Second World War or lost when the Libyan government expelled missionaries from Libya in 1970. Other documents may simply have been misplaced or fallen victim to the ravages of time.

The introduction of religious questions allows for the introduction of new actors in the study of Italian colonialism. Rather than analyzing colonial rule as primarily an interaction between the colonial administration and colonized men, the role of women comes to the
forefront of this study: both missionary sisters and colonized women. Curtis argues that documents related to missionary activities often leave the impression that women were mere auxiliaries to male clergy, despite the fact that they were active agents in the colonial sphere. Instead, they formed communities, established schools, orphanages and hospitals, managed money and stood up to lay and religious authorities. Any discussion of colonial education and the civilizing mission is incomplete without taking into account the role of religious women in their configurations.

While the voices of women and girls are almost completely absent from official archival documents of the Italian state, missionary organizations interacted daily with indigenous girls. They sought to manage and shape gender roles and the domestic sphere of indigenous women through education. Their correspondences offer glimpses into the way in which indigenous women lived their lives during the first half of the twentieth century and the way Italian rule affected the lives of at least some Libyan women. The limitations of the sources are that the experiences of Libyan girls are mediated through the views and expectations of the missionaries themselves. By evaluating missionary policies, I challenge the idea of a universal feminine (Libyan) experience of colonialism. In a region as diverse as Libya, divided by language, ethnicity, and religion, elite Libyan girls from major cities had a substantially different interaction with the missionary education system than did manumitted slaves or Bedouin girls confined to concentration camps outside of Tripoli.

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Missionary Education in Ottoman Libya

The first Italian education in Ottoman Libya predated formal Italian colonialism by more than a century.\(^{591}\) During the nineteenth century, missionary activity expanded across the globe but the Ottoman Empire remained a central focus of evangelization efforts, with twelve missionary orders operating in the empire by 1885.\(^{592}\) The Ottoman policy against proselytizing among the Muslim population of the empire resulted in missionaries adopting a model based on charity work, including education, which put missionary women at the center of activities abroad. These women’s ability to interact with the local population and with indigenous women in particular made them important agents of the Catholic mission.\(^{593}\)

Both French and Italian Franciscan missionaries had promoted educational activity in Tripoli since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Having arrived in Tripoli as early as the seventeenth century to ransom and provide for the spiritual needs of Christian captives of Barbary piracy in the region,\(^{594}\) the Franciscans opened their first boys’ school in the city in 1810. At its inception, the institute taught Italian, arithmetic and religious instruction to the small European population of Tripoli.\(^ {595}\) Later, a friar by the name of Father Venanzio from San Venanzio championed the expansion of the education system to include girls. The Soeurs du

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\(^{592}\) Curtis, “Charity Begins Abroad,” 89-91.

\(^{593}\) Curtis, “Charity Begins Abroad,” 93.


Bon-Pasteur (Sisters of the Good Shepherd) founded the new women's section in 1846. In addition, they were also interested in the release of *fezzanesi* girls (girls of mixed or hybrid heritage) from servitude, but they abandoned this endeavor when their efforts proved fruitless. The school, which taught in Italian, was attended by about sixty pupils from the three major religious communities in Tripoli: Christians, Muslims and Jews. In addition to academic subjects, the school added vocational training. Until the founding of the Ottoman school system for girls in 1895, missionary education was the only academic education, besides private tutoring, available to Muslim women in Ottoman Libya.

The orders that would come to dominate girls’ education in Libya were the *Suore del San Giuseppe dell’Apparizione*, known as the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition or the *Sœurs de Saint Joseph de l'Apparition* in French, and the *Suore francescane Missionarie d'Egitto*, or the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Egypt. These institutions had their origins in changes in the Catholic Church during the first half of the nineteenth century that sought to bring a universalizing Christian message overseas. As modernizing European states replaced religious institutions in a number of areas of social life including education over the century, religious institutions began to identify opportunities abroad. In addition, European governments supported missionary activities in order to increase their political and economic influence in the Middle

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596 The Soeurs du Bon-Pasteur also operated schools for girls in Algeria and Egypt, starting in the 1840s. Baron, *The Orphan Scandal*, 29; Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 128.
600 Festa, *La scuola italiana e l'opera di conquista morale della Libia*, 8.
Both the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Franciscan Sisters focused a significant amount of their attention on work in the northern part of Africa, in Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt. In fact, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Egypt were founded as a mission to provide education to poor girls in the Middle East.

St. Emily de Vialar, born in 1797 to an elite family, founded the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition in Gaillac, France, in 1832. The purpose of the order was the education of the poor as well as healthcare and other charitable works. In 1835, Vialar and three sisters from the Sisters of St. Joseph set sail for Algeria at the invitation of its municipal council to provide nursing services in the new colony. Their work expanded to include an infirmary, a pharmacy, three girls’ primary schools, which accepted Jewish and Muslim pupils, a nursery school, an orphanage and a refuge for prostitutes. Disagreements between Vialar and the then recently-appointed bishop of Algiers, Antoine-Adolphe Dupuch, resulted in the Sisters of St. Joseph being expelled from Algeria in 1842. Most of the sisters returned to Gaillac but some moved their work to Tunis. In 1854, Sisters of St. Joseph continued the educational activities of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who left Libya that year. They had seven members permanently located in Tripoli. Next to the school, they opened a hospital for the European and local population.

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602 Curtis, “Charity Begins Abroad,” 91.
603 Curtis, Civilizing Habits, 102-04.
604 Curtis, Civilizing Habits, 111.
606 Frati Minori, Busta 8, Documenti Riguardanti Le Suore Giuseppine 1873-1913, Convenzione stipulata tra la Missione Apostolica di Tripoli di Barberia e l'istituto della Congregazione delle Suore di S. Giuseppe dell'Apparizione a fine di promuovere e rendere vieppiù solido il Monastero già esistente a Tripoli, 25 agosto 1868.
607 Andrea Festa, La scuola italiana e l'opera di conquista morale della Libia, 8.
1867, the Sisters of St. Joseph opened an additional girls’ school in Benghazi. By 1879, they operated two schools in Benghazi. They were to become the sole female order in Libya for almost forty years.

The Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Egypt was founded by Maria Caterina Troiani in Cairo in 1868. Born Costanza Troiani in Giuliano di Roma, Italy in 1813 and orphaned early in life, she was educated by the Franciscan Sisters of Charity of Saint Claire in Ferentino. She took her vows in the same order at age 16 in 1829 and assumed the name Sister Maria Caterina of St. Rose of Viterbo. In 1852, the Apostolic Vicar of Egypt requested that a Franciscan mission be opened in Cairo in order to provide education for girls. In August 1859, she departed for Cairo along with four other Sisters of Charity to open a new convent in Cairo. In 1868, an agreement between the Propaganda Fide and the Franciscans created a new independent institution called the Terziarie Francescane del Cairo, the Third Order of Saint Francis of Cairo. It was later renamed the Suore francescane Missionarie d’Egitto, only to be changed to the Suore Francescane Missionarie del Cuore Immacolato di Maria (Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary) in 1950. In 1903, the Apostolic prefect of Tripoli, Padre Giuseppe Bevilacqua, requested the assistance of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Egypt. They arrived in Libya with experience providing education and other charitable activities in Cairo for forty years.

Sisters of St. Joseph also provided medical assistance to Arab women in the city of Bengasi. Associazione. Nazionale per soccorrere i Missionari italiani, Busta 20/B Libia – Bengasi, Scuola femminile della Missione francescana diretta dalle suore di S. Giuseppe dell’Appa, Bengasi, 22-2-1911


Curtis, Civilizing Habits, 140.


An apostolic prefect is a priest who oversees an apostolic prefecture, a missionary area where the Catholic Church is not sufficiently established to have formed a diocese.
years. They opened three additional schools in Tripoli, Derna and Homs as well as an orphanage in Tripoli. Both the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Franciscan Sisters would continue to work in the sphere of education during the period of Italian colonialism in Libya.

At the end of the nineteenth century, when the first schools operated by the Italian government were built in Tripoli, the educational activities of private Catholic schools were already well-established. The subject of girls’ education in state-sponsored schools was addressed in the previous chapter. The curriculum called for six daily hours of courses in French and Arabic, as well as Italian. Due to the growing number of pupils in the missionary schools, Father Angelo S. Agata, a Franciscan prefect, began looking for a religious order to which to entrust the management of the schools. It had grown too expensive to be managed by the Franciscan orders, which were primarily engaged in providing for the spiritual needs and religious duties of the growing Christian community in Tripoli rather than in educational activities. In 1881, Marianists took over the management of the institutions that had been founded by the Franciscans in Tripoli to educate boys. Girls’ education remained in the hands of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Franciscan Sisters. In 1907, the Franciscans opened the first school for the handicapped, dedicated to teaching the deaf and the disabled in general. The Marianists abandoned boys’ education in 1910 and were replaced two years later by the Franciscans. In addition, the two Italian elementary schools operated by the Ministry of

615 The Society of Mary, a Roman Catholic Marian Society, is a congregation of Catholic men called Marianists or Marianist Brothers and Priests, founded in France in 1817 by William Joseph Caminade.
Foreign Affairs were in many ways Catholic schools subsidized by Italian and French Catholic Associations including the National Association for Assistance to Italian Missionaries, which been founded in Florence in 1886 with the explicit goal of spreading of the Italian language and culture abroad.\footnote{Salvatore Romano, \textit{Istituzioni scolastiche italiane a Tripoli di Barberia: comunicazione ai soci del Comitato palermitano della Dante Alighieri} (Palermo: Scuola tip. "Boccone del povero", 1906), 16; O. Confessore, “L'Associazione nazionale per soccorrere i missionari cattolici italiani tra spinte «civilizzatrici» e interesse migratorio” in Scalabrini tra vecchio e nuovo mondo: atti del Convegno storico internazionale (Piacenza, 3-5 dicembre 1987). Eds. G. Rosoli (Roma: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 1989), 519.}

The primary purpose of the Franciscan girls’ schools was not “only to instruct Catholic girls in the Italian and French languages and womanly work, but also provide them with a wise religious-moral education, which would offer them guidance and support for the life to come.”\footnote{Frati Minori, Busta 8, Documenti Riguardanti Le Suore Guiseppine 1873-1913, Regolamento per la Scuola Femminile della Missione Francescana in Tripoli di Barberia (o Bengasi in Cirenaica)
Frati Minori, Busta 8, Documenti Riguardanti Le Suore Giuseppine 1873-1913, Regolamento per la Scuola Femminile della Missione Francescana in Tripoli di Barberia (o Bengasi in Cirenaica). 24 luglio 1909.}

However, Catholic schools admitted not only Catholic children, but also non-Catholics, Jews and Muslims, and schools had children from families of Arab notables and Turkish dignitaries as well as members of the creole European community including Greek, Spanish, Maltese and French speakers.\footnote{Romano, \textit{Istituzioni scolastiche italiane a Tripoli di Barberia}, 16.}

The Mother Superior of the Sister of Saint Joseph or director of the school was required to present to the Prefect of the Franciscan Mission the list of the applications received in order to have him clear the admission of non-Catholic girls, whether they be Greek, Jewish or Turkish.\footnote{Frati Minori, Busta 8, Documenti Riguardanti Le Suore Giuseppine 1873-1913, Regolamento per la Scuola Femminile della Missione Francescana in Tripoli di Barberia (o Bengasi in Cirenaica). 24 luglio 1909.}

In the girls’ school of the mission, in addition to teaching the girls “womanly work,” the students received instruction in religious subjects, Italian and French, sacred and secular history, geography, arithmetic, music, knowledge of physical and natural

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617 Frati Minori, Busta 8, Documenti Riguardanti Le Suore Guiseppine 1873-1913, Regolamento per la Scuola Femminile della Missione Francescana in Tripoli di Barberia (o Bengasi in Cirenaica)
618 Romano, \textit{Istituzioni scolastiche italiane a Tripoli di Barberia}, 16.
619 Frati Minori, Busta 8, Documenti Riguardanti Le Suore Giuseppine 1873-1913, Regolamento per la Scuola Femminile della Missione Francescana in Tripoli di Barberia (o Bengasi in Cirenaica). 24 luglio 1909.}

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sciences, hygiene, home economics, and general notions of morality (for non-Catholics). The material was divided into five classes. In some cases, Turkish families petitioned for their daughters to attend Turkish schools four days a week and to attend missionary schools three days a week, probably to give their daughters a well-rounded education in both European and Middle Eastern languages, but the Ottoman government opposed this initiative probably fearing the growing influence of European institutions in the Libyan territories.

Before the beginning of the Italian colonial era, many of the missionary schools had a majority of students who were Muslim or Jewish of either Turkish or indigenous origins depending on the size of the local Christian population. In 1906, the majority of the students at the girls’ school in Benghazi were Jewish, probably due to the small number of Europeans in the city, around 500, or as the missionaries claimed its “distance from civilization.” Out of 121 students, 73 were Jewish and 3 were Muslim while the rest were of various Christian dominations (Catholic, Orthodox – referred in missionary documents as “schismatic,” and Protestant). In 1910, the girls’ school in Tripoli had 353 students, of which 52 were Muslim and 63 were Jewish, with the rest being Christian, while the girls’ school in Derna had 104

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621 ASANMI, 20/D Libia – Derna, Fasc. Suor Francescane 1903-1911, Letter from Suor Maria Teresa Superioria, 7 marzo 1911
623 ASANMI, Busta 20/B Libia – Bengasi, Scuola femminile della Missione francescana diretta dalle suore di S. Giuseppe dell’Appa, Bengasi, 22-2-1911
students of which 58 were Muslim, 44 were Jewish and only 4 were Christian.625 Despite the large number of Muslim students who were enrolled in missionary schools during 1910, conflicts that periodically arose between the Italian government and the Turkish authorities could result in Muslims withdrawing their children from missionary schools, as happened at the school in Derna in Fall 1910.626

The preference by some Libyans for their children to attend missionary schools is partially explained by the limitations of local education before the end of the nineteenth century and the continued challenges during the colonial period. For girls’ education, the only option for education prior to the establishment of the Ottoman elementary school for girls in 1898,627 the first academic elementary school for Muslim girls in North Africa, were al-‘arīfa schools, which taught other so-called feminine arts, home economics and Qur’anic studies but not reading and writing until the colonial period.628 After the beginning of Italian colonialism, options for girls were restricted to vocational schools, which did provide some academic instruction as part of the preparatory course but at most only lasted two years. After the preparatory course work, girls focused primarily on practical skills.629 Only with the introduction of the nurses’ training school in 1936 did girls have the opportunity to continue their education beyond the most basic level in Italian state-sponsored schools.630 Therefore, missionary schools provided one of the few

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629 Articolo 6 del Regio decreto 21 giugno 1928, n. 1698, Norme riflettenti l‘istruzione primaria per i musulmani della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica.
630 Regio decreto-legge 24 luglio 1936, n. 1737 che Approvazione dell‘ordinamento scolastico per le Colonie
opportunities for girls to further their education in Libya besides the exceptionally brief period of Ottoman reform between 1898 and the Italian invasion in 1911.

**Table 1: Students Enrolled in the Girls’ School of the Franciscan Mission, April 1910, Tripoli.**

*(Frati Minori, Busta 8, Documenti Riguardanti Le Suore Giuseppine 1873-1913, Scuola femminile della Missione)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek and Armenian</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish subjects</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>353</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Missionaries and the Occupation of Libya

Missionary organizations had been early supporters of the Italian project to colonize Libya, openly advocating for growth in the Catholic population through mass emigration. Before the invasion, they were concerned about the “well-known Arab-Turkish fanaticism of the inhabitants of Benghazi and Cyrenaica, mostly belonging to the Sanūsī sect.”631 The new Prefect of the Franciscan Mission, Bonaventura Rossetti, promoted Italian colonialism in hopes of expanding the Mission’s plan to convert manumitted slaves, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa,632 an issue that will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.633 In the years leading up to the invasion, the Catholic press sold the colonial war as an opportunity to spread a Catholic brand of Italian civilization, adopting the language of Italian nationalism, and Church funds helped finance the increased Italian influence in North Africa.634

The initial invasion disrupted the operation of missionary schools due to the general unrest and an outbreak of cholera morbus that coincided with the beginning of the invasion. Many religious orders focused their attention on the Italian military, serving as nurses in military hospitals.635 At the time, the two major teaching orders

631 Frati Minori, Busta 6 Rapporti Prefetto Propaganda Fide 1858-1915, Letter from Sig. Card Girolmamo Maria Gotti, Prefetto Generale di Propaganda Fide, 9 giugno 1911
633 The Francian mission’s support for Italian expansion create a number of conflicts with the local Maltese community. For more information, see Ryan, Italy and the Sanusiyya, 96-100.
634 Ryan, Italy and the Sanusiyya, 20.
635 Frati Minori, Busta 6 Rapporti Prefetto Propaganda Fide 1858-1915, Letter to Sig. Card Girolmamo Maria Gotti, Prefetto Generale di Propaganda Fide, 20 dicembre 1911; Guido Cavaterra, Le francescane missionarie d’Egitto (Napoli: [Casa editrice N. Jovene e c.], 1922), 181.
in Tripoli were the Franciscan Sisters and Sisters of St. Joseph, who had eleven members and twenty members in the new colony respectively. Together they ran five girls’ schools with 25 sisters involved in teaching, providing education to many of the children of the approximately 4,000 Catholics in Tripolitania as well as small numbers of non-Catholic Christians, Muslims and Jews. This is a relatively small number of missionaries in comparison to neighboring Tunisia, where 40 sisters from the Sisters of St. Joseph worked in the 1840s.

With the Italian invasion, there was some reorganizing of the three boys’ schools operated by missionaries including the reopening of one of the schools as an Italian government school. Franciscan Sisters and Sisters of St. Joseph continued to operate the five girls’ schools in Tripoli, Benghazi and Derna. The school operated by Franciscan Sisters in Tripoli was in the area of Mescia in a building which was the headquarters of the National Association for Assistance to Italian Missionaries and was used as hospital during the war. The school consisted of two floors with a spacious courtyard, a refectory, and a dormitory for boarders, and was surrounded by a garden.

During the next three years, the number of Catholics in Libya rose dramatically to 16,000, driven by an influx of colonial officials and soldiers to

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636 ASSCPF, NS Vol. 520, Rubrica N. 141/1912, Stato Della Missione Cattolica Della Tripolitania
637 Clancy-Smith, “Muslim Princes, Female Missionaries, and Trans-Mediterranean Migrations,” 112.
640 Cavaterra, _Le francescane missionarie d'Egitto_, 184.
manage the new Italian colony. Along with the general rise in the number of Catholics in the colony, there was also an influx in members of female religious orders, with the thirty-one nuns in Tripolitania in 1911 increasing to 116 in 1914, representing five different religious orders. In addition, the number of girls’ schools operating in Tripolitania rose from five to nine. In Tripoli and Benghazi, the Sisters of St. Joseph operated girls’ schools, with three hundred students and 150 students respectively. The Franciscan Sisters continued to operate their existing schools in Tripoli, Homs and Derna as well as opening additional schools in the suburbs of Tripoli and in Zuara. There was also a missionary school in Misrata. Children of Italian families attended all of these educational institutions, while daughters of some the prominent Arab families also enrolled in some missionary schools.

In addition to education, the religious orders in Libya sought to reach the Muslim community through a variety of charitable activities, including operating orphanages, hospitals, daycares, nurseries, and other charitable institutions that provided social services neglected by the Italian state. In particular, there were a number of religious orders involved in nursing activities at both private Catholic hospitals as well as military hospitals. The Franciscan Sisters operated a clinic in

641 ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 534, Segue Rubrica N. 141/1913, Stato Attuale del Vicariato Apostolico della Libia, Affidato ai Frati Minori, dal I novembre 1914 e al 31 ottobre 1915
643 ASANMI, 20/F. Tripolitania-Autorità civili, Letter to the Signor Comm. De Luca aprile, R. Soprintendente Scolastico per la Tripolitania e la Cirenaica, 12 giugno 1915
645 ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 534, Segue Rubrica N. 141/1913, Relazione della Missione Francescana della Tripolitania
Derna that provided vaccinations to Muslim women in the city. The free distribution of medical services before the beginning of the Italian occupation was credited as one of the reasons that the indigenous population held the missionaries in “high esteem.”

Table 2: Female Religious Orders in Libya from November 1914 to October 1915.

(ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 534, Segue Rubrica N. 141/1913, Stato Attuale del Vicariato Apostolico della Libia, Affidato ai Frati Minori, dal 1 novembre 1914 e al 31 ottobre 1915)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female Religious Orders</th>
<th>Number of Sisters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suore di S. Giuseppe dell'Apparizione</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suore Francescane Missionarie d'Egitto</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suore della Carità (S. Vincenzo-Cappellone)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suore Vincenzine (Ven. Cottolengo)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suore dell'Immacolata Concezione D'Ivrea</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the fact that the church-state relationship in liberal Italy was profoundly antagonistic for most of the period between the unification of modern Italy in 1860 and the early 1920s, missionary organizations and the liberal state allied

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646 ASMAE; ASMAI, *Libia*, *pos.* 121/1. Fasc. 4, Rilascio passaporti a Suore 1913-15, Scuole delle suore francescane in Derna, 8 marzo 1915.
in support of imperial expansion and the civilizing mission in Libya. Much like many French republicans, some Italian liberals were willing to cooperate with Catholic charitable and educational activities in North Africa, depending on missionaries to facilitate their rule abroad. The administration commended the missionaries for their “zeal” in providing education and the Minister of Colonies allocated regular state funding for the mission in Libya,\textsuperscript{647} the political usefulness of their activities outweighing anticlerical sentiments in Rome.

Despite the official policy of cooperation during the Third Republic, Daughton argues it did not always stamp out antagonism on the ground in Algeria between the Catholic mission, the colonial administration and unofficial critics. This was also the case in Libya. Eileen Ryan has argued that during first years of Italian colonial rule, members of the church hierarchy resented attempts by the Italian administration to portray itself as sympathetic to Islamic culture and customs. The missionaries were willing to collaborate with the Italian administration in creating an orderly colony that was conducive to proselytizing but became hostile when they viewed the authorities as making too many compromises to placate local elites that undermined missionary activities. In 1913, the Propaganda Fide filled the new position of Titular Bishop of Tripoli by appointing Ludovico Antomelli, a Milanese Franciscan, who was antagonistic towards attempts by the Liberal administration to govern through alliances with local elites. Antomelli’s tenure as Titular Bishop, then

\textsuperscript{647} ASMAE, ASMAI, \textit{Africa III}, b. 36, Fasc. 1, Missioni Religiose in Libia.
full Bishop of Tripolitania, from 1913 to 1919 was characterized by ongoing conflicts with the colonial administrations.  

Many of the conflicts between the Catholic mission and the Italian administration were related to education. The Catholic mission in Tripoli viewed the state-sponsored education system as an unacceptable secular competitor, complaining that it effectively acted to sabotage the Catholic education system. Missionaries routinely identified Freemasonry as a threat to their work. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, membership in Masonic associations was widespread among members of the Liberal political elite in Italy, many of whom had an anti-clerical orientation. A similar dynamic existed in Algeria where Freemasons were relatively numerous among the European settler population. This resulted in Freemasons dominating administrative posts at government schools, along with the colonial administration. The missionaries frequently accused the Freemasons of undermining their teaching efforts and of scandalous behavior, including the abuse of minors in government schools. They also felt that the Freemasons damaged the civilizing mission of the colonial project by

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649 Daughton, *An Empire Divided*, 89.
653 ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 534, Segue Rubrica N° 141/1913, Rapporto annuale (1916); Archivio generale delle suore missionarie francescane d'Egitto, Busta Libya – Tripoli, Una lettera alla madre superiora dal Vicario Apostolico, Lodovico Antonelli, 29 ottobre 1915.
professing atheism, which led the Muslim population of Libya to reason that Italians did “not believe in God and their religion.” At the same time, the Superintendent of Schools accused some religious orders in the following years of deliberately undermining government schools and criticized the poor quality of some missionary schools, especially those operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Of the female teaching orders, the Sisters of St. Joseph would be least conciliatory towards the colonial administration. In 1917, the colonial administration introduced new requirements that all teachers, including those at missionary institutions, be credentialed by the Italian state in order to become instructors at private schools. This was a particular issue for the Sisters of St. Joseph, since none of their members had teaching certificates and they refused to prepare for the exam in order to obtain them, believing that their authority and the services that they provided prior to the Italian occupation would prevent the implementation of the new regulations. The Propaganda Fide was concerned that Freemasons within the office of the Superintendent of Schools would use this new requirement to further their anticlerical agenda and close missionary schools. In 1921, the conflict between the Sisters of St. Joseph and the colonial administration resulted in this order being expelled from Tripoli and replaced by Suore dell’Immacolata Concezione d’Ivrea.

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654 ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 534, Segue Rubrica N° 141/1913, Rapporto annuale (1916)
(Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception of Ivrea). They would continue to work in Benghazi until the 1930s.

Despite these rivalries and conflicts over policies between the mission and the colonial administration on the ground, the Franciscan mission expressed a willingness to work with the Italian authorities and to abstain from activities that might undermine their efforts or stir up local hostilities. This included abstaining from proselytizing as well as not actively engaging in antislavery activities. When the Superintendent of Schools mandated that all teachers have teaching certificates, the Franciscan mission had already made the necessary arrangements for the their teachers to take the exam to qualify for a teaching certificate and two sisters had completed the exam, while several others planned to take it in the fall of 1917. The result was increased funding from the Italian state, which solidified the Franciscan mission’s monopoly over religious education in Libya. The Italian administration cooperated with missionaries as long as they were willing to recognize the state’s authority.

The Education of Muslim Girls

The history of missionary education for Muslim girls is decidedly mixed. Missionary schools did seek to educate parts of the indigenous population, including girls, and tried to actively recruit sisters who had acquired some skills in Arabic from

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657 Di Pasquale, *La scuola per l'Impero*, 141.
658 Ryan, *Italy and the Sanusiyya*, 96.
659 ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 534, Segue Rubrica N° 141/1913, Rapporto annuale (1916)
660 Ryan, *Italy and the Sanusiyya*, 96.
previously serving in Egypt or in Palestine. The Sisters of St. Joseph also had extensive experience in Tunisia and many members of their order were Maltese; the Maltese language is substantially similar to the dialect of Arabic spoken in North Africa. In many cases, missionary schools expanded education, providing educational opportunities for Muslim girls in cities in the Italian colony where state schooling remained unavailable well into the colonial period, especially outside of the major cities of Tripoli and Benghazi. Some schools continued to admit girls regardless of their religious affiliation, educating Christian, Jewish and Muslims girls together and serving as a location for cross-cultural homosocialization.

The Franciscan Sisters placed particular attention on attracting Muslim and Jewish girls to their schools in both Zuara and Homs, which had a curriculum that included three elementary school classes and a nursery school. The school in Misrata also admitted Muslim girls. Based on their names, it appears that nine out of the seventy girls who attended the missionary school in Homs during the 1919-1920 academic year were from Muslim families. During the 1920-1921 academic year, the school in Zuara had seven female Muslim pupils out of a total of sixty-eight enrolled students. The Italian authorities would not open schools for Muslim girls in these cities until the 1930s.

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663 ASANMI, 20/A Fasc. Libia- Homs Suore Francescane, Elenco delle alunne frequentanti, La scuola elementare di Homs, anno 1919-20
664 ASANMI, 20/E Libia – Zuara e Mirsuata. Fasc. Suore Francescane, Letter to Signore Commendatore, Zuara 6-4-1921
Despite these opportunities, it appears that the majority of the other missionary schools adopted a policy of segregation under Italian rule, including the largest and most well-established schools in Tripoli and Benghazi which had historically admitted Muslim girls prior to the colonial period, sometimes in substantial numbers. Instead, their focus shifted to educating the newly sizeable European population. Unfortunately, exact enrollment numbers are missing for these schools. It is possible that a female Muslim student occasionally enrolled, especially from among the urban notables of the cities, and was educated alongside metropolitan girls, but this appears to have been rare.

The few integrated girls’ schools, especially the schools in Zuara and Misrata, which educated the daughters of political elites in Libya, provided the most comprehensive (and only academic) education to Muslim girls under Italian colonial rule. In 1914, the daughter of a Salim Bey, possibly Salīm Bāy al-Muntaṣir, the eventual leader of the nationalist United National Front (al-Jabha al-waṭaniyya al-muttaḥida), and two daughters of his cousins were listed as students at a school in the city of Misrata in northwestern Libya.\(^{665}\) The school in Zuara educated the daughter of the mayor of the city along with two of his nieces in 1920.\(^{666}\) The most prominent example was ‘Azīza bint Sulaymān al-Bārūnī, the daughter of Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Bārūnī (1870-1940), a Tripolitanian politician from Jabal Nafūsa who was a


\(^{666}\) ASANMI, 20/E Libia – Zuara e Mirsuata. Fasc. Suore Francescane, Letter to Signore Commendatore, Zuara 6-4-1921
jurist, historian, poet and Ibadi author. His daughter, Za’ima Sulaymān al-Bārūnī (1910-1976), was educated through the Ottoman education system and became a Libyan literary figure and short story writer. She will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent chapter. Although al-Bārūnī had been forced into exile in 1921 due to accusations that he supported Ibadi separatism, his daughter ‘Aziza remained in Tripolitania and was educated along with other Berber girls by the Franciscan Sisters in Zuara, and was awarded a Gold Medal along with her diploma in 1923. Despite the fact that she came from a prominent family, little information is available about her life after the colonial period.

Many of these integrated schools were located in Northern Tripolitania in a region with a sizeable Berber population. Arab Muslims were generally considered to

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670 ASANMI, Busta 20/ E Libia - Zuara e Misurata, Saggio finale e premiazione alla Scuola femminile. Mista delle Suore Missionarie d’Egitto, 28 giugno 1924
be too intractable to convert to Christianity, but missions did proselytize among
Berbers in other parts of North Africa,\textsuperscript{671} despite the fact that they were also Muslims. In French-ruled Algeria, colonial administrators, orientalists and missionaries argued that Berbers were “almost European” in their nature,\textsuperscript{672} singling them out as the preferred agents of the colonial project and privileged targets of the civilizing mission.\textsuperscript{673} Influenced by French colonial thought, the Italians viewed Berbers as more favorable towards European rule. Hoping to find converts among the Berber population, the mission provided services, such as education, in an attempt to introduce western costumes and gender practices among the elites in the Jabal Nafūsa region.

Despite hostility towards the administration’s collaboration with local elites during the first decade of Italian rule, which they viewed as undermining their proselyting efforts, the mission interacted with the politics of notables of the period. The families mentioned, al-Muntasir and al-Bārūnī, were both Berber elites who were intimately involved in the politics of the early colonial period. The Young Turks’ hostility towards local notables had weakened the position of the al-Muntasir family

\textsuperscript{671} Karima Direche-Slimani, \textit{Chrétiens de Kabylie, 1873-1954: Une action missionnaire dans l’Algérie colonial} (Editions Bouchene, 2004; Daughton, \textit{An Empire Divided}, 22.
and they initially threw their support behind the Italian invasion. In contrast, al-Bārūnī became a guerrilla commander, rallying the people of Tripolitania behind the banner of Islamic unity to oppose the Italian invasion. The Italian administration negotiated with the leadership of the Berber community in Jabal Nafūsa for special status during the early years of the occupation. Under Ottoman rule, these elites would have sent their daughters to Ottoman schools. With few other options during Italian colonial rule, they chose to send their daughters to schools administrated by missionary organizations.

The education of indigenous girls was not without many of the challenges highlighted in the previous chapter. Missionaries also complained about poor attendance on the part of their Muslim pupils. Stricter gender segregation starting at puberty also made girls continuing their education difficult, a concern that was not unique to the Muslim community. Similar to many Muslim families, when Jewish girls reached 12 or 13 years old their parents no longer wanted them to leave the house. The missionaries reported that girls said that “My parents do not want to send me to school, but I cry and do not give them peace until they give me permission to

677 ASANMI, 20/E Libia – Zuara e Mirsuata. Fasc. Suore Francescane, Letter to Signore Commendatore, Zuara 6-4-1921
come.” While others claimed that “My relatives have told me I'm older, that it is shameful to go to school. But I tell them that now is the time that I can learn something… and I then pray and beg so much so that at last they give me permission to continue my studies.” Echoing Khadi'ja al-Jahmi’s statements about her attending Italian state schools, the missionaries often highlighted the fact that it was the tenacity and persistence of the girls themselves over the objections of their families that enabled them to continue their education.

Despite these opportunities, other schools duplicated the Italian educational policy of segregation based on religion and ethnicity. The Franciscan Sisters operated schools specifically for Bedouin girls in a concentration camp outside of Tripoli. In 1915, they opened a school of tailoring, laundry and ironing for indigenous girls at the school at Mescia in Tripoli, which they claimed was attended by the children of many nobles in Tripoli including the daughters of Hassuna Pascià Karamanli, who was the major of Tripoli. Franciscan Sisters also operated a school for indigenous girls, both Muslim and Jewish, in Derna. In some cases, the education in these

680 ASANMI, 20/F. Tripolitania-Autorità civili, Letter to the Signor Comm. De Luca aprile, R. Soprintendente Scolastico per la Tripolitania e la Cirenaica, 12 giugno 1915
681 Cavaterra, Le francescane missionarie d’Egitto, 184.
schools was for poor Muslim girls and was even more limited than that provided by the public vocational schools operated by the Italian state, focusing on providing girls with training as seamstresses or servants. In fact, poor girls who attended missionary schools were often destined to become maids or servants in Italian homes for fear that they would “fall back into Muslim hands.”

The divisions between different groups in Libya, whether they be Italians, Europeans, Arabs, Berbers, Black Libyans, Christians, Muslims or Jews, became even more complicated in the context of missionary education. Missionaries did not always agree with the colonial state about who should be able to attend metropolitan style schools. The Italian colonial state considered indigenous Jewish girls to be part of the metropolitan population and they attended Italian state schools. This is similar to the French policy in Algeria that culminated with the Décret Crémieux in 1870, which granted French citizenship to the Jewish population of the colony. In contrast, the missionaries often placed indigenous girls who were non-Christians into segregated schools, regardless of whether they were Jews or Muslims.

The Franciscan Sisters’ school for Muslim girls in Derna initially had an academic curriculum but it suffered from low enrollment, which the colonial officials attributed to an “aversion” to the teaching of reading and writing to girls in the Muslim community. The Direzione degli Affari Civili (Directorate of Civil Affairs)

683 ASSCPF, N.S. 921, Rubrica n° 39/1926-1928, Sottorubrica n°4, Letter, 26 gennaio 1926.
685 ASMAE; ASMAI, Libia, pos. 121/ 1. Fasc. 4, Rilascio passaporti a Suore 1913-15, Scuole delle suore francescane in Derna, 8 marzo 1915.
in Derna felt that a school that focused on women’s literacy was a waste of resources and that schools for Muslim girls instead should have a vocational focus on “womanly work” and home economics, as Italian state schools did.686 The Italian claim that Muslim families were averse to sending their daughters to academic primary schools does not fit with the fact that 52 Muslim girls had attended the missionary school in the city of Derna, despite the city’s relative remoteness, in 1910 before the Italian invasion.687 The local population’s aversion to women’s education was in fact a new distrust of missionary schools due to their close relationship with the colonial administration. The low enrollment in the missionary girls’ schools led the Directorate to advocate that the sisters focus their efforts on providing medical care to indigenous girls and women rather than on educational activities.688 Despite this opposition from the colonial authorities, missionary schools for Arab girls would continue to operate in Tripoli and Derna, supported by the National Association for Assistance to Italian Missionaries.689

The school for Arab girls in Derna was closed in June 1917 for the summer holidays and then remained closed due to the plague. It remained temporarily closed through December of 1918 because in 1918 the personnel involved in the Arab school were employed to staff a nursery school for abandoned children at the same

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686 ASMAE; ASMAI, Libia, pos. 121/ 1. Fasc. 4, Rilascio Passaporto a Suore 1913-15, Scuole private in Libia Pagamento del sussidio pel 1914-1915, 6 novembre 1914
688 ASMAE; ASMAI, Libia, pos. 121/ 1. Fasc. 4, Rilascio passaporti a Suore 1913-15, Scuole delle suore francescane in Derna, 8 marzo 1915.
689 ASSCPF, N.S. 921, Rubrica n° 39/1926-1928, Sottorubrica n°4, Letter, 26 gennaio 1926
However, the Mother Superior of the Franciscan Sisters in Derna desired in 1919 to make the necessary repairs to reopen the school at a cost of 439.25 liras and find qualified teachers for a school for European girls, a nursery school, an orphanage for Bedouin children and a free school for Muslim and Jewish girls. This included one sister for the first and second metropolitan classes, one for the third and fourth metropolitan classes, one for the nursery school, one to teach piano, two for the orphanage, two to provide courses for Muslim and Jewish girls, and two sisters to provide for the needs of the school including cooking and laundry.

While the section for the European girls provided a full elementary education, the education provided for indigenous girls no longer included an academic curriculum. Borrowing its curriculum from the al-‘arīfa schools, it focused almost exclusively on home economics and domestic work along with the memorization of the Qurʾan. The inclusion of Qur’anic studies for Muslim girls in a missionary school was unusual, at least for a mission in North Africa, violating the raison d’être of the mission in Libya. A course on the Qur’an might have been added to reduce friction with the local population by dissuading fears about proselytizing among the

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students. It is unclear whether the school also provided religious instruction for Jewish students.\footnote{ASMAE, ASMAI, 
Africa III, b. 36, fasc. 1 Scuole Libia I, Missioni Religiose in Libia}

This new organization of the school reveals a shift towards a more limited educational curriculum for indigenous girls, which focused on vocational training, provided through segregated courses for Muslim and in some cases Jewish girls. This new more limited curriculum probably was the result of moving away from educating the daughters of elites, who were unwilling to risk their reputations by sending their daughters to foreign schools in the new political environment created by Italian colonialism. It remained a reasonable strategy for lower class families to send their daughters to receive vocational training. Therefore, rather than expanding educational opportunities for indigenous girls, missionaries instead placed an emphasis on those sections of the Libyan population who were in some way dispossessed and easier to proselytize to due to the weakening of tribal and familial ties - abandoned children, orphans, and interned Bedouins, a subject that will be addressed shortly.

Starting in 1919, there was a shift in the relationship between the Catholic mission and the colonial state as well as shift in policy of the mission towards the indigenous population. During this period, the Vatican changed its policy towards missionaries abroad, taking a more conciliatory position and distancing themselves from political issues.\footnote{Peter C. Kent, The Pope and the Duce (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 38; Alba Rosa Leone, “La politica missionaria del Vaticano tra le due guerre,” Studi Storici 21, no. 1 (1980), 124.} The Roman Curia, an administrative unit of the Holy See, replaced Ludovico Antomelli in 1919 with Giancinto Tonizza, a Franciscan priest
from Celleno, who promised to refrain from commenting on Italian policies in the colony. This reduced the overt conflicts between the mission and colonial administration.

The rise of Fascism in metropolitan Italy also resulted in a shift in the relationship between the Italian state and the Catholic Church. Despite the violent anticlericalism espoused by the Futurist movement and Mussolini before the March on Rome, there was a steady warming of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Italian state after Mussolini came to power in October 1922. Mussolini appointed the pro-Catholic politician Luigi Federzoni as the Minister of Colonies in 1922 and Federzoni increased state funding for missionary construction projects including the Cathedral in Tripoli. After Alfredo Rocco was appointed Minister of Justice in 1925, he repressed Freemason activities, making it illegal for civil servants to belong to the Freemasons or other secret societies, likely reducing the influence of anticlericalism in the colonial administration and further improving relations with the mission. The better relationship between the Catholic Church and the Italian state culminated in the 1929 Lateran Accords, which solved the “Rome Question” and ended 60 years of conflict between the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See. The result was a more collaborative relationship between the Catholic Church and the Italian state, both within Italy and in the Mediterranean where Mussolini

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697 Lucia Ceci, *The Vatican and Mussolini's Italy* (Boston: BRILL, 2016), 60-61.
698 Ryan, *Italy and the Sanusiyya*, 229.
hoped to utilize Catholic missionaries to spread Italian political and cultural influence.\textsuperscript{701}

Part of the shift towards a less combative relationship with the colonial administration was an increased emphasis placed on providing services to the Italian settler population rather than on proselytizing among the Muslim population of Libya.\textsuperscript{702} In Algeria, the French military government, which ruled Algeria from 1830 to 1870, implemented a similar policy, repeatedly warning missionaries that they must direct their attention to settlers in order not to inflame tensions with the indigenous population.\textsuperscript{703} This shift eased tensions with the local population, but it also meant that there was less of an emphasis on recruiting Muslim girls, whether Berber or Arab, to schools. Much as with state education, girls’ education was sacrificed in the name of stability and political expediency. Many missionary schools that had previously admitted Muslim girls under Ottoman rule became extensions of the Italian state school system, adopting similar curricula and forms of segregation.

In 1933, an agreement was reached between the Government of Cyrenaica and the National Association for Assistance to Italian Missionaries for the conversion of part of the missionary school for metropolitan girls in Derna into a public school, which was “open in general to inhabitants (of the colony), except those of the Muslim

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\textsuperscript{701} Kent, \textit{Pope and the Duce}, 37. \\
\textsuperscript{702} Di Pasquale, \textit{Scuola per l’Impero}, 142. \\
\end{flushright}
religion, for whom another school will continue to operate.” The school provided a complete elementary school curriculum of which the lower level could be co-educational and the higher course would be exclusively for girls. The Association itself was obliged to bear the costs for the teaching staff and the service staff and provide the furnishings and teaching materials necessary to operate the school. The government was obliged to contribute 49,210 liras annually towards the school, and all teachers had to be approved by the Superintendent of Schools.

Missionary education was far from a uniform system under Italian rule. In the case of cities like Zuara, Homs and Misrata, missionaries educated Muslim and Jewish girls alongside European girls, providing the only academic education available to Muslim girls for the entire period of Italian colonial rule. They, therefore, ended up educating some of the daughters of the Libyan political elite, woman who would likely become the wives of some of the most important figures in Libya. At the same time, some of the other missionary schools only provided the most basic education, limited to training for girls to become servants or seamstresses. These girls were pulled from the poorest sections of the Libyan population, people who were willing to risk some of the criticism that came from educating their daughters in

705 ASANMI, 20/F – Derna, Fasc. Cirenaica- Autorità Civili e Militari, Convenzione fra il Governo della Cirenaica e l’Associazione per i Missionari all’Estero per i Missionari all’Estero per il Mantenimento in Derna di una pubblica scuola a tipo metropolitani, settembre 1933.
706 ASANMI, 20/F – Derna, Fasc. Cirenaica- Autorità Civili e Militari, Convenzione fra il Governo della Cirenaica e l’Associazione per i Missionari all’Estero per I Missionari all’Estero per il Mantenimento in Derna di una pubblica scuola a tipo metropolitani, settembre 1933.
European schools if it meant they could contribute economically to their families. Therefore, missionary schools were segregated by ethnic background between Europeans and Muslims but also by class among Libyans themselves.

**The Indigent: The Bedouins and the Abandoned**

Similar to many colonial governments, the Italians relied on missionary organizations to provide social services to both the European and the indigenous population, particularly in the field of healthcare. The missionaries focused their attention on the welfare of infants and children, which included general education but also the provision of special services to the most vulnerable sections of the Libyan society - landless Bedouin and abandoned and orphaned children. In fact, colonial social services for abandoned or orphaned indigenous children under Italian and later British rule were the domain of Catholic nuns, since the Italian administration never developed a state-sponsored system to serve these children, with the exception of schools for those children interned in concentration camps in Eastern Libya during the 1930s. Children who lacked strong familial ties also provided greater opportunities to proselytize without exacerbating tensions with either the local population or the colonial administration.

The missionaries ran schools specifically for Bedouin children in conjunction with the military. During the Italian invasion, the Italians set up an Arab-Bedouin village as a large concentration camp outside of Tripoli in order to place numerous families under special surveillance during the advance of Italian troops into the interior of the colony. In addition, it served to segregate a large number of nomads
who had previously flowed into the city of Tripoli, preventing the spread of “several
dangerous diseases,” including tuberculosis, malaria, trachoma and dermatitis.708
The Italians claimed that the camp operated like a workhouse, providing some public
services and healthcare and preventing the city from becoming overrun with
beggars.709 The camp was divided into four sections (Roma, Torino, Milan and
Palermo) which were intersected by wide streets and two squares.710 It interred about
12,000 Bedouins at the height of the war, a number which fell to 8,000 by 1914.711

Along with public services and health services, the education of Bedouin
children was part of a larger attempt to “penetrate and affect the soul of the nomadic
population.”712 There were two primary areas of education in the concentration camp:
military and religious. The military entrusted the education of young men to Marshal
Maccario Ugo of the Arma dei Carabinieri, the national gendarmerie of Italy. It was
frequented by youths of the age of eight to fourteen years. The classes were held in
the afternoon in order to enable students to be porters in the city to earn some wages
during the morning. The program taught the rudiments of military instruction and

708 ASANMI, 20/F, Fasc. Autorità Militari, Relazione sul Villaggio Arabo-Beduino,
febbraio 1914.
709 *Italy, Atti parlamentari*, 2075.
710 ASANMI, 20/F, Fasc. Autorità Militari, Relazione sul Villaggio Arabo-Beduino,
febbraio 1914.
711 *Italy, and Commissione per l'amministrazione del municipio di Tripoli* (Tripoli,
G. Bertero, 1914), 75.
712 Commissione per l'amministrazione del municipio di Tripoli, *I Servizi sanitari del
municipio di Tripoli*, 81.
gymnastics. The students wore red fez caps with a white seal and small prizes of encouragement were given to the most loyal and willing.  

From the beginning of the concentration of nomadic Bedouin families in a single camp, the National Association for Assistance to Italian Missionaries volunteered to make available some of the Franciscan Sisters with the aim of organizing a school of moral hygiene and work for girls between the ages of 5 and 15. The Franciscan Sisters founded the school in 1912, naming it Queen Elena. Despite the “initial difficulties inherent in the nature and promiscuity of the population” and their “initial suspicions,” the Franciscan Sisters were able to bring together a number of girls to teach them morality, work ethics and hygiene. The initial number of students in the school varied, partially due to fluctuations in the population of the concentration camp. However, the nuns reported that some of girls began to manifest a certain affection for the school and for the teaching sisters. At the same time families began to see the value of sending their daughters to the missionary schools, with girls returning to the tents cleaned and dressed in new clothing and with the rice rations that were given as a prize of encouragement for their work. Given the challenging conditions of the camps and the undermining of the livelihood of the

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713 Commissione per l'amministrazione del municipio di Tripoli, I Servizi sanitari del municipio di Tripoli, 85.
715 ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 634, Segue Rubrica n° 141/1919, Circa una eventuale domanda delle Suore Missionarie Francescane d'Egitto per aprire una casa e Scuola a Zuara (1918); ASMAE, ASMAI, Africa III, b. 36, Fasc. 1, Missioni Religiose in Libia
nomadic population and their way of life, it is not surprising that some families welcomed aid from Italian religious organizations.

Originally, three sisters implemented the program, but that number was later reduced to two. The school was divided into sections much like the vocational schools organized by the colonial authorities, with a section for academic instruction and another for vocational training. The curriculum was designed to provide skills that would be useful for the students’ lives but also to “cultivate in them the more righteous sentiments of morality and a new form...of Italianness.” The academic curriculum was composed of reading and writing in Italian, elementary arithmetic, history and national geography, singing, gymnastics, and hygiene. Arabic or another local language is conspicuously absent from a curriculum for Bedouin girls. The vocational training was similar to that which would be later implemented by the Italian administration in the so-called “Youth Camps” (i campi ragazzi) during the suppression of the resistance in the 1930s, with the goal of training women who would have working class jobs as washerwoman, servants or seamstresses. They were taught how to wash and iron linen, how to sew by hand and with a machine, darning, embroidery, weaving cloth with a frame, the sewing of socks, and various “womanly works” with a hook or needle, etc. They claimed to place particular attention on “the usual work of indigenous women in palm leaves, garments, etc.”

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716 Commissione per l'amministrazione del municipio di Tripoli, I Servizi sanitari del municipio di Tripoli, 90.
717 ACS, Carte Graziani, b. 11, fasc. 14, sottofasc. 9. Situazione generale della Colonia alla data odierna. 18 aprile 1934.
718 Commissione per l'amministrazione del municipio di Tripoli, I Servizi sanitari del municipio di Tripoli, 90.
Religious instruction was not included in the girls’ curriculum, since the missionaries felt that there was no need for religious instruction due to the fact that the moral benefits of education left “lasting traces in the soul” of the pupils.719

The Italian authorities hoped that the camp would “gradually assume the appearance of a camp of true civil redemption” and would gain “significant importance for its high humanitarian, social and patriotic purpose.”720 In particular, it was hoped that the Queen Elena school would result in the moral and hygienic uplift of the entire female population of the “village,” which was implemented through the girls who attend the school, in hopes of changing the sentiments, habits and customs of the women.721 Despite this lofty goal to civilize the Bedouin population, it is difficult to imagine that the skills taught at this missionary school would have been particularly helpful for the lives of Bedouin women, unless they were forced to give up their nomadic lives and eke out an existence as a poorly paid working class in the cities of the new Italian colony.

In addition to educating Bedouin children, the Mission took in and educated orphaned and abandoned children. The Italian colonial administration was concerned that abandoned “children left to themselves and without any means of subsistence” would be forced into “child prostitution” or die from starvation which would create “significant harm” to their “prestige in front of the natives, who would be able to

720 Commissione per l'amministrazione del municipio di Tripoli, I Servizi sanitari del municipio di Tripoli, 90.
rightly argue that the government did nothing to come to the rescue to the indigenous population."\textsuperscript{722} In some cases, there were Bedouins among the indigenous children found to be without families. In the Arab-Bedouin village, a Captain in the Bersaglieri (Marksmen), a corps of the Italian Army, started an initiative to feed orphaned children on the streets of Tripoli, which was the origin of the military education provided in the village, mentioned previously.\textsuperscript{723} In 1912, an orphanage was opened in Bu Meliana near Tripoli for boys under eight who had lost their families during the war, run by the Suore Francescane. Boys over the age of nine were sent to the Scuola di arti e mestieri di Tripoli.\textsuperscript{724} Some girls were entrusted to families within the Arab-Bedouin village.\textsuperscript{725}

The care of orphans continued during the Italian occupation. The Sisters of St. Joseph in Benghazi attempted to look after orphaned and abandoned children during a famine in Cyrenaica between 1916 and 1918, which created some tension with the colonial administration. The Franciscan Sisters operated a girls’ orphanage in Tripoli with approximately 50 children that provided an elementary education, and the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary opened an orphanage in Tripoli for both Christian and indigenous children who had been abandoned.\textsuperscript{726} In Derna, the

\textsuperscript{723} Italy, Atti parlamentari, 2075.
\textsuperscript{725} Commissione per l'amministrazione del municipio di Tripoli, I Servizi sanitari del municipio di Tripoli, 80.
\textsuperscript{726} ASSCPF, N.S. 921, Rubrica n° 39/1927, Sottorubrica n°4, Relazione Straordinaria circa Lo Stato Della Missione Francescana della Tripolitania nell'anno 1927.
Franciscan Sisters also operated an orphanage for abandoned girls with 41 girls in the location of the former school for Arab girls.

In 1919, Comando Zona and Direzione Affari Civili raised concerns about the growing number of abandoned indigenous children in Derna due to the spread of the plague that left 150 children without families.727 Modifications were made to the school in Derna in order to make it more comfortable and suitable for the purpose of caring for these girls. There was also a plan to build another room to provide additional space and the addition of cement floors in the dorms, which would improve the overall cleanliness and hygiene of the school. They also wanted to build a hut from palm fronds that could serve as an outdoor shower so that every morning the girls would bathe under proper supervision.

The missionaries reported that the girls were very happy in the school and with their treatment generally. During the day, the girls occupied themselves with “womanly works” for which they showed “great interest and versatility.” The curriculum also included Islamic studies.728 Although never specified specifically in the available documents, it is likely that Islamic studies were taught by women who had been educated under the previous Ottoman system. Interpreting the experiences of girls in missionary school is “difficult and dangerous” due to the wide variety of girls’ experiences, as Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller and Lorene Sisquoc argue

about the experience of Indian students in boarding schools. It is more difficult due
to the lack of indigenous girls’ voices in the missionary sources. It is entirely possible
that some girls found missionary run orphanages to be a safe refuge after the
uncertainties of being an orphan. At the same time, all of the students had to deal with
new places, new people and policies designed to alter their cultural practices in order
to force them to adopt western-style domesticity.

On March 1 of 1919, the boys’ orphanage, which cared for 50 boys, was
moved from the encampment of “Saluzze” to the encampment of “Fare” that was
closer to the city. Unlike the girls’ curriculum, the boys received vocational training
in a workshop as mechanics, tinsmiths, tailors, saddlers, shoemaker, carpenters and
blacksmiths. A similar curriculum for orphaned or abandoned children would be
adopted in the “Youth Camps” (*i campi ragazzi*) in the 1930s in the concentration
camps in Cyrenaica. Forty of the fifty boys attended the Italo-Arab schools operated
by the Italian state in the city.

Italian missionary activities among the destitute and dispossessed saved some
sections of the Libyan population, especially children, from starvation, exploitation
and even death. The Italian state hoped to legitimize their rule through missionary aid
work while trying to assuage concerns about proselytizing and conversion. Any
discussion of the cause of these conditions is largely absent from documents except
for a matter-of-fact statement about the war. The Italian invasion and subsequent war

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729 Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc. “Introduction” in
*Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences*. Eds.
Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc (Lincoln: University of
Nebraska Press., 2006), 2.
left many children without familial protection as well as disrupting indigenous social institutions that would have usually cared for them. During the invasion, there was a cholera outbreak that may have been carried to Tripoli from Italian ports. Over 2,000 people were infected, more than half of whom died, a third of those being soldiers. Refugees fleeing the war spread the disease to Malta. The internment of the Bedouin population in a concentration camp outside of Tripoli probably also contributed to the spread of disease by confining a large number of people in poor sanitary conditions. In addition, an outbreak of the plague was reported in Derna in 1914, brought by rats aboard ships, which continued until at least 1918. These pathogens, aided by wartime conditions and carried by contaminated water and rodents, became an additional weapon of the invading army, striking down both sides. Missionaries did their best to alleviate some of this suffering but never questioned how their support for the Italian invasion contributed to it.

The Manumitted

In addition to paying special attention to the upbringing of abandoned children, the sisters were interested in the education of manumitted slaves and their

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descendants. Once known as the “gate of slaves,” the slave trade had fallen off in
Tripoli by the second half of the nineteenth century, but there remained a large
community of impoverished former slaves outside of Tripoli in an encampment
known as the “Negro Village,” consisting of a large number of cane huts with
brush fences. The “village” existed until at least until 1925 but was eventually
demolished by the Italian authorities.

Figure 1: Negro Village, Tripoli, Africa, 1874.
(The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Gift of Weston J. and Mary M. Naef,
Charles Bierstadt, Negro Village, Tripoli, Africa, 1874, Albumen silver print.)

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733 Mabel Loomis Todd, *Tripoli the Mysterious* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co.,
1912), x.
734 Negro Village, Tripoli (1874). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, C.A.,
Negro Village, Tripoli, Africa, Charles Bierstadt, Albumen silver print, Stereograph,
1874.
735 G. Casserley, “Tripolitania, Where Romans Resume Sway,” *The National
736 Fuller, “Preservation and Self-Absorption: Italian Colonisation and the Walled
City of Tripoli, Libya,” 144n15.
The decline in the slave trade in Tripoli did not mean that the slave trade did not continue in inland Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica, especially along the trade routes controlled by the Sanūsī from Lake Chad through Kufra and Augila. The Italian invasion did not completely end the practice, and slaves were available in Kufra until the early 1930s, when the Italians officially occupied inland Libya. Black slaves remained a feature of elite households even in Benghazi into the 1920s. The Franciscan mission was active in anti-slavery activities from the 1890s until the Italian occupation of Libya. In addition, the *Pia Società di San Giuseppe di Torino* (the Pious Society of St. Joseph of Turin) ran an agricultural colony for children freed from slavery in Benghazi. Despite their generally good intentions, missionaries sometimes contributed to the trade by purchasing slaves themselves in order to free them from the institution.

In 1904, the Sisters of St. Joseph opened a mission in Benghazi to work with the indigenous population and “collect Africans, especially freed from slavery” in order to arrange for their training in the arts and crafts and agricultural work. Before the Italian invasion, many of the converts to Catholicism in Libya were

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737 Wright, *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, 160.
738 ASSCPF, N.S. 921, Rubrica n° 39/1927, Sottorubrica n°4, Relazione Straordinaria circa Lo Stato Della Missione Francescana della Tripolitania nell'anno 1927
739 Italy, *Bollettino dell'emigrazione*, 406.
women of sub-Saharan African descent \(^{742}\) who were most likely Muslims.\(^{743}\) They had probably been Muslim when captured and enslaved, despite the prohibition in Islamic law against enslaving fellow Muslims.\(^{744}\) Fearing a “sudden burst of fanaticism” or recapture, many of these female converts remained “almost hidden” in missionary institutions. These new converts were an issue, since proper spouses would need to be found for them in order for them to create Christian families. As mentioned previously, the missionaries’ support for the Italian invasion was partially due to a desire to create a political environment more favorable to missionary activities and to lessen the influence of the Sanūsīs, especially in Eastern Libya.\(^{745}\) As early as 1911, the Prefect Bonaventura Rossetti feared that this activity would create opposition to the Italian presence in the region and wrote to the Propaganda Fide to limit missionary activity to aid work rather than proselytizing.\(^{746}\)

Despite the emphasis on the Italian settler population rather than on proselytizing activity among the local Muslim community after 1920, some missions continued to work among the sub-Saharan African population in Libya, and the Sisters of Charity operated a free school for girls of African descent (morette).\(^{747}\) It is unclear what the curriculum of this school included, but it was probably limited to


\(^{746}\) Ryan, *Italy and the Sanusiyya*, 96.

\(^{747}\) ASMAE, ASMAI, *Africa III*, b. 36, Fasc. 1, Missioni Religiose in Libia
vocational training. There were some converts among this population and it was estimated that there were 125 indigenous Christians in Cyrenaica in 1935, mostly former slaves or their descendants.  

These indigenous Christians could become an issue for the Italian authorities especially after the move towards racial politics in the 1930s, which culminated in the *Prevvedimenti per l’Integrità della Razza* (Provisions for the Integrity of the Race) that prohibited conjugal relations between Italians and subjects of Italy’s East African Empire (Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia).  

Even a small number of indigenous Christians could be an issue for maintaining racial segregation among the Italian population and non-Europeans. In 1934, Italo Balbo visited a summer camp run by Franciscan Sisters. Among the Italian children, there were two African orphans of sub-Saharan African descent who had been baptized into the Catholic faith by the Franciscan mission. Balbo ordered their immediate removal. Separated from the local population because of their new religious affiliation, the European community was unwilling to accept them as equal coreligionists within the Catholic church. These kinds of divisions called into question the universalizing message of the Catholic church overseas and the future place of these converts within both Libyan and European settler society.

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748 ASSCPF, N.S. 1296, Rubrica n° 39/1935-36-37, Sottorubrica n°13, Cirenaica, Relazione annuale e Prospetti statistici, Bengasi, li 30 luglio 1935.
750 Di Pasquale, *La scuola per l'Impero*, 149-150.
The Problem of Proselytizing among Muslims

Despite the services provided by the missionary education, the presence of missionaries in Libya was not without its tensions. The most famous example was the murder of a Franciscan priest, Giustino Pacini, in Derna in March 1908, which inflamed tensions between Italians and the Ottoman Empire. Although discouraged by colonial officials and missionary leaders alike, missionaries still sought to baptize the local population. As previously mentioned, most of these converts were manumitted slaves or their descendants, but there were also a small number of conversions among the Jews, Arabs and Berbers of Libya. If these converts were originally Muslims, this conversion was considered apostasy, a crime that was traditionally punishable by death in Islamic jurisprudence. The Italian invasion did not ease these tensions but instead served to excite “religious feeling” among the population that resulted in a decrease in “tolerance towards foreigners of a different race and faith.” Conversions to Christianity continued on a small scale during the colonial period, and it was reported that “both in Tripoli and in Cyrenaica genuine

752 William Clarence Askew, Europe and Italy’s Acquisition of Libya, 1911-1912 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1942), 30
Imamo Maria Gotti, Prefetto Generale di Propaganda Fide, 9 giugno 1911
754 ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 702, Segue Rub. N° 141/1921, Trasmette copia di un rapporto alla Segr. Di Stato sul Vicariato e sull'opera che svolgono i religiosi e le religiose
Muslim adults” sought and received “holy Baptism with much piety and with sincere devotion.”\(^{755}\)

Some missionaries claimed that the number of conversions was exaggerated, especially among the Arab population of Libya, since only the Bishop and a Maltese priest spoke Arabic among the male missionaries in the colony.\(^{756}\) It is likely that a few of the sisters spoke at least some basic Arabic as well. In particular, a scandal erupted in Tripoli in 1929 when a calendar was distributed among the Catholic community with a picture of five friars from the Franciscan order and several Arabs that carried the caption “Libya - Lombardi Mission - Franciscan Penetration among the Arabs.”\(^{757}\) The inference was that these Arabs had converted to Christianity, but this would have been an unusual occurrence. In fact, there is much more evidence of Europeans converting to Islam than adult Arabs or Berbers converting to Christianity.

Any attempt to proselytize among the Arab-Muslim community could create tensions with the local population.\(^{758}\) In particular, there were concerns that orphaned and abandoned children might be converted to Christianity.\(^{759}\) Italo Balbo, the Governor-General of Libya from 1933 to 1940, held that baptisms of indigenous

\(^{755}\) ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 822, Rubrica n° 39/1914, Sottorubrica n°4, Giacinito Tonizza, Rapporto, 6 dicembre 1924

\(^{756}\) ASSCPF, N.S. 1033, Rubrica n° 39/ 1929, Sottorubrica n°4, Un cattolico di Tripoli, Ricorre che i missionari di Tripoli non si occupano della conversione degli Arabi

\(^{757}\) ASSCPF, N.S. 1033, Rubrica n° 39/ 1929, Sottorubrica n°4, Un cattolico di Tripoli, Ricorre ch’è i missionari di Tripoli non si occupano della conversione degli Arabi

\(^{758}\) Asmā’ Muṣṭafā Usṭā, *Anā Khadijah al-Jahmi* (Sirt [Libya]: Majlis al-Thaqāfah al-'Amm, 2006), 98.

\(^{759}\) ASSCPF, N.S. 921, Rubrica n° 39/1927, Sottorubrica n°4, Relazione Straordinaria circa Lo Stato Della Missione Francescana della Tripolitania nell'anno 1927
children below the age of 16 should be prohibited to try to prevent such issues. However, it was common practice for missionaries to try to baptize children believed to be near death. The Chaplain of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Tunis, Abbé François Bourgade, sent a letter to the Propaganda Fide listing the baptisms of 115 children between May 8 and December 18, 1842 of whom sixty-eight were Muslim, while the rest were Jewish. In fact, Emily de Vialar, when summarizing her work in Tunisia, claimed her mission had baptized thousands of children. There is no evidence that these baptisms ever became public knowledge, partially because so many of the children passed away, and mention of these baptisms was censored from published reports about missionary work in the Ottoman Empire. Claims about the conversion of children by missionaries could result in scandals, as was the case in Port Said, Egypt in 1933, when an orphaned girl by the name of Turkiyya Hasan was caned by a Swedish missionary for supposedly refusing to convert.

No similar scandal erupted in Libya, but there were occasional conversions among the children of the Arab population, especially those who were on their deathbeds. How widespread this practice was in Libya is difficult to ascertain, since it is rarely discussed in correspondences. The baptism of the unnamed Bedouin girl in 1919 is one of the few direct mentions of the practice in the Libyan territories. Because of her death, her family probably never learned of the baptism, since these

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762 Curtis, “Charity Begins Abroad,” 102.
763 Baron, *The Orphan Scandal*, iv.
764 ASSCPF, N.S. Vol. 634, Segue Rub. n° 141/1919, Circa una eventuale domanda delle Suore Missionarie Francescane d'Egitto per aprire una casa e Scuola a Zuara (1918)
baptisms were kept secret out of fear of hostility from the Jewish and Muslim populations, which would undermine missionary activities. While missionaries used these kind of baptisms to highlight the good works they were doing, they did not produce an indigenous Christian population, since so few of the children survived and those few children who did survive probably returned to the Muslim or the Jewish community.

The End of Italian Colonialism

Italy’s entry into the Second World War in June 1940 and the evacuation of much of the European civilian population disrupted schools administrated by religious orders in Libya. In the fall of 1940, the Office of the Prefect required the Sisters of Charity to move their school and teachers as well as orphans from the city of Benghazi to the more remote village of Battah, known as Oberan during the colonial period, in the Jabal al-Akhḍar region of eastern Libya. It was probably hoped that by evacuating orphans to the mountains those children, who were not sent back to metropolitan Italy and remained in Libya during the war, would escape the worst of the violence, similar to the British policy of evacuating civilians from cities during the war.

Many other missionary schools and orphanages were simply closed for the duration of the North African campaign and many buildings were damaged due to

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766 ASANMI, 20/B Libia – Bengasi, Fasc. Suore d’Ivrea, Istituto Associazione Nazionale, Diretto dalle Suore d’Ivrea, 14 novembre 1940.
aerial bombardments, especially in the major cities of Tripoli and Benghazi. The Franciscan Sisters in Tripoli reported that one of their houses located in Via Roma was rendered uninhabitable after two aerial bombardments in Fall 1941 and being plundered by indigenous rebels. Only three rooms on the ground floor remained undamaged, which were occupied by American soldiers during their offensive against the Italians, using the kitchen and cafeteria for non-commissioned offices. After the departure of the American military, the sisters had to return and salvage what remained of the house and school.

With the collapse of the Italian regime in Libya and the establishment of the British Military administration over most of Libya, with the exception of Fezzan which was placed under French control, missionary schools began to reopen for the 1943-1944 academic year, as did state-sponsored schools. In September 1943, the Franciscan Sisters reopened their orphanage in Tripoli under the British administration. After a year, the orphanage admitted thirty orphans, which was only a small percentage of the number of applicants, but more orphans could not be admitted due to the lack of means to support the school. When conditions became more difficult, the sisters were forced to ask the relatives of orphans for a monthly contribution of between 300 to 500 liras for the care of the children. In 1944, the Princess Giovanna nursery school was reopened, with 60 children between the age of 3 and 5. The Princess Giovanna elementary school also reopened. The British

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768 ASSFME, Busta Tripoli, Libya, Tribunale di Tripoli, Atto di Notorietà, 22 aprile 1947.
769 ASANMI, 20/C Libia, Tripoli, Gittà e Dahara, Fasc. Suore francescane, Relazione Casa di Tripoli, 15 luglio 1949
government provided a monthly contribution of 22,000 liras for the operation of the two schools.\textsuperscript{770} During 1943-1944 academic year, the Catholic mission in Tripoli provided elementary level education to 83 girls, of whom only one student was Muslim.\textsuperscript{771}

Those schools that were damaged during the war were slower to reopen after the end of hostilities in Libya. After the American military departed from Tripoli, the Superintendent of Schools agreed to reopen the school operated by the Franciscan Sisters in Via Roma, with three elementary school classes in 1944. Since the house remained uninhabitable, three sisters from the house in Dahra, in the suburbs of Tripoli, staffed the school, commuting daily between their house and the school. During the following year, 1945, they made some repairs to the local shelter, which served as a dormitory and refectory, so that a small community could move into the house. They later restored all of the ground floor classrooms and the dormitory of the boarding school. In 1949, the school had three nursery school classes and a complete elementary course. At the time, the school was staffed by four sisters, four lay teachers and two janitors. The teachers and janitors were paid directly by British Military administration.\textsuperscript{772}

By 1951 in Tripoli, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary (White Sisters) ran a nursery school, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Egypt operated a nursery school,

\textsuperscript{770} ASANMI, 20/E Tripoli, Fasc. Suore Francescane, Città e Dahara, Orfanatrofio S. Francesco e Asilo “Principessa Giovanna,” 15-7-1949
\textsuperscript{771} British Administration Tripolitania. \textit{Annuario generale delle scuole italiane della Tripolitania: ottobre 1943 - settembre 1951} (Città di Castello: [s.n.], 1953), 104.
\textsuperscript{772} ASANMI, 20/C Libia, Tripoli Fasc. Suore francescane Città e Dahara, Relazione Casa di Tripoli, 15 luglio 1949
school and girls’ elementary school and an orphanage, and the Sisters of St. Joseph oversaw a nursery school and an elementary school in Tripoli. The Sisters of St. Joseph also operated a school in the suburbs of Tripoli. There were additional missionary schools in Azizia, Homs and Zuara. In Benghazi, Italian nuns oversaw an elementary school and nursery school. The elementary school had three primary classes with a curriculum drawn from the Italian school system along with Arabic as a compulsory subject. The school was attended by boys and girls, including a number of Arab students.

The post-war period represented a transitional phase in the history of education in Libya. Much of the educational infrastructure had been damaged during the war and the ensuing chaos. Under the administration of the British military, there was an attempt to both expand the educational opportunities available to the local population as well as begin to do away with the previous Italian policy of segregation. Once the Libya Bevin-Sforza plan, which would have placed the Libyan territories under French and British trusteeship for 10 years, failed, the British administration would begin the process of transitioning the education system towards the needs of the new independent state. Missionaries would continue providing charitable assistance to the lower classes including orphans and educating those European children who had not fled during the war. With independence, they would begin moving towards providing education to the children of the elite, especially members

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of the foreign community, but also the children of the loyal notables, much like they had done during the pre-colonial era.

**Conclusion**

As is the case with state-sponsored education, determining the lasting impact of missionary education in Libya is difficult, especially since the number of girls educated remained small. Some political elites, especially in Tripolitania, did choose to send their daughters to missionary schools rather than to state-sponsored vocational schools. Unfortunately, there is almost no information about these women. As educated women themselves, it is likely that their daughters would later be educated in post-independence Libya or possibly abroad. Missionary schools had the singular distinction of being the only academic educational organizations for women, besides a brief period of Ottoman rule, until after Libyan independence. In a modest way, they therefore expanded the educational opportunities available to women in Libya during the periods of Italian colonial rule and British military administration. In addition, missionaries also provided educational opportunities and charitable assistance to abandoned and orphaned children, Bedouin girls, and manumitted slaves at a time when the Italian administration was unwilling or unable to provide these services, saving some children from utter destitution, sexual exploitation and even death.

Despite the ways in which they furthered education for Muslim girls, missionaries actively contributed to the ethno-religious and racial segregation of the Italian school system that relegated indigenous girls to third class subjects both due to
their gender and their religious affiliation. While they may have undermined these
divisions in some cases, in other instances their education system served to reinforce
the differentiation between the metropolitan community and the indigenous
community of Libya. With their move towards a greater emphasis on the Italian
settler population in Libya after the 1920s, they reinforced the policy of segregation
which would be one of the most salient features of Italian colonial rule and which
would largely exclude Muslim girls from the Italian civilizing mission in Libya.

The policy of missionary organizations in the Libyan territories did not differ
substantially from those of other teaching orders in North Africa before the arrival of
formal colonialism during the nineteenth century. Female missionary orders in
Algeria and Tunisia primarily educated the daughters of the local European creole
elites, who rarely sent their daughters back to Europe in order to receive an education,
while also at times educating a small number of the daughters of the local Muslim
and Jewish elite.\textsuperscript{775} After the arrival of French colonialism in 1830, the colonial
authorities feared that attempts to convert the Muslim population would inflame
tensions in the colony, so few institutions were established, which benefited the local
population. Most Christian institutions were set up to serve the growing European
population, not the local Jewish or Muslim population, until after the Second World
War.\textsuperscript{776} Monsignor Lavigerie, who became Archbishop of Carthage and Algiers in
1867, made some attempts to aid orphans whose parents died in a terrible drought,

\textsuperscript{775} Clancy-Smith, “Muslim Princes, Female Missionaries, and Trans-Mediterranean
Migrations,” 116.
\textsuperscript{776} Darcie Fontaine, \textit{Decolonizing Christianity: Religion and the End of Empire in
famine and outbreak of cholera and typhus in 1866 and 1867. The surviving orphans formed the basis of two Arab–Christian villages: Sainte Monique and Saint-Cyprien-des-Attâfs, established in 1872 some 180 kilometers west of Algiers.\textsuperscript{777} Much like in the Libyan territories, orphans were targets for conversion by religious organizations due to the fact that they lacked familial ties. After the suppression of the 1871 Kabyle uprising, the White Sisters also established schools for girls in the Kabylia.\textsuperscript{778} While similar in the broad strokes, the limited amount of scholarship on female missionary education during the colonial period in North Africa makes more nuanced comparisons difficult. Overall, attempts to prohibit proselyting among the Muslim population in North Africa under colonial rule resulted in fewer resources directed at the local populations and by extension fewer educational opportunities for indigenous girls.

After independence, Libyans, including Libyan girls, continued to attend Catholic-run schools alongside the European population that remained in Libya after the Italian withdrawal.\textsuperscript{779} In 1970, after the rise of Gaddafi, the Franciscan mission was expelled from Libya, bringing 160 years of Catholic education in Libya to an end.\textsuperscript{780} At the time they were expelled, the Maltese Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception ran a school that educated 500 children from 26 different

\textsuperscript{779} ASSFMM, Box 6.090-1, Province de l’Immaculée Conception. Casa Madonna della Guardia, Tripoli, Rapport, Visite Provinciale, 1961
\textsuperscript{780} ASSFMM, Box 6.088-8, Maisons fermées (Houses Close), Tripoli, Libya, 1925-2006, Généralisation "Casa della Divina Provvidenza" de Tripoli, 7-13, 16-17 février 1970.
During the 1970s, Gaddafi lessened his antagonism towards Catholic organizations and a number of religious orders returned to continue their charitable work, including the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary and the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception of Ivrea. The political instability in Libya since the Arab Spring uprising and the overthrow of Gaddafi have resulted in the evacuation of female religious orders from Cyrenaica including in Benghazi, El-Merj, Beida and Tobruk. In Tripoli, the Sisters of Charity continues to run a mission and to provide humanitarian aid.

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Chapter 4: Gender and Violence under Italian Rule in Cyrenaica

In the 1930s, the Danish journalist Knud Holmboe traveled through the Sahara and was caught on the front lines between the Italian forces and the anti-colonial resistance. Writing extensively about his experiences in the Libyan territories, he described Cyrenaica as a place in which “the land swam in blood.”\footnote{Holmboe, \textit{Desert Encounter}, 187.} Besides the overt violence unleashed against the resistance and those suspected of aiding them, the Italian military had forbidden the Bedouin from grazing their animals, forcing them to remain in one place. In one camp near Syrtis (probably Sirte), Holmboe claimed that he had never seen such poverty:

The fires shone brightly: The ragged women, their faces sharpened from hunger like birds of prey, stirred the embers. The children: they were so horribly emaciated that you could plainly see their ribs, and their stomachs were distended.\footnote{Holmboe, \textit{Desert Encounter}, 43.}

The Italian policy of restricting the movements of the Bedouins had resulted in the population reaching the point of starvation with nothing to feed themselves or their animals. When Holmboe asked one of the inhabitants if the Italians wanted them to settle down in one place, the Bedouin replied “Allah alone knows. I believe that they want us to die.”\footnote{Holmboe, \textit{Desert Encounter}, 43.}

This forced sedentarization of Bedouin tribes, most of whom were nomadic pastoralists in the hinterland, was just one tactic used by the Italian military in order to break the back of the resistance. In September 1911, Italy invaded the Ottoman-controlled coastal regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. A relative latecomer to the “scramble for Africa,” Italy aimed to establish colonial possessions in the Southern Mediterranean to compete with other imperial powers, primarily France and Britain.\footnote{Lisa Anderson, \textit{The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980} (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 229.} However, the Italian government met unexpected local
resistance, partially backed by the Ottoman government, preventing it from winning a decisive victory and gaining hegemonic control over the region during the 1910s. By the 1920s, Italy would try to “pacify” the Libyan population through large-scale military operations and other forms of coercive power and violence. Finally, in 1934, the Libyan resistance was declared defeated, ending a conflict that had started more than two decades earlier.788

However, the suppression of the armed resistance came at a terrible price for the people of Libya, in general, and of Cyrenaica more specifically. Between twenty and fifty percent of the Libyan population perished or fled during the occupation, with some estimates claiming the population declined from approximately 1.5 million to 750,000 during this period. Under the leadership of General Rodolfo Graziani, the violence of the Italian occupation was most extreme in the region of Cyrenaica in eastern Libya, the conquest of which has been described as one of the bloodiest colonial wars. To break the resistance, Graziani utilized a policy of total war which included the construction of a four-meter-thick 300-kilometer fence along the Libyan-Egyptian border in an attempt to cut Libyan fighters off from their supply lines into Egypt.789 When this proved ineffective, he confined the local population in concentration camps to deprive the resistance of its support and aid.790

Analyzing the effects of this systemic violence, this research adds to the current scholarship on women during the colonial period in the Middle East and North Africa by

790 Cresti, Non desiderare la terra d'altri, 97-100.
drawing on oral history interviews to examine the experiences of women who were involved in the resistance to Italian occupation in eastern Libya. Specifically, it assesses the role played by women in the armed resistance by focusing on aspects of the gendered division of labor within resistance groups. It argues that women in Libya made the long rebellion feasible through critical military duties and participated as members of households and clans and in accordance with local allegiances and religious identities. In effect, I demonstrate how women not only interacted with colonial rule but also shaped its configurations. In addition to the pivotal role of women in anti-colonial struggles, colonial violence was gendered. Like many Mediterranean societies, Libya and Italy shared fundamental patriarchal values when it comes to violence and honor. Men were expected to take responsibility for female kin while elders were required to protect those younger members of the community. Whether through tribal vengeance or dueling, injuries inflicted against kin in both societies required retaliation through violence to avenge the wrong and protect an individual’s honor. Therefore, violence perpetrated against another’s female kin was viewed as a way of humiliating that individual by undermining his honor and manliness. The Italians routinely employed this kind of gendered violence in an attempt to weaken the resistance.

The history of the Libyan resistance and its eventual defeat at the hands of the Italian government still tends to focus on questions of nationalism, state-building and Libyan identity while neglecting issues related to subjectivity, local identities and understandings as well as lived experiences under colonialism. Women are usually at the margins of nationalist and colonial narratives of history; however, here they emerge as central figures as this study addresses the

experiences of subaltern members of Libyan society – women, both nomadic and semi-nomadic people – whose stories are rarely recorded and preserved. These voices broaden our understanding of colonialism by challenging accepted narratives about the ways in which it operated at the local level, which raises questions of the shaping of memories and representations of Libyan women, gender, and colonial violence. This marginalization is reproduced through the silences and omissions apparent in the interviews gathered by the Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli, a nationalist enterprise sanctioned by Qadaffi the new leader of independent Libya, that form the basis of this study, as women are forced to negotiate with the largely masculine narratives of Libyan history.

Sources and Methodology

This chapter draws on a collection of oral history interviews gathered by the Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli. Starting in the 1970s, the center began collecting interviews with former mujāhidīn and their relatives.\textsuperscript{792} The center published a collection of these oral narratives in forty-three volumes under the title of \textit{Mawsūʻat riwāyāt al-jihād} (Oral Narratives of the Jihād), but a large percent of the 15,000 narratives still remain un-transcribed.\textsuperscript{793} Despite the large number of interviews, only a small percentage of them were conducted with women. The majority of the sources drawn upon for this study are edited interviews with male and female resistance fighters published as part of the \textit{Mawsūʻat riwāyāt al-jihād} series. These interviews were all conducted in the Libyan dialect during the late 1970s and early 1980s in eastern Libya.

although a few were later transcribed into Modern Standard Arabic. All of the translation in this chapter are my own unless otherwise noted.

The Libyan Studies Center was a major historical project of the regime of Muammar el Qaddafi. After coming to power in 1969, Qaddafi utilized the new state oil revenue to reframe the history of Libya to fit his own intellectual orientation. In particular, he highlighted the revolutionary role of the people in the creation of the Libyan nation and downplayed regional differences, a position consistent with his own revolutionary ideology. This new narrative valorized the resistance of the largely male mujāhidīn and championed the figure of ‘Umar al-Mukhtār, leader of the resistance in Cyrenaica. The male revolutionary was thus placed at the center of the construction of a national Libyan history. This version of Libyan history was sanctioned by the authoritarian nature of the new regime that sought to monopolize the official narratives of Libyan history. One keen way of controlling the historical narrative was through negotiations with historians, most notably Jan Vansina, a central figure in the fields of African and oral history, who organized the Libyan collection of oral history narratives in the 1970s. After the fall of the Qaddafi regime, the future of the Libyan Studies Center remains unclear, a reflection of the precarious trajectories of memory and history writing in Libya.

While I have drawn on Italian archival sources to supplement the oral history interviews gathered in Libya, the vast majority of the Italian sources from this period remain inaccessible to researchers, especially military documents accessed from the Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (USSME). The available written documents on the “pacification” of Libya highlight the extreme violence of Italian colonial rule, including the use of chemical weapons and concentration camps, but it is impossible to verify every accusation made in the

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oral history interviews. Until the Italians open their entire archive to researchers, I only have access to the women’s versions of colonial history. While this is not without its limitations, I follow an approach to oral histories developed by Italian historian Alessandro Portelli, who argues that oral history is a method of exploring new areas of events from the perspective of non-hegemonic classes.795

Place: Cyrenaica

Cyrenaica (Barqa) differed substantially from western Libya. While the Ottomans maintained loose authority over all of Libya from their capital at Tripoli prior to the Italian invasion, a 403 mile desert separates Cyrenaica from the rest of Libya, which enabled the region to develop its own distinct regional characteristics.796 In addition to al-Jabal al-Akhḍar (The Green Mountain), which borders the Mediterranean sea, two arid regions, the plain of Marj and a plateau, dominate the topography of central Cyrenaica.797 The southern region is composed of barren desert with only a few fertile oases. The population of the region was approximately 200,000 inhabitants on the eve of the Italian invasion, three-quarters of which were pastoralists, who herded animals and grew cereals during the rainy season.798 The coastal cities of the region

796 Ahmida, The Making of Modern Libya, 73.
797 According to the Four Powers Commission, the population of Cyrenaica was approximately 304,437 in 1947 of which 98 percent of the population were Arab Muslim. The rest of the population was made up of Jews and European immigrants including Italians, Greeks and Maltese. For more information, see USNA. “Report on Libya,” Vol. III, Records of the Four Power Commission of Investigation (Former Italian Colonies), Record Group 43, 18.
798 Cresti, Non desiderare la terra d'altri, 23.
remained largely marginal, in contrast to Tripoli or coastal cities in nearby Tunisia, and the rural population was economically tied to overland trade with Western Egypt.\footnote{Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, \textit{The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization and Resistance.} 2nd Edition (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 75-81.}

\textit{Al-Jabal al-Akhdrar} (The Green Mountain) differed from the rest of Cyrenaica in its physical geography and culture. It is a fertile and forested region, the wettest part of an otherwise largely arid country, receiving between 500-600 millimeters of rain annually.\footnote{Ahmida, \textit{The Making of Modern Libya}, 12.} It lies northeast of Benghazi, the largest city in Cyrenaica, and south of the port city of Derna and the Mediterranean Sea. While the majority of Cyrenaica was inhabited by nomadic tribes,\footnote{A “tribe”, known as Qabila (pl. Qabã’il) in Arabic, is a designation used to indicate a larger unit than a village or herding group. A tribe has a certain characteristic including a sense of solidarity between its members. These larger groups are not held together by genuine kinship but instead a myth of common ancestry that is sometimes expressed by a common name. For more information, see Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner. \textit{Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East} (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1990), 370.} \textit{al-Jabal al-Akhdrar} during the colonial period was characterized by semi-sedentary or transhumant tribes, who moved seasonally with their livestock, mostly goats and cattle, but retained permanent residences. The tribes in this region included the \textit{al-Häsa}, the \textit{al-Drasa} and some members of the \textit{al-Brä’sa} and \textit{al-’Ubaydät}.\footnote{Ahmida, \textit{The Making of Modern Libya}, 80.} Along with practicing animal husbandry, they also cultivated grain, especially barley, as well as fruit.\footnote{USNA. “Report on Libya,” Vol. III, Records of the Four Power Commission of Investigation (Former Italian Colonies), Record Group 43, 18.}

Although nominally part of the Ottoman Empire, Cyrenaica remained largely politically autonomous, with Ottoman control confined to a few coastal cities and tax collection largely ineffective despite attempts by the Ottoman government to incorporate the tribes into its
The Sanūsī order, founded in the middle of the nineteenth century by Muḥammad bin ‘Alī al-Sanūsī, gradually took root in the region of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, providing a network of zawāya (lodges) that were centers of Islamic learning but also brought greater stability to the region. Established on major trade routes, these lodges became centers of education, trade and commercial activities, banking, courts as well as sanctuaries for the poor and destitute in the region.

In order to understand the rise of the Sanūsiyya, it is first important to look at the overall social structure of the region. The social organization of the region had been shaped by the migration of Arab tribesmen and tribeswomen of Banū Hilāl and Banū Salīm in the eleventh century, who conquered North Africa and took control of the best pastoral lands and water resources of the region, making the existing Berber and Arab population their vassals. In Cyrenaica, the vassals were called Murābitīn (sing. Murābitī) and the descendants of the conquering tribes were known as Saʿda (sing. Saʿdawi). However, by the end the mid nineteenth century, Murābitīn were no longer economically dependent on the Saʿada and instead

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804 Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery”: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate.” Comparative Studies in Society and History 45 (2) (2003): 318-319.
805 Cresti, Non desiderare la terra d'altro, 30.
Sa’ada became a marker of social standing and nobility.\textsuperscript{809} It was in this context that the Sanūsī movement developed and both groups were integrated into the Sanūsiyya order.

**The Social World of the Tribes of Cyrenaica**

To construct the social world of tribes in Cyrenaica, this section draws on the scholarship of Peters, Roy G. Behnke and Lila Abu-Lughod and ethnographic evidence drawn from the oral sources.\textsuperscript{810} In Cyrenaica, Bedouin gender ideology is based on the twinned concepts of honor, associated with men, and modesty, associated with women. Within this framework, “maleness is associated with autonomy and femaleness with dependence.”\textsuperscript{811} Along with dependence, women are also associated with nature and natural processes that include menstruation, procreation, and sexuality in a perspective that presents them as morally inferior, since they lack both reason and self-mastery.\textsuperscript{812}

In practice, women in pastoral societies in Cyrenaica enjoyed high domestic status and the *hijab* was worn only situationally, but women were generally excluded from the company of men in public. A woman wore silk head coverings that were drawn across her face at the approach of a man who was not a close relation.\textsuperscript{813} After the onset of puberty but prior to

\textsuperscript{811} Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, 118.
\textsuperscript{812} Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, 124.
marriage was the period during which both sexes were the most tightly controlled and were, correspondingly, denied the full rights of married members of the community. Premarital indiscretions were also dealt with harshly and may have resulted in the deaths of both parties involved.\(^{814}\) However, both men and women gained more freedom upon marriage, after which they were seen as making the transition to full adulthood, which usually took place in the mid-teens for girls and early twenties for young men, although this could be delayed considerably to hold out for a high bride-price. Women gained additional freedom as they aged and passed the period of childbearing, no longer covering their faces and conversing freely with men.\(^{815}\)

According to interviews with men and women who participated in the anti-colonial resistance, both men and women were actively involved in the tasks of production, although each had their distinctive roles. Men’s tasks included herding livestock, plowing fields, harvesting crops, and storing grain. In contrast, women were involved with the tasks of spinning wool, grinding flour from wheat or barley, fetching water, chopping firewood, cooking, milking animals and weaving carpets (and tents among nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes).\(^{816}\) The mixing of gendered responsibilities or cooperation in tasks between men and women was reduced to a minimum. In fact, the interference of men in women's tasks was greatly discouraged. Peters maintained that this helped create a symbiotic relationship between the sexes, since each was dependent on the other.\(^{817}\)

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\(^{817}\) Peters, *The Bedouin of Cyrenaica*, 250.
Beyond the domestic sphere, women's status also played a part in politics, where marriage alliances were crucial. However, women (and men) had no direct say in their choice of spouse, as marriages were arranged by senior members of the household.818 Women in the narratives routinely mentioned their lack of input into choosing a husband and marriage alliances within a single family were common, especially marriage between first cousins.819 Despite being Sunni Muslims, the most common form of marriage was a “gift” (ʿatat) marriage in which a guardian gives a woman in marriage as if she was not privy to the marriage contract and also claims her dowry.820 This practice is not recognized by the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence, which each recognize the dowry as the woman’s property.821 Among nomadic tribes of Libya, women’s lack of control over her dowry extended to other types of property, since a woman was supported by her father's estate until marriage but did not inherit, either as a wife or daughter. Behnke quoted individuals saying that “women want husbands not property.”822 As a result, women owned substantially less property than men, usually consisting of jewelry and other items of personal adornment, which were often part of the bride price (mahr).823 This relative lack of access to property enshrined the dependent status of women within Muslim Bedouin communities.

823 Under Islamic law, once a woman has reached the age of puberty, she cannot be married without her consent. If she wishes to contract her own marriage, some schools of Islamic jurisprudence require the permission of her guardian if she is a virgin for her to enter into the contract. Before a woman has reached puberty, she can be married without her consent, but the consummation of the marriage must be delayed until she has reached physical maturity. In all
While there is some information available about the differences between the social relations of the semi-sedentary tribes of the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar and their fully nomadic brethren, especially relating to marriage, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the semi-sedentary tribes adopted the practices of more sedentary people. It is clear that the tribes of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar retained their tribal affiliations and continued to maintain other aspects of pastoral cereal cultivation and forms of animal husbandry. However, evidence suggest they also adopted more orthodox Muslim practices, referring to themselves as “ahl al-sunna,” and engaging in stricter segregation of the sexes than was practiced by fully nomadic peoples.

Marriages consistent with the rules of the Mālikī school of Islamic law, the dominant school in North Africa, were more common among women of the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar region. The dowry of an elite member of the community might have consisted of gold (bracelets), silk gowns, a slave, a servant, 100 riyals, honey and 200 camels. At the time of the marriage, the community would build a house for the bride and groom that was set apart a small distance from the hamlet or village and the whole village would participate in the celebration, clapping their hands, dancing and feasting together.

This study looks at decades of changes that were intensified by colonial war and violence. These changes altered the social world of the tribes, resulting in previously semi-sedentary tribes becoming completely nomadic during the war. Jamīla Saʿīd Sulaymān, who was born in 1900 in Shahhat (Cirene) in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar and participated in the anti-colonial resistance, recounted that the war destroyed grain cultivation and herding and that “it was not

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schools of Islamic jurisprudence, the dower is her own private property which she may dispose of as she deems fit. Tucker, Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law, 41-50.

possible to remain in one place.”827 During the war, there was also a breakdown in stricter forms of gender segregation.828

The Women's Resistance to Italian Colonialism

The interviews and other sources make it clear that some women were an active part of the resistance from the beginning. Their names are often listed among those “martyred” in various battles, for example, women like Mubrūka al-Qabṭān and Maryam Sa’d al-Khashabī who died in battle in a place called al-Naḍīd.829 However, not all Libyan women experienced Italian colonialism the same way; rather, their experiences depended on age, status, religion, language, ethnicity, and tribal affiliation. Those women who fought in the anti-colonial resistance were largely from rural tribal backgrounds. Even among those from rural areas, some women stayed with their families and did not participate in the jihād.830 There was no universal feminine experience of the colonial conquest, just as there was no universal male experience.

While there is little source information available about how women joined the mujahidin, it is clear from their narratives that all of the women had other family members involved, whether husbands, brothers, mothers or fathers. Jamīla Sa‘īd Sulaymān and her “family joined the ranks of the mujāhidīn answering the call of jihād in the path of God” when she was a young

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829 ‘Aṭīqa Mas‘ūd al-Shawāy’ar listed these two women along with Ibrīs Abū Mizura as the deaths she remembers from the battle of al-Naḍīd. ‘Aṭīqa Mas‘ūd al-Shawāy’ar was from the Idrīs and the Zlūṭ tribes. Her date and place of birth were unknown and the interview was conducted in 1983. al-Hāyn, Mawsū‘at riwāyāt al-jihād, 127.
girl. It is unlikely that women (or men for that matter) were recruited en masse as individuals; rather, they joined the resistance along with members of their clan or camp. Tribes in Cyrenaica were divided into smaller sub-groups or camps composed of related males and made up of between 200 and 700 adults. Members of each camp share a collective identity that requires every member to exact vengeance, pay blood money (diya), and engage in common defense of the camp as a whole. During the colonial period, it was this tribal organization that gave the anti-colonial resistance its form, and it was likely this organization that led women to join the resistance.

As members of tribal groups, women played a pivotal role in the resistance. While women rarely carried weapons, they rode camels loaded with baggage and children, cared for the injured, distributed water, and carried the fallen away from the battlefield. Jamīla Saʿīd Sulaymān confirmed that the “women helped the wounded and cooked and administered first aid” to the fighters. Similarly, al-Sabir Muḥammad Yūsif al-Tabalqī, who was born in the city of Deriana in northern Cyrenaica in 1913, said that “women participated with us in the battle of al-Qarun by fetching water and distributing it among the fighters while uplifting the morale of the mujāhidīn with zagḥārīd… which inspired a fighting spirit and inflamed the feelings of the mujāhidīn.” These interviews illuminate the patterns and circumstances of women’s

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831 al-Hāyn, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 9.
832 Peters, The Bedouin of Cyrenaica, 60.
835 al-Hāyn, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 10.
837 Zagḥārīd are trilling sounds made by Arab women as a manifestation of joy or extreme sadness. For more information on Yūsif al-Tabalqī’s account see al-Barghathī, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 23.
involvement with resistance and colonial violence. Yet, the interview with this mujāhid also points to a gendered construction of women as primarily supporting, uplifting, and inflaming figures for the male mujāhidīn, rather than being central figures in their own right. This construction has often resulted in downplaying the importance of women’s logistical and tactical roles resisting colonial rule.

Other sources beyond these collections of oral history interviews provide similar accounts with the most detailed being the personal papers of the Tripolitanian politician Sulaymān al-Bārūnī (1870-1940), who was instrumental in organizing opposition to the Italian invasion during the 1910s. However, his account does deal with a different region of Libya, namely Tripolitania, and an earlier period than the majority of the interviews. In his writing on a battle that took place on the August 2, 1912 in the village of Zuwarah, he recounts how he and several other mujāhidīn came upon a group of women between the sand dunes carrying water, describing some of them as having faces “more beautiful than the moon.” One of the women asked him: “Will you give us permission to break the fast like the men?” He said, “Yes, you may. You are mujāhidāt (the female version of mujāhidīn) also.” In response, she said: “We cannot permit ourselves that. There is no work for us except for serving the fighters water on a

838 Along with being an important politician and option leader Sulaymān al-Bārūnī was a celebrated theologian, historian, poet and Ibāḍī author. He was eventually exiled from Libya in 1921 due to suspicions that he harbored Ibāḍī separatist tendencies. For more on Sulaymān al-Bārūnī's life see J.E. Peterson, “Arab Nationalism and the Idealist Politician: The Career of Sulaymān al-Bārūnī” in Law, personalities, and politics of the Middle East: Essays in honor of Majid Khadduri. ed. Majid Khadduri et al. (Washington, D.C.: Westview Press; Middle East Institute, 1987), 124-139.


day like this.”\textsuperscript{842} He then said that “she then went along with those that were with her and they raised their voices in praise and encouragement.”\textsuperscript{843}

He goes on to relate that the “women reached the lines and distributed the water to the fighters. They were in the harshest possible state of thirst. The women returned safely.”\textsuperscript{844} The women continued to circulate among the fighters with water while the enemy launched rockets at them, thinking that that they were men or believing that their aid to the fighting men made them acceptable targets. However, the women were not afraid.\textsuperscript{845} He finishes his account by saying that “so by God, our country belongs to the women and this is the firm truth especially in current times.”\textsuperscript{846}

The tactical and logistical support provided by women were extensions of their responsibilities during periods of greater stability. War is not exempted from the social world, but must instead be understood in reference to its specific social context; sometimes it rejects past traditions while at other times it reproduces and strengthens the former social order.\textsuperscript{847} All of the women's accounts point to the fact that the gendered divisions of labor which were part of the social organizations of pastoral societies continued during the war against the Italians. Providing water for the fighters, cooking, and caring for the wounded were related to the tasks of fetching water, chopping firewood, cooking that women were responsible for in Bedouin communities. Women’s roles were crucial to the maintenance of everyday life in the tribe before

\textsuperscript{842} al-Bārūnī, “Lilnasā’ bildnā,” 80.
\textsuperscript{843} al-Bārūnī, “Lilnasā’ bildnā,” 80.
\textsuperscript{844} al-Bārūnī, “Lilnasā’ bildnā,” 81.
\textsuperscript{845} al-Bārūnī, “Lilnasā’ bildnā,” 81.
\textsuperscript{846} al-Bārūnī, “Lilnasā’ bildnā,” 81.
the Italian invasion and their roles remained crucial to everyday life of the tribe during war and
critical to the continuation of the resistance.

Women were held in high esteem for their bravery, strength, and fortitude and were
considered members of the mujāhidīn like men. At times, the extraordinary situation of the
ongoing anti-colonial resistance enabled women to gain more autonomy on the battlefield than
they would have traditionally within their own communities. Mabrūkā Yūnis Būqafī’s father
expressed this sentiment forcefully, telling her “you are a man in my eyes. I have no sons so you
are my son,”848 and revealing his high degree of respect for her capabilities by entrusting her to
look after the other women as long as she remained alive, a great compliment in a society in
which female dependence and male guardianship were the norm.849

Despite several mentions of women's great bravery, there is only one reference in the
narratives to a woman taking up arms against the Italians. One mujāhid tells of a woman named
Mabrūkā al-ʿAmīsha who he saw firing upon the Italians at the battle of al-Halīqīma, but little
else was said about her. Although women did not usually take up arms, this did not mean that
they were not put in harm’s way. As previously noted, the names of woman are listed among
those remembered to have died at various battles, for example, Mabrūkā al-Qaṣṭān and Maryam
Saḍ al-Khashabī.850 Also, Jamīla Saḍ Sulaymān recounted the battle of Wādī al-Shabriq wa al-
Muḥa in which “many men and women, old and young,” died “especially those on foot.”851
During the battle, the mujāhidīn were split into two groups, one attacking the Italians and one

848 al-Hayan, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 133.
849 al-Hayan, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 133.
850 al-Hayan, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 127.
851 al-Hayan, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 10.
defending their own caravan. Her husband was among those trying to defend the caravan while she ran from the Italians on foot. She recalled that:

My husband ordered me to ride behind him but I was afraid that he would fall from the horse if he carried me so I refused. I was carrying my infant son on my back and he had stopped crying and moving and I knew for certain he was dead so I cried out my husband to inform him of this... the child had been wounded by shrapnel during the battle and was dying of thirst before his death.852

From the horror of the scene that she describes, women (and children) did not escape battle but were often in the midst of it. A number of women tell of carrying small children on their backs in hope of keeping them safe or of watching them and other family members die or be taken prisoner by the Italians.

Nowhere in the accounts do any of the women express any equivocation about the role of the Italians or their motivations, or any of the nostalgia sometimes expressed about the colonial period. In the women’s versions of the colonial period, the Italians were always vicious and brutal and the mujāhidīn were always brave and heroic. This is probably a result of both the individual experiences of women during the colonial period and the official anti-imperialist ideology fostered by the regime of Muammar el Gaddafī.853 The Italians remained shadowy figures, often referred to simply as “the Christians” (al-naṣārā). Khuzna ‘Abd al-Salām al-Kuzza, born in Suluq in 1891, stated that “no one is afraid of them… we are girls and the only thing we fear is shame (al-‘āib).”854 Here she invokes a gendered understanding of fear in which dishonor, most likely defined by sexual impropriety, is a greater threat than other forms of bodily harm that the Italians could inflict. This fear of dishonor may have pushed many women into

852 al-Hayan, Mawsū‘at riwāyāt al-jihād, 10.
silence in their accounts on the topic of sexual violence and to fashion instead heroic accounts more attuned to male mujāhidīn narratives and to their gendered code of honor.

While it can be assumed that those opposing Italian rule ultimately hoped to push the Italians out of the Libyan territories, women explained their involvement as a desire to answer “the call of jihād in the path of God.” They also often spoke of the sense of solidarity between the mujāhidīn: Hūayna Muḥammad Ibrīdān al-Baraʾṣī said that “our tent was their tent, our food was one, our drink was one, and our travel one; we were comrades.” Similar to their male counterparts, women did not express any sentiments that could be construed as nationalist or even proto-nationalist about the establishment of a Libyan nation. This is not surprising given the fact that Libyan nationalism did not develop until the second decade of the twentieth century with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922 and subsequent abolition of the Caliphate. Nationalism had a stronger resonance among urban middle-class elites and took significantly longer to filter down to the popular classes. Although the women in this study actively opposed the Italians well into the 1930s, Islam and allegiance to their family and tribe were the two greatest motivating factors in this struggle, rather the ideal of a Libyan nation as such.

856 Hūayna Muḥammad Ibrīdān al-Baraʾṣī was born in 1893. The location is listed as “mutanaqala” or nomadic. Zahrā, al-Marʿa al-Lībīyya fī al-Jihād, 87.
A Case Study: Hūayna Muḥammad Ibrīdān al-Baraʾṣi

Finding a single woman who is representative of the women who fought and died resisting the Italians is a difficult proposition. In many ways, Hūayna Muḥammad Ibrīdān al-Baraʾṣi is less representative due to her marriage to a non-Libyan, but her life and experiences under Italian rule raise interesting questions about the nature of resistance and women’s role within it. Hūayna Muḥammad Ibrīdān al-Baraʾṣi was born in 1893 and in her late teens at the time of the Italian invasion. Unlike many of the women, her father was not among the mujāhidīn, since he died before her birth, but her sister was the wife of a mujāhid named ʿAbd al-Kaʳīm al-Jamal. Hūayna became the wife of ʿAšmān al-Šāmī, an Ottoman officer sent to assist the Libyan resistance who stayed in Libya and became a companion of ʿUmar al-Mukhtār and leader of the regiment of al-Baraʾṣi and al-Drasa in the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar region. ʿAšmān al-Šāmī was of Palestinian origin and fought against the Italians in Libya for 21 years before his capture and execution at their hands in 1932. Married at about age 18 when he was 25, she eventually bore five sons and two daughters.

Hūayna recounted in detail the role of women in the regiment. Similar to other women’s accounts, she related the fact that women during the Italian occupation washed the blood from...

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858 In the original source, she refers to her sister by the term rāfīqa, which usually refers to a female companion or comrade. It can also mean a mistress. Therefore, her sister might have been the paramour of ʿAbd al-Kaʳīm al-Jamal. However, this would have been unusual given the societal prohibition on extramarital sexual relationships. Zahrā, al-Marʿa al-Šāmīyya fī al-Jihād, 80.

859 At the time of the interview, she was a resident of the city of al-Benghazi. Zahrā, al-Marʿa al-Šāmīyya fī al-Jihād, 79.


861 Hūayna gives her age as both 18 and 16 at the time of her marriage to ʿAšmān al-Šāmī. If she was indeed born in 1893, she would have been 18 years old at the time of the Italian invasion but most of the dates are probably approximations. Zahrā, al-Marʿa al-Šāmīyya fī al-Jihād, 79-80.

clothing and nursed the injured. Women prepared food including cooking meat and making bread. A woman named Fāṭima was a skilled nurse. Hūayna claims that she played comparable roles in the regiment. Similar to other female narrators, she focused on the division of labor between men and women in the resistance cell. While these were their primary roles, Hūayna and other women from her regiment were also involved in direct combat and acted as saboteurs. When they located armored cars, they doused burlap bags in gasoline, lit them and threw them in the cars, killing all the Italians inside. Hūayna expressed the joy felt by the women in being able to provide this service to the resistance.

During the time that she participated in the resistance, Hūayna was seriously injured by an Italian aerial bombardment. Planes came upon her when she was with a pregnant woman named Mabrūka Bū Najwī and Mabrūka’s sister Ṣaʿyiba in a place called al-Muhjah in Khulan, northwest of al-Bayda, in northern Cyrenaica. She saw a flash in front of her but did not think that she was injured. Later, Yūsif Bū Halīqa came to her ask about her children and then he told her that she was covered in blood. Such injuries from aerial bombardments or strafing runs were common among women involved in the resistance. Luckily, Hūayna was able to recover from her injuries.

As previously mentioned, Hūayna’s husband, ʿAšmān, was eventually captured by the Italians after being injured. She was told that they brought him by air to Marj, where many important Italian officers were stationed, including General Rodolfo Graziani. ʿAšmān was eventually executed. After her husband was captured, she went to Benghazi looking for help from a man named Maḥmūd al-Sunnī since she had children and had been left without

protection. She eventually made her way to Tubruq looking for Sa’d al-Abyad al-‘Ubaydī. It was his wife that informed her that her husband was dead, slaughtering a sheep in his memory. In Tubruq, Sa’d al-Abyad al-ʿUbaydī introduced her to al-Shārif al-Gharyānī, the co-founder of the first Sanūsī zāwiya at al-Bayda’ in 1844 and the guardian of the orphaned ‘Umar al-Mukhtār, whose approval she needed to return to her family in al-Bayda’ since he was the wali of Barqah. He treated her kindly, but she saw herself as a “daughter of the badiya (desert)” and disliked the cities of the Italians. While in Tubruq, a representative of Sīdī Idrīs (Idrīs al-Sanūsī) offered to look after her sons and provide for their studies at al-Azhar in Cairo. However, she distrusted these people and feared that they would take her children to be servants, so she went with her sons to al-Bayda and returned to her family.866

Very little information is available on the life of Hūayna after her return to her family, except that she eventually came to live in Benghazi where she was interviewed. Unfortunately, the interviewer did not provide further details about her life after the resistance was destroyed and whether she remarried or what eventually became of her seven children.

Her life shares a number of similarities with other women who belonged to resistance units and fought along with the mujāhidīn. She played an active military role in the unit and risked her life along with other women to defend her community. In the end, she paid a high price, losing her husband as well as witnessing the deaths of a number of members of her unit. Luckily, she avoided the most draconian putative measures implemented by the Italians and was not interned in a concentration camp, an issue that I will address in greater detail in the next section.

Her marriage to a Turkish officer of Palestinian origin also points to the international nature of the resistance. Along with Libyans, fighters traveled from other parts of the Middle East in order to participate in the resistance against the Italians. One of the most famous examples is the Egyptian politician 'Abd al-Rahmān Ĥassan 'Azzām, known as 'Azzām Bāshā, who served as the first secretary-general of the Arab League between 1945 and 1952. 'Azzām joined the resistance in Libya and fought there between 1915 and 1923, later crediting his experience in Libya with developing his conception of Arab nationalism.867 Many of these international fighters, like 'Asmān al-Shāmī, married Libyan women and some eventually settled in Libya permanently.868

Hūayna’s distrust of Sīdī Idrīs al-Sanūsī and his representative might have been genuine. As a woman of non-elite status from the badiya, the Libyan elites may have seemed both foreign and disreputable. Her claims also may have been shaped by the official ideology of the Gaddafi government, which sought to paint the monarchy as corrupt and collaborationist during the period of Italian colonial rule.

868 Adm al-Hāyn Sulaymān recounts the participation of fighters from other regions of Middle East. He said that “there were no conditions [for joining the mujāhidīn] except for a sincere desire and we were joined by mujāhidīn from Yemen and other places and there was a man whose origin was Israeli and converted to Islam and he fought with us sincerely and he was still alive until recently in the city of al-Bayda with his children.” For more information, see Muşṭafā Sa'd al-Hayan, “Adm al-Hāyn Sulaymān” in *Mawsū‘at riwāyāt al-jihād*, Vol 13. (Ţarābulus, al-Jamāhīrīyah al-‘Arabīyah al-Lībīyah al-Sha’bīyah al-Ishtirākīyah: Jāmi‘at al-Fātiḥ, Markaz Dirāsāt Jihād al-Lībīyīn Ḍidda al-Ghazw al-Īṭālī, 1989), 49.
The Gendered Violence of the Colonial Encounter

A large number of Libyans were killed, exiled, and imprisoned for opposition to the Italian occupation during the first decade of their rule. The Italians were unsuccessful in gaining control of the majority of the territory and the resistance of the local population had pushed them back to the cities of Tripoli, Homs and the coastal strip between Zanzur and Zuara in Tripolitania and the cities of Benghazi, Shahhat (Cirene), Derna and Tubruq in Cyrenaica by 1915. Local notables formed a semi-autonomous government, the Tripolitanian Republic (al-Jumhūriyya al-Ṭarābulusiyya), in Tripolitania and the Italian government recognized the control of the Sanūsiyya, a revivalist Sufi religious movement, over the hinterland in Cyrenaica and their leader, Idrīs al-Mahdī al-Sanūsī, was granted the largely ceremonial title of Amir of Cyrenaica.869

Despite the eventual détente that was reached between the colonial administrations and Libyan elites, the first decade of colonial rule was still a period of brutal treatment for those suspected of resisting Italian rule in Libya. Khuzna ‘Abd al-Salām al-Kuzza was the daughter of a famous mujāhid by the name of ‘Abd al-Salām al-Kuzza.870 She recounted this period: “the Italians were pursuing my father and every day they were at war and every day the men died, and I (stayed), they didn’t catch anyone, (instead) they arrested me because I was there when my father was away – the men fired upon them and they took the camels and children (girls).”871 Khuzna attempted to conceal her identity by giving the false (and rather generic) name Mabrūka

870 Khuzna ‘Abd al-Salām al-Kuzza was born in 1891 in the city of Sulūq. She was 95 years old at the time she was interviewed. Zahrā, “Khuzna ‘Abd al-Salām al-Kuzza” in *al-Mar’a al-Lībiyya fī al-Jihād*, 51.
bint Muḥammad but was eventually recognized by al-Shārif al-Gharyānī, who was the adopted father of ‘Umar al-Mukhtār and also acted as an intermediary between the Italian authorities and the resistance. Khuzna was placed under al-Shārif al-Gharyānī’s protection, which guaranteed her safety until she was eventually rescued by her uncle.872

A shift in policy occurred after the Fascist government came to power in 1922, as Benito Mussolini rejected the Liberal government's policy, in place since 1911, of collaborating with local Libyan elites. Mussolini’s first Minister of Colonies, Luigi Federzoni, pushed for what the Italians considered the *riconquista* of the hinterland in early 1923 to transform it into a space open for Italian demographic colonialism.873 This *riconquista* was undertaken by Rodolfo Graziani, nicknamed the “Butcher Graziani” by the local population, who was in command of all Italian forces in Tripolitania by 1928.874 In 1930, he was appointed the vice-governor of Cyrenaica and instituted a repressive campaign against the indigenous population, which included the clearing of ground, the razing of enemy villages, the seizure of crops and livestock, and destruction of wells. Although Graziani was not solely responsible for the repression of the anti-colonial resistance, he became a symbol for the local population of the tyranny and barbarism of Italian colonial rule. Viewing Libya as Italy’s rightful possession, he argued that “the wheel of fate” had been “planted and stuck… a thousand fiery Italian souls” in the “untouched sands” of the Libyan desert.875

873 Cresti, *Non desiderare la terra d'altro*, 92.
875 Archivio dello Stato (ACS); Carte Graziani, Busta 7; Fasc. 10. Sottofasc. 4. Telegramma a Dottor Pomilio, Giornale Azione Coloniale, da Graziani. 27 gennaio 1932.
Drawing on the French discourse about nomadism, the Italians viewed the nomadic population of Libya both as misguided heroic individuals and dangerous criminals, who historically were completely unwilling to submit to any form of governance. In *Cirenaica Pacificata*, Graziani argued that:

A nomad is an anarchist, lover of absolute freedom and independence, intolerant of all restraint, stubborn, ignorant, a blustering and invincible hero; that possesses only a rifle and a horse; camouflaged frequently, often disguised under the guise of the necessity of the movement of his tent in order to escape from all constraint and control of Government.\(^7\)

Graziani goes on to add:

Averse to all constraints of discipline, used to wander in immense, desert territories, proud of their mobility and ease of travel, pervaded by the charm of independence, always ready for war and plunder, the nomads have always rejected every restraint of government.\(^7\)

For Graziani, the nomad is a male figure with a horse and rifle, an *ereo* (hero) and never an *eroina* (heroine). It is this unruly masculine figure who must be subdued in order to guarantee the “security and tranquility of the area, which must be protected above all other considerations.”\(^7\) Therefore, Graziani maintained that the true origin of the political problems in Libya was the nomadic nature of the local population characterized by a chaotic, warlike,


\(^7\) Il problema dei nomadi non è nuovo nella storia della colonizzazione ed ha affaticato nel passato remoto e prossimo, ed ancora nel presidente, tutte le nazioni antiche e moderne che hanno dovuto esercitare la loro autorità ed il loro dominio su di essi. Refrattari ad ogni vincolo di disciplina, abituati a spaziare in territori spesso immensi e desertici, forti della loro mobilità e facilità di spostamento, pervasi del fascino della indipendenza, sempre pronti alla guerra ed alla razzia, i nomadi hanno sempre reagito ad ogni freno di governo. Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata*, 120.

\(^7\) Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata*, 121.
masculine ethos. In the past, the Italians were prevented “from implementing the regime of force, barely touching their conditions of life” for twenty years,\textsuperscript{879} but now he could implement this regime against the nomadic population. While women would be rhetorically ignored in Graziani’s construct of the nomad, they would also be victims of the Italian policy of “pacification.”

Franz Fanon has argued that the first colonial encounter “was colored by violence and their cohabitation – or rather the exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer – continued at the point of the bayonet and under cannon fire.”\textsuperscript{880} This kind of systemic colonial violence was experienced by women as well as men. Violence was indiscriminately inflicted on Libyans as colonial subjects, but it was also gendered. Women’s experiences of violence overlapped men’s but was not identical. There were gendered divides in the way Italians approached men and women involved in the resistance, often using women as ammunition against men. The Italian military consistently inflicted humiliation on Libyan men by attacking women and children in hopes of bringing the resistance to an end by targeting their honor and manhood.

Women were often on foot during engagements and those who rode camels or horses were usually weighed down with luggage and children. Men, on the other hand, rode on horseback unburdened, giving them greater speed and mobility in battle. The Italians did not hesitate to exploit the more vulnerable position of women. The safety of children on the ground during battles was a constant concern for women, with Jamīla Saʾīd Sulaymān mentioning that children “lived a life of exhaustion and hardship during the war and most of them died during Italian bombardments.”\textsuperscript{881} The lack of mobility of women and children made them easy targets

\textsuperscript{879} Graziani, \textit{Cirenaica Pacificata}, 121.
\textsuperscript{880} Frantz Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1.
\textsuperscript{881} al-Hayan, \textit{Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād}, 11.
for capture. For example, at the battle of al-Ḥaqīfāt, in the region of Suluq, the Italians captured more than 60 women and imprisoned them at the prison called Giardina.\(^{882}\) Mabrūka bint ‘Abd al-Rahmān bin Salīm of the Būḥadī tribe told of an incident in which her tribe was bombarded by the Italians and the men fled to a nearby area while the women remained. When the Italians arrived, they demanded the women send an agent to the men and broker an exchange between them – their weapons for the release of the women. As a result, the men sent their weapons to the Italians and the Italians let the women go.\(^{883}\) This was not the only case of women being captured by the Italians. In fact, the majority of the women involved in the resistance were captured at least once.

Many women were questioned while in Italian custody.\(^{884}\) Jamīla Saʿīda Sulaymān, for example, proudly recounts that she stood up under interrogation when the Italians suspected her of being responsible for the downing of one of their planes:

> I was interrogated harshly about the crash of the airplane and I denied that there was any close relationship between myself and the individual who brought it down. I said only that those who were fighting the Italians on that day were from my tribe.\(^{885}\)


\(^{884}\) At times, women were arrested and sentenced for their involvement in the anti-colonial resistance. According to the Italian authorities, ‘Atiyya bint Bū Bakr,\(^{884}\) the wife of ‘Abd al-Nafī bin Zayd, sheltered two individuals who had shot and killed a zapité. She was convicted by a military tribunal and sentenced to five years’ imprisonment under Article 132 of the Criminal Code. Her husband, who was absent from the tent at the time, was sentenced to four years in prison because it was assumed that he knew the individuals. A military attorney raised the possibility of granting her clemency because two main culprits might have forced her to assist them through violence. The governor, conversely, expressed the opposite view, holding that ‘Atiyya acted of her own volition. At the root of the debate were perceptions of the role of women in Libyan society, especially whether a woman would allow strange men to enter her home and whether she could be actively involved in the resistance under her own volition. There was a strong disagreement among officials about whether she was culpable for her actions. Part of the grounds for clemency were also that her three minor children had been left without a guardian after the arrest of her and her husband. ASMAE; ASMAI, *Libia, pos.* 112/1. Fasc. 11. Oggetto: Istanza di Grazia Ettaia bent Bubaker, 19 novembre 1915.

Huniyya Sulaymān Idrīs Abū Baqusa was also subjected to more than one interrogation and described the torture of her and her mother at the hands of the Italians:

They questioned everyone individually and the questions revolved around the mujāhid Sulaymān Idrīs and our ties with Massʿūd al-ʿUbaydí and if he was the one that had brought that use to the territory of the ʿUbaydāt tribe and if he had helped us in our ordeal. We denied any knowledge of Massʿūd al-ʿUbaydī as he denied any knowledge of us. Both he and his children were tortured because of this. He was thrown to the ground every day and whipped and we suffered the same treatment and were tortured despite our young ages. I remember that among the methods of torture was imprisonment in an enclosed space for seven days without food or water. And they would take my mother out every day and whip her 50 lashes with a whip that was frayed at the end. But she did not respond or reveal the location of my father or the mujāhidīn and denied any knowledge of Masʿūd al-ʿUbaydī... This brutality caused my brothers Ibrāhīm, Abd al-Laṭīf and Ṣalāḥ to flee while my mother failed in an attempt to escape where she was exposed to torture, as I have mentioned, and us little children were the reason for her continued imprisonment. We all suffered under the worst that a person could be exposed to who has fallen into the hands of oppressive imperialists like the Fascist Italian colonizers... As for my mother, she was tortured continuously for several days and they rubbed salt in the wounds so that it would be more painful.886

Huniyya Idrīs Abū Baqūsa was young when she witnessed her mother beaten and tortured and was tortured herself. In hopes of extracting information about the location of the mujāhidīn and its leadership from them, the Italians subjected the women to extreme physical abuse. Torture was used consistently by the Italian government as a tool to pacify the indigenous population of Libya. In spite of the overwhelming brutality of Italian rule, the employment of torture was not unique to their colonial policies. Torture was intrinsically linked to colonial history and the repressive nature of the colonial state.887 Pierre Vidal-Naquet, a historian of Algeria, argued that “the essential feature of the practice of torture... is that one man or one class of a society claims

886 al-Hayan, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 110.
absolute power over another man or another class of society.”888 In the case of Libya, male colonial officers inflicted absolute power over female bodies, which they starved, exposed, and brutalized.889

Beyond torture, the capture and confinement of women by the Italians opened them up to a wide range of physical dangers, including the possibility of sexual abuse. While the interviews contain references to most extreme forms of barbarism by the Italians, including cutting fetuses from the bodies of pregnant women, accusations of rape or other forms of sexual violence are rare but not completely absent. Many women, including Fāṭima Muḥammad Būnajī al-Masārī, denied outright that Italians raped women and claimed that her sister was captured and held by the Italians but she was returned un molested. When she was married to ʿUmar al-Mukhtār, he verified her sisters’ virginity. The fact that her sister escaped unharmed from Italian custody does not mean that other women did not experience sexual violence, whether that violence was systematic or unorganized. ʿUmar al-Mukhtār may simply have chosen to protect his new wife’s modesty before the community and concealed the fact that she was assaulted in Italian custody. Women silencing experiences of sexual violence helped preserve narratives of male honor and female modesty.

In contrast, Ruqiyya al-Fakhrī claimed the Italians regularly took women and girls by force. The forced abduction of women epitomized the relationship between power, gender and ethnicity under Italian rule, under which colonial men could physically claim the bodies of colonized women with impunity. In one case, some Italians came to a girl’s father and demanded her, but her father refused since they “did not betroth women to Christians.” The next day the

889 Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*, 3.
Italians returned with soldiers and took the daughter away in a car. After he was done with her, he passed her along to an Arab soldier in the Italian military. Those references to rape which do exist in the narratives contain the consistent details of women being kidnapped by Italian soldiers and forced into marriage or concubinage and then passed between men as concubines or sex slaves. Given the silences and shame that exist around this subject, and the emphasis Arab society places on women’s chastity as a marker of male honor, Ruqiyya al-Fakhri is one of the few individuals who directly discusses the rape of Libyan women, including her own kidnapping and rape in Siwa.

Beyond the capture of women, narrators highlight other ways that women and children could be used to punish mujāhidīn. The children of mujāhidīn were sometimes kidnapped and raised by Italians as punishment for their parents’ resistance. The Italians also executed the wives and children of mujāhidīn who refused to surrender. When Ibrīk al-Lawāṭī, fled to Egypt to avoid capture by the Italian authorities, they executed his wife and daughter in al-ʿAqīla concentration camp as a kind of collective punishment for his actions. Fāṭima ʿUmar al-Mukhtār tells of the bravery of women facing execution including a woman who began to trill (zaghrata) when the Italians threatened to execute her. When asked why she was celebrating, she said because “I want to be like ʿUmar al-Mukhtār,” who they had hanged. This echoes the interview with Fāṭima al-ʿAqariyya, pointing to the heroism in the face of violence as a central theme of women’s narratives.

891 al-Hayan, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 14.
Individual experience of violence and loss are central to women’s narratives and indicate the ways in which Italian actions damaged their social world. The imprisonment or death of male family members had devastating effects on the lives of women because they lacked economic and social independence. In 1914, two women by the name of Faṭima bint Raḥīm and Umm Scenāf bint Ḥāmid wrote to the Italian authorities on behalf of their husband, Rajab bin Ḥusayn Sasi.894 He had been appointed Imam of the Mosque of Sīḍī al-Mustani in al-Maghār Tripolitania with a monthly salary of 13 lire, which was the only livelihood of the family. He had been arrested twenty-six months before, supposedly without cause, and deported to the penal colony on the island of Favignana, between Trapani and Marsala.895 Without their husband, the family had been reduced to financial ruin. Therefore, they implored the Vittorio Emanuele III, the King of Italy, for mercy on behalf of their husband.896

The death of a husband or father could be equally devastating for women in a society in which dependence was the norm. Ruqiyya al-Fakhrī lost her husband less than a week after her wedding, and later all her male relatives were taken to the al-ʿAqīla concentration camp, leaving her without protection.897 It was common practice among the mujāhidīn to marry or take under their protection the wives and daughters of mujāhidīn who had died in battle with the Italians.

894 Arabic names (Fatma bent Rehaiem, Umm-Scenaf bent Hamed, Regeb ben Hussein Sasi, Ettaia bent Bubaker) that appear in Italian sources have been transliterated following IJMES guidelines to the best of my ability. However, sometimes the name in the original name is unclear.

895 Italy also had a long history of banishing its criminal and political prisoners to remote islands in the Mediterranean. Thousands of Libyans were interned in penal colonies, particularly on the islands of Ponza, south of Rome, and Ustica, north of Palermo, during and immediately after the First World War. Michael R Ebner, Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).


When a man named Muḥammad Būnajī al-Masārī died at the battle of al-ʿAqīr, his four daughters were put under the protection of ʿUmar al-Mukhtār, al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā and Yūsif Būrahīl. ʿUmar al-Mukhtār married one of the sisters, Sālmīn, and after she was killed in battle, he married the second sister, Fāṭima.

While the death of a male family member could leave women vulnerable, the Italian army also targeted the civilian population directly. The Italians used their superior military technology to maximize losses on the Libyan side. A number of mujāhidīn recount strafing by the Italians in which low-flying planes used aircraft-mounted machine guns to kill members of the resistance. Along with fighters, the Italians targeted the women, children, and livestock of the mujāhidīn during these raids, inflicting heavy casualties. As Malcolm D. Evans and Rob Morgan argue, summary justice serves to enforce the power of the state through a presumption of guilt. Giuseppe Daodiace, a colonial bureaucrat and Governor of Eritrea from 1937 to 1940, wrote in a letter to Giussppe Bruscasca in 1951 that he had complained several times about:

the fact that no prisoners were ever taken during clashes between rebels and our troops and they shot women and children… a group of zaptiè (colonial troops) who had been ordered to shoot 36 women and children at an encampment showed up to protest, letting me know that if they were again given a similar order that they would have preferred deserting.

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898 In addition to the death of her father, her only brother, Ḥamad Būnajwā, died at age 25. Zahrā, al-Marʿa al-Lībīyya fī al-Jihād, 71.
901 al-Hāyn, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 91.
902 al-Hāyn, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 94.
905 Giuseppe Daodiace as quoted by Angelo Del Boca in Italiani, brava gente?: un mito duro a morire (Vicenza: Pozza, 2005), Kindle edition, 2761-2767.
In addition to the bombardment and execution of the mujāhidīn during engagements, Italians used Phosgene and mustard gas in 1923 – 1924, 1927 – 1928 and 1930 against the Libyan population, despite the fact that Italy had signed the Geneva Gas Protocol in 1925, which banned the use of poison gas and other forms of chemical warfare.906

While it has been previously noted that the lines between civilian and combatant were purposely blurred under colonialism, colonial powers also obscured the line between licit and illicit action. In Algeria, for example, the French waged a brutal war of “pacification” against the indigenous population between 1830 and 1847 that included razing villages and the asphyxiation of rebels hiding in caves on the west bank of the Chéliff.907 Jean-Louis de Lanessan revealed that the French “consider any village that gives refuge to a group [of rebels] or fails to report its presence to be responsible and guilty. They have the chief and the three or four most important villagers beheaded, then set fire to the village and raze it to the ground.”908 Thus, the French utilized collective punishment as a tool to undermine the resistance to their rule. The Italians adopted a similar policy in relation to the population of Cyrenaica. They routinely burned crops and filled in wells, the major sources of food and water for the rural population.909 If rebels attacked an Italian position, the nearest camp was held primarily responsible for providing moral and material support to mujāhidīn. The Italians destroyed the camps and robbed mujāhidīn of their supply lines. Abrīdān al-Sanūsī Brīdān recounted the fact that Italians targeted the relatively unprotected camps the end of battles:

The Italian attacked the camps of the mujāhidīn as they always did after the battles to put pressure on the mujāhidīn, and they pressed their attack against the grouped tents of the mujāhidīn and there was no one to face them besides women and children and some defenders from among the mujāhidīn. Groups of the mujāhidīn were called from their various locations to rescue the prisoners and my father was one of them. He saved Ruqiyya al-Mabrūk and killed the soldiers that were taking her prisoner.910

While Brīdān's camp was fairly lucky during this particular battle, not all camps were as successful in repelling attacks. At the battle of ‘Aqīra al-Masīrab, for example, forty women and children were captured from the village of Saʿīd Yūnis Bū āliyya and the Italians burned all their tents and furnishings. Brīdān’s mother was among those captured and then imprisoned in the region of Suluq for five months.911

While the Italian government had success subduing opposition to their rule in Tripolitania, the resistance used its superior knowledge of the terrain of hilly topography in Cyrenaica to prevent the Italians from winning a decisive victory between 1923 and 1930. In 1930, General Graziani decided to utilize all the tools at his disposal to crush the resistance, arguing that he needed to secure the border between Libya and Egypt and be granted the permission to “strike at the heart” of the resistance since it currently had a power base in a foreign county, Egypt, which the Italian military could not invade.912 He devised a plan to cut off the mujāhidīn’s supply lines from western Egypt by building a 270-kilometer fence stretching along the Libyan-Egyptian border at a cost of L. 13,500,000,913 or about L. 49,000 per

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910 al-Hāyn, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 25.
911 al-Hāyn, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 21.
kilometer. The construction of the border fence went along with the confinement of the majority of the nomadic population within concentration camps in Eastern Libya.

**Concentration Camps**

The concept of the modern concentration camp originated in the colonial encounter at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the Libyan context, Italians frustrated by the hit and run tactics of the resistance, who could disappear within the population after battles and then reunite, devised a policy to physically separate members of resistance from the larger population by placing the tribes under a form of strict surveillance. This policy of separation started in June 1930, as the Italians determined it was necessary due to the unique conditions in Libya where there was widespread support for the resistance in spite of harsh reprisals. This fact was not lost on the mujāhidīn: ʿUthmān Jabrīl Muḥammad Būyāmīnā of the Idrasa, al-Sharīrīq and Imuḥammād tribes stated that “since ʿUmar al-Mukhtār drew his strength from the people's assistance, Italy decided to intern them in concentration camps,” Maǧīd Yūnis Muṣṭafā al-Jayyāsh, who was born in Slonta in 1909, also mentioned that “a number of things slowed the jihād’s progress, and one of them was the deportation of the Bedouin villages to concentration camps.”

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916 The term ‘concentration camp’ first entered the English language in the context of the British camps in South Africa (1900–2). The earliest existence of the phenomenon has usually been traced back to the Spanish–Cuban War of 1895–98 but references to (re)concentrados occurred earlier in Cuba, during the Ten Years’ War (1868–78) and the Guerra chiquita (1879–80). For more information, see Iain R. Smith and Andreas Stucki, “The Colonial Development of Concentration Camps (1868-1902).” *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 39 (3) (2011), 417.
camps in al-ʿAqīla and al-Brīga,” pointing to the military effectiveness of the Italians’ strategy.918

Hannah Arendt has argued that the establishment of concentration camps was the culmination of a process through which certain sections of the population were placed outside of the protection of the law and deprived of any form of judicial process.919 In Libya, these camps were, in effect, giant open-air jails to house those suspected of aiding the mujahidin in the hope of breaking the back of the resistance. The camps were a punitive measure that sought to punish the population for their continued disobedience rather than simply divide people between good (non-resisting) members of the population and bad (resisting) members.

Starting in June 1930, the population of Cyrenaica was confined in 15 concentration camps surrounded by barbed wire between Benghazi and al-ʿAqīla [“al-ʿAgīla” in the Libyan dialect]. The population was subject to strict rationing and control over the grazing of their livestock and allowed to move outside the confines of the camps only with a special permit. In the course of the round-up and internment of the population in 1930–31, roughly 90 percent of its sheep, goats, and horses and 80 percent of its camels and horses perished.920 It is estimated that approximately one-third of the population of Cyrenaica, between 85,000 and 110,000 people, were interned in concentration camps, a large number of whom died by execution, disease, and hunger, in many cases in front of their family members.921

918 al-Hāyn, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 15.
920 Gooch, "Re-Conquest and Suppression,” 1020.
921 Ahmida, The Making of Modern Libya, 139.
Among the many atrocities committed by the Italians, the concentration camps are remembered with the greatest bitterness. Jamīla Saʿīd Sulaymān gives the most detailed account of her life in the al-ʿAqīla concentration camp, located about 300 km west of the city of Benghazi:

In the camp, it was rare that several hours would pass without a death. I remember my brother ʿAbd al-Raḥmān died of hunger and we shrouded him with a scrap of cloth and we buried him next to us in the sand and the whip of overseer would be raised to any person for the least reason and insults were a common occurrence for the old and young, men and women alike. After I had stayed in the camp for a period of a year and a half, someone came and informed me that my son, Salīm, had fallen from his father's arms after he was taken in the battle of Wādī Shubāriq and had been taken prisoner and taken to the camp as well. When I went to him, he fled from me and began to cry but after a while when a group of the young orphaned children were brought to me and I was charged with preparing their food and I got closer to my son, little by little, until he trusted that I was really his mother. And the health of the women that were charged with the cooking got a little better meanwhile misery had engulfed the camp and spread in it. We saw people's bodies start to swell and waste away and then die slowly and we lived surrounded by constant terror and death from hunger and thirst, sickness and hanging. I heard with my own ears several times the Italian officers and some of the recruits ordered some of the women, who were asking for a few scraps to allay their infant children's hunger, to throw them in the sea, because the goal was really their death or the death of all of the prisoners. And I did not know if God would spare my life, so now I thank Him greatly.  

Here, she expresses the feelings of the personal loss of her brother in the camps and a mother’s experience of locating her young son. Intertwined with this personal loss is the collective helplessness experienced by the camp's inhabitants and their inability to protect their families from torture, forced labor, degradation, starvation and death. Suffering was indiscriminate and affected all the inhabitants but, at the same time, the collective suffering affected individual lives and shaped individual experiences.

In a similar vein, Adm al-Hāyin Sulayman al-Qatalā recounted his experience in the same camp:

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922 al-Hāyn, Mawsūʿat riwāyāt al-jihād, 12.
[Al- 'Aqīla] was a prison of destruction for all, and we would work without anything in exchange. There were entire families that perished from hunger and sickness. I cannot count the number of those that died every day, and I saw women who were suspended upon a board for two days or more and were not allowed to relieve themselves until their clothes became dirty and blackened. Whenever I remember the terror of al- 'Aqīla and al-Briqa, I am filled with sadness because of the painful memories that remain in my soul.923

These accounts express the feelings of shame about being unable to protect women in the camps from the arbitrary and cruel treatment of the Italians. The Italians used the exposure of women’s bodies in public as a form of collective punishment. In a society that places emphasis both on the protection of women and on the concealment of female bodies and physical modesty, this treatment was deeply degrading for the individual women, who were publicly exposed. It was also a social humiliation for male family members in a society that values honor, since men were not able to protect their women-folk.

Conclusion

While the Italians eventually succeeded in crushing the Libyan resistance through the use of brute force, their military victory was a political failure. Rather than establishing the legitimacy of Italian rule, the savagery of the campaign further called into question Italy's image before the international community. As noted previously, the population of Libya had declined markedly due to the overt violence of Italian rule, either perishing in battle, dying from disease and malnutrition, or fleeing across the borders into Tunisia and Egypt. These scars and resentment would continue to be carried by the local population, along with their remembrance of the ‘Butcher of Cyrenaica,’ General Graziani. The crimes of Mussolini’s government would not soon be forgotten.

923 al-Hāyn, Mawsū‘at riwāyāt al-jihād, 47.
Women such as Jamīla Saʿīd Sulaymān, Mabrūka bint ‘Abd al-Rahmān bin Salīm, and Honiyya Sulaymān Idrīs Abū Baqūsha were a central and important part of the resistance against the Italian invasion, risking their lives and facing great hardships to defend their homes and family and “answer the call of jihād.” While women may not have typically carried arms, they nonetheless displayed great courage and fortitude against almost impossible odds. The Italians purposely targeted the civilian population as part of their policy of “pacification” and, as a consequence, women routinely faced capture, interrogation, torture and internment in concentration camps. This kind of violence had lasting impact on the lives of women because it destroyed the social world of the Bedouin by disintegrating familial and tribal ties.

Overall, the women whose stories are captured by the narratives participated in the resistance to Italian colonialism through a variety of means. The lack of a clear division between combatants and civilians was a key element of the Italian colonial encounter, as it was an element of many anti-colonial uprisings and wars of independence. Within this context, women joined the resistance for a variety of reasons, but mostly due to a mixture of anti-imperialist sentiment fueled by religious identity and local allegiances to their families and tribes. Of the women surveyed, only a few took up arms against the Italians. However, the lack of widespread participation by women in direct combat roles in no way diminished their contribution to the resistance. It also did not protect them from violent retribution at the hands of the Italian authorities. Recognizing their symbolic value and strategic importance to the resistance, the Italians regularly targeted women and children specifically.

In addition to bringing to light the experiences of women and non-elite groups under Italian colonialism, violence emerges forcefully in this history, although “violence” seems an insufficient term to fully capture such brutality. The violence of the state against the individual,
the strong against the weak, the “civilized” against the “backward,” points to power dynamics that ensure certain groups of people are dehumanized and brutality is unleashed upon them. This violence is then partially forgotten, sometimes even by the victims, as understandings of traumatic events are constructed through shared, cultural memory. In its most excessive manifestations, women in Libya experienced the same kind of state violence as men. At the same time, this violence resulted in the destruction of the social framework that offered a degree of (albeit patriarchal) protection in tribal societies. Faced with resistance, the colonial system did not hesitate to release the full ruthlessness of the modern state against the civilian population of Libya, including women.

Much like other forms of power, violence is gendered. While women experienced some similar forms of violence as men, their experiences were not identical. The Italian military habitually targeted women due to their physical vulnerability during skirmishes and battles but also to humiliate their male kin who were unable to protect them. The Italians utilized the Libyan preoccupation with honor as a way to punish the mujāhidīn by capturing and kidnapping women and putting their chastity in danger or physically exposing their bodies. In some cases, they subjected women to particularly gendered forms of violence: namely rape and other forms of sexual violence. While their male compatriots fought bravely, their manhood and honor was undermined by their inability to protect their female kin. Once lost, it is difficult for such honor to be regained.
Chapter 5: Colonialism Remembered: Libyan History in Women’s Imagination

*Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward.* - Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, *Contested Pasts*

The official version of Libyan nationalism under the government of Muammar el Gaddafi attempted to highlight the valiant struggle of the Libyan people against Italian colonialism, as embodied by figures like the resistance leader ‘Umar al-Mukhtār. Despite the claim of universalism inherent in this official ideology of resistance, its iconic imagery is almost always centered on the masculine figure of a Bedouin fighter. Similarly, colonialism is conventionally understood as a masculine, and at times violent, interaction between male Italian colonists, soldiers and administrators, and colonized men. This chapter attempts to expand the gendered analysis of post-colonial Libya by exploring the ways in which Libyan women remembered Italian colonial rule between 1911 and 1943. Drawing on oral history narratives collected by the Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli and literature written by Libyan women, it explores the way in which women participated in the contested meanings of Libyan history during the colonial period, under the post-colonial monarchy, and then under the government of Muammar el Gaddafí. It argues that women constructed their own unique, albeit fragmented, understandings of Libyan history and of the colonial period that undercut supposedly universalist narratives of Libyan national liberation and development.

Writing about women’s perceptions of the colonial period is not without its challenges. While Libya has a strong oral tradition (often reduced to the rather patronizing label of “folklore”), a written literary scene in Libya was slow to develop after independence, and the

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first Libyan novel did not appear until 1961, according to some literary theorists, and not until the 1970s according to others. While women were active in the production and transmission of oral poetry during the pre-colonial and colonial periods, the limitations of girls’ education in Libya, which were highlighted in previous chapters, meant that few women produced written literary works or memoirs addressing the colonial period. One of the few exceptions is Khadija al-Jahmī’s memoir Anā Khādījah al-Jahmī (I am Khadija al-Jahmi) but Italian rule primarily serves as a background for her struggle to promote education for women in Libya rather than as the focus of her narrative. One of the few female writers to address colonialism explicitly during the first decade of Libyan independence was Zaīma Sulaymān al-Bārūnī. 

Memory, Gender and Nationalism

This chapter employs a variety of sources, both literary and oral, in order to reconstruct Libyan women’s memories of the colonial period. An interest in the study of memory has become a prominent area of research among historians over the past two decades. This chapter

927 Asmāʼ Muṣṭafá Uṣṭā, Anā Khādījah al-Jahmī (Sirt [Libya]: Majlis al-Thaqāfah al-ʻĀmm, 2006).
is mostly concerned with the question of what memories contain and the context in which they were remembered and transmitted. The sociologist Maurice Halbwach, who argued that “the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present,” developed a notion of the way in which memories operate in a given society. \(^{930}\) Within this context, an individual always constructs the past within a social framework in which memories are understood through the perspective of a group and simultaneously manifested within individuals. He also drew a distinction between individual memory and historical memory, arguing that although individual memories cannot be separated from the social context in which those memories are created, collective memory and individual memory are not the same thing.

Halbwach’s work on memory has been followed by a robust body of scholarship addressing the relationship between history and memory. Within this framework, gender has been a central area of exploration, beginning as an examination of the differences between men and women’s memories. \(^{931}\) While gender remains an important lens for analysis, historians have largely moved away from this previous approach based on a treatment of gender as a monolithic category. If memories have gender that means that gender is immutable. Instead, Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith argue that gender “along with race and class, marks identities in specific context rather than subsumed into monolithic categories.” \(^{932}\) Gender is one of the elements of the social reality in which individuals live and is a constantly shifting social process.

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Given the history of loss, displacement and violence, national narratives in the Middle East and North Africa have drawn on themes of loss and violence in intense ways. In the last several years, there has been a substantial amount of scholarship addressing the relationship between violence and memory in nationalist narratives.\(^{933}\) Despite this emphasis on collective memory, few studies have evaluated the role of women’s memories in state formation in the Middle East, instead focusing on sites of memory that commemorate sacrifice and bravery as part of the larger nationalist project and its claim to universalism. One of the few exceptions is Natalya Vince’s work on post-colonial Algeria, which examines former women combatant’s attitudes towards the Algerian state between 1954 and 2012, challenging the assumption that women were depoliticized after the Algerian war of independence.\(^{934}\)

This study adds to the history of gender and memory in North Africa. While there is no universal social reality for Libyan women, and gender was by no means immutable, gender is a defining social element of Libyan society. Libya was and remains a deeply gendered society that ascribes specific gender roles and expectations to men and women. These gendered attitudes intersect with other elements of their lived reality, especially status, class and the economic


characteristics of their communities. The vast majority of the women whose memories are explored in this chapter were rural women connected with the anti-colonial resistance, the exception being the short story writer Zaʿīma Sulaymān al-Bārūnī, who was from an elite Berber family. Their status as women from non-elite backgrounds had a profound effect on their relationship to the colonial state, their experience of colonialism, and the ways in which those experiences were remembered and transmitted after independence. Until recently, the emphasis on cultural history among historians of the Middle East and North Africa has meant that studies of women in the Middle East primarily focus on elite women. In contrast, this study attempts to bring non-elite women within the scope of the study of memory.

Beyond the connection between gender and memory, questions about women and nationalism have often focused on women’s access to the post-independence public sphere and whether women should support and participate in movements that do not advocate for women’s emancipation (as defined by western liberalism). With the rise of political Islam in 1970s, this question remains a salient one. Historians such as Marnia Lazreg have criticized the position that women were “duped into joining nationalist movements by incredulous men who later did not share the spoils of independence,” maintaining instead that women’s participation in nationalist struggles was the logical outcome of colonial rule.935 As Lila Abu-Lughod has argued, women’s history cannot be viewed as a straight trajectory from tradition to liberation.936 For most of the Middle East, women’s rights movements emerged during the process of state-building, so the two questions are inexorably intertwined. The emergence of nationalism and feminism as two

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ideologies of mass liberation that existed alongside and at times in opposition to each other in the Arab world has been explored in detail by Beth Baron, Elizabeth Thompson, Ellen Fleischmann and Malek Hassan Abisaab.937

Libya offers a counter-example to the connection between women’s rights and state-building. Libya emerged from colonialism a poor and divided country, battered by years of colonial rule and war. Because of the lack of access to education and slow process of development after independence, debates about women’s rights were restricted to a small circle of elites and primarily focused on the need to improve women’s education. We must take seriously Lila Abu-Lughod's questioning of the ascription of “feminist consciousness” to those for whom it is not a meaningful category.938 The women who preserved the memory of the trauma of the colonial period did so within the larger framework of traditional modes of mourning and orality. For most of them, a nationalist orientation, let alone a demand for women’s rights, were peripheral if not completely alien. It was only after Gaddafi came to power that he attempted to incorporate collective memories of the colonial period into an official history as part of the process of state-building. Despite the incorporation of these narratives of the suffering of the Libyan people under colonialism, women’s accounts fit uncomfortably with a

heroic nationalist history. Unfortunately, there is very little historical scholarship on post-independence Libya.

**Female Poets and Colonial Legacy**

Poetry has and continues to play an important symbolic role in the lives of Bedouin and nomadic women in Libya. Lila Abu-Lughod argued in her work that the Awlād ‘Alī in Western Egypt, who continue to have strong connections with the Bedouin population of Western Libya, incorporate poetry into the rituals of everyday life in an act of social intimacy, allowing women to express deviant sentiments that contradict the norms of respectability in Bedouin society. Within this framework, she argues that the poetic tradition “is kept alive by those who benefit least from the system that the honor ideology maintains.”

Along with the expression of personal sentiments, for Arab Bedouin women poetry plays an important role in formal occasions such as weddings and funerals. In terms of funerals, it has a central importance in the public commemoration of the death of a husband, brother, child or kinsman. Starting in pre-Islamic Arabia, women composed elegies (rithā’) in the form of a lament (marthiya; plural marāthī), one of the few forms of poetry that women composed.

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939 As women’s rights became associated with state-building in the rest of the Middle East and North Africa at independence, they would come to be linked with Qaddafi’s regime in the 1970s. The regime did take a number of steps to enhance women’s rights that limited the rights of men to seeking divorce or seeking a second wife while supporting state feminism. His use of all female body guards, referred to as Revolutionary Nuns (al-rāhibāt al-thawriyyāt) or the Amazonian Guard by the western media, fostered an idiosyncratic but feminist image abroad. This image was undermined both by Qadhafi’s erratic behavior and accusations of abuse and sexual assault by the upper echelons of the Qadhafi government during the Libyan Civil War. Fatima Sadiqi, *Women’s Movements in Post-"Arab Spring" North Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 187.


Suzanne Stetkevych argued that elegies were an acceptable public form of women’s participation in the public rituals of the tribe at the death of kinsman, when women had a public voice. In fact, it was their obligation to lament their fallen warriors and incite their remaining kinsmen to vengeance (tahrīd). In these circumstances, it was their duty to shed ritual, poetic tears of bereavement for their fallen menfolk, while it was the duty of men to redeem the death of kin by shedding blood.\footnote{Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, \textit{The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 161–6.} Tumādir bint ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥārith ibn al-Sharīd al-Sulamīyah (d. 24/645), better known as al-Khansā’, was the most prominent poetess during the first century of Islam, in the seventh century, who excelled in the genre of elegy.\footnote{Al- al-Khansā’ is often referred to as a Mukhadrama poet, the feminine form of mukhadaram, which signifies a poet who lived during the pre-Islamic jāhiliyya period and early Islamic period.} She composed more than a hundred short or medium-length poems in which she mourned her brothers Ṣakhr and Muʿāwiya, who were killed in tribal warfare before the rise of Islam, and incited her tribesmen to take vengeance.

This tradition of elegy has been carried on among women in Bedouin communities across the region. Moneera Al-Ghadeer argues that Arabian Bedouin women borrow (without merely imitating) conventions of praise for the fallen and expressions of bereavement from the eulogy of the classic Arabic tradition. Instead, women introduce their own feminine voice, which seeks to deny death through the use of allegory.\footnote{Moneera Al-Ghadeer, \textit{Desert Voices: Bedouin Women's Poetry in Saudi Arabia} (New York; London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009),72-73} The women of the Awlād ʿAlī of Western Egypt express loss and bereavement in a formulaic medium called “crying” (bkā) that Lila Abu-Lughod finds structurally equivalent and technically similar to poetry, carrying some of the same sort of sentiments.
Similar to Stetkevych’s argument about pre-Islamic Arabs’ attitude towards death, Peters has argued that the Arabs of eastern Libya continue to react to the death of a kinsmen with an impulse for vengeance, the same impulse that is institutionalized for men in the context of feuding. This impulse of vengeance has been incorporated into the modern poetic traditions of Bedouin women. Al-Ghadeer finds that Arabian women manipulate the form of the eulogy to call for vengeance for the death or murder of a kinsmen. While feuding did not play a significant role in the conflict between the Bedouin of Libya and the colonial authorities, the desire for vengeance against the Italians certainly did. For women, who rarely take part in feuding or revenge, these sentiments of loss and sorrow were expressed through poetry.

Poets were individuals of high esteem in Bedouin communities. Muḥammad al-Sanūsī Bū Marayīf al-Maqīm from al-Qīqab recounted in an interview that the Italians took prisoner Fāṭima al-ʿAQariyya, “poetess of the mujāhidīn,” and the mujāhidīn followed in an effort to rescue her from the clutches of the enemy, and did not break off pursuit until four squadrons of reinforcements forced them to flee. She was brought before General Rodolfo Graziani, who demanded that she tell him the poetry that she had recited. She recited to his face lines of poetry satirizing the Italians. He said to her “I will hang you as punishment for this crime,” at which point she began to trill joyfully. In astonishment, he said “how are you doing this when you are about to die?” She replied, “is there anything greater than martyrdom on the same day that ʿUmar al-Mukhtār was martyred?” She witnessed the execution of ʿUmar al-Mukhtār and

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946 Al-Ghadeer, *Desert Voices*, 73.
composed verses praising his bravery. This account creates a mythic narrative that connects the poetess of the mujāhidīn to ʿUmar al-Mukhtar, solidifying both of them within the nationalist construction of Libyan memory of the resistance against the Italians.

Countless women would have translated their loss into bkā or marāthī, to commemorate their fallen men (but rarely women) at the hands of the Italians, but very little of it has been published or transmitted outside of the community. The literary critic Um al-ʿIzz al-Fārisī, praised a poem by Dārūhā al-ʿIbār which elegizes the life of the hero ʿUmar al-Mukhtar, describing the last moments of his life and his execution. While dedicated to a specific hero of the nation, Dārūhā al-ʿIbār’s poetry also serves to mourn the ultimate defeat of the resistance against Italian colonialism.

A mujāhida by the name of Saʿdā Saʿd ʿAbd Allāh recited a poem by Maryam al-Ḥamrāʾ, from the family of Ashaʿwa, during an interview conducted by the Libyan Studies Center. Maryam al-Ḥamrāʾ composed colloquial poems in honor of “marytered” mujāhidīn and eulogized her husband, who was killed by the Italians. During a battle, Maryam’s husband placed her and her daughter on a camel and said to her: “Join the caravan and I will resist the enemy. If I live, then I will join you and if I die then it is the martyrdom in the path of God that I desire.” After his death, she composed the following lines:

I salute him, my lantern-light / The best of my generation, he placed me atop my mount
and I did not halt / I salute the gunpowder, bitter is his parting / Colocynth and
Aloeswood are his companions.\textsuperscript{950}

The bitter vine colocynth, or bitter apple, appears in the traditions of the prophet and has
connotations of grief while aloeswood, or agarwood, is used in incense and evokes feelings of
nostalgia.\textsuperscript{951} These lines capture her love for her husband and bitter sorrow over his death, as
well as illustrating the role of the poetess as guardian of the memory of her fallen mujāhidīn
comrades, and of the anti-colonial struggle in general.

Beyond the social and symbolic roles that poetry plays in the lives of Arab Bedouin,
poetry and popular songs remain one of the most important ways in which the memory of Italian
colonialism is carried, transmitted, and reproduced in the popular consciousness, and poets
remain highly valued. Libyan historian Ali Abdullatif Ahmida has pointed to the role of poetry in
the construction of Libyan history:

Before the recent academic exploration into the oral history of Jihad, Bedouin poetry was
the principal voice of Libyan history and culture. That poetry has traditionally offered
invaluable insights into the historical events and social views... it represented the richest
source of Libyan colonial history, specially of the genocide in 1929-1934.\textsuperscript{952}


\textsuperscript{951} According to Abu Musa Al-Ashʿari, “The Prophet said, "The example of him (a believer) who recites the Qur'an is like that of a citron which tastes good and smells good. And he (a believer) who does not recite the Qur'an is like a date which is good in taste but has no smell. And the example of a dissolute wicked person who recites the Qur'an is like the raḥānā (sweet basil) which smells good but tastes bitter. And the example of a dissolute wicked person who does not recite the Qur'an is like the colocynth which tastes bitter and has no smell." Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl Bukhārī and Muhammad Muḥsin Khan, Ṣahīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Translation of the Meanings of Sahīḥ al-Bukhari: Arabic-English. Vol 6. (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam Pub. & Distr., 1997), 61:579.

While a number of male oral poets are widely known, the most famous being Rajab Bū Ḥuwaysh, the poet of the ‘Aqīlah concentration camp, the work of female poets is less well known. The most prominent female popular poets of the Italian period were Um al-Khayr bint Muḥammad bū ‘Abd al-Dāym and Fātima ‘Uthmān. Both Um al-Khayr and Fātima ‘Uthmān composed poems about the experience of suffering by the Libyan population during the Italian colonial period.

Overwhelmingly, Bedouin women’s poetry in Libya was originally composed and transmitted orally. There is a long tradition of the transition of oral poetry in the Arab world dating back 1500 years, consisting of pre-Islamic poetry that became part of the canon of Arabic literature. Libyan women reciters composed the poems which were disseminated and transmitted in oral form between women before being gathered and published. Some of the most famous poems by men and women were collected by the Libyan Studies Center as part of their larger efforts to preserve the memories of the colonial period. The advent of the internet has resulted in poetry being disseminated more widely. Unfortunately, despite the increased interest in preserving oral heritage and women’s cultural productions, there is no anthology dedicated to Libyan women’s poetry.

As an important source on the history of Italian colonialism, poetry serves as a way in which memory of the colonial period is preserved and transmitted through female networks of kinship. Through poetry, women commemorate the deaths of their fallen kinsmen as well as

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955 Al-Ghadeer, Desert Voices, 4.
express their own grief and loss. Many of the poems are personal, paying tribute to close relatives, but in some cases women have transformed the traditional genre of the eulogy in order to commemorate important figures or mourn the death of those who lost their lives during the colonial period. Before the trauma of the colonial period was incorporated into the narrative of Libyan nationalism, this was one of the ways ordinary Libyans kept alive the memory of the anguish experienced by those who witnessed the execution of mujāhidīn or were interned in concentration campus.

**Za‘īma Sulaymān al-Bārūnī, the Short Story and Nationalism**

While poetry remains an important mode for artistic expression and cultural identity, the post-colonial period witnessed the birth of written literary culture that focused on prose. In his seminal work on the formation of national identity, Benedict Anderson has argued that print culture, especially the novel, was central to the construction of national identity.956 However, Tetz Rooke maintains that in Libya, it is the short story rather than the novel that “served as a vehicle for political debate and national expression” during the first decades after Libyan independence.957 Very few academics, however, analyze the contributions of female authors to this national project. Rooke mentions the work of Za‘īma Sulaymān al-Bārūnī in passing but does not expand on the way in which her perspective as a woman shaped her contribution to Libyan national identity and the ways in which her work differed from other male writers of the same period.

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Zaʿīma Sulaymān al-Bārūnī (1910-1976) published the second collection of short stories by a Libyan writer, the first being Nufūs ḥāʾirah by ʻAbd al-Qādir Abū Harūs in 1957. Born in Jadu in the Tripolitania region of Libya into a prominent political family of Amāzīgh (Berber) origin, she was educated in Istanbul in Turkish. She returned to Libya in the 1940s to stay with her sisters and to complete her studies in Arabic. She worked in education after Libyan independence and then assumed the position of director of the Dār al-muʿallimāt, a teacher training school in Tripoli, and then the director of Maktab Maḥwa al-Ummiyyah (The Office for the Elimination of Illiteracy). She also established Jamʿiyyat al-Nahdah al-Nisāʾiyyah (Libyan Women’s Association), which focused on the education and welfare of Libyan families. She also published her literary works in Libyan newspapers and magazines such as in Ṭarābulus al-Gharb, Sawt al-Murabba, and Huna Ṭarābulus al-Gharb, starting in 1953.

Zaʿīma had an unusual upbringing for a woman in early twentieth century Libya, having travelled extensively with her father, Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Bārūnī (1870-1940). He was a Tripolitanian politician who was instrumental in organizing opposition to the Italian occupation of the region, in addition to being a jurist, historian, poet, and Ibāḍī author. After the Young

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960 Diana, La letteratura della Libia, 139.

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Turk revolution, he represented the province of Tripolitania in the 1908 Ottoman Parliament along with Farḥāt Bay al-Zāwī. Following the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911, al-Bārūnī became a guerrilla commander, rallying the people of Tripolitania behind the banner of Islamic unity to take up arms against the European invaders. The Italians eventually defeated him militarily. However, in 1918 a nationalist convention founded the Tripoli Republic (*al-Jumhūriyya al-Ṭarābulusiyya*) and he was elected to the four-person council of notables which governed it. Finally, in 1921, when Zaʿīma was 11 years old, her father was banished from Tripoli due to a perception that he was willing to collaborate with the Italians. Al-Bārūnī never returned to Tripolitania, living the last nineteen years of his life in exile. On April 30, 1940, he died from a heart attack on a trip to Bombay, India. It is difficult to imagine that her father’s involvement in some of the most important political events of the day in Libya did not have a profound effect on her early thinking, including her anti-imperialist orientation. She traveled with her father across the Middle East, including to Iraq during the rule of King Faisal when Arab nationalism was emerging as central ideology among Iraqi elites. Given the influence of Arab nationalism in the region, it is unsurprising that Arab nationalism would be her primary intellectual orientation throughout her life, an issue that I will address in more detail later in this chapter.

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964 The three Ottoman regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan were not known as Libya until 1929. Following scholarly convention, the use of the term prior to 1929 is a matter of convenience.


966 Peterson, “Arab Nationalism,” 135.

In 1958, she published a collection of eleven short stories under the title *al-Qiṣaṣ al-Qawmiyya* (The Nationalist Stories).\(^{968}\) She dedicated the collection “to great souls, defenders of the rights of the nation (*watan*) and precious nationalism. To all lovers of true reform and burgeoning thinkers now and in the future. To all defenders of good morals and supporters of true virtue and to all faithful workers.”\(^{969}\) For this quotation, the influence of Nasserism is evident, as well as her support for those allied with policies that have come to be known as Arab Socialism. Arab Socialism combined an adherence to Arab nationalism, at least in its rhetoric, with economic and social policies that emphasized state development, agrarian reform and social benefits for workers in an expanded public sector.\(^{970}\) Here she looks to reformist and nationalist thinkers and workers as the future of the Libyan nation. While her orientation was always more nationalist in orientation, she at least alludes to the need for a new political and economic orientation for Libya.

Al-Fagih has argued that this collection was a remarkable accomplishment “written by a woman in the days when a Libyan woman could hardly dream of participating in any form of public life, let alone in the literary field.”\(^ {971}\) In the late 1950s, there were only a handful of women in all of Libya who had a secondary education. Za‘īma was among the first generation of women to play a public role in the intellectual life of Libya after independence. A product of the intellectual debates in Libya during the mid-twentieth century, Za‘īma’s short stories reflect a number of the intellectual trends within Libya during the mid-twentieth century including the influence of Arab nationalism, the weakness of a national Libyan identity, an interest in oral

\(^{971}\) al-Faqīh, *The Libyan Short Story*, 137.
traditions and glorifying Libyan history as well as concerns over the role of women within Libyan society.

In the introduction of the collection, Za‘īma puts forward a vision of the Libyan nation in opposition to the mainstream narrative of the 1950s. During the reign of King Idrīs I, the monarchy largely avoided the question of the colonial period and the resistance in order to evade questions of complicity during the period of Italian rule. In contrast, Za‘īma took the colonial period as central to her narrative, tracing the history of her country, Ṭarābulus al-Gharb, (Tripoli of the West) and its people from the Islamic Conquest to the “last war against the Italians” in order to portray her “country in an accurate way.” Her writing becomes an extension of her commitment to education and the formation of the Libyan national identity. She was dedicated to nationalism (al-qawmiyyah) as a mass ideology of liberation which she described an “elixir that preserves for nations (al-umam) their immortality.”

While championing nationalism and its contribution to the nation, she subtly emphasizes her adherence to local, provincial Tripolitanian nationalism, over a more all-encompassing Libyan nationalism supported by the monarchy, highlighting Ṭarābulus al-Gharb as her country of origin. Less than a decade after Libyan independence, the fragile nature of Libyan nationalism was evident with the growth of the appeal of Pan-Arabism. It was the Italians that originally linked the three regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan in 1929 into a single unified state, and Za‘īma’s own father had supported an independent government in the region of Tripolitania. After independence, the new Libyan state was established as a federal monarchy with two federal capitals in Benghazi and Tripoli, a system that turned out to be ineffective at

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972 al-Bārūnī, al-Qiṣṣaṣ al-Qawmiyya, 3.
973 John Wright, A History of Libya (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 173, 178
governing Libya and contributed to the ultimate demise of the monarchy. Along with the federated government, Anna Baldinetti has argued that a new national identity based on a shared history and language failed to gain traction among the majority of the population.974 While Za‘īma does mention “Libya” in her stories, her allegiances remain largely local rather than national as evidence of the weaknesses of a national Libyan identity.

In addition to her adherence to local nationalism, she describes her nationalism in Pan-Arab terms. Due to adherence to Pan-Islamism, fear of European encroachment, and a sizable non-Arab ethnic minority,975 Arab nationalism was late to have an appeal in Libya and only blossomed after independence. The Libyan monarchy was agonistic towards Arab nationalism and the British had partially supported Idrīs al-Sanūsī, who became Idrīs I, in order to create a client monarchy that would counter the spread of Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism, socialism and other ideologies that could threaten their interests in the region.976 Despite the hostility of the monarchy to Arab nationalism, by the mid-1950s, King Idrīs was facing internal opposition from pan-Arabist movements, which had substantial appeal among the educated, urban youth.977 After coming to power in 1969, Muammar el Daddafi would come to embrace Arab nationalism as the official ideology of the Libyan state and in June 1970 Nasser would anoint Gaddafi as the heir to Pan-Arabism shortly before his death in September 1970.978


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Given her intellectual background, Za‘īma’s adoption of Pan-Arab themes was not surprising. For young Libyans who were educated post-independence, Arab nationalism seemed to provide a solution to the divisions in the regions as well as address the socio-economic issues that plagued Libya. Although already in her forties during the 1950s, Za‘īma allied herself intellectually with this reformist trend inside Libya, claiming that Libyans were the “children of the great Arab East, and the Arabs are the most blessed nation (*umma*) for their heritage (*turāth*) and the strongest in defense of their nationhood (*qawmiyyatuhum*) and the happiest in its faithful support.” Therefore, she put out a call for Libyans to “serve the greater Arab Nation and greater humanity.”

While her embrace of Pan-Arabism was not that unusual, given the fact that she published her collection just two years after the Suez Crisis (1956) when Gamal Abdul Nasser was at the height of his popularity in the Arab world, Za‘īma’s intellectual orientation highlighted Partha Chaterjee’s argument that “the story of nationalism is necessarily a story of betrayal.” Chaterjee elucidated the fact that “nationalism confers freedom only by imposing new controls, defines a cultural identity for the nation only by excluding many from its fold, and grants the dignity of citizenship to some because others could not be allowed to speak for themselves.” Among those excluded from nationalist projects in many cases are women and ethnic minorities. Za‘īma’s identity as a woman and as an *Amāzīgh* (Berber) came to be omitted from this definition of the Libyan nation. This is despite the fact that she did allude to the multi-

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ethnic nature of Libya in some of her stories. In effect, she placed herself in opposition to her father’s later intellectual adherence to an *Ibāḍī / Amāzīgh* identity as his primary intellectual orientation.

Za‘īma attempted to come to terms with this omission in the story “Nakhwa ‘Arabiyya” (Arab Nobility). In this story, she tried to closely connect the Arab population with the Berber people of Tripoli, claiming that the Arab warriors were amazed that the local Berber dialect, Nafusi, was close to Arabic. They speculated that the Berbers were actually Arabs who were long separated from the Arab homeland.984 While Arabic and the various Berber languages are both members of the Afroasiatic language family, they belong to different sub-divisions, which means they are not closely related.985 In fact, most similarities between the two languages are likely due to the influence of Arabic on the Nafusi Berber dialect after the Arab invasion. By including the Berber people under the larger umbrella of Arab identity, she attempted to include them within her definition of Pan-Arabism. Qaddafi would make a similar move, characterizing the indigenous languages of Libya as ‘older’ forms of Arabic, and indigenous Libyans themselves as “Arabs who immigrated to the region before Islam.”986 However, he would come to exclude Berber identity from Libyan nationalism in practice.

While there once was a habit of dismissing the position of folklore and the oral tradition among specialists of Arabic literature, scholars for the last two decades, including Sabra Jean Webber, have argued that folklore represents a “potential weapon to be used by people against repression or domination by cultural outsiders. The ambiguity, the multi-vocal nature of aesthetic

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984 al-Bārūnī, al-Qiṣṣa al-Qawmiyya, 45.
communication… should be especially useful in the study of a postcolonial or minority group.  

Literature in North Africa has drawn both material and stylistic inspiration from folk traditions. This has been particularly true in Libya. In trying to create a written literary tradition, many of the first generation of Libyan writers, including Za‘īma, rooted their writing in the folklore tradition and popular literature of Libya. According to Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqaḥ, these stories aspired to create a new modern mythology by evoking the world of fantasy and supernatural powers which he refers to as the “tell-a-tale approach” to the short story.

Za‘īma draws on the oral tradition in order create stories which illustrate the history, culture and identity of her country, attributing miracles to its holy men and women, bestowing heroism on the leaders of its struggle, and praising their self-sacrifice, their devotion, and their generosity. Sometimes she takes her material directly from the popular imagination as in her first story “Qudsiyyat al-Umūma” (The Holiness of Motherhood). In this story, she recounts the life of an elderly woman, named Salīma, who was dedicated to raising her child after the death of her husband, working and toiling until he becomes a married man. Despite her fortitude, her son does not appreciate her sacrifice to raise him and provide for “his education, his circumcision, [and] his marriage.” She takes solace in nature, taking her grandson away from the village. Similar to the story of the Virgin Mary in the Qur’an, she survived in the wilderness by eating dates, and when they ran out of water a spring miraculously appeared. She viewed this as a new start of to her life, since “God has guided her and blessed her motherhood and old age

989 Ahmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqaḥ, The Libyan Short Story (Ph.D. University of Edinburgh, 1983), 137.
after she was scorned.” The Umm al-Qirab Mosque was later built on the location and became a location of pilgrimage because of its spiritual power.

At the end of the story, Za‘īma noted that Libya was moving away from older traditions and its past was being forgotten. However, despite these changes, people would continue to call out “Oh, Umm al-Qirab” to save them from life’s hardships. People have spoken the “holiness of Libyan motherhood over generations… to the very last degree of yearning for the nation and its beloved places.” Drawing on the image of the Virgin Mary, the only woman in the Qur’an with a chapter named after her, this places the elderly women in Za‘īma’s story in a position as a similar spiritual mother to the Libyan nation, to be revered for her piety and submission. This is consistent with the tendency of many nationalists to define women as “mothers of the nation,” who were responsible for the biological survival of the community but also the nation could only advance with girls’ education and women’s progress. Without educated mothers, sons imbued with proper love for the nation could not be raised. Thus, women’s education was central to the progress of the nation. Salīma is a biological parent but her role is more closely

996 Karin van Nieuwkerk, Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 166.
997 Wendy Bracewell, “Women, Motherhood, and Contemporary Serbian Nationalism.” Women's Studies International Forum 19 (1) (1996): 25-33; Anne Kostelanetz Mellor, Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830 (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2002); Laura Elizabeth Bier, From Mothers of the Nation to Daughters of the State: Gender and the Politics of Inclusion in Egypt 1922-1967 (PhD Diss.: University of Michigan, 2006); Beth Baron, Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 36; Patrizia Albanese, Mothers of the Nation Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016);
connected with nurturing the spiritual needs of the Libyan nation, fostering an identity that connected all Libyans regardless of tribal, regional or ethnic origin.

In addition to writing a new modern folklore for the nation, Za‘īma traces the history of Libya from the Arab invasion of North Africa and spread of Islam to the region during the seventh century until the colonial period. Many stories set in the medieval period touch on the nobility and selflessness of the local population, the multiethnic nature of Libya, and the plurality of Libyan experiences. Two stories address the Arab invasions of Libya during the seventh century, “Nakhwa ‘Arabiyya” (Arab Nobility) and “Al-Ab Al-Hakīm” (The Wise Father). In “Nakhwa ‘Arabiyya,” the people of the city of Tripoli were in state of panic as rumors spread of an impending slaughter if the city fell to the invaders.998 The invading army treated the local population with respect, emphasizing the nobility of the Arab invaders. The “Al-Ab Al-Hakīm” (The Wise Father) tells the tale of a village called Maghdāmis and its conversion to Islam, which saved them from terrible flooding that threatened to destroy the villages. In the story, a woman, Najwa, was one of the first converts in the village, much like Muḥammad’s first wife, Khadīja, who was central to the history of Islam as the first convert to the religion and supporter of his prophetic mission.999 These two stories place both Arab and Muslim identity as central to the construction of Libya.

Moving from the Arab invasion as a pivotal defining period in Libyan history to the early nineteenth century, the stories "al-Marwa'a"(Generosity), "Fazzān al-Ba'īda’” (The Far-Away Fazzan), and "al-Rabi‘ fi al-Hamada" (Spring in Hamada1000) address life prior to the Italian...

999 al-Bārūnī, “Al-Ab Al-Hakīm” in al-Qiṣṣa al-Qawmiyya, 42.
1000 A hamada is a type of desert landscape consisting of hard, rocky plateaus, which wind has removed most of the fine sediment leaving bare rock. Shahina A. Ghazanfar and Martin Fisher, Vegetation of the Arabian Peninsula (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 175.
invasion during the second Ottoman period (1835-1911). Generally viewing Ottoman rule positively, she draws a happy picture of popular life, giving an account of the social habits and customs of the Libyan population. In the story “Fazzān al-Baʿida’,” Zaʿīma addresses Sultan Abdülhamid II’s use of the provinces of North Africa as a form of Saharan Siberia where his more troublesome political opponents could be exiled to prisons or minor posts at the farthest reaches of the empire.1001 This policy was responsible for the spread of modernizing ideas in Libya despite its remoteness from the imperial center, since many of the exiles were liberal-minded constitutionalists. In the story, an Ottoman official is sent to the remote region of Fezzan by the Sublime Porte. After spending an extended time in Fezzan, he is won over by the people’s hospitality and comes to consider the region “his real homeland that brought him out of childhood into real manhood.”1002

Zaʿīma’s positive portrayal of the Ottoman period in Libya differed from the depictions of the same period by mainstream Arab nationalists in the rest of the Middle East. Following the First World War, the Arab nationalist consciousness embraced westernization and modernization projects, while the Ottoman period was depicted as oppressive, tyrannical and corrupt without differentiation.1003 Instead, the Turks in Zaʿīma’s stories are responsible for the growth in national feeling and for development in Libya. For metropolitan subjects of Libya, Ottoman rule was characterized by modernizing reforms, especially during the Tanzimat and constitutional reform eras, due to the role of political exiles. The Ottomans also played a central role in

opposing the Italian invasion during the beginning of Italian rule. While the Ottoman government formally withdrew from the Libyan province, they continued to encourage resistance against the Italians and sometimes provided arms and funds, especially during the First World War.1004

Moving from her idealized vision of the Ottoman period, Za‘īma addressed the Italian invasion, with a number of her stories highlighting the resistance of the local populations to the Italian invasion. In the story “Bint al-Hādira” (Daughter of the Capital) she described the Italian invasion of Tripoli, which sharply contrasts with her earlier descriptions of the Arab invasions. The story follows a wealthy man named al-Sayyid Hamīda and his wife Fahkariyya on the eve of the Italian invasion. After the birth of his daughter, named al-Zahra’, al-Sayyid Hamīda decided to throw a large party in order to celebrate the birth of his first child. In their house hangs an embroidered Qur’anic inscription in Kufic script, made by Fahkariyya,1005 reading “Victory is from God and liberation (fatḥ) is near,”1006 which their guests praise. Years later, when al-Zahra’ has become a mother, the Italian invade Tripoli. During the chaos of fleeing from the Italians, the inscription is trampled and destroyed, which Fahkariyya viewed as a bad omen that prophesized defeat at the hand of the Italians. Despite this fear of an impending Italian victory, al-Sayyid

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1004 Once the Italians joined the First World War on the side of the Entente Powers, the Germans encouraged the local population to attack the British position in Egypt in 1915, supplied with German arms, which Lisa termed a “reverse Arab revolt.” Lisa Anderson, “The Development of Nationalist Sentiment in Libya, 1908-1922,” 234.

1005 In Libya, feminine crafts, including embroidery, were a central part of girls’ education during the nineteenth century. In private schools referred to as al-‘arīfa, daughters of the urban bourgeois attended these schools from age 3 or 4 until they reached puberty. The curriculum was divided into religious and practical education. The practical curriculum included “feminine” crafts and skills such as sewing and embroidery, as well as a diverse set of domestic skills that were viewed as necessary to play the role of a good wife and mother. G. Cerbella, “L’arifa, secolare scuola delle fanciulle tripoline” in Italia d'Oltremare IV (15) (1939), 415.

1006 Qur’an 61:13.
Hamīda’s encourages his son Rafīq to join the mujāhidīn. At the famous battle of al-Hani, the first major offensive by the mujāhidīn, Rafīq loses his life along with his mother Fahkariyya.

The story emphasizes a general feeling of distrust towards the Italians among the population for their desire to claim Tripoli. Before the invasion, Fahkariyya comments that she is glad that the chandeliers in the home are from Tunis and Paris rather than Rome. Al-Sayyid Hamīda asked her why she was wary of the good work done in Rome and she replied immediately “its closeness to Tripoli! And fear that it may attack our freedom some day!” They should not allow the foreigners to gain their sympathies despite their wondrous products. She goes on to comment that she is happy that her husband is a merchant of local fabric, just as her father was, so they are free from complicity with the economic takeover of the country by European capital. Al-Sayyid Hamīda was not surprised that his wife freely expressed her opinions, because she was from a prominent family that did not deny their daughters an education.

During the late nineteenth century, attempts at modernization in the Middle East through centralization and improving education went hand and hand with new consumption patterns as markers of modern identity. These changes usually started within the ruling household and spread throughout the country. The desire to develop the nation was reflected in the homes of the elites. According to Pierre Bourdieu, “[t]he effects of mode of acquisition is most marked in the ordinary choices of everyday existence, such as furniture, clothing or cooking...” The

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Western luxury items like chandeliers that elites purchased for their home marked their commitment to being members of the modern international elite. While many elites during this period also adopted western fashions, Fahkariyya wore the local fashion, which revealed her “grace” and “authentic Libyan modesty.” While her and al-Sayyid Hamīda’s home revealed his commitment to modernization, his wife’s fashion highlighted her commitment to Libyan national identity.

When al-Sayyid Hamīda learned of his son’s death, he told the mujāhidīn who brought the news that he thanks his “brothers in the mujāhidīn for assuring his (Rafīq’s) eternal place (in Paradise).” The leader of the mujāhidīn replied “May God have mercy on our martyrs, both men and women.” In response, al-Sayyid Hamīda said to mujāhidīn “No, my son, do not leave me to leave the field of glory and dignity (the battlefield) … for every young man who is here is my son.” The commander was moved by the father’s insistence not to abandon the cause of Libyan independence. A call to not leave the struggle against the Italian aggression is an implicit criticism of the Libyan royal family for their collaboration with the Italians during the colonial period.

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1011 Russell, Creating the New Egyptian Woman, 15-16.
1014 Beyond her depiction of the Italian occupation, the story “al-Karāma al-Haqqa” (The True Miracle) more specifically glorified the mujāhidīn. The story tells of the gathering of mujāhidīn at ‘Ain Zara. During the gathering, a mysterious man with a dark complexion appears and speaks of the true meaning of Jihad. When Muḥammad, a servant, was asked about the guest, he said that no one had entered the tent while they had been watching and they did not know which guest they meant. They speculate that he was a saint (wali) who came to remind them that glory lay in the path of God. Muḥammad swears not to leave his master until the jihād is over and their country is liberated. After two years, the war was over and Muḥammad despairs because he cannot fulfill his promise although his master has released him from his obligation. The story highlights the fact the success or failure of the struggle against the Italians lay in the intention to become a martyr in the path of God. If glory or victory did not come in this life, it was
Za‘īma was not the only Libyan writer whose work had a nationalist orientation or was concerned with Libyan history. The most prominent example was ‘Alī Muṣṭafā al-Misraṭī, who remains a leading Libyan intellectual. Born and raised in Egypt to a Tripolitanian family, who fled to Egypt during the Italian occupation, he returned to Libya in 1948. He was active in politics as a member of the Congress Party as well as writing a number of histories of Libya and four volumes of short stories that also reflected an interest in folklore, local customs and popular storytelling. Much like Za‘īma, he uses the form of the short story to write about Libya’s heroic past and opposition to Italian colonialism. In the story "Mismar Mussolini," he tells the story of a Libyan saddle maker who is coerced to make a saddle for the fascist leader during his visit to Libya in March 1937. As a Libyan patriot, he hides a nail in the saddle, which injures Mussolini when he attempts to use it. The story describes not only the horrible treatment of Libyans during the fascist period but also the heroic but simple resistance of an ordinary Libyan, who is willing to die in order to injure the occupier.

While Za‘īma’s stories focus on several pivotal events, the Arab invasions, the Ottoman period, and the Italian invasion and occupation, none of them address events after the resistance of the mujāhidīn, which was suppressed by the Italians in the early 1930s. The British occupation of Libya during the Second World War as well as Libyan independence are completely absent from her collection of stories. While the collection was published a full seven years after

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1016 A number of literary critics have questioned the literary value of al-Misraṭī’s short stories. al-Faqīḥ, The Libyan Short Story, 170-71.
independence, the absence of more recent events was consistent with her emphasis on educating the Libyan population on the past. While her writing is political and historical, it avoided taking an overt political stance related to the monarchy or the post-independent state, which might have resulted in her writing being censored.

Finally, a number of stories also overtly address the role of women in Libyan society. The nobility of Libyan women is a consistent theme throughout her stories. The story, “Washāḥ al-Shujā‘a” (The Emblem of Bravery), recounts the tale of a girl named Ghāliyya, who is known in the village for bravery. Her mother always said she wanted her daughter to be “decorated with all the good qualities” and most of all she admired this bravery rather than her beauty. During the annual harvest festival, Ghāliyya sees a large snake across the road and strikes it dead, saving the town from this danger. The village shaykh praised the bravery of Ghāliyya to the villagers and she is given a badge, which she alone will wear as long as she lives, and her daughters after her.1018 To this day, this emblem of her bravery is worn by the daughters of her tribe, Awlād Dhurkā from Fasātū and only may be woven in a house that has daughters; a woman who marries into the tribe may not weave it until she is blessed with a daughter.1019 While emphasizing the influence of folklore, the story is also a criticism of society’s emphasis on the appearance of women rather than their less superficial qualities, advocating for a different set of societal values regarding women.

As a champion of women’s education, Za‘īma pointed to the necessity of women’s education to instill the right nationalist orientation for the population. As mentioned previously, reform minded nationalists in the Middle East argued that the nation would only advance with

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girls' education since only educated mothers could impart their children with proper love for their nation.  

In the story “Bint al-Hādira” (Daughter of the Capital), al-Sayyid Hamida said directly to his wife:

As your understanding of everything pleases me! The daughters of the capital for years now have not been ignorant of the facts … and your words confirm the existence of some awareness, that the amount that we have mixed with the Turks and our knowledge of their internal affairs has begun to leave its influence on our country … they have taught us valuable things… I understood the greatness of the Turkish family as well the reasons for the critical political weakness (in Turkey) … and I have realized that the family is the essential support of the homeland (watan), in every community (umma) and how it can unify the umma, and so we should be able to ward off every harm through our rights and freedom!  

Here she uses a variety of kinship idioms with the nation imaged as a family, which Beth Baron argues was a way of overcoming divisions. Za‘īma emphasizes the connection between a strong family and a strong nation, reminiscent of “republican motherhood” without the democratic aspects of republicanism. She highlights the lack of access women had to education and the modest growth of women’s education in Libya at the end of nineteenth century, sponsored by the Ottoman Empire, and the imperative to remove ignorance. This criticism of societal treatment of women, especially seclusion and lack of access to education, would be a consistent criticism raised in Libyan literature.

The emphasis on the status of women in Libya was a theme among other Libyan writers of the period. The first collection of short stories published in Libya, Nufūs Hā’irah, by ‘Abd al-Qādir Abū Harūs, published a year before Za‘īma’s collection in 1957, argued for greater rights for women and against the practice of strict seclusion practiced among the Libyan elite. This argument is most clearly conveyed in the story “Najla’ al-Ha’ira fi Dimashq” (The Perplexed

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1020 \text{Baron, } \textit{Egypt as a Woman, } 36.
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1021 \text{Baron, } \textit{Egypt as a Woman, } 36.
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1022 \text{Baron, } \textit{Egypt as a Woman, } 36.
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Najla’ in Damascus),\textsuperscript{1023} which tells of the interaction between the writer and a Libyan girl raised in Damascus, who reacts in horror when she learns of the condition of women in Libya. She decries the fact that a country as noble as Libya with a history of resistance can continue to imprison their women, comparing the women of Libya to female slaves.\textsuperscript{1024} A number of his other stories portray the way in which society punished women who set outside the bounds of societal norms.\textsuperscript{1025} Writers such as ‘Abdullah al-Quwayri, ‘Alī Muṣṭafā al-Misrāṭī, Yūsif al-Quwayri, and Muḥammad al-Shuwayhidi addressed similar themes in their writing, especially the way in which blind adherence to tradition destroyed the happiness of women and could end in tragedy.\textsuperscript{1026}

Za‘īma has a distinctive female evocation of historical memory in her work. Libyan male writers generally appropriate the female voice in order to criticize existing societal norms in the decades after Libyan independence, characterizing the female condition as one of suffering in unenlightened societies. In contrast, women are active agents in the history of Libya in her stories, which intertwine aspects of memory, folklore and myth. While containing elements of social criticism, her stories tell of women’s contribution to the Libyan nation through bravery, sacrifice, resolve and wisdom. For Za‘īma, women are pivotal to a reimagining of a nationalist history of Libya, which is both heroic and personal. Rather than capturing her own experiences of the colonial period or her own memories, she incorporates a variety of women’s voices into the historical memory of the Libyan nation.

\textsuperscript{1024} Faqīh, \textit{The Libyan Short Story}, 352-53.
\textsuperscript{1025} Faqīh, \textit{The Libyan Short Story}, 355-56.
\textsuperscript{1026} Faqīh, \textit{The Libyan Short Story}, 357-60.
Women, Oral History and the Rewriting of Libyan History

Starting in the 1970s, there was a shift in the official narrative of Libyan nationalism and by extension the role of women in the official narrative. A coup d'état overthrew the Sanūsī monarchy in 1969. The monarchy had ruled a unified state in Libya for only five short years and during that time a strong national identity had yet to develop. Not only did Libya lack the strong foundational myth of other nations in the region, like Egypt’s emphasis on its pharaonic past or Iraq’s mobilization of the Golden Age of Islamic rule and of past Mesopotamian civilizations, but there was also little agreement about the nature of the political community in Libya.

As Muammar el Gaddafi established himself as the leader of the new revolutionary government, he made the establishment of a new historical memory a central goal of the regime. “Historical memory” may be defined as the collective understandings that a specific group shares about events that it perceives to have shaped its current economic, social, cultural, and political status and identity. In the context of Libya, this approach sought to focus almost exclusively on modern events while marginalizing the role of the Sanūsī family. Overall, it highlighted the revolutionary role of the people in the creation of the Libyan nation and downplayed regional differences, a position consistent with Gaddafi’s own revolutionary ideology. This new narrative sought to valorize the resistance of the mujāhidīn and championed the figure of ‘Umar al-Mukhtār, the leader of the resistance in Cyrenaica, who was executed by the Italian government, placing him and like figures at the center of the construction of a national Libyan

The major historical project of the Gaddafi regime was the Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli. In 1978, the Libyan Studies Center was founded in Tripoli and other provincial cities, and was sponsored by Gaddafi himself. Originally, the center was named Markaz buhurst wa-dirasat al-jihad al-libi (Research and Study Center of the Libyan Jihad). The name was changed to Markaz jihad al-libiyyin didda al-ghazu al-itali (Center of the Libyans' jihad against the Italian invasion) in 1981, to the Markaz jihad al-libbiyin lil-dirsat al-tarikhiyya (Center of the Libyan's Jihad for the Historical Studies) in 1990, and to al-Markaz al-watani li-l-mahfuzat wa-l-dirasat al-ta'rikhiyya (Center for National Archives and Historical Studies) in 2009. Starting in the 1980s, the center began collecting interviews with former mujāhidīn, veterans of the anti-colonial struggle, and their relatives. The project was coordinated by the African historian Jan Vansina, who was a pioneer in the use of oral sources in African history. The center published a collection of oral narratives in forty-three volumes under the title of Mawsuʿat riwayat al-jihād (Oral Narratives of the Jihad), but a larger percent of the narratives still remains un-published.

Beyond the preservation of Libyan history, Lisa Anderson argued that the goal of the Center was to create “a cohesive, nationalist, anti-imperialist society, loyal to its Arab and Muslim culture, opposed to Western political and cultural domination, and actively participating

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in world history.” The commitment to a nationalist narrative is also apparent in concerns that some narrators might shed “doubt on the commitment or the importance of some individuals, which could be damaging to their reputation or even the overall history of the resistance to Italian colonialism” and therefore damaging the nationalist narrative of Libyan history.

Despite the official mention of women’s commitment to resisting the Italians, only a small percentage of the overall interviews were conducted with women. Zaynab Muḥammad Zahrā edited a volume specifically dedicated to women’s involvement with the goals of:

Arriving at the truth of the role of Arab Libyan women in the Jihad against the Italian invasion, urging them to speak on this role with all objectivity and impartiality, in order to write our history holistically, thus it includes the role of men in the Jihad which distinguished clearly those who went to battle and carried weapons, in addition to this, others worked such as planting, plowing, harvesting, and similar roles… and there is the role of women who were reflections of the conditions, the nature of the environment and living situations of that time…

The first notable aspect of this description is that Zaynab highlights the Arab identity of the women that she interviewed. While the women in the region of Eastern Libya would have been overwhelmingly Arab Muslims, this statement is not a simple description of the women interviewed, but is instead a prescription for a particular interpretation of Libyan history. As previously noted, Arab nationalism was an intellectual trend in Libya after Independence and this emphasis was in line with the attempt to create a nationalism “loyal to its Arab and Muslim culture.”

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1034 al-Hayan, Mawsū‘at riwāyāt al-jihād, 6-7.
This kind of “betrayal” of ethnic or linguistic minorities was neither unique to Gaddafi’s vision of the Libyan state nor to Libyan nationalism. In Europe, a whole range of local identities were suppressed in favor of a national identity, from Bretons in France to the Catalans in Spain. In other parts of North Africa, Berber identity and language has been tolerated but marginalized, despite becoming one of the official languages of Morocco in 2011, due to fear that Berber identity could become the basis of a claim for political independence within modern nation-states. Despite the fact that the Berber population of Libya was unlikely to effectively agitate for independence, Gaddafi came to embrace the most authoritarian and exclusionist interpretation of nationalism, in line with some of the Fascist governments in Europe during the mid-twentieth century, such as Francisco Franco’s Spain. Gaddafi omitted minority identities from the definition of the Libya nation, claiming that Berbers were a colonial invention, banning the use of Amazigh names and demanding that Tamazight not be spoken in public. It is unsurprising that the Berber population were enthusiastic supporters of the anti-government forces during the Libyan Civil War.

1038 Muḥammad al- Nājī, Multilingualism, Cultural Identity, and Education in Morocco (New York, NY: Springer, 2010), 183.
1039 Marc Howard Ross, Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 139.
Despite an attempt to contribute to the goals of the Libyan Studies Center, the past that is present in the women’s narratives of the colonial period often contradicts the goals of the Center. In an eloquent essay on the nature of remembrance, Joep Leerssen draws on Friedrich Nietzsche and Ernest Renan to distinguish between monumental and traumatic modes of remembrance. Monumental modes of remembrance is the purview of nation-states and their governing elites. This triumphal narrative of history is lionized through official histories and high public culture. Through a recognition of the achievements of the nation, grief and loss are overcome. Traumatic modes of remembrance is the submerged culture of the subaltern, without access to the public sphere, which returns to the grief and humiliation of events.1042 There are of course cases when trauma and loss are incorporated into the dominant narratives of societies, for example the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. or Martyrs Square in Beirut. At its root, the goal of the Libyan Studies Center was to convert the traumatic history of the colonial period that had previously been denied a place in public space under the monarchy into a heroic history of the Libyan state with ‘Umar al-Mukhtar as the central figure. The lack of nationalist ethos among the narrators remains a lingering issue.

Within Joep Leerssen’s definition of the traumatic are the victimized who include subalterns, women, homosexuals, ethnic minorities, the colonized, and conquered people.1043 Gender is a central marker that dictates individuals place within the nation-state and women are often found within the larger analytical category of the subaltern. While not all male experiences are encompassed within the monumental modes of remembrance, the monumental mode is by

nature masculine. As Cynthia Enloe remarked, “nationalisms have typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope.”

Therefore, most female forms of remembrance fall within the traumatic. Their position as subaltern narrators mean that their accounts rarely conform to heroic ideals even when they show great bravery. Rather, their versions of the colonial period are largely about hardship, dislocation, arrest and internment.

The attempt to create a heroic narrative means that women’s experiences are marginalized even within their own accounts. Their motivations are often portrayed as familial rather than political, religious or ideological. Many of the women in the volume were chosen for their relationship to men in the struggle rather than their own individual contributions. Of the first four interviews, three are women in some way connected to ʿUmar al-Mukhtar, and the fourth is Khuzna ʿAbd al-Salām al-Kuzza, the daughter of a famous mujāhid by the name of ʿAbd al-Salām al-Kuzza. Of the three other women, two were related to ʿUmar al-Mukhtar through blood or marriage, the first being his daughter, Fāṭima ʿUmar al-Mukhtar, and second his wife, Fāṭima Muḥammad Būnajī al-Masārī, and the other woman was a member of his resistance cell. Fāṭima ʿUmar al-Mukhtar and Fāṭima Muḥammad Būnajī al-Masārī were quite young during the period of the resistance. If the birth dates they provided the interviewer are accurate, his daughter was fifteen or sixteen when her father was executed and his wife was around seventeen. Both of these women were old enough to be aware of the events surrounding them and do provide some details, but their inclusion at the beginning of the volume works primarily to highlight the good qualities of ʿUmar al-Mukhtar, helping to solidify his reputation.

as a nationalist hero. When the interviewer asks her about 'Umar al-Mukhtar’s character, it seems impossible that she would respond with anything besides that he was of good character, but she also fails to elaborate more.\textsuperscript{1045}

Women’s accounts of the colonial period overlap but do not duplicate men’s memories of the resistance. Rural non-elite women were far less likely to be literate, travel or have contact with the post-independence state than rural men and, therefore, less likely to be impacted by official ideology. Divisions of labor within the communities dictate the tasks appropriate for women and the tasks appropriate for men, which filtered down into their roles in the anti-colonial resistance. While still in combat, women often, but not always, took up the supporting roles of providing food, water and first aid to the fighters. These subtle differences had a substantial impact on the experience during the period of resistance to Italian colonialism. Men were far more likely to carry weapons and be on horseback during battles. Women were more likely to be unarmed and on foot and to be captured, interrogated and interned in concentration camps.

Women’s accounts tend to include more personal details about their experiences than the interviews conducted with men. Since the interviewers were interested in supplementing the official history with information from the interviewees, many of the interviews focus on the battles in which men participated. Men’s responses are often terse and do not include any details about their own participation in the battle or about their families. For example, when a man named Sa‘īd Yūnis Bū‘āliyya, who was from al-Baydā’, was asked about the battle of Wādī al-Shabruq, he replied that “it lasted for a whole day from morning till dark and the fighting continued the following morning and among those martyred was the mujāhid al-Sīfī and his


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These succinct answers provide the information that the Libyan Studies Center was seeking to gather but give very few details about the individual’s actual experiences.

Not all women remember the same things - individual and community differences are important - but most women’s responses tend to be less objective and factual. They contain details about their social world including their families and their communities as well as their own personal experiences. The account of Jamīla Saʿīd Sulaymān, who was born in Shahhat in 1900, of the battle of Wāḍī al-Shabruq was vastly different with details about the tactics of the mujāhidīn and concern about the safety of her son as well as specifics about her own participation in the battle:

That day, an airplane was dropping bombs on us and I screamed in panic every time it got close to us. My husband paused until it (the plane) flew very close to the ground and then he fired bullets from his rifle, after which the plane withdrew and then crashed in the region of Qasr al-Ramthayya.\(^{1047}\)

Women’s accounts lack the detachment of many of the men’s accounts. The events are not simply historical facts, but instead their memories of the struggle are deeply personal. They felt fear for themselves and others, fought and suffered during the twenty years of armed opposition to Italian rule. The interviewer was primarily interested in her account of the plane crash, but in giving her narrative of this event we learn the way she felt in battle. The trauma of fleeing an aerial bombardment by Italian forces on foot does not fit comfortably within the more heroic narrative of taking down an Italian plane. Therefore, this traumatic history remains at odds with the larger nationalist narrative that the Center sought to create.

For a historian dependent on interviews previously conducted by a separate interviewer, as well as the fact that most, if not all, of the women have since passed away and the difficulty of

\(^{1046}\) al-Hayan, Mawsūʿt riwāyāt al-jihād, 21.
\(^{1047}\) al-Hayan, Mawsūʿt riwāyāt al-jihād, 12.
undertaking research in Libya, there are aspects of the social world of these women that are impossible to capture. These researchers asked questions related to women’s participation in the armed resistance, but rarely looked at issues outside of this. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know what nuances could have been added by not limiting the scope of inquiry to the narrative chosen by the Libyan state to serve its particular ideological goals. Despite this, women did insert their particular experiences and concerns within the limited framework provided by the interviewers.

Conclusion

Despite its claim to universalism, nationalism is by nature a masculine project that attempts to create a heroic history through the commemoration of the masculine values of sacrifice and bravery with the help of official histories and high public culture. Women’s experiences of events as subaltern, are often relegated to traumatic history and excluded from official narratives as the narrator returns to the grief and humiliation of events. However, this exclusion does not mean that women do not play a role in remembering. During the colonial and monarchical periods, when the trauma of colonialism was buried, women became protectors and bearers of communities’ memories through poetry in the form of laments that were part of the public rituals carried out at the death of a member of the tribe. This traditional poetic form was expanded to mourn the death of key figures and the execution of resistance fighters, preserving the history of the colonial trauma.

Beyond traditional forms of remembrance and eulogy, women also participated in the creation of a body of literature which theorists such as Benedict Anderson have argued were central to the creation of national identities. Za‘īma Sulaymān al-Bārūnī, as one of the first
writers in Libya, wrote stories that sought to educate the Libyan public by glorifying the history of Libya from the Arab invasions in the seventh century until the anti-colonial resistance during the 1920s and 1930s. By providing new images and a new vocabulary for the Libyan nation she sought to foster reformist and Arab nationalist tendencies within Libya.

With the rise of Muammar el Gaddafi, the new leader would instigate new attempts to incorporate the trauma of the colonial period into the heroic history of the nation through the collection of oral history narratives by the Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli. While the center primarily gathered interviews with men, women’s accounts of the colonial period were also included. Women’s experiences, which were deeply personal, never fit comfortably within a heroic history due to their emphasis on loss, displacement, internment and death. While some aspects of loss have of course been included in the nationalist narrative about the brutality of the colonial period, this kind of collective loss has little room for the individual loss experienced by women and their families.

This study has focused on three distinct forms in which women’s experiences were recorded – oral poetry, short stories and oral interviews, and more generally on the way in which women’s historical memories share a number of salient features that differentiate them from those of their male kinsmen and compatriots. Rather than the heroic retelling of important events or the lionization of key figures, women captured their own individual subjective experiences of the past and of its relationship to the larger historical period, especially of the trauma of the colonial period. Instead of placing women at the margins or excluding them completely, women emerge as central to the history of the region as both actors and preservers of memory. Their voices unsettle traditional masculine nationalist narratives with their emphasis on the courageous nature of the (masculine) founders of the Libyan state.
Since the fall of Muammar el Gaddafi in 2011, Libya is again reimagining its history. The anti-colonial resistance and the figure of ‘Umar al-Mukhtar were transformed from symbols coopted by the state to heroes of the opposition during the Libyan Civil War. There have been new attempts to integrate the trauma and loss of the Gaddafi period into the dominant heroic narratives of the Libyan nation. Libyan rebel groups renamed the central square in Tripoli, known as Green Square (al-Sāḥah al-Khaḍrā’) under Qaddafi, Martyrs’ Square (Maydān ash-Shuhadā’) in order to commemorate those who died in the fight against his government. Even the once maligned King Idris I has been reinvented as a symbol of Libyan nationalism and the state has returned to the post-independence flag of the monarchy with a white star and crescent on a triband red-black-green design.

Women played a role in opposing the regime including demonstrating against atrocities committed by the government, the most infamous of which was the Abū Salīm prison massacre, the slaughter of an estimated 1,200 prisoners over two days in 1996. They helped overthrow Gaddafi by handing out leaflets, demonstrating, smuggling arms and spying on the government. Since the fall of the government, women have asserted their voices in deciding the future of Libya, but political insatiability and rise of conservative Islamic militia including ISIS in Eastern Libya have made this more difficult. The question of the ways in which

women’s experiences during their Gaddafi era and their participation in the movement to overthrow his regime will be incorporated into the official narrative of the new Libyan state remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Colonialism was never a single, coherent, monolithic project imposed from the metropolitan center by a small cadre of elite, white male administrators. In deconstructing this narrative through an evaluation of gender and sexuality as both a process and a discourse, this dissertation reveals the way in which colonialism was the product of negotiations and struggles among colonizers as well as between ruler and ruled. The colonial project implicated a wide range of people from military officials, settlers, administrators, and missionaries to local elites, and was opposed by resistance fighters and nationalists, who contested the terms and modes of European domination abroad in various ways. Therefore, colonialism could not be unilaterally imposed on the people of Libya, just as it was not imposed unilaterally upon the people of other regions across Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Instead, it required constant negotiation and renegotiation of power relationships as individuals attempted to secure rights and benefits for their particular group while at times participating in and at others opposing the overall colonial framework.

Within the contested space of colonialism, gender was central to questions of status, power, difference and complex and evolving identities. While negotiations happened over desks of imperial officials, they also unfolded in the more intimate realm of the domestic sphere, around household affairs and in classrooms. Gender helped to define and tightly police the boundaries of European and non-European selfhood, revealing the Italians’ continued anxieties about their own cultural superiority. For the Italian authorities, the maintenance of correct (European) domestic arrangements were central to defining what it meant to be European. Those Europeans who formed relationships with indigenous women were accused of lowering themselves to the same moral and material level as the indigenous population. European women
who transgressed these boundaries risked expulsion from the colony, while children born of such unions could be stripped of their European citizenship.

Moving beyond the ways in which European anxieties about gender and race were mapped on colonized bodies, this dissertation evaluates the way in which such assumptions were translated into polices on the ground and affected the opportunities available to Libyan women. Assumptions about local gender roles and fears of opposition by local elites were used to justify non-intervention into the realm of local customs as well as limitations on the modernizing plans of the colonial administration. Despite this fact, the Italians’ policies towards Libyan girls had the express purpose of attempting to introduce European gender norms and hygiene into the Libyan domestic sphere and to replace Libyan patriarchal arrangements with a more European model of domesticity. While colonial officials considered interfering in certain gender norms to be a threat to the orderly operation of the colony, teachers, doctors and administrators openly sought to reform those areas that required little investment by the colonial government and were unlikely to spark additional social unrest. In the end, the Italian administration focused on the creation of obedient subjects rather than on greater development that may have weakened some existing forms of local patriarchal control over the lives of Libyan women.

This dissertation focuses on conflicts and fissures between different individuals over the meaning of gender and the role of women in the colonial sphere. While I have often emphasized the spaces in which these individuals came into conflict, these debates and clashes were at their heart about the nature of patriarchy in the colonial sphere. A few voices of women reformers attempted to challenge the patriarchal notions of both colonial officials and indigenous elites, but mostly the debate was not between two camps advocating radically different roles for women. Instead, it was about which kind of patriarchy would prevail. While no existing society
gives women and men equal access to the resources of the state, these prevailing patriarchal norms as well as the general lack of development in Libya explains why women did not see rapid improvement in their status after independence.

Empire is by nature a paradoxical and ambiguous project, especially in relationship to issues of gender and sexuality, and is molded by anxieties within the metropole as well as clashes between disparate elements within the colony. This goes along with a recognition that categories such as male and female, white and black, and European and Other were constructed and deconstructed in both the metropole and periphery through the process of the colonial encounter and the development of industrial capitalism as a worldwide economic system. These identities were mutually constituted through the colonial encounter. Rather than being a unidirectional process, ideas traveled from the metropole to the colony and back again, albeit under greatly uneven relationships of power.

Beyond an evaluation of understandings of gender and colonialism, this dissertation evaluates modernization efforts that had profound impacts on the place of women in Libyan society. The Libyan territories would go through intense changes during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, moving from local economies primarily based on agriculture, piracy and the caravan trade to being more formally integrated into the Ottoman and European cultural spheres as well as the world economy. During the late nineteenth century, the Ottomans’ modernizing efforts were not dissimilar in formal intent from some of the rhetorical aspirations of European modernizers as they endeavored to strengthen their political institutions in the light of territorial losses in Europe and North Africa. A part of this modernizing effort included the introduction of new gender norms, which required the introduction of new forms of education. While some Ottoman initiatives met with opposition, they more effectively pursued and had greater moral
authority to make reforms. In contrast, the Italian administration struggled to establish a well-ordered colony and to create cohesive modes of governance. European colonialism in Libya disrupted and ultimately set back the very process of modernization that it pretended to foster and by extension limited women’s access to the public sphere and state resources.

The two institutions that interacted with Libyan women during colonial rule and shaped state rhetoric and practices on the ground were the education system and the military. Education was the most important institution in terms of women’s status within Libyan society. The Italians dismantled the Ottoman education system, which sought to advance educational opportunities to Libyan women as part of the greater process of modernization. The new Italian system would limit the plurality of educational opportunities that existed under Ottoman rule while offering only the most basic level of state-sponsored education, which primarily focused on providing vocational training at the expense of an academic curriculum. During the same period, missionary education would move away from providing integrated schools for local elites and the creole European community to a focus on the settler population and the most indignant sections of Libyan including orphaned and abandoned children and manumitted slaves.

The failures of the Italians’ modernizing efforts were partially the result of the inability of the colonial authorities to coopt the local elites into participating in the colonial order in large numbers, although some individuals did cooperate. Without a strong political alliance with sections of the local population, Italian colonial rule was largely marked by instability, resistance, and political violence until well into the 1930s. The Italians would utilize the military to institute draconian modes of control in order to root out political resistance and place those at the margins under the control of the state. They would primarily focus on women involved in the armed resistance in eastern Libya during the 1920s and 1930s and on women who transgressed
community boundaries by forming sexual relationships with members of the European community, especially prostitutes. Therefore, the Italian state was largely unsuccessful in its modernizing efforts while at the same time more coercive in terms of their use of state violence. The Italian authorities would eventually gain political control of the colony and attempt to implement more substantial reforms in the waning years of their rule, but the collapse of the Italian Empire during the Second World War would bring such efforts to an abrupt halt.

In telling this story, I am as cognizant of the voices that are absent from this account as those that are present. In many cases, I capture what male officials said about Libyan women and the policies that they implemented based on these assumptions. The observation of Italian missionaries about Libyan women also survive in their correspondences between the organizations that oversaw missionary activities, their home houses in the metropole and their sisters working in the Libyan territories. The perspectives of urban and elite girls and women who interacted with state-sponsored schools, missionary schools and police are almost entirely missing, with the exception of a few women who wrote memoirs about their experiences during the colonial period. I can only speculate about what prostitutes thought of their European clients or what an orphaned Arab girl experienced in a missionary school. Given the sources available, this omission is not unexpected, since these women’s voices are rarely captured in colonial era documents, but it does point to the limits of historical knowledge. It is unusual that I was able to draw on the perspectives of rural, subaltern women who fought the Italian authorities. The viewpoints of these kind of individuals, male or female, are rarely captured in historical documents from any period.
Gender in Post-Colonial Libya

Despite the fact that Libya gained its independence over sixty years ago, gender remains an important analytical lens through which to evaluate Libyan history and politics. King Idrīs ruled Libya from 1951 to 1969. Unfortunately, there is little scholarship on the gender transformation during the rule of King Idrīs, partially due to the weakness of available scholarship on the period of the monarchy. Despite the influx of people to urban areas during the colonial period, eighty percent of the population lived in rural areas without access to government services at independence. Modest improvements were made to education during the 1950s, with the Libyan constitution making elementary education compulsory for all children of both sexes. In 1955, the Libyan University was founded. By 1958, the number of students in all levels of education had reached 106,712. Girls’ enrollment had increased from a few hundred students at independence to 16,967.1052 In 1964, the literacy rates among young women had risen to 15 percent while it remained at one percent among women of the previous generation.1053

While the various post-independence Libyan constitutions guaranteed equal rights to all citizens, Libyan women did not make substantial legal and social gains under the monarchy outside of the field of education. This period did see the birth of independent female activism. The Women’s Renaissance Society of Benghazi was founded in 1957 and Women’s Society was founded in 1957. Both would play a role in the founding of the Women’s Movement Union of Libya.1054

Gender under Gaddafi

While briefly addressing the political reforms that Gaddafi instituted upon coming to power in 1969 in the context of debates about gender and state-building, the bulk of Gaddafi’s rule is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, a brief comment on the Gaddafi period is relevant to discussions of the post-Arab spring era. The role of women in Libyan society would remain a contentious issue throughout the Gaddafi period. The regime had initially supported more of an Islamic orientation to the country but reversed this decision in the mid-1970s, when Gaddafi put forward his own vision of a revolutionary regime, which was expounded in The Green Book. His revolutionary agenda included support for equality between men and women as well as the mobilization of women in the military and political system of the revolutionary councils during the 1980s and 1990s. In comparison to other countries in the region, women enjoyed substantial rights, including the right to divorce (khul’), limits on polygamy as well as the right of women to pass their citizenship to their children. Starting in 1975, women could serve as judges in Libya. Despite these advancements, the regime again reversed course in the mid-1990s, supporting an increased role for Islamic law in Libyan society as a way of undercutting support for Islamist groups.

While championing women’s rights publicly, there were ongoing questions about Gaddafi’s motivations. Nowhere was this more evident than his support of women in the military. The creation of a military academy for women in 1979, the requirement that all girls

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over the age of fifteen receive military training and his adoption of elite female body guards, officially named the \textit{al-rāhibāt al-thawriyyāt} (revolutionary nuns), in 1980, were all used to signal the progressiveness of the regime.\footnote{Sandi J. Davies, \textit{Women in the Security Profession a Practical Guide for Career Development} (Butterworth-Heinemann, 2016), 146.} This has been criticized as both a kind of “lipstick feminism” based on fantasy, glamor, make-up and high heels rather than substance and as a form of “military feminism” sought to solidify “fanatical loyalty to the Colonel” rather than female emancipation.\footnote{Amanda Rogers, “Revolutionary Nuns or Totalitarian Pawns: Evaluating Libyan State Feminism After Mu’ammar al-Gaddafi” in \textit{Women’s Movements in Post-“Arab Spring” North Africa}. Ed. Fatima Sadiqi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 182.} Little is known about the recruitment processes for the \textit{rāhibāt} except that they were drawn from the military academies’ distinguished graduates and seemed to have been selected for their stunning beauty. After the 2011 uprising, accusations of wide-scale sexual abuse by Gaddafi and the top echelons of his government became public as well as claims that members of the \textit{rāhibāt} were forced to kill members of the opposition in the waning days of the regime.\footnote{Martin Chulov, “Gaddafi’s 'Amazonian' Bodyguards' Barracks Quashes Myth of Glamour,” \textit{The Guardian}, September 7, 2011, accessed June 19, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/07/gaddafiis-amazonian-bodyguards-barracks; Annick Cojean, and Marjolijn De Jager, \textit{Gaddafi’s Harem} (New York: Grove Press, 2013).} Separating truth from rumor can be difficult and women who were viewed as previously loyal to the regime had incentives to distance themselves after the collapse of the government.\footnote{\textit{Rāhibāt} are not the only women to accuse the regime of sexual violence. Eman al-Obeidi received worldwide media attention during the Libyan Civil War when she accused Gaddafi’s forces of rape and the International Criminal Court has alleged that Gaddafi's forces used rape as a weapon of war.} As Amanda Roger has argued, the two narratives of \textit{rāhibāt}, one of them as evidence of progressive rule and one as evidence of Gaddafi’s despotism and sexual perversions,
often fall along political fault lines. Women served as ideological tools in larger debates about governance and state-building.

**The Arab Spring and the Future of Women in Libya**

On December 17, 2010, a Tunisian street vendor by the name of Muḥammad al-Būʿazīzī set himself on fire in response to harassment and confiscating of his wares by the municipal authorities, setting off a wave of protests that toppled then-President Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn bin ʿAlī, who had governed Tunisia for 24 years. From Tunisia, protests spread across the region and unseated longtime dictators in the Middle East and North Africa in what became known as the “Arab Spring.” While the political context and consequences differed slightly between countries, several causes or motivations for these uprising was shared across the region. These included the lack of job opportunities and economic development, long-term political disenfranchisement and marginalization, human rights violations, despotism and corruption. While presidents provided more vulnerable than kings in the region, the outcomes of this wave of protest was changes in the leadership in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen and a protracted civil war in Syria.

In Libya, activists had planned a so-called Day of Rage (*yawm al-ghaadab*) for February 17, 2011 in hopes of capitalizing on the momentum created by demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt. The protests broke out early in Benghazi on February 15 in response to the arrest of Fatḥī Tirbil, a human rights lawyer and the legal advocate for the families of the victims of the 1996

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1062 Rogers, “Revolutionary Nuns or Totalitarian Pawns,” 184.
Abū Salīm prison massacre. After security forces fired on demonstrators, the protest escalated to an armed rebellion against the government, with the forces opposing Gaddafī establishing an interim governing body, the National Transitional Council (al-majlis al-waṭanī al-intiqālī). On October 20, 2011, forces loyal to the National Transitional Council captured Gaddafī and summarily executed him. Rather than a simple change in leadership, the collapse of the Gaddafī regime swept aside the existing political culture in Libya, resulting in new symbols of governance, including a new flag. The period immediately after Gaddafī’s death until the elections in July 7, 2012 was a period of enthusiasm in Libya for not just the victory of the rebel forces but also the birth of democratic institutions including open elections and blossoming of civil society. Initial election results for women were promising, with forty percent of the electorate composed of women and women winning 44 seats in the first National Congress (al-Muʾmar al-waṭanī al-ʿām). However, a lack of government consultation with civil society on women’s and minority issues were obstacles to reforms.

Most women did not fight in the eight-month war to topple the Gaddafī government, although a few women did on both sides of the conflict. Despite their general lack of involvement as armed combatants, women contributed to the success of the movement and eventual war which overthrew the Gaddafī regime. Building on their historic roles opposing the regime, such as demanding justice for the victims of the Abū Salīm prison massacre, women distributed leaflets, joined demonstrations, provided first aid and medical treatment, raised

money, smuggled supplies and weapons, reported on events, and coordinated social media campaigns.\textsuperscript{1067}

Unfortunately, the county’s institutions, underdeveloped during the four decades of Gaddafi’s rule, were ill-equipped to deal with the challenges of transitioning Libya from a dictatorship to a multiparty democracy. Despite the pivotal roles played by women, concerns quickly developed over the National Transitional Council’s lack of commitment to women’s rights. Women have become vocal advocates for gender-based equity in Libyan society and there has been a flourishing of NGOs since the fall of the Gaddafi government. However, the spread of armed factions has resulted in ongoing political instability which has caused economic stagnation as well as political disintegration, resulting in greater political polarization, regionalism and tribalism. This instability has meant that women’s issues have often taken a backseat to the more pressing issue of preserving some sense of political cohesion. In 2012, leaders in Libya's eastern city of Benghazi declared the region autonomous and called for a return to federalism, which the National Transitional Council rejected.\textsuperscript{1068} Currently, the internationally recognized Government of National Accord, which was formed in December 2015, governs the country from Tripoli, but the Libyan National Army (\textit{al-Jaysh al-waṭanī al-ḥalībi}) (LNA) governs eastern Libya from Derna to Ben Jawwad under the command of Khalīfa Belqāsim Ḥaftar, a retired general who served under the ousted Gaddafi government.

There have been a number of developments that have been less than encouraging in terms of women’s place within the political community in Libya. On February 16, 2017, ‘Abdel Rāziq


al-Nāḍūrī, chief of staff of the Libyan National Army, banned women under the age of 60 from going overseas without male chaperones for “security reasons.” This was justified due to claims that several Libyan women had been in contact with foreign intelligence agencies while abroad. The ban had been criticized for curtailing women’s freedom of movement, access to medical treatment and educational opportunities. On February 23, al-Nāḍūrī repealed the original ban and replaced it with a ban that replaced it with a new order imposing travel restrictions on all men and women between the ages of 18 and 45. While the repeal of the ban is promising for women, freedom of movement and protection of basic rights is still a problem. The future of women’s rights as well as the larger question of the political future of post-Gaddafī Libya remains unresolved.

As Libya struggles to build new institutions in the aftermath of over forty years of despotic rule, the question of role of women with Libyan society remains a salient one. Since independence, Libya has gone through dramatic changes brought about by economic development due to the resources provided by oil revenues. However, women who advocate greater rights and equality for women still face accusations that they are betraying their cultural values or are tools of the West, due to the connection drawn between feminism and the history of imperialism. This dissertation provides part of the historical connection for understanding of the connection between gender, sexuality and the foreign intervention in the Libyan context.

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