



# Imperial Violence, Anti-Colonial Nationalism and International Society

The Politics of Revolt across Mediterranean  
Empires, 1919–1927

Giorgio Potì

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization  
of the European University Institute

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European University Institute  
**Department of History and Civilization**

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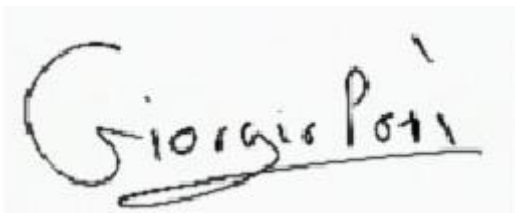
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the reconfiguration of colonial empires in the interwar years through four cases of anti-colonial nationalist insurrection and imperial repression from the British, French and Spanish Middle East: the Egyptian Revolution of 1919, the Iraqi revolt of the following year, the Rif War in Morocco (1921–26), and the Great Syrian Revolt (1925).

Scholars have alternatively portrayed the years between the World Wars—and especially the 1920s—as the era of nationalism, the apogee of European imperialism and the age of internationalism. This thesis investigates four short circuits among the three forces, by comparing the selected cases along two main lines. First of all, my preoccupation has been to trace their international resonance throughout the public debate of the metropolitan powers and the League of Nations bodies. Furthermore, I have attempted to assess whether and how, in each case, this international resonance shaped the policy of the imperial powers.

Recently, Erez Manela and Robert Gerwath have portrayed the ‘long’ Great War as the inauguration of a process of imperial decline eventually leading to decolonization. The general picture of Middle Eastern events resulting from my case-studies is rather that of a ‘war of adjustment’ of the Euro-Mediterranean imperial complex lasting from the opening of the Paris Conference up to the ‘pacification’ of the Moroccan and Syrian theaters. Anxious about the preservation of their imperial status and pressed by war-exhausted and public-spending-intolerant national opinions, the European powers employed unrestrained military force to annihilate rebellions as quickly and definitively as possible. Metropolitan authorities accepted negotiations with indigenous elites only when facing the reoccurrence of insurgency—like in Egypt, out of a recalculation of costs and benefits—like in Iraq, or under international pressure—like in Syria.

Conversely, although insurgent violence reached impressive peaks of brutality, especially in Morocco, Middle Eastern nationalist ‘agitators’ conceived of armed insurrection in a fully Clausewitzian way, that is, as part of a broader political strategy. Their infatuation with internationalist ideologies or the faith in ‘third’ international institutions never misled anti-colonial elites up to the point of believing that they could get rid of European control on a complete and permanent basis. Instead, Sa‘ad Zaghloul and his neighbor ‘homologous’ exploited insurgency in combination with international claim-making and appeals to metropolitan public opinions as part a comprehensive effort to force imperial governments to negotiations and reshape colonial rule on more collaborative and progressive bases. In sum, alongside and in strict interaction with petitioning, ‘revolting’ became a way of life of post-1919 colonial subjects.

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Of course, I am entirely responsible for the limited achievements and huge shortcomings of the work which follows.

## INTRODUCTION

*Who is to be the judge whether a given nationality should be allowed to become a state or not? Obviously, it is not the nationality seeking such a privilege. Nor is it any single outside nationality. The judge should be an impartial and international group representing the family of sovereign states. A nationality which is not fit to be admitted to statehood should be placed under the guardianship of the entire group of nations. It should no longer be a matter of self-election, as in the past.*

E. Asirvatham, *Forces in Modern Politics* (1936).

The quote above is from a textbook published by Professor E. Asirvatham in 1936, as part of the Lucknow University Studies in Political Science, to familiarize students with the most relevant ‘forces in modern politics’.<sup>1</sup> Glenda Sluga has recently portrayed the history of the twentieth century as a recurring entanglement between nationalism and internationalism.<sup>2</sup> However, if focusing on the first half of the century, that couplet should probably be expanded into a triad that also encompasses imperialism, as Asirvatham did in the subtitle of his book. The basic assumption of the Indian scholar was that both nationalism and imperialism contained light and shadow. The former could either foster civic commitment among citizens, and demand democratic accountability and economic reforms from governments, or result in racism and wars of

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<sup>1</sup> E. Asirvatham, *Forces in Modern Politics: Nationalism, Imperialism and Internationalism* (Lucknow: Upper India Publishing House, 1936).

<sup>2</sup> Glenda Sluga, *Nationalism in the Age of Internationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). I will return on Sluga’s arguments in my conclusion.

conquest. Likewise, Asirvatham noted, European imperialism historically oscillated between the brutal exploitation of native populations and civilizing missions, without ever fully coinciding with either of the two extremes.

An Edinburgh-trained political scientist with contacts among British liberals, Asirvatham argued that, in an increasingly interdependent world, internationalism alone could temper the other two ‘forces’ and incline them toward their brighter sides. For example, only a ‘third’ international institution, representing the ‘family of nations’ but no single nation in particular and accountable to ‘international public opinion’ in its entirety, could decide which national groups deserved to be rewarded with statehood on the basis of ‘objective’ parameters, like the ability to ‘make good laws’, ‘establish a suitable government’, ‘admit trade, pay debts and allow travel’, honor international obligations, etc.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, only an international body with the ‘light of world opinion’ behind it could compel imperial powers to bear the ‘white man’s burden’ properly through scrutiny and public exposure.<sup>4</sup> ‘We are members one of another’, Asirvatham stated, quoting Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians with the roaring of German, Italian and Japanese revisionism in mind.

If mankind is to save itself from the catastrophe which awaits it, it should replace national exclusiveness by international inclusiveness; the doctrine of national sovereignty by the doctrine of international solidarity. ‘International-mindedness’ on the part of the civilized world is the pre-requisite to its future progress, if not to its very existence.<sup>5</sup>

In this thesis, I investigate the interplay among the same three ‘forces’ of Asirvatham’s book through four cases of anti-colonial nationalist upheavals and imperial repression in the early-interwar Middle East: the Egyptian Revolution of 1919 and the Iraqi revolt of the following year, both occurring in the British Empire; and the Rif War in Morocco (1921–26) and the Great Syrian Revolt (1925), which both involved the French Empire—alone in the latter case, alongside Spain in the former. Before detailing the research focus and questions of my study, let me delve into its historical, conceptual and scientific rationale.

Nationalism and internationalism have overlapped, reinforced or fought each other since, at least, the Vienna Congress, and colonial empires were a cornerstone of the international order for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nonetheless,

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<sup>3</sup> Asirvatham, 1–48.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–121.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–216.

what is peculiar about the interwar years is that, at that point in history, the three ‘forces’ simultaneously reached their climax, thus triggering a potential short circuit. The 1920s and 30s can rightly be summarized, at the same time, as the triumph of nationalism, the apogee of imperialism and the age of internationalism. It is superfluous to recall the relevance of nationalism for the remaking and subsequent questioning of European borders after the Great War. Recent popular (and less recent and less popular) scholarship has also shed light on the rise of nationalist opposition to European domination in the colonial world, in strict connection with the new international atmosphere of 1919.

With the fall of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman Empires, the end of the First World War left sovereignty relations between peoples and territories to be reinvented in huge portions of the world and two competing outlooks about how to do that. The Russian Revolution projected Marxist-Leninism internationalism onto the world stage, with its dual call to proletarian revolution and peoples’ self-determination. According to Lenin, capitalism and imperialism were two faces of the same coin; indeed, the latter represented the ‘highest stage’ of the former. In his famous essay of 1917, the Bolshevik leader portrayed the Great War as a sort of imperial Armageddon in which, after controlling all available spots of land on Earth, capitalist powers eager for new markets devoured each other, thus providing fertile ground for a general uprising of the world proletariat.<sup>6</sup> Before reaching the ideal end of a stateless communist society, the proletarian revolution would first of all allow oppressed nationalities to decide their futures.

In parallel, the United States’ entry into World War I, and its decisive role for the eventual victory of the Allies, made Woodrow Wilson’s liberal declination of internationalism, with its emphasis on government by consent, international cooperation and free trade, the starting point of peacemaking in 1919. I will return to the differences between Wilsonianism and Leninism as internationalist ideologies, and their contemporary reception, later in this thesis. What is worth stressing, for the moment, is that both designs conceived the regeneration of the world order as resting on peoples’ right to self-determination.

Two distinct pieces of scholarship, with almost 50 years between them, have investigated the impact of the Bolsheviks and Wilson on the wave of anti-colonial

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<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Ulyanov Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* [1917] (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1948).

unrest that spread across Africa and Asia in the aftermath of the Great War. The English-speaking reader will be familiar with Erez Manela's attempt to identify a common root for the Egyptian, Indian, Chinese and Korean upheavals of 1919 in what he calls the 'Wilsonian moment', and to explain the subsequent political radicalization of the nationalist leaders of the four countries with their disappointment in the US president. Regardless of how convincing the 'Wilsonian factor' may sound in each of the four case studies—I will propose my own view on Egypt in chapter one—Manela deserves credit, to a certain extent, for finding a common interpretative framework for seemingly disconnected episodes in colonial history, which, in his words, 'would be rendered incomprehensible' otherwise.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, already in 1961, Walter Markov, one of the key figures in the Leipzig school of world history and comparative colonialism, proposed a unifying explanation for the arch of revolution embracing most of the colonial world between the world wars. Despite his lifetime commitment to intellectual exchange among scholars across the Iron Curtain, Markov is almost entirely neglected by Anglo-American scholarship: no English translation is available for most of his massive bibliography. In the view of the German historian, Wilson and the Japanese government alike are 'downgraded' to the rank of 'colonial profiteers' who, through their seemingly 'innovative diplomatic praxis', sought to lure anti-colonial nationalists with the promise of a new 'de-Europeanized and anti-colonial era', while, in fact, they both aimed at replacing European influence with their own. Rather, Markov traces the origins of anti-European discontent back to the wartime exploitation by the Old Continent of its overseas possessions.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, and most importantly, the scholar analyzes nationalist upheavals in Morocco as well as in China and India and elsewhere through the typically Marxist lenses of economic development, class consciousness and mass mobilization. Anti-European resentment rose and consolidated alongside industrial development, which, in turn, allowed the emergence of a nationalist bourgeoisie and a self-conscious working class. Revolutions were especially successful, Markov argues, where they benefited from the ideological inspiration and material support of the Bolshevik regime, like in

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<sup>7</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Walter Markov, *Sistemi coloniali e movimenti di liberazione* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1961), 49–62—the volume only appeared in Italy. Here, Markov understands Japan's insistence on the racial equality clause during the Paris Peace Conference as a diplomatic strategy to seduce non-European peoples across the world.

Turkey, Mongolia and China, and where the levels of organization and ‘ideological competence’ of communist parties allowed the effective ‘education’ and mobilization of worker and peasant masses. Hence, what Manela would later label the ‘Wilsonian moment’ is relativized and ‘diluted’ by Markov in what he calls the ‘first general crisis of capitalism’, ranging from 1917 to 1939.<sup>9</sup>

Taken together, the two works share the idea of ‘an international moment’ connecting nationalist uprisings across the colonial world to the spread of internationalist ideologies and political agendas. Markov’s analysis suggests that the relevance of Wilsonianism as a causal factor decreases, if not disappears, when extending the chronological focus both before and after the US president’s ephemeral transit on the world stage. Yet, both authors display different varieties of the same intellectual fault: explanatory reductionism. Their quest for global dynamics leads them to ignore or bypass local specificities and differences, and to reduce nationalist leaders and movements in Cairo, Constantinople, Beijing and so on to empty boxes receiving substance and significance from ‘global’ ideologies and socio-political trends.

Conversely, one of the challenges of this thesis is to grasp the international dimension of anticolonial nationalism—that is, its international origins, connections and constraints—in interaction with the historical, political and cultural frameworks of the different case studies, the motivations of the various nationalist leaders, the policies and strategies of the different imperial powers and the attitudes of the metropolitan publics. To enhance the harmonization of the general with the particular, I have adopted, as a criterion for the selection of my case studies, a minimal degree of geographical and chronological proximity, and of historical, cultural and political homogeneity. Though stretching throughout three colonial empires, all my cases concern the re-organization of the former Ottoman Middle East after World War I. Iraq and Syria were Ottoman provinces up until 1919. Egypt was a British-controlled viceroyalty recognizing the nominal sovereignty of Constantinople up to 1914 and an official British protectorate during the war. Formally, the establishment of a Spanish and a French protectorate over the Moroccan territory ended neither the sovereignty of the local sultan nor the spiritual authority that the Moroccan monarchy acceded to the Ottoman Emperor; indeed, most Moroccan notables and tribal leaders adhered to the Sublime Porte’s call for *jihad* against the Entente powers in 1914.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem. Markov was also the co-editor, alongside Manfred Kossok, Kurt Büttner and Lothar Rathmann, of the monumental series *Studien zur Geschichte Asiens, Afrikas und Lateinamerikas*, 24 volumes (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959–1973).

The chronological range of my thesis requires explanation as well. Even if focusing only on the Middle East, the Great Syrian Revolt did not end the wave of anti-colonial unrest triggered by WWI, as is evident, for example, in the Arab Revolt in Palestine of 1936–39. Yet, the Syrian crisis exhausted the season in which African and Asian nationalists thought and hoped that the Paris settlements could be revised. What is more, the world of the 1930s was different from the world of the 1920s. Classical readings of the interwar years, like Edward Carr's, have recognized the seeds of WWII in the faults of peacemaking in 1919 and have depicted the world as inexorably marching from one global war to another over the course of a 'twenty years' crisis'.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, a recent 're-evaluative' historiography has stressed the partial success of the Paris settlements, and of the League of Nations (LoN) that emerged from them, in promoting economic and political stability and fostering cooperation among the main powers for at least a decade.<sup>11</sup> The League's contribution to the resolution of the Åland crisis between Finland and Sweden in 1921, the stabilization of the Franco-German and Polish-German frontiers, the 'Locarno spirit' of the mid-1920s and the Briand-Kellogg Pact of 1928 were all remarkable achievements of interwar internationalism, which meant, this time, a policy of international cooperation and an attempt at global governance through international institutions. It was rather the Great Depression, the crisis of parliamentary regimes and the foreign policy of the revisionist powers that undermined the world order in the 1930s. Overall, the period between the two wars can roughly be divided to a decade in which things seemed to work and a decade in which things dramatically deteriorated, as implied by the titles and cover page illustrations of Zara Steiner's two volumes on European international history in that period.<sup>12</sup>

Moving to the colonial realm, interwar internationalism essentially meant the reorganization of the former Pacific, African and Middle Eastern possessions of the German and Ottoman Empires through the mandates system of the League of Nations. Alongside the minority rights and the refugee protection regimes, mandates account for the extensive work of the League in 'adjudicating, managing and delimiting relations of

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<sup>10</sup> Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* [1945] (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> For a state-of-the-art overview of the resurfacing scholarly interest in the League of Nations since the 1980s, see Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review*, 112:4 (2007), 1091–1117.

<sup>12</sup> Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and, by the same author, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History, 1933–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).



sovereignty' out of the ashes of the vanished empires.<sup>13</sup> The administration of former colonial dominions was entrusted to the wartime Allies (the British Commonwealth, France, Belgium and Japan) with the declared purpose of leading those territories to self-rule and placed under the (public) supervision of *ad hoc* League bodies—essentially, the mandates' section of the Secretariat and a Permanent Mandates Commission. Therefore, the defection of the US from the LoN, the initial exclusion of Germany and the Soviet Union—which, *de facto*, reduced the Geneva-based organization to a repeat of the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe centered on the Franco-British axis—and the incorporation of mandate territories meant that London's and Paris's empires reached their apex in terms of geographical extent and international weight. In this sense, the 1920s marked the climax of European imperialism. In the following decade, Japan's and Italy's violent seizure of Manchuria and Ethiopia respectively launched the revisionist challenge to Franco-British hegemony in the colonial world and unveiled the ineffectiveness of the League's collective security system in guaranteeing the territorial integrity and political independence of its member states.

Nonetheless, a recently flourishing branch of historiography has challenged the traditional picture of the mandates regime as just a disguised perpetuation of nineteenth-century colonial exploitation in the guise of 'a sacred trust of civilization'.<sup>14</sup> If a general argument can be drawn from the extensive scholarship published by Susan Pedersen on the subject, it is that no generalization about mandates is possible. As the historian points out, 'empirical research has demonstrated that mandatory administrations were neither uniform, nor particularly progressive, nor clearly distinguishable from colonial administrations'.<sup>15</sup> In some cases, like in Iraq and Syria, the mandatory administrations

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<sup>13</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations'.

<sup>14</sup> Michael D. Callahan, *Mandates and Empire: The League of Nations in Africa, 1914–1931* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1993), and, by the same author, *A Sacred Trust: The League of Nations and Africa, 1929–1946* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), as well as Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), substantially align with this negative assessment of the mandates system.

<sup>15</sup> Susan Pedersen, 'The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 32:4 (2006), 560–582. Pedersen's work on the LoN mandates has resulted in a stream of publications stretching from this 2006 path-breaking article to the recent monograph *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). In the meantime, other contributions have appeared, including 'Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations', *History Workshop Journal*, 66 (2008), 188–207; 'Getting out of Iraq—in 1932', *American Historical Review*, 115:4 (2010), 975–1000; 'The Impact of the League Oversight on British Policy in Palestine', in Rory Miller (ed.), *Palestine, Britain and Empire: The Mandate Years* (London: Ashgate, 2010), 39–65; and 'Samoa at Geneva: Peoples and Petitions before the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:2 (2012), 231–261.

did prepare former colonial populations for self-government by enhancing economic modernization and political reforms.<sup>16</sup> Yet, in the same territories, Britain and France did not refrain from bombing insurgents. South Africa treated ex-German South-West Africa as an actual colony and a manpower reserve, while Australian and New Zealand inflicted punitive raids and forced deportations on the inhabitants of their Pacific mandates in New Guinea and Western Samoa.

Despite this significant variation in the practices and outcomes of mandatory administration, as Pedersen highlights, the oversight work carried out by the League of Nations was an indisputable innovation introduced by the mandates regime. The Permanent Mandates Commission was made up of experts retaining a certain degree of independence from their national governments. They examined and assessed yearly reports submitted by the mandatory powers, and could gather information and receive petitions from private citizens and NGOs from both within and outside mandate territories. Finally, the proceedings of the Commission were public. What League oversight did, in sum, was to allow, promote and legitimize an open and public international discussion on the behavior of the mandatory powers. This was, in Pedersen's view, only the lowest common denominator of the mandates system as a whole; however, it was also its most significant contribution to interwar international relations. By articulating an ideology of trusteeship, it raised the standards of legitimacy and acceptability for colonial rule. Consequently, it introduced a system of incentives for the great powers, in terms of international reputation, according to their compliance with those standards.

What was distinctive about the mandates . . . was neither the ideals the system professed nor the administrative systems the participating states operated on the ground, but rather the particular processes of international scrutiny, consultation, appeal and publicity centered in Geneva and focused on the mandates alone. If we take those processes seriously, I argue, we see that the mandates system was less a means for transforming governance than a mechanism for generating talk: while lacking the capacity directly to affect colonial rule, it could require colonial powers to

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<sup>16</sup> The British and French mandates have been the most and best studied. Among the most valuable volumes devoted to them, see the bi-lingual Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (eds.), *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives/Les mandats français et anglais dans une perspective comparative* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), and the recent Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

discuss the character and legitimacy of that rule. It was, in other words, an engine for the generation and promulgation of international norms.<sup>17</sup>

Again, Pedersen sketches a demarcation line between the two decades of the interwar years, with a ‘creative’ transition phase coinciding with the short-lived but significant German membership in the League of Nations. Between 1926 and 1933, the Germans tried to use the mandates system, and in particular the supervisory and recommendation powers of the Mandates Commission, to challenge Britain and France’s imperial stand, thus providing nationalist leaders and anti-colonial campaigners across the various mandates with an unexpected and useful ally. It was in those years, for example, that the Permanent Mandates Commission approved the transition of Iraq to nominal independence and the League Council declared that the mandatory powers retained no sovereignty on mandate territories.<sup>18</sup> Deprived of the German outsider and unable to stop Japanese and Italian imperial conquests, the League lost any ability to propel the mandates’ transition to self-determination forward during the 1930s.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, as a legacy of the Great War, the world experienced a season of ‘population politics’, at least for a decade. According to Eric Weitz, WWI marked a ‘tectonic shift’ from the Vienna to the Paris system of international relations. The Congress of Vienna of 1815 was meant to reaffirm and restore an international system consisting of multi-national and multi-confessional states whose legitimacy rested primarily on dynastic succession. From the Paris Peace Conference, conversely, a new order ensued, centered on the recognition of discrete populations groups as the main subjects of the international system and on a concept of state sovereignty rooted in national homogeneity. Besides drawing a connection between collectivities conceived in national and racial terms and sovereignty, the Paris peacemakers also institutionalized a system to safeguard and advance the rights of these collectivities worldwide. These changes mainly affected two geopolitical areas: on the one hand, the borderland region stretching from the Baltic to the Black and Caspian seas and into Anatolia, where new states were erected along alleged demarcation lines between different ethno-lingual groups; and, on the other, former European colonies and informal spheres of influence

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<sup>17</sup> Pedersen, ‘The Meaning of the Mandates System’, 564.

<sup>18</sup> Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 195–288.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 289–407.

in the Middle East and Africa, where the mandates regime was implemented. In both areas, the League of Nations pledged to protect refugees and minorities.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, almost immediately, ‘population politics’ revealed its dark side. The pursuit of ethnic homogeneity in Central and Eastern Europe legitimized forced population transfers, like the deportations between Bulgaria and Greece in November 1919 or the ‘voluntary’ exchange of Muslims and Orthodox Christians between Greece and Turkey of May 1923.<sup>21</sup> If forced population transfers were the other face of the interwar minority protection regime, the ‘civilizing mission’ of the mandatory powers took the shape, sometimes, of violence and repression against the populations under ‘tutelage’. The difficulties and contradictions of ‘population politics’ turned into a true catastrophe during the 1930s, as Nazi Germany appealed to the same Wilsonian language of national self-determination and peoples’ rights to expand into neighboring countries and discard the Paris settlements. According to Mark Mazower, it was the consciousness of this failure that persuaded the peacemakers of 1945 to recast the focus and the protective range of international law and institutions from ‘peoples’ to individuals. Compared to the minority, refugee and mandates systems of the interwar years, the human rights regime developed after 1945 appears less ambitious, and the UN commitment to it looks cautious in comparison with the LoN’s declared endorsement of peoples’ rights.<sup>22</sup> Hence, I have referred to the years between the World Wars as the apogee of internationalism in the sense that never before or after were attempts at international governance so ambitious and grandiose.

My thesis focuses on four cases of short circuits in the overlapping of nationalism, imperialism and internationalism in the age of ‘population politics’, and in particular, in the time period in which, internationally speaking, ‘things seemed to work’. I employ the term ‘short circuits’ for several reasons: first of all, because the alleged ‘civilizing mission’ of the imperial powers and the progressive scope of their rule, either formally consecrated in the League Covenant and in the mandates statutes or affirmed in their public discourse, openly clashed with the violent means they employed to reassert their authority on colonial subjects; secondly, because the same internationally accepted principles that officially legitimized colonial or mandatory

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<sup>20</sup> Eric D. Weitz, ‘From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions’, *The American Historical Review*, 113:5 (December 2008), 1313–1343.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Mazower, ‘The Strange Triumph of Human Rights’, *The Historical Journal*, 47:2 (2004), 379–398.

rule—that is, the ‘interest’ and the ‘wellbeing’ of the subject populations—were invoked by anti-colonial nationalists and twisted around by the metropolitan powers; and finally, because the same Euro-centric and empire-friendly international system in which colonies and mandates prospered could turn into a hostile environment for imperial powers if their misdeeds were exposed to public attention.

Nonetheless, there is still the question as to whether and to what extent my selected cases provide sufficient ground for a general argument. After all, the shape and content of the clashes between colonial subjects and imperial rulers appear extremely variegated throughout the geographical spectrum covered in this thesis. The scale and nature of hostilities, as implied by the ‘official’ labels of the events, range from ‘revolts’ in Iraq and Syria to a full-scale ‘war’ in Morocco and a ‘revolution’ in Egypt. Furthermore, at first glance, the motivations behind anti-colonial resistance appear to diverge within and among the five cases: while the Revolution of 1919 is a founding myth of twentieth-century Egyptian nationalism, nationalist claims overlapped with economic discontent and sectarian rivalries in Iraq and Syria. What is more, in the words of Brigit Schaebler, the only partial success of the latter uprisings ‘le[ft] a residue of deep ambivalence constituting a kind of “sore spot” in the national consciousness, which then tend[ed] to be fragmented’.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the outcomes of the various uprisings also varied: the Egyptian Revolution was the only to achieve an immediate change in the formal status of the country from a protectorate to an ‘independent’ state; outwardly, things in Iraq, Morocco and Syria remained the same as in 1919.

Thus, are my cases comparable? Let me articulate the reply to these pre-empted objections in a *pars destruens* and a *pars construens*. Charles Tilly has proposed a famous theoretical model to classify the different degrees of popular mobilization up to ‘revolution’.<sup>24</sup> However, I would rather quote a much older and far less scholarly source to question the common labeling of Middle Eastern events after 1919. In August 1861, in the middle of the American Civil War, an editorial appeared in the *New York Times* to refute a previous argument by a Boston Republican paper that, since the initial rebellion of South Carolina had escalated into a ten-state armed resistance against the US government, ‘the Southern movement ha[d] passed completely out of the narrow

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<sup>23</sup> Brigit Schaebler, ‘Coming to Terms with Failed Revolutions: Historiography in Syria, Germany and France’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35:1 (January 1999), 17–44. While dealing with the Syrian and French historiography on the Great Syrian Revolt, the article does not cover Iraq. However, Schaebler, remarks apply to ‘failed revolutions’ in general.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Tilly, ‘From Mobilization to Revolution’, *CRSO Working Papers*, n. 156, University of Michigan (March 1977).

domain of rebellion, and entered upon the broad limitless field of revolution'. To this statement, the NYT responded that the difference between 'rebellions' and 'revolutions' was a matter of quality rather than size: 'Revolutions, in history, invariably assume the character of a revolt of an oppressed people against a Government not of its own choosing. In the Pro-Slavery rebellion, it is . . . the wrongful separation of a relationship into which the revolting States voluntarily entered'. Most importantly, the editorial continued, a fundamental difference between rebellions and revolutions was that the former were 'generally wrong', while the latter were 'always right'. Therefore, regardless of the number of states involved and the scale of hostilities, the Southern rising would invariably remain a 'conspiracy' and a 'treasonable rebellion'.<sup>25</sup>

As the reader will have guessed, the purpose of this digression into a topic geographically and historically so remote from my subject is to stress that the labeling of historical events is often a product of historicization and a tool of political will rather than 'objective reality', and the former are equally worthy of scholarly enquiry as the latter. Official records and historical memory notwithstanding, Egypt was all but 'independent' in 1922 and, despite the different labels, the Egyptian 'Revolution' and the Iraqi and Syrian 'revolts' all achieved the similar goal of compelling the imperial powers to relax colonial rule and take a more collaborative and conciliatory attitude towards colonial elites. Conversely, although the international press immediately qualified the events of the mid-1920s in Morocco as a 'war', the Spanish government never recognized the juridical status of the Rif 'rebels' as 'belligerents' and never considered negotiating a change in its colonial policy with them. In sum, the names by which we remember the events covered in this thesis alternatively resulted from their perception by contemporaries, the political goals of the parties involved or their subsequent assessment by historiography.

Challenging and relativizing the differences between my units of analysis prepare the ground for the identification of a *tertium comparationis*. In particular, I propose three *traits d'union*. First and foremost, all the case studies feature episodes of nationalist resistance against colonial powers in the shape of armed insurrection that elicited military repression by the latter. Here, the adjective *nationalist* requires qualification. What the insurgents claimed to want was not always clear—and, in some cases, as we will see, is still a subject of scholarly disputes—and did not necessarily coincide with what they actually desired. The Moroccans proclaimed independent

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<sup>25</sup> 'Rebellion, not a Revolution: A Distinction and a Difference', *New York Times*, 27 August 1861.

republics in the Rif with poor chances of survival, and they were finally crushed. The Egyptians demanded independence, but, in the end, they contented themselves with a new settlement leaving Britain in charge of Cairo's foreign policy, defense and communications. The Iraqis and the Syrians invoked the termination of mandates; however, eventually, Baghdad's and Damascus's notables yielded to a negotiated solution granting them more autonomy under the mandatory administration. Overall, regardless of public proclamations, it appears that insurgents in all five countries hoped for some sort of international recognition and a higher degree of administrative autonomy for their communities, but took the influence of the European powers for granted. What really varied in each case was the willingness of the imperial governments to make concessions to their colonial subjects.

In addition, no matter what the demands and objectives of the rioters were, in all the four cases their mobilization was nationalist in its perimeter, motivation and self-perception. Opposition to colonial rule transcended traditional divides of ethnicity, tribal affiliation, provincial administration and allegiance to local notables. It fostered—or, in the cases of Iraq and the Rif, generated anew—a sense of belonging to a wider community: precisely, to a 'nation' in the Mazzinian-Rénanian sense of a community of self-aware and politically engaged citizens sharing the same territory and the same institutions of government. Islam could provide a common ground among Iraqis, Rifians or Syrian nationalists and enhance their appeal to a broader Muslim transnational public, but they acted and stood vis-à-vis the imperial powers primarily and essentially as Iraqis, Rifians or Syrians campaigning for the rights and advancement of Iraq, the Rif and Syria. The same applies to Egypt.

While this first *trait d'union* is linked with the internal composition and organization of anti-colonial risings, the other two relate to their external dimension and connections. However concerned they were with their own imagined national communities, nationalists in the four countries also looked at each other. When petitioning the Paris Peace Conference, the Egyptians proudly refused to present themselves as Arabs or Muslims in order to denote their superiority to other Middle Eastern populations, but they also based most of their complaints on the privileged treatment granted by the peacemakers to their 'less important' and 'less civilized' Hedjaz cousins. Similarly, the Syrians claimed to have reached an unparalleled level of cultural and material progress in the Arab world, but took British policy in Iraq as a model for their claims to the French and collected money to help Moroccan nationalists.

Finally, imperial powers too looked at each other. Britain interpreted the Egyptian and Mesopotamian events ‘systemically’, that is, as part of the ongoing evolution of London’s empire as whole, and elaborated its Egyptian and Iraqi policies accordingly. France did the same in its approach to the Rif War and the Great Syrian Revolt. What is more, London and Paris constantly monitored the internal affairs of each other’s empire and compared colonial policies, either to strengthen their respective sense of superiority or to ponder the wider effects of what was going on in the imperial dominions of the counterpart. As for Spain, it perceived its interests in Morocco in terms of a comparison—and, often, a minority complex—with the two main imperial powers of the time.

In sum, events in different parts of the interwarMiddle East originated and developed within an extremely interconnected and osmotic international humus, and it is on that humus that my research focus lies. This thesis compares the selected cases along two main lines. First of all, my preoccupation has been to trace their international resonance. Furthermore, I have attempted to assess whether and how, in each case, this international resonance shaped the policy of the imperial powers. Of course, both research questions require empirical and methodological clarifications, which will occupy the remainder of this introduction.

By ‘international resonance’, I refer to what in each nationalist upheaval resonated in public debates outside national borders. I have further specified this broadly defined international realm by identifying four, partially overlapping, public spheres: (a) the *regional*, that is, the former Ottoman space; (b) the *intra-imperial*, by which I refer to the public debate in the metropolitan power; (c) the *inter-imperial*, i.e., the public debates of other imperial powers; and, finally, (d) the properly *international* sphere. By the latter, I mean a forum of discussion and political mobilization that transcended the simple sum of national polities and lay above them, at the level of international organizations. In other words, I am mainly referring to the public discussion and scrutiny of the technical bodies of the League of Nations like the Permanent Mandates Commission and to the streams of petitions that they attracted.<sup>26</sup>

However, these are abstract analytical definitions that do not help us to locate empirically the four public spheres that I have mentioned. In practice, I have sought

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<sup>26</sup> Of course, although the League embodied an embryo and an experiment of an international government, it only represented a portion of the world and did not exhaust the range of international institutions and NGOs of the interwar years. When relevant, I have also focused on other ‘international’ actors, like the Paris Peace Conference in chapters one and two and the International Committee of the Red Cross in chapter three.



evidence of public resonance through three groups of sources: the international press, the national archives of the European powers involved in my case studies, and the archives of Geneva-based international organizations like the League of Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Of course, I could only carry out a comprehensive monitoring of the international press at the cost of arbitrary selection. For all the four cases, I have examined the coverage in the leading British and French newspapers of the time, representing the political spectrum from left to right. I have integrated those sources with Spanish press excerpts on Morocco, and, occasionally, with extracts from US newspapers and magazines.

In this monitoring task, I have followed four groups of actors. My first preoccupation has been to trace and assess the ability of the various Middle Eastern nationalist groups and leaders to cross the borders of their home communities and make their voices heard by foreign publics. Moving from the regional public sphere towards the international via the intra- and the inter-imperial levels required growing linguistic, logistic and organizational resources and international contacts, as well as sympathetic audiences in the European capitals and in Geneva. Moreover, each of the four public spheres featured its own vocabulary, unspoken assumptions and rules of interaction—for example, as we will see in chapter one, Egyptian nationalists alternatively appealed to the principles of English liberalism, to the Marxist doctrine of class struggle and to the Wilsonian rhetoric of self-determination when seeking contacts with, respectively, the British press, French socialists, and the Paris Peace Conference. As such, I found it methodologically useful and plausible to articulate the broad concept of ‘international debates’ into different analytical levels.

It is to be expected that the declared purpose of surveying colonial voices through ‘Western’ sources will raise charges of badly disguised Euro-centrism, especially among practitioners of global history. Nonetheless, colonial voices are ‘worthy’ of my attention to the extent to which they managed to surface in that Euro- and imperial-centric world. Further, and more subtly, besides the direct contacts of anti-colonial nationalists with the European public through petitions, memoranda, pamphlets, etc., their claims and actions can also be traced indirectly through their representation and assessment in the official records of the imperial powers. Ranajit Guha, the famous father of subaltern studies, has based most of his landmark study of peasant insurgency in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India on the ‘elitist’ and official documents of the British authorities. As he explains,

counterinsurgency, which derives directly from insurgency and is determined by the latter in all that is essential to its form and articulation, can hardly afford a discourse that is not fully and compulsively involved with the rebel and its activities. It is of course true that the reports, dispatches, minutes, judgements, laws, letters, etc. in which policemen, soldiers, bureaucrats, landlords, usurers and others hostile to insurgency register their sentiments amount to a representation of their will. But these documents do not get their content from that will alone, for the latter is predicated on another will—that of the insurgent. It should be possible therefore to read the presence of a rebel consciousness as a necessary and pervasive element within that body of evidence.

In particular, Guha identifies two ways in which official counterinsurgency accounts can mirror insurgent consciousness: in the ‘elite’s report or interception of the insurgent discourse’ and in the numerous ‘expressions of elite’s hostility’ against insurgent ‘immorality’, ‘illegality’, ‘undesirability’, ‘barbarity’, etc.<sup>27</sup> A Spanish source that I will quote again in chapter three when discussing Madrid’s attitude vis-à-vis Moroccan resistance perfectly exemplifies Guha’s argument. There, a military officer reports about the ‘just punishment’ inflicted by the colonial army on rebel tribes in the Tetuan region. Yet, instead of describing the Spanish reprisal, the officer delves in detail into the ‘ungrateful’ and ‘outrageous’ proclamations of the tribal leaders, *para que siempre quede reconcida la justificación del castigo* [‘to make the justification of the punishment always recognizable’].<sup>28</sup>

The second and third groups of actors at the core of my analysis correspond to the trans- and international ‘intervening variables’ in the confrontation between colonial subjects and metropolitan powers: first of all, the network of individuals, associations and NGOs across the world, like the England-based Egyptian Association and Rif Committee, which entertained relations with Middle Eastern nationalists, provided them with logistic bases in Europe and/or forwarded their claims through publications and petitions; secondly, the international experts and officials working in the League (and, in the case of Morocco, for the international Red Cross) who received, examined, and, sometimes, acted upon petitions and memoranda. Recently, Daniel Gorman has published a volume on the birth of ‘international civil society’ in the 1920s as a ‘broad public response to the currents of internationalism unleashed by Versailles’. In particular, the scholar shows how ‘evolving international ideas of racial equality and

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<sup>27</sup> Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 1–17.

<sup>28</sup> Archivo General de la Administración, Alcalá de Henares, Spain (from now on, AGA), sección 15, fondo 3/1 (Marruecos), caja 81/10132, exp. 1, ‘Breve relato de la situación militar e historia política de la zona española de protectorado en Marruecos hasta el año 1922’.

international trusteeship changed what it meant to be an imperial citizen' in that decade. Although covering a wide and variegated range of geographical areas and topics, including, for example, the East Africans' campaign for accession to equal imperial citizen rights, Gorman basically mistakes the British Empire (however huge and influential at that time) for the entire world.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, as Andrew Arsan has noticed, if looking at the Ottoman Empire, the roots of a transnational civil society of activists, journalists and petitioners should be traced back to, at least, the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Hence, instead of the 'emergence' of international civil society in the 1920s, it appears more plausible to talk of an 'interwar moment' evolving out of pre-existing patterns of the globalization of civil society, as Arsan, Sun Li Lewis and Anne-Isabelle Richards do in the preface to a special issue of the *Journal of Global History*.<sup>31</sup> What marked the 'moment' after WWI was the fact that those patterns now drew legitimation and impulse from new internationalist ideologies and found potential arenas of expression and influence in new international institutions like the League. Therefore, upon considering 'internationalism' in this further sense of the rise of internationally-minded and transnationally engaged elites, we can talk of the 1920s as an apogee. Up to now, several valuable studies have appeared on, respectively, 'Western' and 'non-Western' international civil society, as well as on international experts in the interwar years.<sup>32</sup> However, few attempts have been made at investigating the interactions and entanglements among those three actors, and this study aims at partially filling that gap.<sup>33</sup>

My fourth object of interest in the study of international debates has been, of course, the reaction to Middle Eastern nationalism by the metropolitan publics of both

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Civil Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Arsan, "'This Age is the Age of Associations": Committees, Petitions, and the Roots of Interwar Middle Eastern Internationalism', *Journal of Global History*, 7:2 (July 2012), 166–188. I will return on Arsan's arguments later in chapter one.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Arsan, Su Lin Lewis and Anne-Isabelle Richard, 'Editorial – The Roots of Global Civil Society and the Interwar Moment', *Journal of Global History*, 7:2 (July 2012), 157–165.

<sup>32</sup> Several scholars have traced the emergence of Asian and African transnational currents of reaction to European dominance since the mid-1800s; for example, Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), and Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Penguin, 2012). As an example of studies on international experts, besides the literature on the mandates system, see Patricia Clavin, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations: Understanding the Work of its Economic and Financial Organisation', *Contemporary European History*, 14:4 (2005), 465–492.

<sup>33</sup> Important exceptions are, for example, Pedersen's studies on the mandates system and Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Interwar Nationalism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

the imperial powers directly involved in each uprising and their allied-yet-rival empires, which leads to my second research question. Besides following the international resonance of the four selected cases, I have sought to evaluate whether, to what extent and in which way international resonance shaped the metropolitan government's reaction to the upheaval and the handling of its aftermath in each case. In other words, I have tried to understand if and how publicity concerns and, when relevant, international oversight affected decision-making by the imperial powers.

As Daniel Hucker has noted, studying public opinion as an independent variable in international history—that is to say, as a causal factor of foreign policy—is a tricky and potentially hopeless enterprise. After all, especially when addressing a pre-opinion-polls era, ‘public opinion’ is difficult to define and locate, and the ‘empirical paper trail’ only conveys an incomplete and often distorted representation of opinion trends. However, as he points out, what matters in decision-making, rather than public opinion *per se*, is its perception by decision-makers, the ‘images by which elites make sense of public opinion’. Hucker proposes to differentiate those images into two categories, which he calls ‘reactive’ and ‘residual representations’. By ‘reactive’ images, the author means ‘the way in which public opinion is represented “here and now” reflecting ebbs and flows on any given issue and at any given time’. As far as this first category is concerned, matching press surveys with archival records should reveal ‘which expressions of opinion reverberated most emphatically in policy-making circles, and thus entered the consciousness of decision-makers themselves’.<sup>34</sup> Among the numerous petitions and press excerpts examined in my research, I have cast special attention on those which received an official reply from the European governments or those that are explicitly referred to in official governmental records.

Furthermore, Hucker claims, there also exists a deeper and less visible, but probably more influential, form of public opinion representation, the ‘residual’ one, which decision-makers refer to ‘instinctively and intuitively’; in other words, ‘the alleged dominant trends in opinion taken for granted with no need for verification, established firmly within their cognitive maps’.<sup>35</sup> It is the craft of the historian to recognize in the official records the intellectual *habitus* and stereotypes pre-existing to and informing the elites’ perception of opinion trends. As we will see, for example, ample evidence of anti-British resentment among the Egyptians, at least initially,

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel Hucker, ‘International History and the Study of Public Opinion: Towards Methodological Clarity’, *International History Review*, 34:4 (2012), 775–794.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

produced no self-criticism among HMG because the petitions and memoranda received or intercepted by the British authorities were assumed to be scarcely representative of the Egyptian public, or the work of self-interested or manipulated fanatics. It took a couple of years before the prolonged Egyptian unrest, accompanied by a fair amount of criticism of HMG's policy in the leading British newspapers, stimulated a critical rethinking of the progressive and benevolent self-representation of British imperial rule, which provided the basis for the Milner proposal of a negotiated solution to the Egyptian crisis. Overall, I have sought to assess if and how public talks and international mobilization engendered by the various revolts, when relevant, affected the 'residual' imagination of the imperial governments.

I could have fashioned the four case studies in various alternative formats: for example, by classifying them according to the empire involved, by proposing a section on mandates and another one on 'pure' colonies, by distinguishing between the *Mashriq* and the *Maghreb*. Instead, I have chosen to present one revolt per chapter according to chronological order, which remains the most plausible and defensible criterion for a historian. This also means that the studies on the British Empire and the French Empire bookend the thesis, with Spanish Morocco as an interlude. Hence, the story that I am about to tell appears, at first glance, as a sequence of colony-metropolis binaries (with the exception of the Rif War, which interested the Spanish and French Empires simultaneously). This thesis can be considered an essay of comparative imperialism with the ambition to integrate the 'standard' Franco-British couple with the Spanish 'outsider'.<sup>36</sup>

There is also another fundamental rationale behind my format choice. International 'interferences' notwithstanding, my research persuaded me that the colony-metropolis perspective remains an essential analytical key and the necessary starting point to understand the development and outcome of the four uprisings. However, it is also an incomplete one. To make sense exhaustively of the motivations and strategies of the various nationalist leaders and organizations, as well as of the perceptions and choices of the imperial governments, the various cases must be placed

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<sup>36</sup> A famous example of comparative history of the British and French Empires in the interwar years is Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1924* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). The same author has successively published a comprehensive assessment of social unrest and repression across European colonial empires: *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in European Colonial Empires, 1918–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). A valuable monograph comparing French and Spanish colonialism in Morocco is Víctor Morales Lezcano, *El colonialismo hispano-francés end Marruecos*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2002).

in their broader international humus and explored in their transnational connections and interactions. Thus, the ultimate goal of the comparison that follows is to draw some general conclusions on the evolution of the Euro-Mediterranean imperial system as a whole during the 1920s. In 1919, European imperialism reached its ‘higher stage’, to put it in Lenin’s language. After 1945, colonial empires looked discredited and begun to collapse. My thesis wants to explore the ‘Copernican Revolution’ that occurred in the meantime, without necessarily indulging in teleological readings. Rather than a pre-history of decolonization, the story told in the forthcoming chapters can be approached as a history of ‘re-colonization’: more specifically, the history of the reconfiguration of European imperial rule in different areas of the post-Ottoman Middle East in response to a stream of nationalist unrest in the ‘age of internationalism’.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, my study wants to take advantage of the impressive empirical findings and analytical insights of the recent scholarship on mandates by ‘exporting’ them into the broader field of general imperial history. In terms of the quantity and quality of publications and ongoing research projects, ‘mandates studies’ is emerging as a sort of autonomous field of scholarly enquiry connected with the growing interest in the history of international institutions and global governance. In contrast, imperial historians often continue to approach colonial empires from a pre-eminently national perspective (the history of the French Empire, the history of the British Empire, etc.) and reduce the difference between mandates and pre-existing regimes of colonial administration to a mere matter of labels. By comparing mandate and non-mandate case studies across multiple empires, I aim to build a bridge between these opposite trends in historiography. Without denying the peculiarity of the mandates system as a new international engine of the interwar years, I explore its interactions with the pre-existing colonial world. In particular, my concern throughout this thesis has been to investigate whether and how, in a sort of osmotic exchange, the higher moral and legal standards for acceptable colonial rule introduced by the mandates system, and the wave of transnational mobilization encouraged and legitimized by the oversight procedures of the League, also affected the wider colonial world.

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<sup>37</sup> Among the scholarly works placing the prodromes of decolonization in the interwar years, see Martin Thomas, Bob Moore and L. J. Butler, *Crises of Empire: Decolonization and Europe’s Imperial States, 1918–1975* (London: Hodder Education, 2008), and Henri Grimal, *La décolonisation* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1965). [English translation: *Decolonization: The British, French, Dutch and Belgian Empires, 1919–1963* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978)].

## CHAPTER ONE

### Engaging with Empire through International Channels: The Egyptian Path to ‘Independence’, 1919–1922

*Ceux qui proclamaient le plus hautement, quand tel était leur intérêt, que l'univers serait renouvelé sur ses bases, affichent aujourd'hui le conservatisme le plus intransigeant. Ainsi Napoléon I glorifiait les principes de la Révolution contre la Prussie, l'Autriche ou l'Espagne, et instaurait en France la plus lourde des dictatures militaires. Il se trouve toujours des gens pour commander à l'histoire, mais leurs prétentions sont dérisoires comme stériles sont leurs efforts.*

Phedon, ‘Les difficultés coloniales de l'Angleterre’, *Le Populaire*, 29 April 1919.

‘Our country has been conquered. You have taken away our burley, our camels and donkeys, and much corn; so leave us alone’: this was, according to the translation provided by English intelligence officers, a verse of an anti-British popular song circulating in Egypt in 1919. It revealed the accumulation of grievances among indigenous milieus as a result of the sacrifices they had undergone to support the Allies’ war efforts, and their claim to a just reward for that burden. The song went then on as follows: ‘The invitation is sent out to all—Perfect Freedom. And so you must quit our country. Then we shall be equal to any people in civilization’.<sup>1</sup> The Egyptians felt that

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter, TNA), Records Created or Inherited by the Foreign Office (FO), FO Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906–1966 (371), box 3714, file 50207, ‘Anti-British Popular Song’, 1 April 1919.

something had changed in the international scene from which they expected to benefit. They felt that the proper moment to claim self-determination had come.

It was the Egyptian Revolution of the spring of 1919. Of that foundational moment in the history of contemporary Egypt, this chapter is especially concerned with what reverberated beyond Egyptian borders. Of the five sections that follow, the central ones deal with the interplay between the Egyptian rising and international politics. Section two describes how the new ethos and rhetoric of ‘national self-determination’, which dominated international talks at the end of the First World War, fused and overlapped with the political strategy and expectations of Egyptian nationalists, in particular the *Wafd* movement, resulting in a multiform petitioning and press campaign to gain international support for Egyptian independence. Of the many sides of that mobilization, sections three and four discuss the *Wafd* and its diasporic associates’ efforts to reach both the governments and the public opinion of the Allied countries, and the responses they received.

As should emerge from the following pages, the ‘Wilsonian Moment’ is just one part of the story as far as Egypt is concerned. An accurate analysis of the international petitioning by Egyptian nationalists reveals a plurality of discourses, venues and targets in which Wilsonian rhetoric and the principle of self-determination itself appear as but one among many inspiring forces; indeed, they sometimes looked rather like temporary instruments of an ampler political strategy. Despite the *Wafd*’s excellent performance as an ‘international actor’, however, I will show that the metropolis-colony binary remains the fundamental analytical perspective to interpret the events of 1919 as well as the expectations and initiatives of the main actors involved. That is particularly evident when placing the Revolution in the wider context of the pre-existing patterns of British-Egyptian relations—which I do in the first section—and considering its aftermath, the subject of section five.

Finally, a word on the chronological range of this chapter. Was 1922 the end of the story? By that year, despite labels and official declarations, Egypt was anything but a sovereign state—the Egyptians had to wait until the 1950s to enjoy the substance, and not just some semblance, of independence: it is for this reason that the word is placed in inverted commas in the title of the chapter. What is more, the ‘settlement’ of 1922—rather a unilateral ‘concession’ from HMG—would shortly reveal its precariousness, and London-Cairo tensions would continue in the following years. However, it was between 1919 and 1922 that national independence was the central issue at stake in the



Egyptian disorders, while the successive struggle with Britain concerned rather the administration of Sudan. Moreover, the Revolution and its immediate aftermath not only forced the Egyptians to cope with the persisting reality of colonial empires, but also made it manifest to the British that, after 1918, the Empire needed to be reshaped in less costly and more morally justifiable ways. This recurring tension in interwar talks and politics across the Middle East lies at the analytical core of my dissertation.

#### HALF-PROMISES AND SEMI-SOVEREIGNTY: BRITISH EGYPT UP TO 1918

British imperial expansion took root in Egypt alongside with the progressive erosion of Ottoman sovereignty. After assisting the Sublime Porte in its efforts to restore order following Napoleon's Middle Eastern campaign of 1798–1801, Britain established itself as the leading European guardian of Egyptian politics and finances, in competition with the French and in cooperation with the ruling Turco-Circassian military elites.<sup>2</sup> Pushed by the nightmare of bankruptcy, in 1876, Khedive Isma'il Pasha of the Muhammad Ali dynasty consented to the establishment of an international *caisse de la dette*—a public debt commission representing European creditors—and to the hiring of British and French financial controllers in Cairo's government. It is against the Franco-British Dual Control that a heterogeneous coalition of Turkish officials, indigenous army officers, village shaykhs, provincial landlords and parliamentary deputies rose, led by Colonel Ahmed 'Urabi, between September 1881 and September 1882.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, British economic and financial interests in the region had gradually overcome France's. It has been estimated that, by 1880, London absorbed 80 percent of Cairo's exports and contributed 44 percent of its imports. The vicissitudes of the Suez Canal, which had been completed by the French only in 1869, exemplifies these shifting patterns of imperial hegemony: in 1875, the Disraeli government obtained 44 percent of the Canal Company's shares; in the following years, British traffic reached 80 percent of the Canal's total.<sup>4</sup> The motivations of the British occupation in 1882 are therefore easy to guess. The 'Urabi revolt marked the apex of a season of political turbulence and

<sup>2</sup> Darrell Dykstra, 'The French Occupation of Egypt, 1798–1801', in M. W. Daly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 113–138.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Malcolm Reid, 'The 'Urabi Revolution and the British Conquest, 1879–1882', in Daly, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 2, 217–238; Juan R. I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> A. G. Hopkins, 'The Victorians and Africa: A Reconsideration of the Occupation of Egypt, 1882', *Journal of African History*, 27 (1986), 379.

financial instability, lasting from the days of the Napoleonic campaigns, which the Ottoman authorities had not been able to end. It was only in 1867 that the Porte recognized Isma‘il as khedive—roughly translatable as ‘viceroy’—of Egypt, but the Muhammad Ali family had *de facto* ruled Egypt since the early nineteenth century. After the British seizure, an annual tribute of 15 million francs that Cairo granted to Constantinople remained the only mark of Ottoman nominal sovereignty.

But the unlawful occupation of a territory of an allied empire—as the Porte was for London at that time—was only one of the many paradoxes of London’s Egyptian policy. Established to end the ‘Urabi revolt in the wake of a bankruptcy crisis, British rule was clearly directed at assuring political stability and financial solidity so as to provide a safe environment for imperial business: consistent with this purpose, the administrative apparatus of the khedivate, which remained formally in force up to World War I, was infiltrated with British ‘advisors’, mostly coming from the imperial financial intelligentsia. The career of Evelyn Baring, an army officer from a famous banking family, summarizes the trajectory of the international technocratic appropriation of Egypt, which had already started under the Anglo-French Dual Control. After representing British private bondholders in the *caisse de la dette* and then serving in the Egyptian government as controller-general of revenues, he became London’s first ‘agent and consul-general’—in fact the shadow ruler of Egypt—in 1883. Under Lord Cromer, the new title acquired by Baring, the Egyptian economy benefited from significant improvements: the reduction of the quota of the budget devoted to public debt by a half and the increase of annual governmental revenues and national imports by, respectively, 100 and 400 percent feature among Cromer’s best achievements. Likewise, considerable irrigation and sanitation works were completed by the British administration.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, these consistent modernization efforts in the economic and administrative realms contrast with the improvisation, ambiguity and dilation characterizing the overall Egyptian policy of Her Majesty’s Government. In numerous public and official statements, which would provide formidable rhetorical weapons for the Egyptian nationalists’ campaigns after the Great War, the British occupation was explained as temporary and intended to pave the way towards the greater involvement of the indigenous people in the administration of their own country. Intervening in the House

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<sup>5</sup> Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt and Cromer* (New York: Preager, 1969); John Marlowe, *Cromer in Egypt* (London: Elek Books, 1970).

of Commons in August 1882, Prime Minister William Gladstone categorically excluded the possibility of a permanent occupation of Egypt, labeling it as 'absolutely at variance with all the principles and views of Her Majesty's Government, and the pledges they have given to Europe and with the views, I may say, of Europe itself'.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in an address to the House of Lords of August 1889, Foreign Secretary Robert Salisbury declared that the British would never violate the 'sanctity' of their own obligations and of 'European law' by turning themselves from 'guardians' into 'proprietors' of Egypt.<sup>7</sup> The same point was officially reasserted in the Anglo-French agreement of 8 April 1904, stating that London had 'no intention of altering the political status of Egypt'.<sup>8</sup> Still in 1909, Sir Eldon Gorst, who had replaced Lord Cromer as British consul-general in 1907 after serving as his financial advisor, wrote:

Since the commencement of the occupation the policy approved by the British Government has never varied, and its fundamental idea has been to prepare the Egyptians for self-government by helping them in the meantime to enjoy the benefit of good government.<sup>9</sup>

Gorst was right, at least in part: the fundamental idea of HMG's policy had never changed, in the sense that HMG had never shown a clear idea on when and how to leave Egypt. The occupation was portrayed and planned as if it were to end soon, even though it lasted decades. What is more, in spite of Gorst's proclamations, the British authorities proved reluctant to accept even marginal degrees of Egyptian political autonomy, which caused regular tensions between indigenous politicians and their foreign 'advisors': Prime Minister Nubar Pasha (1884–1888) vainly attempted to put the Egyptian police under his control, while his successor Riaz Pasha resigned after fighting with Cromer over the appointment of a financial advisor. What made London's closure to political reforms particularly obnoxious was the coincidence of the British occupation with a crucial phase in the consolidation of a modern Egyptian political consciousness. During the khedivate of 'Abbas Hilmi (1892–1914), organized political parties, with more or less broad social bases, emerged out of previous circles of notables, students or admirers of a particular philosopher. In those transitional years, political leadership gradually shifted from 'Islamist reformers', to borrow the label from M. W. Daly, to

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<sup>6</sup> William Gladstone in the House of Lords, 10 August 1882. The parliamentary records of the UK can be consulted <http://www.portcullis.parliament.uk/dserve/DServe.exe?dsqApp=Archive&dsqCmd=Index.tcl> (last seen on 31 July 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Lord Salisbury in the House of Lords, 12 August 1889.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Text of the Anglo-French agreement of 8 April 1904.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Sir Eldon Gorst's report, 27 March 1909.

‘secular politicians’ displaying a proto-nationalist consciousness.<sup>10</sup> All the major political groups, like the Constitutional Reform Party or Lutfi al-Sayyid’s Umma Party, advocated gradual reforms in cooperation with the British ‘guardians’. These new organizations appealed to public opinion through the proliferating newspapers, such as *Al-Liwa*, which started circulating in 1909 under the aegis of Mustafa Kamel’s National Party.<sup>11</sup>

It was only in 1913 that Consul-General Earl Kitchener seconded the promulgation of an organic law introducing a Legislative Assembly of 89 members, two thirds of whom were elective. If this opening might appear to be the prelude to broader concessions, the World War put any hope of political reform to a bitter end. Confronting the Central Empires, London soon realized Egypt’s economic, military and geostrategic relevance for the control of the Mediterranean and as a key gateway to British possessions in Africa and Asia. The geopolitics of the Middle East radically changed as a consequence of Constantinople’s decision to enter the conflict on Berlin and Vienna’s side.<sup>12</sup> Khedive ‘Abbas Hilmi supported the Sublime Porte’s call for a holy war in the name of Islamic brotherhood, which provided the British with a pretext for unilaterally turning Egypt into a formal protectorate.

In December 1914, the Foreign Office announced the deposition of the khedive, guilty of ‘adher[ing] to the King’s enemies’, and the termination of Ottoman sovereignty over Egypt, now proclaimed a sultanate under British ‘protection’. The Egyptian crown, however, remained within the Muhammad Ali dynasty, moving from ‘Abbas to Husayn Kamel Pasha.<sup>13</sup> Britain claimed ‘the full responsibility’ for the ‘protection of all Egyptians subjects’ as well as for the defense of Egypt’s territory from external aggressions. Furthermore, ‘HMG deem[ed] it most consistent with the new responsibilities assumed by Great Britain’ to conduct Egyptian foreign relations through the British representative in Cairo. As far as internal administration was concerned, ‘in consonance with the traditions of British policy’, London affirmed its willingness to cooperate with local authorities to secure individual liberty, promote the spread of education, further the development of natural resources and, ‘in such a measure as the

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<sup>10</sup> M. W. Daly, ‘The British Occupation, 1881–1922’, in Daly, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 2, 239–251.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob M. Landau, *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt* (Tel Aviv: Israel Publishing House, 1953); Marius Deeb, *Party Politics in Egypt* (Oxford: Ithaca Press, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Communiqué by the Foreign Office published in *Journal Officiel du Gouvernement Égyptien*, 18 December 1914.

degree of enlightenment of public opinion may permit, to associate the governed in the task of government'. Further decisions about the new regime remained to be taken, in the conviction that a 'clearer definition of Great Britain's position in the country' would 'accelerate progress towards self-government'.<sup>14</sup>

Beginning with Britain's occupation of the Greek Ionian islands in 1815, and culminating with the partition of the Balkans into Austrian, Russian and Ottoman spheres of influence sanctioned by the Berlin Congress of 1878, an increasing number of territories, both within and outside European borders, came to be labeled as 'protectorates' during the nineteenth century. In 1896, Frantz Despagnet, a professor at the Law Faculty of the University of Bordeaux and a fellow of the *Institut de Droit International* (IDI)—an international consortium of leading lawyers founded in 1873 and based in Ghent—published an extensive and well documented *Essai sur les protectorats*. In this thorough and systematic overview, he defined the protectorate as a regime of 'semi-sovereignty' originating from the 'feeling of weakness by a country, from its need for the protection of a stronger power to rescue it from internal troubles, from disorganization impeding the exercise of its political and social function, and from external attacks'. A protectorate was established via a bilateral treaty between two fully sovereign states, one of which placed itself voluntarily under the protection of the other in exchange for a portion of its sovereignty.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, the dual underlying assumption of the doctrine of the protectorate, as Despagnet portrayed it, is clearly evident: on the one hand, it presupposes an interaction between equally sovereign states and an encounter of their free wills, while, on the other, it implies a hierarchization of the international community in terms of military power, political functionality, administrative effectiveness and, indirectly, the level of moral and civil development of different countries, *de facto* preventing some from looking after themselves.

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<sup>14</sup> Official Covering Despatch by the Acting British Representative, *Journal Officiel du Gouvernement Égyptien*, 19 December 1914.

<sup>15</sup> Frantz Despagnet, *Essai sur les Protectorats: Étude de Droit International* (Paris: Librairie de la Société du Recueil Général des Lois et des Arrêts, 1896), 41–54.

Among the states as well as among individuals, it is a natural law that the weaker abdicate to a portion of their liberty to the advantage of the stronger, and pay for the defense of their rights and their interests. . . . In each period of history we find patrons and clients among both peoples and persons.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas Hobbes's theory on the contractual origins of states seem to resound in Despagnet's pages, with the relevant difference that, at the stage of international society traced by the jurist, the 'voluntary submission' of the weaker does not give way to a world government ruled by a single power but to a number of subject/Leviathan bilateral relations.

Historically, Despagnet argued, the modern institute of protectorate resulted from the most deplorable practices of *ancien-régime* European power politics, where great powers imposed their 'protection' on the minor ones to prevent these latter from falling in the hands of rival powers or, sometimes, the weaker states preferred to place themselves under the influence of a certain power before being conquered by a worse one (the author does not mention any precise historical moment or episodes). Yet, intervening *ex post* to ratify and justify the arbitrary behavior of the big powers, international law 'elevated' the practice of establishing protectorates from a means of mere territorial expansion to a proper instrument of protection for the weak.

This situation was quite natural in an era of unscrupulous diplomacy in which fear was the only restraint to territorial greed; this is to say that this was the cause of the protectorates until the time has come in which international relations have improved a little thanks to the moral action of international law as a doctrine and to its more effective application as a practice.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to notice how politics, law and ethics are mutually placed in Despagnet's view—a singular synthesis of political realism and the optimistic trust in the moralizing mission of law. International politics correspond to a sort of Hobbesian *état de nature*, the realm of the egoistic and aggressive behavior of states in which the survival of the fittest is the only rule. International law is often invoked and exploited *ex post* by the major powers as window dressing to justify their actions in morally tolerable terms and fix the *status quo*. Nonetheless, once norms and principles are codified and accumulate over time, they can in turn re-orient the actions of states more ethically.

A quick insight into the cultural background and theoretical stands of the members of the IDI will help clarifying this argument. The eleven jurists who gathered

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–57.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–68.

in Belgium in September 1873—two dozen more would join shortly afterwards—defined the purpose of the *Institut* as ‘to enhance the progress of international law by attempting to become the organ of the conscience of the civilized world’.<sup>18</sup> Legal scholars, that statement implied, should not limit themselves to reporting the content of existing treaties and customs: there existed a core of universal moral values lying in the soul of humankind which international lawyers had to articulate and keep alive in the public awareness. Johann Caspar Bluntschli, the Heidelberg professor and Protestant liberal politician who drafted most of the IDI’s statute, was a convinced advocate of this organic, dynamic and ‘romantic’ conception of law.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Gustave Moynier from the University of Geneva, another Swiss fellow of the IDI, wrote that he and his colleagues should aim to ‘proclaim, with a single voice, the rules of moderation which the legal consciousness of the time found indispensable’.<sup>20</sup>

The belief that ‘positive law’—here meaning a real, supra-individual historical process—lived in the *Volksgeist*—the ‘spirit’ of the community—was a core assumption of the German Historical School of Law to which Bluntschli can be ascribed. However, while the nationalist and conservative wing of that school emphasized the uniqueness and irreducibility of various national identities and traditions, the superiority of the German soul among them, Karl von Savigny considered single peoples just as individual manifestations of a common human nature: therefore, nations shared a common sense of right that needed to be translated into formal laws. The Roman Empire and then the ‘Christian-European’ community, Savigny noted, had already displayed a tendency towards the universalization of law.<sup>21</sup> In line with Savigny’s cosmopolitan and liberal humanism, Bluntschli and his fellows at the *Institut de Droit International* aspired to represent a ‘universal’ legal conscience. Indeed, the IDI’s statute circumscribed the possibility of knowledge and the field of the applicability of universal norms to the ‘civilized’ world (I will return later to the controversies about the standard of civilization in the colonial discourses of the time). Hence, the early attempts at a codification of international norms brought about a hierarchization of the international community in terms of progress and civilization and a legitimization of

<sup>18</sup> *Revue de droit International et de législation comparée*, 5 (1873), 68.

<sup>19</sup> In his *Denkwürdiges aus meinem Leben*, vol. 3 (Nördlingen: Rudolf Seyerlen, 1884), 171, Bluntschli identified the scope of international law as ‘to articulate legal norms that were held necessary by the consciousness of the civilized world’—almost the same phrasing of the IDI’s statute.

<sup>20</sup> André Durand, ‘The Role of Gustave Moynier in the Founding of the Institute of International Law (1873)’, *ICRC Review*, 34 (1994), 543–563. For a more detailed account of the origins and activities of the IDI, see Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870–1960* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11–178.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Carl von Savigny, *System des heutigen Römischen Rechts*, 8 vols. (Berlin: Veit, 1840).

European colonial expansion on the basis of the alleged hierarchy, as in Despagnet's writing.

But the organicist and historical approach does not account completely for the perceptions and ambitions of the jurists who set up the IDI. The word *conscience*, featuring in the official version of the statute of the *Institut*, is the French for both 'conscience' and 'consciousness', and the men of 1873 aimed to incarnate the two. They believed that a corpus of moral-legal truths, ontologically prior to the institution of states and their behavior, inhabited the soul of humankind; they were equally persuaded, however, that such norms needed to be raised to public consciousness and systematized by professional scientists-lawyers before they could actually affect state praxis. An emblem of the positivist-Darwinian approach informing European social scientists at the turn of the century, Despagnet was convinced of living through an era of considerable advancements in international law, since the practice of protectorates was becoming more consistent with their theoretical scope. As an example, the scholar quoted two forms of international protection quite common in the last decades of the nineteenth century that shared a clear progressive 'civilizing' profile: that of Christians living in the Ottoman provinces and that of colonial peoples. These latter, the scholar explained, applied to either 'barbaric countries unable to reach by themselves the level of political and social organization necessary for their self-sustainment and progress' or to 'countries which, unable to surpass their relatively inferior level of civilization, find in the assistance of their protectors the means to safeguard themselves from internal dissolution and external domination'.

It is in this latter form that protectorates play a great role nowadays. They constitute therefore, at least outwardly, the accomplishment of the civilizing mission of certain states, more or less dissimulating the acquisition of territorial sovereignty and political influence, which before could only be achieved by brutal conquest and unrestrained annexation.<sup>22</sup>

Again, the three plans of how the world is, how it is represented, and how it ought to be were kept analytically separate by Despagnet. There remained a constant tension between might and right; yet, the two poles seemed gradually to converge

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<sup>22</sup> Despagnet, 65–68. It must be noticed that, according to Despagnet, even 'non-civilized' peoples might display a conscious exercise of sovereignty and the signs of accomplished statehood, making them eligible for stipulating lawful treaties of protection. As evidence for this argument, the author quoted several travel accounts from regions 'outside our civilization' with no previous interactions with the Europeans—like the Sekkoto Sultanate or the Pehuls' territories—which possessed nonetheless 'a very old, solid and even . . . wise constitution, as well as a regular and perfectly established government' (252–253).



alongside with the progressive juridification of international relations. Rephrased according to the terminology of contemporary international legal debates, Despagnet's stand could be described as a policy-approach to law. International norms, such an approach posits, result from social reality, which means from the existing power relations among states; nonetheless, they can regulate 'naked power' by incorporating moral values.<sup>23</sup>

Martti Koskenniemi has placed the policy approach midway between skepticism and a 'rule-approach' to international law.<sup>24</sup> However, in his continuous oscillation between optimism and realism, Despagnet became remarkably unbalanced towards the second extreme when accounting for British protectorates. After praising Her Majesty's government for its pragmatism and efficient colonial administration, the jurist pointed out that the principles inspiring Britain's colonial expansion were 'the scientific degradation of sovereignty in the colonial domain to strengthen England's ties to the territories where her supremacy manifest[ed] itself', and the 'reduction of the independence of local authorities from almost complete sovereignty to almost absolute absorption and annihilation'.<sup>25</sup> Egypt provided a perfect example of this strategy. In Despagnet's opinion, the khedivate was, prior to the British conquest, a sovereign state enjoying international subjectivity, as the various commercial treaties signed by the khedive proved. After the occupation, with British officials assuming 'the full and sovereign direction of all the services of the occupied country', it became *de facto* a protectorate lacking the necessary precondition of consent from the protected state.<sup>26</sup>

This digression into pre-WWI legal scholarship concurs with one of the main goals of my dissertation: that is, to explore the interactions and the tensions between political developments and their representation in international talks. It is also intended to provide a historical and semantic framework for the legal terms—'protectorate', 'independence', 'free consent', etc.—employed by the main characters of this chapter: What did these terms evoke in the minds of their contemporaries? What scholarly

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<sup>23</sup> As pointed out by Myres McDougal, the chief modern advocate of the policy-approach, legal processes 'strive to maximize values'—namely 'goal values of international human dignity'—by applying institutions to social life (Myres S. McDougal, 'International Law, Power and Policy: A Contemporary Conception', *Recueil des Cours de l'Academie de Droit International*, 82 (1953), 133–259). A similar stand can be traced in the 'concretivist grass-roots approach' that Outi Korhonen identifies with the work of Erich Kaufmann. Cfr. Outi Korhonen, *International Law Situated: Culture, History and Ethics* (The Hague and Boston: Kluwer, 2000), 249–253.

<sup>24</sup> Martti Koskenniemi, *From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal Argument* (Helsinki: Lakimieslito Kustannus, 1989), 170–178.

<sup>25</sup> Despagnet, 139–144.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 102–105.

disputes or consensus did they entail? Finally, this excursus aims to build a bridge between some recurring concepts of wartime and interwar debates—like ‘self-determination’, ‘civilization’, ‘administrative efficiency’—and their use in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century conversation. The parallel between Despagnet’s and Woodrow Wilson’s emphasis on the moralizing mission of international law as an antidote to the self-interested behavior of states is evident, although the French scholar never questioned the existence of empires as such, nor could his optimistic trust in the gradual and almost mechanic realization of international morality contemplate the specter of an imminent suicide of the ‘civilized world’.

We may wonder what would have become of that optimism after the catastrophe of 1914–1918—Despagnet died in 1906. Of course, albeit emanating from the elite of international jurists and however in line with the spirit of its time, the French scholar’s assessment of the nature and legitimacy of protectorates represented one among various strands in legal scholarship. Far more realist and minimalist understandings of international law and its concrete impact on colonial politics than the view of the IDI’s founders gained momentum after WWI—even the ‘idealist’ Wilson was well aware of the irrelevance of international norms in the absence of a supra-national institutional machinery of legal codification, scrutiny and sanction. In 1926, M. F. Lindley of the Middle Temple published an essay on *The Acquisition and Government of Backward Territory in International Law* under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In agreement with Despagnet, the British lawyer deemed the consent of the indigenous, manifested via a treaty, an essential precondition for the establishment of a protectorate whenever the inhabitants of the acquired territory ‘exhibit[ed] collective political activity which, although of a crude and rudimentary form, possess[ed] the elements of permanence’. Otherwise, the acquisition of such territory was only possible by way of conquest. However, while the prerequisite of indigenous approval might help the legal scholar to assign the appropriate label to different forms of territorial aggrandizement, it had no implications for their lawfulness. In Lindley’s perspective, international law was deprived of any normative authority and reduced to a mere description of states’ behavior.

[O]nce a Conquest has become a *fait accompli*, international law recognizes its results. From the point of view of international morality there may be much to be said on both sides as to the legitimacy or justice of a particular war of conquest. But such a war is neither justifiable nor unjustifiable by international law.

What is more, while Despagnet portrayed the practice of protectorates as gradually aligning to the doctrine of international protection, Lindley acknowledged no substantial difference between protection treaties and pure conquest in terms of their final outcomes.

The more modern protectorates have been established over political societies of very varied degrees of advancement, and they have been usually intended or destined to result in the incorporation of the protected region into the dominions of the protecting Power, or, in all events, in an increasing control by that Power over the internal affairs of the protected country. The sovereignty is to be acquired piecemeal, the external sovereignty first. This is generally patent; but the use of the term 'protectorate' . . . is calculated to render the first step in the process more palatable to the inhabitants of the territory that is being acquired or controlled, and less obnoxious to opponents of colonial expansion in the acquiring state.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the triangle linking, in Despagnet's view, law with praxis and ethics was reduced to a binary relation in which right proceeded directly from might. The ethical neutralization of international norms was pushed even further in a piece written for the Society of Comparative Legislation in 1917 by Malcolm McIlwraith, who served in Cairo as judicial advisor to the khedive up to the outbreak of World War I. Commenting on the Foreign Office's communiqué of 1914, which presented the protectorate as a war measure—clearly, albeit not explicitly, a punitive one—against 'Abbas, the lawyer criticized the 'brief announcements [of 1914] which, by a stroke of the pen, put an end to the complicated international status of Egypt'.

Perhaps what will chiefly strike the legal reader is the meagerness of the information . . . as to the main fabric thus erected . . . and the absence of any indication as to the precise limits of the respective spheres and mutual relations of the Protecting and Protected governments.

However, despite depriving lawyers of subjects for their scholarly disquisitions, the author immediately clarified, the omissions in FO's statements did not imply that the British initiative was arbitrary or unlawful. The peculiar nature of the Egyptian protectorate, resulting from a pre-existing occupation, exempted it from any formal

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<sup>27</sup> M. F. Lindley, *The Acquisition and Government of Backward Territory in International Law* (London and New York: Longmans, 1926), 181–206.

criterion that protectorates were generally expected to satisfy, *pace* Despagnet's emphasis on free consent and protecting missions.

It is this superimposition of a formal Protectorate on the previous long-established occupation . . . which distinguishes this Protectorate from all others and furnishes the key to the solution of the various legal problems which may arise. The rights of Great Britain in Egypt are primarily founded not upon general doctrines of international law applicable to any Protectorate that a Great Power may be pleased to declare, but on the specific and fundamental fact that she rescued the country in 1882, by force of arms, from anarchy and bankruptcy.

McIlwraith's series of arguments is extremely easy (maybe too easy) to follow: the default of the Egyptian state authorized the British to intervene militarily; Britain prevailed over Egypt and could therefore do whatever it wanted with Egypt. At that stage, force *per se* was a sufficient source of legitimization for international action—one could hardly expect a better example of British 'pragmatism'. Furthermore, the author argued, there was nothing disquieting or disappointing in the FO's apparent 'policy of wait and see', for it was 'entirely in harmony with [British] national habits' and its advantages overcame its risks.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, during the war the British took whatever they could from Egypt in terms of natural resources, manpower and military and economic mobilization. Egyptian reinforcements were essential for the success of British Palestinian and Mesopotamian campaigns, which London explicitly acknowledged. But Cairo's wartime contributions were not limited to the front: thousands of peasants were forcefully recruited into the labor corps, while animals, crops and other agricultural products were confiscated by the army. At the end of the war, a 'friendly and reliable Egyptian' reported to the Foreign Office that, while chatting with the *fellaheen*, the following complaint could be commonly heard: 'We thought the British the most capable and fair governors the world possessed, but since the proclamation of the Protectorate, they have sewn their hand: the whole sale robbery of the fellah has begun as it was under the Turks'.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Egypt became a key center for the deployment of troops from all over the British Empire, and the encounters between the indigenous and the 'barbaric legions' were not always friendly. Recalling her service in Egypt in 1915–16 as a clerk in an army canteen, a woman named M. E. Durham told the *Daily News*:

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<sup>28</sup> Malcolm McIlwraith, 'The Declaration of a Protectorate in Egypt and Its Legal Effects', *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation*, 17:1/2 (1917), 238–259.

<sup>29</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/42331, Memorandum from Sir W. Wilcocks 'giving the opinion of a very friendly and reliable Egyptian on the situation to-day', 4 March 1919.

The authorities were certainly to blame in landing colonial troops without carefully instructing them as to the population they would meet there. So ignorant were numbers of these men that they imagined that Egypt was English, and the natives of the land were intruders. More than one Australian said that he would clear the lot out if he had his way. They treated the natives with cruelty and contempt. In the canteen in which I worked a very good native servant was kicked and knocked about simply because he did not understand an order given him by a soldier.<sup>30</sup>

Contextually with military operations, an intensive exchange of opinions and memoranda took place within the Foreign Office as to what future policy would best secure British interests in Egypt. The supporters of the protectorate confronted those who stood in favor of a full annexation of Egypt as an integral part of the British Empire. By mid 1917, two major concerns tormented the Egypt experts: the ultimate fate of the Ottoman Empire and the succession to the old and ill Sultan Husayn, an obedient and reliable ally whose death was expected soon. Britain could no longer run the risk of another 'Abbas Hilmi, the annexationists thought, especially if the Sublime Porte survived the war. "Hussein Kamels" are rare', warned Brigadier-General Gilbert Clayton, the head of British intelligence in Egypt; if London decided to perpetuate his dynasty, it should be prepared 'at periodic intervals to choose between a puppet ruler of secondary ability, such as his brother Prince Ahmed Fu'ad, and a man of strong personality but of doubtful political sentiments such as his son Kamel el Din'. An uncooperative Sultan competing with British authorities would alienate Egypt from London's influence and, Clayton remarked, any authority: 'to gain the respect of an Oriental people must be powerful and concentrated'.

It must not be forgotten that the family of Mohammed Ali are Turks by race and Moslem by religion; that, with rare exception, the family is anti-British in sentiment, and in tradition and temperament strongly opposed to those constitutional restrictions and limitations of personal power which are imposed by modern liberal systems of government'.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the association of the 'Orient' with unrestrained despotism had been a recurring theme in European political thought since the Enlightenment, dating back to the work of Montesquieu.<sup>32</sup> In those same years, within the British Empire, India worked as a laboratory for the elaboration and experimentation of theories and prejudices about the 'East', and early British Orientalists paralleled Montesquieu's

<sup>30</sup> TNA, FO 371/3719/125377, excerpt from the *Daily News*, 2 April 1919.

<sup>31</sup> TNA FO 371/3714/178021, Appendix C, Memorandum by Brigadier-General Clayton, 23 July 1917.

<sup>32</sup> In *L'esprit des lois* (1748), Montesquieu distinguished three forms of government: republican, monarchical and despotic, based, respectively, on virtue, honor and fear, and located the latter in Asia. See Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1979).

assumption when writing about Indian colonization.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the self-conferred task of teaching the rule of law to a people of slaves informed the British perception of their alleged civilizing mission in India. Still in the interwar years, mainstream British historiography of Indian colonization emphasized the building of a codified and effective legal order among London's best accomplishments.<sup>34</sup> Little wonder, then, that General Reginald Wingate, the former governor-general of Sudan who served as high commissioner in Egypt by the end of the Great War, resorted to a comparative assessment of Egypt and India to advocate the annexation of the protectorate by extending Clayton's mistrust of the Muhammad Alis to the whole of the Egyptian people:

There is . . . no vox populi in Egypt and it is a case throughout of the tail wagging the dog; in other words, it is the small and noisy Turkish Pasha clique, who are largely imbued with nationalistic ideas, who can generally secure the adhesion of the Fellaheen to their views through the influence of religion. There are of course many points of similarity between India and Egypt, but the fact that India has been ruled as part of the British Empire for a couple of hundred years, and for nearly three quarters of a century by perhaps the finest Civil Service in the world, has created a very different political atmosphere.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, from eighteenth-century political thought to Clayton's and Wingate's writings via Despagne's pages, a *fil rouge* runs which would also continue in post-WWI debates on colonial peoples' eligibility to self-rule: the impartiality and effectiveness of political authority and bureaucratic efficiency, a quality in which the British claimed their excellence and whose deficiency the Europeans denounced as one of the faults of 'un-civilized' people that prevented them from achieving emancipation and progress. The high commissioner was not the only one in the FO to believe that the Egyptians needed to be raised more directly as children of the empire. Other officials, however, were more concerned with the public impact of a formal incorporation of Egypt into London's dominions, especially among Arabs, whose association with Britain had been dramatically strengthened during the World War. In reply to Wingate, Sir Ronald Graham, the diplomat who would later witness the Fascist March on Rome as

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Robert Orme, *A General Idea of Government and People of Hindostan* (1752), published in *Historical fragments of the Mogul Empire, of the Morattoes, and of the English concerns in Indostan* (London: Wingrave, 1805). For an overview of Orientalism in British history, see Douglas Kerr, *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Edward Thompson and G. T. Garrett, *Rise and Fulfillment of British Rule in India* (London: Macmillan, 1934).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Wingate to Sir Robert Graham, 28 May 1917.

ambassador to Italy but then working in FO's Eastern Department, maintained that an annexation would be regarded 'all over the East' as a 'breach of faith'.

It would appear that we had merely invited the Sultan to accept his post as a stop-gap in order to tide us over a difficult period, and it would be generally believed that we had established the Protectorate simply with the idea of changing it into annexation whenever the moment suited us.<sup>36</sup>

This was also the position of W. E. Brunyate, who stressed that the protectorate would secure Britain's strategic interests in the Mediterranean by involving 'the minimum of interference with the habits and settled ideas of the subject population'. However, 'the corresponding disadvantage', he pointed out in accordance with Wingate and Clayton, was 'that it almost necessarily involv[ed] a lower standard of efficiency in administration'.<sup>37</sup>

But the history of British Egypt up to the First World War is not only a story of administrative efficiency and economic improvements. It also corresponds to an interminable suspension of time in Egyptian political life: three decades delimited by two *coups de main* of the British—a military occupation to remedy bankruptcy and political turmoil and the unilateral proclamation of a protectorate to maximize war mobilization—during which Egyptians were regularly told that London was anxious to grant them self-rule; a third of century of day-to-day responses to day-to-day problems which left the overall policy of the British government undefined and the big questions on the future of Egypt unanswered. Hence, the seeds of Anglo-Egyptian tensions already existed when the conflagration of 1914 came and produced a dramatic acceleration to the events: the further compression of Egyptian sovereignty enacted with the proclamation of the protectorate could hardly be reconciled with the previous series of vague promises of political autonomy that had regularly been delivered to the Egyptians over the years of the occupation. Still, as the end of the hostilities approached, the British foreign policy establishment planned to prolong a wartime measure *sine die*.

More or less in the same weeks in which Wingate and his colleagues exchanged their respective views, American entry into World War I contributed decisively to reverse the outcome of the conflict, paving the way to the defeat of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. In the end, the Sublime Porte collapsed, and the more

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Graham to Wingate, 25 June 1917.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Memorandum by Sir W. E. Brunyate, 23 July 1917.

‘moderate’ line prevailed in the British government. The Egyptian crown remained in Egypt, moving to Fu’ad’s head in October 1917. Besides fostering the ultimate victory of the Allies, the US intervention drastically altered the terms of the discussion on future Middle Eastern settlements. After Woodrow Wilson’s endorsement of the principle of national self-determination, the hope galvanized Egyptian nationalists that the time had come to free their country from the British yoke. What London intended to sell as a benevolent concession to their diligent and subaltern Egyptian allies—the enduring ‘protection’ by HMG—would be publicly denounced as an intolerable perpetuation of British imperial greed.

#### DREAMING OF SELF-DETERMINATION

The man who came to be regarded worldwide as the champion of national self-determination had no definite stand on that issue by the end of the Great War, nor could he claim primacy in the adoption of the term. When Woodrow Wilson asked the Congress of the United States to declare war on Germany on 2 April 1917, he made a clear distinction between Berlin’s military autocratic ruling caste, who had precipitated the catastrophe, and the German people, who bore no responsibility for the expansionist greed of their unaccountable rulers. No conflicts but only a natural harmony of interests, Wilson’s liberal mind implied, could emerge among democratic states, in which the decisions of the governors were subjected to the consent of the people. If the United States was to break their traditional policy of non-entanglement in European rivalries by entering the war, it was to end all wars, which could only be achieved through the worldwide spread of democratic regimes.



We are glad . . . to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included: for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, it was mainly with the principle of 'government by consent' than with the coincidence between state borders and lines of demarcations between nationalities that Wilson was concerned. Later in Paris, he would reject Ireland's secessionist claims on the grounds that, being part of a constitutional monarchy, the Irish already enjoyed self-rule.

The president illustrated his liberal internationalist agenda in more detail to Congress in the following January. His famous Fourteen Points included free trade and open diplomacy, and culminated with the proposal of a collective security system centered around a 'general association of nations . . . formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike'. As to territorial settlements, a resuscitated Poland and a new Turkish state to be erected on the ashes of the Sublime Porte were the only new entities that Wilson explicitly advocated. He then invoked 'the opportunity to autonomous development' for the people under Ottoman and Habsburg sovereignty and 'a free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined'.<sup>39</sup>

This cautious and ambiguous reference to colonial questions certainly resulted from consideration of the foreseeable objections from the British and French Allies to the dismemberment of their empires. But there was more than diplomatic pragmatism in Wilson's reluctance to endorse full sovereignty for colonial peoples. Only 'well established' nations, in his view, were eligible for self-rule, and a brotherhood of blood and language was not sufficient to make a nation a well established one. According to

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<sup>38</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *War Messages*, 65th Cong., 1st Session, Senate Doc. No. 5, Serial No. 7264, Washington, D.C., 1917, 3–8.

<sup>39</sup> Woodrow Wilson's address to the Senate of the United States, 8 January 1918, ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp), last seen on 12 May 2013).

Lloyd Ambrosius, the nationalist paradigm that Wilson had in mind was chiefly inspired by the experience of the United States, which only after the Civil War had achieved a mature civic consciousness. National identity, Wilson thought, was not a primordial and immutable fact, but required consolidation over time through the experience of common institutions and a common leadership.<sup>40</sup> The world Wilson had in mind was a hierarchical one, in which the various ‘races’ ranked differently according to the alleged stage of their civilization and political development, and the intended addressees of his ‘universal’ message were only the ones in the top ranks. This assessment is confirmed, as Erez Manela points out, by Wilson’s harsh closure of the movements for the rights of African Americans during his tenure as president of the United States and, previously, as governor of New Jersey.<sup>41</sup>

Peoples’ right to self-determination had been conceptualized in much more explicit and radical terms in European socialist circles well before Wilson came to be associated with it. After seizing power in St. Petersburg and publicizing the Entente’s prewar secret agreements, the Bolsheviks issued a *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia*, in which not only the ‘equality and sovereignty’ of all the peoples under former tsarist rule was asserted, but also their ‘right of a free self-determination’, ‘including secession and the formation of separate states’.<sup>42</sup> Arguably, the race to the endorsement of the principle of self-determination by the Allies in the last months of the conflict was also a response to Bolshevik revolutionary internationalism. Curiously, it was British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, not Wilson, who was the first among them to use the term ‘self-determination’ in a speech delivered on 5 January 1918 at Cuxton Hall in front of the Trade Union League, mainly aimed at the Labour Party in the name of wartime national unity.

If, then, we are asked what we are fighting for, we reply as, we have often replied: we are fighting for a just and lasting peace, and we believe that before permanent peace can be hoped for three conditions must be fulfilled; firstly, the sanctity of treaties must be established; secondly, a territorial settlement must be secured, based on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed, and, lastly, we must seek by the

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<sup>40</sup> Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 125–134.

<sup>41</sup> Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 19–34.

<sup>42</sup> *Declarations of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia*, 15 November (2 November by Old Style) 1917 (<http://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/1917/11/02.htm>, last seen on 12 May 2013). The document was signed by both Lenin and Stalin in their respective capacities as chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars and commissar on Nationality Affairs.

creation of some international organization to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war.<sup>43</sup>

The strategy of the British premier was clear: appropriate the concept of self-determination by circumscribing its meaning within the boundaries of government by consent, as if the two expressions were synonyms despite the abyss separating the outlooks of their respective advocates. Therefore, it was from Lenin, via Lloyd George's rhetorical adjustments, that the 'magic word' of interwar talks burst into the Wilsonian vocabulary.<sup>44</sup> The occasion was a speech delivered to the Congress three days after the Fourteen Points address. There, the US president portrayed self-determination as 'an imperative principle of action', involving that 'every territorial settlement' ought to 'be made in the interest and for the benefit of the populations concerned'.<sup>45</sup>

What such interest actually was and who was entitled to assess it would be a controversial point in postwar settlements. Nonetheless, Woodrow Wilson became, in the eyes of nationalists within and outside Europe, the champion of a new world of equal, free and self-governing states. If, at a purely intellectual political level, the Wilsonian criticism of empire might just appear a pale and late competitor of the Bolshevik agenda, in 1919, the confrontation between Wilson and Lenin, in terms of their capability of appealing to international public opinion, was largely in favor of the US president. Not only was Wilson the leader of the military and moral victorious power, and was therefore expected to dictate the terms of the peace, but the bubble of international visibility and reputation that he enjoyed at the end of the war also made his moral authority even greater than the emerging power of the US in world affairs. Europe was the key concern for Wilson, and an abundant literature exists on how the American propaganda machine contributed to the creation and circulation of his myth in Europe.<sup>46</sup> However, as Erez Manela has highlighted, press agencies and telegraph lines

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<sup>43</sup> Statement by David Lloyd George on British war aims, 5 January 1918 ([http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Prime\\_Minister\\_Lloyd\\_George\\_on\\_the\\_British\\_War\\_Aims](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Prime_Minister_Lloyd_George_on_the_British_War_Aims), last seen on 12 May 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 33–55. On the interactions between Wilson and British progressives, see Thomas J. Knock, *To End All War: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Woodrow Wilson's address to the Congress, 11 February 1918.

<sup>46</sup> See, among others, G. R. Conyne, *Woodrow Wilson: British Perspectives, 1912–1921* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), Victor S. Mamatey, *The United States and Eastern Central Europe, 1914–1918: A Study in Wilsonian Diplomacy and Propaganda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) and Betty Miller Unterberger, *The United States, Revolutionary Russia and the Rise of Czechoslovakia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). For a more recent contribution, Daniela Rossini, *Woodrow*

propelled the Wilsonian message well beyond his intended addressees, European public opinions, thus raising the expectations and radicalizing the claims of nationalist leaders across the colonial world. Spread worldwide by mass communications, the Wilsonian rhetoric of self-determination lit a fire in colonial politics. Despite the moderate and racist mindset of its creator, it provided anti-imperial campaigners with a new and powerful language to advance their demands before the international community and with a powerful (involuntary) advocate to appeal to.

Numerous excerpts of Wilson's speeches featured prominently in the Egyptian Arabic- and French-speaking wartime press, enjoying large popularity among indigenous political elites.<sup>47</sup> On 13 November 1918, a 'Delegation' (*Wafd*)<sup>48</sup> of 14 members of the Egyptian Legislative Assembly presented the British high commissioner with a request for the 'complete autonomy' of their homeland, and asked to discuss the issue directly with the British government in London.<sup>49</sup> Prime Minister Rushdi Pasha supported the initiative, and demanded that he and his ministers be heard in Britain together with the Delegates in time to affect the settlement of the Egyptian question at the peace conference. Wingate responded with a combination of accommodation and firmness: Rushdi or other ministers of the legitimate Egyptian government would be welcome in London after HMG solved 'more urgent and important problems', that is, once Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour came back from Paris. However, in no way could the Delegation receive formal recognition, nor would a solution contemplating the complete withdrawal of Britain from Egypt deserve consideration. A decisive and controversial point concerning the legitimacy and representativeness of the *Wafd* therefore burst into the British-Egyptian confrontation. No Egyptian was allowed to go abroad, since martial law was still in force. Meanwhile, Wingate was called back to London for consultation.

The leader of the Delegation was the 60-year-old Sa'd Zaghlul Pasha, the vice-president-elect of the Legislative Assembly who had previously served as minister of Justice and Education. He shared with his fellow Delegates a moderate background and a past of attempted reforms in cooperation with the British. It is difficult to assess to

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*Wilson and the American Myth in Italy: Culture, Diplomacy and War Propaganda* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 63–76.

<sup>48</sup> Throughout this chapter, I will capitalize the words 'Delegation' and 'Delegates' when referring to the *Wafd* and its members.

<sup>49</sup> Indeed, 'complete autonomy', as the *Wafd* meant it, contemplated relevant restrictions to Egyptian sovereignty, as Britain would maintain the supervision over the Egyptian debt and transit facilities in the Suez Canal.

what extent their radicalization was a product of the 'Wilsonian Moment'. The sacrifices of the war and the authoritarian turn of British policy since the proclamation of the protectorate had certainly exasperated Egyptian reformers. Neglected by London, the members of the *Wafd* addressed their claims directly to the Paris peacemakers, and there is no doubt that they saw in Woodrow Wilson a powerful champion of their crusade for independence. As soon as the peace conference gathered, petitions started flowing from Cairo, although British censorship often prevented them from reaching their addressees. In a letter sent to the American, British, French and Japanese delegations in Paris, the *Wafd* reminded the peacemakers that 'all the world expect[ed] the fulfillment of [their] solemn declarations to the effect that the peace will be a peace of Nations and not of Governments'.<sup>50</sup> A memorandum circulated among foreign diplomats in Egypt explicitly welcomed President Wilson as 'the inflexible interpreter of the thoughts of a great people who fought selflessly for a universal regime of peace and justice', and applauded the beginning of a new era in international relations.

When the United States intervened in the conflict, nobody doubted, in Egypt, that the only aim of this intervention was the liberation of the world. . . . The right to existence and to freedom is no longer a matter of continent and latitude. This is why the Egyptians refuse to believe that, since their country lies in Africa, it must be a lure for the appetite of the imperialists. Continuing to label certain nations as free and certain others as voted to slavery, just because the Western spirit has imposed over the centuries ethnic and geographic borders to the freedom of peoples, will absolutely contradict the new spirit which the sorts of the conflict have just consecrated.

This is but one of numerous passages suggesting that the imagination of Egyptian nationalists was actually shaped by Wilsonian discourses: not only did they appear to sincerely believe that a window of opportunity for the demise of empires had opened, but they also seemed persuaded that self-determination was an inherent right of nations, even if a qualified one which only applied to 'adult' peoples matching the necessary levels of 'progress' and 'civilization': they argued that those levels could also be found outside European borders. They wanted to see the place of Egypt among civilized nations recognized, recalled the Egyptian contribution to the intellectual and material progress of mankind in the glorious age of the pharaohs, and quoted tons of data on the current economic development and educational system of the country in support of their claim.

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<sup>50</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/29160, Petition by the Egyptian Delegation to the US, British, French and Japanese representatives at the Paris Peace Conference, 21 February 1919.

The Egyptian is not reluctant to progress. He possesses a lively intelligence and a remarkable ability of assimilation, and his intellectual education is in no way inferior to that of the most advanced peoples. Who did not see the Egyptian peasant or the artisan working from the dawn to the sunset without being distracted by the degenerated vice of alcohol? . . . If we consider freedom not simply a natural right of peoples but the prize for a constant effort for the triumph of civilization, we can state that Egypt . . . deserves to benefit from the new regime of justice.<sup>51</sup>

The rhetorical strategy of Egyptian petitioners was multifaceted and diversified, progressing through an accumulation process. One after the other, they put together all the ‘merits’ entitling Egypt to self-rule—basically, its stand as a ‘well established’ and ‘developed’ nation, its loyal wartime cooperation with the Allies and its decisive contribution to their success in the Middle East—and, once the line of arguments reached the climax, they opposed the just reward that the Egyptian people was awaiting with the indifference of the British authorities. In numerous petitions, the *Wafd* complained that the representatives of ‘less important’ and ‘less civilized’ peoples were being heard in Paris, while the Egyptians were ‘imprisoned within their frontiers’: they were normally referring to the Hedjaz, which was represented in Paris by Prince Faisal. In the stream of complaints addressed by the Egyptians to the peacemakers, the peroration of the rights of their country coexisted with the stigmatization of British repressive measures, marking the contrast between the future of freedom and morality promised by the Allies and the cruel present of violence in which the British were holding Egypt.<sup>52</sup>

The conspicuous investment in petitioning as a political strategy was not simply the necessary surrogate to a physical presence in Paris during the captivity imposed by British martial law. Their constant pursuit of a direct channel of communication with the peacemakers signals their trust—or at least hope—in the peace conference as ‘a parliament of mankind’ that was opened to the voices ‘of great and small states alike’ and based on open diplomacy and accountability in front of international public opinion, according to the Wilsonian rhetoric.

The subject of a growing body of scholarly work, petitioning was quite a common tool of interaction between people and power in the Ottoman world well before 1919. The *mazalim*—the institution of petitions in the Islamic world dating back to the eighth century—allowed commoners to establish a direct exchange of complaints

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<sup>51</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/38764, Memorandum setting the case for Egyptian independence, 11 March 1919.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, TNA FO 371/3714/27042, Petition from Sa’d Zaghlul to Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau, 18 February 1919.

and feedback with the top of the government by circumventing ordinary jurisdictions. Often written by professional intermediaries on behalf of ordinary taxpayers to protest against the abuses of the local bureaucracy, petitions were usually examined by the Imperial Council in Constantinople, which, if the case succeeded, issued decrees to remedy the wrong or replace local officials.<sup>53</sup>

The frequency and relevance of petitions to the Sultan did not diminish in the late nineteenth century, despite the Porte's attempted reforms towards a modern bureaucratic state; on the contrary, at the turn of the century, the pre-modern institution of the *mazalim* went through a period of revival and change. As Yuval Ben-Bassat has pointed out, the diffusion of the telegraph widened the spectrum of actors involved in the petitioning process, bringing about its 'globalization'. The parcellization of sovereignty in the Ottoman space among the Porte, local rulers acting *de facto* as independent monarchs, and the foreign powers supervising their respective spheres of influence made any local question an international issue. Ottoman petitioners often asked European chancelleries to exert pressure on imperial authorities.<sup>54</sup>

What is more, diasporas benefited from the advances in communications, finding it easier to remain engaged in the affairs of the homeland. In his article in the recent special issue of the *Journal of Global History*, Andrew Arsan has examined the campaigns of several committees, associations, newspapers and journals established in Paris, New York, Cairo and Alexandria by migrants from the Ottoman provinces of Mount Lebanon, Beirut and Damascus between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Among them, for example, the Parisian Comité Libanais led by Shukri Ghanim, the Lebanon League of Progress established by Mukarzil in New York in 1911 and the Alliance Libanaise created by the lawyers Iskandar 'Ammun and Yusuf al-Sawda in Cairo and Alexandria in 1909 coalesced into a common crusade for administrative reforms in Mount Lebanon.

Despite campaigning for regional issues, Arsan shows that these organizations and their leaders acted as 'self-conscious exponents of globalism'. In the huge number of pamphlets and petitions that they produced, they explicitly recognized themselves as part of a transnational social and intellectual network transcending the boundaries of their home communities, 'a diasporic public space of discussion, debate and

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<sup>53</sup> Avi Rubin, *Ottoman Nizamiye Courts: Law and Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 20–44. On the practice of petitioning in British Egypt, see John Chalcraft, 'Engaging the State: Peasants and Petitions in Egypt on the Eve of Colonial Rule', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 37:3 (2005), 303–325.

representation' which 'sustained and gave meaning to their political activity'. They clearly perceived the emergence of an embryonic international civil society and considered participation in transnational campaigns a distinctive feature of political life in their time. But it was not only the mobilization of diasporas across the globe which gave these campaigns an international character.<sup>55</sup>

Evidence suggesting continuity between early-twentieth-century mobilization and post-WWI petitioning provides ground, in Arsan's account, for a radical questioning of the notion of 'Wilsonian Moment' and of the interwar years as a discrete period characterized by 'the emergence and decline of novel mechanisms of international interaction'. In this section, I aim to reconcile Arsan with Manela by showing that the two stories they tell may coexist. The 'Wilsonian Moment' overlapped with the practices of late Ottoman political participation and took root in their legacy. It provided petitioners with a new language, new contents and a new environment—a distinctively international public sphere symbolized by the peace conference and later embodied by the League of Nations. Nevertheless, pre-existing forms of political activism went on according to their own conventions and traditions. The case of Egypt in 1919 appears to support this reading.

The language and arguments adopted by Egyptian nationalists when petitioning the British government varied whether addressing London together with the other Allies or individually as the imperial power in charge of Egypt. In this latter case, only marginal references were made to 'government by consent' and to the principles of 'freedom' and 'impartial justice agreed with President Wilson', while claims to Egyptian independence were almost exclusively justified in the light of Britain's liberal tradition, HMG's reiterated pledges to the Egyptians, and the benefits it obtained from Cairo during the World War. On 12 January 1919, Zaghlul wrote to Lloyd George to protest against martial law preventing the Egyptians from going abroad. Civilization was, again, the key concept of the document. In the first part, the glories of Egyptian history were recalled in contrast with the brutal restrictions imposed by the 'protectors'.

We cannot understand how the English may systematically apply such a humiliating treatment to a nation with a reach and glorious past as we are. . . . A nation with such an ancient civilization will always retain its prestige in the eyes of the universe and deserve the gratitude of human intelligence. You deny its civilizing mission, despite the traces certifying this glorious past; deny the benefits it lavished to the world;

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<sup>55</sup> Andrew Arsan, "'This Age is the Age of Associations': Committees, Petitions, and the Roots of Interwar Middle Eastern Internationalism', *Journal of Global History*, 7:2 (July 2012), 166–188.



suppose that it is nothing more than an agglomerate of savages having no rule besides anarchy and no law besides the brutality of their instincts.

But it is mainly in the second part that the language was thoroughly calibrated to fit the cultural background and the system of values of the intended reader. Zaghul addressed Lloyd George with an extremely respectful tone, stressing the incompatibility of authoritarian rule not only with the tradition of Britain's constitutional guarantees but also with the personal history of its current prime minister.

Your Excellency, please let me ask the liberal statesman that you are if what is being done in Egypt in your name and under your orders is not diametrically opposed to the principles of liberty, the sacred dogma that you spent your life to defend. . . . Let me also ask . . . if the noble English nation is informed of the treatment inflicted on the Egyptian people. Is not it rather a measure emanating from the executive power under its exclusive responsibility unbeknown to English public opinion?

In sum, there was no need to appeal to novel higher principles of international legitimacy and morality to stigmatize British policy: before being at variance with Wilson's proclamations, it was simply un-British.<sup>56</sup>

Again, these excerpts confirm the flexibility of petitioners in adapting their discourses and rhetorical strategies to the contexts and moments of their interactions. The various levels of the Egyptian delegation's foreign mobilization—the international, the inter- and the intra-imperial—will be analyzed in more detail in the next sections. Before that, a further, 'primordial' dimension must be considered in order to account completely for the *Wafd's* petitioning strategy. Curiously, although the proclamation of the protectorate had definitely downgraded the Mohammed Alis to puppet rulers, the Delegates never stopped petitioning the sultan. Rather than legal texts, Suraiya Faroqhi has argued, petitions in the Ottoman world should be regarded as political acts intended to press and influence the government.<sup>57</sup> Following this interpretation, I attribute an eminently symbolic value to the complaints of the Egyptian Delegates. They displayed loyalty to the existing institutions—the petitioners were responsible statesmen, not anarchist revolutionaries—and placed the protest of the *Wafd* under the restrictions of the rule of law, which the British were arbitrarily violating. Ranajit Guha has pointed out how peasant insurgency in nineteenth-century British India 'extricat[ed] itself from the placenta of common crime' by claiming publicity and collective representativeness,

<sup>56</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/48592, Zaghul to Lloyd George, 12 January 1919.

<sup>57</sup> Faroqhi, Suraiya, *Coping with the State: Political Conflict and Crime in the Ottoman Empire* (Istanbul: Isis,

in opposition to the secretive and individualistic character of criminal violence.<sup>58</sup> This was also the case with Egyptian nationalists, whose personal history spoke in favor of their attachment to institutions and national interests

When Zaghlul and his colleagues wrote to Fu'ad, on 3 March 1919, the political situation was rapidly deteriorating. Rushdi Pasha, who had just resigned in protest at the confiscation of the Delegates' passports, asked the sultan not to cooperate with the British in the formation of a new cabinet. Labeling themselves as 'segregated at home by force of despotism and not by force of law', petitioners declared the protectorate unlawful, as it lacked any legitimacy after the war.

The terms of Rushdi Pasha's resignation do not allow Egyptian patriots, retaining the sense of their dignity, to accept his succession. Your Highness, please forgive this intervention, . . . but things have reached such a point of gravity that all considerations disappear in front of national interest, of which you are a loyal servant'.<sup>59</sup>

Of course, the petitioners were all but common citizens complaining about 'ordinary' bureaucratic abuses. Nonetheless, the text of the document features the typical rhetorical devices employed in standard nineteenth-century Ottoman petitions, like the diminution of the writer's status, the glorification of the addressee, and the emphasis on the gravity of the situation.<sup>60</sup> Looking for a pretext to have Zaghlul arrested, Milner Cheetham, the acting high commissioner during Wingate's absence, submitted this petition to his legal advisers. Surprisingly—but in accordance with Ben-Bassat's and Arsan's points—they found that, while the text would surely constitute an outrage to the authority of British law, an Egyptian judge would probably deem it compatible with indigenous norms on the right of petition. Therefore, the procedure leading to Zaghlul's imprisonment included neither a trial nor allegations of infraction of precise norms: Fu'ad turned to the British for protection against the 'intimidations' contained in the complaint, and the 'protectors' acted upon his request by arresting the petitioners. Together with Zaghlul, three other members of the Delegation—Mohammad Mahmud Pasha, Hamal al-Basil and Isma'il Sidqui—were deported to Malta on the evening of 8 March.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, the sultan was invited to London. The strategy of the Foreign Office was to isolate the Delegation, which they regarded as representing an extremist minority of the political spectrum, and to strengthen

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<sup>58</sup> Guha, 109.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/40842, Zaghlul to the sultan, 3 March 1919.

<sup>60</sup> Ben-Bassat, 45–60.

<sup>61</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/39690, 'Egyptian Political Situation', 13 March 1919.

'moderate' Egyptians:<sup>62</sup> the forthcoming events would show how distorted this perception was.

Of course, the regime of martial law exempted British authorities from the need to provide particular explanations for the forceful and hasty removal of the petitioners from Egyptian territory. However, some consideration on Britain's conception of colonial law is required to dwell deeper into the rationale behind Cheetham's handling of the petition affair. As explained in the previous section, British imperial expansion was justified, among other reasons, with the alleged exportation of a rule-bound bureaucratic form of government throughout the despotic 'Orient'. Yet, this 'modern' concept of law was constrained, in colonial contexts, by racial prejudices. Already in 1861, John Stuart Mill maintained that loyalty to a system of formal and abstract rules could not be expected from 'slave' peoples, who, though capable of obedience, might only be domesticated by direct command and coercion—more or less the same argument we find in Clayton's remarks on authority and the 'Orientals'.<sup>63</sup>

Again, the abundant Anglophone literature on colonial India may help us interpret British conduct in Egypt. As Nasser Hussain argues, racial stereotypes had ambivalent implications in colonial legal discourses: on the one hand, they fostered arguments about the necessity for legal codification and modernization; on the other, they worked as a 'limit case' to such arguments, 'shaping them in surprising ways'. Situating subaltern peoples at a backward stage of civilization and moral development meant placing colonial legislation and jurisprudence in a perennial state of emergency, a pre-state-of-law condition in which sovereign violence was the only pursuable means to establish authority. Therefore, Hussain points out, martial law, the situation *par excellence* of arbitrary rule and the suspension of fundamental rights, turned out to be, in the mindset of the colonizers, the condition of a system of written laws.

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<sup>62</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/39198, 'Egyptian Political Situation', 12 March 1919.

<sup>63</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (London: Parker, Son and Bourn, 1861).

Martial law seeks to effect not just the restoration of order but the restoration of the general authority of the state. In doing so, it takes advantage of the absence of normative constraints on power not just to punish *more* . . . but to punish out of a different logic. This punishment . . . is not caused by questions of innocence or guilt or a specific transgression of the law . . . . Rather, it is a purely nonmediate form, purely performative, the purpose of which is the sheer manifestation of power itself.

Hussain focuses especially on the martial law regime in 1919 Punjab, having its bloodiest application in the Amritsar massacre. The official British account of the carnage, the author highlights, was concerned less with the number and individual responsibilities of the insurgents killed than with the overall logic of repression—that is, the peremptory reaffirmation of British authority over Punjab.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, when Colonel William Wedgwood of the Liberal Party pressed the executive on the deportation of Sa‘d Zaghlul and the other members of the *Wafd* without trial, everything he obtained as an answer was a general assessment of the Egyptian situation in which the arrested leaders were portrayed as ‘play[ing] the most conspicuous part in the present agitation’. At no point did HMG make it clear what provisions of Egyptian law the petitioners had transgressed, while it admitted more or less implicitly that the decision to exile them had been taken in London with no involvement of the Egyptian government or courts.<sup>65</sup> Despite the FO’s elusive and generic reply to Wedgwood’s parliamentary question, the question of the modality and lawfulness of insurgency and repression would return prominently in the British public debate on the Egyptian rising. What is more, Zaghlul and his associates soon revealed a representativeness and capacity to mobilize their constituency that greatly exceeded London’s expectations.

#### FACING THE EVIL: THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION AND THE BRITISH PUBLIC

As soon as the news of Zaghlul’s deportation became public, unrest spread throughout the country. On 15 March, Cheetham reported on the rioters’ efforts in Cairo to withdraw employees from government offices and prevent students from returning to school. All the clerks of the Education and Public Works Ministries refused to work, while a massive strike of lawyers was paralyzing all native courts of first instance.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 35–68 and 99–132.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/44530, Colonel Wedgwood’s parliamentary question, 21 March 1919. The written answer provided by the FO reported that, after the sultan’s request for protection, ‘authority was given’—by whom and to whom was not specified—for the arrest and deportation of the nationalist leaders.

<sup>66</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/41408, Cheetham to FO, 15 March 19.

According to the *Times*, 10,000 people, including ulemas, students and railway workers, assembled at El-Azhar University on 17 March. Led by police commandant Russel Bey, they paraded through the city past the sultan's palace and US, French and Italian diplomatic agencies calling for Egyptian independence.<sup>67</sup> The FO instructed the acting commissioner that 'all rioting should be sternly suppressed' and encouraged Cheetham to cooperate with the sultan and 'sober Egyptian elements', since any recognition of the *Wafd* at that stage would mean yielding to insurgent violence.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, the situation was also degenerating in the provinces: large crowds gathered in Kaliu and Wasta, holding up trains, destroying permanent roads and cutting telegraph lines so that Cairo's connections to Upper Egypt were completely severed.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, between Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said, stations were burnt, signal boxes destroyed and rails and sleepers removed along both main and subsidiary lines.<sup>70</sup> The country was in danger of an 'outbreak of fanaticism' and 'large troops' were needed to pacify it, Cheetham warned, but even the advice of 'moderate, pro-British' Egyptians, not connected with the disorders, was that the Delegation should be allowed to move to the United Kingdom and France.<sup>71</sup> Balfour himself reassessed that the restoration of order and the formation of a new government were the priority; afterwards, HMG had no objection to discuss Egyptian grievances in London with Cairo's ministers 'accompanied . . . by persons qualified to represent the nationalist case even in the extreme form'.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, order first, than accommodation: this was the strategy on which London insisted. On 21 March 1919, General Edmund Allenby, the wartime commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, arrived in Cairo to replace Reginald Wingate as High Commissioner, soon followed by a letter of good wishes and congratulations from Lloyd George. After praising the 'wisdom' of the new head of the Egyptian administration, the prime minister exhorted him to undertake 'a vigorous policy to bring forces of disorder throughout the country under control'. At the same time, the premier communicated HMG's decision to set up a commission under the direction of Lord Alfred Milner, the Secretary for Colonies, to 'investigate the existing conditions in Egypt, enquire into the causes of the unrest, and determine future forms of

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<sup>67</sup> 'Agitators Warned: Drastic Action in Reserve', *Times*, 25 March 1919.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/41408, FO to Cheetham, 17 March 1919.

<sup>69</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/41615, Cheetham to FO, 15 March 1919.

<sup>70</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/43601, 'Egyptian Situation', 20 March 1919.

<sup>71</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/41569, Cheetham to FO, 15 March 1919.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/4239, Balfour to Cheetham, 18 March 1919.

protectorate and the extent and nature of constitutional and administrative reforms'. Through this double move, Lloyd George concluded, 'the cause of order and good Government would have been vindicated and Nationalist sentiment would have received every legitimate satisfaction'.<sup>73</sup>

On 4 April, Allenby presented Egyptian notables with the outline of his programme: he had come back to the Nile Valley to bring 'peace, quiet and contentment', and would subsequently 'address such grievances as appeared justifiable'. With the current state of unrest, he warned, it was impossible to pacify the country 'by merely defensive measures'; 'active repression' was required, which would 'bring tremendous suffering upon the people and result in a great loss of public and private property'.<sup>74</sup> General Bulfin arrived from Palestine, bringing his divisions with him to help in the task of repression.<sup>75</sup> The Egyptian territory was divided into seven regions, each under the direct rule of an army officer who was also responsible for confirming convictions except capital ones, which were reserved for the headquarters in Cairo. Fire troops were employed to disperse riots in Cairo, while columns were dispatched to towns and villages to arrest rebels, repair and protect railway lines and interview witnesses. Airplanes holding bombing machines in readiness conducted 'reconnaissance' flights over Wasta, Ismailia, Abukir, Heliopolis and Ambria.<sup>76</sup> According to British estimates, by July 1919, the Cairo unrest had caused the death of four British, 22 Armenians, seven Greeks, three Syrians and one Jew. In the whole country, British troops had killed 800 rioters and wounded 1,500; 49 Egyptians had been sentenced to death and 27 to imprisonment for life. Overall, the casualties among His Majesty's troops amounted to three officers and 26 other ranks, while 114 had been injured.<sup>77</sup>

Drawing from ancient political theory, the *Daily Herald*, a radical pro-Labour paper, exhorted Allenby to see himself as a 'dictator' rather than as a 'tyrant', the former being a 'trustee' of the people under his rule while the latter was a mere 'temporary autocrat'.<sup>78</sup> M. A. Omar, who petitioned the Foreign Office on behalf of the 'Egyptian Association of England', had no doubt as to which of the two roles Allenby fit best: 'The terms used by the newly appointed Dictator General Allenby can only be

<sup>73</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/50133, Lloyd George to Allenby, 5 April 1919, and FO to Allenby, 18 April 1919.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/52101, Allenby's speech to Egyptian notables, 4 April 1919.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/42905, 'Egyptian Political Situation', 19 March 1919.

<sup>76</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/57328, Cairo's G.H.Q. to War Office on 'Secret Operations', 9 April 1919.

<sup>77</sup> TNA, FO 371/3718/105367, Allenby to FO, 21 July 1919.

<sup>78</sup> 'The Dictatorship in Egypt: Tyrant or Trustee?', *Daily Herald*, 29 March 1919.

uttered by a tyrant of the Middle Ages to a nation of slaves'.<sup>79</sup> Yet, the replacement of Wingate—against his will—meant not only that HMG perceived the need of a stronger leadership in Cairo, but also that they envisioned a new, more accommodating course of action, as implied by the Milner mission announcement.

According to the mindset of the British imperial establishment, episodes of anti-colonial unrest in His Majesty's dominions were regarded as 'short circuits', necessitating an explanation and, if appropriate, a consequent reassessment of colonial policy. For the old and immense imperial bureaucracy of HMG, which conceived of itself as the rational, progressive and efficient machinery of civilization and good government, rebellions represented weeds to be removed with as little pain as possible, not only by repressing them but also by constructing an acceptable interpretation and representation of them: putting it in 'psychoanalytical' terms, moments of unrest represented parentheses of folly in an otherwise virtuous and ordered life which needed to be rationalized and elaborated. Re-ordering the events along a linear, teleological cause-effect narrative of the life of the colony was a crucial part of this elaboration effort by imperial bureaucracy. As Ranajit Guha notices when surveying British official accounts of Indian disorders,

administrative practice turned it almost into a convention that a magistrate or a judge should construct his report on a local uprising as historical narrative. . . . Causality was harnessed thus to counter-insurgency and the sense of history converted into an element of administrative concern.<sup>80</sup>

Likewise, when the British government decided to establish the Milner mission under pressure from Parliament, the Egyptian crisis had activated the articulated inquiry machinery of the Foreign Office, which produced memoranda by various experts, reports from intelligence and military officers and interviews with indigenous leaders. On 15 April 1919, Ronald Graham drafted a note on the Egyptian unrest for the War Cabinet. In the document, the diplomat placed the revolt in the 'general wave of unrest, dissatisfaction and vague political aspirations which' was 'passing all over the world as the after effect of the four years' crisis'. More precisely, Graham identified a chief inspirer of that wave:

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<sup>79</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/50100, M. A. Omar to Cecil Harmsworth, undersecretary of state for Foreign Affairs, 31 March 1919.

<sup>80</sup> Guha, 3. The author is especially concerned with stressing the stylistic and epistemological convergence between the reports of British colonial officials on nineteenth-century Indian rural unrest and the contemporary colonialist historiography, both aiming, in Guha's words, at 'an apology of law and order' restored by British counter-insurgency.

The ideals of the intellectual classes, even of their more moderate members, have, during the past few years, hardened considerably. Many of those who formerly only hoped for a greater freedom of political expression, now aspire to complete independence. This is but the natural outcome of the Wilsonian idea of the cry for self-determination. . . . Thinking Egyptians had realized that Egypt was defenceless, and must rely on the protection of some strong Power, and on the whole, they preferred British tutelage as being less onerous than that of any other great Power. But now they see in the League of Nations a fairy godmother, remote and unobtrusive in their internal affairs, but always ready to step in and save them the trouble and anxiety of defending themselves from aggrieved or aggressive neighbors.

Hence, Graham showed a full awareness of the epochal turn in international relations marked by the ‘Wilsonian Moment’.<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, he appears entirely caught in the normative assumptions of imperial self-representation. One of these assumptions was, of course, that the Egyptian people was structurally deficient and needed a more advanced power to watch over its home security and foreign relations; there was no power in the world that could accomplish that task better than Britain. A corollary of this theorem was that ‘enlightened’ or ‘thinking Egyptians’ were the ones who thought that their country needed protection and that the British were the best available protectors. Self-assuring assumptions produced self-absolving conclusions: only ignorant, weak-minded and incautious Egyptians could rebel. According to Graham, wartime ‘prosperity’ had given the fellaheen an excessive ‘feeling of independence’, as the cotton price had increased by almost 500 percent during the conflict; the notables were a ‘simple and ignorant lot’, except in terms of agriculture, and were ‘easily swayed by political influences’ which they could not understand. However, the diplomat envisioned no particular difficulty to bring both groups ‘back to a saner state of mind’; he was rather more concerned with the nationalist leaders, ‘unscrupulous men’ who were fomenting unrest for their political self-interest. ‘We do not know’, wrote Graham, ‘and shall probably never learn, what wild tales as to our misdeeds and nefarious intentions have been circulated in the bazaars and villages’. Furthermore, the ‘general wave’ of ‘vague political aspirations’ spreading across the globe had helped strengthen the insane purposes of the rioters. The ‘externalization’ of evil is another typical self-absolving argument: discontent and unrest were inconceivable in a relationship based on protection, progress and mutual trust; if anything like that had happened, it was because

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<sup>81</sup> The Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Station, writing to the Secretary of Admiralty on 5 April 1919, also identified ‘first and foremost the declarations of President Wilson’ as the chief causes of the Egyptian unrest (TNA, FO 371/3716/65990).



an 'exogenous' agent—the utopian illusions seconded by Wilson's call for self-determination—had intervened to alter the natural course of events.<sup>82</sup>

I do not question that FO officials were genuinely interested in investigating the causes of the outbreak, nor do I doubt that many among them sincerely believed that they were open to criticism: evidence of the FO's autonomous initiative to ascertain the facts implies a self-critical disposition. I am rather suggesting that this self-questioning of imperial consciousness was conducted under such assumptions and according to such practices that it could only ensue in a substantial acquittal. The survey of indigenous opinion provides a further example of 'conditioned' self-criticism. Listening to the voice of subaltern populations confirmed the British authorities' self-perception as benevolent and progressive colonial administrators. At the same time, they recognized as 'reliable'—or, alternatively, 'moderate', 'educated', 'enlightened', etc.—voices only those of local elites with well established connections to the colonial administration and who, either sincerely or for political convenience, displayed loyalty to the imperial power. Several memoranda representing the point of view of Egyptian notables on the uprising were collected by Allenby and forwarded to London. They included a paper from Shaykh Mohamed Madi, a 'modern reformer holding moderate views' who used to play chess with the British high commissioner, and the only professor in Cairo who did not sign a petition against Zaghlul's arrest. Among the causes of the upheaval, he listed Egypt's exclusion from the Paris conference, the indefiniteness of British policy, the resentment of the fellaheen at the confiscation of crops and the upper classes' discontent with their exclusion from the highest ranks of the Egyptian bureaucracy. He recommended the British end martial law, clarify the limits and the scope of the protectorate and involve the Egyptians more effectively in the government of the country.

A lawyer from Damietta named Amin Effendi Yusuf credited the British with bringing liberal principles to Egypt together with economic development, and therefore regarded the colonial power to be the first responsible for the unrest.

We have become liberal minded through you, your literature and your history. Whenever you permit a people like the Egyptians to read your books, your papers, and understand your way of thinking and liberal ideas, you must not suppose that they do not deduct from them what they believe to be their moral aspirations. When the

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<sup>82</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/60201, Ronald Graham's note on unrest in Egypt for the War Cabinet, 15 April 1919.

Egyptians balance the material success they have gained against the disadvantages of their moral inferiority, the scale turns against you.<sup>83</sup>

In agreement with Madi, Yusuf blamed the British for excluding the Egyptians from local administration. Even so, his reading of the situation confirmed the progressive nature of British imperialism. Actually, if a certain degree of criticism could be voiced via these ways of recording local opinion, the modality of the selection of 'reliable' and 'moderate' Egyptians assured that they would never put British rule *per se* into question; they could 'at worst' suggest a change in colonial policy.

The inquiry procedures enacted by the Foreign Office were in many ways self-referential, which confirms a 'psychoanalytical' reading of them as a means of defense, consolidation and perpetuation of imperial self-consciousness. First, it was the inquirer who inquired on herself, although this sort of 'circular trial' also contemplated fictitious hearings of 'third' opinions. Further, reports, memoranda and white papers were produced by the foreign policy establishment on its own initiative and for confidential circulation among its own officials—as was the case for Egypt before the Milner mission. Nevertheless, the views and arguments exchanged by imperial bureaucrats were often transferred in the government's public representation of the events. In an address to the Commons, George Curzon, the Lord President of the Council who temporarily replaced Balfour, then engaged in the Paris negotiations, for all other matters in the competence of the Foreign Secretary, denied the status of national revolution to the Egyptian unrest. It was rather, in his view, a constellation of criminal raids, local agrarian risings and incursions by Bedouin tribes that had nothing in common except having been instigated by Zaghlul and his fellows; it was a collective regression from order, civilization and the rule of law back to barbarity. The Delegates were the 'self-appointed irresponsible leaders of the agitation' who, by advocating the unreasonable idea of ending the British Protectorate, were alienating Egyptian 'moderate opinion'.

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<sup>83</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/65052, 'Various Memoranda from Egyptians and Englishmen on Current Unrest', 28 April 1919.

Recent manifestations have been predatory rather than political in character, rioters at Tantah Zagazig and elsewhere looting European shops. In certain districts the movement has taken the form of peasant tenants rising against landowners. A more serious feature of the situation is that some of the Bedouin tribesmen who live on the edge of civilization, especially in the Behera and Fayeun Provinces, have joined in the disturbances. They constitute a lawless element, always ready to take advantage of disorders for purposes of plunder.

However, Curzon reassured the MPs, order would be soon restored, and the loyalty of local officials and the 'better instructed native opinion' to British authorities was a 'gratifying feature' of the current crisis.<sup>84</sup>

The rhetorical strategy of HMG aimed at contrasting the extremism of the members of the *Wafd*, which manifested itself in both their 'immoderate demands' and insurrectional strategy, with Egyptian 'responsible opinion' and at building a bridge between the latter and London by declaring British support for gradual political reforms.

We have never had the least wish to repress Egyptian individuality. On the contrary, we accept the principle that Egyptians should be, in an even increasing scale, in the government of the country; and it is our earnest desire that under our Protectorate they advance in prosperity and take her rightful place as the leading Islamic Power.<sup>85</sup>

Indeed, since the early circulation of news about Egyptian disorders, several voices in the British political debate had started pressing the government in that direction, and not only among Labour or Liberal circles. From the conservative side of the political spectrum, Captain William Ormsby-Gore auspicated that the Milner commission would also include MPs and real experts in Egyptian affairs, would carry out its mission with transparency and work in consultation with 'responsible Egyptian opinion'. Otherwise, he warned, there would be 'a day fight between the House and the Foreign Office, and somebody' would 'win'.<sup>86</sup> Interviewed by the *Daily Graphic* on 25 March 1919, the politician argued that the present disturbances in Egypt were the result of 'the lack of efficient foresight' and the 'dilatatory strategies' by the FO, and advocated transferring the administration of Egypt to the Colonial Office: 'Once again, one witnesses the evil results of the policy of concealment'.<sup>87</sup>

Overall, the editorial lines of the two major British newspapers—the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, the latter holding, at that time, an independent and progressive liberal stance—converged along similar assessments of the Egyptian affair.

<sup>84</sup> 'The Position in Egypt', *Times*, 25 March 1919.

<sup>85</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/74917, Lord Curzon's speech in the House of Lords, 16 May 1919.

<sup>86</sup> 'Egyptian Affairs: The Proposed Enquiry', *Times*, 17 May 1919.

<sup>87</sup> 'Egypt and the Foreign Office' and 'Unrest Abroad', *Daily Graphic*, 25 March 1919.

They stigmatized the riots as brutal manifestations of lawlessness, proving how unready Egypt was to administrate itself as a stable, safe and ‘civilized’ state; though not questioning British presence as such, however, both papers blamed the coalition government for the inconsistency between the continuous promises of self-rule and the perpetuation of a repressive war-like regime, and predicted greater autonomy for the Egyptian indigenous administration under British control.

The wartime policy of HMG and its perpetuation after the hostilities were generally deemed responsible for undermining the social bases of British popularity in Egypt. The combination of the lack of a definite policy with the systematic exclusion of indigenous officials from the higher ranks of the administration, Cyril Goodman wrote to the *Times*, had alienated the ‘better disposed classes of the Egyptian population’, pushing public workers into the hands of the nationalists.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, as an editorial published on 12 April 1919 pointed out, resentment had spread among the fellaheen as a consequence of the increases in food and clothing prices and of ‘the revival for military purposes of the detested system of forced labour’: ‘[W]henver an Oriental peasantry rises in revolt it is almost axiomatic among those experienced in Eastern ways that if you probe far enough you will find a sense of personal, and probably financial, injustice’.<sup>89</sup>

Hence, the ‘mainstream’ interpretation circulating in the press considered nationalist claims to Egyptian independence as just window dressing, an epiphenomenon of the deeper roots of social and economic discontent. The *Times* portrayed an extremely severe picture of the *Wafd* and its supporters, presenting them as unscrupulous ‘agitators’ anxious to exploit the grievances of the peasantry for their political careers.

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<sup>88</sup> ‘Egyptian Policy’, letter by Cyril Godman to the editor of the *Times*, 27 March 1919. See also ‘Egyptian Policy’, letter by Coles Pasha to the editor of the *Times*, 25 March 1919. Both authors were ex-officials of the Egyptian administration.

<sup>89</sup> ‘The Insurrection in Egypt’, *Times*, 12 April 1919. An editorial titled ‘Egypt’ which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* on 25 April 1919 contained basically the same analysis.

The people who make troubles are mostly students, young clerks eager for Government places, the rabble to be found in all Eastern cities, and the hereditary robbers of the West bank of the Nile. . . . None of these elements is in the least formidable in itself—least of all the 'intelligentsia'. But in Egypt, as in the rest of the East, the people expect their rulers to rule, and when agitators of any kind can point to an apparent slackening of the reins, . . . the lawless classes seize the opportunity to gratify their passions, while the loyalty of the masses remain strictly passive.<sup>90</sup>

The *Guardian* attributed to 'a small section of Nationalist politicians or students or pro-Turkish agitators' a marginal part in the Egyptian rising, which was mostly due, according to the editorialist, to British mistakes;<sup>91</sup> some of the letters hosted by the paper contained even more reductive assessments of the nationalist component of the revolt. For example, Leslie Haden-Guest, a socialist writer and a Labour member of the London County Council, opposed the elite social basis of the nationalist party—that is, one million educated Egyptians—to the eleven-million-strong mass of illiterate fellaheen to whom national consciousness meant nothing.

Certain sections of the educated class . . . would like to get the power into their own hands, and they call themselves nationalists. Their real power comes from the fact that they are Moslems and are able to utilize the grievances of the population for their own ends.<sup>92</sup>

What made nationalism a particularly popular and exploitable currency, many contributors agreed, was the new international ethos resulting from the Great War, with Wilsonian discourses launching the gospel of 'self-determination'. 'This unfortunate movement in Egypt is marked by one characteristic common to all countries just now', stated a *Times* editorial:

The Nationalist politicians wanted the future of Egypt settled out of hand. For many centuries Egypt has enjoyed no form of genuine indigenous autonomy, but these eager aspirants could not wait even few weeks. The purely nationalist movement . . . is from the British point of view revolutionary. Like certain similar movements elsewhere now coming to a head, it is being stage-managed for the benefit of distant spectators in Paris.<sup>93</sup>

Likewise, Georges Samné, the Paris-based director of the *Oriental Correspondence* interviewed by the *Guardian*, placed the Egyptian unrest in a wider

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<sup>90</sup> 'The Troubles in Egypt', *Times*, 2 April 1919.

<sup>91</sup> 'Egypt', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 November 1919.

<sup>92</sup> 'Causes of Trouble in Egypt: Dr. Haden Guest's View', *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1919.

<sup>93</sup> 'Unrest in Egypt', *Times*, 25 March 1919.

‘movement for the right of peoples to dispose of themselves according to the doctrine of Dr. Wilson’.

[T]here was an intense propaganda during the war in favor of the aspirations of the Syrians and the natives of Palestine. Egyptians compared the policy of England in proposing the independence of semi-civilized peoples and in refusing it to a rich, organized nation, which possesses the habits of administration, and in which there are fourteen millions of Mohammedans out of an entire population of fifteen millions, which includes 800,000 Copts and 200,000 foreigners. No political or religious difficulty exists.

Unlike Haden-Guest and the *Times* editorialists, and quite isolated among the Egypt experts intervening in the British press, Samme accorded the character of a ‘national matured movement’ to the rising and the stature of ‘men of reflection and intelligence’ to its leaders; accordingly, he advocated the admission of Egyptian Delegates to the peace talks and the eventual conversion of the British protectorate into an international mandate.<sup>94</sup> However, what is of particular interest to us is that even this ‘progressive’ commentator endorsed the imperial paradigm, of which we have already found traces in the writing of Egyptian petitioners. This was a mindset subjecting peoples’ eligibility to self-rule to certain ‘objective’ and measurable ‘standards of civilization’—basically, those of the ‘Western’ model of a stable, efficient and secular bureaucratic state.

That such parameters were all but objective and quantifiable is evident if comparing Samme’s assessment with the position of most of the other contributors to the Egypt debate. ‘The cry of Nationalism is premature’, stated a letter to the *Times* signed under the pseudonym of Debendos.

It is manifest to all who know Egypt intimately that the Egyptian is still far from possessing the qualifications necessary for self-government. Even in the formation of banks and agricultural companies, or in any organization requiring combined efforts and mutual confidence, Egyptians have been conspicuously unsuccessful, and it is out of doubt that, with the Turkish element still so strong in the ascendant, any attempt to free the country from guidance and control in financial matters would lead to a return of corruption.

The author went on to blame the protectorate authorities for failing to ‘enlighten the inhabitants on the true causes of their present prosperity’, thus subjecting them to the ‘fake and harmful’ propaganda of the agitators. In other words, the unrest was a matter

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<sup>94</sup> ‘Nationalist Movement in Egypt: “England Responsible for Unrest”’, *Manchester Guardian*, 26 March 1919.

of bad and communication by the British and the Egyptian nationalists respectively, lacking any other substantial causes.<sup>95</sup>

Inefficiency and corruption, having international insolvency as their expectable consequence, were a typical mark associated by the Orientalist mindset with the 'Eastern' style of administration. Despotism was another one, and a *Guardian* editorial of 26 November 1919 fits in the same line of thought of John Stuart Mill on that point:

The problem of Egyptian government is not very different from that of Indian government. You have the same enormous preponderance of a completely illiterate peasantry, the same age-long tradition of a purely arbitrary form of government, the same impact of Western ideas of political emancipation and self-government for which the very basis has yet to be created. . . . In practice it is pretty certain that [a constitutional monarchy] would not endure, and either the ruler would assert himself after the old fashion or the forms of popular government would be used to cover the exploitation of the helpless many.<sup>96</sup>

There remained religious fanaticism to complete the set of stereotypes to question the compatibility of Egypt with 'modern' government, and Haden-Guest centered most of his understanding of the revolt on the alleged preponderance of Islam in Egyptian national identity.

Nationalism in the Western sense does not exist, but the religious and racial bond between the Moslems in all these countries, whether in Egypt, Palestine or Syria, is exceedingly strong. . . . The place of Nationalism, as it exists in the West, has been taken by religious feeling for Islam. There is undoubtedly anti-foreign religious fanaticism.<sup>97</sup>

Almost invariably in the *Times's* and *Guardian's* commentaries, arguments about the inapplicability of 'Western' models of government to Cairo and the recognition of Egypt's strategic relevance to British imperial communications reinforced each other. Therefore, although many pieces condemned the enduring regime of censorship and martial law and supported the admission of the Egyptian representatives to the peace talks, all the solutions suggested to meet Cairo's 'right and natural demand for political liberty and political power' contemplated the permanence of British control, though to a less pervasive extent. The *Guardian* envisioned future Egypt as a 'self-governing dominion under the British Crown', but affirmed that the times were not mature enough for such a development.<sup>98</sup> In general, the editorials in

<sup>95</sup> 'Our Rule in Egypt', letter by Debendos to the editor of the *Times*, 17 April 1919.

<sup>96</sup> 'The Future of Egypt', *Manchester Guardian*, 26 November 1919.

<sup>97</sup> 'Causes of Trouble in Egypt: Dr. Haden Guest's View', *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1919.

<sup>98</sup> 'The Future of Egypt', *Manchester Guardian*, 26 November 1919.

both papers suggested a combination of social reforms to assure better working conditions and higher revenues to the fellaheen, and administrative and institutional reforms involving the Egyptians more extensively and effectively in indigenous administration. In an April 1919 editorial, the *Manchester Guardian* supported the creation of wholly elective legislative assemblies both in Cairo and at local levels, with British ‘advisers’ supervising the key ministries.

We do not think that Egypt is ripe for independence, but we do think that progress towards autonomy has been unduly delayed. . . . These reforms are required by justice and dictated by justice and prudence. Egypt not only has a moral right to them, it expects them, and the movement in Egypt is symptomatic of what is pulsating over much of Asia.<sup>99</sup>

Therefore, not a demise, but rather a reshaping and sugaring of imperial rule were deemed to be in line with the new spirit of the times. While condemning insurgent violence and questioning the legitimacy and real intentions of nationalist leaders, the *Times* stood generically in favor of granting to Egyptian officials a ‘greater share’ in the administration of their own country,<sup>100</sup> and the pages devoted to the letters to the editor hosted a vibrant debate on the vices and virtues of the advisor system that had secured Britain’s control over all branches of Egyptian administration since the occupation.<sup>101</sup> Frederick Lugard, the Governor-General of Nigeria soon to be appointed to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, quoted his experience in Africa as a model for the success of that system. The solidity of colonial administration and its popularity, he maintained, depended on the competence and discretion of the advisers. They should avoid open clashes with village sheikhs, rather pushing them ‘gently’—through empathy and persuasion—towards economic and administrative reforms. The success of the ‘advice’ meant establishing ties of friendship with landlords and local notabilities; at the same time, the advisers were expected to gain popular trust by protecting villagers from ‘extortion and corruption’.<sup>102</sup> The kind of colonial rule that Lugard had in mind and propagandized was a ‘gentle’ and ‘enlightened’ one, operating in the shadows and with the substantial approval of the governed. With the FO officials exchanging memoranda on Egypt, he shared a progressive and self-absolving

<sup>99</sup> ‘Egypt’, *Manchester Guardian*, 25 April 1919.

<sup>100</sup> For example, in the already mentioned editorial ‘Unrest in Egypt’, *Times*, 25 March 1919.

<sup>101</sup> British officials constituted a sort of shadow bureaucracy, with its own hierarchy and rules of procedure, independent from Egyptian authorities and subject directly to the Foreign Office. Top advisers ‘assisted’ Cairo’s ministers of the Interior, Finances, Justice, Education and Public Works, and had local delegates to provincial governors and village sheikhs.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Unrest in Egypt’, letter by Frederick D. Lugard to the editor of the *Times*, 16 September 1919.



representation of the British Empire, resting on the total trust in the moral integrity and self-restraint of colonial administrators and on the allegedly widespread support for British authorities among colonial people and elites.

Indeed, the letters-to-the-editor pages provided room for a certain diversification of the opinions in the Egypt debate, sometimes openly challenging the editorial line of the paper. Lugard can be regarded as falling midway between those who thought that the protectorate administration had failed because it had been too liberal and well disposed towards the Egyptians and those demanding that all the British apparatus as such be dismissed. Malcolm McIlwraith, the jurist who had already established himself among hardcore imperialists with his rough legal argumentation in favor of the protectorate, can be ascribed to the first pole of the spectrum. A regular contributor to the *Times*, he took the Egyptian unrest as proof that indigenous officials had failed to 'inspire general confidence and respect' among their fellow countrymen, and stood for an inversion of the adviser system. That is, in McIlwraith's view, British advisers should be turned from 'Eminences grises' with no executive power into actual ministers, while Egyptian ministers could be downgraded to 'technical advisers' to the British 'on purely native questions'.<sup>103</sup>

At the opposite extreme of the debate, Joseph Bampfylde Fuller, a writer-inventor with a past as a lieutenant-governor in India, authored a smart piece on the strengths and weaknesses of 'imperial democracy'. By focusing preeminently on the variation of the material prosperity of the fellaheen in search for the reasons of the unrest, he argued, the whole Egypt debate was missing the central point of the crisis. What the Egyptians as well as other communities under British rule were making manifest, according to Bampfylde Fuller, was the intrinsic contradiction of a democracy holding an empire.

If we reason dispassionately . . . we shall be forced to the conclusion that unrest, or revolt against political authority, is the consequence of an extension of human dignity, which renders it unworthy to submit to an alien domination. We have impressed this conception over other peoples by our own political history. We have sedulously inculcated it in our schools and colleges. It is now used against us, we are reaping what we have sown.

Thus, albeit echoing the same set of arguments that we have seen in Yusuf's memorandum portraying liberty and the rule of law as exported eastwards by British rule, Fuller was maybe the only one within the colonial establishment to reckon lucidly

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<sup>103</sup> 'Our Position in Egypt', letter by Malcolm McIlwraith to the editor of the *Times*, 26 April 1919.

with the ultimate consequences of that ‘progressive mission’: an empire producing and teaching democracy could either give way to ‘complete self-government for Colonial Dependences’ or preserve itself through militarism. On two decisive points, usually treated with ambiguity and concealment in British public diplomacy, the author displayed much clearer ideas. First of all, the complex question of when, how and by whom Egypt’s readiness to self-rule might be assessed was dismissed by the simple consideration that unrest itself was a sign that the time to slacken imperial reins had come. What is more, Fuller explicitly adopted the word ‘democracy’ to substantiate the slippery concept of ‘self-government’, making it hardly compatible with London’s permanence in Egypt.<sup>104</sup> As we will see, both questions will remain at the core not only of the British-Egyptian confrontation, but also of the major controversies in the reshaping of post-WWI imperial systems.

A last point makes Fuller’s letter worthy of mention. Identifying the very cause of the rising allowed the author to reason ‘systemically’, thus placing the Egyptian case among the many waves of rebellion challenging British rule here and there. A common perspective was necessary to make sense of the ‘troubles . . . perplexing us in Ireland, India and Egypt’, Fuller stated in the opening of his letter.<sup>105</sup> In fact, anxiety about the stance of Britain as an imperial power was a major concern in the public debate in the immediate aftermath of the Great War, with the Irish crisis threatening the empire at its core: ‘Egypt . . . has gone Sinn Fein’, commented the previously mentioned 26 November editorial of the *Manchester Guardian*.<sup>106</sup>

While trained in very different colonial contexts and displaying diverse political leanings, Lugard, McIlwraith and Bampfylde Fuller were both exponents of the imperial *intelligentsia*: an overview of the letters published by the *Times* reveals a systematic connection between the paper and the Foreign and Colonial Offices. As Bernard Porter has pointed out, chronically preoccupied with the alleged lack of popular interest in the empire and alarmed by shifting patterns of world hegemony, colonial ‘zelatos’ embarked on an intense domestic propaganda campaign after 1918. In contrast to early twentieth-century campaigns, this time ‘[p]eople were appealed to on other grounds than their putative pride in their empire’s glory or strength or power. Instead they were asked to admire it—reverting to a mid-nineteenth-century perception—for its . . . liberalism’.

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<sup>104</sup> ‘Imperial Democracy’, letter by Joseph Bampfylde Fuller to the editor of the *Times*, 3 May 1919.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>106</sup> ‘The Future of Egypt’, *Manchester Guardian*, 26 November 1919.

Alongside this communicative effort chiefly aimed at the middle- and working-class public, a parallel campaign took place on the pages of the *Times*. It was meant to revitalize imperial interest among the elite circles making up the basis of recruitment for the colonial and Indian services that featured to a large extent in the paper's readership.<sup>107</sup> It is thus no wonder that Lugard and Fuller shared an insistence on the 'non-imperial qualities' of HMG's rule. That such an emphasis characterized the public presentation of the empire is confirmed by McIlwraith's complaints about the softness of the British yoke in Egypt.

In the meantime, Egyptian nationalists presented (or, rather, sought to present) the British public with a completely different narrative and interpretations of the events. Distinct from London's 'official discourse', where information on the bloodshed in Egypt, when provided, was basically used to stigmatize the cruelty of the rioters, the description and condemnation of counter-insurgent violence pervaded to a large extent the writings of Egyptian petitioners, fusing with claims to national independence. The two 'realms'—the paradise of freedom and morality of Wilsonian promises and the hell of British tyranny—became the poles of constant rhetorical oppositions. The two languages of violence and of rights clashed and at the same time reinforced each other: not only did British brutality contradict the elementary 'natural rights' of individuals, it appeared even less defensible in the light of the 'natural rights of peoples' to which the Allies professed observance. On 10 March 1919, Cheetham received a collection of five petitions coming, respectively, from the inhabitants of the Province of Dakalia, the Egyptian native bar, the employees of the Ministry of Justice, the merchants and the doctors of Cairo. These latter wrote:

We alone are deprived of the natural right proclaimed by Dr. Wilson and by the other Allies. . . . Brutal force, to our great humiliation, and to detriment of our rights and of the principles declared as the basis . . . of peace, placed an insurmountable obstacle before the Delegation, to which we gave mandate for the defense of our cause in Europe.<sup>108</sup>

Other complaints described the alleged atrocities of repression in detail. The executive committee of the Egyptian National Party telegraphed the British Parliament a concise but striking account of the events:

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<sup>107</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 255–282.

<sup>108</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/49310, Cheetham to FO, 29 March 1919.

BRITISH SOLDIERS FIRE AT UNARMED PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS KILLING AND WOUNDING MANY WITH DUM-DUM BULLETS AND AIR-CRAFT BOMBS. ACTS WHICH PUT CIVILIZATION TO SHAME.<sup>109</sup>

In a subsequent telegram to Wilson, Clemenceau and Orlando, they were more ‘eloquent’. The oversimplification of grammar and syntax required by the ‘language of the telegraph’ conferred a sort of stream-of-consciousness shape to the text and allowed an accumulation effect in the list of atrocities which inevitably strikes the reader.

LOIN S’ARRETER LÀ ANGLETERRE ORDONNE AUTORITÉ MILITAIRE METTRE FIN AU MOUVEMENT. MALGRÉ MISURES TERRORISTES PRISES AYANT BUT DONNER NATION EGYPTIENNE COUP GRÂCE FOULER PIEDS SON IDÉAL VIOLER OUVERTEMENT LIBERTÉ INDIVIDUELLE MALGRÉ FUSILADES CANNONADES MANIFESTATIONS DÉARMES HOMMES FEMMES ENFANTS MALGRÉ PILLAGES INCENDIES VOLONTAIRES COMMIS ANGLAIS CONSCIENCE NATIONALE PAS ÉBRANLÉE. MOUVEMENT GAIGNE TOUT EGYPT.<sup>110</sup>

Similar arguments were echoed in the campaigns of Egyptian diasporas. On 27 March 1919, the Egyptian Association of the University of Bristol addressed a protest to Lord Curzon.

We solemnly protest against the slaughter of our countrymen and the use of armoured cars in the midst of the most crowded streets. The present serious conditions in Egypt prove definitely that all the Egyptians are unanimously fighting for and are insisting on their rights to liberty violated harshly and unscrupulously by brutal militarism. Can the human politicians of England remain silent before those barbarous measures which have obviously no aim but to exterminate the nation and enforce upon it the undesirable Protectorate?<sup>111</sup>

Again, the semantic fields of violence and rights intersected, and the scale of civilization implicit in the protectorate concept was reversed, with the British acting as unrestrained barbarians and the Egyptians fighting to defend their nation. This leads to a further set of arguments running throughout both the Egyptian National Party’s telegrams and the protest from Cairo’s doctors: the petitioners insisted on stressing the countrywide diffusion of the revolt and on characterizing it as a veritable national ‘revolution’—as the events of 1919 would crystallize in the Egyptian national memory.

<sup>109</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/59540, Ali Kamel, vice-president of the Executive Committee of the Egyptian National Party, to the British parliament, 28 March 1919.

<sup>110</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/59543, Ali Kamel to Wilson, Clemenceau and Orlando, 29 March 1919. In this case, I preferred not to translate the text in order to leave its original telegraphic style and communicative effect untouched.

<sup>111</sup> FO 371/3714/47695, ‘Situation in Egypt’, 27 March 1919.

Likewise, they portrayed the members of the *Wafd* as the legitimate representatives of the entire Egyptian nation.

The question of the representativeness of the Delegation recurred, again, as a major issue of controversy, and, indeed, it was difficult to assess given the suspension of constitutional life resulting from martial law and from the Egyptian political crisis. When signing petitions, Zaghlul used to style himself as 'ancient minister' and the 'vice-president elect of the Egyptian Legislative Assembly', and he often accompanied his letters with supporting statements from major Egyptian notables and tribal leaders. A certain El Sayyid Shir of Liverpool, in the name of the Egyptian Association in England, wrote to Lloyd George that everyone could observe that 'the deported leaders' were 'members of a delegation freely chosen by the Egyptian nation to obtain by lawful means their country's independence'.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, a communiqué by self-styled 'Egyptian Nationalists of Switzerland' to the local press stated that 'all classes of the population'—including 'the notability, the peasantry and the cultured youth'—were united in 'utmost resistance' to the 'British yoke'.<sup>113</sup>

The British authorities and pro-Egyptian campaigners circulated two opposite narratives of the revolt and proposed almost mirror-like antithetical representations of who was serving the Egyptian cause and who was pursuing her self-interest, who was acting lawfully and who arbitrarily, who was the barbarian and who the civilized, who had sacrificed herself for the other and who was ungrateful. Indeed, as far as the British public debate is concerned, the two voices almost entirely ignored or did not recognize each other, since the contents of the petitions rarely came out of the government offices to which they were addressed or by which they were intercepted and the 'official truth' was overwhelmingly endorsed by the major British newspapers. Even so, there were a few moments in which the two versions met and confronted each other.

Since complaints from Egyptian residents regularly stumbled upon the barrier of British censorship, diasporic mobilization was essential to circulate the point of view of the nationalists outside the Egyptian borders. It was through the transmission belt of the Egyptian Association of England that a printed report from Giza Provincial Council came into the hands of Ben Spoor, a Labour MP from Bishop Auckland. Speaking in the House of Commons on 16 May 1919, he read the macabre account of repression in a village by the local omdeh (mayor). British troops were reported to have rushed into the

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<sup>112</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714/41220, 'Egyptian Political Situation', 15 March 1919.

<sup>113</sup> TNA, FO 371/3714746121, 'Situation in Egypt', 25 March 1919.

omdeh's house, dragged his wife and daughters from their beds by their hair and torn the earrings out of their ears, 'bringing flesh with them'. The villagers, meanwhile, were ordered to evacuate the village as it was to be set on fire, but, when they did so, they were surrounded by a cordon of troops who first robbed the people of their valuables and then fired upon them.<sup>114</sup> The author of the report was, in Spoor's words, 'a responsible official' whose allegations were 'apparently well authenticated'. Yet, the intervention of the Labour MP, a sympathizer of anti-colonial movements who often found himself at odds with his party colleagues, was met by the majority of the House with derision or reproach, especially from MPs with a past in the army. Lt. Colonel Warren Guinness, a Conservative from Bury St. Edmunds, maintained that, if such atrocities as denounced in the report had occurred, they could only have been perpetuated by native soldiers, but never by 'British white troops'. Earl Winterton, who had served in Egypt during the war, deplored any attempt to depict British rule as 'harsh or unjust' as a mendacious and irresponsible act which could only undermine the safety of HMG troops in Egypt.<sup>115</sup>

Besides challenging the official version of the facts, the Egyptians' appeals to the metropolitan public, when obtaining visibility, achieved another significant goal: they forced the British conversation, normally focused on the 'high' level of general principles informing HMG's policy, 'down' to the discussion of 'base' events. They obliged the Foreign Office to provide abstruse explanations and justifications for precise allegations of abuses and misconduct. The Allenby-FO correspondence contains several pieces of evidence indicating that the British government did care about the public impact of the charges raised in the complaints. In an exchange in early May, Allenby had warned London against foreseeable press campaigns on alleged British atrocities and had suggested how to reply to the Giza Province charges: only after 'prolonged provocation' by the rebels including the destruction of railways, he pointed out, were villages 'accidentally set on fire'; the women were 'naturally frightened'. The FO welcomed the advice of the high commissioner, and asked him to forward data on British and foreign casualties to be used 'for propaganda purposes'.<sup>116</sup>

Responding to Spoor's speech, Curzon acted faithfully upon Allenby's recommendations. The nationalists' allegations, he argued, were pure propaganda, since

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<sup>114</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/77885, Report from the omdehs of the villages of El-Eziza and Nizlet-El Showbak of the Giza Province, 23 March 1919.

<sup>115</sup> 'Egyptian Affairs: The Proposed Inquiry', *Times*, 16 May 1919.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/6844, Allenby to FO, 5 May 1919; FO to Allenby, 7 May 1919.

imperial troops had 'shown most praiseworthy restraint in very trying circumstances'. Conversely, turning the charge against the charger, there had been 'a number of brutal murders of isolated and unarmed British soldiers by the native mob'; patrols and sentries had been sniped and ambushed 'without the least provocation'. Among the outrages raising 'horror and indignation', he quoted the murder of two British officers and six other soldiers on the Upper Egypt Express by the fellaheen.

The peasant of Upper Egypt is naturally violent in character and, on the present occasion reports, for which there was not the remotest vestige of foundation, of outrages alleged to be committed by British troops, such as the burning of mosques and assaults of women, may have led to such an outbreak of ferocity'.<sup>117</sup>

In fact, the killing of the British soldiers received far more attention in the British public debate than Egyptian protests did, thus emphasizing insurgent violence. 'The spirit of lawlessness' was 'rapidly spreading' in Egypt, announced the *Times*, while 'the general Egyptian public' was 'swallowing lies from the nationalists', who represented 'a clique rather than a party': 'Not only did the Nationalists show no recognition of the sacrifices of the troops from Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and India', a leading article stated, reversing the Egyptians' argument on war sacrifices and rewards, 'they have never ceased to intrigue against their protectors'.<sup>118</sup>

To sum up, the documents examined in this section reveal a substantial continuity between the self-absolving representation of the Egyptian crisis shared by British imperial officials in their confidential exchanges, the public account of the events provided by HMG and the 'mainstream' reading circulating in the major newspapers. To a certain extent, this continuity was consciously planned and pursued, as suggested by both the conspicuous presence of FO and CO names among the *Times* contributors and HMG's efforts to silence disturbing voices. However, when they did manage to escape censorship through their metropolitan supporters, Egyptian petitioners broke the harmony of the picture. They did not really succeed, however, in establishing a systematic channel of communication with the British public or alter the terms of metropolitan debates.

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<sup>117</sup> 'Egyptian Affairs: The Proposed Inquiry', *Times*, 16 May 1919.

<sup>118</sup> 'Unrest in Egypt', *Times*, 25 March 1919.

## AWAKENING BACK IN A WORLD OF EMPIRES

Despite the firm denial of public recognition to the *Wafd*, the British authorities had fully realized the extent of the nationalists' appeal to Egyptian public opinion: the troubles of March 1919 oriented HMG towards a more conciliating attitude when dealing with the Delegation. Among his first acts, Allenby announced the liberation of Zaghlul and his associates. Meanwhile, Rushdi Pasha had managed to form a new cabinet. According to the high commissioner, it was in British interest that the Delegates be received in Paris by the representatives of the Allied powers, since this would deprive the Egyptians of a powerful argument for anti-British propaganda (provided that these latter expressed support for the protectorate).

Curzon stood for a firmer line: the Allies' refusal to hear the Delegates would 'convey to them in unmistakable terms that their programme and pretensions' had 'no prospect of being entertained'. At most, the Allied governments could reply in writing to Zaghlul's claims to reject them.<sup>119</sup> Curzon's apprehension was excessive, as the Allies were anything but willing to create tensions with London over the Egyptian question. Paradoxically, detention preserved the dream of Zaghlul and his friends for some more weeks. It kept them in the conviction that the world outside was entering a new era and that a champion of oppressed peoples was waiting for them in Paris. In fact, the moment when the nationalists were left free to approach the propagation center of 'self-determination' marked the beginning of their disillusionment.

On 7 April 1919, Zaghlul and the other arrested leaders won back their freedom and passports, which they immediately employed to move to Paris. Their intended propaganda and political strategy was based on the alleged incompatibility of the British position in the Egyptian question with those of the other Allies. Their hope was sustained not only by the Wilsonian rhetoric, but also by the reassuring circumstance that neither Italy nor—most importantly—the United States had recognized the protectorate yet.<sup>120</sup> Actually, when preparing for the peace negotiations, Woodrow Wilson had envisioned tensions with the Entente on colonial issues, in which, he was confident, he would prevail thanks to both the diplomatic weight acquired by the US with the war and his enormous personal popularity among European publics.

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<sup>119</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/59034, Allenby to FO and FO to Allenby, 15 April 19.

<sup>120</sup> When the protectorate was proclaimed, France immediately recognized it. The United States, instead, expressed a 'qualified recognition' under the terms of the December 1914 proclamation of the Foreign Office, that is, pending a reconsideration of the status of Egypt after the war.



There can be no real difficulty about peace terms and interpretation of fourteen points if the entente statesmen will be perfectly frank with us and have no selfish aims of their own which would in any case alienate us from them altogether. . . . England cannot dispense with our friendship in the future and the other Allies cannot without our assistance get their rights as against England. If it is the purpose of the Allied statesmen to nullify my influence force the purpose boldly to the surface and let me speak of it to all the world as I shall.<sup>121</sup>

Secretary of State Robert Lansing was less optimistic, as he foresaw an Anglo-French convergence for the preservation of their respective empires.

I am convinced that the two principal governments, with which we are to deal, have come to a working understanding and will endeavor to frustrate any plan which will defeat their ambitions. We are peculiarly strong because we have no territorial cravings, no selfish interests to serve. If they could succeed in tarring us with that stick, they would gain a deciding advantage. Strategies: tempting US by offering an African colony, a protectorate on Palestine or Armenia, or starting a controversy on Pacific Islands.<sup>122</sup>

Early talks among the Allies confirmed those fears. In a meeting with Colonel House on 30 October 1918, Lloyd George confessed to expecting a peace conference lasting no longer than a week in which the major powers would 'thresh out their differences'. That meant, in the view of the British prime minister, that not only should the existing French and British protectorates receive formal recognition, but also that new ones should be conferred to Paris on Syria and to London on Mesopotamia and Palestine; the United States could instead become 'trustee' for former German East-Africa.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, the French Ambassador Jusserand wrote to Lansing that peace preliminaries, 'to be settled directly amongst the great powers', ought to include the cessation of German colonies and the full recognition of the protectorates of France over Morocco and of England over Egypt.<sup>124</sup>

In fact, Washington and Rome's seeming reluctance to recognize the Egyptian protectorate raised irritation in London, which was strengthened by intelligence reports of the support provided to Egyptian nationalists from more or less official French, Italian and US agents. The Delegates in Paris were suspected of receiving an 'allowance' of 500,000 francs from the Banco di Roma, while Cairo reports signaled the

<sup>121</sup> United States Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1919, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 1 (available online at <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1919Parisv01>, last seen on 15 May 2013), 235, Wilson to Colonel Edward House, undated (most probably 29 October 1919).

<sup>122</sup> FRUS, Paris Conference Papers, vol. 1, 295–296, Lansing to General Tasker H. Bill, 16 December 1918.

<sup>123</sup> FRUS, Paris Conference Papers, vol. 1, 407, House to Wilson, 30 October 1918.

<sup>124</sup> FRUS, Paris Conference Papers, vol. 1, 366–371, Jusserand to Lansing, 29 October 1918.

infiltration of Italian Lieutenants Carmagnano and Sacco in the Abdin Palace protest.<sup>125</sup> Meanwhile, British intelligence never stopped circulating confidential reports on alleged French, Turkish and, sometimes, Bolshevik ‘intrigues’ in the Middle East.<sup>126</sup> Allenby’s informal contacts with Allied diplomats in Cairo seemed to reveal an ambiguous, if not supportive, attitude vis-à-vis the insurgents. Though disassociating himself from the conduct of Carmagnano and Sacco, Rome’s diplomat Negrotto Cambiaso stressed that the substantial Italian colony in Egypt was largely ‘sympathetic’ to the nationalist cause ‘on sentimental and liberal grounds’. The French Minister Lefèvre Pontalis ‘welcomed’ Allenby with ruder tones, which revealed, in the opinion of His Majesty’s high commissioner, France’s ‘immemorial jealousy for England’: the British protectorate, according to the diplomat, had been ‘arrogantly proclaimed’ and, in contrast with French rule in Morocco, lacked any source of legitimacy.<sup>127</sup>

French officials in Egypt had formed their own interpretation of the revolt, which was rather closer to the Egyptian nationalists’ than to that of the British. Again, as in the case of the FO memoranda overviewed in the previous section, their correspondence with Paris represented an auto-referential exercise of imperial self-legitimization. In this case, however, the glorification of the French Empire was achieved indirectly and implicitly, through a contrast with the mistakes and excesses of their British ‘cousins’. A former area of French influence hosting huge francophone communities, Egypt provided obvious grounds for imperial comparison and competition. ‘The indecisions, contradictions and hesitations’ in the handling of the protectorate, Pontalis wrote to the Foreign Minister Stéphen Pichon on 15 March 1919, appeared to ‘confirm the charges of bad faith raised by the indigenus’ and had led to upheaval and repression which both could have been ‘easily avoided’.<sup>128</sup> Consul Benzon from Alexandria was even harsher than Egyptian petitioners in assessing the repressive methods of the British. General Bulfin, who arrogantly crossed the town on a mail coach announced by trumpets to launch an ultimatum to the rioters, raised the indignation of the diplomat:

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<sup>125</sup> TNA, FO 371/3716/65072, Allenby to Curzon, 16 April 1919; TNA, FO 371/3716/68328, Report on Egyptian International propaganda, 5 Mai 1919.

<sup>126</sup> See, for example, TNA, FO 371/3720/142836, Intelligence report on French intrigues in the Middle East, 18 October 1919.

<sup>127</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/61398, Allenby to FO, 22 April 19.

<sup>128</sup> Archives Diplomatiques du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve, Paris (hereafter, AMAE); correspondance politique et commerciale, serie K – Afrique (1919–1940), sous-serie ‘Egypte’ (65CPCOM); volume 12, document no. 59, Lefèvre Pontalis to Pichon, 15 March 1919.

It is doubtful that the terrifying injunctions of General Bulfin will succeed in putting down the movement. It is regrettable that they are in such a contradiction with the Hague Convention! England's most sincere friends cannot dissimulate that some of those proclamations could have been signed by von Bissing. . . . England must understand that violence will not suffice; it has already shown too much ignorance and disregard for this country.<sup>129</sup>

Yet, moving from intelligence theorems and local confidential exchanges to the highest ranks of diplomacy, there was little reason for London's mistrust of the Allies. At the conclusion of the Great War, the reasons of solidarity among the imperial powers overcame by far the temptation of inter-imperial competition. The French government could hardly question British rights on Egypt and advocate the continuation of its own protectorates. Most importantly, the effervescence triggered throughout the colonial world by the combination of the 'Wilsonian bubble', Bolshevik internationalism and indigenous nationalist movements threatened to undermine London's and Paris's stance in the new world order, and required a joint effort to preserve the status quo. However much he seethed with anti-British resentment, Benzon himself was seriously preoccupied with the 'fraternisation of nationalism and Bolshevism', which, he thought, was going on in Egypt: he acknowledged that public criticism of British repression should be avoided.<sup>130</sup> Likewise, the French minister in Tunis wrote to Pichon that the Egyptian events were galvanizing the imagination of the Tunisians and warned his government against the repercussion of 'too large an extension of Arab sovereignty in the East' on French possession in North Africa.<sup>131</sup> In fact, the perceived common threat to the imperial order forced British-French tensions somewhat underground.

As for the US, Wilson had conceived his call for self-determination in quite restrictive geographical and political terms, as we have seen above; equally, if we trace the *New York Times* debates during the peace conference, a relevant portion of American progressive opinion appeared to follow the same line of thought as the president. A leading article of 20 March looked at the Egyptian unrest in its wider context, just as Bampfylde-Fuller had proposed to do in the *Times*. The New York paper, however, went beyond the boundaries of the British Empire and, some 90 years before Manela, saw a direct connection between the Zaghlulist movement and resistance to Japanese occupation in Korea.

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<sup>129</sup> AMAE, 65CPCOM/12/79, Benzon to the Foreign Ministry, 25 March 1919. Moritz von Bissing, died in 1917, was a general of the Prussian—later German—Army. Curiously, his son Friedrich was an Egyptologist.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>131</sup> AMAE, 65CPCOM/12/306, French Residence in Tunis to Foreign Ministry, 31 March 1919.

When many nations are being freed from alien rule of long standing . . . it is natural that national feeling should break out elsewhere. . . . Egypt and Korea may both raise the question of a people's right to self-government, but they raise the even more important question of a people's capacity for self-government. Whether a people has a divine right to misgovern itself is a matter on which opinions will be held according to political theory.

Egypt, the journalist went on, had fallen into British hands precisely because of its incapacity to assure an 'efficient' and 'satisfactory' government for its citizens, while British rule had undoubtedly brought about 'security and prosperity'. The Egyptian nationalist movement, according to the racist-Darwinian mindset revealed by the article, represented a first but insufficient step towards 'maturity': that is, an elite of intellectuals displaying national consciousness, but lacking administrative competence and experience.<sup>132</sup> The killing of British soldiers, the pillaging of villages and the sabotaging of routes by the insurgents, another article stated, were the chief proof that nationalist 'agitators' were incapable of actual organization or control of their constituency.<sup>133</sup>

What is more, the US president would never sacrifice inter-Allied unity to fight for the liberation of colonial peoples. The establishment of a league of nations ranked first in his agenda and, to reach that goal, he was ready to compromise on colonial settlements. Not only did the Allies recognize HMG as speaking on behalf of Egypt at the peace conference, but the *Wafd's* requests of private talks with foreign representatives were also frustrated. Philippe Berthelot, the secretary general of the French Foreign Ministry, assured the FO that 'British and French interests in regard to the Egyptian Nationalist Movement were identical'. Approached by the Delegation members, Ambassador Perretti de la Rocca suggested that they discuss their grievances with the British government.<sup>134</sup> Zaghlul's attempts to be received by Wilson enjoyed even less success: all he obtained was a series of identical messages from Wilson's secretary regretting that the president was too busy. But what frustrated the Egyptians the most was the US public recognition of the protectorate late in April 1919, which was first privately conveyed by the US consul in Cairo to Allenby and then, at the latter's insistence, publicly announced by the State Department.<sup>135</sup>

Hence, a preliminary condition to the peace settlements, which all the Allies more or less tacitly accepted, was that the new order would in no way alter the status

<sup>132</sup> 'Egypt and Korea', *New York Times*, 20 March 1919

<sup>133</sup> 'Rioters in Egypt Sacked 2,000 Houses', *New York Times*, 27 March 1919.

<sup>134</sup> TNA, FO 371/3716/68659, 'The Egyptian Delegation and the French Government', 1 May 1919.

<sup>135</sup> TNA, FO 371/3715/62582, 'US Recognition of Protectorate'. 23 April 1919.

quo in the French and British colonial space. It is not surprising that the Egyptian question is scarcely present in the records of the Paris talks, except for a few provisions included in the Treaty of Versailles. Article 147, in particular, required Germany to recognize the British protectorate.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, after 28 June 1919, when the treaty was signed, Italy found itself in the curious position of compelling Berlin to accept the protectorate even though Rome had not yet done so, which caused enormous irritation in London. In October 1919, Curzon summoned the Italian ambassador, Marquis Guglielmo Imperiali, to protest against the 'unreasonable delay' in Rome's recognition of the protectorate and presented the diplomat with the veiled threat of withdrawing the offer of the British East African territories of Jubaland and Kysmayo to Italy, as promised during WWI. As a response, Imperiali candidly pointed out that, while these latter concessions had been formally agreed on, no explicit wartime commitment had been made by Rome on Egypt.<sup>137</sup>

Rather than reflecting any sympathy with the Egyptian cause, however, Italy's dilatory strategy was a device to negotiate further territorial or economic gains from the British Empire, which seems evident when we look at the Italian press of the time. Mario Appellius, a journalist-businessman-adventurer and an Africa correspondent for various papers, wrote in *Epoca* that recognition of the British protectorate would be a 'most impolitic' move given the extent of Italy's financial and economic interests in Egypt. The same argument was advanced by Aldo Cassuto in Rome's *Il Messaggero*. 'At any cost', he wrote in November 1919, 'the Italian government must prevent any recurrence of what has taken place in Tunisia, Algeria and Syria, where all traces of Italian civilizing influence have been stamped out'. The tone of the article, a British diplomat commented, was 'imbued with the fear, so perpetually expressed in the press of the country, that the government [might] give without driving a hard bargain'.<sup>138</sup>

Cambiaso prepared a memorandum for his native Foreign Ministry with a series of conditions for Italy's consent to the British protectorate, including the granting of commercial privileges, the preservation of Italian officials in the Egyptian public administration and courts, the tutelage of Italian schools and banks and the protection of Catholic religious orders.<sup>139</sup> However, again, diplomatic pressure and soft threats could

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<sup>136</sup> The Versailles Treaty can be consulted online at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/versailles\\_menu.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/versailles_menu.asp) (last seen on 15 May 2013).

<sup>137</sup> TNA, FO 371/3720/141131, Curzon to Sir R. Rodd, 14 October 1919.

<sup>138</sup> TNA, FO 371/3721/158747, Note on Italian press, 29 November 1919.

<sup>139</sup> Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome (hereafter, ASDMAE); Archivio della Conferenza della Pace, 1918–22 (Pace); busta 75, posizione 28-1 ('Egitto'), cartella 8; annex to

be attempted as long as they did not compromise the necessary inter-imperial solidarity. ‘The recognition of the British protectorate’, Imperiali wrote to Foreign Ministry Tommaso Tittoni, ‘appears a short- or long-dated bill, which, in any case, we shall settle soon or later’.<sup>140</sup> And Italian recognition did eventually come under similar terms to Washington’s: Rome accepted London’s rule in Egypt, expressing the ‘trust’ that it would result in ‘a government worthy of the English liberal tradition and justly respectful of the moral and material interests’ of the Italian residents.<sup>141</sup>

The Paris mission worked as a sort of amplifier of the Egyptian voice, and the British press *in primis* started paying more attention to it. While the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* usually limited themselves to publishing telegraphic statements by Zaghlul or other nationalist leaders, the Labour press granted wider space to *Wafd*-authored letters and commentaries. Paradoxically, by mid-1919, the apex of the Egyptians’ visibility in the ‘Western’ world coincided with the disappearance of their trust in the Allies. After the conclusion of the Versailles Treaty, bitterness and resentment dominated their writings, as exemplified by an article of Mahmud Pasha for the *Daily Herald* of 7 June 1919.

[I]t was felt that this war could never end in the humiliation of this country or in imposing a foreign domination against the will of the people. . . . Towards the end of the war signs were not warning that the Protectorate was not only to be permanent, but that the Egyptian people, under the Protectorate, were to be treated as a mere negligible quantity in the management of their own affairs.<sup>142</sup>

Two days later, the *Wafd* sent a ‘Memorandum on British Policy in Egypt’ to Georges Clemenceau in his capacity as president of the peace conference. In the document, among the most rhetorically refined and inspired produced by the Delegation, the petitioners complained that the peacemakers seemed to ‘content themselves’ with considering the British protectorate a legal and definitive act. The myth of Woodrow Wilson was fading into the background, and the piece was pervaded by a disillusioned and rancorous tone. The Delegates appeared almost to blame themselves for having fallen for the Wilsonian illusion and having believed that the conduct of European powers might deviate from tradition.

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document no. 23448, Negrotto Cambiaso’s memorandum on the recognition of the British protectorate, undated.

<sup>140</sup> ASDMAE, Pace, 75/28-1/9/1208, Imperiali to Tittoni, 26 August 1919.

<sup>141</sup> ASDMAE, Pace, 75/28-1/8/3546 *bis*, Vito Catastini (Ministry of Colonies) to the Italian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, 5 december 1919.

<sup>142</sup> Mahmud Pasha, ‘The Egyptian Revolution’, *Daily Herald*, 7 July 1919.

Were not there enough reasons to doubt of justice in front of the diplomatic combinations of statesmen who rein the Great Powers, and who, by a mutual exchange of complaisance, use to split among themselves the spoils of the weaker, to detriment of justice and right?

The document also revealed the deterioration of any ties of trust and deference that had previously linked Egyptian moderate reformers with the British administration.

The actions of the English in Egypt during the occupation and, most of all, during the war and after the armistice, have created such a deep abyss between them and us that it has become radically impossible that the Egyptians may any longer accept to be associated with the English, even admitting, absurdly, that they previously approved foreign domination.

The petitioners went on to list again all the alleged atrocities by British troops. However, when stating their regret for charging 'the sons of the greatest civilized nation' with the 'revenges inflicted in the name of the great English democracy', the Egyptian nationalists took a desperate but highly symbolic step in their international communicative campaign. Having been disappointed by the self-interested and ungrateful Allied governments, they now planned to apply pressure on them by appealing directly to their home constituencies and public opinions in a vain attempt to affect the various national debates on the ratification of the Versailles Treaty.<sup>143</sup>

Thus, the *Wafd* appropriated a typical Wilsonian argument—the separation between governors and public opinion, and the natural inclination of the latter towards the peaceful coexistence of all peoples—and tried to turn it against the Allies. Moreover, they paralleled Woodrow Wilson's initiative to overcome the hostility of the US Senate to the peace settlements. The harsh fight between internationalists and isolationists across the Democratic and Republican Parties impeded the ratification of the Versailles Treaty, so, in September 1919, the US President embarked on an extensive speaking tour—which eventually caused him to have a permanently invalidating apoplectic stroke—throughout the country to raise popular support for the Paris settlements. He traveled in particular across the South and the Midwest, the constituencies of the senators who most strenuously opposed the treaty, in an ambitious effort to rally local electorates to his program.<sup>144</sup>

The Egyptian affair was mainly mentioned in American talks as part of the campaign of the so-called 'Irreconcilables' for the rejection of the peace agreements.

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<sup>143</sup> TNA, FO 371/3718/100448, Egyptian Delegation to Clemenceau, 9 July 1919.

<sup>144</sup> John Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

‘Outlandish examples of an incredibly provincial American political culture’, in the words of Dutch historian Schulte Nordholt, these dozen senators—mostly Midwestern Republicans—argued that participation in the forthcoming League of Nations would entangle Washington in European power politics, thus contradicting an axiom of American diplomatic tradition.<sup>145</sup> Former President William Taft dismissed the ‘bitter-enders’—another nickname of the Irreconcilables—as ‘barking critics’; their leader, William Borah from Idaho, was used, in Taft’s view, to annoying the Senate with his ‘ponderous Websterian language’. Indeed, he gave proof of his oratorical ability when he addressed the Egyptian question on 19 August 1919. The North African country, Borah pointed out, was ‘in rebellion and only held down by . . . bayonet, bloodshed and carnage’. Engaging in a ‘collective security system’ such as the one proposed in Paris would require the United States to employ its armed force to repress unrest around the world and to back ‘colonial misrule’, like Britain’s in Egypt or Japan’s in Korea. The cause of Egyptian independence thus provoked a typical argument of American exceptionalism: the claim of US moral superiority vis-à-vis the ‘Old World’ and of its proud extraneousness to the practices and goals of European imperialism.<sup>146</sup>

But Borah’s interest in Egypt was quite marginal—in some passages of his speeches, he seemed to imply that Egypt was Europe or spoke of the Balkans and the Middle East interchangeably—and instrumental to his Anglophobic rhetoric. Frank Welsh and Joseph W. Folk, two progressive Democratic lawyers, were the actual liaisons between the *Wafd* and the US Senate. The former led the Irish American delegation in Paris, while the latter was the ex-governor of Missouri and a talked-about potential presidential nominee in 1908. In the summer of 1919, Folk circulated among the senators a memorandum from the Egyptian nationalists which, besides listing a series of British misdeeds bombastically denounced by Borah, presented the ratification of the Versailles Treaty as a complete frustration of the American war efforts, for it implied an approval of the status quo in the colonial world.

Can England retain Egypt and the respect of mankind in this era of the rights of men and of nations? What title can England show to Egypt? Neither discovery, purchase nor lawful conquest, but occupation to collect debts with solemn promises to the Egyptians and to the world to withdraw after a temporary occupation. Now that war is

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<sup>145</sup> J. W. Schulte Nordholt, *Woodrow Wilson: A Life for World Peace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 378. [Original edition: *Woodrow Wilson: Een leven voor de wereldvrede* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff Informatief, 1990)]. For a more ‘moderate’ assessment of the Irreconcilables, see Ralph A. Stone, *The Irreconcilables: The Fight against the League of Nations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970).

<sup>146</sup> Debate in the Senate of the United States, 19 August 1919.



over and a League of Nations is to be established and government has to be based upon the consent of the governed, shall the title of seizing nations to their plunder be recognized? If so, the war will have failed of its highest purpose and victory will have been robbed of her most precious jewel.

At that time, Folk was, according to Edward Grey, the British Ambassador in Washington, 'a failed politician, a radical theorist' and 'a disappointed man' who did not 'enjoy any consideration'.<sup>147</sup> Yet, in August 1919, the lawyer from St. Louis managed to obtain a hearing before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate. Foreigners having no right to be heard, Folk qualified himself as 'counsel appointed by the Egyptian Delegation' and, therefore, claimed to speak on behalf of all the Egyptians:

They ask that in the name of self-determination you do not sanction to make . . . Egypt a pendant to Britain's red girdle of the globe. . . . This protectorate is the same character of protectorate that a highwayman would proclaim over your pocketbook when he should hold a pistol at your head and demand that you deliver over your valuables.

Folk went on by stressing the incompatibility of the unlawful British seizure of Egypt with the alleged triumph of international law and democratic rule that the forthcoming League of Nations was supposed to embody. At this point, he engaged in an ironic exchange with Senator Hiram Johnson of California, another Irreconcilable, which is worthy of full reproduction:

FOLK: How can occupation still be justified under the League of Nations?

JOHNSON: What League of Nations is that you speak of?

FOLK: I am speaking which is supposed to be based upon the ideal [of the government by consent].

JOHNSON: I think it is conceded now that it is not based upon any such ideal.<sup>148</sup>

The sarcasm of Folk's interlocutor pointed out the paradox of Wilsonian diplomacy after his repeated yielding to London and Paris's claims, as the League of Nations appeared mainly to be an international and institutional guarantor of European imperial expansion. What the American president was now fighting for, the Irreconcilables maintained, was the same against which he had fought the war. Increasing 'objections', according to the *Washington Post*, were 'finding voice in the

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<sup>147</sup> TNA, FO 371/3719/125377, Grey to FO, 21 August 1919.

<sup>148</sup> Minutes of the hearing of Joseph W. Folk before the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US Senate, 25 August 1919.

US against the snuffing out of the principle of self determination of well-defined nationalities', and—however controversial the application of such a category to Egypt might be—the Egyptians Delegates found a well disposed environment in this opinion movement.<sup>149</sup> On 16 October 1919, Mahmud Pasha, the *Wafd's* 'ambassador' to the English-speaking world, arrived in Washington to meet Folk. In the same days, the Democratic Senator Robert Owen introduced an 'interpretative resolution' of the Versailles Treaty, stating that article 147 implied Germany's recognition of the Egyptian protectorate was 'merely a means through which the nominal suzerainty of Turkey over Egypt shall be transformed to the Egyptian people'. However, Johnson's reply to Folk also pointed out the unrealistic and badly-timed character of the crusade that the *Wafd* was conducting in the US via its American sympathizers: as remarked by Henry Cabot Lodge, the Republican chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, there was no way a rejection of the Versailles Treaty could affect Washington's attitude towards Egypt since the US had already recognized the protectorate in April.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, although the final outcome of the Treaty Fight was as the Egyptian nationalists wished, it is hard to argue that their mobilization played any actual role in the US Senate's vote against the peace agreements, nor did that rejection imply an American commitment to the Egyptian cause.<sup>151</sup> As Frank Ninkovich has put it, World War I 'was the point in time when new and more enduring forms of anti-imperialism became part of the ideological fabric of American foreign policy'. Yet, both Borah's and Folk's pro-Egyptian arguments prove the self-referential nature of that anti-imperialism: it was a mirror image of American nationalism in its different declinations rather than an interventionist agenda to change the world. After Wilson's inglorious disappearance from the political scene, and the failure of his 'progressive' and 'interventionist' foreign policy agenda, his Republican successors found it more consistent with national interest and more in keeping with the mood of domestic opinion to reorient American foreign policy towards a less costly and ambitious 'geo-political

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<sup>149</sup> TNA, FO 371/3720/153291, Excerpt from *The Washington Post*, 16 October 1919.

<sup>150</sup> Folk's audience on behalf of the Egyptian nationalists was immediately welcomed by the *Wafd* as implying that the Senate recognized Egypt as a sovereign state. This was the content of a telegram that Zaghlul addressed to his fellows in Cairo on 30 August, which caused great excitement across Egypt and forced the US consul into a public denial (TNA, FO 371/3719/128246).

<sup>151</sup> The final vote of the US Senate on the Treaty of Versailles, marking its definitive rejection, took place in March 1920.

anti-imperialism', to keep borrowing from Ninkovich: in other words, a combination of open-door diplomacy and a 'live and-let-live advocacy of cultural pluralism'.<sup>152</sup>

It is precisely to this mood that the Egyptian nationalists turned when presenting their claims as a fulfillment of the rationale behind the US entry into WWI. Leaving aside the actual weight of the Egyptian question in the Treaty Fight, what deserves attention in the Atlantic journey of the *Wafd* is the 'Americanization' of their discourses. Similarly, when turning to the French public, they rearticulated their rhetoric appropriately. In an appeal to the Paris parliament against article 147, the *Wafd* defined Egypt as 'the beloved daughter of France in the East'. With remarkable rhetorical contortions, Cairo's independence was portrayed as the preservation of the 'moral superiority' which France had gained and exerted over Egypt for the last century. Self-rule, in other words, was, according to the petitioners, the ultimate accomplishment of the values that the French had inculcated in Egypt via their language, schools and laws before the English 'tyrants' came.<sup>153</sup> In the same weeks, a lawyer named Vasy Bouchoff Amed addressed Paris's *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* on behalf of the *Wafd* to explain that the Covenant of the League of Nations contained the same 'principles of justice' professed by the French Revolution, to which the Egyptians appealed.<sup>154</sup> Hence, Wilson and the alleged new era of the international politics lost relevance, in the particular context of the *Wafd*'s mobilization, as the asserted sources of inspiration and legitimization of Egyptian claims, fusing with—if not vanishing behind—more properly French heroes and models.

Actually, if socialist circles were best disposed towards the voice of Cairo, their anti-imperialism was, again, subject to a series of cultural and ideological restraints and contradictions with which the *Wafd* had to cope in order to gain visibility in the papers of the French Left. As Jean-Pierre Biondi has highlighted, until World War II the SFIO failed to articulate a proper anti-imperialist doctrine. Whether drawing from the 'humanist' tradition of the *enciclopédistes*, from Marxist theory or from pacifism, French socialists often criticized the excesses and 'deviations' of imperialism (slavery, the exploitation of indigenous workers and farmers and inter-imperial wars), but did not consider empire as such necessarily bad. On the contrary, caught in an abstract

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<sup>152</sup> Frank Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 214–236.

<sup>153</sup> TNA, FO 371/3718/121899, appeal by the Egyptian Delegation to the French Parliament, 31 July 1919.

<sup>154</sup> AMAE, 65CPCOM/14/4615, Home Security Department of the Interior Ministry to the Foreign Ministry, 13 December 1919.

universalist and assimilationist mindset, the majority of the SFIO leaders believed in the possibility of a *mission civilisatrice* to be carried out through the French Empire. Public talks on empire in early twentieth-century France, Biondi has written, resembled rather ‘a monologue of paternalism’:

The ‘master’ claimed the right to assess the happiness and progress of the ‘slave’ or the ‘pupil’. . . . Both the Right and the dogmatic and assimilationist Left incurred in the same . . . general misunderstanding, since everyone reasoned with reference to an exclusive model (the metropolis) and to a reductive dialectic (civilization-vs.-barbarianism).<sup>155</sup>

The socialists in particular envisioned and theorized empire as a venue of ‘temperate reformism’ or ‘colonial socialism’ to be applied on ‘backward’ and ‘disorganized’ peoples.<sup>156</sup> How racist-minded the French Left was at the end of the Great War can be guessed from an article published in *Le Populaire* in August 1919. The author, appearing under the pseudonym of Phedon, wanted to enlighten his fellow *comrades* about the ‘things of Islam’. ‘The fact that the peoples of Anterior Asia and many more’ were ‘at a stage of evolution that has been overcome elsewhere’, he explained, did not mean that they could be neglected. However marginal capitalism was in Muslim societies, and although religious ties covered class struggle, he argued, ‘the spirit of criticism and of revolt’, ‘the very basis of contemporary civilization’, was rising in the ‘East’.<sup>157</sup>

To be honest, the Egyptian crisis coincided with a particularly tormented phase of the socialist movement in France, as well as elsewhere in Europe. After the outbreak of the Great War, the SFIO had suffered a split between the interventionist majority and the neutralist opposition, and the circulation of two leading socialist newspapers—*L’Humanité* and *Le Populaire*—was the legacy of that trauma, with the latter paper voicing the *socialistes minoritaires*.

In 1918, the SFIO took part in the Inter-Allied Socialist Conference of London, stating that an exchange of colonies among the victors or the return of colonies to pre-war possessors would not impede peace. Yet, at the end of the hostilities, the colonial question burst into the internal frictions of the SFIO, though only to a relatively marginal extent, and worked to further undermine its unity. At the Congress of Tours of 1920, three motions confronted each other. The *Comité de Résistance Socialiste*, headed

<sup>155</sup> Jean-Pierre Biondi, *Les anticolonialistes (1881–1962)* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1962), 11–20.

<sup>156</sup> Claude Liauzu, *Histoire de l’anticolonialisme en France: Du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007).

<sup>157</sup> Phedon, ‘Choses d’Islam’, *Le Populaire*, 3 August 1919.

by Leon Blum, deplored the oppression of peoples in any form, but denied that the socialists should care about nationalist movements, which represented an artificial fractionalization of the proletariat across the world. Jean Longuet and his motion endorsed the principle of national self-determination, but approved only gradual reforms and non-violent means for the emancipation of colonial peoples. On the contrary, Cohin, Fossard, Vaillant-Couturier and others blessed liberation movements in all forms, including armed resistance and war. The third position, also backed by most delegates from Indochina and North Africa, won the majority, but left the party to join the Third International, which, with the Petrograd and Baku Congresses of 1920, launched a massive appeal to colonial peoples to join the anti-capitalist struggle of the Russian and European proletariats. The other two motions converged under the leadership of Blum; *de facto*, the axis of the SFIO, or what remained of it, moved rightwards.<sup>158</sup>

The Paris mission of the *Wafd* occurred in the fluid gap between the conclusion of WWI and the Tours 'secession'. Egyptian nationalists developed a systematic connection with the papers of the Left, which the French authorities were aware of and constantly monitored.<sup>159</sup> Ahmed Lufti Al-Sayyid became a familiar name to both *L'Humanité's* and *Le Populaire's* readers, and his 'flirting' with the SFIO was marked by more than one paradox. Curiously, the Egyptian politician and other French journalists writing on Egypt in the two papers advocated the same principle, Cairo's independence from London, but on different grounds. Emile Goude, a socialist MP and a champion of the Egyptian cause in the Chamber of Deputies, praised the Egyptians for being, 'among all the Oriental peoples, the most determined to . . . open the doors of their country to the Europeans'. As a result, the politician went on, they had learned at school 'our ideas of method, progress, freedom and independence'.<sup>160</sup>

Fortunately for Zaghlul and his associates, most socialist commentators recognized that Egypt had already benefited from the gifts of civilization dispensed by European culture (in particular during the period of French influence) and was thus ready for emancipation. Many editorials, especially in the *Populaire*—directed by Jean Longuet—stressed both the maturity of national consciousness in Egypt and, as a consequence, the eminently national character of the rising. If presented with the

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<sup>158</sup> Biondi, 103–119.

<sup>159</sup> For example, the AMAE files contain an undated reproduction of a letter that President Lévy-Bruhl of the *Société des Amis de Jaures* wrote to thank Zaghlul for a donation of 10,000 francs via *L'Humanité*. (AMAE, 65CPCOM/14, p. 26).

<sup>160</sup> Emille Goude, 'L'Égypte resuscitée', *L'Humanité*, 30 August 1919.

following excerpt from a piece by J. M. Sabry, the average reader would hardly guess that it comes from a socialist paper, since the two adjectives chiefly associated with the Egyptian Revolution are neither ‘popular’ nor ‘proletarian’, but rather ‘liberal’ and ‘national’.

The Egyptian Revolution—we will know it soon or later—is certainly one of the best in history. This revolution is at the same time national and liberal. . . It is national because it is backed by the entire nation, without distinction of religion, age, sex and race. . . . The movement is equally liberal because the nation wants to establish a solid government on a constitutional basis. The democratic idea, under its most recent form, has matured throughout all Egypt.<sup>161</sup>

Al-Sayyid, by contrast, carefully pondered any reference to the national question, maybe aware that its relevance and compatibility with proletarian revolution was a disputed issue within the SFIO; instead, he portrayed the rising as simultaneously pursuing the liberation of the nation from colonial oppression and the peasants from economic exploitation.

At the moment in which our insurrection turns into a revolution, it is indispensable that the world be persuaded that it has neither a religious nor a xenophobic character. It is a purely political and economic revolution. It aims at freeing us from English domination. The fellah is dreadfully exploited; the worker is shamefully enslaved; the nation as a whole is cynically oppressed. . . . It is against English tyranny, against this situation that our revolution is directed. We will never repeat our war cry enough: “Free at home, hospitable to all!”<sup>162</sup>

In another piece written for *L’Humanité*, al-Sayyid displayed a solid command of Marxist economic theory and applied it to the Egyptian case to explain how the British had reshaped indigenous agriculture to secure higher profits and lower costs for their cotton companies and keep the fellaheen in a perennial state of economic subjugation. The author concluded by launching a subscription campaign to the forthcoming SEIO—*Section Égyptienne de l’Internationale Ouvrière*.<sup>163</sup>

What makes these articles singular is the sharp contrast between their contents and the background of their author. A renewed liberal intellectual and the president of Cairo’s National Library, al-Sayyid had been the first translator of the works of John Stuart Mill into Arabic—hence, not exactly a politician of Marxist leanings. Thus, a bizarre inversion of discourses and arguments took place between al-Sayyid and his

<sup>161</sup> J. M. Sabry, ‘La Revolution d’Égypte’, *Le Populaire*, 24 April 1919.

<sup>162</sup> Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid, ‘Le vrai caractère de la Revolution égyptienne’, *Le populaire*, 7 Mai 1919.

<sup>163</sup> Ahmed Lufti al-Sayyid, ‘Politique anglaise et misère du fellah’, *L’Humanité*, 1 June 1919.

SFIO supporters, with the former looking more orthodox socialist than the latter. The Egyptian intellectual spoke a 'plain' and standard Marxist language in order to appeal to an average socialist readership in indisputable terms; by contrast, the socialist journalists who most sternly championed Cairo's independence were those who sought to integrate anti-colonial nationalism into the SFIO's platform. The paradox of an Egyptian nationalist fascinated by English liberalism writing for a public of French socialists could well seem an omen of the lasting consequences of the 'Wilsonian Moment' as Manela depicts them: by alienating the sympathy of anti-colonial leaders after seducing them with self-determination, Wilson pushed them into the orbit of his radical counterpart—Lenin's revolutionary internationalism. However, I would rather take the articles of al-Sayyid as another example of the political 'wisdom', communicative skills and flexibility of the Egyptian nationalists.

However 'efficient' the campaigns of the Egyptians were, there were no real opportunities for them to undermine French solidarity with the British Empire, especially since the League Fight in Washington allowed little hope for significant US involvement in the new world order. This appears evident if we turn our review of the press rightwards. Jules Sauerwein, the foreign affairs expert of the conservative *Le Matin*, wrote in October 1919:

Prudence requires us to rely only upon the three powers which have ratified [the treaty], that is, France, Italy and Great Britain. We can no longer wait for America. . . . The nationalist movement has turned powerful and redoubtable in the Ottoman Empire. . . . An absolute union of France and Britain is indispensable unless we want to waste the fruits of our victory.<sup>164</sup>

Like *Le Figaro*, another leading newspaper of the Right, the *Matin* did not devote much attention to the Egyptian crisis, and often limited itself to telegraphic summaries of the events. The proximity of the paper to Paris's 'official' mind, at its highest levels, can be inferred from the fact that, a few weeks before Sauerwein's piece, the President of the Republic, the liberal conservative Raymond Poincaré, had written to the paper in similar terms on the occasion of the anniversary of the Battle of the Marne. 'While darkness is enshrouding the world', he emphatically asked, 'how could the two free peoples on the cutting edge of civilization part ways?'<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Jules Sauerwein, 'L'union avec la France doit être renforcée devant les difficultés très graves qui vont surgir en Orient', *Le Matin*, 31 October 1919.

<sup>165</sup> Raymond Poincaré, 'L'anniversaire de la Marne', *Le Matin*, 5 September 1919.

Appeals against article 147 were sent both to the British and Italian parliaments, enjoying everywhere poor success. Though freed from Maltese captivity, the leaders of the *Wafd* underwent a further exile, that from official international recognition. The Paris mission gratified Zaghlul and his movement with a few months of international visibility, an achievement which they consciously and wisely pursued, but had no chance of affecting the peace terms, although the Egyptian cause found sympathizers and advocates across the US and Europe. The window of opportunity for the demise of empire that the Egyptians, together with other colonial peoples, had envisioned in Wilson's proclamations had already closed when the *Wafd* launched its international tour against the Versailles Treaty. What is more, that window was probably much narrower than hoped in Cairo. The combination of Wilson's restrictive understanding of the principle of self-determination with the imperial interests of his Allies resulted in the deliberated exclusion of the pre-war French, British, Italian and Japanese colonial space from the Paris settlements.

Regardless of the fate of the Versailles Treaty, the international 'consecration' of British rule in Egypt had previously been sanctioned by Paris's and, most importantly, Washington's recognition of the protectorate, with Italian hesitations making no real difference for the Egyptians. Well before the eventual rejection of the peace treaty by the Senate, the US decided to disengage itself from the Middle Eastern theater. By early 1919 it was clear among the Allies that the Egyptian question ought to remain an exclusively British affair, as it had been since 1882. Likewise, it was very clear, in London as well as in Paris and Rome, that major imperial powers had no better alternative than backing and 'covering' each other in front of the combined local and international threats to the colonial order in the 'East'.

#### EPILOGUE: COMING TO TERMS WITH THE EVIL

'British supremacy exists; British supremacy is going to be maintained, and let nobody either in Egypt or out of Egypt make any mistake upon that cardinal principle of His Majesty's Government', Arthur Balfour proudly proclaimed to the House of Commons on 30 October 1919.<sup>166</sup> The following month, Lord Curzon explained to the Lords that the formula of protectorate offered 'a wide latitude of opportunity' to give 'free scope to the political aspirations and self-governing capacities of the Egyptian people'.

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<sup>166</sup> Balfour's speech in the House of Commons, 30 October 1919.



Quite apart from the fact that Egypt, if left to stand alone, could neither protect her frontiers against external aggression nor guarantee a strong and impartial government at home, her geographical position at the gate of Palestine [and] at the doorway to Africa, and on the high road to India renders it impossible that the British Empire, with any regard to its own security and connections, should wash its hands of responsibility for Egypt. Egypt is, of course, primarily an Egyptian interest; the good government and the prosperity and happiness of her people are the first concern; but it is also a British interest of capital importance; and I expect there are few who would deny that it is also a world interest; and that the world interest is served by leaving Egypt under the aegis of a great civilization.<sup>167</sup>

Curzon continued to portray the past, present and future of Egypt as a sacred alliance between British and native interests gaining the support of 'responsible' Egyptians. In fact, if the chief effort by the *Wafd* had been to bring about a belt of diplomatic pressure and international public attention around London, the British response was to 'de-internationalize' the Egyptian affair and to seek its solution along the HMG-'moderate Egyptians' axis. Zaghlul replied to Curzon's speech with a letter making it clear that, after the events of 1919, the idyllic picture produced by the British to appease their consciences and to defend their international reputation as enlightened colonial administrators no longer corresponded to reality.

[T]his appeal of yours to the moderates will secure no response in Egypt, for the simple reason that a moderate section of the people according to the British interpretation of it, or in other words, those who would tolerate foreign rule, are undoubtedly non-existent.<sup>168</sup>

Indeed, if the *Wafd's* mission to Paris was a bitter awakening for Egyptian nationalists, the Milner mission, which, in December 1919, was welcomed with 'a storm of protest and disapprobation by the native public' and with 'a repertory of vituperando and innuendo by the vernacular press', marked the realization that most British assumptions about Egypt had to be reconsidered.<sup>169</sup> The report that Milner handed in a year later contained a long list of mistakes, underestimates and inconsistencies that had undermined HMG's handling of Egypt since the occupation.

<sup>167</sup> Curzon's speech in the House of Lords, 25 November 1919.

<sup>168</sup> TNA, FO 371/3721/160854, Zaghlul to Curzon, 9 December 1919. The text was reproduced in many international newspapers (see, for example, Sa'd Zaghlul Pasha, 'An Answer to Lord Curzon', Paris edition of *The Chicago Tribune*, 14 December 1919).

<sup>169</sup> TNA, FO 371/4982/15962, Report of the Milner mission, 22 December 1920. The members of the Mission included, besides Secretary for Colonies Alfred Milner, Cecil Hurst and Rennel Rodd of the Foreign Office, the Liberal journalist John Alfred Spender and two high-ranking army officers (General John Maxwell and Brigadier-General Owen Thomas: the latter had also been a Labour MP since 1918).

[A] settlement was becoming more and more urgent, the more widely the influence of our presence in Egypt and the introduction of Western methods made themselves be felt. With the removal of that fear of oppression which in old days had made Egyptians acquiescent and submissive, new impulses and ambitions were inevitably aroused. The Egyptians of 1920, whether townsmen or peasants, are different people from those of 1910, and very different indeed from the Egyptians of 1890. We have never honestly faced the Egyptian problem, and our neglect to do so is in a measure responsible for the present situation.<sup>170</sup>

Thus, although a ‘Western’ civilizing mission through the British Empire remained the alleged rationale and interpretative key to London’s appropriation of Egypt, HMG was blamed for failing to fully cope with the ultimate consequences of the ‘gifts of civilization’. While an elite of freedom-educated Egyptians, ‘capable of taking an intelligent interest in public affairs’, had emerged under British aegis, the Milner report reasoned, indigenous bureaucrats had systematically been excluded from the highest ranks of the administration. Almost prefiguring Hans Kohn’s writings, the members of the mission distinguished between a positive nationalism (that of civic consciousness and public engagement introduced to Egypt via ‘Western’ influence) and a negative one: the patriotism of anti-Christian religious fanaticism and xenophobia, a ‘more fundamental sentiment’ throughout ‘the East’. ‘The evolution of a sane and moderate Nationalist spirit’ among educated Egyptians, the report regretted, should ‘have been regarded with sympathy and interest’.<sup>171</sup>

What was even worse, the report pointed out, was that Britain had done nothing to ‘legalise her own position’: London’s agent and consul-general (later labeled high commissioner) had gradually become ‘the real arbiter of the country’, while ‘provisional and extemporized expedients’ had ‘broadened into established institutions’: ‘With her continuous insistence on the Protectorate’, the mission members concluded, ‘Great Britain had definitely departed from her original policy and, in fact, broken her word’.

Given that framework, the unpredictable or unavoidable ‘circumstances’ of the Great War exacerbated an already flammable situation, as the Wilsonian call for self-determination ‘appeared to give international sanction to sentiments which had long been maturing among the educated classes’. Moreover, as a consequence of confiscations and forced recruitment into labor corps, discontent also spread among the *fellaheen*. The refusal to hear Rushdi Pasha in London and the arrest and deportation of Zaghlul, both acknowledged as silly mistakes, simply gave the final impulse to the

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibidem*. Among Hans Kohn’s most influential works, *A History of Nationalism in the East* appeared in 1929.

unrest. Reversing another pillar of HMG's public rhetoric up to that moment, not only did the report recognize Zaghlul's claims to national representativeness, it also ascribed the *Wafd* to the family of moderate nationalism rather than to extremist circles.

The violence, unfairness and unreason of the more extreme and noisy section [of the Egyptians] have given to the whole movement an appearance of intransigence which, in our opinion, is not essential or necessarily enduring. The remarkable organisation known as the *Wafd* . . . which, under the leadership of Zaghlul Pasha, has established . . . so complete an ascendancy over the Egyptian public, and claims, not without many credentials, to speak in the name of 'the nation', does not consist mainly of extreme men. Its members from the ranks of the old *Hisb el Umma*, which . . . stood for gradual and constitutional progress.<sup>172</sup>

The Milner report, especially its first sections dealing with the long-term causes of the revolt, represents the most lucid and articulate assessment of the Egyptian crisis produced by the British establishment. Compared, for example, to the FO memoranda of early 1919, it reveals a significant rift in imperial self-consciousness. In Milner's account, external evils and disturbing agents—Wilson, religious fanatics, etc.—played a relatively marginal role compared to British inconsistencies, shortsightedness and dilatory strategy. Likewise, wartime contingences were attributed a minor weight as explanatory factors compared to the structural features of British occupation. London's imperial expansion continued to be portrayed, in general terms, as benevolent, progressive and necessary for both British interests and the moral and political advancement of 'backward' areas of the world. The concrete carrying out of that civilizing mission in Egypt, however, was depicted as vitiated by fundamental faults, since Milner and his colleagues appeared to question the lawfulness not only of the protectorate, but also of the khedivate. The situation of Egypt, according to the report, had 'always remained an abnormal one since the British Occupation in 1882'—the distance between these words and McIlwraith's justification of the protectorate is evident.<sup>173</sup>

Where did this critical self-assessment come from? Arguably, a partial *mea culpa* on Egypt was a response to pressure from domestic public opinion, since, as we have seen above, both the leading independent newspapers in Britain had interpreted the Egyptian troubles as a result of the 'un-Britishness' of HMG's policy and had called for liberal reforms in Cairo. The existence of a direct line of communication between the Milner mission and the press is suggested by the publication, especially in the *Times*, of

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<sup>172</sup> Milner mission's report.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibidem*.

regular updates about the enquiry (whose proceedings were supposed to remain confidential) and is confirmed by the honeymoon between Milner and the main papers I will shortly deal with. Furthermore, crucial for the work of the mission was a first-hand survey of native ‘moderate opinion’—most of the enquiry was conducted through interviews with Egyptian notables. Although Zaghlul was already an internationally popular figure when Milner and his colleagues landed in Egypt, it was only after testing the indigenous *milieu* that the mission members resolved to deal with the *Wafd* as an institutional counter-part. In a word, it was mainly from the intra-imperial axis that the impetus for a British-Egyptian understanding originated: the international campaign of the *Wafd* remaining a parallel influential story.

Actually, the Milner report oscillated as to what status and weight the Delegation should be given.<sup>174</sup> However, what is certain is that, when the mission returned from Egypt, its members received Zaghlul and his associates in London for consultation—another major reversal of British policy. The starting point of the negotiations was the acknowledgment that Egypt represented a special case to be dealt with differently from the rest of the British Empire. On the one hand, the strategic relevance of that country in the overall network of imperial communications and regional geopolitics made it imperative for the British to maintain their influence there; on the other, the mission realized that:

Egyptians do not regard their country as a British Dominion or themselves as British subjects. This wholly differentiates the problem of constitutional development in Egypt from the same problem in, . . . for instance, British India. We talk of such countries as gradually attaining the status of nationhood. The Egyptians claim that they already have this status. No settlement of the future of Egypt which does not recognize this claim is ever likely to be accepted by—it can only be imposed on—the Egyptian people.<sup>175</sup>

The first tranche of interviews with the Delegation took place in the summer of 1920. By mid-August, the two parties reached a compromise between the doctrine of ‘special relations’ postulated by Milner and the nationalists’ claims: Egyptian independence would be sanctioned through a bilateral treaty, subject to ‘a few, but essential safeguards’ of British and foreign interests. Egypt would be entitled to diplomatic representation abroad, but would undertake not to sign anti-UK alliances

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibidem*. While the excerpt quoted above attributed nationwide representativeness to the *Wafd*, in another passage of the report the mission members stated that what the Delegates called ‘mandate’ was rather ‘their own programme’, ‘a policy of their own creation . . . which the Egyptian public had simply accepted from them’.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibidem*.

with other powers. London's financial advisers would remain in Cairo to secure the solvency of Egyptian debts, while British judges would assume jurisdiction over the foreigners instead of mixed and consular courts.<sup>176</sup> Finally, Britain would retain a military force to safeguard imperial communications.

According to Milner's report, labels were the only real matter of contention between the Delegation and the mission members.

[W]hile in the course of our discussion we were often very near to agreement on points of substance, it was always difficult to clothe such agreement in ways which did not conflict with formulae to which the Egyptians felt themselves committed. . . . There was much discussion between us, and much difference of opinion among the Egyptians themselves, about details. Interminable and wearisome argumentation about the meaning of words—'Protectorate', 'Sovereignty', 'Independence' and 'Complete Independence'—occupied much time. But it did not prevent a great deal of practical consideration of the actual provisions of the contemplated Treaty. . . . The bitterness and suspicion, with which all Egyptian nationalists had recently come to regard Great Britain, were beginning to disappear.<sup>177</sup>

The scheme outlined in the 'Milner-Zaghlul Agreement', as the August compromise became immediately known, differed slightly from the model of protectorate depicted by Despagnet. This reveals, again, how conservative-minded Zaghlul and his fellows actually were. Furthermore, the contest over labeling and formalities reflected the anxiety of the two sides involved in the London talks to present their respective home fronts with some semblance of success. Indeed, many controversial 'points of substance' required further clarification, like the extent and precise tasks of British contingents, or had been deliberately excluded from the agreement, as was the case, in particular, for the question of Sudan, on which the Egyptians claimed exclusive control. Therefore, when the *Wafd* members returned to London after submitting the scheme to their home parliament, they were unable to make any definite commitment. The works of the Milner mission ended in the fall of 1920 with a mutual commitment by the mission's members and the Delegation to gain the approval of the Milner-Zaghlul agreement by HMG and the Cairo cabinet. Further talks

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<sup>176</sup> Up to that moment, the status of foreigners in Egypt had been decided by the so-called 'capitulations', that is, ancient concessions by the Byzantine Empire which were successively codified in formal agreements between the Sublime Porte and foreign powers. Those concessions included various extra-territorial rights, like the exemption of foreign citizens from personal taxation, arbitrary arrest and local jurisdiction. In particular, international mixed courts were set up in Egypt to adjudicate controversies between indigenous and foreigners. Criminal jurisdiction over foreign citizens and disputes between foreigners of the same nationality were in the hands of consular courts from the country of the people involved: cases were decided according to the law of their homelands.

<sup>177</sup> Milner mission's report.

between official delegations of the British and Egyptian governments would be convened to set up a treaty.

However vague and precarious, the compromise of August 1920 constituted the highest point in London-Cairo relations since 1914 and, probably, the only possible beginning of a durable settlement of the Egyptian question. Both Zaghlul and Milner enjoyed considerable popularity at home. On 25 August, the *Times* praised Milner for the success of the negotiations.

It must be recognized that the proposal will give Egypt an independence such as her people have not known for many centuries. They have never for ages past enjoyed the advantage of full freedom coupled with complete safety from attack. . . . The scheme about to be submitted has the further advantage that it is generously in accord with the spirit of the new age. The Egyptians have been restive under the yoke, and as in the case of other restive peoples, the yoke will now be lifted.<sup>178</sup>

In the same weeks, Consul Scott from Alexandria reported the triumphal welcome received by the *Wafd* returning from London: over 10,000 people gathered at Cairo's train station and escorted the Delegates from there to Zaghlul's home.<sup>179</sup> The nationalists' discourses shifted from the rhetoric of 'complete independence' to the admitted possibility of reconciling Egyptian aspirations with 'legitimate' British interests.<sup>180</sup> In the French *Journal de débats*, Zaghlul praised Lord Milner as a wise politician, a 'realist and idealist at the same time' and the first to realize that British-Egyptian relations could be grounded 'no longer on fallacious labels such as protectorate or mandate, but on the solid bases of a frank and sincere friendship'.<sup>181</sup> When addressing his domestic constituency, the leader of the Delegation was more cautious, as he sought to stress his merits in reaching a settlement while, at the same time, distancing himself from it in view of the debate in the Legislative Assembly.<sup>182</sup> Rushdi Pasha's cabinet strongly campaigned in favor of the Milner-Zaghlul scheme (thanks to which, the prime minister told *La bourse égyptienne*, Egypt would become 'a constitutional state in the widest sense of the term'),<sup>183</sup> which was eventually endorsed by the parliament, with only three votes against, on 16 September 1920. In fact, the

<sup>178</sup> 'The Future of Egypt', *Times*, 25 August 1920.

<sup>179</sup> TNA, FO 371/4979/11186, Scott to Curzon, 8 September 1920.

<sup>180</sup> See, for example, 'L'indépendance de l'Égypte sera prochainement proclamée par la Grande-Bretagne', *Le Journal*, 20 August 1920.

<sup>181</sup> 'Les négociations Lord Milner-Zaghloul Pacha', *Journal des débats*, 28 June 1920.

<sup>182</sup> Sa'd Zaghlul Pasha, 'England and Egypt', *The Egyptian Mail*, 22 August 1920.

<sup>183</sup> Rushdi Pasha, 'Le projet Milner-Zaghloul', *La bourse égyptienne*, 4 October 1920.

Legislative Assembly approved the text while simultaneously advancing some 'non-prejudicial reservations'.<sup>184</sup>

However, with regards to the rift in imperial self-consciousness marked by the Milner enquiry, a corresponding split occurred within the British government, as revealed by the intense internal exchanges following the circulation of the report. A small group of medium-to-high-rank FO officials coalesced around the outgoing Secretary for Colonies to endorse a new vision of empire, one that was committed to the necessity of reducing Britain's military, administrative and financial commitment in Egypt and to reshaping London-Cairo relations along the lines of devolution and mutual trust. Yet, paradoxically, the 'imperialist' Milner, as he was usually referred to in the British and French socialist press, and his circle proved to be the most 'progressive' voice in the Coalition Government, since other prominent figures of HMG remained attached to a more traditional, geopolitical and territorial conception of empire.

Lord Curzon was concerned, first of all, with the potential domino effect of yielding to Egyptian claims throughout the British Empire.

The decision . . . is one of the most momentous that will ever have been taken by a British Government, not only in its effect on Egypt itself, but in its reaction on every country in the East towards which we act in a governing or fiduciary or mandatory capacity. For what is given to Egypt, over which we have solemnly declared our Protectorate scarcely six years ago, can with difficulty been withheld from other countries, whose national spirit is equally clamant and assertive. We are therefore not merely solving a problem, but creating a precedent.

Two points in the Milner-Zaghlul scheme proved particularly controversial: the possibility for the Egyptians to conduct foreign relations autonomously and, above all, the provision circumscribing the role of British troops to the defense of the Suez Canal Zone. As far as the first proposal was concerned, Curzon revealed how deeply the conspiracy stories circulated by intelligence had penetrated his mind, as he feared that accredited Egyptian diplomats in European capitals might easily be involved in French or Italian 'intrigues' in the 'East'. Likewise, the Foreign Secretary's (Curzon and Balfour had taken each other's position in the cabinet after 1919) fixation with territorial control, combined with his mistrust of the Egyptians on racist grounds, were

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<sup>184</sup> TNA, FO 371/4980/12142, Scott to Curzon, 19 September 1920. In particular, the Legislative Assembly invited the new delegation, to be appointed by the government, to insist on some points in the course of the negotiations with the British: (i) there should be no obligation for the future Egyptian government to consult British financial and judicial advisers; (ii) British troops should be stationed exclusively in the desert east to the Suez Canal; (iii) Sudan should be administered on an equal basis by London and Cairo.

strong reasons to dismiss the policy of military disengagement contemplated in the Milner report.

Let us suppose a fanatical or racial rising in Cairo, directed, not necessarily against the British, but against Europeans or Christians as such. . . . In such a contingency the native army, even if it were partially officered by Englishmen, might prove unreliable.<sup>185</sup>

If we were to assess the evolution of imperial self-consciousness on the basis of Curzon's words, we would conclude that the Egyptian Revolution had little impact, as he kept thinking that religious and xenophobic fanaticism were the main explanations for the rising. Not surprisingly, the officials who supported Milner the most were the ones with some direct experience of Egypt. Responding to the Foreign Secretary, John Murray, the head of the Egyptian Section of the FO with a long record as adviser to various ministries in Cairo, conceded that all the dangers pointed out ('internal disorder leading to an anti-foreign outbreak', 'progressive decline of administrative efficiency' and 'intrigues with foreign powers') should be taken into account, but they probably needed to be contained and balanced by the instauration of new ties of reciprocal trust with the Egyptian government.

[T]he risk is real but remote because 'ex hypothesi' we shall be in cordial relations with the Egyptian Government. We shall be regarded by them as a buffer against the rapacity of foreign powers while, on the other hand, foreign powers will look at us as trustees for their interests.<sup>186</sup>

It must be noticed that both the factions in HMG displayed an ideological and geopolitical attachment to the empire, as well as a racist-Darwinian mindset—though to different extents. Cecil Hurst, the head of the Legal Section of the FO who had taken part in both the British delegation to the Peace Conference and the Milner mission, shared Curzon's stereotypes. 'The Egyptian', he wrote, 'is not an efficient person; he also suffers from the defects of not realising his own shortcomings'. What differentiated the Milner 'party' from 'hardcore imperialists' was, firstly, the realization that the Egyptian outbreak had chiefly been Britain's fault; and, secondly, the perception that devolution and trust, however hazardous, were the best ways to run an empire facing the wave of anti-colonial unrest unleashed by the Great War. In Hurst's words,

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<sup>185</sup> TNA, FO 371/4980/12578, memorandum by Lord Curzon, 11 October 1920.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, memorandum by John Murray, 4 October 1920.



The British hold over Egypt can be maintained in either of two ways: by force or by the concurrence of Egyptians. For the last thirty years the position has been maintained by force, and to me it seemed clear that the system was breaking down.<sup>187</sup>

The 'reformists' were relatively isolated and far less influential than their critics. Although no longer a member of the government, Alfred Milner was invited to a cabinet meeting of 22 February 1921 to discuss the future Egyptian policy. There, he reassessed that only a bilateral treaty of alliance could keep Egypt 'within the ring-fence of the Empire' by recognizing Egyptian nationality as a status distinct from that of British subjects. However, he was confronted by Winston Churchill, his successor at the Colonial Office, who eventually won the support of the majority of the cabinet. Milner's report, he argued, had never represented the official stand of HMG. The Egyptian crisis was, first of all, an internal affair of the British Empire; as such, it needed to be dealt with collegially by the 'Imperial Family' of London and its dominions before entering into new negotiations with Cairo's government.<sup>188</sup>

I have previously spoken of HMG's response to the campaigns of the *Wafd* as an effort to 'de-internationalize' the Egyptian question. More precisely, that verb should be replaced with 'imperialize'. Churchill and Curzon reasoned 'imperially': they could only think of Egypt in terms of its strategic significance in the overall framework of the British Empire. Consequently, the Imperial Conference of July 1921 was, for them, the only appropriate venue to reformulate an Egyptian policy. Actually, that meeting, in which the Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African prime ministers participated alongside Lloyd George, Balfour, Curzon and Churchill, proved to be a far more conservative and racist environment than the British cabinet did.<sup>189</sup> The *Leitmotif* of the conference can be seen in the words of Auckland's premier William Massey, a synthesis of English exceptionalism, ignorance of and contempt for the rest of the world and geopolitical obsessions:

In listening to [our] discussion . . . I have been very forcibly reminded of a saying of a German writer in the early days of the war—I think it was Nietzsche [*sic*], but I am not positive, for one cannot remember these things or who is responsible for them, but whoever it was it attracted a good deal of attention. He said something like this, speaking from the German point of view: 'To stab the British Empire to the heart we must get possession of Egypt and the Canal'. . . . There is the whole position in a

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., memorandum by Cecil Hurst, 4 October 1920.

<sup>188</sup> TNA, FO 371/6292/2463, records of the cabinet meeting, 22 February 1921.

<sup>189</sup> TNA, FO 371/6301/8245, minutes of the Imperial Conference, 6 July 1921. Participants included also the British Secretaries for War (L. Worthington), Admiralty (Lee of Fareham), Air (F. E. Guest), and India (E. S. Montagu)

nutshell from an enemy point of view. If we abandon Oriental people what is going to happen? The British Empire is at an end. . . . It would put the whole of civilization—I do think there is no exaggeration about it—back for a thousand years.

Billy Hughes from Australia agreed. The Egyptians, he pointed out, were ‘a corrupt people’ with a ‘megalomaniac leader’, a ‘hopelessly corrupt’ bureaucracy and ‘an ignorant proletariat’. Therefore, any satisfactory solution should necessarily contemplate a ‘machinery’ to put Cairo’s foreign policy under the complete control of Britain and the dominions. Hence, as we will see again when discussing the origins of the mandates system, the representatives of the dominions were the most traditionalist defenders of empire. Among them, paradoxically, Prime Minister Jan Smuts from South Africa was the most ‘left-wing’. ‘The whole political atmosphere of the world’ had changed, he recognized, and any attempt ‘to govern those Oriental communities on our lines and by our methods’ was ‘bound to fail’. In Egypt as well as in Mesopotamia, he maintained, the British should limit themselves to the minimum indispensable policy to protect imperial interests. What he advocated, in line with Milner’s mindset, was devolution by necessity.

In the end, Curzon’s stand prevailed. Rather than a permanent and mutually satisfying settlement, which was impossible given the strength of Zaghlul and his party, the forthcoming negotiations with the Egyptians should seek a ten-year *modus vivendi* to safeguard imperial interests. Those demanded the permanence of garrisons throughout the entirety of Egyptian territory, the supervision of Egyptian foreign policy and a ‘reasonable share’ in the indigenous administration. Churchill regretted that such a solution diverged significantly from the model of ‘a family of self-governing dominions, all perfectly autonomous . . . but co-operating freely within the circle of the British Empire’, the ‘great ideal’ that London wished to apply to all of its possessions. However, again, Egypt was a special case demanding an exceptional solution. ‘Your opinion, in a word, is that our vital interest as an Empire is that we do have a Protectorate [in Egypt], even if it must be called something else’, the Canadian premier Arthur Meighen asked the Secretary for Colonies. ‘Yes, exactly’, Churchill replied. It was all a matter of labels and formulae.<sup>190</sup>

Meanwhile, the precarious pacification of the Egyptian front was likely to collapse as time lapsed. Despite the overwhelming consensus surrounding the *Wafd*, the ultra-nationalists of the *Watan* party had vociferously criticized the Milner-Zaghlul

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibidem*.

scheme both in the national press and in the parliament, where they had voted against it. The agreement, they argued, was completely devoid of advantages for Cairo and entailed, *de facto*, the continuation of the protectorate.<sup>191</sup> The seeming about-turn of HMG from the scheme enflamed Egypt again and, after the Imperial Conference of July 1921, the country experienced a recrudescence of unrest.

The Alexandria riots of May 1921 were, according to the Zaghlulists, a spontaneous reaction of the Egyptian people to the abrupt involution of London's policy imposed by Churchill.<sup>192</sup> According to the protectorate authorities, it was a nationalist plot. The *ad hoc* court set up by Allenby to investigate the events distinguished two phases in the revolt. Firstly, rioters attacked and burned police stations, 'forcing' the authorities to fire and employ armored cars. All of this had been orchestrated by Zaghlul, according to the enquiry, to apply pressure on the Rushdi Pasha cabinet in view of the forthcoming second round of negotiations with London, with the deliberate aim of causing the shedding of Egyptian blood. The second phase was characterized by an explosion of anti-European violence, mainly targeted at the Greek community, which had its cruelest culmination with the burning of an Italian inside his home. That deplorable turn of the revolt was, in the court's opinion, a repercussion of the Greco-Turkish War, which was also polarizing Muslim-Christian hostility in Egypt.<sup>193</sup>

As we have repeatedly seen, portraying insurgent violence in terms of religious fanaticism and xenophobic impulses was a typical strategy to which British conservative commentators and sometimes HMG itself resorted to both disqualify nationalist claims and justify repression. Little wonder, then, that the anti-foreigner component of the Alexandria riots elicited the most vibrant official reactions abroad. Negrotto Cambiaso, for example, conveyed Rome's indignation to Allenby, maintaining that the disorders proved the inability of the British authorities to protect foreign nationals. The Italian diplomat claimed an indemnity for the casualty and material losses suffered by his co-nationals, as well as the inclusion of an Italian into the enquiry commission.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> TNA, FO 371/4979/12965, Scott to Curzon, 21 October 1920.

<sup>192</sup> Particularly inflammatory were press reports about a speech that Churchill delivered at a dinner organized by the English-Speaking Union at Hyde Park. There, he equally spoke of Egypt and Ireland as integral parts of the British Empire. See 'Empire Family Council: Mr. Churchill and the Dominions', *Times*, 14 February 1921.

<sup>193</sup> TNA, FO 371/6299/7779, Allenby to FO, 6 July 1921.

<sup>194</sup> TNA, FO 371/6299/8036, Allenby-Cambiaso exchange, 20 June 1921. Both requests were rejected by the high commissioner.

But the stigmatization of xenophobia and concerns with the status of the European communities were not the only faces of the international resonance surrounding the Alexandria affair. As highlighted in the previous sections, the Paris Peace Conference worked as a catalyst of international attention on Egyptian politics and a magnet for complaints from the *Wafd* and related diasporic associations. But the connection between unrest at home and international petitioning also remained a feature of Egyptian political life after the revolution, with significant innovations in both the senders and the addressees of petitions. If the petitioners of 1919 fell preeminently within the orbit of the *Wafd*, or, at least, acted in connection with the Zaghlulists, complaints against repression in Alexandria came from a variety of autonomous subjects in the Egyptian diaspora. Arguably, the *Wafd* preferred to avoid an open confrontation with the British government at a moment when London and Cairo were seeking an agreement. More generally, the plurality and autonomous initiative of the petitioners confirms the structural and long-term association of that form of mobilization and diaspora politics.

What is more, although the Wilsonian promise of a ‘parliament of mankind’ had given way to bitter disillusionment with the Peace Conference, a number of Egyptian organizations and individuals across the world saw continuity between the Paris assembly and the newborn League of Nations (LoN) as potential venues for anti-colonial claims.<sup>195</sup> They envisioned in the latter an international institutional arena to receive and process protests, and a supra-state guarantor of international legality. On 14 June 1921, the Egyptian Association of Montpellier addressed the League’s Secretariat to denounce the ‘savage proceedings of British troops’ in Alexandria, including machine gunning against a pacific demonstration. Petitioners appealed to the ‘humanitarian feelings of the civilized world’ and kept invoking ‘peoples’ right to dispose of themselves’ as a legacy of the Allied victory in the Great War.<sup>196</sup>

Hence, as was already common during the revolution, petitioners built their discourse around a sort of dual standard of civilization. First of all, they recurred to a minimum and primordial concept of civilization, identifiable with such general

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<sup>195</sup> The League of Nations, with an initial membership of 42 states, started working as of January 1920, and established its permanent seat in Geneva by November of that year. Its main bodies were an Assembly, in which all member states were represented, and a Council, retaining most decisional power, where Britain, France, Italy and Japan each held a permanent seat. A General Secretariat was also established with coordinating and administrative functions.

<sup>196</sup> Archives of the League of Nations at the United Nations Office, Geneva (from now on, LNA), fonds du Secretariat – Section politique (Secretariat), box 552, dossier 1012, document no. 11572, petition from the Egyptian Association of Montpellier, 14 June 1921.

categories as 'human dignity', 'universal morality', or 'humanitarian feelings', and to stigmatize counter-insurgent violence, thus reversing the barbarians-vs.-civilized representation of the revolt produced by British authorities. Furthermore, they also appealed to a 'modern' and highly qualified notion of civilization, the one fixed by Wilsonian and Allied rhetoric as a prerequisite for enjoying self-determination, to claim independence for their home country. This rhetoric of extremes and paradoxes, centered on peoples' rights-imperial violence and new era-old politics oppositions, appropriated the ideological foundations and discursive apparatus behind the Paris settlements and the League of Nations to delegitimize imperial politics.

Another complaint, forwarded by the Italian delegation in Geneva to the Secretariat on 10 June 1921, deserves mention here. It was jointly signed by an Irishman, an Indian and an Egyptian. Claiming the representativeness of 'one fifth of all human races', the three protested against the 'unprecedented tyranny' and 'brutal imperialism' displayed by Britain in their respective countries, an 'outrage to civilization'. The League of Nations, they provocatively pointed out, was rather a 'league of governments' emanating from the Versailles Treaty. If the Geneva organization wanted to act according to its 'pompous name', it should respect the 'genuinely democratic principle of equal justice for great and small nations alike', and immediately recognize the independence of such peoples of 'high and ancient civilization', as the Irish, Indians and Egyptians were.<sup>197</sup> Not only was that joint initiative significant because it suggested the three petitioners' full awareness of living through an enduring 'global' moment of popular upheaval against colonial empires; it also meant a bridge between seemingly so different peoples across three continents, all represented as sharing the same high degree of civilization, national consciousness and international dignity.

However, referring to general principles of international morality and legality was not only a wise rhetorical strategy by petitioners; it was also their only possible line of argument in the absence of a positive normative basis to place the Egyptian case under the jurisdiction of the League. As explained above, the Allies' pre-1914 colonial spaces had deliberately been excluded from the Versailles settlements, and the LoN had no direct authority on them. According to Article 17 of the League's Covenant, controversies involving non-member states could also be submitted to the League's

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<sup>197</sup> LNA, Secretariat, 573/4690/4690, the petition bares the names of Cellaigh, Waheed, and Abdulhamid Said.

arbitrate on a voluntary basis, but Egypt was neither a member of the LoN nor even a sovereign state. Viewed from Geneva, the Egyptian crisis was a purely internal affair of the British Empire, which could only be brought before the League if the government of a member state presented it as a threat to international peace, which, of course, was not the case.<sup>198</sup> Thus, the only responses that the two complaints, as well as all other Egyptian petitions on the Alexandria riots, obtained from the League, were a series of acknowledgments of reception.

However 'ineffective', that new phase of petitioning was the international refraction of the effervescence passing throughout Egypt. It was in that inflamed context that the British and Egyptians resumed talking to each other in London between 13 July and 24 November 1921, this time through 'official' delegations of the two governments. Egypt was represented by the new Prime Minister Adly Pascha, Rushdi Pasha (who had assumed the duties of vice prime minister in the new cabinet), and the ministers of Finances and Public Works, accompanied by the president of the Native Court of Appeal. There was little hope for success, since, with the Milner-Zaghlul scheme, the *Wafd's* members had already reached the minimum acceptable compromise for their home constituency, while Churchill and Curzon, who led the game on the British side, planned to push the final agreement even below that minimum. As expected, new provisions regulating Egyptian foreign policy (in particular the obligation not to undertake anti-British alliances), the role of British advisers and the administration of Sudan were all areas where the plans of the two parties for the perspective treaty clashed. However, military occupation was the crucial point of breakdown in the negotiations. The British wanted to keep their troops in all Egyptian ports, at any time and in any necessary form (included naval and air forces), to protect imperial communications, safeguard foreign interests and 'assist' Cairo's government in keeping public order. Conversely, according to Adly and his colleagues, no British soldiers should remain on the Egyptian soil in peacetime, except a contingent in the Canal Zone with the exclusive task of securing imperial communications.<sup>199</sup>

All the while, HMG was subjected to domestic criticism along two lines. Overall, the press and Parliament demanded more transparency and accountability in the

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<sup>198</sup> According to Article 11 of the Covenant, each member of the League had 'the friendly right' to submit to the Council or the Assembly 'any circumstances whatever affecting international relations which threatens to disturb international peace or the good understanding'. (The Covenant of the League of Nations can be consulted online at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp), last seen on 31 July 2013).

<sup>199</sup> TNA, FO 371/6304/9814, FO minutes, 30 August 1921.

conduct of the negotiations. The inclusion of the editor of the *Westminster Gazette* and of a Labour MP in the Milner mission had seemed like a step in that direction, but the government had subsequently returned to the old vice of concealment. When, in the House of Commons, Lieutenant Colonel James asked Lloyd George to assure that no binding commitments with the Egyptians would be made without consulting Parliament, the prime minister simply answered that the point would be 'borne in mind'.<sup>200</sup>

Furthermore, the *Daily Herald* condemned the new wave of repression following the Alexandria disorders, charging the protectorate authorities with 'amazing brutality';<sup>201</sup> overall, the Labour Party, which participated in the Coalition Government with a handful of junior ministers or undersecretaries, pressed the cabinet towards a more conciliatory attitude vis-à-vis Egyptian claims. The party conference of June 1921 endorsed the thesis of 'special relations' which, according to HMG, should persist between London and Cairo for strategic and geopolitical reasons. However, while substantially aligning with Milner's proposals, the Labour Party maintained that British interests would be better secured by the 'respect of national feeling, acceptance of the voice of democracy, and the cooperation of a friendly and allied nation'. Otherwise, a document passed by the assembly stated, the consequences would be 'the creation of another Ireland with a population of 14 instead of 4 millions'.<sup>202</sup> Again, like in Churchill's mind, the parallel with the Irish question informed the approach to Egypt, but led to opposite conclusions.

Worse followed: the failure of the talks with Adly Pasha and his ministers precipitated Egypt into chaos. The specter of the spring of 1919 was back. At the end of December 1922, crowds gathered at Zaghlul's home. Clashes between protesters and the army resulted in the killing of a British soldier and two Egyptians.<sup>203</sup> Unable to learn from their previous mistakes, the British seemed caught in a sort of compulsive repetition: although most 'official' commentaries on the revolution had recognized that the deportation of the *Wafd* leaders, in 1919, had been an inappropriate and disastrous move, Zaghlul was forced into a new—this time more exotic—exile. After resisting Allenby's order to withdraw in the countryside, on 22 December, the nationalist leader

<sup>200</sup> Parliamentary question by Lt. Col. James, records of the House of Commons, 14 July 1921.

<sup>201</sup> 'Slow Death of Gallows: Story of Amazing Brutality at Alexandria', *Daily Herald*, 5 October 1921. The paper circulated Egyptian reports of the summary executions of seven rioters randomly picked after the attacks to the Greeks. 'Hanged one by one on the same gallows, with the same rope', those reports stated, the convicted 'died slowly by strangulation'.

<sup>202</sup> TNA, FO 371/6298/7441, 'Another Ireland: A Note on the Present Situation between Britain and Egypt', Labour Party Conference, June 1921.

<sup>203</sup> TNA, FO 371/6309/14084, Allenby to FO, 23 December 1921.

was deported to Ceylon with three of his fellows.<sup>204</sup> Of course, disorders did not cease; three more Egyptians were killed and 14 wounded during the repression of the following days.<sup>205</sup>

The recrudescence of violence was accompanied by a renewed wave of international attention to the Egyptian affairs. On 6 December, the Egyptian students of Montpellier—the same who had petitioned the League of Nations—paraded past the British consulate in Marseille. They handed in a memorandum to the consul, protesting against the ‘tyranny’ of ‘Perfidious Albion’, which, still in the twentieth century, sought to quash a people by force of cannon.<sup>206</sup> In the same weeks, Paul-Louis, a communist politician and journalist, conducted a harsh campaign from the pages of *L’Humanité*—now aligned with a radical anti-colonial platform—against English imperialism, which, though ‘wrapping itself under a liberal phraseology’, could only speak the ‘language of force’.<sup>207</sup>

The epilogue of those incandescent months was pathetic, resulting from hurry and confusion rather than a conscious policy planning. On the one hand, criticism of HMG came almost invariably from the British press, including, Curzon complained, traditionally government-friendly papers.<sup>208</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* looked back at Milner’s proposals with a sense of lost opportunity: ‘[I]n Egypt, as surely as in Ireland or India, force breeds force. Hopes of a peaceful solution are now ebbing swiftly after slowly rising almost to completion’. An ‘ever-widening breach’, the paper concluded, separated ‘Egyptian hopes and British willingness to fulfill them’.<sup>209</sup> ‘A turning point has been reached’, proclaimed the *Times*. ‘There is no question of giving up anything that is really essential to British interests in Egypt. It is merely a question of abandoning forms and pretensions of which the further maintenance will steadily undermine [our] position in the Nile Valley’.<sup>210</sup> The Foreign Secretary himself recognized that ‘an almost universal desire’ existed within the government ‘to extricate’ themselves ‘from a position which, already difficult, may easily become intolerable’.<sup>211</sup>

On the other hand, it was clear that no treaty could be drafted between HMG and Egyptian ministers that matched the demands of both parties. Therefore, London

<sup>204</sup> TNA, FO 371/6308/13931, Allenby to FO, 23 December 1921.

<sup>205</sup> TNA, FO 371/6309/14090, Allenby to FO, 27 December 1921.

<sup>206</sup> TNA, FO 371/6308/13550, British consulate in Marseille to FO, 9 December 1921.

<sup>207</sup> Paul-Louis, ‘L’imperialisme britannique et la rupture Anglo-Égyptienne’, 8 December 1921; ‘L’Angleterre et le soulèvement Égyptien’, *L’Humanité*, 24 December 1921.

<sup>208</sup> TNA, FO 371/7730/652, Curzon’s memorandum on Allenby’s proposals, 11 January 1922.

<sup>209</sup> ‘Losing Ground in Egypt’, *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1921.

<sup>210</sup> ‘The Future of Egypt’, *Times*, 15 February 1922.

<sup>211</sup> TNA, FO 371/7730/652.



decided to proceed unilaterally towards Egyptian independence. A first 'solution', supported by Allenby, proposed to introduce a debate in the British Parliament on a scheme contemplating the recognition of a Kingdom of Egypt with 'a few guarantees' for London's interests (again, on defense, imperial communications and the protection of foreigners).<sup>212</sup> However, even this late hypothesis to involve Parliament in the decision-making on Egypt—rather a further time-wasting expedient—was eventually abandoned; in February 1922, HMG issued a proclamation declaring Egypt 'an independent sovereign state'. Still, four matters continued to be 'absolutely reserved to the discretion of His Majesty's Government', including the security of communications of the British Empire, the defense of Egypt against foreign aggression or interference, the protection of foreign interests and minorities and Sudan.<sup>213</sup>

What changed for the Egyptians? The use of the adjective 'Britannic' before 'King' was resumed in official references to the British monarch, as Cairo now had its own. Lord Allenby remained the head of the British apparatus, his title changing from high commissioner into *Safir*, an Arab word meaning 'ambassador'.<sup>214</sup> Yet, as Lloyd George assured the House of Commons on 28 February, the 'special relations' between Britain and Egypt remained a matter concerning exclusively London and Cairo: no foreign powers would be allowed to interfere.<sup>215</sup>

Clearly a window-dressing device to placate the protests and safeguard the *status quo*, the recognition of Egyptian independence nonetheless marked a turning point in London-Cairo relations, since it cannot be forgotten that, as late as 1917, the Foreign Office was considering whether the protectorate provided adequate safeguards for British financial and security demands or whether to annex Egypt. The massive nationalist upheaval of 1919, with a never-ending legacy of incidents and bloodshed, activated a critical revision of British policy and imperial self-perception within a certain portion of London's colonial and foreign policy establishment, having in Alfred Milner its most prominent representative. He started thinking that British-Egyptians 'special relations' could be secured on a more consensual and liberal basis. Yet, for the highest and most influential ranks of the Coalition Government, yielding to Egyptian claims (even with all the restrictions and hesitation we have seen) was a forced move in face of the evidence of perennial unrest; however, their minds remained exclusively

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<sup>212</sup> TNA, FO 371/7730/1040, Cabinet minutes, 26 January 1922.

<sup>213</sup> TNA; FO 371/7731/1816, declaration to the sultan, 16 February 1922.

<sup>214</sup> TNA, FO 371/7732/2849, 'Termination of Protectorate: Formal Consequences', 15 March 1922; TNA, FO 371/7732/3211, 'Change in the Status of the High Commissioner', 23 March 1922.

<sup>215</sup> Records of the House of Commons, 28 February 1922.

concerned with the geopolitical relevance of Egypt for the security and internal connections of the empire. Overall, the British government and public kept thinking of the Egyptian question as an eminently intra-imperial affair, its global resonance notwithstanding.

## CONCLUSION

Formally, Egypt organized itself as a constitutional monarchy and remained as such until a new revolution in 1952. Sa'd Zaghlul took his personal revenge a couple of years later: not only did he return home, but he also became prime minister, serving in that capacity, with a short intermission, from 1924 to his death in 1927. The *Wafd* crystallized into a formal political party, reported an overwhelming victory at the first elections of the Kingdom of Egypt and dominated the political life of the country in the following years.

But was Egypt really independent? According to the League of Nations, no. The question emerged as a side issue in an exchange between the Foreign Office and the League's Secretary-General, the Briton Eric Drummond, in November 1922. After being notified of the termination of the protectorate, the LoN officials wanted to clarify whether and how they should deal with the Kingdom of Egypt. Was it 'a self-governing state', thus entitled to accede to international conventions?<sup>216</sup> London replied affirmatively about Egyptian international personality by pointing out that the khedivate could sign treaties even under the Turks, but escaped the related central question on independence.<sup>217</sup> However, the FO's argument did not convince Drummond's legal advisers, according to whom Egypt was neither independent nor entitled to membership in international conventions and the League.<sup>218</sup>

Once more, Geneva's confusion about the actual sovereignty of the new state confirmed the significant extent to which the British-Egyptian struggle had been over labels and symbols. It also showed how legally unequipped and politically unwilling the League was to give salience and formal recognition to colonial peoples: even in 1924, in the middle of an Anglo-Egyptian dispute following the assassination of the governor of

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<sup>216</sup> LNA, Secretariat, 619/39825, Lord Drummond to Charles Tufton (FO), 9 November 1922.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., Tufton to Drummond, 21 November 1922.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., van Hamel (Legal Section of the Secretariat) to Drummond, 27 November 1922. At most, van Hamel argued, the Egyptian government could be considered for formal communications that the League normally addressed to non-member states, such as notifications about new treaties or forthcoming diplomatic conferences.

Sudan, Lord Drummond refused to submit to the Council a request of mediation from Cairo's Chamber of Deputies on the procedural grounds that it emanated from a legislative body and not from an executive, as prescribed by current regulations.<sup>219</sup>

Although they represent a series of identical denials, the stream of Egyptian petitions to international institutions (the Paris Peace Conference first and the LoN afterwards) did not cease until the mid-1920s. The *Wafd* and a number of independent actors in Egyptian civil society and the diaspora believed in the emergence, as a legacy of the World War, of an international arena of discussion and decision making, qualitatively different and politically autonomous from the mere sum of European national governments and based on a supra-national set of values and norms. In their perception, the moment of self-determination which had opened after the war survived the disillusionment of 1919.

Indeed, if a distinctively international level of mobilization originated in the wake of postwar settlements, it was only one form among the many that the campaign of the *Wafd* took. The Delegates engaged in a continual and carefully planned effort to make the claims of the revolution resonate beyond Egyptian borders. They appealed to the governments and, above all, to the public opinion of both the metropolis and its allied powers, each time tuning to the ideological mindset, discursive equipment and visions of the world of the various addressees. In particular, Zaghlul and his fellows found in the Treaty Fight in the US Senate and in the controversy on colonial issues animating the SFIO two favorable environments to access the American and French public debates respectively.

By virtue of their 'transnational training'—in part a result of their education and in part a common mark of post-Ottoman political elites—and of their logistic connections with the Egyptian diasporas, the *Wafdists* gained a sort of quasi-monopoly over the representation of the revolution abroad—in the Western press of the time, 'Egyptians', 'Egyptian nationalists', '*Wafd*' and 'Zaghlul', were interchangeable terms, and I have also adopted such simplifications throughout this chapter. This conferred on Zaghlul and his associates a power to select and adapt the different inspiring principles, claims and political components of the revolution according to the diverse arenas and

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<sup>219</sup> LNA, Secretariat, 619/40641, Drummond to the president of the Egyptian Chamber of Deputies, November 1924. In this instance, Cairo was insisting on a wide interpretation of Articles 11 and 14 of the Covenant as allowing a non-member state engaged in a controversy with a member to activate the settlement procedures of the League regardless of the consent of the counterpart.

targets of their mobilization.<sup>220</sup> In fact, if national independence was invariably identified as the rationale and goal of the unrest, it was invoked in the name of varying inspiring doctrines and heroes, ranging from Wilsonian anti-imperialism to the emancipation of proletariat, English liberalism and the ideals of the French Revolution. Overall, peoples' right to self-determination was not always explicitly mentioned in the Egyptian nationalists' petitions; often, they preferred appealing to more generic and 'universal' formulae like 'freedom', 'equality', or 'humanity'. In particular, the concept of civilization, in its multiple possible declinations, was a recurring tool of their rhetoric just as much as in imperialist discourses.

Hence, a question emerges: Who were, in fact, the men of the *Wafd*? How did they think of their country and of the world beyond? It is virtually impossible to discern the extent to which they consciously appropriated 'Western' ideologies and discourses to pursue their international crusade, or whether they were 'organic' to the Euro-centric imperial order that they wanted to challenge. As Jamal Mohammed Ahmed has highlighted, reading French and British liberal political theorists had a decisive impact on the generation of reformers from which Zaghlul and al-Sayyid came. Ahmad Fathi Zaghlul, Sa'd's brother, translated both Rousseau's *Contrat social* and Bentham's *Principles of Legislation* into Arabic. He advocated progress along 'English' lines for his country. Before 1914, Sa'd Zaghlul and Lutfi al-Sayyid themselves envisioned independence as a long-term goal whose achievement required deeper and widespread familiarization of the Egyptians with education, social justice and civil consciousness.<sup>221</sup> That was the intellectual background of the nationalist leaders, however dramatic the consequences of 1914–1918 might have been on their political views and expectations.<sup>222</sup>

If we focus on what Zaghlul and his fellows really wanted in 1919, the label of 'revolutionaries' that has been applied to them appears chiefly to be a product of Egyptian national mythology. The kind of 'complete independence' that they demanded

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<sup>220</sup> Recently, Lisa Pollard has explored less-studied aspects of British Egypt and especially of the revolution by focusing, in particular, on the nexus between engagement with colonial rule and social changes in class structure and household. See her *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing and Liberating Egypt, 1805–1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>221</sup> Jamal Mohammed Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 44–52 and 85–112.

<sup>222</sup> More recently, James Whidden, 'The Generation of 1919', in Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Jonson and Barak A. Salmoni (eds.), *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919–1952* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2005), 19–45 has argued that radical ideas of nationhood and citizenship elaborated by the early *Wafd* affected successive generations of Egyptian politicians.

contemplated such restrictions to Egyptian sovereignty as the deployment of British troops around the Suez Canal and an enduring regime of extra-territorial privileges for the foreigners. As Lord Milner was aware, they fundamentally desired an official recognition of Egyptian independence and a constitutional representative regime, and were ready to accept the permanence of their country in the orbit of the British Empire, but on a more liberal and consensual basis than in the past.

Therefore, although the *Wafdists* and other Egyptian petitioners revealed a lucid consciousness of the global moment of anti-imperial unrest resulting from the Great War and acted as wise entrepreneurs of internationalism: Egyptian-British relations remained the current and future horizon of their mobilization. Enhancing international attention on the Egyptian rising was, in their intended strategy, a means of inducing HMG to take a more conciliatory attitude, but they could not realistically envision a complete demise of British influence. An equal global awareness characterized Allied chancelleries and, often, European and US press commentators as well. Thus, regardless of the inter-imperial rivalries that the Egyptians might plan to exploit, the reasons for solidarity prevailed, by far, in London, Paris and Rome, with Washington disentangling itself from non-American affairs after the Wilsonian parenthesis. The nexus between domestic unrest and international resonance persisted into the early 1920s, but that resonance had no provable weight in London's decision to proclaim Egyptian independence.

The internal correspondence of HMG on Egypt in 1919–1922 contains no traces of concerns with the international reputation of Britain. Lord Milner and other minor figures of the colonial establishment were instead preoccupied with the consistency of London's Egyptian policy with the historical principles, ideals and aims of the British imperial tradition, and their concerns reflected the tone of the conversation in the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*. As described by Mira Matikkala, in the late Victorian Age, the concept of a humanitarian, civilizing, Christian and anti-slavery empire had gained momentum in the British public debate.<sup>223</sup> Reconciling that reassuring image with the handling of the Egyptian crisis was an improbable task for the Milner mission, resulting in significant admission of guilt.

Furthermore, the British government had to cope with the military and economic costs of a turbulent empire. As John Darwin has put it, the Coalition Government was

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<sup>223</sup> Mira Matikkala, *Empire and Liberal Ambition: Liberty, Englishness and Anti-Imperialism in Late Victorian Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 98–120.

trapped in the choice between neglecting increasing demands for demobilization from home taxpayers and making an ‘inglorious scuttle’ from the Middle East after wartime triumphs. The dilemma was especially complicated for men like Churchill and Curzon, who remained attached to the ‘old assumptions of imperial defence’: that is, that military supremacy in the Middle East was crucial to the British world system, since it granted the ‘command of the Eurasian crossroad’.<sup>224</sup> As General Major Frederick Maurice pointed out in the *Guardian* as early as 1922, that geopolitical argument was rather an ideological obsession, since the empire had flourished for centuries without the Suez Canal.<sup>225</sup>

Someone in the Foreign and Colonial Offices thought that the dilemma could be solved, as far as Egypt was concerned, by substituting military control with respect and trust from indigenous for the government. This fundamental idea behind the Milner proposal would be rearticulated, for other geographical contexts, into the mandatory regime. Meanwhile, however, the acceptance of Egyptian independence was basically an *oborto-collo* concession of conservative imperialists to the necessity of cutting down costs. In the drastic interpretation of historian Ronald Hyam, after 1918, Britain and its colonies looked like ‘a dysfunctional Empire on the road to liquidation, . . . a global mosaic of almost ungraspable complexity and staggering contrasts’.<sup>226</sup>

This chapter does not alter the overall narratives provided by the existing historiography of the British Empire. I have rather enriched the intra-imperial perspective on the Egyptian Revolution, normally centered on the role of HMG’s geopolitical, economic and electoral calculations, by looking at the dialogue between that event and Britain’s self-consciousness as an empire. Further, most importantly, I have placed the Egyptian crisis in the broad context of its international ramifications, a significant story in itself for the multiple and variegated forms of Egyptian engagement with imperial rule that it reveals, regardless of the ‘concrete outcomes’.

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<sup>224</sup> John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System, 1870–1930* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 359–417.

<sup>225</sup> Frederick Maurice, ‘Egypt and Empire: What Do British Interests Demand?’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 14 February 1922.

<sup>226</sup> Ronald Hyam, *Britain’s Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonization, 1918–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–12.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Hell in the Garden of Eden: Mandatory Self-Determination in Mesopotamia, 1919–1922

*E non li avete uditi coloro fra essi, che si vantavano più eruditi . . . , beffeggiare quanti hanno preso sul serio l'art. 22 del patto della Società delle Nazioni? Non li avete uditi sfoderare l'elenco . . . dei tentativi falliti di una pace universale? . . . Signori sapienti, signori furboni, lasciate a noi l'illusione di credere che l'umanità va avanti: a piccoli passi sì, ma va avanti. . . . [S]e anche i mandati aprono l'adito a grandi cupidigie, a sconfinati egoismi, a mentita benevolenza, . . . hanno fatto e fanno progredire le genti umane nelle vie della civiltà.*

Biagio Brugi, preface to Alberto Vallini, *I mandati internazionali della Società delle Nazioni* (1923).

‘Mr. Lloyd George in the Garden of Eden’: This was the title of a *Times* survey of a speech by the British prime minister in the House of Commons on Mesopotamia in the summer of 1920.<sup>1</sup> The article began with an ironical allusion to the earthly paradise of the Biblical tale, which is traditionally located between the Tigris and the Euphrates. On the contrary, a couple of years ago, Charles Townshend chose *When God Made Hell* as the title of his history of the British invasion of Iraq. It is the beginning of a famous Arab saying, which, in English, should sound more or less as follows: ‘When God made

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Mr. Lloyd George in the Garden of Eden’, *Times*, 24 June 1920.

Hell He did not think it bad enough so He created Mesopotamia'.<sup>2</sup> We can wonder whether the proverb originated from the unevenness of the soil and the climate beyond the rivers' banks or from the turbulent history of the region. What is evident is that paradise and hell are twisted in the mythical and popular representation of Mesopotamia. This antithetical couple provides also a conceptual framework for my account of the vicissitudes of the former Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul from the end of the Great War up to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Iraq in 1922. This chapter is an attempt at making sense of two paradoxes: first, the sharp contrast between the regime of 'trusteeship' set up by the Paris peacemakers for the former Middle Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire and its imposition in Mesopotamia by brutal repression; secondly, the contradiction between the British 'heavy' occupation of Iraq and its subsequent abrupt turning into a 'provisionally independent' Arab kingdom under the supervision of the League of Nations.

A partial explanation for these paradoxes, I will argue, lies in the confusion and incompleteness that characterized the birth of the mandates system of the League, as outlined in the first two sections of the chapter. That made of the Mesopotamian insurrection of 1920 an internal affair of the British Empire. And it is only through the lenses of London's national interest, as perceived by HMG and represented in the British public debate, that we can understand the outwardly schizophrenic passage from a policy of brutal repression to a policy of native empowerment and partial disengagement from the Iraqi theater. Curiously, that was exactly what the mandates system, meanwhile resuscitated and regulated by the League bureaucracy, provided for.

#### CAPACITIES, TRUSTEESHIP AND CIVILIZING MISSIONS: THE BIRTH AND INFANT DEATH OF THE MANDATORY IDEA

On 31 January 1919, an editorial with an eloquent title appeared in the *Times*: 'Trusteeship or Possession?' The two extremes described the oscillation range of the Paris peace talks on former German colonies in Africa and the Pacific Ocean, and the ex-Middle Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, the British dominions claimed direct annexation of the Pacific spoils of the Second *Reich*, while, on the other, Woodrow Wilson demanded that the 'tutelage' of the ancient possessions

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Townshend, *When God Made Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia and the Creation of Iraq, 1914–1921* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011).



of the two defeated empires be entrusted to the Allied powers under the supervision of the forthcoming League of Nations and in the interests of the indigenous populations. In fact, a careful reading of the *Times* piece—which, in this case, reproduced quite faithfully the official stand of HMG—reveals that the divide between the two options was much less net than the title suggests, and, therefore, the annexationist solution and the mandatory system did not necessarily exclude each other.

First of all, Wilson's usual ambiguity about how to translate his high principles into practice left most British colonial officials and commentators uncertain on whether and how the proposed mandates regime differed from the traditional working and purposes of London's colonial administrations. 'There is everything to be said for the conception of the mandates system', the article noticed. 'The principle which it embodies, after all, is nothing more than the principle on which our own imperial system is based, and the wide acceptance with which that principle meets is really the highest possible tribute to a fundamental doctrine of the British Empire'. With this benevolent and self-praising portrayal of the British Empire in mind, the *Times* suggested to assess case by case whether geographical, historical and political circumstances made pure annexation the most appropriate solution or some sort of international administration was advisable. Yet, on one point, the editorialist had no doubt: 'however impeachable the mandatory form [might] be', it represented 'a new experiment in the art of government' and, therefore, needed a careful and precise definition.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, as this section shows, the working and scope of the mandates system of the League of Nations, as defined in Paris, were all but clear, and the new international regime was alternatively interpreted by politicians, activists, scholars and commentators as a prosecution of the old forms of imperial domination or as a landmark departure in international relations. While the Peace of Westphalia had consecrated the balance of power as the criterion for European settlements, and the Congress of Vienna had proclaimed dynastical legitimacy to be the only source of sovereignty, the French jurist Albert Millot wrote in 1924, the Paris Conference of 1919 meant to reshape the world order according to the principle of nationality. The mandates system was the application of that principle to 'backward' populations, 'with a rudimentary civilization and a vague notion, if any, of their nationality'. The League mandates, the author stressed, were a real innovation in international law, as history provided very few examples of

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<sup>3</sup> 'Trusteeship or Possession?', *The Times*, 31 January 1919.

comparable regimes of territorial administration. The most significant case was Crete after the Greek-Turkish War. In 1897, the isle was divided to British, French, Russian and Italian occupation zones and exempted from Ottoman control, though the sultan retained nominal sovereignty. The local administration was directed by a high commissioner jointly appointed by London, Paris, St. Petersburg and Rome, who was responsible in front of both the local parliament and the consuls of the occupying powers.<sup>4</sup>

During the Paris Peace Conference, in spite of Woodrow Wilson's appeal to international public opinion and call for open diplomacy, most colonial questions were settled in the private meetings of the 'Council of Ten', a restricted circle of head of states and prime ministers representing the main victorious powers and London's Dominions. There, the idea of mandatory administration came out in two subsequent moments—first, as part of the discussion of the peace terms to be imposed on Germany, and, later, when dealing with the 'Eastern Question'—and, roughly speaking, split the peacemakers into two factions, with Wilson championing the mandatory principle and, on the opposite extreme, France and the Dominions making up the annexationist coalition. In the end, the mediation by Lloyd George and Lord Milner allowed the inclusion of the mandates scheme into the Covenant of the League of Nations as article 22, although, as we will see, the provision was phrased in a baroque and controversial language.

The early steps in the negotiations on Pacific settlements looked encouraging, as everyone agreed, on a moral and humanitarian ground, that never again should the Pacific islands return to Berlin.

In many cases the Germans had treated the native populations very badly. For instance, in South West Africa, they had deliberately pursued a policy of extermination. In other parts of Africa they had been very harsh, and they had raised native troops and encouraged these troops to behave in a manner that would even disgrace the Bolsheviks. The French and British, doubtless, had also raised native troops, but they had controlled them better.<sup>5</sup>

However united, in principle, in championing the rights of the indigenous, the peacemakers clashed over which sort of administration should replace Germany's. The

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<sup>4</sup> Albert Millot, *Les mandats internationaux. Étude sur l'application de l'article 22 du Pacte de la Société des Nations* (Paris: Émile Larose, 1924), 28–32.

<sup>5</sup> FRUS, Paris Conference Papers, vol. 3 (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1919Parisv03>, last seen on 15 May 2013), Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ten, 24 January 1919.

British Dominions advanced their rights over the territories that they had occupied during the hostilities in the name of territorial proximity and the continuity of the good administration they had established there: Pretoria's government wanted to keep occupying ex-German South-West Africa, while Australia and New Zealand claimed the annexation of, respectively, New Guinea and Samoa.

Hence, immediately, two radically opposite diplomatic outlooks confronted each other. Albeit voicing an even newer world than Wilson's, most Commonwealth prime ministers still reasoned in terms of 'Old European' power politics—as already noticed in the previous chapter. They envisioned a world divided to spheres of influence among regional powers, and the only assurance they wanted to hear was that nobody would disturb the Dominions in their backyard. William Massey of New Zealand recalled that already once, with the Vienna Congress, the great powers had attempted to 'frame universal peace' with poor success, and he was inclined to expect that history would repeat itself. Similarly, the Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes highlighted that annexing New Guinea was the only way to prevent the nightmare of a hostile power seizing Australia's neighborhood from materializing again.<sup>6</sup> If a great power would obtain a mandate on New Guinea, he feared, with the authority of the League of Nations behind it, that power 'would be so overwhelmingly superior . . . to Australia that Australian authority would be completely overshadowed. The Mandatory, as it were, would live in a mansion and Australia in a cottage'.<sup>7</sup> 'The islands', Hughes concluded, 'were as necessary to Australia as water to a city'.<sup>8</sup>

Everyone would agreed with Hughes, Wilson remarked, if international politics were to proceed as they had done up to 1919, but the Australian politician displayed 'a fundamental lack of faith' in the collective security system sanctioned by the League of Nations, which was inseparable from the mandates system. Wilson replied to Hughes and Massey by calling into question two actors that the Pacific statesmen had completely ignored in their portrayal of the diplomatic game: international law and public opinion. First, the US president deemed all annexationist demands disqualified by 'the feeling which had sprung up all over the world' during the hostilities.<sup>9</sup> In addition, he pointed out, the founding principle of the mandates proposal was that the

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<sup>6</sup> FRUS, Paris Conference Papers, vol. 3 (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1919Parisv03>, last seen on 15 May 2013), Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ten, 24 January 1919.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ten, 27 January 1919.

entire ‘world’ (that is to say, in the Wilsonian language, the League of Nations) should act as a ‘trustee’ for former German colonies through a mandatory state. This latter would work as an instrument of the League on behalf of the populations under mandate—exactly the opposite than feared by Hughes—subject to three fundamental requirements: first, that the mandatory administration should be exerted in the exclusive interest of the indigenous, to safeguard them against aggression and to ‘better their conditions’; second, that the mandatory regime ought to be a temporary one, ‘until the day when the true wishes of the inhabitants could be ascertained’; third, that the mandate involved no discrimination among the members of the League of Nations in terms of ‘economic access to the resources of the district’ and custom duties. No ‘irritation’ or ‘interference’ would come from the LoN, Wilson remarked, as long as the mandatory would ‘perform his duties satisfactorily’.<sup>10</sup>

When the focus of the Council of Ten moved to former German Central and Southern Africa, the spectrum of Wilson’s ‘enemies’ widened, as Pretoria’s claims to South-West Africa merged with France’s demand for Togoland and Cameroon. Compared to Hughes’s and Massey’s rude imperialism, the points raised by the French Minister of Colonies Henri Simon represented a more refined and provocative criticism of Wilson’s ‘idealism’, and the minutes of the peace negotiations reveal the US president’s growing embarrassment and nervousness at Simon’s words. The French statesman questioned the mandates proposal on Wilson’s preferred ground, that is, the alleged interest of the peoples concerned. The temporary nature of the mandate, he maintained, would provide ‘little inducement for the investment of capital’: ‘The mandatory would be content to live quietly without trying to develop the colony or to improve the conditions of life of the natives, and the desired ideals would not be attained by this means’.

Moreover, by a cunning inversion of roles, Simon described European imperialism as an agent of material progress and moral advance, while dismissing Wilsonian internationalism as simplistic and outdated anti-imperialist criticism.

Annexation might be said to lead to the exploitation of the country for the benefit of the individual; it might be said to lead to the ill-treatment of the natives; it might permit of the setting up of the economic policy of the ‘closed door’. All these points were part of a theory which was today quite obsolete and condemned by all. France had higher aspirations, and the Colonies were no longer considered as a kind of close preserve for the exploitation and benefit of the individual. Higher moral principles

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

now guided the nations. All the great Powers worthy of the name considered their colonies as wards entrusted to them by the world.

In accordance with Frantz Despagnet's account of protectorates, Paris's minister portrayed 'the efforts made by France for the civilization of Northern Africa' in the past centuries as already accomplishing the two criteria fixed by Woodrow Wilson's Fifth Point for the settlement of colonial disputes—the balance between 'the interests of the populations concerned' and the 'equitable claims' of the colonial powers. As a result of the French work in the *Maghreb*, Simon argued, 'the old Colonies formed part of the old country', their inhabitants had equal rights compared to French citizens, sent their representatives to the French Chamber of Deputies, and enjoyed an identical system of local government as in force in France. Turning to the contended Central African regions, which French explorers and traders had already penetrated before wartime occupation, Simon quoted two petitions from Garoua and Maroua as examples of the Cameroonians' will to remain under French rule.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of January 1919, the wall of incommunicability between the American president and his French and Commonwealth counterparts paralyzed the Council of Ten, while Italy and Japan followed the debate as silent but interested spectators—Rome's Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando only stated that 'Italy would readily accept whatever principles might be adopted, provided that . . . she could participate in the work of civilization'.<sup>12</sup> Just one span before a no-return break point, Lloyd George obtained the approval by the Dominions of a scheme contemplating the conversion of wartime occupiers into mandatory powers on behalf of the LoN. At the same time, the 'idealist' Wilson was satisfied with 'the acceptance of the genuine idea of trusteeship', which he deemed a fundamental precondition for his assent to any peace scheme.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the British mediation broke the cohesion of the annexationist front, and, in the end, the French Prime Minister Clemenceau agreed on the establishment of the mandates system after the British delegation had introduced a resolution extending the application of that new international regime also to the former Ottoman provinces in Armenia, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Arabia—an idea that had only marginally come out in the previous days.

What those territories had in common with former Berlin's colonies, according to the document, was the 'mis-government' of the imperial powers, which had also

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ten, 28 January 1919.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem.*

taken the form of ‘terrible massacres’—the text made explicit mention of the Armenian case. Hence, humanitarian concerns required that the territories formerly under German and Turkish oppression no longer returned in the hands of the oppressors, and ‘careful study’ had led the Allies to the conviction that ‘the best method to give effect’ to that principle was that ‘advanced nations’, by reason of their ‘resources, their experience, or their geographical position’, took charge of the ‘tutelage’ of less developed peoples as mandatories on behalf of the League.<sup>14</sup>

Mainly the work of South Africa’s Prime Minister Jan Smuts, the British resolution eventually turned, with some modifications, into article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations:

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Appendix to the Secretary’s notes of a conversation held at M. Pichon’s Room, Quay d’Orsay, at 11 a.m., 30 January 1919.

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.

The character of the mandate must differ according to the stage of the development of the people, the geographical situation of the territory, its economic conditions and other similar circumstances.

Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.

Other peoples, especially those of Central Africa, are at such a stage that the Mandatory must be responsible for the administration of the territory under conditions which will guarantee freedom of conscience and religion, subject only to the maintenance of public order and morals, the prohibition of abuses such as the slave trade, the arms traffic and the liquor traffic, and the prevention of the establishment of fortifications or military and naval bases and of military training of the natives for other than police purposes and the defence of territory, and will also secure equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other Members of the League.

There are territories, such as South-West Africa and certain of the South Pacific Islands, which, owing to the sparseness of their population, or their small size, or their remoteness from the centres of civilisation, or their geographical contiguity to the territory of the Mandatory, and other circumstances, can be best administered under the laws of the Mandatory as integral portions of its territory, subject to the safeguards above mentioned in the interests of the indigenous population.

In every case of mandate, the Mandatory shall render to the Council an annual report in reference to the territory committed to its charge.

The degree of authority, control, or administration to be exercised by the Mandatory shall, if not previously agreed upon by the Members of the League, be explicitly defined in each case by the Council.

A permanent Commission shall be constituted to receive and examine the annual reports of the Mandatories and to advise the Council on all matters relating to the observance of the mandates.<sup>15</sup>

The partition of the mandates into three classes, with the degree of mandatory authority varying accordingly from simple ‘administrative assistance’ to de facto annexation, yielded to the Dominions’ territorial claims while satisfying, at the same time, Lloyd George’s desire of a lighter military and bureaucratic apparatus to replace the huge and expensive British occupation forces stationing across the Middle East at the end of the Great War. Furthermore, article 22 contained a vague reference to the temporary character of mandates, but, to placate France’s anxiety, no suggestions on how to identify the moment when the services of the mandatory would no longer be needed. Finally, the vagueness of the provisions on the Middle East reflected the uncertainty of the situation of the former Ottoman space at the time of the Paris Conference, as it was still unclear what government would be established in Anatolia, which provinces ought to be placed under mandate and how they should be partitioned among the Allies.

I will come back to the Turkish theater more in detail later in the chapter. Meanwhile, I will spend the remainder of this section to analyze the key concepts employed in article 22 and briefly trace their historical genealogy. I will then concentrate on the ambiguities and concealments characterizing the wording of the Covenant and on the disputes that they raised among contemporary legal scholars. All that had crucial implications on the way in which the League officials, the mandatory authorities and the populations under mandate interpreted and handled the new machinery set up in Paris for the administration of former colonial subjects.

Overall, peoples’ right to self-determination is the stone guest of article 22, since it is constantly implied though never explicitly mentioned—it only surfaces in the ‘not yet’ of the first paragraph, while the conceptual edifice of the text revolves around two couples: ‘capacity’/‘civilization’ and ‘trusteeship’/‘tutelage’. Civilization discourses have been inherent to Europe’s encounter with the ‘others’ since the very early steps of European imperialism. Both Robert Williams and James Muldoon trace the genealogy

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<sup>15</sup> The Covenant can be consulted online at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp) (last seen on 15 May 2013).



of such discourses back to the pontificate of Innocent IV (1043–54), who is remembered, among others, for addressing two letters to the Great Khan of the Mongols: one to illustrate the basic dogmas of the Christian faith and persuade the addressee of their truth; the second, to warn the Great Khan against persecuting the Christians under the threat of Divine punishments. It was the same pope who, in 1045, chaired the Council of Lyon, which set up the juridical framework legitimizing the imminent launch of the crusades to ‘free’ the Holy Land. It was in the right of the Muslims, the council stated, to hold and administer land, even around the holy places of Christianity. However, if the ‘infidels’ ruled abusively and arbitrarily—that is, if they prevented the Christians from following their cult and worshiping in public—they could be dispossessed by order of the Roman Pontifex, who, as vicar of Christ on earth, detained a higher authority than any other human sovereign did.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, at its very debut, the European standard of civilization was associated with a notion of good and/or just government, which, in the Middle Ages, could only derive its legitimacy and purpose from Divine law. As Brett Bowden points out, it was later, during the Early Modern Age, that civilization discourses went through a partial ‘secularization’, and international law, originally coinciding with the law of the *Christianitas*, gradually evolved into the public law of Europe. This transition can especially be traced, according to Bowden, through the works of the Spanish scholar Francisco de Vitoria. One of the fathers of modern international law, Vitoria devoted parts of his *Relectiones Theologicae* (1557) to defend and justify the Spanish claims on the lands inhabited by American Indians: people of ‘defective intelligence’, these latter were incapable of sociopolitical organization and, thus, ought to be ruled and educated by the white man as children under the guidance of parents or wives under the authority of husbands. Therefore, although the evangelizing mission remained a powerful motivation for the European conquest of the ‘New World’, it was rather the stage of intellectual development that truly differentiated the Amerindians from the Europeans, which, in turn, resulted in the former’s incapacity of government. At the same time, the Spanish monarchy was elevated to a universal standard of social and political organization to be imposed upon ‘uncivilized’ populations.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: Discourses of Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); James Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers and Infidels* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 103–128.

After the crusades and the colonization of the ‘New World’, the ‘scramble for Africa’ of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century marked the third massive wave of European imperial expansion. The international conferences held in Berlin and Brussels to crystalize and discipline Europe’s partition of the ‘Black Continent’ in spheres of influence and domination definitely consecrated the modern standard of civilization and codified it into positive international law. The Berlin West-Africa Conference of 1884–85 was indicted by the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, according the preamble to its Final Act, ‘to regulate the conditions most favourable to the development of trade and civilization in certain regions of Africa’, which included, among others, free trade and free navigation along the Congo and Niger Rivers, the protection of foreigners and missionaries, freedom of consciousness and religious toleration. All powers ‘exercising sovereign rights of influence’ on West Africa pledged to guarantee those conditions, which also applied to any future colonizers. Of course—it went without saying—their indigenous populations were assumed to be unable to meet a sufficient standard of civilization, if not ignorant of the meaning of that word. In fact, the Berlin Congress was promoted by Bismarck to have Germany’s position in Africa sanctioned by the ‘Concert of Europe’ on acceptable conditions for the other powers.<sup>18</sup>

The Berlin General Act included also a common commitment by the signatories to prevent the slave trade in Africa, which was also the subject of a subsequent *ad hoc* conference, in Brussels, in 1889–90. Curiously, the European imperial powers assumed their surveillance to be necessary to eradicate an evil that they themselves had inflicted on Africa, and turned slave traffics into a sign of the ‘barbarity’ and backwardness of their colonial subjects. The slave trade could be best halted, the Brussels Final Act stated, if the ‘progressive organization of the administrative, judicial, religious and military services in the African territories’ was placed ‘under the sovereignty and protectorate of civilized nations’.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, by examining the main international treaties of the period alongside the publications of the leading contemporary legal scholars, Gerrit Gong has summarized the ‘classical’ European standard of civilization in five parameters marking the boundaries between ‘civilized’ and ‘barbarian’ peoples. The first two had to do with the internal organization and working of state communities: that is, the existence of an

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<sup>18</sup> The General Act of the Berlin Conference can be accessed online at <http://africanhistory.about.com/od/eracolonialism/1/bl-BerlinAct1885.htm> (last seen on 15 May 2015)

<sup>19</sup> The Brussels Act of 1890 is available for consultation at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.35112104560067;view=1up;seq=12> (last seen on 15 May 2015).

efficient state bureaucracy, able, in particular, to guarantee public order and security, and the respect of some basic rights of individuals, like life, property, freedom of movement, commerce and religion. In addition, other requirements concerned state interactions with foreigners, and, in general, with the external world. A ‘civilized’ country was expected to safeguard home and foreign citizens alike, to entertain permanent and adequate diplomatic exchanges with other countries, and, most of all, to conform to the accepted norms and practices to the ‘civilized world’—which meant, for example, banishing slavery and polygamy.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, reciprocity and international recognition were necessary ingredients to ascribe a country to the club of civilized powers, generating a conceptual short circuit among sovereignty, civilization and international law. Not only did the Europeans elevate themselves to a universal and superior model for the rest of the world, but they also elected themselves the only competent authority to assess the conformity by non-European communities to that model, thus linking civilization, state sovereignty and international personality to each other in an indissoluble trinity.<sup>21</sup> In his famous *Elements of International Law*, for example, Henry Wheaton defined the discipline as an exclusive apurage of ‘civilized nations’.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Lassa Oppenheim explained that no representatives of the African tribes could be invited to the Berlin Conference because they were too primitive to understand the concept of sovereignty and, therefore, to cede it by treaty.<sup>23</sup>

In short, international law has evolved hand in hand Europe’s colonial encounters, and, precisely, it emerged as an autonomous scientific field in conjunction with the scramble for Africa. Inherent to the spirit and purpose of late-nineteenth-century international legal scholarship was a ‘dynamic of difference’, in Anthony Anghie’s words, between ‘civilized’ Europe (including its American appendices) and its ‘uncivilized’ surroundings along the divide of the ‘capacity’ of sovereign statehood, which legitimized the subordination of the latter to the former. As the scholars argues,

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<sup>20</sup> Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of Civilization in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 14–21.

<sup>21</sup> Nele Matz, ‘Civilization and the Mandates System under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship’, *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, 9 (2005), 47–95.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Wheaton, *Elements of International Law* (London: Sanson, 1863, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition).

<sup>23</sup> Lassa F. L. Oppenheim (1858–1919), a renowned German jurist and Cambridge professor, can be considered the father of the positivist school of modern international law. In 1905, he published an essay on the laws of peace and, in the next year, another volume on the laws of neutrality and war. After a second edition of both in 1912, the two works were republished together as the posthumous *International Law: A Treatise* (London and New York: Longman, 1920).

the international law of the period can be read not simply as the confident expansion of intellectual imperialism, but as a far more anxiety-driven process of naming the unfamiliar, asserting its alien nature and attempting to reduce and subordinate it. Within the positivist universe, then, the non-European world is excluded from the realms of sovereignty, society, law; each of these concepts . . . was precisely defined . . . [to] maintain and police the boundary between the civilized and the uncivilized. . . . Having stripped the non-European world of sovereignty, then, the positivists in effect constructed the colonial encounter as an arena in which the sovereign made, interpreted and enforced law.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the mandates system of the League of Nations perpetuated the equation between sovereign statehood on the European model and the notion of civilization in international law. In line with Anghie's approach, the mandates experiment can be read as the culmination of the 'dynamic of difference' that justified and regulated Europe's colonial conquests. As Walter Ritscher, a professor of political science at the American University of Beirut, wrote in 1934, after the Paris Peace Conference 'capacity' had definitely become 'the password of political advance'.<sup>25</sup> Not only did article 22 of the Covenant assume former German and Ottoman colonial subjects to be incapable of good government; it also 'measured' their geographical and/or substantial remoteness from the 'centers of civilization' and distinguished three levels of 'incapability'.

Yet, as Gerrit Gong has highlighted, though defined and exploited as a tool of European domination, the 'standard of civilization' could easily turn against its inventors as a boomerang, as it 'also represented a code of expected civilized behavior which Europe imposed upon itself'.<sup>26</sup> Regarded from a complementary perspective to Anthony Anghie's, the time span stretching from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century can be represented as the progressive affirmation of the idea of trusteeship in international law, that is, of the principle that the strong should rule on behalf of the weak. As William Bain has remarked, the moral guilt trip for the slave trade, which was formally abolished by HMG in 1807, encouraged the British government to rethink the empire as a humanitarian enterprise and a 'civilizing mission'. What is more, after the American Revolution, many British liberals began to consider the colonies' path to independence as a 'natural development', to regard the conquest of new territories as 'inexpedient' and to believe that the local administration of the existing colonies should be transferred as much as possible to the natives—as a resolution adopted by Westminster's parliament stated in 1865. As a result, a consensus

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<sup>24</sup> Anghie, 52–64.

<sup>25</sup> Walter H. Ritscher, *Criteria of Capacity for Independence* (Jerusalem: Syrian Orphanage Press, 1934).

<sup>26</sup> Gong, 3–14.

consolidated among the imperial elites that the essential task of British rule over its colonies was to promote free commerce and navigation, and to guarantee the necessary conditions of peace, order and security to enjoy them.<sup>27</sup>

Among the best known advocates of ‘indirect rule’, Frederick Lugard served as governor of Hong Kong and Nigeria between 1909 and 1914, before joining the LoN personnel as a member of the Permanent Mandates Commission in 1922. In a volume appearing in that same year, Lugard illustrated the famous doctrine of the ‘dual mandate’. Drawing from his experience in the colonial administration, he maintained that imperial rule could be beneficial to both the colonizer and the colonized if the local administration remained in the hands of indigenous officials under the oversight of imperial authorities. This system of ‘supervised self-government’ would ‘instill . . . a sense of responsibility, initiative, fair play, discipline and justice’ in the ‘native races’ and lead them towards a higher plane of civilization. At the same time, it would secure the business of the European industrial class without burdening national budgets.<sup>28</sup>

Initially a British invention, colonial ‘trusteeship’ pervaded the European imperial discourse to an increasing extent, and, with the Berlin and Brussels Conferences, it was formalized as one of the legitimizing ideologies of the scramble for Africa. According to article 6 of the Berlin Act, for example, the signatories bound themselves ‘to watch over the preservation of the native tribes and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being’, to ‘instruct the natives and bring home to them the blessing of civilization’. In Bain’s view, at the opposite extreme of Anghie’s,

the great achievement of the Africa conferences—and perhaps their only lasting achievement—lies in the fact that they internationalized the idea of trusteeship. They established in international law the principle that the conditions of Africa’s native inhabitants constituted a legitimate subject of international concern.<sup>29</sup>

Frederick Lugard’s professional trajectory is emblematic of how influential the British imperial tradition was in the shaping of the mandates system.<sup>30</sup> Little wonder, thus, that most legal writers of the 1920s emphasized the doctrine of trusteeship as one

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<sup>27</sup> William Bain, *Between Anarchy and Society: Trusteeship and the Obligations of Power* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 54–63.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate for Africa*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1929), 617.

<sup>29</sup> Bain, 63–69.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), especially 28–103, emphasizes the British imprint on the mandates regime.

of the pillars of the mandatory regime and its roots in the British juridical tradition. Indeed, the French jurist J. Stoyanowsky identified three historical antecedents of the international mandate, including, besides the ‘trust’ of English private law, the *mandat* of the French tradition and the ancient *mandatum* in Roman law. What the three institutes shared, the scholar pointed out, was the requirement of the gratuitousness of the mandate, that is, its exercise in the interest of mandate subjects. From continental European law, according to Stoyanowsky, the League mandates inherited especially the principle of ‘tutelage’, which made mandatory rule comparable to the tutelage of a minor in private law. Therefore, the jurist deemed the term mandate insufficient to account for the meaning and scope of the new international institute, and suggested to call it ‘mandate/tutelage’.<sup>31</sup>

In accordance with Stoyanowsky, the Dutch member of the Permanent Mandates Commission D. F. W. van Rees described the tutelary mission of the mandatory administration as consisting of its gratuitous, provisional and moral character. Gratuitousness meant that the mandatory should obtain no ‘material, direct and exclusive profit’, which clearly differentiated the Geneva system of post-colonial administration from pure annexation, bound the mandatory to an open-door commercial policy and excluded the training of indigenous military forces for other purposes than police and domestic security. As to the moral scope of mandates, van Rees conceded that the ‘civilizing mission’ was already part of the ‘civil consciousness of modern nations’ before World War I. Yet, the mandates system codified the generic moral commitment to the ‘well-being’ and advancement of the indigenous into a set of juridical obligations, which, especially for class A mandates, compelled the mandatory to involve indigenous authorities in the local administration.<sup>32</sup>

Both Stoyanowsky and van Rees insisted on the parallel between the mandates regime and the protection of the minor in private law, with two important differences. First of all, peoples under mandates would not reach their ‘legal age’ at a fixed moment, but ‘gradually’ and ‘step by step’. The Dutch jurist considered this difference to prove the progressive and native-centered mission of the Geneva system. Nonetheless, the duration of mandates was one of the weak—or, rather, empty—spots of article 22, as, besides referring the provisional character of class A mandates, the text provided no

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<sup>31</sup> J. Stoyanowsky, *La théorie générale des mandats internationaux* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1925), 41–48.

<sup>32</sup> D. F. W. van Rees, *Les mandats internationaux: Les principes généraux du régime des mandats* (Paris: Librairie Arthur Rousseau, 1928), 184–192.

indication about when and how should mandatory rule terminate and who was entitled to decide on that. This was just one among the many gaps and ambiguities in the Covenant. Other questions provided materials for disputes among contemporary law scholars, like the fundamental ones of sovereignty over mandate territories, the nationality of the populations inhabiting them and their legal personality. Besides their theoretical relevance, these questions are worthy of mention in this thesis for their political implications on the relations among the mandatory powers, their mandate subjects and the League of Nations. I leave the issue of legal subjectivity to chapter five, where I will discuss its implications on Syrian petitions. For the moment, let me concentrate on the two legal problems that especially mattered for the destiny of former Ottoman Mesopotamia: besides duration, sovereignty.

Almost all legal commentators agreed on the existence of two pillars in the mandates building. What was really innovative about mandatory trusteeship (first pillar), was the international supervision that the League of Nations was expected to exercise over it (second pillar). As Stoyanowsky underlined, unlike the tutor of the minor in private law, who essentially exercised the tutelary duty on his own, the mandatory exerted his authority on behalf of the ‘international family council’ of the League of Nations.<sup>33</sup> Although article 22 vaguely provided for a forthcoming Mandates Commission to receive and assess reports by the mandatory powers, it appeared not at all clear whether, how and to what extent the supervision of that organ would bind mandatory authorities. Further, the Covenant postponed the definition of the ‘degree’ of control/assistance/administration of the mandatory case by case to future international agreements or Council’s deliberations, which left the task and the boundaries of mandatory rule substantially unknown. In other words, the fundamental question of who detained sovereign rights on mandate territories remained unanswered.

Still in 1925, Stoyanowsky indicated that question as the ‘most serious’ concerning mandates, on which the ‘essence itself’ of the system depended. Surveying the stands of various authors on the issue, the French jurist identified two extremes. On the one hand, a few scholars regarded the mandatories as sovereign on the basis of an extensive interpretation of articles 118 and 199 of the Versailles Treaty, by which Germany ceded all rights on its territory and colonies to the Allies. Thus, according to a sort of transitive property, sovereignty had moved from the Germans to the mandatories via the Allied ‘Pentarchy’. On the other hand, other commentators considered the

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<sup>33</sup> Stoyanowsky, 41–48.

mention of the ‘sacred trust of civilization’ in article 22 as implying that the League as a whole detained ultimate sovereign rights on former Ottoman and German colonies. Between those two poles, Stoyanowsky enlisted a series of ‘eclectic theories’—according to his proposed classification, which distributed sovereignty in different ways among mandate populations, mandatory governments and the League. Finally, Stoyanowsky outlined his own theory of ‘virtual sovereignty’. In poor words, he separated sovereignty in principle from sovereignty in fact: he regarded mandate peoples to detain only the former, and to be granted the latter gradually while progressing along the path of civilization.<sup>34</sup>

However theoretically sound Stoyanowsky’s argument might appear, he was not able to explain how ‘virtual sovereigns’ differed in fact from colonial subjugation. Other authors’ ventures into the problem of sovereignty resulted in equally insufficient or baroque answers. In 1920, Leonard Woolf, the husband of Virginia and himself a prolific political writer, authored a pamphlet to illustrate the benefits of the mandates system to his compatriots. Published under the aegis of the British League of Nations Union, the essay was part of a broader editorial project to train new generations of liberal internationalists, and it ended by asking the reader to take a quiz. Woolf enthusiastically welcomed article 22 of the Covenant as a ‘revolution’ marking the ‘end of imperialism’. He strenuously opposed the doctrine of the sovereignty of the mandatory, but without proposing an alternative one—probably, because he lacked a sufficient legal and logical ground to argue for native sovereignty.<sup>35</sup>

Among the authors covered in this short review, Stoyanowsky appears probably the most acute, as he grasped an unprecedented innovation marked by article 22 in legal theory: that is, the conceptual separation of political power from state sovereignty. Though entitled to the latter in principle, ex-German and ex-Ottoman imperial subjects were deprived of the former in practice on the ground of their alleged inability ‘to stand alone’. The League oversight further complicated this relation between non-sovereign rulers and non-ruling sovereigns. If eighteenth-century imperialists regarded Africa as a *terra nullius*, the League covenant turned the former Ottoman and former German colonial spaces into potential *terrae totius*, where three actors—the mandatory, mandate

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<sup>34</sup> Stoyanowsky, 68–86. The scholars endorsing the doctrine of mandatory sovereignty included the hardcore imperialist M. F. Lindley, whom the reader will recall from chapter one. In his essay on ‘backward territories’, the British jurist equated the mandates to pre-existing protectorates and conceived sovereignty as entirely belonging to the mandatory. He argued that the League oversight added no further constraints to the mandatory authority than the obligations already imposed by the ‘general law’ on colonial powers (Lindley, 263–269).

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Woolf, *Mandates and Empire* (London: British Periodicals, 1920).



populations and the League, were all given a voice with no clear demarcation among the prerogatives of each of them. Stoyanowsky's doctrine of virtual sovereignty actually meant a system of powdered and shifting sovereignty.

In sum, despite the lengthy and complex prose of article 22, the mandates scheme resulting from the Paris Peace Conference outlined a magmatic and chaotic new international regime. The vagueness of that juridical edifice reflected the precariousness of the political consensus behind it. The Covenant of the League of Nations became integral part of the Treaty of Versailles, as well as of the other peace treaties imposed by the Allies on Austria, Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, the British and the French continued to quarrel over the mandatory right to raise and employ native troops and other controversial aspects of the mandates regime. Most of all, Wilson's failure in the 'Treaty Fight' deprived the forthcoming League of Nations of the main inspirer and most strenuous supporter of the mandates idea, leaving its implementation to a quarrelsome re-edition of the old 'Concert of Europe'. As Susan Pedersen has noticed, by the summer of 1920, 'the mandates system as an Anglo-American project was over', and it looked rather like 'a naked and shivering shadow of its Wilsonian self'.<sup>37</sup>

Up to 1922, the mandates system existed only on paper, and it was manly the League bureaucracy that resuscitated it from its infant death. In the meantime, Britain and France partitioned the former Ottoman Middle East in spheres of influence. That biennium of juridical vacuum and political uncertainty provided the conditions of possibility for London's schizophrenic policy in Mesopotamia.

#### RESURRECTING THE MANDATES AMONG THE QUASI-CIVILIZED

To remain within the 'eschatological' symbolic framework of this chapter, I should employ the metaphor of the Purgatory to account for peoples under former Ottoman sovereignty which were know considered for mandatory rule. That is, according to the Catholic and some other Christian denominations, the provisional destination of the

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<sup>36</sup> Although the Paris Conference is normally associated with the Versailles Treaty, it resulted in several agreements, each regulating the peace terms between the Allies as a whole and a single hostile power. The Treaty of Versailles only concerned Germany. The Allies stipulated also the Treaty of St. Germain with Austria and the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary (the two countries were separated). The Treaty of Neuilly-sûr-Seine concerned Bulgaria, while the peace conditions with the Ottoman Empire were fixed in the Treaty of Sèvres, later amended by the Treaty of Lausanne with Turkey.

<sup>37</sup> Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 17–44.

souls of those dying in God's grace without having completely expiated their sins yet. They need to be purified through sufferings and contrition before being admitted to contemplate the Almighty in the Heaven. This reign of expiation is a gift of God's mercy, since those imperfect souls would otherwise be destined to eternal damnation. The representation of class A mandates endorsed by the peacemakers can be compared to the status of the people passing away in communion with God but with an impure consciousness: the Great War—a sort of doomsday for the Sublime Porte—found them in a civilized, yet 'disorganized' state. Trapped into sectarian rivalries and unable to set up an efficient administration by themselves, those peoples needed to pass through the purifying fire of a temporary foreign rule before being upgraded to the elite of self-governing nations.

The trajectory of the Jews, Syrians, Lebanese, Armenians and Kurds described by Albert Millot in his essay on the mandates resembles the life course of Purgatory-suitable people. First of all, the scholar praises all those 'races' for having consciously and strenuously preserved their national identity and claimed their liberty against the authoritarian methods of the Porte.

The existence of these communities . . . had never ceased to be humiliated and compromised. Of course, the Turks never allowed any of their members to participate in the government; but they were even excluded from administration. All the officials . . . were recruited among the Ottoman subjects of Turkish race. . . . Nevertheless, this secular subjugation had never obscured the lively feeling, by these communities, of a national existence separated from that of the conquering nation. Resting, in general, on religion, this sentiment stemmed from oral and written traditions, and from a certain literature. . . . All the Near East longed impatiently to liberation. The course of the [world] war gave effect to this desire: though defensive at its beginning, did not the war take the shape of a crusade for the liberation of peoples?

Yet, the mark of sectarianism stained the curriculum of the rebellious populations of the Middle East, so that only the 'help' of an advanced great power could definitely rescue them from servitude and lead them to proper self-determination.

Unfortunately, we must add that [their national feeling] had also sustained itself . . . through the hatreds and the clashes among the adepts of twenty-nine different confessions who fought rather each other than against the common oppressor.<sup>38</sup>

In accordance with Millot, Historian Eric Weitz has rightly pointed out that the Paris settlements marked the 'tectonic shift' from the Vienna system, composed of multi-national and multi-confessional states legitimized by dynastical succession and

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<sup>38</sup> Millot, *Les mandats internationaux*, 20–21.

aiming at preserving the balance of power, to a concept of state sovereignty rooted in national homogeneity and an international system devoted to the cause of peoples' rights. In line with the Wilsonian endorsement of self-determination—and in competition with Lenin's—collectivities conceived in national terms became the main subjects of international law.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Mark Mazower has stressed the more ambitious character of the various peoples rights regimes established under the aegis of the League of Nations—the mandates, minorities and refugees ones—compared to the human rights law codified and defended by the United Nations.<sup>40</sup>

However, if nationalism became the accepted currency of international relations, and of international talks, it was qualified in extremely 'high' terms. The British-Wilsonian alliance which brought about the approval of the mandates system, with its implicit hierarchy of civilization, was surely a compromise between the imperial interests and 'democratic' principles. It also reflected, however, a communality of assumptions among the Allies on what a nation was, combining the 'civic' theory of nation of Paine, Mazzini and Renan with the 'primordialist' one of Herder and Fichte. A common ethno-lingual affiliation was an essential precondition to make of a people a nation, the Paris system implied, but further requirements made a nation eligible to self-determination. The common belonging inherited from the ancestors via blood and language had to be translated into a conscious, voluntary and active involvement of the individuals in the life of the community. A long record of effective institutions, an efficient economic system and an articulated and peaceful civic life were the marks of distinction of 'well established nations'—the ones immediately suitable for the Paradise of self-determination.

By identifying the systematic exclusion from the government and the recurring intertribal rivalries as the deficits of the fierce nationalities of the Ottoman Empire, Millot placed himself entirely on this line of thought. But even Middle Eastern nationalist elites employed a similar concept of nation to advance the claims of their constituencies. Chapter one offers plenty of examples of how the Egyptian petitioners insisted on the titles of civilization of their country, in terms of past glories and current economic and social development. However, if, in the case of the *Wafd*, the doubt remains to what extent that sort of argument reflected the genuine convictions of the

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<sup>39</sup> Eric D. Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions", *The American Historical Review*, 113:5 (December 2008), 1313-1343.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Mazower, 'The Strange Triumph of Human Rights', *The Historical Journal*, 47:2 (June 2004), 379-398.

petitioners or was rather strategically appropriated to fit in the Wilsonian paradigm of self-determination, no question arises as to the national consciousness of the pre-WWI campaigners featuring in Andrew Arsan's article. They clearly recognized their transnational civic engagement as a sign of the civilization of their home communities and of their full participation in the spirit of their time. One of these characters, the journalist K. T. Khairallah, co-founder of the Comité Libanais in Paris, was still active in 1919. He addressed an open letter to the forthcoming League of Nations on the 'problem of the Levant', in which he explicitly mentioned Ernst Renan's definition of nation, and argued that the Arabs perfectly fit in it.

We, the martyrs of the Arab cause, are the sons of glorious ancestors. In fact, our regions, which Mr. Lloyd George, on 29 June 1917, qualified as the cradle and temple of civilization, possess the highest legacy of humanity. . . .The renaissance [of the Arab soul] dates back to the day in which the genius of Gutenberg met that of Idrici and Avicenna, when a Lebanese took from the press the first printed page in Arabic. It was this soul that repopulated Syria and Lebanon with schools. . . . It was the Arab soul which inspired the martyrs of Syria and Iraq, making their life bright and their dead sublime. Their cause cannot die. . . . The freed Arab nations have more than a common soul and a common will. They are united by race, language, economy, history and laws. They have therefore the sacred right to organize themselves as one or several states, free or confederated, according to their national will. They want to exert this right, and only brutal force can prevent them from doing so.<sup>41</sup>

Khairallah's writing signaled that the range of possibilities for the reorganization of former Ottoman provinces was still wide when the Peace conference closed. The armistice of Mudros, which put to an end the war on the Near Eastern front in October 1918, left huge portions of Constantinople's possessions at the mercy of British and French occupation forces. Actually, an informal partition of spheres of influence between London and Paris had already begun with the Anglo-French Entente of 1904, when France was granted hegemony over Syria in return for its recognition of the Egyptian protectorate. Further partition plans were drafted after the outbreak of the Great War. Secret negotiations on the Middle East begun in November 1916 and had were conducted, for the British, by Mark Sykes, and by Georges-Picot as French representative. As stated in what would become known as the Sykes-Picot agreement of the following December, London accepted French hegemony on a great Syria,

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<sup>41</sup> K. T. Khairallah, *Le Problème du Levant: Lettre Ouverte à la Société des Nations* (Paris: Editions Ernest Leroux, 1919), 193–195.

stretching from the Egyptian to the Persian frontier as a barrier between a British-controlled Mesopotamia and a prospective Russian Armenia.<sup>42</sup>

What the Allies referred to as ‘Mesopotamia’, and would later become the Kingdom of Iraq, encompassed the three ex-Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul—actually, disputes arose among London, Paris and Istanbul whether this latter should be part of British Mesopotamia, French Syria or the new Turkish state. It was a strategically and economically crucial region, whose importance lay mainly in the abundance of oilfields in the Mosul region—Iraq is today ranked second among the world’s oil-richest countries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the use of petroleum products—gasoline and diesel fuel—was contributing to a rapidly increasing extent to the development of transportation means, and would prove to be a key feature of WWI economics. A number of foreign companies strove for railroad and mineral concessions from the Sublime Porte in Mesopotamia. In the framework of the *Drang nach Osten*-policy, the German Empire obtained the permission to build a Baghdad-Berlin railway. Even greater was the concession granted to the American businessman Admiral Colby M. Chester, who, in 1909, was authorized to build a railway running from Sivas in Central Anatolia to Yumurtulik on the Mediterranean and Lake Van. Such concessions often included the right to exploit all mineral resources available within a twenty-kilometer strip on each side of the line.

Shortly before the outbreak of the Great War, Britain negotiated a partition of concessions in Mesopotamia with the Germans. The British-owned Anglo-Persian Oil Company was expected to contribute to half of the costs of oil extraction, while Shell and Deutsche Bank would cover the remaining fifty percent on an equal basis. However, after the Sarajevo assassination, previous cooperation efforts gave way to a harsh imperial competition for the oilfields of Mesopotamia. According to Sir Maurice Hankey, the secretary of London’s War Cabinet, the control over Mesopotamian and Persian petroleum supplies was ‘a first-class British war aim’. France, despite Clemenceau’s initial downplaying of the strategic relevance of petroleum, realized also very soon how essential fuel and gas were wartime mobilization. According to the

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<sup>42</sup> David K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914–1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3–35.

provisions of the Sykes-Picot agreement, the northern part of the Mosul province, including the city of Mosul itself, should fall under Paris's control.<sup>43</sup>

But Iraq was also one of the most remote, impervious and politically unstable portions of the Ottoman Empire, as its geography and history taught. In several Ottoman proverbs, Baghdad was a metaphor to designate a far and inaccessible place; the word 'Iraq' itself sounds like *irak*, the Turkish for 'distance'. Still in the second half of the nineteenth century, despite steamer services, traveling from Constantinople to Baghdad could take from thirty-five to forty days. Geographically, the Iraqi territory presented two basic varieties of landscape: the rainy mountains of the Northwest were the home of the Kurds, and had often provided shelter to their anti-Turkish rebel tribes; the central and southern provinces, conversely, were dry—with hot summers lasting from April to October, and most of their economy was centered on irrigation provided via the Tigris and the Euphrates. It was along those two rivers that the main urban agglomerates of the region had flourished. People there lived off of trade, handicrafts and administration, but agriculture was, by far, the most relevant economic activity of the region, with Basra dates accounting for most Iraqi exports.

Tribal pastoralism and nomadism characterized the countryside. It has been estimated that, around 1905, nomads made up seventeen percent of the Baghdad province's inhabitants and roughly half of the entire Iraqi population.<sup>44</sup> In a sort of vicious circle, nomad pastoralism had both enhanced and been strengthened by insecurity and instability over Iraqi history. Until the early decades of the nineteenth century, most Turkish attempts at imposing governors over Iraq's provinces were vain. In the 1720s, in an effort to restore his army after a disastrous battle against the Afghans, governor Hasan Pasha brought numerous Abkhazian, Georgian and Circassian slaves to Baghdad. Their descendants were educated in the provincial palace and made careers in the offices of their patrons. It is from these lineages of Mamelukes that most

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<sup>43</sup> George E. Gruen, 'The Oil Resources of Iraq: Their Role in the Policies of the Great Powers', in Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian (eds.), *The Creation of Iraq, 1914–1921* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 110–124.

<sup>44</sup> These figures are provided by Muhammad Salman Hasan, 'Growth and Structure of Iraq's Population', *Bulletin of the Oxford University Institute of Economics and Statistics*, 20, 4 (1958), 339–352, and Rhodas Murphey, 'Some Features of Nomadism in the Ottoman Empire: A Survey Based on Tribal Census and Judicial Appeal Documentation from Archives in İstanbul and Damascus', *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 8 (1984), 189–197. According to Justin McCarthy, 'The population of Ottoman Syria and Iraq', *Asian and African Studies*, 15 (1981), 39, in 1909, the populations of the three Iraqi provinces were as follows: 1,300,000 inhabitants lived in Baghdad, 1,150,000 in Basra, and 828,000 in Mosul.

of the actual rulers of Iraq came until 1830, when the Sublime Porte made its last effort to reassert its direct rule over Baghdad, Mosul and the Kurdish emirates.<sup>45</sup>

The main cities of Ottoman Iraq were cosmopolitan centers, and the ethnic and religious composition of the tribal areas was also variegated. Sunni Kurds and Arabs were predominant in the North, while the Shi'is lived mainly in the South and in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. Many Kurds spoke also Persian, while Turkish was the second language of most Baghdadi Arabs. Baghdad featured the largest Jewish community in the Arab East: of the 63,272 male Ottoman nationals living there in 1869, according to the newspaper *Zewra*, 52,689 were Muslims, 9,325 Jewish and 1,258 Christians. For centuries, the future capital city of Iraq had been a highway of peoples and trade and a short-cut to India and the East, which made it particularly appealing to the foreign powers. By the end of the nineteenth century, thousands of foreigners lived in Baghdad; among them, the Persians ranked first, while the city hosted the second largest British community in the Ottoman Empire after Constantinople's.<sup>46</sup>

Britain's invasion of Mesopotamia begun as early as November 1914. The Mesopotamian campaign was initially intended as just a device to deter Ottoman activities at the head of the Persian Gulf. The early successes, however, galvanized the India Office, which was in charge of the operation, making London's ambitions higher and higher. On 22 November, General Delamian's troops occupied Basra, captured the local *wali* and took 2,000 prisoners. Immediately, the Civil Commissioner Sir Percy Cox asked for the establishment of an enduring administration, responsible for the management of state property, the supervision of the Tobacco *Régie*, and the collection of both land revenues and the Ottoman public debt. A corpus of Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulations and a new penal code, both modeled on the Indian legislation, were enforced in the occupation zone.

By March 1915, Sir Beauchamp Duff, the commander in chief of India, started considering plans for an advance towards Baghdad. In the following December, however, the Turkish counteroffensive drove the Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' first to Ctesiphon and subsequently to Kut, where the British surrendered after enduring a five-month siege. In February 1916, the India Office was relieved of the Mesopotamian campaign and replaced by the War Office, which led the British army to the final victory. By the autumn of 1917, Baghdad and the neighbor towns of Samarra and

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<sup>45</sup> Ebubekir Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq: Political Reform, Modernization and Development in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 21–67.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*. According to the same *Zewra* estimates, there were 2,126 male Persians in Baghdad in 1869.

Ramadi had been seized. The Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force completed the occupation of Iraq on 2 November 1918 with the conquest of Mosul, which was authorized by the War Office despite the Mudros armistice had been signed three days before.<sup>47</sup>

Contextually to the Allies-Ottoman confrontation, the Sykes-Picot agreement recognized a third fundamental actor for the future of the Middle East. The coming into force of the pact was subject to the outbreak of an Arab revolt against Turkish rule, which occurred in June 1916 under the leadership of Husayn bin ‘Alī, the sharif of Mecca. The basis of Husayn’s initiative was an epistolary exchange with Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Egypt, who promised that, in the case of a rebellion against Constantinople, the Arabs would be rewarded with an empire encompassing the entire territory between Egypt and Persia, with the exception of Kuwait, Aden and the Syrian coast. In fact, McMahon’s assurances were much more cautious and ambiguous than Husayn understood. Nevertheless, the increasing military help from the British, and the leadership of the legendary Lieutenant Colonel T. E. Lawrence, helped the Arab revolt to succeed. Faysal, one of the Mecca sharif’s sons, occupied Damascus in October 1918. Britain’s Occupied Enemy Territorial Administration appointed him military governor of Syria.<sup>48</sup>

In early November 1918, when censure on the circulation of Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech in the Arab world ended, the Hashemite’s initiative was provided with an influential source of international legitimization of their claims to Arab self-rule. Paris and London issued a common pledge to the populations of the former Ottoman Empire, assuring that

Far from wishing to impose any particular institution on these lands, they have no other care but to secure by their support and effective aid the normal workings of the Governments and Administrations which they shall have adopted of their own free will.<sup>49</sup>

When the peacemakers gathered in Paris, the threat posed by Faysal’s military successes to the Sykes-Picot settlements was even increased by the mandates proposal,

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 8–11.

<sup>48</sup> Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*, 44–63. David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Holt, 2009), 315–331.

<sup>49</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 13–21.



and the latter's declared compliance with the interests of the indigenous. As London was doing with Zaghlul in Egypt, the French questioned the representativeness of Faysal. Conversely, replicating the strategy adopted with Togoland and Cameroon, they sought to inject in the diplomatic conversation and in international public talks the argument that their 'administrative assistance' was welcomed by the Syrians. They collected evidence of pro-French opinion among the Syrians and submitted it to the peacemakers.

For example, during an informal meeting of the Council of Ten on 13 February 1919, Shukri Ghanim, the early mentor of Khairallah, was invited to speak in the name of a Central Syrian Committee, which also included Anis Schéhadé and Nejlil Bey Maikarzel—respectively, an Orthodox Greek and a Maronite from Lebanon, Jamil Mardam Bey, George Samné and Tewfik Fahri—all the three from Damascus and belonging, respectively, to the Muslim, Melkite and Jewish confessions. The multi-confessional character of the committee broke the stereotype depicting the Lebanese Maronites as the strongest supporters of French presence in Syria as protectors of local Christianity. Ghanim claimed to be 'duly authorized' to represent all the Syrian and Syro-Lebanese committees of the United States, Europe, Australia and Africa (at all, a one-million people constituency). He dismissed the identification of the Syrians with Islam and Arab ethnicity as reductive simplifications of the Syrian identity, which had to be considered as separate from—and superior to—that of other Arabic speaking communities of the Middle East. At the same time, Ghanim portrayed himself as voicing the educated and enlightened Syrians who fully realized that their country was yes civilized, but not enough to enjoy self-rule.

The high-class Syrian may perhaps be conceded an . . . attribute, namely, that of recognizing that the majority of his compatriots, having little experience of liberty, are not yet capable of exercising it without serious danger to themselves. He has not the courage born of ignorance. Not only does his ambition confine itself modestly within the frontiers which nature has assigned to his country, without attempting even the moral domination of his less-educated neighbours, but he is wise enough to distrust himself and seek a friendly shoulder on which to lean, and a guide in the somewhat difficult paths to liberty.

In no way, Ghanim pointed out, could such a guidance be expected from a Hashemite emir.

What affinities exist between the native of the Hedjaz and the Syrian, the nomad and the settler on the soil? And, apart from a similarity of language (more apparent than

real) imposed by the first conquests, what reasons can be adduced for annexing, even by ties of nominal suzerainty, an educated people to a race less advanced, if one may say so, in the ways of civilization, or a people of enlightened progress, open to every conception of liberty, to a race rooted to its primitive organization?

Conversely, Ghanim concluded, it was almost superfluous to recall the reasons why, if the Syrians were looking for a ‘friendly shoulder’ to back their progress towards self-rule, they would only find that in a French mandate. Besides the ‘affinities of temperament and culture’, finding ‘eloquent testimony’ in the spread of French language and schools—all ‘matters of common knowledge’, Ghanim quoted ‘the absence of any Imperialist party in France’ and ‘her relative proximity’ to his country as inclining the Syrians to Paris ‘with fervour’.<sup>50</sup>

Ghanim’s arguments provide a further sample of the reception of the ‘qualified’ notion of nationhood by Middle Eastern intellectuals. Such notion is employed, this time, to advocate the establishment of a mandatory administration. Without question, the hearing of Ghanim and the sympathetic attitude he enjoyed from Clemenceau is another example of the façade of consultation of ‘reliable local opinion’ that imperial powers used in the public representation of their policy. Having said this, intellectuals with a consolidated experience of international lobbying, as Ghanim was, cannot be reduced to mere puppets or complacent cooperators of French diplomacy. He was imbued with the ideas he professed, and the kind of progress he envisioned for his country was a European-like one. Again, an eschatological metaphor may help us framing the case. Although the sufferings of the Purgatory may resemble those of the Hell, there is an ontological difference between the inhabitants of the two reigns and their disposition towards God’s justice. The damned are unrepentant sinners who will eternally pay the price of their rebellion to the Lord with grief and resentment. The souls of the Purgatory, conversely, accept the just expiation of their faults with resignation and patience, being certain of their salvation. Ghanim was a good soul of the Purgatory: not only did he invoke expiation for his country, but also recognized submission to the rule of the Lord (France), as beneficial.

Also Faysal was invited to lead a delegation from the Hedjaz at the Paris conference, while Damascus emerged as the aspirant centre of a pan-Arab awakening. In March 1920, the Syrian Congress, dominated by the nationalist movement al-Fatat, proclaimed Faysal king of Syria. One of the first acts of the new monarch was to ask the

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<sup>50</sup> FRUS, Paris Conference Papers, vol. 3. Secretary’s notes of a meeting held at M. Pichon’s room, Quay d’Orsay, at 3 p.m., 13 February 1919.

League of Nations to establish a British mandate over Syria. However, as assured to Clemenceau in the Council of Ten, His Majesty's Government had no intention to make its occupation of Syria permanent, considered itself bound by the Sykes-Picot agreement, and had to devote its attention and resources to other issues and other theaters, as the Irish were fighting for independence. Therefore, London 'declined the invitation' by Faysal and decided to comply with the partition lines as agreed on with Paris. All British troops had evacuated Syria by November 1920. Meanwhile, General Henri de Gouraud, a conservative Catholic, was appointed commander of the French Army of Levant and high commissioner for Syria, with Robert de Caix serving as his secretary general. At that point, no alternative remained to Faysal other than negotiating with the French the terms of a mandate. In return for some degree of Arab self-rule in inland Syria, Paris was provided with the authority of handling Syrian foreign relations and advising Damascus on military and administrative matters; it was also granted priority for economic concessions.<sup>51</sup>

In the meantime, the Syrian capital had also become the basis of the main attempts at Mesopotamian independence. At the beginning of 1920, a 'Mesopotamian Conference' gathered there. It was, in fact, a meeting of six notables who claimed to act in the name and on behalf of 'the notables of Mosul and Baghdad by powers of attorney and' of 'a considerable number of tribal chiefs by special letters'. Faysal himself featured prominently among the conference members, who included also Jaafar Pasha el-Askari, former leader of the Arab army within the British Eastern Expeditionary Force. On 10 March, a 'Declaration of Independence of Mesopotamia' appeared in Damascus's Arab nationalist newspaper *Ul urdun*. The authors, who qualified themselves as 'the members of a conference completely and legally representing the Mesopotamian nation', reminded that their country had entered the world war 'to take its places besides independent peoples', relying on President Wilson and his Allies' commitment to national self-determination. In the name of that principle, of 'the nation's natural right to live in freedom', and of 'the expressed wishes of all classes of the people', they declared 'the absolute and unmitigated independence of Mesopotamia . . . within its natural frontiers from the province of Musil in the North to the Persian Gulf', and proclaimed Abdullah as its 'constitutional king'.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, as General Nouri Pasha—another Arab officer fighting with the British army—assured to his superiors,

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<sup>51</sup> Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*, 44–63 . I will return on the Syrian mandate in chapter 4.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, FO 371/5188/E 2872, Arabic press extracts, 30 March 1920.

the conference's proclaim did not exclude a British protectorate, which could coexist with Abdullah's rule. The Arabs, he recalled, had taken up arms beside Britain in a common crusade against the Turks, and 'the wishes of people' in Mesopotamia were 'in perfect harmony with the intentions and promises of the British government'.<sup>53</sup>

A dispatch addressed by the Civil Commissioner in Baghdad Percy Cox, and received by the India Office on 4 May 1920, identified two main positions within Mesopotamian public opinion as to the future of the country. The majority of Arabs appeared to be in favor of the inclusion of Mesopotamia in a larger pan-Arab state, with the younger generations of politicians and ex-officials supporting Abdullah, Faysal's brother, as ruler of this new state, and elder Baghdadi notables opposing it. Leading Jews, who feared an Arab-dominated regime and mistrusted the British willingness to defend them, were conversely well disposed towards a return of the Turks, at least as advisers of an Arab government.<sup>54</sup> A subsequent report, in June, highlighted the spread of anti-British sentiments among both Baghdadi and Mosul's elites.<sup>55</sup>

As for the British, an India-like model of quasi-direct rule, characterized by the concentration of the executive power in the hands of a few colonial officials appointed by London, was no longer replicable for economic and public consensus reasons. As historian Peter Sluglett points out, '[l]ong established and hitherto almost unchallenged assumptions of British imperial policy had to be reconciled with a whole set of new requirements', since, '[i]n Iraq, it was necessary to adapt the existing machinery . . . to a new and less direct form of control, which was both unfamiliar and unpalatable to many of those called upon to operate it'.<sup>56</sup> Nouri Pasha concluded the above mentioned letter by inviting London to establish a mixed Arab-British commission to study the future settlement of Iraq, which it did in part. Sir Edgar Bonham Carter chaired a committee, 'composed of four able men, all Englishmen, with whom no Arab was associated', charged by the Cabinet with inspecting Mesopotamia and advancing proposals for a future constitution. 'The low standard education of the country', they observed, 'and the absence of individuals who were capable of filling even lower administration appointments', made it impossible to give the region a decent government without a direct involvement of British authorities. The constitution the committee envisioned

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<sup>53</sup> TNA, FO 371/5226/E 2719, General Nouri Pasha to Major Young, 5 April 1920.

<sup>54</sup> The British National Archives, Public Record Office (hereafter, TNA), Foreign Office, Political Departments, General Correspondence, 1906-1966: Eastern (FO 371), box 5226, file E 4200, 'Public Opinion in Mesopotamia in Regard to Future of Mesopotamia', 5 May 1920.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, FO 371/5227/E 6058, 'Public Opinion in Mesopotamia in Regard to Future of the Country', 9 June 1920.

<sup>56</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 13.

featured two main governing bodies: the legislative power had to be entrusted to an elective assembly, while the executive power should be conferred upon a mixed British-Arab council head by the civil commissioner.<sup>57</sup> Not all British officials, however, were eager to co-opt the Arabs onto the new government. Sir John Shuckburgh, a prominent civil servant in both the India and the Colonial Offices, did nothing to hide his anti-Arab-prejudices:

It is clear that the enlightened and progressive Arab in whom the enthusiasts ask us to believe is a mere fiction as far as Mesopotamia is concerned. Such progressive elements as do exist in the country are not Arabs at all but Jews and Christians. It will be a poor kind of self-determination that places such people at the mercy of an uncontrolled Arab administration.<sup>58</sup>

Meeting on 23 March, the Lloyd George cabinet decided to accept a mandate over Mesopotamia, provided that it included also Mosul. The character of the mandate, it is stated in the minutes, should conform to article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations: that is, Britain's policy would be limited to provide administrative advice and assistance, when necessary, to 'an Arab government founded on representative Arab institutions (District and Provincial Councils, etc.) and an Arab Administration'.<sup>59</sup>

At the San Remo conference of the Allies Supreme Council of April 1920, it was confirmed that Mesopotamia and Palestine would become British 'A' mandates. The British-controlled *Baghdad Times* commented on that with emphatic and reassuring tones:

The inhabitants of Mesopotamia may rest assured that the British Government has not accepted the allotted task without full realization of the responsibility it implies. The position of mandatory makes high demands upon any power which strives to fulfill the intention of the League of Nations under which it works. The ideal at which it must aim is the creation of a healthy body politic, guided and controlled by healthy public opinion. Care for the material prosperity of the mandate country would not alone suffice for the attainment of this end. It is the duty of the mandatory Power to act the part of a wise and far-seeing guardian who makes provision for the training of his charge with a view to fitting him to take his place in the world of men. . . . Reconstruction will not be a work of a day, but with a race such as the Arabs, quick to

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<sup>57</sup> TNA, FO 371/5226/E 5643, Inter-departmental conference on Middle-Eastern affairs, 17 May 1920.

<sup>58</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, FO 371/5071/E 2167, 'Future of Mesopotamia': Record of conclusions of a Cabinet Meeting, 25 March 1920.

learn and eager to seek advantage from the attainments of science, progress should be rapid. . . . [A]s the guardian rejoices over the growth of his ward into sane and independent manhood, so will the guardian Power see with satisfaction the development of political institutions which shall be sound and free.<sup>60</sup>

Syria and Lebanon were assigned to Paris according to the partition lines set up in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, with the relevant exception of Mosul, which would remain under British rule.<sup>61</sup> The Syrians, however, were anything but willing to welcome the new occupiers. The Arabist movement al Fatat, which controlled Faysal's cabinet, demanded that Syria be included with Palestine and Mesopotamia in a fully independent Arab state, in fulfillment of McMahon's alleged promises, under the rule of Faysal's brother Abdullah. Moreover, the Syrians refused to adopt the French franc as their currency and blocked railways to Lebanon. On 9 July 1920, the French sent Faysal an ultimatum. He was asked to accept the French mandate unconditionally, which he ultimately did, but not, according to Paris, in time. French troops occupied Damascus after defeating a largely unprofessional Syrian army in Maysalun, on 24 July, Faysal fled to Palestine. In one year, he would become the king of Iraq, after a massive rising against British rule definitely persuaded London to give formal autonomy to the Mesopotamian mandate.<sup>62</sup>

#### MESOPOTAMIA IN LIMBO: IMPERIAL REPRESSION AND METROPOLITAN REFRACTIONS

To describe the context in which the Iraqi revolt took place, I will use a last image from Catholic eschatology, though an 'unofficial' one. In the time lasting between the end of the Great War and the coming into force of the mandate, Iraq was trapped in a sort of limbo—according to Catholic popular culture and sacred art, the container of the good souls passed away before Christ who, despite ignoring Jesus' Revelation, lived in the respect of morality and natural law, but could not benefit from the redemptory sacrifice of God's Son. The limbo is neither a painful nor a blessed reign, but a place of eternal suspension of time, whose inhabitants will never see God. Indefiniteness was also the mark of Iraqi politics at the end of WWI. In spite of the British's consolidated

<sup>60</sup> TNA, FO 371/5226/E 5977, Excerpts from the *Baghdad Times* of 3 May 1920, 7 June 1920.

<sup>61</sup> France was compensated for the lost of Mosul's oilfields with the opportunity to get 25 percent of crude oil at current market prices, but the concession holder, the Turkish Petroleum Company, had to remain under permanent British control.

<sup>62</sup> Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*, 48–63, and Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, 435–440 and 558–568.

experience as colonial rulers, at first glance, confusion appeared to be the most evident characteristic of the administration of Mesopotamia: the War Office was in charge of military operations, while the India Office was responsible for civil administration. The general framing of London's Mesopotamian policy, however, fell in the realm of the Foreign Office's competence, which also included the gathering and circulating of information through the Arab Bureau of Intelligence. Hence, the editorialist of the *Morning Post* could ironically wonder: 'As to the administration of Mesopotamia: is it to be under the Foreign Office, or the India Office, or the Government of India? At present it may be suspected of being carried on by a Ministry of Circumlocution'.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, the direction of the entire political and administrative machinery was centralized in the hands of Sir Arnold Talbot Wilson, the acting civil commissioner of Baghdad. He carried on the work that in an Indian province was usually distributed between the lieutenant-governor, financial commissioners, divisional commissioners and the accountant-general: to him accounted directly not only a Secretariat consisting of a financial, a revenue and a judicial section, but also such crucial departments as those of Education and of Irrigation, and sixteen divisions of the size of an average Indian district.<sup>64</sup> Damascus's newspaper *Al Uqaab* labeled Wilson as a man 'well known for his passionate imperialistic leanings'. Government, placed in the hands of such a figure, was only conceivable as 'merely a concession to the natives granted by Great Britain'. The paper blamed the civil commissioner for pursuing a policy aiming at 'at stirring up dissension between the tribes and the townmen, and the Shis and the Sunnis'.<sup>65</sup>

The British administration abolished the existing elective municipal councils and imposed the Indian rupee as the new currency of Mesopotamia. Most importantly, the political officers governing the various districts chose to rely directly on local notables for maintaining public order. Selected sheikhs were co-opted onto the civil administration in exchange for their loyalty. They accepted the primary responsibility for keeping peace, protecting the lines of communication and collecting revenues; in return, they obtained arms, agricultural loans, subsidies and relief from taxes. According to historian Judith Yaphe, this strategy produced devastating effects on the tribal structure of the Iraqi countryside, as it alienated the sheikhs from their tribes by

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<sup>63</sup> TNA, FO 371/522/E 6055, 29 May 1920, Excerpt from 'Two Adjournments', *The Morning Post*, 16 May 1920.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, FO 371/5229/E 9020, 'British Policy in Mesopotamia', 28 July 1920.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, FO 371/5074/E 5284, 'Criticism in *Al Aqaab* of British Policy in Mesopotamia', 26 May 1920.

replacing tribal obligations with British protection as the basis of their authority, thus encouraging them to pursue their self-interests and to rule by authoritarian methods. But discontent spread among urban middle classes as well. Besides suffering for the general increase of prizes characterizing the aftermath of the Great War, many civil servants, teachers, scholars, lawyers and former soldiers lost their jobs in the transition from the Turkish to the British rule.<sup>66</sup>

The mistakes of the British ultimately turned against themselves, as the unpopularity of their administration enhanced the formation of an anti-British coalition among ethnic groups and social classes which had fought each other for centuries. Shi'i clerics joined the tribal sheikhs of the Middle and Lower Euphrates and Sunni nationalists of Baghdad in campaigning against British authorities. Disorders started in the early summer of 1920. In Najaf, the British responded with the blockade of the town, and numerous arrests and executions, to the murder of one of their officers. Wilson, meanwhile, held a plebiscite among Baghdadi notables on which kind of civil administration they desired, reporting that a majority supported the British as advisers of the new regime. Even so, Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi, a leading Shi'i cleric of Kerbala, issued a *fatwa*—that is, a legal opinion, stating that not only did the Muslims have no right to elect a non-Muslim ruler, but the service itself in the British administration was also unlawful for them.

The common anti-British crusade resulted in an unprecedented joint celebration of the *Ramadan* by the Shi'is and the Sunnis in April 1920. Besides prescribing fast and pilgrimages to the shrine cities to every Muslim, the holy month has a different meaning for the two main groups of the Islamic family: while the Sunnis celebrate the birth of the prophet Muhammad in a ceremony called *mawlud*, the Shi'is commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Husayn, for whose murder the hated 'cousins' are held responsible. For this reason, Sunnis are unwelcome in Shi'i mosques, where a passion play reproducing the assassination of Husayn at Kerbala, named *ta'ziyya*, takes place. This short background on Muslim traditions is enough to understand the exceptionality of what happened in Baghdad on 17 May 1920, as *mawlud* and *ta'ziyya* were celebrated alternatively in Sunni and Shi'is mosques in joint services featuring members of both sects. Mass marches, nationalist speeches and public performances of anti-imperial poems followed. The coincidence of religious and political rallies ensued

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<sup>66</sup> Judith S. Yaphe, 'The View from Basra: Southern Iraq's Reaction to War and Occupation, 1915-1920', in Simon and Tejirian, *The Creation of Iraq*, 18–35.



in massive anti-British demonstrations. Their organizers, among whom the businessman Ja'far Abu al-Timman and Ayatollah Muhammad al-Sadre featured prominently, managed to gather roughly 20,000 people. But it was one week later that rebellion spread in the future Iraqi capital, as a consequence of the arrest of a young employee of the civil administration charged with reciting an anti-British poem in public. Wilson accepted to meet fifteen delegates of the protesters, but only in presence of other notables he trusted. The result of the negotiation was the establishment of a provisional committee of former members of the Ottoman parliament, under the leadership of the Naqib of Baghdad Sayyid Talib, as an advisory body to remain in charge until a general constituent assembly was elected.<sup>67</sup>

*Al Uqaab* commented sarcastically on developments in Mesopotamia:

The Allies thought that they had solved the Eastern Question at the San Remo Conference by the distribution of the Ottoman inheritance among adventurers. England took the lion's share. . . . England swallowed too large a mouthful to digest, and placed herself in opposition to the Moslem world which at once showed a dangerous agitation.<sup>68</sup>

Baghdad disorders were maybe the most evident episodes of the Iraqi revolt, but they proved to be only the beginning of a series of upheavals involving the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala as well as the tribes of the Middle and Lower Euphrates, where several provisional governments were proclaimed. The Kurds were particularly angry with the British: after sending a delegation to the Paris peace conference, they had obtained the promise of an independent Kurdish state providing home to the numerous tribes spread among Persia and the Turkish Empire. The treaty of Sevres between the Allies and the Ottomans provided for that, but it was eventually rejected by Istanbul as Mustapha Kemal took the power.

Most of the Iraqi press, however, was controlled by the British. Therefore, the coverage of the disorders was minimal and partial, at least judging from the excerpts available in London's National Archives. On 28 May, for example, the editor of the *Basra Times* wrote to Wilson, asking for the permission to start a correspondence with London's *Times*, as requested by the editors of the British paper. The civil

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*. Charles Townshend, *When God Made Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia and the Creation of Iraq* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 463–478.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, FO 371/5188/E 6497, Arabic press extracts, 15 June 1920. 'Problems of the East', *Al Uqaab*, 26 May 1920.

commissioner answered affirmatively, but demanded that telegrams from Basra be submitted to his office before being sent to Britain.<sup>69</sup> Hence, relatively few news could cross the Mesopotamian borders due to the British censorship. Nonetheless, Beirut's *Al-Barql* published a telegram from Teheran reporting an accident occurred at Tel-Afar, though with a considerable delay.

The situation in Mesopotamia is becoming serious. The powerful Shammar tribes led by Sherifian Officers attacked 'Tel-Afra' and murdered all the British Officials and occupied the government buildings. Serious troubles also happened in Mosul where 6000 Arabs occupied Government Offices and bombarded two quarters of the town. Communications between Baghdad and Mosul have been broken. The people rebelled in many places and sanguinary battles were fought between English and rebels. Crowds demonstrated before the Police Station at Baghdad and asked for the release of the political prisoners. Many English Steamers on the Tigris were attacked and pillaged and their crews murdered.

We do not know how accurate the information provided in the article is. As reported in British documents, on 3 June, the commander of the British gendarmerie was shot by one of his own men, the political office was stormed, and two armored cars which drove into the town were shot to a standstill. Even more than the account of events, however, the comments which follow are worthy of mention. Curiously, they feature the same eating vocabulary of the *Al Uqaab*'s article. According to the journalist, Britain was now facing the consequences of its unfulfilled promises to the Arab people.

England is reaping today what she has sown. She wished for an Arab Empire on religious foundations to replace the Turkish Empire and to have a strong buffer against Powers in the neighbourhood. . . . The smooth sea over which Great Britain sailed for her interests and the fish which she fed with delicious food is now very heavy and excited.<sup>70</sup>

In conjunction with the Iraqi uprisings, a harsh debate on British policy in Mesopotamia was taking place in Britain, both in the parliament and in the press. Differently from the Egyptian case, however, no diasporic mobilization occurred, and

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<sup>69</sup> TNA, FO 371/5079/E 12727, 'Censoring of Telegrams from *Basra Times* to *London Times*', 16 October 1920.

<sup>70</sup> TNA, FO 371/5188/E 9628, Arab press extracts, 9 August 1920, 'Between Yesterday and Today', *Al-Barql*, 5 July 1920.

the Mesopotamian viewpoint never really entered the British debate. At the end of May, Lord Islington asked the executive to clarify what kind of administration they had in mind for Mesopotamia. The government replied that they needed time to elaborate an answer. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, the MP publicized his view on this subject in a letter to the *Times*.

The method in which the mandatory system is to be applied is being awaited by the world in a critical spirit, not devoid of suspicion. Any system that suggests analogy with our Protectorates or Crown Colonies will raise strong opposition. . . . No one can contemplate without grave concern the responsibility that Great Britain is asked to assume in that country. . . . On three grounds modification of the present system require early consideration. (1) Can it be regarded as a form of administration consistent with the conception of a mandatory system? (2) Is it a system of Government which is likely to be permanently acceptable to the Arab community in Mesopotamia? (3) Can the British Exchequer afford to meet the annual expenditure entailed by this system? . . . The mandatory system is the supposed offspring of the League of Nations, but the latter has not even reached the stage of adolescence. . . . It is, after all, the nation that stands or falls by whatever is done and eventuates hereafter.<sup>71</sup>

In general, confirming Lloyd George's expectation during the peace conference, all parts opposed a direct British rule on the ground of the economic and human costs it would involve. Almost unanimous, furthermore, was the emphasis on the necessity of drafting a new regime with some involvement of the Iraqi public opinion and of establishing new institutions based on popular consent. In most cases, however, this priority was justified in the name of London's international reputation and national interest: on the one hand, traditional imperialism was hard to defend in the era of self-determination announced by Woodrow Wilson; on the other, giving the Arabs some degree of self-rule would avoid recurring unrests and the expenses to contain them. This is the case for the above mentioned letter by Islington. Also an article written for the *Daily Express* by William Ormsby-Gore presents the same sort of argument.

National consciousness is something which has long been familiar to Europe. It is comparatively new in Asia, but though new it is none the less real. We have to reckon with it in Burma, India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia, and Egypt. We can either go with the stream, helping and guiding to the best of our ability with goodwill and enthusiasm, or we can try vainly to stop the stream. In the latter case the waters

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<sup>71</sup> TNA, FO 371/5226/E 6055, Letter to the editor of the *Times*, 29 May 1920, attached to Lord Islington's parliamentary question on the future of Mesopotamia.

will pile up from everywhere and we shall run grave risk of being borne away on the flood. We have a great opportunity in Asia to-day. Do not let us throw it away for lack of vision and lack of understanding, or because of departmental muddle and extravagant waste.<sup>72</sup>

Again, national consciousness is associated with progress, whose trajectory runs from Europe Eastwards. In addition, more or less implicit in these arguments was the assumption that Britain needed to remain in Mesopotamia, both to secure its neighbor possessions in India and its influence sphere in Persia, and to exploit the oil available in that region. Given this necessity, the task had to be accomplished in the least costly way. The *Times* took quite a critical stand towards Arnold Wilson. Its editorials often pointed out the counterproductive effects of his attachment to old forms of colonial rule.

Colonel Wilson, who seems to combine inexhaustible energy with a dangerous tendency to disregard the broader aspects of Imperial policy, has acted as though Great Britain proposes to take permanent possession of Mesopotamia and to keep it under direct British rule. The frequent outbreaks in these areas are to some extent a consequence of his excessive activities. Had we left the people of both Southern and Northern Kurdistan to manage their own affairs, we should probably have had none of the expensive 'punitive' expeditions of the last twelve months.<sup>73</sup>

Educated conservative Englishmen did little efforts to disguise their mistrust for the 'Arab race' and their exclusive concern with the economic and strategic interests of Britain. In their view, seeking to teach democracy and the rule of law to a backward and endemically bellicose people was a pious and incredibly expensive illusion. Rather, many maintained, London should limit its presence in Mesopotamia to economic activities and strategic garrisons. George Buchanan, a respected diplomat and former ambassador to Russia, wrote in the *Times* that the British taxpayer was paying 'to defend Mesopotamians from themselves'.

The question arises whether we are not going too fast and teaching the people to run before they can walk. Eastern peoples as a rule detest efficiency and sanitation, and although the Arab welcomed us when we were beating the Turk, and incidentally paying for everything bought in the country at rates far in excess of any prices before heard of, I doubt if he wishes to be civilized in a hurry, and certainly he resents

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<sup>72</sup> William Ormsby-Gore, 'Our Problem in the East', *Daily Express*, 3 June 1920.

<sup>73</sup> 'A Case for Frankness', *Times*, 15 June 1920.

excessive control and taxation. . . . We should also . . . refrain from forcing on the people town councils, improvement trusts, drainage and water supply, and all the other paraphernalia of civilization.

The diplomat suggested that British garrisons be placed only in the main cities and that the rest of Mesopotamia ‘be left to work out its own salvation by degrees and by its own people’.<sup>74</sup> Conservative imperialists and the most progressive and radical wings of the British political spectrum had in common the sincerity about the actual reason of London’s presence in Iraq, that is, Mosul’s oil. The latter, however, combined the condemnation of British economic imperialism with a genuine concern with the rights and the development of the population under Britain’s tutelage. The *Manchester Guardian* appears to align along on this stand in an editorial titled ‘Mesopotamia’ that appeared on 24 June.

In the forefront Mr. Lloyd George places the grim figure of Mustapha Kemal and our duty to the Arab peoples. Does anyone consult the Arabs? Do they want an Anglo-Indian administration, or would they form a government of their own with some backing of expert advice from us? Agreed that, having driven out the Turks, we could not leave the country without some provision for order. Was it necessary for us to rush in with a regular Westernised administration, with punitive expeditions and machine-guns all complete?. . . We should not need these things if we were establishing a political system on the basis of popular consent.<sup>75</sup>

To be sincere, such arguments appear quite rarely in the excerpts from those days’ debates. But what strikes the most of those debates is the absence of the voice of the government. The *Times* blamed the executive for the ‘evasions, concealments and half-truths’ of its public statements on Mesopotamia.<sup>76</sup> While Winston Churchill—at that time secretary of War—was forced, sometimes, to provide details on military operations and the casualties of the revolt, Lloyd George’s ministers’ tactic, when asked by MPs to illustrate the general guidelines of London’s Mesopotamian policy, was that of silence and procrastination. Actually, the Iraqi uprisings fell in the middle of a terribly fluid and uncertain moment for Middle Eastern settlements, as uncertain was the meaning of that new institute of the international law called ‘mandate’. The ability of

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<sup>74</sup> George Buchanan, ‘Mesopotamia. Our Commitment under the Mandate: A too Great Attempt’, *Times*, 21 June 1920.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Mesopotamia’, *Manchester Guardian*, 24 June 1920.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘A Case for Frankness’, *Times*, 15 June 1920.

the League of Nations to make the mandates system effective seemed also highly questionable, especially since the U.S. Senate was likely to reject the covenant. A partial settlement for former Ottoman possessions had been reached with the treaty of Sevres, but the new Turkish government had soon withdrawn from it. Meanwhile, the pro-British Faysal had been crowned king of Syria against France's wishes, while many Iraqi wanted Abdullah as a ruler in spite of London's indifference to their claims, and the Allies had to find a job for Husayn's sons by remaining faithful to their wartime commitments to the popular will of the Arabs.

The only certain assumption on Britain's projects on Iraq at that moment, therefore, was that the British were not sure what to do. Moreover, most commentators agreed that Colonel Wilson's rejection of the Iraqi claims was not instrumental to British interests. Therefore, the civil commissioner found himself in a difficult position when he tried to reassure an Arab deputation in Baghdad, on 21 July. He reasserted London's commitment to the Anglo-French declaration of 1918 and to article 22 of the covenant, and its intention to establish a new government by popular consent. But even after accomplishing that task, he maintained, reducing Britain's control over Mesopotamia would inflict a death-blow to the new institutions of the country 'whilst in their infancy'.

We should be false to our trust if we allowed ourselves to relax the reins of government until we are in a position to hand them over the National Civil Government . . . . Do not be misled by appearances. Mesopotamia has been under alien Government for 200 years, and with the best will in the world an indigenous National Government cannot be set up at once. The process must be gradual or disaster is certain.<sup>77</sup>

Wilson quoted the proposal drafted by the Bonham Carter committee as the basis for the shaping of future Mesopotamian institutions, with the relevant difference that he promised to place an Arab at the head of the executive council. Furthermore, the civil commissioner tried to rekindle the old internal divisions of the anti-British front, by presenting those who had aroused 'the passions of ignorant men', 'for patriotic or other motives', to 'hasten the establishment of a Civil Government', as irresponsible people who were doing 'a great disservice' to their country. In fact, after the impressive May

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<sup>77</sup> TNA, FO 371/5228/E 8609, 'Future Government of Mesopotamia', 21 July 1920, speech by Arnold Wilson to an Arab deputation, 2 June 1920.

demonstrations, the situation in the future Iraqi capital was turning quiet and the old Sunni-Shi's rivalry was re-emerging. On 15 June, a dispatch from the India Office reported: 'Situation in Baghdad has improved and moderate opinion condemns extremists'.<sup>78</sup>

However, the paternalistic tones of Wilson's address were not enough to placate the anti-imperial fervor in the countryside. On the first of July, for example, an uprising spread around Rumeitha as the local political officer arrested a sheikh for defaulting on an agricultural loan. The members of the Dhawalim tribe reacted by storming into the town and rescuing their leader, and by conducting raids along the railway. The British sent 527 troops to restore the order. Between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>, they suffered more than ninety casualties and 160 wounded soldiers. A relief column sent subsequently was blocked by the rebels, and only an aerial bombing allowed it to reach Rumeitha and to relieve the local garrison on the 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>79</sup> Even worse was the fate of the so-called 'Manchester column', consisting of two squadrons of cavalry, an infantry battalion and an artillery battery, which was sent from Hilla to Kifl on 23 July. After being halted on the Rustumia canal for twenty-four hours through heat exhaustion, it was attacked by the insurgents and forced to retreat to Hilla. According to Churchill's report to the parliament, 250 among British and Indians were killed, 280 were missing, 260 horses died, seven ammunition wagons and eighty-nine transport carts were lost.<sup>80</sup>

In June, Sir Aylmer Handle, the commander of British troops in Mesopotamia, obtained roughly 30,000 reinforcements—most of whom were Indians—to his 80,000-men contingent. It took the entire summer and part of the autumn for London to regain control of all the Mesopotamian territory. Rumors have widely circulated, both in scholarly work and in general debates, that the British employed chemical weapons against the insurgents.<sup>81</sup> Especially in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, in 2003, many sought in the years of the mandate a precedent for Saddam Hussein's use of gas against the Kurds in the 1980s. However, as Ray Douglas has convincingly put forward in a recent article appeared in the *Journal of Modern History*, there is no conclusive evidence to prove Britain's use of gas in Iraq, while an accurate exam of all available

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<sup>78</sup> TNA, FO 371/5227/E 6426, 'Future of Mesopotamia', 15 June 1920.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, FO 371/5228/E 8803, Winston Churchill in the parliament on the military situation at Rumeitha, 24 July 1920.

<sup>80</sup> TNA, FO 371/5228/E 9519, 'Casualties – Military operations in Mesopotamia', 7 August 1920.

<sup>81</sup> Charles Townshend is among the historian supporting this thesis. See his *Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

primary sources seems more likely to disprove that thesis.<sup>82</sup> On the basis of what we know for sure, the British response to the riots was mainly centered on low warfare and punitive strikes and sweeps. As after the Rumeitha and Hilla incidents, slow-moving columns of infantry and mounted cavalry troops were sent to sweep into villages, burn homes, destroy and confiscate livestock, and leaving fines. A punitive sweep was conducted north of Hilla in late October, when the British took 800 prisoners and 7,000 heads of cattle, sheep and horses. When necessary, the punitive expeditions were supported by armored cars or airplanes. By the end of October, the revolt could be considered extinguished. It has been estimated that the rebellion cost about 8,540 lives to the insurgents, while 426 British were killed, 1,288 wounded and 615 missing.<sup>83</sup>

Another crucial difference between the British public debate on Iraq and that of Egypt, and a consequence of the lack of transmission belts—petitions, diasporic campaigns—between the Iraqis and the international public sphere, is that, apart from few exceptions, no proper discussion on the methods and figures of insurgency and repression took place in Britain. The talks were mostly centered on the goals and expenditures of the British presence in Iraq, and no remarkable voices pressured the government on the causes, repression and casualties of the uprising. Even so, as the revolt was coming to an end, British officials started their neurotic exchange of explanations of the disorders. In a telegram dated 19 August 1920, Colonel Wilson listed the mistakes that, in his view, had undermined Britain's popularity in Mesopotamia. Acutely, he acknowledged that the sheikhs had been granted too much authority compared to their effective control over their tribes. He also enlisted both low prices and shortage of goods, and London's delays in defining the Mesopotamian situation, as concurrent factors of discontent. Except the latter factor, a venial sin, the causes of the revolt fell outside Britain's responsibility. Wilson's interpretation of the outbreak was almost entirely centered on the externalization of the evil technique. He highlighted the ill-omened consequences of 'President Wilson's 14 points and agitation created thereby and stimulated by Sheriffian and Turkish agents, both corrupted and paid'.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ray M. Douglas, 'Did Britain Use Chemical Weapons in Mandatory Iraq?', *Journal of Modern History*, 81, 4 (December 2009), 859–887.

<sup>83</sup> For a detailed account of Britain's military operations in the Lower Euphrates region, see Mark Jacobsen, "'Only by the Sword': British Counter-insurgency in Iraq", *Small Wars and Insurgences*, 2, 2 (1991), 323–363.

<sup>84</sup> TNA, FO 371/5229/E 10109, 'Unrest in Mesopotamia', 19 August 1920.



The obsession with subversive influences from Turkey and Russia seems to be a *trait d'union* of all British officials' different readings of the Iraqi events. The most articulated—and maybe imaginative—was that provided by the Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu. Here, the externalization of the evil is matched with another typical self-absolving argument: the separation between enlightened and irresponsible indigenous opinion. The 'Arab party', Montagu argued, could be divided between 'sane extremists', who desired Arab independence under British control, and 'ultra-extremists', who wanted just to expel the Europeans from the Middle East. The latter were able to gain the support of the anti-British forces operating outside Mesopotamia, such as the Bolsheviks, Indian anarchists and the Kemalists. 'Whether independent movements or separate manifestations of a single conspiracy', wrote Montagu, 'they are at least allied'. The minister urged London to promote the formation of a coalition of all pro-British nationalists of Iraq. Being Mesopotamia the centre of so widely extended international conspiracies, he thought, the region was of utmost relevance for Britain's national interest.

We must recognise that we are fighting in Mesopotamia not a constitutional question as to the future government of Mesopotamia, but for the very exercise of civilization in the Middle East.<sup>85</sup>

Montagu's conclusions were probably stimulated by the intelligence reports that the political department of the India Office produced weekly. On 7 October 1920, Major N. N. E. Bray, the special intelligence officer attached to that department, submitted a 'Preliminary Report on the Causes of the Unrest'. Although the British had encountered the major problems in the countryside, he argued, the origins of the revolt had to be looked for in Baghdad. Tribal leaders, Bray affirmed, were 'unable of political initiatives'; they were but tools in the hands of 'the Educated Class', that is, 'prolific students of history (especially of Arabian history), though they are not always capable of deriving correct conclusion therefrom'. These students, according to the officer, were 'saturated with intrigues' and 'directed by outside influence through the medium of Berlin and Moscow', with the aim of the 'unification of the whole (Turkey, Syria and Mesopotamia) on a pan-Islamic basis'.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> TNA, FO 371/5229/E 10440, 'Outbreak in Mesopotamia', 26 August 1920.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, FO 371/5230/12339, 'Situation in the Middle East', 7 October 1920.

Curiously, Wilson's analysis appears to be the most plausible, complete and balanced of the three—although none contemplate a legitimate aspiration of the Iraqi people to self-government. Even so, the revolt enhanced London's decision to replace the colonel with a more moderate and conciliatory figure: in October 1920, Sir Percy Cox, former chief political officer of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, was appointed high commissioner for the mandate of Mesopotamia. Wilson's farewell speech, on September 20, was particularly intense and solemn. The commissioner began by outlining its quasi-Hegelian conception of history, which he applied to the interpretation of the Great War and its immediate aftermath.

I believe the truth to be that the world is swayed now even more than of old by moral, rather than by material forces, by ideas and theories rather than by Governments and facts. Time was when ideas which had their birth in the East had a profound influence on Western thought. We are now seeing the opposite process at work. The 19th century witnessed the revival of nationalism in Europe and Asia, a reaction of the man in the field and in the street from the conception and existence of great Empires. The people had their part in these Empires, in which the common interests, rather than the differences of the component parts, were emphasised. But they could not see it. They preferred something smaller which they would feel to be their own. Nationalism is the basis of the last peace treaties. It was to protect the rights of small nations that we fought, and no idea appealed more widely to the many races composing the British Empire. Critics of nationalism as a constructive politics were silenced; doubters were perforce dumb.

Leaving aside the paradox of Britain as the champion of national self-determination in the Middle East and the silence on the economic and strategic calculations guiding the Mesopotamian expedition, Wilson's speech synthesized the set of self-absolving argument inspiring the British perception and public representation of their rule in Iraq. It comprised a mixture of ideal principles and economic interests in which the pursuit of British power was easily reconcilable with the advance of progress and civilization.

The clouds are low, but the sun shines above. . . . By the help of God we will with patience bring to a successful conclusion the task to which we have set our hands. Officials come and go, administrations change; but we may be sure that . . . our first consideration will be the interests of the people of this country. To quote President Lincoln: ‘With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right of God as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in’.<sup>87</sup>

Little did Wilson care, maybe, that Abraham Lincoln could mean nothing to Baghdadi notables or that his audience might have a much different conception of God that he did. The most formidable response to Wilson’s arguments may be found in a letter that Colonel Lawrence addressed to the *Times* on 23 July 1920. In a concise and simple article, the hero of British WWI campaigns in the Middle East destroyed the very assumption on which all the excerpts quoted in this section are based: that is, that the Arabs needed Britain’s guidance to achieve self-government. What the British did not realize, Lawrence pointed out, is that the Arabs rebelled against the Turks not because they wanted a better ruler, but because they wanted to rule themselves. Moreover, the evaluation of Britain’s ‘progressive’ rule and Ottoman ‘tyranny’ could easily be reversed if assuming the consideration of popular will as the fundamental criterion.

The government we have set up is English in fashion, and is conducted in the English language. So it has 450 British executive officers running it, and not a single responsible Mesopotamian. In Turkish days 70 per cent. of the executive civil service was local. . . . [and] the two Army corps in Mesopotamia were 60 per cent. Arab in officers, 95 per cent. in other ranks. This deprivation . . . is galling to the educated Mesopotamians. It is true we have increased prosperity—but who cares for that when liberty is in the other scale?

Nor the claim could be advanced that a certain degree of civilization was an essential precondition to enjoy self-rule.

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<sup>87</sup> TNA, FO 371/5230/E 11921, ‘Situation in Mesopotamia’, 28 September 1920, excerpts from the speech of the civil commissioner, 20 September 1920.

Whether [the Arabs] are fit for independence or not remains to be tried. Merit is no qualification for freedom. Bulgars, Afghans and Tahitans have it. Freedom is enjoyed when you are so well armed, or so turbulent, or inhabit a country so thorny that the expense of your neighbour's occupying you is greater than the profit.

Lawrence concluded his letter by exhorting the British to adopt Arabic as official language of Mesopotamia, to raise two divisions of local volunteer troops to be put in charge of national security, and to conduct negotiations with Mesopotamian elites for the exploitation of oilfields.<sup>88</sup> Probably moved by profits-vs.-costs calculations rather than persuaded by Lawrence's arguments, the British resolved to grant to the inhabitants of Mesopotamia a higher degree of political and administrative autonomy. The Iraqi uprisings proved that a direct rule over Mesopotamia was militarily unaffordable and politically undermining for London's government, even in spite of the strategic and economic relevance of the region. Scholars disagree whether the 1920 upheaval can be considered as a big nationalist revolution for the independence of Iraq or rather a combination of small and isolated uprisings, originating from diverse local situations and pursuing different goals. Surely, it played a key role in the birth of an Iraqi national consciousness and in the construction of an Iraqi national mythology in the following decades. Furthermore, the revolution convinced the British to turn Iraq into a nominally independent kingdom with an Arab sovereign.

#### MANDATING SELF-DETERMINATION: AN ARAB KING FOR IRAQ

At the beginning of October 1920, a farewell dinner in honor of Colonel Wilson was held in Basra, in which also the incoming Commissioner Percy Cox took part, together with several local notables. After congratulating Wilson on the 'magnificent and courageous ways' in which he had carried on his task, the new head of the British administration made it clear that the transfer of power to Mesopotamian authorities would proceed rapidly.

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<sup>88</sup> TNA, FO 371/5228/E 8736, 'British Policy in Mesopotamia', 23 July 1920, 'Arab Rights. Our Policy in Mesopotamia: Colonel Lawrence's Views', *Times*.

We are here to complete the task which we have shouldered—to help the people of the country to work out their salvation as a self-governing State, and the sooner the people of Iraq realize this, and set to work to cooperate with us, the better for us all.<sup>89</sup>

Almost contemporaneously, Foreign Secretary George Curzon was addressing the British Central Asian Society. He announced to his audience that people in the Middle East had to ‘face the fact that the expansion of the British Empire in Central Asia [was] at an end, and rightly at the end’. If the British remained there, he added, it was not ‘to absorb territory’, but ‘to give security’: they were to make ‘islets in the ocean, peaceful spaces in the chaos, landing places in the storm’.<sup>90</sup>

By the end of the month, Cox completed his journey to Baghdad, during which he stopped in the main urban centers—like Nasiriyah and Kut—as well as he toured the countryside to test local opinion on the future government. He reported that non-Arab tribes were afraid of being left at the mercy of Arab rulers, and Basra’s merchants were eager to make business in a safe and ordered environment, as only the British presence could secure. ‘All seemed unanimous’, wrote Cox, ‘in opinion that, if a National government had to come, it must be a monarchy under our effective supervision’. In Baghdad and Mosul, he continued,

the type and temper of people are different. Among them there is a very general and impatient desire for a greater share in the administration. . . . The majority of intelligentsia are no doubt strong nationalists, but realising that they cannot walk alone, are inclined to trust in our assurances and look forward to gradual formation of a National administration under our auspices. In the minority is the extreme element composed of a few older firebrands and a number of ambitious and visionary young men who believe that, if we were not here, they could run the administration and have the plums for themselves. . . . [Fortunately,] our vigorous repressive measures . . . [and] the benevolent announcements by His Majesty’s Government . . . have taken the wind out of their sails.<sup>91</sup>

Apart from British officials’ reports, it is hard to trace the real opinion of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia on the basis of the records available in the National Archives. A piece published in *The Near East* on 18 November 1920, not differently

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<sup>89</sup> TNA, FO 371/5230/12636, ‘British Policy in Mesopotamia’, 14 October 1920, excerpts from ‘Mesopotamian Home Rule. Sir Percy Cox on His Task: Arab Leaders’ Loyalty’, *Times*, 6 October 1920.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘Lord Curzon and the Middle East’, *Times*, 6 October 1920.

<sup>91</sup> TNA, FO 371/5231/E 13471, ‘Establishment of National Arab Government in Mesopotamia’, 30 October 1920.

from what Colonel Lawrence stated in his letter to the *Times*, seems to indicate that the picture portrayed by Percy Cox was maybe too benevolent towards British policy and too simplistically dismissive of the critical voices within the Arabs. The author of the article describes himself as a former British officer who, like many others, fell in love with the Arab civilization during his wartime stay in the Middle East. He interviewed an old acquaintance of his, a native from Baghdad, who was wanted by the French police due to his political activism in Syria. ‘What you are doing in Mesopotamia’, the interviewee told to the journalist, ‘shows the bankruptcy of British policy in Asia’.

You English have little idea how the Arabs to-day regard you. . . . I believe Sir Percy Cox is sincere in his desire to set up an Arab Government; but I do not believe that he or any other Englishman can do it . . . . I do not believe that he or any other Englishman realizes the intensity of Arab feelings on the matter. . . . We are actually worse off as a race to-day than we were under the Turks. Then we were at least united; we returned Arab members to the Ottoman Chamber; even the Turkish garrisons were mainly Arab troops and were under Arab officers. . . . How can you expect us to have confidence in your professions about setting up an Arab State in Mesopotamia? We understand that you would like a stucco building, with an Arab Council of State, which would make us believe we had a native government, and so keep us quiet while your officials ran the country.<sup>92</sup>

By the new year all competences on Iraq were transferred to the Colonial Office. Winston Churchill, who had moved to that department from the War Office, was firmly intentioned to find a ruler for Iraq who could simultaneously be malleable to London’s influence and could appear as a champion of Arab nationalism, and Faysal was undoubtedly the best candidate available to fit in that profile. In a memorandum from the Foreign Office, John Tilley stressed that Franco-British relations could considerably relax if London ceased to deem Paris’s acceptance of Faysal as king of Syria to be essential for the fulfillment of the British pledges to the Arabs.<sup>93</sup> Interviewed by the Mecca newspaper *El Falah* as ‘king of Iraq’, Abdullah stated that he would willingly leave the crown to his brother if ‘the two nations’—the Syrians and the Iraqis—agreed on that.<sup>94</sup> In fact, he had never been crowned king of Iraq, while Faysal had been forced by the French to his Palestinian exile: therefore, Faysal’s accession to the Iraqi throne

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<sup>92</sup> TNA, FO 371/5066/E 15233, ‘The British in Mesopotamia: An Arab View’, *The Near East*, 18 October 1920.

<sup>93</sup> TNA, FO 371/5247/E 13924, ‘Settlement of Anglo-French Differences in the Middle East’, 10 November 1920.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, FO 371/5066/12962, ‘Arab Newspaper “El Falah”’, 21 October 1920.

would contribute to the reconciliation of French and British Middle Eastern policies. A document by the War Office, dated 21 February, identified other reasons making the candidature of Husayn's son especially desirable for Britain. Besides entertaining positive relations with the British, Faysal was a strenuous anti-Bolshevist, was exempt from Kemalist influence and came from the same tribe as the Prophet Muhammad, which could make him acceptable for Iraqi Shi'is even in spite of his Sunni affiliation. Most importantly, the memorandum emphasized the positive repercussions of the British support for Faysal for London's stand in the Middle East: 'The influence which His Majesty's Government has over the Mohamedan world in general is greatly maintained by its reputation of fair dealing, and of keeping its pledged word. The appointment of Feisal to Irak would greatly enhance that good name'. Other Arab chiefs, hence, would realize how rewarding cooperation with the British was.<sup>95</sup> It only remained to have the prospective king 'invited' by the Iraqis, in order to save the appearance of a democratically legitimized ruler.

Indeed, increasing pressure to comply with the will of the populations under mandate came also from the British domestic political debate. Intervening in the higher chamber of parliament, in March 1921, Lord Lamington pointed out that, according to article 22 of the covenant of the League of Nations, the wishes of the peoples concerned had to be taken into account in the establishment of mandates. He thus asked the Government if any step had been taken to ascertain whether the Syrians and the Lebanese wanted the French, and the Palestinians and the Mesopotamian desired the British as their advisers. In response, Foreign Secretary Curzon conceded that

By the time the mandates came to be allocated by the Supreme Council at San Remo in April 1920 it had become abundantly clear that Great Britain and France, alone of the Allied and Associated Powers, were prepared, however reluctantly, to assume the responsibilities and duties which the acceptance of these mandates entails. . . . By forces of circumstances, therefore, it was impossible for the Supreme Council to pay as much attention to the wishes of the people in selecting the mandatories as to the Powers available to guide and assist the local population. . . . [In Mesopotamia,] owing to difficulties of communication and the conditions prevailing in the country there was but little spontaneous expression of local opinion.

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<sup>95</sup> TNA, FO 371/3349/E 2279, 'Emir Feisal as Ruler of Mesopotamia', 21 February 1921.

However, he remarked, the opinion survey conducted by the civil commissioner in 1918 had revealed that ‘an exceedingly large majority of the leading men throughout the country desired the protection and assistance of Great Britain’. His first doubt having been driven away, Lamington remained skeptical about the actual involvement of the Arabs in the current framing of a new Mesopotamian government.

My question is really intended to try to give some assurances to these Arabs who have been our most loyal allies during the war that the promises to them in the dark days will now be redeemed. . . . [everyone knows] what a fundamental appeal our word makes to these Eastern people, and I regret to say that, certainly among the Mahomedan people, we are felt to have broken faith. . . . Many of us felt that the Government were setting up an administration in Mesopotamia which, though excellent, would not give full expression to the wishes of the Arab people.<sup>96</sup>

As highlighted for other critical voices towards London’s Mesopotamian policy, the divide is hard to discern between the commitment to the cause of self-determination of the Arabs and the concern with British national interest—in this case, the honorability of Britain’s name in the light of wartime pledges. Anyway, His Majesty’s Government wanted to show to the world that Faysal was highly welcome by the great majority of the Mesopotamians. In April, the Colonial office identified the most prominent Iraqi notables whom the new king needed to have on his side.<sup>97</sup> Apparently, their efforts succeeded, as, on 11 July, the executive Council of Baghdad passed a unanimous resolution proclaiming Faysal king of Iraq ‘provided that his highness Government shall be a constitutional representative and democratic Government limited by law’. But for the monarch-elect, that was not enough: he wanted to be designated by a direct popular vote.<sup>98</sup> Cox reported that, during a private conversation, the son of the king of Hedjaz warned him against the risk of an enthronement which could appear as imposed by an outside power.

If you wish me and your policy to succeed it is folly to damn me permanently in public eye by making me a puppet. . . . Much more is it in your interests to show at once that I am really King, that I am trusted and that you are ready to support me.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> TNA, FO 371/6349/E 3315, ‘Terms of Mandates and the Wishes of the Arabs’, debate in the House of Lords, 15 March 1921.

<sup>97</sup> TNA, FO 371/6350/E 4113, ‘Emir Feisal’s Candidature for Rulership of Mesopotamia’, 6 April 1921.

<sup>98</sup> TNA, FO 371/6352/E 8122, ‘Rulership of Mesopotamia’, 15 July 1921.

<sup>99</sup> TNA, FO 371/6352/E 9483, ‘Rulership of Iraq’, 19 August 1921.



Britain and Faysal's reciprocal sympathy was internationally known and, although his definitive disappearance from the Syrian political scene would solve a big problem for Paris, French newspapers were particularly sarcastic towards London's effort at presenting Abdullah's brother as chosen by popular will. On 21 March, for example, a journalist of *Paris-Midi* wrote:

There are, in England, sincere people who take the emir very seriously. To their eyes, . . . he is the very incarnation of the Arab world. It is . . . vain to show them how happy and peaceful the Syrians are after losing this king. . . . In few years, maybe, the British will realize that Faysal's popularity with the Arabs was just an invention due to the imagination of some experts of the Egyptian question.<sup>100</sup>

Within Mesopotamia itself, some of the few free voices condemned the false Arab nationalists who, in their opinion, were actually playing into the hands of British imperialism by supporting Faysal's cause. Among them, the newspaper *Al-Istiqlal*, which was suppressed at the end of February 1921.

We have sacrificed thousands of our people in paying for the policy of concealment and flattery which has been pursued by such of our men as were in contact with the government in occupation for their own advantage.<sup>101</sup>

Also to disprove such rumors, a plebiscite on Faysal was held in August, in which the aspirant king obtained the approval of ninety-six percent of around one million voters.<sup>102</sup> A solemn coronation ceremony took place in Baghdad on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the same month, with Percy Cox and Sayyid Talib sitting on the two sides of the monarch.<sup>103</sup> Though important, however, the king was just the top of a complex political and administrative machinery which the British had to frame in compliance with the covenant of the League of Nations. Preliminary drafts of the mandate for Mesopotamia were drawn up as early as September 1920, although it would come into force only two years later. The British chose to prepare the text of the mandate in

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<sup>100</sup> TNA, FO 6350/E 3644, 'Anti-British Articles in the French Press', 22 March 1921, excerpt from 'L'émir Faïçal et l'accord franco-turc', 21 March 1921.

<sup>101</sup> TNA, FO 371/6349/E 2172, 'Situation in Mesopotamia', 18 February 1921, excerpt from an article titled 'The Duty of Iraq'. Information about the newspaper's suppression is provided in FO 371/6349/E 2645, 28 February 1921.

<sup>102</sup> TNA, FO 371/6352/E 9502, 'Rulership of Iraq', 20 August 1921.

<sup>103</sup> TNA, FO 371/6352/E 9689, 'Accession of Feisal', 25 August 1921.

accordance with their French and Italian allies, rather than submitting it to their home parliament, which resulted in the vehement complaints of Lord Lamington during the above mentioned debate. Nor were the inhabitants of Mesopotamia consulted. But, according to the covenant, the only condition for mandates to be lawful was their approval by the Allies and by the LoN Council, and the British managed to gain both. A first report submitted by HMG to the Council on 17 November 1921 stated that the events in Mesopotamia had been so rapid, and the wishes of the indigenous so irresistible, that the British had had not managed to consult the League before appointing Faysal, which was, in any way, in compliance with popular will. In the following October, London submitted the final version of the mandate under the form of a treaty with Faysal.

The text of the Mesopotamian mandate was very similar to the one the French imposed over Syria. Article 1 obliged the mandatory power to pass, in two years, an organic law, that is, a constitution. That should be framed in consultation with the native authorities. '[It] shall take account of the rights, interests and wishes of all the population inhabiting the mandated territory. It shall contain provisions designed to facilitate the progressive development of Mesopotamia as a self-governing State until such time as it is able to stand by itself'. At that point, 'the services of the mandatory' would be 'no longer required'. Under article 2, the British were responsible for the maintaining of peace and order, and they were also placed in charge of the foreign relations of the mandated territory (articles 3, 4, 13, 14) and retained the responsibility for the protection of the lives, interests and properties of the foreigners (articles 5 and 10). Articles 6 and 7 disciplined the freedom of conscience, religion and worship. It had been discussed, among British officials, whether Arabic should be mentioned as official language of the mandate, alone or in association with English.<sup>104</sup> Eventually, they preferred to avoid any direct reference to an official language. Article 8 only stated:

Instructions in and through the medium of the native languages of Mesopotamia shall be promoted by the mandatory, and no preference shall be claimed or exercised by the latter in favour of the use of its own language.

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<sup>104</sup> TNA, FO 371/5247/E 14027, 'Mesopotamia Mandate: Official Language Clause', 11 November 1920.

Finally, article 12 specified that the mandatory power was endowed with the faculty of advising upon the granting of concessions for the use of the natural resources of Mesopotamia<sup>105</sup>—as if Mosul’s oilfields were really the point.

In conclusion, it is plausible to argue that several factors combined to bring about Britain’s final decision to deal with Iraq as a semi-autonomous state. The calculation of the cheapest way to pursue London’s economic and military interests in Mesopotamia, the concern with Britain’s reputation in the Middle East, the pressure of public opinion all played a role. Nor can it be neglected that the granting of significant degrees of autonomy to colonies and dominions was in the imperial tradition of Britain more than in the history of any other European imperial power. At the same time, it seems that the costs and difficulties experienced in facing the upheavals of 1920 catalyzed the predisposition of British authorities to transfer a higher share of Mesopotamia’s government to the Arabs.

Isolating the impact of each of these factors and measuring their relative weight would be a tricky enterprise and too a ‘scientific’ task for a historian, as it would reduce the complexity of an incredibly intricate process to a set of mathematic equations. One could vainly wonder whether the British would have acted in the same way if the revolution had not occurred or if it had happened before 1918. What is clear, however, is that the attention to the Arabs’ aspirations to self-rule was featured in both British public debates and the internal governmental correspondence over Mesopotamia. Whether dictated by new moral international standards or comprised within the calculation of Britain’s self-interest, this preoccupation appears to be a key assumption of the handling of British imperial relations in the immediate aftermath of the Great War.

The whole Iraqi crisis went on in the after the closure of the Paris conference but before the League of Nations came fully in charge of the supervision of the mandates system (reviews of the mandatories’ reports begun on a regular basis only in 1922). Therefore, no international arena was available where the Iraqis could address their complaints. Furthermore, nothing like an Iraqi nation could be claimed to exist before 1920, as ‘Mesopotamia’ was rather a ‘residual’ container of whatever fell outside Palestine, Syria and Lebanon as defined by the Sykes-Picot agreement. No strong nationalist movement with a wide social basis and international connections, comparable to the *Wafd* in Egypt, was in operation in Iraq—the Mesopotamian

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<sup>105</sup> TNA, FO 371/5245/E 11383, ‘Mandates and Arabian Chapter’, 14 September 1920.

conference of 1920 was but a meeting of six notables, and part of the a wider campaign of Damascus-based pan-Arab nationalists. All these factors account for the lack of public resonance of the 1920 revolt beyond Iraqi borders. The absence of domestic and international pressures notwithstanding, the British government decided, by its own, to stage a farce of self-determination. The autonomous incorporation of the indigenous will—though in a highly partial and questionable form--seemed to support the reaction of French Minister Henri Simon to the Woodrow Wilson's proposal for the settlement of colonial questions: what was the point of establishing a mandate?

## CONCLUSION

At first glance, the British policy in Egypt and Iraq proceeded along similar patters: yielding to negotiations with indigenous elites after fierce repression. Therefore, it appears that the lack of a truly international resonance of the Iraqi revolt marked no significant difference. This lack was due, one the one hand, to the absence, in Mesopotamia, of a strong nationalist movement with deep roots at home and a network of supporters abroad; on the other, to the paralysis of the League of Nations up to 1922. As Susan Pedersen has highlighted, beginning in that year, HMG shaped its mandatory policies, both in Iraq and Palestine, with careful consideration of the League's assessments and recommendations.<sup>106</sup>

Nonetheless, before that date, the national public debate placed sufficient constraints to London's decision making as to orient HMG's policy towards an indirect-rule style of administration in Iraq. As we have seen, the resulted by a widespread call, by the press and the political spectrum, of significant disengagement from the Middle Eastern theatre in the aftermath of WWI. 'Accidentally', the national mood of the British public coincided with the international ethos of the 'Wilsonian Moment'. In 1922, London discovered that the League could help relieving HMG taxpayers of the Mesopotamian border by keeping the British government in charge of a strategically crucial region of the Middle East with its precious oil fields.

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<sup>106</sup> Susan Pedersen, 'The Impact of the League Oversight on British Policy in Palestine', in Rory Miller (ed.), *Palestine, Britain and Empire: The Mandate Years* (London: Ashgate, 2010), 39–65.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Frozen Rivalries and National Tragedies: The Rif War, 1921– 1926

*No pretendemos . . . mostrar . . . los infinitos incidentes . . . que tuvieron poer escenario las bellas ciudades de Mogreb; ni . . . trataremos de levantare el velo, que cubre aún, en buena parte, todo el tinglado politico y diplomático que se formó por virtud del empeño manifesto de algunos países de acabar rápida y definitivamente con la ‘molesta’ situación de un país que, a la puerta misma de Europa, y enclavado entre dos mares (paso obligado para el intercambio entre Europa y el continente americano), se ostinaba en aislarse total y hostilmente de las corrientes de civilización, una civilización para la que sólo tenía actos de verdadera animadversión, a las veces expresada con todo el cortejo de síntomas propios de un pueblo bárbaramente fanático y enquistado en creencias y procedimientos sólo explicables en la época medieval.*

Juan de España, *La actuación de España en Marruecos* (1926).

#### A MICROCOSM OF EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM: THE SCRAMBLE FOR MOROCCO

I can remember perfectly the embarrassed disclaimer from one of my university professors at the beginning of an introductory lecture on 19<sup>th</sup>-century Spain, part of an undergraduate modern history course. A learned Germanist, he honestly admitted his

substantial lack of background knowledge on the topic. An unmissable subject for medieval and early modern historians, he explained, Spain is subject to relatively marginal consideration by scholars of the modern age, and the contents of his lecture were the result of frenetic last-minute readings.

It was the Spanish *regeneracionista* writers and politicians of the ‘inter-century crisis’ themselves who circulated the image of Spain as a peculiar—in the negative sense—and declining country compared to the main European powers; indeed, modern Spanish history follows a separate and often ‘delayed’ chronology. There, ‘Restoration’ began when the Bourbons were chased away from Paris and Naples, while fascism ended some 30 years after the end of World War II, which, along with the Great War, Madrid did not join. Nonetheless, at many points and in many ways throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Spanish history offered a microcosm—and, often, a ‘premonition’—of broader European dynamics. The Civil War of 1936–39 anticipated the ‘total’ war between fascism and the ‘free world’ that would break out immediately afterwards, and the Rif War constituted a crucial step in the brutalization of combatant violence that culminated in WWII. The Franco-Spanish partition of Morocco, and the surrounding diplomatic and military machinations, summarized the reconfiguration of the European network of alliances and the mounting imperial ambitions and nationalist passions that paved the way to the Great War. In the words of Richard Fogarty, ‘[a]ny account of the road to war in Europe must run through Morocco’.<sup>1</sup>

For both Madrid and Paris, Morocco represented a way out of a crisis of national identity and imperial self-confidence, although to very different extents and with diverse outcomes. Traditionally, the Spanish ‘rights’ over Morocco dated back to the last will and testament of Queen Isabel I *la Católica* (1474–1504). Indeed, Juan de España traced the roots of Spanish expansion beyond the Strait of Gibraltar to the conquest of the Atlantic city of Salé by Alfonso X *el Sabio* in 1260 and the subsequent papal bull of 1457 by which Innocent VIII blessed the Christian *Reconquista* of the ‘Moorish’ lands.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as Edmund Burke has stressed, prior to 1860, Moroccan-European relations amounted to modest trade exchanges revolving around the activities of a few European residents in the Maghreb and small Moroccan communities in the port cities of Manchester, Marseille and Alexandria. Spain retained only the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the Mediterranean, while most Europeans regarded Morocco as an

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<sup>1</sup> Richard S. Fogarty, ‘The French Empire’, in Gerwarth and Manela, 109–129.

<sup>2</sup> Juan de España, *La actuación de España en Marruecos* (Madrid: Imprenta de Ramona Velasco, 1926), 1–36.

‘unchanging medieval Muslim state’.<sup>3</sup> Still, in 1932, General Manuel Goded introduced the country to the readers of his account of the Spanish ‘pacification’ of the Rif in these terms:

Morocco, at the north-western extreme of Africa, is a country with an exotic character and fascinating legends which, at the very doorstep of Europe . . . has remained immune from any contacts with our civilization, and attached to its customs and traditions, in which there always vibrates a fund of mysticism and poetry and a special color that irresistibly subjugate and attract us. Separated from Central and Southern Africa by the Sahara Desert, it has a completely different geography, ethnography and civilization.<sup>4</sup>

The interactions between the North African country and the ‘Old Continent’ both deepened and deteriorated in the context of the ‘scramble for Africa’ in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the concurrent weakening of the Moroccan monarchy. Officially, Morocco was a sovereign empire that had existed since a Berber rebellion against Arab rule in the mid-eighth century whose crown had belonged to the Alawid House of the Sharifian dynasty since 1666.

Edmund Burke explains the latter process with the overlapping of a crisis in the balance of trade, a drop in agricultural production, and multiple military defeats. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the diffusion of steamships and the inauguration of transcontinental railroads made Russian and American wheat, as well as Australian wool, available to the European market, much to the detriment of traditional Moroccan exports. In parallel, consecutive years of disastrous harvest, like from 1867 to 1869 and between 1878 and 1884, spread famine, smallpox and cholera throughout the Moroccan countryside. In 1856, the desperate need for cheap European imports pushed Sultan Abd al Rahman to sign most-favored-nation agreements with Britain, France and Spain. In that same period, the Sharifian monarchy granted a privileged legal status to European traders operating in the main Moroccan port cities, which essentially exempted them from local jurisdiction (like the Egyptian capitulations): this also applied to their indigenous intermediaries. The latter gradually emerged as a caste of ‘extraterritorial landowners’ under the control of rapacious European businessmen.<sup>5</sup>

While the European appropriation of Morocco progressed through essentially ‘peaceful’ commercial and financial penetration in these early stages, it also took the

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<sup>3</sup> Edmund Burke, III, *Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco: Precolonial Protest and Resistance, 1860–1912* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 19–26.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Goded, *Marruecos. Les etapas de la pacification* (Madrid and Buenos Aires: Compañía Ibero-americana de Publicaciones, 1932), 29–40.

<sup>5</sup> Burke, 19–26.

shape of armed conflicts on several occasions. These unveiled the inadequacy of the Moroccan military apparatus and infused a sense of weakness and decadence of the Sharifian state among both the *makhzen*—the bureaucratic and military establishment revolving around the royal court—and its domestic opponents. That was the case, for example, during the ‘Tetuan War’ of 1859–60 launched by Spain to secure its Ceuta possession from the incursions of Berber tribes. However, it was France in particular which engaged in repeated and victorious military confrontations with the Sharifian army after the seizure of Algeria, in 1830. These often originated from trespassing on French ‘police’ operations against the Algerian resistance, like in the Battle of Isly of 1844 or the raids in the Oujda area in 1860.<sup>6</sup>

As Alice Conklin, Sarah Fishman and Robert Zaretsky have pointed out, *fin-de-siècle* France experienced a strange mixture of impressive material progress—as symbolized by the monumental Universal Exhibition of 1889 and the Eiffel Tower erected to celebrate it—and a widespread feeling of anguish and uncertainty. Clearly, the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, besides depriving Paris of Alsace-Lorraine, called into question the French position in the international hierarchy of power vis-à-vis the rising star of unified Germany. In the *Troisième République*, anxiety about the rise of Germany combined with recurring concerns of politicians and press commentators regarding *dénatalité* and the effect that growing immigration flows from Italy and Belgium were having on French industrial growth and demographic trends: in around the mid-1880s, foreign workers accounted for 7–8 percent of the national workforce.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, the outcome of the post-Sedan syndrome was a political realignment towards the right and the emergence of an ‘irrational’, conservative and xenophobic nationalism. A key component of the rhetorical and intellectual equipment of the radical, anarchic and socialist left, 19<sup>th</sup>-century French nationalism traditionally appealed to the progressive and universal values of the Enlightenment and the Revolution of 1789. Conversely, in the last decades of the century, French nationalism was increasingly appropriated by the political right and reshaped in a traditionalist and primordialist cult of *la terre et les morts*—French soil and blood—under perceived threats from internal and foreign ‘enemies’. The wave of anti-Semitism emerging in the *affaire Dreyfus* that polarized French public opinion between 1894 and 1906 is a

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 19–39.

<sup>7</sup> Alice Conklin, Sarah Fishman, and Robert Zaretsky, *France and Its Empire since 1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75–99.



famous example of the cultural and political environment of the Third Republic.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the policy of *ralliement* promoted by the French Catholic hierarchy (and, in particular, by Cardinal Charles Lavigerie) with the approval of Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) also favored a conservative reconfiguration of the political spectrum. It essentially consisted of the invitation for the French Catholics to accept the republican regime in so far as it did not contradict Christian values and to participate actively in politics, with the final goal of creating a formal Catholic party.<sup>9</sup>

In foreign policy, the missionary fervor of the re-integrated Catholic elites combined with the nationalist mood of the *fin-de-siècle* and the desire to recover from the Sedan shock to promote a new massive wave of imperial expansion. Colonial lobbies flourished to push the government in that direction, like the French Africa Committee and the *Union Coloniale*, established in 1889 and 1893 respectively. Furthermore, the social Darwinism then dominating the social sciences provided imperialism with an ‘objective’ justification and even a progressive mission, which accounts for the partial support given to colonial expansion by the socialists as seen in chapter one. As Raoul Girardet has noticed, the first decades of the *Troisième République* saw the development of ‘a coherent doctrine of French imperialism’.<sup>10</sup> For example, in a famous essay from 1874, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu defined colonization as ‘one of the highest functions of those societies which have reached an advanced stage of civilization’.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1895 and 1910, French governors-general were installed in Indochina, French West and Equatorial Africa and Madagascar. In many cases, the Parisian authorities relied on the ‘collaboration’ of missionaries and private companies to realize public works, carry out commercial exchanges and establish schools in the new colonies. However, increasing European competition over the African continent encouraged a gradual strengthening of the French military and bureaucratic presence, as well as a harsher exploitation of material and human resources. In exchange for their

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<sup>8</sup> The case concerned charges of pro-Germany espionage against a Jewish officer named Alfred Dreyfus. Despite the insufficiency and apparent manipulation of the evidence against him, Dreyfus was convicted by a martial court and exiled. French public opinion split into two factions, with some leading intellectuals and politicians like Émile Zola and Georges Clemenceau joining the *Dreyfusards*. Yet, the army’s reticence to admit the groundlessness of the verdict impeded a formal revision of the trial. In the end, Dreyfus accepted a presidential pardon, which, though ending his conviction, did not imply an official recognition of his innocence.

<sup>9</sup> Conklin, Fishman, and Zaretsky, 75–123.

<sup>10</sup> Raoul Girardet, *L’idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris: Hachette, 1972), 51–76.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, 2nd edition (Paris: Guillaumin, 1882).

alleged ‘civilizing mission’, the French often required colonial subjects to pay taxes, serve in the metropolitan army or work for free in the building of schools, hospitals, railroads and other facilities.<sup>12</sup>

A similar dynamic applied to Morocco too, where the policy of ‘peaceful penetration’ initially promoted by the radical Undersecretary and then Minister of Colonies Théophile Delcassé gave way to the imposition of a formal protectorate. Several international summits and agreements, like the Treaty of Madrid of 1860, the Conferences of Tangier of 1877 and 1879 and the Madrid Conference of 1880, sanctioned the declared commitment of the main European powers to the Moroccan *status quo*. This meant the preservation of the formal sovereignty of the sultan and the guarantee of an open-door commercial policy with the ‘Old Continent’, with Britain, in particular, insisting on this latter point.

Yet, the rapid escalation of imperial rivalries undermined this collective attempt at a non-interventionist and mutually beneficial policy. With the ‘Fashoda Incident’ of 1898, when the French troops claiming the Upper Nile region met the firm resistance of the British Governor Lord Kitchener, Paris and London came very close to war. As part of the subsequent negotiations to restore amicable relations between the two powers, Delcassé, who now led the Quai d’Orsay, exchanged Paris’ renunciation of Sudan for British acceptance of the partition of Morocco into French and Spanish spheres of influence. In the same year as the Franco-British *Entente Cordiale* (1904), Paris and Madrid stipulated a convention delimiting their respective Moroccan zones. The Spanish government was assigned an area of around 22,000 square kilometers around the Rif Mountains in Northern Morocco (compared to the 415,000 of the French zone), corresponding to roughly one fifth of the Sharifian empire.

The German ambitions on Northern Africa further accelerated the establishment of the French and Spanish protectorates. In 1905, Kaiser Wilhelm II ignited the First Moroccan crisis when he traveled to Tanger to state his commitment to the sovereignty of the sultan. Eventually, Germany yielded to the Franco-Spanish partition of Morocco. At the Algeiras Conference of 1906, London, Paris, Madrid and Berlin, alongside nine other signatories, ratified the boundaries of the spheres of influence as set in the 1904 convention. Further, the conference stated France and Spain’s special responsibility to intervene whenever the sovereignty of the *makhzen* was under internal or external threat. Even so, a Second Moroccan Crisis broke out in 1911 when Germany responded

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<sup>12</sup> Conklin, Fishman and Zaretsky, 88–95.

to the French military operations to crush a rebellion against Sultan Mulay Abd al Hafid by sending a gunboat to the port of Agadir. This time, the solution to the crisis was to concede a free hand in Congo for the Germans and the formal establishment of Paris and Madrid's protectorates over their respective spheres of influence.<sup>13</sup>

As should already be apparent from the previous brief summary of diplomatic history, the North African colony represented both a burden and an opportunity for the Spaniards. A few years after the loss of the last American colonies in the nefarious US-Spanish War of 1898, it undoubtedly provided Madrid with a gate for re-entering the European international system of the post-Bismarck era. Nonetheless, Morocco was an 'imposed gift' of an Anglo-French anti-German strategy in which Madrid had no voice. In 1902, the government led by the liberal Práxedes Mateo Sagasta declined a French offer of a wider sphere of influence than was later established in the 1904 convention on the grounds that Madrid did not want to irritate their British ally, who were attached to an open-door policy: the Spaniards also deemed a strategy of peaceful commercial and financial penetration to be more compatible with their goals, military preparedness and national budget.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, two years later, accepting the supervision over a reduced area of the sultanate appeared to be a necessary step to the conservative Prime Minister Raimundo Fernández-Villaverde if Spain was to avoid exclusion from the Moroccan theater. Indeed, some of the Spanish political and intellectual elites 'endured' the progressive formalization of Madrid's control over the *makhzen* as a sort of necessary sacrifice required by the combination of Morocco's inept and 'barbarous' state and the overwhelming interests of Europe as a whole. Writing in 1926, Juan de España blamed the Spanish government not for accepting the 'protecting' mission over Morocco, but for failing to explain to domestic public opinion that such a commitment was unavoidable for the 'balance of the Latin Sea', the 'free expansion of trade necessary to European civilization' and the 'moral and material interests of all Western and Southern peoples of the Old World'. Thus, according to the author, the unpopularity of the Moroccan enterprise was essentially the result of poor and inadequate communication between elites and public opinion.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3–30; Pablo La Porte, *La atracción del iman. El desastre de Annual y sus repercusiones en la política europea (1921–1923)* (Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 2001), 23–51.

<sup>14</sup> La Porte, *La atracción del iman*, 29–37.

<sup>15</sup> De España, 1–36.

The acceptance of the Moroccan ‘burden’, as remarked by Pablo La Porte, clashed with the absence in Spain of overpopulation problems similar to Italy’s, military power comparable to Germany’s, a colonial party as influential as France’s, a high level of industrialization requiring access to new markets like in Britain, or any other of the material incentives that normally motivated European imperial conquests.<sup>16</sup> Combined with the internal troubles of the Restoration monarchy, the lack of obvious benefits accounts for the initial attitude by the majority of the Spanish public opinion vis-à-vis the African enterprise, which ranged from indifference to violent protest. I will return to this point in a few paragraphs.

The ‘passive’ and second-rank position of Spain in the Moroccan game also becomes apparent when looking at the tortuous and bizarre juridical architecture of the international ‘protection’ regime imposed on the *makhzen*. Technically, both protectorates stemmed out of the nine articles of the Treaty of Fez of 30 March 1912 between the Moroccan Sultanate and the Republic of France. There, the monarch acknowledged the authority of the protecting power to carry out all ‘administrative, judicial, educational, economic, financial and military reforms’ deemed ‘appropriate’. The treaty also granted the French government the right of military occupation of its assigned Moroccan zone for the purpose of securing the authority of the *makhzen*, and designated the French resident-general of Rabat as the legal representative of the sultan in Moroccan foreign affairs.

Thus, unlike the unilaterally imposed British protectorate in Egypt, French rule in Morocco conformed to Frantz Despagnet’s model of the ‘voluntary’ transfer of sovereignty from the protected state to the protecting one by treaty. Of course, in reality, the treaty of 1912 was all but the encounter of two ‘sovereign’ wills, as the partition of Morocco into spheres of influence had already been sanctioned by a number of inter-European diplomatic dealings in which the sultan had had little voice and in accordance with the typical imperial image of Africa as a *terra nullius*. As Anthony Anghie has observed, while ‘the main task of late-nineteenth-century international law’ was to ‘exclude the non-Europeans from the realm of sovereignty’, ‘unequal treaties’ like that of Fez ‘provided patterns for the re-entry of non-European societies into the sphere of law on terms which completely subordinated or disempowered those societies’.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> La Porte, *La atracción del iman*, 29–37.

<sup>17</sup> Anghie, 65–99.

Indeed, the French occupation pre-existed its formal sanction in the protectorate agreement, and a close reading of the treaty and its contemporary commentaries reveals that, from both a theoretical and a factual point of view, it was the military occupation *per se*, rather than a sovereign decision of the sultan, that legitimized and regulated the French ‘protecting’ mission. Max Touron, who wrote his doctoral dissertation in law on French Morocco, described the role of the protectorate authorities as the surveillance of indigenous institutions and ‘their prudent adaptation to the needs resulting from the French occupation’.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in his *L’Afrique du Nord*, Henri Lorin defined the protectorate as a ‘benevolent regime towards the indigenous, which leaves their natural leaders and laws untouched as far as they are just, and which respects their customs [in a way] compatible with an advanced state of civilization’.<sup>19</sup> In sum, the interests of the metropolitan government and its legal and moral systems were the actual ordering principle of the ‘protection’ of colonial subjects, as evident in the reiterated references to French ‘discretion’ in the Fez Treaty.

Furthermore, the Franco-Moroccan ‘agreement’ mentioned Paris’ commitment to ‘consult’ the Spanish government on the latter’s ‘interests’ in its occupation zone. That was the subject of a subsequent Franco-Spanish Treaty on 27 November 1912. Basically, it entrusted Madrid with a similar ‘reformist’ and ‘civilizing’ task to that assumed by Paris in the French zone. It also provided for the appointment of an indigenous official bearing the title of *khalifa* as an institutional interface between the sultan and the Spanish authorities.

Besides reflecting wider patterns of the big power game, the gradual Franco-Spanish ‘appropriation’ of Morocco was the response to repeated episodes of indigenous resistance threatening the safety and business of European nationals. In 1907, the murder of Émile Mauchamp, a French doctor who had been sent by the Quay d’Orsay to open a charitable clinic in Marrakesh—or, according to the Moroccans, a French spy—provided the French authorities with a pretext for extensive military operations lasting until the following year that also involved the province of Oujda in the Spanish zone.<sup>20</sup> In 1909, indigenous raids against mining activities in the Rif triggered Spain’s military intervention and exposed Madrid to its first Moroccan

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<sup>18</sup> Max Touron, *Notre Protectorat Marocain* (Poitiers: Marc Texier, 1924), 19–145. All the main international treaties and conventions concerning Morocco are also reproduced in these pages.

<sup>19</sup> Henri Lorin, *L’Afrique du Nord. Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc* (Paris: Collin, 1908)

<sup>20</sup> Mauchamp’s assassination, and its broad resonance and significance in the context of French colonialism, is the subject of Jonathan G. Katz, *Murder in Marrakesh. Émile Mauchamp and the French Colonial Adventure* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.).

humiliation. Untrained in guerrilla warfare, the Spanish army suffered a serious defeat at the so-called *Barranco del Lobo* ['Wolf Ravine'].<sup>21</sup>

The subsequent dispatch of 42,000 troops allowed Spain to 'pacify' the Eastern Rif for some time. Yet, the mass call-up of reserve soldiers compromised the popularity of the conservative cabinet led by Antonio Maura and forced him to resign. Opposition to the Moroccan expedition, combined with Catalan autonomism, discontent over economic stagnation and political corruption and resentment at the public influence of the Catholic hierarchy, resulted in the famous *Semana Tragica* of 25 July–2 August 1909, a week of working-class unrest in Barcelona and other Catalan cities which was bloodily repressed by the regular army, leaving around 150 casualties among the protesters. In particular, the socialists, who, along with the anarchists and republicans, supported the rioters, launched an intense campaign against the army recruitment system under the slogan *O todos o ninguno* ['Either everyone or no one']. The legislation in force at the time allowed young citizens to escape service in the army by paying 1,500 pesetas. Therefore this system exempted the wealthy from military service, since the *redención a metalico* remained unaffordable for most lower-class families. Therefore, the left denounced the Rif campaign as a 'capitalist war' fought with the useless sacrifice of the proletariat, which reveals how distant and unattractive the colonization of Morocco appeared to huge sectors of the Spanish public.<sup>22</sup>

A military reform allowing the *redención a metalico* only after a minimum period of military service, combined with the establishment of indigenous divisions of Moroccan *regulares* under Spanish command, placated popular discontent to a certain extent. Yet, in 1911–12, a new wave of military operations beginning, again, in the French zone paved the way for the formal proclamation of the two protectorates. Unable to subjugate the rebel tribes of the Fez area (which were also accused of all sorts of atrocities and abuses against Jews and European residents), Sultan Abd al Hafid turned to the French government for help under the 1904 and 1906 international conventions. Paris restored the sovereignty of the *makhzen* by sending a mixed column of French and indigenous units. In those same months, an attack against a geographical expedition in the Kert River region induced the Spanish government, now under the premiership of the liberal José Canalejas y Méndez, to launch a new military campaign in the Western Rif.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 3–30.

<sup>22</sup> Maradiaga, 59–69.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 70–79.

Although, the entire Spanish zone could be considered ‘pacified’ by 1912, imperial wars, along with a number of internal troubles, were eroding the domestic reputation and stability of the Restoration regime. In November 1912, Prime Minister Canalejas was assassinated by an anarchist, the same fate suffered by his conservative predecessor Antonio Cánovas del Castillo a few months before the *Desastre del '98*. As Julián Casanova and Carlos Gil Andrés have noted, the two magnicides encompass a crucial transition period in Restoration Spain when the interplay between colonial ambitions and nation-building followed a path diametrically opposed to that taken elsewhere in the ‘Old Continent’.

At a time when nationalist imperialism was inciting the popular masses of the European powers to identify with the state, in Spain the opposite phenomenon was occurring. The country, which not long before had lost the remnants of its colonial empire, was incapable of defeating an insignificant enemy located at its doorstep. The memory of the *Desastre* of '98 and the news of the summer of 1909 revealed cracks in the legitimacy of the Restoration system and inaugurated the crisis of the hegemony of the state, a process that was unstoppable from 1917 onwards.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, several influential sectors of the Spanish political, economic and military establishment supported, or even took part in, the Moroccan campaign with enthusiasm and pressed the government towards increased commitment in Northern Africa. As Pablo La Porte himself recognizes, the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the replacement of a ‘romantic Africanism’ (that is, the vague dream to complete the *Reconquista* up to the ‘natural frontier’ delimited by the peaks of the Atlas Mountains beyond the Gibraltar Strait) to a ‘pragmatic’ one especially concerned with the penetration of Spanish financial and commercial interests into the *Maghreb*.<sup>25</sup> According to Víctor Morales Lezcano, two main orientations informed Spanish foreign policy at the turn of the century: first and foremost, there was *aliancismo*, the perceived need to compensate Madrid’s exclusion from the ‘Concert of Power’ since the Vienna Congress through stable alliances with its European partners and by coordinating important foreign policy decisions with Paris and London. At the same time, the minority complex in the European theater fomented a ‘centrifugal projection’ towards Africa in search for new glories and prestige.<sup>26</sup> ‘Moroccan lobbies’, like the *Centres*

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<sup>24</sup> Julián Casanova and Carlos Gil Andrés, *Twentieth-Century Spain: A History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> La Porte, *La atracción del iman*, 37–51.

<sup>26</sup> Morales, 35–41.

*Comerciales Hispano-Marroquíes*, proliferated in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Especially attractive to Spanish capital were the mining opportunities in the Rif. A Spanish Rif Mining Company was established in 1908. In the same year, President García Alix of the Bank of Spain chaired *Norte Africano*, a trust fueled by French capital that was devoted to the exploitation of the coalmines of the Spanish protectorate.<sup>27</sup>

What is more, the army became a key catalyst of the colonization of North Africa after 1898. Besides deepening the identity crisis of a once-prosperous imperial power, the *Desastre del '98* left a frustrated, disproportionately large and 'jobless' military establishment in search of new reasons for its existence and pride. In Morales Lezcano's words, the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century monarchy was afflicted with 'military hypertrophy'. For example, despite the loss of the American colonies, the number of army officers either in service or in reserve remained at around 15,000 for a metropolitan population of roughly 20 million inhabitants.<sup>28</sup> Pablo La Porte has written that 'there would have been no 1909 without 1907' in order to emphasize that the early military operations in the Spanish zone of Morocco stemmed from both the pressure of their French neighbors and the desire to emulate them. Up until the early 1920s, the scholar argues, Spain's 'passive imperialism' was preoccupied with preserving the *status quo* in the Northern African theater rather than with colonial expansion.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, allegations that both the indigenous attacks on the mines in 1909 and the ambush of the geographical expedition of 1911 were provoked by the Spanish are well grounded.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, of the 42,000 troops sent to 'pacify' the Rif in 1909 (including Spanish and Moroccan regulars, voluntaries and mercenaries), 20,000 remained to oversee an area of roughly 17,000 kilometers around Melilla on a permanent basis. That campaign inaugurated a military escalation in which the Spanish military presence increased constantly, finally overcoming the number of troops employed by the French in their zone in 1924: the number remained stable at around 90,000 after that date. Between 1909 and 1921, the military expenditure of the Spanish government grew from 218 million pesetas in 1909 to 627 million in 1921. However attractive the Rif mines might be to traders and investors, Morales argues, the influence of the military on the government apparatus was the key factor of Spanish policy in

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem* and Maradiaga, 43–55.

<sup>28</sup> Morales, 157–178.

<sup>29</sup> La Porte, *La atracción del iman*, 37–51.

<sup>30</sup> Maradiaga, 43–58 and 72–79.



Morocco.<sup>31</sup> In 1922, the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, one of the most famous Spanish intellectuals of his generation, described Spain as an ‘invertebrate’ nation lacking in enlightened and effective ruling elites.<sup>32</sup> However, if we look at the country from the perspective of Víctor Morales, Ortega y Gasset’s image should be revised: the military made up a gigantic and noisy skeleton suffering the precarious size and capabilities of its civilian body.

The increasing military presence in Morocco corresponded to the predominant role of the army in the administration of the colony. Although the Spanish authorities established a ‘civil delegation’ consisting of an indigenous affairs department and other economic and financial offices, the army’s general headquarters in Ceuta, Melilla and Larache were, in Morales’s words, the three ‘lungs’ of the protectorate, where the crucial decisions were made and where the Spanish official perception and representation of Moroccan affairs took shape. The office of high commissioner, based in Tetuan, was normally entrusted to military officers. Indeed, this administrative structure did not differ very much from that of the French zone, where Marshal Hubert Lyautey ran the protectorate up to 1925 without disdaining the use of force. However, it was the ‘quality’ of the military presence (the mindset of the army establishment) rather than the quantity that made a difference.

In 1922, the French General Residence of Rabat published a collective volume to celebrate the ‘renaissance’ of Morocco in a number of fields ranging from education and public hygiene to agriculture and irrigation during the first decade of Lyautey’s administration.<sup>33</sup> In his dissertation, Touron described Lyautey’s ‘method’ as a ‘constant combination of force and politics’.<sup>34</sup> Yet, as the officer himself admitted in a public report addressed to Paris at the end of 1920, in his early approach to the indigenous, the stick had prevailed over the carrot; for example, between 1914 and 1921, the French forces fought a parallel war to WWI to subjugate the rebel Berber tribes of the Zayan confederation in the Middle Atlas region. Nonetheless, Lyautey maintained, the outcome of the Great War required a substantial change in the administration of the protectorate towards a policy of indirect rule.

A turning point is necessary as far as the indigenous policy and the participation of the Muslim element in public affairs are concerned. We must look with frankness at the

<sup>31</sup> Morales, 164–172; Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 3–30.

<sup>32</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *Invertebrate Spain* [1921] (New York: Norton, 1937).

<sup>33</sup> Résidence Générale de la République Française au Maroc, 1912–1922: *La renaissance du Maroc. Dix ans de protectorat* (Paris, 1922).

<sup>34</sup> Touron, 239–248.

situation of the world in general, and especially of the Muslim world . . . . It was not without consequences that we launched across the world the formula of peoples' right to self-determination and the ideas of emancipation and evolution in a revolutionary sense.

Curiously, according to the resident-general, the most serious obstacle to an increasing involvement of the Moroccans in government positions was the lack of preparation of the French colonial bureaucrats, who were more familiar with a direct-rule style of colonial administration and, normally, did not have a sufficient command of Arabic to interact with local elites on a regular basis. Conversely, Lyautey praised the 'intelligence' and 'reactiveness' of the Moroccan Berbers, who had little to share with the 'passive *fellah* of Egypt' or 'the less energetic Tunisians', and, in general, did not display the 'usual inertia of the Muslims of the East'. Instead, through frequent and systematic contacts with the West, the Moroccans had become familiar with the 'free discussions' and 'spirit of independence' of the Europeans.<sup>35</sup>

Though conditioned by racist stereotypes, Lyautey's words appear at the antipodes of General Goded's portrayal of the Moroccans as 'immune from any contacts' with the external world, to say nothing of their dismissal as medieval-style barbarians in this chapter's opening quote by Juan de España. As a partial 'excuse' for the Spaniards, it must be noted that they were assigned the most turbulent portion of the Sharifian empire. The Rif was traditionally depicted as the *bled es siba*, or, in the Spanish expression, the *país insumiso*: the portion of Morocco in which the authority of the *makhzen* was more nominal than actual. The term 'Rif' probably derives from a dialect word designating the external tents of an encampment. In accordance with these etymological roots, the Rif delimited the Muslim world after the Christian *Reconquista*. Although part of the Moroccan Empire since its establishment by the Almoravid dynasty in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Berber tribes of the region established themselves as rebel outsiders. For example, in 1898, Sultan Abd el Aziz sent a punitive expedition to eradicate piracy from the Rif coasts.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, the years preceding the Franco-Spanish agreement of 1912 and the early stages of the protectorate saw several attempts by Madrid's officers at a 'civilist' approach seeking to secure the Spanish and European interests in Morocco through cooperation with local tribal leaders. Between 1905 and 1909, while serving as

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<sup>35</sup> Hubert Lyautey, 'Politique du Protectorat', 3 December 1920, published in Max Leclerc, *Au Maroc avec Lyautey (Mai 1921)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1921).

<sup>36</sup> Maradiaga, 80–93.

commander of the Melilla district, General José Marina Vega experimented with a policy of ‘peaceful attraction’ towards the notables of the Eastern Rif, like Jilali ben Driss Zirhouni al-Youssefi (known simply as *El Rogui*, ‘The Pretender’). After ‘stealing’ the identity of one of Sultan Abd el Aziz’s brothers, *El Rogui* had, from 1902, established his own *de-facto* sultanate in the area around Taza, where he sold mining licenses to European companies and dispatched abusive militias to monitor the mines.<sup>37</sup> The Spanish unofficially recognized the authority of *El Rogui* as a cheap and effective way to promote the mining business. However, in 1908, the new Sultan Abd al Hafid inaugurated a policy of vigorous repression of rebel tribes with the support of the French, which, in addition to several abuses by *El Rogui*’s soldiers, persuaded General Marina to ‘dismiss’ his ally, who was eventually captured and executed by the armed forces of the sultan.

In other cases, the Spanish authorities paid ‘pensions’ and distributed public positions to cooperative local leaders. The *moros pensionados* of the Western Rif included Mulay Ahmed el Raisuni of the Jebala tribal confederation. After failing to be appointed *khalifa* as expected, El Raisuni turned to kidnappings of Westerners, arms smuggling and guerrilla warfare against the Spanish. The ‘firing’ of *El Rogui* and El Raisuni resulted in the indigenous raids against the mining companies of 1908 and the attack on the geographical expedition in 1911 respectively. Therefore, to a significant extent, both ‘incidents’ were the outcome of the inconsistency of Spanish policy. Moreover, the occupier’s attempts at strengthening the loyalty by reaching out to individual Rif tribes overlapped with a divide-and-rule strategy, thus breaking the solidarity among the various *kabilas*. For example, local custom allowed a member of a tribe who had offended or damaged another tribe to remedy the outrage by paying a fine fixed by the *yema’a* [‘council’] of the offended tribe. In the case of murder, the fine was combined with a ‘blood debt’ to be paid directly to the relatives of the victim. By impeding the payment of such fines and debts, the Spanish authorities triggered spirals of revenge in lieu of the traditional peaceful means of settling inter-tribal disputes.<sup>38</sup> In sum, instead of strengthening the position of the Spanish occupiers, this policy of *divide et impera*, as well as the timid and wavering experiments at ‘peaceful attraction’ directed towards the Rif elites, resulted in a destabilization of the long-standing balance

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 43–58. *El Rogui* claimed to be Moulay Mohammed, the sultan’s mysterious brother who enjoyed the reputation of a saint among the Moroccans while spending most of his life in the royal palace: this made his identity both palatable and easily available to an usurper.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 104–117.

of power among the local tribes and the polarization of the various sharifs between ‘collaborationists’ and ‘resisters’.

Officially, World War I left Morocco untouched; furthermore, according to articles 141 and 146 of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany gave up all claims on the Sharifian Empire. In reality, however, the Great War years further destabilized the Spanish protectorate, as the Germans fomented indigenous resistance by providing money and weapons to rebel leaders. In the eyes of the Spanish occupiers, the enduring difficulties with retaining control of the protectorate territory confirmed the ‘barbarity’ and unreliability of the Rif tribesmen, and Madrid’s Moroccan policy gradually shifted from a ‘civilist’ to a ‘militarist’ approach. The official account of the military and political situation of the Spanish zone up to 1922 is revelatory of the mindset of the army establishment that ruled the protectorate. The document exalts the Spanish troops’ commitment to respect the customs, laws and beliefs of the Moroccans, as exemplified by the peremptory order that soldiers should not to gaze at the ‘Moorish women’ too much (curiously, however, the report failed to mention that Spanish respect for local traditions included the demolition of ancient Islamic shrines to build the railway to Tetuan). Even so, the document complained, continuous agitations showed that the ‘Moors’ did not understand and accept the ‘work of peace and progress’ carried out by the Spaniards under international obligations.

Rationality protests against the use of armed force, which is not in the wishes of the protecting nation . . . . Yet, we must cope with circumstances as they are. A political action is impossible if our good intentions are subject to the daily aggressions of insolent and hot-blooded rebels. . . . It was a consequence of the rebel environment in which the Jebalas lived that they exteriorized their will by violent means, and it was the logic duty of those charged with the guarantee of peace and order to . . . impose discipline on the transgressors who disregarded the orders of the recognized authority.

This passage referred to some tribes of the Jebala confederation who did not recognize the authority of *Khalifa* El Mehdi Ben Ismael, appointed by the sultan in accordance with the Spanish high commissioner. In December 1913, General José Marina was so kind as to forewarn the Jebalas before bombing their villages and souks in order to spare women and children. However, the reporter noticed, Spanish ‘benevolence’ was mistaken for weakness by the rebels, who responded with ‘inadmissible arrogance’ and ‘lack of respect’. To prove the ‘irrationality’, ‘savagery’ and ‘complete lack of humane sentiments’ of the Jebalas, the reporter reproduced their written reply to General Marina’s proclamation.

In perfect accordance with Ranajit Guha's argument, the Spanish preoccupation with disqualifying anti-colonial resistance provides us with a revelatory insight into the insurgent consciousness and discourse. Two features of the Jebala declaration deserves emphasis here for their significance in the development of an anti-colonial Rif nationalism: the appeal to Islam as a common ground for opposing Spanish rule regardless of tribal affiliations, and the reversal of Spanish arguments about legitimate authority and subversion. According to the rebels, the sultan (and, consequently, the *khalifa* too) had lost any legitimacy after concluding an alliance with Christian powers, which was, according to Islam, a grave sin. Therefore, the Jebalas were not afraid of dying under the Spanish bombs because they were fighting for a just cause and their martyrdom would be rewarded by God. Of course, the cogent rationality of the Jebalas' points was not grasped at all by the Spanish reporter, who instead saw a sort of divine confirmation of Spanish righteousness in the unprecedented torrential rains and frosts that 'placated the violent passions' of the Jebalas.<sup>39</sup>

The fanatic and millenarian tone of this anonymous report, which is kept in the archival records of Primo de Rivera's *Directorio Militar*, is emblematic of the *formantis* of the military elites who ran the protectorate. Sebastian Balfour has thoroughly studied the ethos and cultural background of the Moroccan army. In his words, 'virility, paternalism and high mission were all terms encapsulating the self-image of the traditional Spanish colonial officer', for whom 'civilization became the rationalization of uncivilized behavior'. The aforementioned report and similar official documents, while accounting in detail for the 'misdeeds' of the insurgents, conceal most of the excesses of counter-insurgency under the rhetoric of 'just punishment'. Unpublished memoirs, informal interviews, diaries and other unofficial sources surveyed by Balfour and other scholars have shed some light on the brutality of the Spanish repression which included, for example, the burning of villages, the decapitation of rebel leaders and the public exhibition of their mutilated corpses.<sup>40</sup> Overall, the first decade of the protectorate stimulated the emergence and the radicalization of an anti-colonial consciousness in the Rif. The Abd el Krims of the Beni Uriaghel tribe feature prominently among the products of this radicalization. During General Francisco Gómez-Jordana's tenure as high commissioner (1915–18), they were among the *moros*

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<sup>39</sup> AGA, Marruecos, caja 81/10132, exp. 1, 'Breve relato de la situación militar e historia política de la zona española de protectorado en Marruecos hasta el año 1922'

<sup>40</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 31–51.

*pensionados*. In a couple of years, this family would become the nightmare of the protectorate authorities.

#### A COLONIAL DISASTER BEFORE INDIFFERENT SPECTATORS: MOROCCO AS A SPANISH TRAUMA

*España invertebrata* was Ortega y Gasset's contribution to a vibrant discussion around the causes of the perceived decline of Spain and the proposed means of its regeneration that animated the talks and writings of the *noventayochistas*, as the generation of 1898 became known. In the elitist mindset of the philosopher, the key to the moral and material development of any society lay in the leading role of an 'eminent minority' vis-à-vis the 'vulgar mass'. The massification of economic wealth, political participation, education, culture, entertainment, etc. needed to be guided by the most 'excellent minorities' of the nation. Conversely, Spanish history since the Middle Ages could be summarized as an 'imperturbable empire of the masses' (which is how the author referred to average Spaniards regardless of their bourgeois or proletarian affiliation), an 'atrocious landscape saturated with indocility and overwhelmingly deficient in exemplarity'. 'For a strange and tragic perversion of discernment', the philosopher wrote, 'the Spanish people detest any exemplary man or, at least, cannot appreciate his excellent qualities'. This 'aristophobia' had emerged in all realms of social life, from the prevailing standards of femininity appealing to ordinary men to the Spanish inclination to adore the most despicable political leaders. Therefore, the masses had to acknowledge that their 'biological mission' was just 'to follow the best': only the firm application of the 'imperative of selection' in public life could reverse Spain's decline.<sup>41</sup>

However pompous and naïve, Ortega y Gasset's contempt for the 'masses' was not at all eccentric among European reformist political writers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; for example, it substantially echoed the Italian elitist school of political thought of Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto and Robert Michels. Similarly, the inertia, corruption and clientelism of both national and local Spanish political elites were a recurrent target of the *regeneracionista* authors of the post-1898 era. The political system of the Bourbon monarchy that had been restored with the Constitution of 1876 rested on the maneuvered turnover between the liberal and the conservative parties in the national

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<sup>41</sup> Ortega y Gasset.

government. As Julián Casanova and Gil Andrés have stressed, the *sistema del turno* sanctioned by the Pardo Pact of 1885 between the two ‘dynastical’ parties and the crown implied a reversed concept of national sovereignty, as the government shaped elections instead of the opposite. Whenever a significant political or economic crisis occurred, the monarch dissolved the parliament, and the Interior Ministry manipulated the elections to secure the transfer of the parliamentary majority from the ruling dynastical party to its ‘competitor’. Through a system known as *encasillado*, the liberal and conservative leaders agreed on which candidate ought to be elected in each district and relied on local *caciques* to influence voters accordingly. The fiction of electoral competition with the blessing of the monarchy kept the ‘anti-system’ parties, like the socialists, republicans and radicals to the left, and the ultra-nationalist ‘Carlists’ to the right, permanently out of power.<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, as Casanova and Andrés argue, it was essentially the post-1898 narrative of the *regeneracionistas* which impressed on early-Restoration Spain the marks of negative uniqueness and necessary decadence. After all, in both Liberal Italy and, to a certain extent, the French Third Republic, the government exploited clientelism and recruited corrupt local notables to consolidate state authority and legitimacy across the geographical and social peripheries. Likewise, the *turnismo* did not impede a certain integration of the ‘anti-system’ parties into the political game, as testified by the election of Pablo Iglesias, the founder of both the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) and the *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT), to the Chamber of Deputies in 1910. More significantly, under the leadership of Gumersindo de Azcárate and Melquiades Álvarez, the Spanish ‘republicans’ accepted *de facto* the monarchical constitution and refocused their campaign on the reform of the political and social content of the Restoration regime rather than the formal change of its institutional shape. After experimenting with an electoral alliance with the PSOE in 1912, the *Partido Reformista*, established in that year by Azcárate, Álvarez and Ortega y Gasset, began flirting with the liberals with the aim of creating a potential government coalition that would provide a real alternative to the conservatives and substantially alter the *turno* system.

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<sup>42</sup> Carlism was a legitimist movement dating back to 1830, when King Ferdinand VII abolished the Salic law, thus allowing the accession of his daughter Isabel to the throne in lieu of his brother Charles. The Carlists considered the latter to be the only entitled to rule Spain and accused the Alfonsine line of the House of Bourbon of usurpation. Though maintaining the original name, the movement evolved into a generically traditionalist, Catholic and nationalist party.

The reign of Alfonso XIII, who, after reaching legal age, succeeded his mother Regent Maria Christina in 1902, was characterized by increasing royal interventionism in public affairs. Alongside the army and the Catholic hierarchy, the crown was a super-powerful party for the status quo. Even so, the political realignments triggered by the electoral advances of the socialists and reformists suggest that the *sistema del turno* was more fluid than it seems at first glance. What is more, they were not the only signs of a gradually evolving social and political landscape.<sup>43</sup> Albeit restricted to Cataluña and a few other areas and limited if compared to the main European powers, industrialization brought about the growth of a capitalist bourgeoisie and the rise of a socially self-conscious proletariat, as is evident in the increasing membership of the main trade unions: in 1918, the socialist UGT and the anarchist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT) had around 100,000 members each. Between 1914 and 1918, Spanish neutrality led to an upswing in external demand, which fostered commercial and industrial expansion.<sup>44</sup> In a word, the screenplay of the Restoration regime did not necessarily contain a tragic ending, as most *regenerationista* discourses implied.

Julián Casanova, Gil Andrés, Pablo La Porte and Sebastian Balfour all agree that the season of colonial humiliations inaugurated by the defeat in the Spanish-American War was a key catalyst of the authoritarian outcome of the Restoration monarchy, as it exacerbated social tensions and exposed the country to the rising threat of praetorianism.<sup>45</sup> Of course, both 'evils' existed regardless of Morocco, as did Catalan and Basque separatism; however, until 1917, Restoration Spain was able to contain and metabolize them in one way or another. The 1917–23 period featured a prolonged social and political crisis exasperated by the increasing difficulties of the African campaign, which paved the way to the establishment of the military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. The other side of the foreign demand boom during WWI was the increase of inflation and, therefore, of food prices. Galvanized by the example of the Bolshevik Revolution, Spanish workers engaged in continuous violent confrontations with employers and public authorities, like, for example, in the general strike promoted by the PSOE and UGT in August-September 1917 or in the unrest among workers of the

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<sup>43</sup> Casanova and Andrés, 9–34.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–58.

<sup>45</sup> Other scholars who emphasize the Moroccan roots of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera include Susana Sueiro Seoane, *España en el Mediterráneo: Primo de Rivera y la "cuestión marroquí", 1923–1930* (Madrid: UNED, 1923), and Margarita Caballero Domínguez, 'La cuestión marroquí y su corolario de Anual como causa y consecuencia de la crisis del sistema restauracionista', *Investigaciones Históricas*, 17 (1997), 219–242.



*La Canadiense* hydro-electric company of Barcelona in February 1919. The spread of the latter to the entire Catalan labor movement led to a quasi-civil war between workers and the ‘civic guards’ set up by employers, resulting in around 1,000 casualties.

In parallel, political instability reigned. Four general elections were held and 12 governments succeeded each other between 1917 and 1923. Those cabinets were often ‘invented’ by Alfonso XIII, even in the absence of a parliamentary majority; indeed, the *Cortes* met quite rarely in this period. Meanwhile, the leaders of the left demanded political reforms granting more power to the parliament, regional autonomy, and separation of the executive and judicial branches. In June 1917, a number of national and Catalan MPs gave birth to a Barcelona-based *Asemblea de Parlamentarios*, invoking the election of a constituent assembly. Like the labor protests, this para-parliament was also violently crushed by the authorities. In general, both revolutionary and reformist claims elicited vociferous and, often, violent reactions from the pillars of traditional order: the Church and the army. Officer lobbies and military corporations, the *juntas de defensa*, proliferated from 1917. The response of the crown and the dynastical parties to these quasi-coups *d’état* ranged from benevolent toleration to attempts at containment and institutionalization. For instance, in 1919–20, the Minister of War José Villalba Riquelme converted most of the *juntas* into formal ‘information committees’ of his ministry.<sup>46</sup>

This was the metropolitan background in the summer of 1921, when the Army of Africa suffered an even more humiliating and far-reaching defeat than the *Desastre del ‘98*. During the Great War, Madrid yielded to French pressure to suspend military operations in the Spanish zone of Morocco in order to avoid opening a further front in Africa. Once the global conflict was over, in the spring of 1919, the Spanish High Commissioner General Dámaso Berenguer resumed the military penetration into the interior of the Rif with the goal of subduing el Raisuni and securing the communications between the main urban centers of the Spanish zone and the international port city of Tangier. As part of that campaign, General Manuel Silvestre established an outpost in the abandoned village of Annual, some 60 kilometers from his Melilla headquarter. Between 22 July and 9 August 1921, the Spanish troops stationed there suffered repeated raids from a Berber army under the command of Mohamed Abd el Krim al Khattabi. After one week of furious fighting, which extended to the nearby Mount Arruit where Silvestre’s men sought shelter, the Moroccans inflicted between

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<sup>46</sup> Casanova and Andrés, 59–69.

8,000 and 12,000 losses on the Spaniards and their indigenous soldiers and took thousands of prisoners and weapons.<sup>47</sup>

The *Desastre de Annual* immediately became a national case. The conservative Prime Minister Manuel Allendesalazar resigned and his party colleague Antonio Maura became leader of a new 'national concentration' cabinet. General Juan Picasso, a relative of the painter, was appointed to draft an official report on the Rif disaster, while five military judges were sent to Morocco to investigate on the ground. In the meantime, Berenguer, Silvestre and the entire Army of Africa were stigmatized as the first and most obvious culprits in public discussions. The early press and parliamentary commentaries pointed at the confusion, poor organization and incautious decision-making of the African campaign. After visiting Morocco as a member of a delegation of journalists invited by the minister of war, Torcuato Luca de Tena, the chief editor of the conservative *ABC*, summarized what had happened in Annual as an 'unbelievable and unpredictable collapse of the military forces', a 'wave of panic' representing the 'logical, human and fatal consequence of disorganization'.<sup>48</sup> In the same paper, the famous landscape and genre painter Álvaro Alcalá Galiano reasoned more generally on the inadequacy of Spanish military culture and tradition when it came to colonial campaigns. According to the artist, the outdated values of 'individual heroism, *hidalguia* and *quijotismo*' were insufficient if not complemented by a modern military spirit, competence and organization. The Annual combatants had proven this right by displaying a 'lack of foresight, an excess of self-confidence and under-estimation of the enemy'.<sup>49</sup> While intervening in the Chamber of Deputies, the independent MP Arsenio Martínez Campos accused the indigenous *regulares* of desertion and treason, and invoked a 'just punishment' for them as demanded by the 'respectability' of Spain.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, all these arguments highlighted real problems of the African Army. Unlike Britain and France, Spain could not move indigenous troops from one corner of the empire to the other; it could only employ Moroccan *regulares* against other Moroccans. Many of the former deserted rather than fighting against their fellow countrymen, joining the 'enemy' or simply disappearing into the mountains and the countryside after receiving weapons and training. Conscious of these insurmountable difficulties, General Berenguer had started recruiting for a Foreign Legion in 1920

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<sup>47</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 52–82.

<sup>48</sup> 'La zona de nuestro protectorado en Marruecos: Impresiones de un viaje', *ABC*, 4 January 1922.

<sup>49</sup> Álvaro Alcalá Galiano, 'Lo que ha pasado en Africa', *ABC*, 18 August 1921.

<sup>50</sup> Congreso, Extracto Oficial, 88, 10 November 1921.

among European WWI-veterans, who, for legal, economic or psychological reasons, were either unable or unwilling to return to normal life in their home countries. Even so, the Army of Africa remained poorly equipped, inadequately trained and insufficiently funded to face the needs of colonial warfare. Most of Madrid's outstanding military expenditure was absorbed by the metropolitan army and used for salaries and promotions rather than technological and logistical renovations. Finally, up until Annual, the monitoring of Moroccan affairs by the metropolitan government was intermittent and inconsistent; most decisions were left to the military headquarters in Tetuan, Ceuta, Larache and Melilla. There, the top ranks included some competent and experienced Africanists and champions of the 'peaceful attraction' of indigenous notables, like General Silvestre. Yet, the Spanish officers remained attached to a conventional conception of warfare centered on the progressive occupation of permanent outposts and were uninterested in mobile guerrilla combat.<sup>51</sup>

Juan Ortega Munilla, the father of José Ortega y Gasset and himself a famous journalist and politician, 'dismissed' the catastrophe of Annual as one the recurrent disasters that the European powers suffered in their encounters with the colonial world: he made explicit parallels with the Battle of Adwa of 1896, in which the Italian army was defeated by the Ethiopians, as well as with the French difficulties in controlling the Atlas region of Morocco. In the expectations of the author, if Spain persisted in its crusade for the triumph of 'civilization and justice', the end of the Moroccan campaign could only be 'happy'.<sup>52</sup> However, Ortega's optimistic tone was an exception in the Spanish public debate. Almost all commentators realized the apocalyptic size and implications of the Moroccan humiliation, and talk about Annual inevitably intersected with pre-existing preoccupations over the 'decline' of the Spanish nation and Spain's minority complex vis-à-vis the other colonial powers. Intervening in the Senate, Melquíades Álvarez acknowledged that 'never before' had Spain faced a situation of 'such gravity and transcendence'.

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<sup>51</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 52–82.

<sup>52</sup> Juan Ortega Munilla, 'Lecciones de la guerra', *ABC*, 5 August 1921.

The tragic disaster of Morocco made evident a long-standing lack of correspondence between the organs of the state and the Spanish nation. With the disaster of Melilla, all representations of the state have collapsed; only the nation remains firm.

If the rulers of Spain failed to realize the true meaning of the disaster, the politician affirmed, the country would be lost.<sup>53</sup>

Likewise, Prime Minister Antonio Maura contextualised the Annual disaster within a sclerosis of the Spanish imperial power that began in 1898 and progressively infected the metropolis.

Ah, the memory of 1898 inevitably overlaps with that of July 1921! In 1898 the torment of the flesh was enormous and the wound very evident. This one is a foil injury, but very close to the heart. . . . Now, if the expedition army fails to accomplish its duty in the Spanish zone of Morocco, I cannot say how long, what geographical name and what bureaucratic label the repetition of the lesson will take; but we can take that repetition for granted if we do not eradicate the origins of the evil once and for all.

Therefore, instead of shuffling all responsibility onto the scapegoat of the Army of Africa, the *Presidente del Consejo* ventured onto a quest for the structural causes and domestic roots of the debacle, depicting the colonial establishment as a mirror image of the metropolitan state apparatus.

When we search for ‘the cause’, we must look at the entire picture, encompassing also the antecedents of the tragedy and its aftermath. . . . This disorder [of the Army of Africa], this laxity, this fiction of official things without reality, this lack of accomplishment of one’s duty . . . just reflect what goes on at other levels where people do not wear military uniforms.<sup>54</sup>

Such an admission of state failure may sound surprising in a public speech by a prime minister, although Maura’s acrobatic prose left many of his listeners uncertain as to what he really meant; equally, we can wonder whether it stemmed from a genuine desire to rationalize and exhaustively understand a national cataclysm or rather reflected military pressure to divert public blame from the army. Ever since the protests against the *redención a metalico* of 1909, the stigmatization of the military-capitalist complex driving the Moroccan policy had been a recurring theme of socialist discourse. Julián Besteiro, one of the leading voices of the PSOE in the *Cortes*, replied to Maura by reversing the causal nexus between the behavior of the army and the failure of the Spanish state. ‘In the last years’, he pointed out, ‘the Moroccan policy and the military

<sup>53</sup> Senado, Extracto Oficial, 109, 15 December 1921.

<sup>54</sup> Congreso, Extracto Oficial, 88, 10 November 1921.

policy' had formed 'an indissoluble unity', which had 'absorbed most activities and resources of the country'. The recent official recognition of the *juntas de defensa*, Besteiro denounced, sanctioned the subordination of the government to the military in a substantial subversion of the constitution of 1876.<sup>55</sup> *El Socialista*, the official organ of the PSOE, reported the Besteiro-Maura confrontation in detail.<sup>56</sup> A few days later, the paper published an appeal by the Socialist Youth, which substantially reassessed the main arguments of the MP:

It seems that the fate of the working class has imposed on this sad historical period the need to prosecute war, which is consubstantial with the interests opposed to those of the wealth-producing classes. After Cuba, the Moroccan problem was resuscitated to hollow out a grave in which the energies of the Spanish youth are being buried.<sup>57</sup>

Overall, regardless of proximity to the ruling establishment and sympathy with the army, most post-Annual parliamentary addresses insisted on the necessity for an investigation of the deep roots of the defeat. Like Álvarez and Besteiro, numerous deputies and senators underlined the disconnection between the nation and the state, between real and official Spain, with the Moroccan expedition representing the latter. Thus, the discussion around the causes of the disaster necessarily touched upon the reasons and the ends of the Spanish presence in Morocco. Yet, while the confrontation between *intervencionistas* and *abandonistas* had characterized the public debate on Morocco since 1904, after Annual, very few argued that Spain should leave North Africa; the question was rather what the Spaniards should do there.

Numerous press and parliamentary records from late 1921 and early 1922 reveal a widespread consensus, especially among the dynastical parties and the republicans, that it was both Spain's international duty and in its strategic interest to hold the Moroccan protectorate. In their congressional speeches, both Maura and Martínez Campos emphasized that the Moroccan 'burden' was neither an option nor a whim for Madrid; it was a necessity. Leaving the 'protection' of the *makhzen* entirely to Paris would trap Spain in a French sandwich. Conversely, history taught that Spanish national security rested on two pillars: the neutrality of the Strait of Gibraltar and control of the 'strategic frontier' of the North African coast. Otherwise, the national territory could only be secured at the price of the permanent militarization of Andalusia and the

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> 'En Marruecos se está contra la voluntad del pueblo español: Los socialistas contra la guerra', *El socialista*, 11 November 1921.

<sup>57</sup> 'Las Juventudes Socialistas frente a la guerra de Marruecos', *El Socialista*, 18 November 1921.

Mediterranean islands. Therefore, the question at stake was whether it made any sense for the Army of Africa to struggle to control the wild and turbulent interior of the Rif or if it was wiser to concentrate on a few strategic bases along the coast.<sup>58</sup> The newspaper *El Liberal* conducted an intense campaign in favor of the latter option, which Maura also contemplated in his parliamentary address. Disseminating military posts throughout the Rifian wasteland, the paper pointed out, was a vane imperialist ambition and would just lead to a fiction of territorial control.<sup>59</sup>

In reality, emotional reactions and millenarian readings prevailed considerably over pragmatic assessments of the national interest and cost-benefit calculations like in *El Liberal's* pieces. To many Spanish observers, avenging the shame of Annual became an urgent and categorical imperative: it was a question of national pride and the international reputation of the Spanish state. In his generally moderate and equivocal speech, Martínez Campos invoked 'nothing more than a just punishment' of the Rifians, 'as required' by Spain's 'own essence and decorum'.<sup>60</sup> 'When facing such a desolating spectacle', Alcalá Galiano wrote in his *ABC* editorial of 18 August 1921, it was not the moment 'to wonder whether the war [in Morocco] is popular or not'; it was 'a pressing necessity to avenge the honor of Spain in the world with a convincing victory' and 'an elementary patriotic duty' to support the Army of Africa.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, the chain of events from the *Barranco del Lobo* to the Annual disasters completed the 'nationalization' of Morocco by turning it from a relatively marginal and intermittent public issue into *the* national problem. In the wake of a crisis of national identity and self-consciousness, opposition to military operations in North Africa came to be stigmatized as anti-national and enjoyed only few advocates beyond socialist circles. Even the PSOE adjusted to the predominant patriotic mood when dealing with the question of prisoners of war. It took up to 1923 for Abd el Krim to release the last Spanish POWs after extenuating negotiations with Madrid and in return for around four million pesetas. In the meantime, monitoring the sorts of Spaniards detained in the Rif and pressing the government to obtain their liberation became a daily preoccupation of the leading national newspapers. Again, the socialists read the misfortunes of the Spanish prisoners as another example of the exploitation of the

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<sup>58</sup> Congreso, Extracto Oficial, 88, 10 November 1921.

<sup>59</sup> 'Los que callan y los que hablan: Nuestra acción en Marruecos', *El Liberal*, 7 February 1922.

<sup>60</sup> Congreso, Extracto Oficial, 88, 10 November 1921.

<sup>61</sup> Alcalá Galiano, 'Lo que ha pasado en Africa'.

proletariat for the sake of a capitalist war; nonetheless, in fact, they participated in the atmosphere of national cohesion surrounding the Rif campaign after Annual.<sup>62</sup>

Overall, the quasi-obsessive fixation of most Spanish public figures with the perceived decay of the fatherland was inversely proportional to their consideration for the motivations, claims and rights of the Rifians. Even the socialist criticism of the war never reached an open endorsement of Morocco's right to self-government. During the Seventh Congress of the Second International in 1907, Pablo Iglesias and the French Socialists introduced a resolution condemning militarism and imperialism alike and supporting the emancipation of colonial peoples. Yet, during WWI, sympathy for the Allied cause prevailed over the appeal of Lenin's Third International; like the SFIO, the PSOE realigned along a more moderate platform contemplating the possibility of a peaceful and civilizing colonialism.<sup>63</sup> After the Franco-Spanish Convention of 1912, Iglesias and his fellows never questioned the legitimacy of the Spanish protectorate *per se*, but rather denounced its imperialist-militarist character; nor did they display solidarity with the oppressed Rifians.

The most positive appraisal of Abd el Krim and his compatriots featured in the words of Martínez Campos, who defined them a 'dormant civilization'. By mentioning the British administration in Egypt as an example, the politician identified indigenous advancement to self-rule as the ideal goal of Spanish control in North Africa. However, he regarded the Rif tribes to be far from close to the necessary level of civilization.

If we will succeed in forging this nationality, we will have accomplished an impressive work and will be regarded as the champions of civilization. After knowing these indigenous peoples and appreciating their intelligence and tenaciousness, I must say that their civilization, albeit dormant, can resurrect and beam its light on Europe. If so, we will establish such ties of affection with this nationality as between Spain and the Hispano-American republics.

Campos' biography included direct experience of both theaters of Spanish imperialism: after resigning from premiership in 1879, he had first led Madrid's troops in Melilla and then moved to Cuba as captain-general. In the aftermath of the trauma of July 1921, despite his call for a 'just punishment' of the enemy, he was among the very few Spanish elites to contemplate a restoration of peaceful and cooperative relations with the Moroccans, and, thus, to recognize the latter as a legitimate counterpart.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Maradiaga, 203–249.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–69.

<sup>64</sup> Congreso, Extracto Oficial, 88, 10 November 1921.

For most other metropolitan observers, the tribes gathered under the command of Abd el Krim remained an unruly and barbarous mass inhabiting remote and backward lands. *El Liberal* published a letter of an anonymous Melilla veteran blaming the government for sending 150,000 men to control a region worse than Las Hurdes, the Extremadura district that exemplified poverty and backwardness in the imaginations of the Spaniards: thus, the events were a ‘tragic and ridiculous adventure’.<sup>65</sup> This parallel between the interior of the Rif and the most desolated corners of Spain constituted another recurring argument of the socialists, who criticized the dynastical parties for wasting national resources on the former instead of relieving the latter. It was clear that the Spaniards were ‘protecting nobody’ in Morocco, Besteiro argued in the parliament; instead of fighting against the ‘Moors’ abroad, it was wiser to fight famine and unemployment at home.<sup>66</sup>

The number of racist stereotypes and dismissive judgements about the ‘Moorish other’ (in the words of Sebastian Balfour) multiplied when moving rightwards across the political spectrum. The *ABC* piece by Juan Ortega Munilla quoted above was an enthusiastic review of a book by General Berenguer of 1918. The Spanish high commissioner described Rif society as centered on an ‘aristocracy of value’, by which one’s record on the battlefield determined status in the tribe and allowed mobility along the social scale. The portrayal of Rifians emerging from the book was one of romantic and opportunist warriors only seeking chances of individual bravery and war booty through continuously shifting alliances and rivalries.

Souls get drunk at the prospect of victorious fighting, and the imagination runs to the desired spoils, weapons and ammunitions of the hated enemy. Previous resentments between tribes fade away before cups of tea, huge portions of cous cous and roasted mutton. . . . All quarrels and egoistic passions—the ulcer corroding the primitive Moroccan society and paralyzing it along the path of progress—evaporate at the dream of robbery, and, enveloped in the smoke of the kif, the Rifians fall asleep while reveling in their illusions.<sup>67</sup>

In August 1921, a Tangier correspondent of *ABC* writing under the pseudonym of Riruor listed the numerous reasons for the Spanish presence beyond the Gibraltar Strait. Above historical, geographical, ethnic, political and economic ties, what entitled

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<sup>65</sup> ‘La campaña ineficaz y absurda’, *El Liberal*, 2 February 1922.

<sup>66</sup> Congreso, Extracto Oficial, 88, 10 November 1921; ‘En Marruecos se está contra la voluntad del pueblo español’.

<sup>67</sup> Dámaso Berenguer y Fuste, *La guerra en Marruecos: Ensayo de una adaptación táctica* (Madrid: Librería Fernando Fé, 1918).



Spain to hold the protectorate was its ‘superiority’. ‘Nothing else can authorize a people to intervene in the affairs of a neighbor’, the author wrote. ‘If we committed ourselves to bringing order to this degenerate and disorganized country, it is because Spain is more civilized, better organized and more advanced’. Therefore, Riruor invited the Spanish government to recruit the Army of Africa from among well-trained metropolitan troops only and exhorted the Spaniards serving in Morocco to refrain from contaminating their clothing and language with those of the Rifians, which were occasionally used by the colonial army to overcome indigenous diffidence. Such hybridizations, the journalist warned, conveyed the nefarious message of a reversal of roles between the ‘penetrator’ and the ‘penetrated’, with an allusion revealing the machist subconscious of Spanish imperialism.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, as we have seen in the previous section, the enduring stereotype of the *país insumiso* misrepresented and simplified the complex social and political structure of the Rif, which the Spanish ‘penetration’, combined with German interference during the Great War, had upset and destabilized. Up to WWI, Sibi Abd el Krim al Khattabi was one of the most reliable collaborators of the Spanish authorities, who backed his appointment as an Islamic judge by the sultan and paid ‘pensions’ to his family. His elder son Mohamed also became a magistrate, taught Arabic to the Spanish troops and served as editor of the Arabic section of the *Telegrama del Rif*, the official bulletin of the Spanish zone. The younger brother Mohammad benefited from a grant to study mining engineering in Madrid.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, most of the Khattabis’ fortune came from the mining business, and they did not disdain negotiating concessions with the Germans, which undermined their reputation with the Spaniards during World War I and led to Abd el Krim’s detention. However, it was the Spanish decision to resume military campaigns in the Rif in 1920 which definitively compromised the collaboration with the Beni Uriaghel tribe. As both Maria Rosa de Maradiaga and Sebastian Balfour have stressed, the Krims were Islamic reformers fascinated with Europe who desired to transform their society ‘by intelligent use of the Western tools of development while retaining some features of the local culture, religion and social organization’.<sup>70</sup> In Balfour’s words, they hoped that Spain would bring ‘neo-colonial benefits’—infrastructure, education, an efficient bureaucracy, economic productivity, etc.—but were also confident that Madrid was militarily and

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<sup>68</sup> Riruor, ‘Desde Tanger: Enspanoles y Marroquies’, *ABC*, 18 August 1921.

<sup>69</sup> If not specified otherwise, in this thesis, ‘Abd el Krim’ or simply ‘Krim’ refer to the elder son.

<sup>70</sup> Maradiaga, 355–391; Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 83–202. The quote is from the latter text.

financially unequipped to impose ‘a full-blown colonialism’ on the French model. When Mohamed Abd el Krim realized that the Spanish were delivering nothing but military operations, he employed the revenues derived from selling mining concessions to build up an anti-colonial army. According to Balfour’s estimates, by the time of the Annual offensive, the forces of Abd el Krim amounted to around 6,000 regular soldiers organized on the model of a Western army and 60,000 *harka* [‘guerrilla’] fighters. The Rifians made up three quarters of this mixed army, which also comprised of deserting *regulares* and members of the Jebala and Gomora tribes: this highlights another significant flaw in the Spanish understanding of the Annual disaster.<sup>71</sup>

Almost all Spanish commentators understood the debacle of the colonial army as the reverberation of various diseases of the metropolis, thus failing to grasp a fundamental lesson from the Battle of Annual: the transition of indigenous resistance from traditional tribal demarcation lines to anti-colonial nationalism. Jonathan Wyrzten has compared the impact of France and Spain’s dominions in their respective zones of ‘protection’. Both colonial interventions, the scholar argues, ‘politicized Moroccan identities’, but in opposite ways. While the anti-French guerrilla fighters in the Atlas Mountains represented opposition to any form of state control and perpetuated pre-existing patterns of local resistance, the attempted imposition of the Spanish colonial state in the Rif resulted in a rival state-building project.<sup>72</sup> In 1920, Abd el Krim proclaimed a Republic of the Rif. In fact, most of the ‘republican’ government was concentrated in the hands of Krim, who proclaimed himself president, and his families and closest associates, who were assigned the various ‘ministries’ of the presidential cabinet. As Balfour has remarked, the word ‘republic’, as Abd ed Krim employed it, designated a ‘Moroccanization’ of a European political concept rather than a mere importation. In most of Krim’s writings and public speaking, *ripublik* could be replaced with either of the following terms: *siba*, the guerrilla against the sultan, who, after allying with the infidel Spanish, had lost any legitimacy; or *al ashra*, a group of military officers working and living together (for example, Krim’s headquarter in Adjir or even the Spanish high command in Melilla could be designated as ‘republics’).<sup>73</sup>

Nonetheless, Wyrzten points out, the self-proclaimed Rif Republic endowed itself with a ‘blending of patrimonial and rational-legal bureaucracy’ that included not

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<sup>71</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 52–82.

<sup>72</sup> Jonathan Wyrzten, *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 116–124.

<sup>73</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 83–202.

only a regular army and a network of military posts, but also a consultative national parliament based in Adjir, a tax collection system and several public works projects to link the ‘capital’ with the rest of the ‘state’. What is more, Abd el Krim and his fellows promoted ‘substantial symbolic work to legitimate the nascent state-apparatus and sustain anti-colonial jihad’. That symbolic apparatus encompassed, among other things, a national anthem emphasizing the forging of the Rifian nation through fighting against the Spanish oppressor, public oaths of allegiance towards ‘Emir’ Abd el Krim from the main tribal leaders, and a canon of anti-colonial poems performed by government-hired minstrels in weekly markets. The capture of Mount Arruit marked the zenith of the symbolic and political power of the newborn republic, which now controlled all of Eastern Rif except Melilla.<sup>74</sup>

Of especial interest to this thesis, the Republic of the Rif also attempted to project its crusade for national self-determination internationally through petitions and press campaigns. As the reader will remember from chapter two, ‘capacity for good government’ and international recognition were the two necessary pre-requisites of sovereign statehood according to the European classical standard of civilization: the Rifians sought the latter on the basis of the former. Abd el Krim established a network of European intermediaries and agents not only to raise financial and military supplies for his republic, but also to forward the claims of the self-proclaimed state to European chancelleries and the League of Nations. Besides people mobilizing at Krim’s request, a growing number of ‘Western’ sympathizers wrote press articles, pamphlets and petitions to awaken international attention. As we will see later in this chapter, most of the international resonance of the confrontation between the Spaniards and the Rifians concerned alleged abuses and the excesses of warfare. For the moment, I will focus on the early stream of petitions invoking mediation by the League of Nations in the Rif War. Pablo La Porte has thoroughly traced the contemporary legal discussion around the competence of the League in the Northern African crisis. In the spring of 1924, an interesting discussion went on within the League Secretariat about how to reply to a handwritten letter by a certain Monica O’Sullivan from Barcelona asking the LoN to take active steps to stop a ‘senseless war’ from taking innocent lives.<sup>75</sup> Captain Walters, the vice director of the Political Section, thought that ‘an acknowledgement of reception pure and simple’ would be more than enough. Conversely, the director, the Frenchman

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<sup>74</sup> Wyrzten, 122–131.

<sup>75</sup> LNA, Secretariat, 591/12861/35911, petition by Monica O’Sullivan, 11 May 1924.

Pierre Mantoux, accepted the advice of van Hammel of the Legal Section, who suggested including a line clarifying that no question could come under consideration by the Council or the General Assembly unless raised by a member state.<sup>76</sup> That solution, van Hammel pointed out, would dispel misunderstandings in public opinion about the range of action of the League; it also had ‘the advantage of closing the correspondence at once’.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, the Covenant contemplated alternative channels to activate the jurisdiction of the Geneva organization. Article 17 mentioned the possibility for non-member states to accept the obligations of League membership limited to the resolution of a certain dispute. Like the Cairo government after ‘independence’, the government of the Rif Republic and its foreign supporters also appealed to that norm, but, again, to no avail. The juridical counter-argument of the Secretariat, this time, pointed to the lack of international recognition for the self-styled Republic of the Rif, which, therefore, did not satisfy the necessary requirements for international legal subjectivity; the only sovereign powers involved in the Rif War were the Sultanate of Morocco and the Kingdom of Spain. Finally, and most importantly, article 11 stated that ‘any war or threat of war, whether immediately affecting any of the Members of the League or not’ was ‘a matter of concern to the whole League’, which should ‘take any action . . . to safeguard the peace of nations’ as ‘deemed wise and effectual’. Hence, although non-state actors had no formal power to set the agenda, nothing prevented the secretary-general, or any single member of the Council and the Assembly, from raising questions they had learned about from private individuals and organizations. In the end, the Secretariat abandoned the initial choice of providing juridical arguments in its responses to petitions, which could easily turn into a banana skin, and limited itself to ‘acknowledgments of reception pure and simple’, as in Walter’s advice.<sup>78</sup>

Overall, the systematic efforts by the Geneva bureaucracy to silence pro-Rif petitions under legal and procedural pretexts confirm the political will of the League as a whole not to interfere in the ‘internal affairs’ of colonial empires, as already evident in the LoN’s attitude vis-à-vis the British-Egyptian dispute. Indeed, even the most internationally-minded petitioners displayed a certain awareness of these unspoken constraints. In her petition of May 1924, Ms. O’Sullivan acknowledged that she could

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Mantoux to O’Sullivan, 14 May 1924.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., van Hammel to Walters, 27 May 1924.

<sup>78</sup> Pablo La Porte, “‘Rien à ajouter’: The League of Nations and the Rif War (1921–1926)”, *European History Quarterly*, 4:1 (2011), 66–87.

not expect her home government to intrude in the colonial difficulties of their Spanish ally and thereby threaten the delicate international balance of the *Maghreb*. Instead, O'Sullivan wrote, the League could mediate between the Rifians and the Spanish as an 'impartial and well disposed body'.<sup>79</sup> Mantoux's response notwithstanding, the British petitioner did not give up her hope of involving the Geneva organization in the Moroccan crisis. However, in a counter-reply to the Secretariat, she completely refashioned her line of argument by replacing her previous preoccupation with the Rif and its inhabitants with a declared commitment to the imperial status quo. This time, O'Sullivan reported press rumors of a forthcoming Franco-Spanish war if the Spaniards did not stop the military escalation in the Rif, which might be regarded by Paris as a security threat. Hence, she invoked a League intervention as a means to preserve the balance of power in Europe.<sup>80</sup>

As evident in this example, the legal controversy around the League's competence and the apparent incommunicability between 'idealist' petitioners and reluctant Geneva bureaucrats convey a partial and simplified image of the international claim-making process triggered by the Rif War. The interaction between the two poles was rather a process of mutual adjustment, learning-by-doing. Most importantly, the positive legal framework of the Covenant did not necessarily matter to petitioners. Numerous petitions received by the Secretariat were political rather than legal in both content and scope. In fact, several complaints addressed by the government of Rif Republic to Geneva, either directly or via European supporters, addressed 'Europe' or 'the world' in general, and not specific League bodies endowed with precise competences. They often appealed to broad non-written and non-judicial principles, like 'humanity' and 'civilization', a similar discourse to that in pre-1922 Egyptian petitions. What is more, many of these documents were not even 'petitions' in the proper sense, since they asked for nothing in particular: they just aimed to 'let the world know' that a new government had been established in the Rif with the consent of its inhabitants against the abuses of its supposed protectors and that the new regime satisfied the requirements for sovereign statehood and international recognition set by the 'civilized world'.

In September 1922, the Rif Committee of London forwarded two declarations from Abd el Krim and his associates to the League Council (I will return to the

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<sup>79</sup> Petition by Monica O'Sullivan, 11 May 1924.

<sup>80</sup> LNA, Secretariat, 591/12861/35911, petition by Monica O'Sullivan, 13 July 1924.

international networks of Krim's supporters in the last section). In the first document, the 'president and chief commander of the Republic of the Rif' and the Inspector General of the Rif Army Mohamed Ben Mohamadi Boujibar presented themselves as the 'duly accredited representatives of the actual government comprising deputies from the tribes of the Rif and Gomora' and professed 'full recognition of the desires of the League of Nations'. Their government, the petitioners maintained, committed itself to free trade and the protection of foreigners, and, if needed, could provide evidence of its will and ability to rule 'in the interest of peace and international commerce'.<sup>81</sup>

Attached to this first document was an appeal by Abd el Krim to the 'conscience of those, whether presidents or princes, holding the political reins of the civilized world'. With a rhetorical strategy that we have already observed in the Egyptian petitions, Krim opposed Europe's declared commitment to the principles of 'humanity' and 'civilization' with the misdeeds of the Spanish in the Rif, including the use of forbidden weapons, a complete disregard for the Islamic religion and a systematic usurpation of the property and rights of the indigenous people. The Spanish rule in Morocco, Krim maintained, was pure 'annexation under the cover of protection', a sort of 'possession characteristic of the days of barbarianism'. Therefore, not only were the protectorate authorities and the *khalifa* 'constructed unconstitutionally', but they were also 'ruling unjustly'. Overall, the appeal aimed at endowing the Rif government with the marks of 'civilization' and legitimacy while depriving the Spanish authorities of the same. Nonetheless, Abd el Krim stated, the Rifians were still willing to negotiate a settlement with Madrid. If the powers of the Old Continent wanted to 'carry [their] noble principles from the domain of precept into that of practice', they should convene an international conference involving the Spanish and the Rif governments on an equal basis.<sup>82</sup>

In sum, these complaints and other similar documents were political 'statements of existence' challenging European imperial domination along the main lines of its traditional rhetoric and using the League of Nations as a catalyst of publicity. Nonetheless, the rise of the Rifians to the club of 'civilized nations' and their quest for self-determination and international recognition passed unnoticed by most European public opinion. In Spain, left-wing Basque nationalists were the only ones to portray the Rifian conflict as a liberation war of an oppressed nationality. In a piece which appeared

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<sup>81</sup> LNA, Secretariat, 591/12681/23217, Abd el Krim and Mohamed Boujibar to the Council of the League of Nations, 6 September 1922.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, Abd el Krim's 'Appeal to the Civilized World'.

in the summer of 1923, *Aberri*, the paper of the radical *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, included the Rif in reportage on ‘ultra-peninsular nationalisms’, which also covered Ireland. In the same months, the newspaper proposed a ‘quadruple alliance’ against the Spanish monarchy consisting of the *Euskadi*, Galicia, Andalusia and the Rif. Conversely, *La Publicitat*, the official organ of *Acció Catalana*, dismissed the Moroccan crisis as ‘a Spanish affair’ in which the Catalans were involved against their will.<sup>83</sup> Hence, with the Basque exception, the Spanish public debate approached the Rif exclusively as the theater of a Spanish national trauma.

Most of the European press too interpreted the Rif War as a crucial test for the stability, if not the survival, of the Spanish state, as evident, for example, in the *Times*. In May 1922, a few weeks before the Annual disaster, the paper reported about the growing public resentment of the Spaniards with the ‘apparently useless sacrifices’ of the Moroccan campaign: the time had come for Madrid to ‘make up its mind either swiftly to conquer and wisely to rule in Morocco, or else to abandon an unprofitable enterprise that may easily endanger national stability’.<sup>84</sup> The defeat of Annual came as a fulfilment of the prophecy; in March 1923, the *Times* summarized the last 12 years of Spain’s ‘military operations against the “Moors”’ as ‘a prolonged and ruinous failure’. ‘This Moroccan story’, the paper concluded, ‘fills one of the most tragic chapters in the modern history of Spain. It contains dark as well as tragic pages’.

The same article described how the military establishment, with the support of the leading conservative press, was ‘crying out for immediate vengeance’, or ‘at least retribution of a somewhat drastic kind’ against the Moroccans while hiding the culpability of the army.<sup>85</sup> In general, several commentaries in the British paper insisted on the rising importance of the army as a consequence of the military escalation in North Africa. An editorial of April 1923 offered a thorough analysis of the key dynamics of Spanish society and the role of political liberalism in them. Spain, the piece highlighted, exerted a ‘strange fascination’ on the English public, for nowhere else was ‘the relation between progress and reaction, or retrogression, so subtle, or, in a way, so picturesque’. The country was ‘neither a museum of the past nor a typical state of Modern Europe’. ‘Keen intellectual vitality’ and ‘widespread desire for genuine reform’ coexisted with ‘profound respect for form and custom’ and revolutionary threats from the extreme left and right. Yet, while leftist agitations were forcefully repressed, the

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<sup>83</sup> Maradiaga, 197–202.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Spain in Morocco’, *Times*, 22 May 1922.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Spain and her Troubles’, *Times*, 16 March 1923.

political activism of the Catholic Church and the army could be contained only poorly, because, while holding Spain back, the two institutions also kept the country together 'by some strange operation of historical continuity'. Therefore, progress in Spain could only 'assert itself by a kind of gradual infection' without openly challenging the institutions of the status quo. Relieving popular discontent with the Moroccan campaign 'while avoiding any obvious provocation of the traditional forces' was the delicate task of Madrid's liberal statesmen, which necessarily meant seeking revenge against a foreign enemy.<sup>86</sup>

Corresponding to this accurate monitoring of the Spanish political crisis, there was a rude dismissal of Abd el Krim and his Rif Republic. The Rifians, according to a piece of June 1923, were 'stubborn fighters' whose 'lord' had 'stained his hands with the blood of thousands of ... massacred [Spanish] subjects' and 'treated thousand more with savage cruelty', which made any official recognition of the self-proclaimed Rif government a 'pretension which no civilized Government in the circumstances could admit'.<sup>87</sup>

In conclusion, the overall resonance of the early Rif War, throughout the intra-imperial, inter-imperial and international public spheres, was that of a Spanish national trauma: I will deal with the French press in the next section. This perception was encouraged by the diplomacy of 'neutralist indifferentism' (in Pablo La Porte's words) followed by Paris and London. Officially, neither of the two governments took any active steps in the Rif crisis, although both supported the Spanish army indirectly by allowing it to purchase weapons from French and British companies. In particular, Marshal Lyautey, with the approval of the metropolitan government, did not want active support for the Spanish authorities to alienate Moroccan sympathies while the French were attempting to gain a reputation as friends of the indigenous people. The British feared that Spain could lose its role as a counter-weight to French influence in the *Maghreb*; yet, in the end, consistent with the diplomatic strategy of the last two decades, HMG aligned with Paris's policy.<sup>88</sup>

The perceived indifference of the two main European partners elicited the resentment of the Spanish government; tensions multiplied in the early years of the Rif War, especially along the Paris-Madrid axis. For example, an acrimonious exchange of official notes occurred on the juridical status of Spanish rule in Morocco. The Spaniards

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<sup>86</sup> 'The Dilemma of Spain', *Times*, 6 April 1923.

<sup>87</sup> 'Spain and Morocco', *Times*, 8 June 1923.

<sup>88</sup> La Porte, *La atracción del iman*, 186–193.



claimed to be legally entitled to the ‘protection’ of the Rif through a voluntary cession of sovereignty by the sultan, as implied by the appointment of a *khalifa* for the Spanish zone. Conversely, Paris ‘downgraded’ the Spanish ‘protectorate’ to a mere administrative zone implying no sovereign rights. Moreover, and more significantly, the two allies clashed over the status of Tangier, a point that the Convention of 1912 had postponed to further negotiations. In accordance with the doctrine of the ‘strategic frontier’, Madrid demanded that the coastal city be included in its sphere of influence, subject to free trade guarantees for foreign nationals. Nevertheless, at the end of 1923, Britain, France and Spain approved the Statute of Tangier as an international city, resting on the dual pillars of neutrality and open doors. The sultan would retain his authority on indigenous affairs, while London, Paris and Madrid would be jointly responsible for the external relations of the city and the protection of foreigners. For the Spanish government, it was another bitter pill.<sup>89</sup>

Hence, until 1924, the two ‘mischievous’ allies ‘abandoned’ Spain in its Moroccan trauma, which reinforced the ‘national’ and self-referential character of the Spanish public discussions on the Rif. As feared by the *Times* editorialist, the cabinet led by the liberal Manuel García Prieto failed to satisfy the public cry for explanation and expiation of the Annual shame without compromising the delicate social and political balance of the Restoration monarchy. The aftermath of Annual exacerbated the tensions between the metropolitan and colonial branches of the army and their respective supporters. Madrid’s military establishment sought a quick punishment of the culprits of the disaster among the members of the African Army, who, in turn, interpreted the failure of the campaign of Melilla as a consequence of the low levels of attention and material support given by the metropolis. What is more, a summary identification of a scapegoat clashed with the public demand to address the deeper and ‘systemic’ roots of the colonial debacle. As Balfour has emphasized, a strange alliance consolidated between the Army of Africa and national public opinion against the metropolitan army, with the government trapped in an improbable mediation effort between the two sides.

The work of the five military judges sent to Melilla was systematically boycotted by their ‘African’ colleagues, who concealed or destroyed most documentary records of the fighting. The commission was only able to charge and prosecute a few

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<sup>89</sup> Both the controversy on the legal status of the Spanish zone and the negotiations leading to the Statute of Tangier of December 1923 are covered in detail by Touron, 180–185.

low-ranking soldiers. Silvestre underwent a brief spell of detention but was eventually acquitted, while Berenguer remained untouched. Meanwhile, General Picasso submitted to the High Council of the Army and the Navy the final report of his parallel inquiry, in which he proposed the committal for trial of 39 officers. Under a recent law, this step could only be taken after a parliamentary vote to deprive the charged officers of judicial immunity. Eventually, the senate did not have enough time to deal with the *Expediente Picasso*, for, in September 1923, the Captain-General of Cataluña Miguel Primo de Rivera assumed control of the national government in a largely unopposed *coup d'état*.<sup>90</sup>

This dramatic turn in Spanish politics brusquely interrupted the causal explanation and rationalization effort of the colonial debacle in the metropolitan public. There only remained one solution: to 're-unify' Spain around the three pillars of the nation, the monarchy and the Church (as desired by the military dictatorship), the externalization of evil and the pursuit of revenge against the 'Moorish' enemy.

'DURA CONTROVERSIAS DENTRO DE GRAN CORDIALIDAD': AN IMPERIAL TRUST AT WAR

One of the first, highly symbolic foreign policy initiatives of Primo de Rivera's government was to arrange an official visit by the king to Rome, where Benito Mussolini had recently installed his fascist regime. When introducing the Spanish dictator to Vittorio Emanuele III, Alfonso XIII labeled him, with pride, as 'my Mussolini'. Indeed, as Ismael Saz has stressed, the dictatorship established with the *pronunciamento* of September 1923 is hard to classify: it lies somewhere along the downfall of democracy towards fascism.<sup>91</sup> Overall, the dynastical parties and most Spanish public opinion tolerated the end of constitutional government with apathy and resignation, while the leftist parties and syndicates were paralyzed by fear and disorganization. Nonetheless, a variegated coalition of social and political actors supported Primo de Rivera's road to power with enthusiasm and hopes of change, including huge sectors of the metropolitan army, most of the national Catholic

<sup>90</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 52–82; Casanova and Andrés, 69–78.

<sup>91</sup> Ismael Saz, 'Foreign Policy under the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera', in Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston, and Paul Preston (eds.), *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 53–72.

hierarchy, employers, Catalan industrialists, and, of course, the king, who appointed him head of government.

Until May 1925, Primo de Rivera ruled out of a ‘state of emergency’ with the declared purpose of restoring social order, administrative efficiency and economic productivity. From the national government to municipal councils, the entire public administration was ‘supervised’, if not directly occupied, by the military. The cabinet was ‘temporarily’ replaced with a ‘military directorate’ led by the dictator and run by a mixture of high-rank officers and technocrats. The public rhetoric of the dictatorship combined moralizing and ‘scientific’ discourses, as it pledged to defend traditional values and institutions while restructuring the public administration and the economic system on the basis of objective and rational criteria of efficiency and productivity. The local *caciques* were obvious targets of this moralization-cum-rationalization policy. Most of all, Primo’s *samotén* (paramilitary squads) crushed communists, labor organizations and separatists.<sup>92</sup>

Alongside social unrest, regionalism and *caciquismo*, the Moroccan question completed the series of national evils that the dictatorship planned to eradicate. Again, the traditional dichotomy between *abandonistas* and *intervencionistas* does not help grasping Primo de Rivera’s Moroccan policy. The military seizure of power stopped the parliamentary enquiry around responsibilities for the Annual disaster; even so, it did not end tensions within the army between *junteros* (the metropolitan supporters of the *juntas de defensa*) and *Africanistas* (the colonial branch), among whom the star of the young Colonel Francisco Franco was rising. The Spanish counteroffensive started a few weeks after the Annual disaster. 37,000 more troops landed in Melilla, and, by November 1921, the Spanish reached River Kert and re-appropriated the mines nearby. Traumatized by the lesson of Annual, the Army of Africa readjusted its tactics to the needs of colonial warfare. The previous sedentary system of isolated blockhouses and temporary incursions into the enemy territory gave way to strong mobile units regularly employed in lateral deployment and encirclement of the enemy while pillaging his villages and extracting tributes. But the humiliation of the summer of 1921 had also dramatic implications for the mentality of colonial soldiers. As observed by Sebastian Balfour, ‘in the prevailing military ideology, defeat was like losing masculinity’, which resulted in an immediate ‘obsession with reaffirmation’. What is more, while recapturing positions, the Spanish soldiers discovered the macabre legacy of the Rifian

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<sup>92</sup> Casanova and Andrés, 81–104.

retreat, including the beheaded, impaled or otherwise outraged corpses of the victims of Annual and Mount Arruit. The *desastre* of 1921 injected a ‘spirit of compulsive revenge’ in the minds of the Army of Africa, enhanced its cohesion and, in parallel, ‘erased any lingering sense of guilt’ towards the Moroccans.<sup>93</sup>

Yet, the *Africanista* pressure for large-scale military operations clashed with Primo de Rivera’s wish to pacify Morocco while containing the already outstanding human and economic costs of the African campaign. Initially, the dictator followed the same policy of the late constitutional governments and of the High Commissioner Luis Silvela, who resigned on the same day of Primo’s *coup* and was replaced with Luis Aizpuru. The Spanish authorities combined aerial bombing on Abd el Krim’s allied tribes with ‘peseta-diplomacy’ to lure potential competitors of the Rifian leader. This stick-and-carrot policy included the ‘rehabilitation’ of Raisuni, who, albeit old and ill, was appointed *pasha* of Tetuan with the approval of the sultan. In the meantime, the Spanish attempted peace negotiations with the president of the Rif Republic through various intermediaries. Madrid offered to Abd el Krim administrative authority over a region to be delimited by a joint Spanish-Rifian commission. Indigenous officials would lead the various departments of the administration with the help of Spanish ‘advisers’. An elective assembly would be endowed with legislative power subject to the final approval of the protectorate authorities. Finally, Abd el Krim would maintain an army of 2–3,000 effectives with Spanish officers among the top ranks. However, the ‘rebel’ leader rejected any solution maintaining the sovereignty of the sultan on the Rif.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, the very ‘mortal sin’ committed by Abd el Krim was to conduct military raids beyond the Spanish zone. According to Jonathan Wyrzten, Krim embarked in such a hazardous move out of a sense of almightiness fostered by the Annual triumph combined with the need for new allies and food supplies after a season of poor harvest, adverse weather conditions and refusal by several tribes of the Rif to pay tributes to the ‘republican’ government.<sup>95</sup> In November 1924, the Rif Army attacked some French outposts around Fez and almost reached the imperial capital. Krim’s new offensive turned immediately the Rif War from an intra-imperial confrontation into an inter-imperial affair, as it made the French policy of ‘neutralist indifferentism’ no longer pursuable.

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<sup>93</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 52–120.

<sup>94</sup> AGA, Marruecos, caja 3 (81/09981), exp. 2, ‘Negociaciones de pax con Abdelkrim’, undated.

<sup>95</sup> Wyrzten, 131–134.

Immediately, Paris and Madrid started planning joint military operations. Paradoxically, the conservative *Bloc national* that ruled France after the Great War reacted to the Spanish difficulties in the Rif with irritated indifference, despite ideological and political affinities with Madrid's dynastical parties; now, instead, a strange imperialist alliance was emerging between the Spanish military dictatorship and the *Cartel des gauches* that prevailed in the French general elections of 1924. In the following biennium, the radical Édouard Herriot (June 1924–April 1925 and again briefly in July 1926), the independent socialist Paul Painlevé (April–November 1925) and the SFIO leader Aristide Briand (November 1925–July 1926) chaired four subsequent coalition cabinets supported by various radical and socialist groups before a new centre-right affirmation in the 1926 elections.

After the Tours split, with which I have dealt in chapter one, the SFIO re-oriented its platform towards moderate reformism while seeking, in parallel, to reconcile colonialism with the socialist doctrine. While condemning the militarist and exploitative drift of imperialism, the party Secretary Léon Blum and many of his fellows regarded the French colonization of oversea territories to be historically natural and positive, as it delivered moral and material benefits to backward populations.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, while in government, the socialists promoted political and economic reforms in Algeria and Indochina. Nonetheless, their sympathy for the colonized depended on the latter's acceptance of the French *mission civilisatrice*, and, thus, could never reach the point of approving anti-colonial nationalism. In particular, the SFIO leaders stigmatized North African nationalist movements on the ground of their alleged fusion with Islam, which was automatically associated with despotism and fanaticism. Therefore, while mentioning the Moroccan crisis during a broader illustration of the SFIO platform, Léon Blum and his right hand man Paul Faure stressed the socialist desire to reach a peaceful settlement with the Rifian tribes, which were not represented by the religious fanatic and warmongering Abd el Krim.<sup>97</sup>

The French government's 'residual' representation of the Moroccans, to speak in Huckerian terms, was that of rude and backward yet civilization-greedy and West-fascinated populations, with whom peaceful attraction and cultural influence worked better than military oppression. Consistently with this assumption, the *Cartel des*

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<sup>96</sup> As an example of a socialist exaltation of the French *mission civilisatrice*, see the pamphlet by the secretary of the Tunisian section of the SFIO Joachin Durel, *La politique coloniale du Parti Socialiste* (Tunis: Éditions Tunis Socialiste, 1928).

<sup>97</sup> Léon Blum and Paul Faure, *Le Parti Socialiste et la participation ministérielle* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Socialiste, 1926).

*gauches* cabinets separated the political leadership of the Moroccan protectorate from the military one. In October 1925, the former radical Senator and Governor of Algeria Théodore Steeg replaced Lyautay as resident-general of Rabat, while leaving Marshal Philippe Pétain in charge of military operations. After one year of service in the new capacity, the head of the civil administration exposed his assessment of the differences between the various populations of the *Maghreb* in a book on the ‘French peace in North Africa’.

The Moroccan cares about his Maghzen. He is fond of his millenary costumes. He will never allow the traditions of the past to disappear, and he will raise if we will attempt to touch them. However, at the same time, he observes and looks around—what the Algerian *fellah* does not, as the latter has no curiosity in his soul. The Moroccan perfectly realizes what the French civilization can bring in terms of examples, teachings and resources.

The resident-general went on by describing how enthusiastically the French ‘civilizing’ institutions—schools, hospitals, etc.—were welcome by the inhabitants of the protectorate.<sup>98</sup> *Le Matin* praised Steeg’s analysis for its lucidity and depth; indeed, it corresponded to the predominant views within Paris’s foreign policy and colonial establishment.<sup>99</sup> What the Rifians expected from the Spaniards, a memorandum circulating at the Quay d’Orsay stated, in substantial reversal of Madrid’s image of the *país insumiso*, was material progress and a peaceful environment to conduct their mining, trading and farming business. Hence, the troubles in the Spanish zone were the result of the failure by the ‘protectors’ to carry out their mission properly. The armed rebellion of the Rif was a response to Spain’s political ineptitude and military oppression. Abd el Krim was a product of a spiral of military escalations, and his threat could not be removed by simply intensifying military operations. The only way to defeat Krim, the memorandum concluded, was to ‘win the peace’, that is, to foster a negotiated settlement between the Spanish and the Rifian government. On the success of this enterprise, the stability of the entire Mediterranean region depended, as a permanently turbulent Rif would easily turn into a center of piracy and smuggling at the heart of the North African coast and a few kilometers from Gibraltar. Moreover, only by presenting themselves as peace-harbingers in the Rif, the French would preserve their reputation among their colonial subjects in the rest of North Africa.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Théodore Steeg, *La paix française en Afrique du Nord* (Paris: Alcan, 1926).

<sup>99</sup> ‘Le Maroc n’est pas l’Algerie’, *Le Matin*, 13 December 1926.

<sup>100</sup> AMAE, correspondance politique et commerciale, 1918–1940. M-MAROC (73CPCOM); box 133, memorandum by M. Bourmancé, 28 December 1925.

At the same time, when responding to the Rifian offensive, for the first time, the French officers had a direct experience of the organization and bravery of Abd el Krim's army, which led Paris to soften its previous negative judgements on the Spanish military planning and efficiency and to feel more sympathetic with the imperial ally. In sum, once involved *obtoro collo* in the Rif War, the French government faced a set of conflicting goals. On the one hand, a joint Franco-Spanish offensive, accompanied by a public image of inter-imperial solidarity between Paris and Madrid, was necessary to fasten Abd el Krim's surrender; on the other, the French involvement should mark a clear discontinuity in hostilities, by turning previous patterns of military escalation into a gradual march towards peace. Finally, although the French public rhetoric emphasized the distinction between the peace-loving Berber tribes and their war-prone fanatic leader, no peace settlement in the Rif was conceivable without recognizing Abd el Krim as a legitimate counterpart of negotiations.

A Franco-Spanish conference gathered in Madrid in the summer of 1925 to plan joint military and political initiatives. The two delegations were led, respectively, by the radical socialist MP Louis Malvy and by General Francisco Gómez Jordana, Primo de Rivera's spokesperson on Moroccan affairs—an improbable couple, indeed. Official communiqués notwithstanding, Paris's and Madrid's representatives quarreled on a number of issues, both symbolic and substantial, ranging from the see and presidency of the conference to the fundamental question whether joint military operations should precede new attempts at negotiations with Krim.<sup>101</sup> As we have seen, Annual notwithstanding, the Spanish authorities resumed confidential talks with the Rifian leader a few months after the disaster. Yet, as Madrid made it clear, no final and official peace negotiations could start before *una energética campaña de castigo* as demanded by the Spanish popular mood.<sup>102</sup> In addition, the Spanish stressed that the Rifians would only yield to the language of force: it was a feature of the 'peculiar psychology of the indigenous of North Africa'.<sup>103</sup> Conversely, Malvy insisted that no armed intervention could be justified in front of international public opinion if not after failed negotiations with Krim.

In parallel, the negotiators discussed the future status of the Rif. At the beginning of July, the French Ambassador Emanuel Peretti della Rocca forwarded to

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<sup>101</sup> AGA, Marruecos, caja 36 (81/10014), exp. 1, Spanish embassy in Paris to Primo de Rivera, 7 and 22 June 1925.

<sup>102</sup> AGA, Marruecos, caja 3 (81/09981), Francisco Gómez Jordana to Luis Aizpuru, 1 May 1924.

<sup>103</sup> AMAE, 73CPCOM/95, G. de Coquelay to the Foreign Ministry, 11 July 1925.

Paris an agreement project. The draft emphasized the wish by the two ‘protecting’ governments to grant the ‘free development’ of the Rif and Jebala tribes compatibly with the civilizing mission of France and Spain and international treaties. Furthermore, as a mutual guarantee against separate peace talks, Paris and Madrid pledged to negotiate with Krim only ‘simultaneously’. The ‘emir’ would be offered the leadership of an administratively autonomous Rif under the sovereignty of the sultan. The boundaries of this administrative entity would be drafted by a Spanish-Rifian committee, with the irremovable condition that they remained open to international trade. The Rif administration would also include a local police force, provided that Abd el Krim dismantled his war arsenal and handed it over to the Spanish. The Rifian leader would assume the entire responsibility for the renewal of hostilities if he rejected such peace proposals.<sup>104</sup>

As a confirmation of the internal tensions of the Franco-Spanish imperial trust, and of Madrid’s anxiety about its perceived status of a minor power, General Jordana demanded further assurances against a Franco-Rifian separate peace. He wanted the final agreement to specify that negotiations with Krim should be carried out by a ‘joint commission’ representing the two ‘protecting’ powers.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, the Spanish delegation found unexpected allies among the military advisors to Malvy’s mission. The free development of the Jebala and the Rif tribes and the enduring leadership of Abd el Krim, Heads of Battalion Sicard and Coutard pointed out, excluded rather than implying each other. In fact, Krim’s authority rested on ‘terror, pillage and murder’, as shown, for example, by the burning of disloyal villages. If internationally legitimated as the head of the Rif, he would miss no occasion to resuscitate the ‘bellicose instinct’ of his compatriots against France and Spain.<sup>106</sup> However, the French priority, according to Briand (then serving as Foreign minister), was to avoid a long colonial war just a couple of years after WWI, which the French public could hardly tolerate; that meant making the Franco-Spanish peace offer as palatable as possible to the Rifian leader. Thus, he recommended to exclude from the final agreement any direct mention of the sovereignty of the sultan—after all, that was already implied by references to existing international treaties.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> AMAE, 73CPCOM/102, Peretti della Rocca to Paris, 2 July 1925.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*,

<sup>106</sup> AMAE, 73CPCOM/102, Sicard and Coutard’s report, 3 July 1925.

<sup>107</sup> AMAE, 73CPCOM/102, Briand to Peretti della Rocca, 9 July 1925.



This exchange of views reveals the main coordinates of the Franco-Spanish approach to the Rif War after the turning point of late 1924. Mutual suspects between Paris and Madrid (especially by the latter towards the former) clashed with an overwhelming interest in inter-imperial solidarity. Obviously, the two powers displayed preoccupations with their respective domestic opinion, as reflected by the diverging views on the *castigo* to be inflicted on the Rifians before undertaking negotiations with them. Finally, although the attitude by the members of the two delegations towards Abd el Krim ranged from obsessive hatred to veiled admiration past suspect and benevolent tolerance, they all tended to ‘personalize’ the Rifian question, as it were all about the qualities, merits, responsibilities and future role of the rebel leader. The final and public outcome of the Madrid summit was a synthesis of such conflicting impulses. The agreement of 11 July 1925 stated that military operations would continue until Abd el Krim accepted the Franco-Spanish ‘joint and simultaneous’ peace proposals. As regarded the future administration of the Rif, the agreement mentioned neither the enduring sovereignty of the sultan, nor Krim’s role as head of an autonomous regional administration. The Rif and Jebala tribes, France and Spain promised, would choose their preferred governors ‘compatibly with international treaties’. The rest of the agreement coincided substantially with the first draft.<sup>108</sup>

Of course, no trace of inter-imperial tensions surfaced in the public diplomacy of Paris’s and Madrid’s governments. ‘As evident’, a communiqué of the *Directorio Militar* highlighted, ‘the outcome of [our] talks was extremely satisfying, . . . given the ties linking Spain and France in their splendid work of civilization in Morocco’.<sup>109</sup> With the exception of *El Socialista*, the leading Spanish newspapers celebrated the imperial honeymoon between Paris and Madrid.<sup>110</sup> Any possible disagreement between the two allies, *El Liberal* commented, disappeared given the ‘transcendental importance’ of the Moroccan question.<sup>111</sup> ‘At no moment did cordiality cease’, the *ABC* underlined in one of its daily reports on the Madrid summit.<sup>112</sup> ‘Since we observe higher intimacy in political action and mutual penetration [*compenetración*] between our two countries’,

<sup>108</sup> AMAE, 73CPCOM/102, Franco-Spanish agreement, 11 July 1925.

<sup>109</sup> AGA, Marruecos, caja 40 (81/10018), exp. 2, ‘Nota oficiosa para la prensa’, undated.

<sup>110</sup> Constrained by Primo de Rivera’s censorship, the socialist paper normally limited itself to reproducing official government information. Nonetheless, occasionally, it resumed its previous criticism of the Moroccan military expedition as a capitalist war under the guise of a patriotic crusade, thus stressing a substantial continuity between the foreign policy of the military dictatorship and that of the previous constitutional governments. See, for example, ‘Marruecos y el interés nacional’, *El Socialista*, 23 October 1925.

<sup>111</sup> Leopoldo Bejarano, ‘Hablando con el Gen. Gómez Jordana’, *El Liberal*, 14 July 1925.

<sup>112</sup> ‘La conferencia hispano-francesa: Impresiones’, *ABC*, 26 June 1925.

the same paper stated on 28 June 1925, ‘we look forward to a happy end of the conference’.<sup>113</sup>

In 1925, Spain’s conservative opinion felt relieved, both internally—by Primo de Rivera’s ‘revolution from above’, and internationally, as a consequence of the French involvement in the Rif crisis. These developments erased the neurotic and self-referential sense of national trauma surrounding the Annual disaster. Gradually, the *ABC* abandoned the previous fixation with the decline of Spain and obsessive demands of punishment for the Rifians. Instead, the paper now ‘discovered’ the language of enlightened and indigenous-friendly imperialism of the post-WWI era and even claimed Spain’s compliance with that. Two trends of imperial domination emerged throughout history, Manuel Bueno pointed out in an editorial of 24 June 1925. On the one hand, those conquerors aiming at ‘modifying the soul of the annexed peoples and mortifying their intimate feelings’ had regularly incurred in failure. On the other, a ‘tolerant and less absorbing’ version of imperialism contented itself with exerting influence on colonial subjects while respecting their culture, religion and customs.

The ancient Romans were the inventors of this policy, and the British its modern champions. ‘The imperial ideal is currently going through transformations’, Bueno concluded, ‘as it now cares about protecting rather than dominating’. When dealing with colonial subjects, the journalist acknowledged, Spain had frequently erred through ‘abuse of power’ and believed in the ‘hallucination that force legitimizes everything’. Nonetheless, in Bueno’s view, Primo de Rivera adjusted to the currently prevailing and historically winning school of benevolent imperialism, as he stated that the Spanish end was to maintain influence and not to achieve full sovereignty over Morocco.<sup>114</sup>

Spain’s acceptance of some forms of indirect rule in the Rif, as implied by the Franco-Spanish agreement, was a sign of Madrid’s benevolence and a tribute to the ‘spirit of the time’. Yet, it meant no ‘rehabilitation’ of the barbarous Rifians and their fanatic leader. On this line, both *ABC* and *El Liberal* concurred. After the Great War, the latter paper wrote, the Moroccan ceased to be an exclusively Spanish affair and became an episode of the broader confrontation between the Western civilization and ‘Muslim religious nationalism’.<sup>115</sup> Thus, even when acknowledging the national character of the Rifian insurrection, the Spanish press disqualified it by underlining its contamination with religious fanaticism. Though abandoning the hardcore racist

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<sup>113</sup> ‘La conferencia hispano-francesa: Impresiones’, *ABC*, 26 June 1925.

<sup>114</sup> Manuel Bueno, ‘Italia y Marruecos’, *ABC*, 24 June 1925.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Acuerdo francoespañol: Necesidad de tropas coloniales’, *El liberal*, 25 June 1925.

discourse recurring in the coverage of the early Rif War, *ABC* delivered a thorough bombardment of subliminal messages to undermine the image of the ‘Moorish other’ in the eyes of the metropolitan readership. Regular reports of military operations and Franco-Spanish diplomatic dealings were often preceded by exotic travel accounts from North Africa. Shaped in a refined and captivating prose, and filled with bizarre anecdotes, these pieces conformed to the classical stereotypes of the North Africans, and of the Moroccans in particular, as irrational, opportunist, unreliable, dishonest, etc.

For example, a tale by an anonymous traveler to Tlemcen (Algeria) featured in the July-1<sup>st</sup> issue, with an eloquent title: ‘Africa me ha vendido su misterio’ [‘Africa sold me its mystery’]. Reportedly, the imam of the local mosque allowed the traveler to touch the tomb of Sidi Bou-Mediene, a legendary Andalusian mystic and Sufi master of the Middle Ages, in exchange for a coin. Traditionally, the mausoleum was interdicted to the ‘infidels’, and popular stories told of an Englishman dying after approaching the tomb.

Without fanaticism and intolerance, what remains to this country? But Africa is not this. This man who lets me touch the tomb of Sidi Bou Mediene for a coin while invoking Allah . . . in the minaret is not a Moor; he is less than a pig, according to the ranking established by Abd-el-Kader. The latter said . . . that ‘a Mohammedan is worth more than a Christian; a Christian is worth more than a Jew; a Jew is worth more than an idolater; an idolater is worth less than a pig. . . . What a disillusionment! I believed, desired to believe—to make my journey more romantic, . . . in the Holy War! . . . Yet, in Africa, it is quite frequent to walk blindly: at every step, the sun dazzles your eyes. . . . After ceasing to believe in the legend, in the Holy War, I saw just this: sun!’<sup>116</sup>

Therefore, the doors of the intra-imperial public debate remained closed to Rifian claims. On the contrary, in the meantime, the French intervention in the Moroccan crisis provided Abd el Krim and his supporters with a new arena of mobilization and claim-making. Upon precise instructions by the Third International, the *Partie Communiste Française* (PCF) endorsed the cause of the independence of the Rif as part of a broad anti-imperialist campaign.<sup>117</sup> On 26 June 1926, *L’Humanité*, which now voiced revolutionary socialism, reproduced a speech by the leading Soviet ideologue Grigorij Zinov’ev at a recent communist rally near Moscow. The ongoing ‘imperialist offensive’, Zinov’ev observed, fulfilled the prophecy by Lenin, in the last

<sup>116</sup> ‘Africa me ha vendido su misterio’, *ABC*, 1 July 1925.

<sup>117</sup> According to the Interior Ministry intelligence reports, for example, a meeting took place in the offices of *L’Humanité* in May 1925, in which Moscow’s emissaries instructed the paper to make the Rif campaign unpopular among the readers (AMAE, 76CPCOM/128, ‘Le Partie Communiste Française et les événements du Maroc’, 16 May 1928).

days of his life, of a new world war breaking out between 1925 and 1928. However, the Moroccan war marked a significant innovation compared to the Great War. ‘In 1914’, the Soviet intellectual remarked, ‘no one in France raised his voice against the war. Conversely, the last events have shown that, should the bourgeoisie try to launch a new war, thousands of Liebknecht’s would rise in all European countries’.<sup>118</sup>

In Claude Liazu’s words, the Rif War represented the ‘baptism of fire’ for the PCF and its youth section, the *Jeunesse Communiste*.<sup>119</sup> As Jean Pierre Biondi has highlighted, ‘the propaganda campaign against the war is worth being remembered for its mass character, organizational effort, width and diversity of its public manifestations’, which included mass rallies, circulation of pamphlets and flyers among soldiers and workers, and the boycotting of military transfers to North Africa.<sup>120</sup> Under the slogan *Le Maroc au Marocains!*, the French communists invoked the immediate termination of the armed conflict, the complete evacuation of the French and Spanish armies, ‘fraternization’ between French soldiers and the Rifians, complete independence for the Republic of the Rif.<sup>121</sup>

Indeed, as Michael Goebel has underlined, however part of a transnational initiative, the PCF mobilization against the Rif War was all but other-directed and very ‘national’ in scope. It pursued two fundamental goals: on the one hand, to obtain the sympathy of the numerous North African workers living in Paris; on the other, to attack the ‘traitor’ cousins of the PSOE, who, after forming a government coalition with bourgeois forces, were now supporting an imperialist war.<sup>122</sup> ‘The current war entangles us in bargaining . . . with Spain and Britain and inflames the entire Islam’, Jacques Doriot, the head of the colonial section of the PCF, wrote. ‘From Tunisia, Algeria and Mauritania, protests abound’.<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless, this ‘opportunist’ mobilization offered to Abd el Krim an inter-imperial channel to present his case against Spain. In August 1925, *L’Humanité* published an appeal by the president of the Rif Republic to French MPs. Overall, the document employed the ‘Wilsonian’ rhetorical strategy of distinguishing between government and the ‘real’ people. Krim aimed to give the lie to Paris’s authorities, who charged the Rifians with responsibility for the extension of the

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<sup>118</sup> ‘Le Maroc et la crise mondiale de la bourgeoisie: Un discours de Zinoviev’, *L’Humanité*, 26 June 1926.

<sup>119</sup> Liazu, 143–147.

<sup>120</sup> Biondi, 135–155.

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, ‘La guerre du Maroc: Un bel appel des soldats’, *L’Humanité*, 1 June 1925.

<sup>122</sup> Goebel, 158–166.

<sup>123</sup> Jacques Doriot, ‘À bas la guerre du Maroc: Faites la paix immédiate avec le Riff’, *L’Humanité*, 23 May 1925.

war beyond the Spanish zone, and, in parallel, to win the sympathy of the French public. It was Lyautey the first to carry out armed attacks against the Rif Army at the end of 1924, Krim claimed. Up to that moment, the French government had benevolently tolerated the Rifian crusade for independence. In response to Painlevé's denial of past contacts with the Khattabi family, Abd el Krim revealed that he had met the French statesman in person during a trip to Paris in 1923, when he had also communicated with Poincaré through intermediaries. 'We were in Paris, the mother of civilization, the source of liberty, equality and right', Krim wrote, 'with the conviction that the noble people of France and its free men would listen to our appeal and recognize the rights of the people of the Rif'. Hence, by a similar line of arguments to the *Wafd's* during the Egyptian Revolution, Abd el Krim inverted the stands of the French and the Rif governments vis-à-vis justice and morality. The Rifians, he pointed out, were 'people with a sensitive soul, ready to die for their rights', despite the military oppression by France and Spain. Furthermore, allegations that the Rif insurrection was fomented and other-directed by world Bolshevism were groundless, as the Coran and communism were incompatible with each other.

Once again, as during the Egyptian crisis of 1919–22, the campaigns of the French left provided fertile ground for anti-colonial claim-making by Middle Eastern nationalists. Yet, the links between the Rif government and Paris's leftist circles were less organic and more opportunist compared to the interactions between the *Wafd* and the socialist press. When intervening in *L'Humanité* or *Le Populaire*, Lutfi al-Sayyid rephrased the Egyptian crusade for national self-determination in a Marxist language, thus adjusting to the ideology and discourses of his addressees. Conversely, Abd el Krim simply juxtaposed his nationalist and religious rhetoric to the class-struggle language of the PCF. As evident in the above quote, the Rifian leader openly disassociated himself and his fellows from Bolshevism, which *L'Humanité's* journalist remarked in his accompanying comments to the petition: 'We know that Krim is not a communist, . . . but we also know that the enemies of the Rifians, the imperialists, who want to enslave the peasants of the Rif, are also the enemies of French peasants and workers'. In sum, both the Rifian leader and the PCF openly acknowledged that their converge was an instrumental one.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> 'Une lettre ouverte du gouvernement riffain à la Chambre des Députés française', *L'Humanité*, 11 August 1925.

Nonetheless, the ability by Abd el Krim and his associates to project the Rifian crusade for independence throughout culturally and ideologically distant milieus cannot be underestimated. The Rif government exploited all available petitioning channels, from the international arena of the League of Nations, ‘down’ to the inter-imperial public sphere and the regional one (the Spanish public debate, as we have seen, remained inaccessible). We should not forget that the Rifians fought not only an anti-imperialist war against France and Spain, but also a secession war against the *makhzen*—since 1912, the sultanate and the Franco-Spanish control of Morocco implied each other. Even so, Abd el Krim attempted also to appeal to his ‘fellow’ Moroccans beyond the Rif. In the absence of a shared recognized political authority, religion was the only available common ground. ‘Our sole purpose’, Krim wrote in an appeal featuring on the gates of Tangier’s mosque, ‘is to drive the enemy out of the land of the Muslims, and to accomplish all necessary moral and material reforms to restore . . . the glory of our ancestors’. The Rifian president even mentioned his willingness to abide to the sultan’s authority—which he categorically excluded in private negotiations with and public addresses to the French and Spanish, provided that the latter disassociated himself from the ‘infidels’.<sup>125</sup>

Did this multifaceted and multi-leveled petitioning effort produce any ‘concrete’ effects? As in the other case-studies of this thesis, an indisputable causal nexus between international claim-making by anti-colonial nationalists and decision making by European chancelleries and international organizations is hard to discern. Arguably, the inter-imperial public sphere was the one in which the Rifian mobilization proved to be more successful. As the Bourmancé memorandum quoted above stressed, the French government ought to ponder its Rifian policy with care, by containing the use of military force within the minimum indispensable level to pacify the region while preserving, as far as possible, an indigenous-friendly façade. Otherwise, any perceived ‘imperialist drift’ would be exploited by the Communist Party for its ‘subversive’ campaigns, and could even alienate the support of the socialist electorate to the government. Hence, the international resonance of the Rif War affected the residual representation of opinion trends by the French government, as it threatened to undermine the reputation of the *Cartel des gauches* vis-à-vis its national constituency. In fact, while coordinating military operations in the Rif with Madrid, the French government disassociated itself from the Spanish unrestricted warfare. For example, in

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<sup>125</sup> AMAE, 73CPCOM/103, Lyautey to the Foreign Ministry, 30 September 1925.

an exchange with Resident-General Steeg, Briand authorized the aerial bombing of villages only as a ‘repressive measure immediately following an aggression, and limited to the responsible populations’.<sup>126</sup>

However disconcerting under nowadays ethical standards, the French colonial warfare in Morocco, as conceived and outlined in Briand’s letter, appears self-restrained if compared to Spain’s. The military cooperation between Paris and Madrid culminated in the grandiose amphibious landing at Al Heceima Bay, a few kilometers from Adjir. Since 1913, the Spanish military establishment had dreamt of a mortal strike at the very heart of the Rif ‘Republic’. The plan turned into reality in September 1925, when around 90,000 among French and Spanish troops reached Al Hoceima by more than fifty ships and sixty airplanes, and met the resistance of a 20,000-staffed Rifian Army. The Spanish combatants missed no occasion to ‘repay’ the Moroccans with the same level of atrocities as inflicted on the Annual victims. Confidential reports of those bloody days include, among others, the account by a Spanish pilot who, while overflying Al Hoceima, saw his companions in arms throwing Rifian prisoners out of a cliff, and the horrifying story of a Spanish Red Cross nurse who was ‘greeted’ by hospitalized soldiers with the heads of two Moroccans in the middle of a basket of roses.<sup>127</sup>

One after the other, the loyal tribes to Abd el Krim surrendered to Franco-Spanish forces, until Madrid’s troops occupied Adjir, the hometown of Krim and the capital of the Rif Republic. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1925, the commander of the *Alfonso XIII*, stationing at Al Hoceima Bay, delivered a triumphant radiograph to Madrid: ‘Our columns reached Adjir almost unopposed by the enemy, heavily punished by recent combats. . . . The whole town burns, including the house of Abd el Krim. Our soldiers, crowning the high hills, offer a marvelous spectacle’.<sup>128</sup> The Spaniards unleashed unrestrained military force, including the use of tear and lethal gas bombs, outside any ‘Clausewitzian’ logic, that is, with the conscious purpose of annihilating the enemy. Despite the ‘moderation’ displayed by the metropolitan press since 1924, fanaticism of the fighters of the Moroccan campaign even increased. In September 1925, Primo de Rivera, who had assumed himself the office of high commissioner, issued an apocalyptic warning to the inhabitants of the Rif and Jebala, in preparation for the Al Hoceima landing. The Spanish soldiers, the dictator warned, could no longer stand the

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<sup>126</sup> AMAE, 73CPCOM/197, Steeg to Briand, 12 April 1927; Briand to Steeg, 13 April 1927.

<sup>127</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 85–120.

<sup>128</sup> AGA, Marruecos, caja 7 (81/9925), exp. 3, *Alfonso XIII* to Madrid, 1 October 1925.

‘provocations and daring threats’ of the ‘perverse tyrant’ Abd el Krim. Three days remained to the Rifians and Jebalas to surrender and hand over their weapons, thus escaping ‘an extremely ferocious punishment’.

‘However, if you do not listen to me and continue to follow those bringing about your prediction and annihilation, and the foreigners helping them, . . . you will shed many tears for the loss of your entire families’.<sup>129</sup>

At the same time, the Franco-Spanish advance did not force Abd el Krim to compromise. Apparently, he conceived the ‘full independence’ of the Rif to be a non-negotiable goal. Still in November 1925, approached by a French emissary in Targuist, the Rifian leader reiterated the demand for full sovereignty of the Rif government, placed under his presidency and endowed with an autonomous armed force. He was willing to recognize only the religious authority of the sultan. Finally, the Rif Republic could renounce to diplomatic sees, but did not authorize the French or Spanish to represent it abroad.<sup>130</sup>

Eventually, Krim surrendered to the French in May 1927. A new Franco-Spanish summit was held to decide on his sort. Again, the two imperial partners clashed, albeit in private. The Spanish demanded ‘the harshest possible treatment compatibly with humanity’. However, they encountered the firm resistance of Théodore Steeg, who, in the words of the Spanish ambassador in Paris, ‘stood up in ferocious defense’ of the Rifian leader. In the end, the French exiled the latter to the Isle de la Réunion. An acrimonious confrontation went on between Paris and Madrid on a number of points, including the size and composition of Krim’s retinue and his home while in exile, whether he could be visited by friends or doctors, whether he could work for his own livelihood, whether he could communicate with the external world, etc. The words employed by Madrid’s ambassador to sum up the tone of the Franco-Spanish talks may well apply to the overall inter-imperial dimension of the Rif War: ‘harsh controversy within great cordiality’.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., proclamation by Primo de Rivera to the populations of the Rif and Jebala, 4 September 1925.

<sup>130</sup> AMAE, 73PCOM/103, ‘Vues officielles du gouvernement Riffain’, 23 November 1925.

<sup>131</sup> AGA, Marruecos, caja 40 (81/10018), to Madrid, 22 June 1926.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Mandates System at Its Peak: The Great Syrian Revolt and Its International Resonance, 1925–1927

The Great Syrian Revolt of 1925–1926 represent the peak of the mandates system of the League of Nations, in two opposite senses. On the one hand, it was maybe the most internationally debated-about uprising which occurred in the mandates of the League of Nations. France's fierce repression of the rebellion, which culminated with the bombing of Damascus in October 1925, impressed the international community, threatening to cause a legitimization crisis of the entire mandates system. At the same time, although the French remained committed to a policy of direct rule of the mandate, they inaugurated a season of moderate cooperation with local elites after the revolt. On the other hand, however, the Syrian crisis marked a short circuit of the mandates system, as the civilizing and progressive missions had taken the shape of brutal counter-insurgency.

After summarizing the historical processes which led to the Syrian revolt, I assess its resonance in the international arena on the basis of the documents I consulted in Geneva's and Paris's archives. The second section deals with the debate on the Syrian rebellion in the League of Nations, as emerging from the records of the Permanent Mandates Commission. Then, I focus on 'global' dimension of the revolt, as emerges from the petitions addressed to the League by the Syrian diasporas and the international press. Finally, I investigate the French home debate through the press and the acts of a governmental inquiry on the situation in Syria.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> When quoting the League documents, I use the following acronyms for citations: 'LNA', which means 'League of Nations Archives'; 'LNI', which stands for 'League of Nations Journal'; 'OC', which is to indicate the original correspondence. Sometimes, I have integrated the documents I consulted in Geneva with the microfilms available in the Library of the European University Institute. I refer to this latter collection as 'LNI'. Most of the League records were issued in both English and French official versions. Some documents, however, especially if collected in the original correspondence, are exclusively available in one language. When I had to translate from other languages than English, I place a '(\*)' at the end of the citation. Several excerpts from the international press, finally, were translated into

## A TURBULENT MARRIAGE: SYRIA AND LEBANON UNDER FRENCH MANDATE

Until 1914, Britain and France had pursued a dual strategy toward the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, they were interested in the preservation of the Sublime Porte as a bulwark against Russian expansionism, and had encouraged the Ottoman rulers to promote domestic reforms. On the other hand, as part of the Anglo–French Entente, in 1904, London and Paris had agreed on the partition of the Middle East in informal spheres of influence: the French recognized British control of Egypt, while Paris was granted hegemony over Syria.<sup>2</sup>

As the historian David Fieldhouse highlights, France’s stake in the Near East at the end of the Great War ‘consisted of a complex of ‘sentimental’, financial and religious involvements’. The French Catholic Church was closely tied to the Maronites of the vilayets of Beirut, including the sanjaq of Mount Lebanon, where numerous missionaries had been displaced. It also claimed a French protectorate over Catholic interests in Jerusalem. French companies owned and ran several railways in Palestine and were the main investors in utilities in Syria—especially in the vilayets of Aleppo and Suryya, while a silk industry from Lyon had strong interests in Lebanon. As far as the domestic political debate was concerned, the French claim to Syria was based, in Fieldhouse’s words,

on an amorphous nationalist impulse that was centred on and mobilized by a number of imperialist organizations. None of these was large in membership but they included a number of key politicians who, once war was declared, were able to manipulate French policy.<sup>3</sup>

Eugène Etienne’s Parti Colonial was the umbrella organization of the imperialist front. Its subsidiary movements included the Comité de l’Asie Française, from which some leading politicians of the WWI years came, such as Philippe Bertelot, Robert de Caix and François Georges–Picot. Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon (1906–11, 1912–13, and 1917–20), was a member of two other small organizations, the Comité de l’Orient and the Comité de Défense des Intérêts Français en Orient. Before the breakout of the world conflict, these organizations had been campaigning for the international

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English or French by the LoN staff, and their original versions are not collected in the Geneva archives. When I am quoting translated documents, I mark this with a ‘(\*\*)’ at the end of the citation.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*, 3-35.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-63.

recognition of French control over what they called *la Syrie intégrale*, a territory running from the Taurus Mountains in the North to the Egyptian borders in the South and including much of the Arabian Desert.<sup>4</sup>

In July 1922, the Council of the League of Nations formally recognized Syria and Lebanon as a class ‘A’ French mandate and approved its statute. France was expected to frame ‘within a period of three years from the coming into force of [the] mandate, an organic law for Syria and the Lebanon’, with the aim of facilitating ‘the progressive development’ of the two regions ‘as independent States’ (article 1). Under article 2, the mandatory power was allowed to maintain its troops on the mandated territory and also to raise a local militia if necessary for the defense of the mandate and the preservation of public order, but was forbidden from recruiting soldiers outside the mandate. Articles 3, 4 and 5 provided for the French to be entrusted with the exclusive control of Syrian and Lebanese foreign policy, defense and foreign trade. Under the latter article, furthermore, the mandatory was authorized to raise taxes if deemed ‘adapted to local needs’. Article 6 asked France to safeguard ‘the personal status of the various people’ and ‘their religious rights’. The mandatory power was responsible for public education, to be given in the language of the natives, but local communities were also allowed to maintain their own schools for their own members (article 8). Finally, according to article 17, the mandatory power had to report annually to the League Council on the measures taken during the year to carry on the provisions of the mandate.<sup>5</sup>

‘It is an interesting historical counter-factual’, according to David Fieldhouse, ‘to consider what might have happened to Faysal’s regime in Syria had he and his supporters there played their hand [...] according to rules laid down for them’. In fact, their strenuous resistance meant the end of any ambition of Arab independence in Syria, which became, in all but name, a French colony.<sup>6</sup>

According to Fieldhouse, the ‘reluctance to transfer any real power to indigenous Syrians was the hallmark of French rule’.<sup>7</sup> Philip Khoury, a prominent historian of modern Middle East and a recognized authority on Syria, argues that the ethos of French administration of the mandate was inspired by Paris’s previous

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*. See also Christopher M. Andrew and Alexander Sydney Kanya-Forstner, *France Overseas: The Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> The text of the mandate can be found in LNA, LNJ, vol. 3, no. 8, part II (August 1922), Minutes of the Nineteenth Session of the Council (17-24 July 1922), 1013-1017.

<sup>6</sup> Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*, 62.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

experiences in Morocco and Tunisia: many of the early French officials in Syria and Lebanon had previously served in North African colonial administrations. Gouraud and de Caix *in primis* had worked in Morocco, as had General de Lamothe, Delegate in Aleppo, Colonel Niéger and his successor General Billotte, Delegates in the Alawite territory, and General Georges Catroux, the first Delegate in Damascus. France's strategies consisted of keeping alive a formal structure of indigenous rulers and elective bodies as a device for attracting the consent of local notables, while any real decisional power rested, *de facto*, in the hands of the mandatory administration.<sup>8</sup> M. Bareyton from the Quay d'Orsay indicated the priority of French policy in Syria in these words:

The need is for an indigenous façade which is reasonably consistent, behind which we can operate without direct responsibility and in the way and under the circumstances which we judge useful.

The federal articulation of the mandate reflected a *divide et impera* approach rather than a genuine recognition of the natives' right to self-administration. The various federated states were articulated in sanjaqs (regional districts) and municipalities. Each level of governance generally involved local governors, ministers and elective councils. Each single decision of these organs, however, had to be taken with the advice and consent of French officials and could eventually be blocked by their veto.

All this system was supervised and directed by the headquarters of the French administration in Beirut. The high commissioner had the power to issue decrees and to decide on the appeals from local authorities against the decisions of French officials. Appointed directly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris, he was left relatively free to fix the guidelines of the mandatory rule. He was assisted by a secretary-general, who was also designated by Paris. Furthermore, the Lebanese capital city hosted several departments, in charge of handling matters of common interest for the mandate as a whole, such as public security, education, public works, Bedouin affairs, customs, postal services, and concessionary companies. As a pillar of their control over the mandated territory, the French also established a capillary intelligence apparatus, called Services Spéciaux, which had the task of collecting information and managing press

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<sup>8</sup> Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: the Politics of Arab Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), ch. 3.

ensorship and propaganda. Finally, the Armée du Levant, made up of about 70,000 mostly North African, Senegalese and Madagascar's soldiers, was deployed on the Syrian and Lebanese territory. It was reinforced by both engineer and aviation corps from France and a natives-composed Syrian Legion, which, in 1924, amounted to roughly 6,500 personnel.

Some timid steps towards democratization were attempted in 1922, as Commissioner Gouraud appointed a federal council, picking its members from the assemblies of the federated states. His successor, General Maxime Weygand, made the council elective the following year, but it remained a merely advisory organ. This reluctance to give substantial power to the local inhabitants, according to David Fieldhouse, prevented the French from providing their rule with both efficiency and legitimization.

[France's] major mistakes in dealing with both Syria and Lebanon was to assume that what worked in Morocco would work in these far more sophisticated Near Eastern communities which, moreover, had had some experience of representative government under the reformed Ottoman system of the post-1908 period. Equally importantly, the French largely ignored the force of pre-1918 Arab nationalism and the fact that Syria had briefly formed an autonomous state under Faysal from 1918 to 1920.<sup>9</sup>

Resistance to the French emerged in Syria's countryside, after the establishment of the mandate, as a continuation of the opposition to foreign rule which had characterized the last decades of the Ottoman domination. From the ethnic, religious and cultural standpoint, Syria was an extremely complicated country, lacking a tradition of unity and hosting several potentially conflicting minorities, such as the Alawites in the North, the Druze in the South, and significant Christian communities spread here and there. While the hostility to French occupiers enhanced the sense of belonging to a unique Syrian nation, Michael Provence points out, that 'there were many Syrian nationalisms, each evolving in a local context. Some played a larger role than others'.<sup>10</sup>

What would eventually evolve into the 'Great Syrian Revolt' started as an uprising of the Druze inhabiting the Jabal Hawran region. They were, and still are, an Arabic speaking religious community which had emerged in the eleventh century from an original synthesis between Islam, Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism and other

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<sup>9</sup> Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*, 245-303.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Provence, 'A Nationalist Rebellion without Nationalists? Popular Mobilizations in Mandatory Syria', in Méouchy and Sluglett, 673-694.

philosophies.<sup>11</sup> Under the French administration, they were granted some degree of local autonomy. They were also allowed to elect a governor until, in 1925, the position was taken on an interim basis by Captain Gabriel Carbillet, who then ignored calls for a new election. The French officer imposed a policy of public works based on the conscription of *corvée* workers. Spread of discontent with Carbillet induced the mandatory authorities to replace him temporarily with Antoine Raynaud. He allowed a Druze delegation, led by Sultan al-Atrash, to submit a petition to Senator Auguste Brunet, who was visiting Damascus. After remarking that the Jabal Druze was ‘an integral part of Syria through a deeply ingrained common language, common nationality and common economic relations’, the petitioners, who later constituted a Patriotic Club, asked for the definitive demise of Carbillet, the end of arbitrary judgment and imprisonment, and the preservation of personal freedom and freedom of speech. As was typical of the Syrian Revolt, rebels used a nationalist rhetoric to pursue local aims. The claims of the Druze population were completely ignored by the new High Commissioner Maurice Sarrail. Sultan al-Atrash led to the mountain in armed revolt after several Druze shaykhs were kidnapped by the French under the pretext of negotiation.<sup>12</sup>

Another recurring feature of the Great Syrian revolt is the spread of unrest from the countryside to urban centers. The Druze initiative galvanized insurgents in Hamah, the third town in the mandate, with a population of about 80,000 inhabitants, 200 kilometers North of Damascus. Their leader was Fawzi al-Qawuqji, who established a party named Hizb Allah (‘The Party of Allah’). After serving as an officer first in the Ottoman army and then in the cavalry of the Syrian Legion, he rebelled, in both cases, against foreign occupiers. He saw the French mandate as just the continuation of the Turkish domination under new rulers. Hamah being a renewed center of Muslim conservatism, he could appeal to the religious affiliation of his countrymen to denounce the tyranny of the Christian occupiers. On 4 October 1925, a mixed corps of armed Bedouins and mutineers from the Syrian Legion occupied Hamah. Led by al-Qawuqji, they had virtually the entire local population behind them. They cut telephone lines, blocked roads and opened jails. The day after, the uprising was cruelly repressed by the French, who subjected Hamah to a protracted air bombing. The ultimate toll of the

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<sup>11</sup> There is no room, here, to present and discuss the Druze history and identity in depth. For more details, see Nissim Dānā, *The Druze in the Middle East: Their Faith, Leadership, Identity and Status* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2003), 91-92 deal in particular with the status of the Druze in modern Syria.

<sup>12</sup> Provence, ‘A Nationalist Rebellion without Nationalists?’.

counterattack, according to the insurgents, amounted to 344 casualties (mostly civilians, including women and children), plus the destruction of several public buildings and bazaars.<sup>13</sup>

The French press censorship notwithstanding, the news from Hamah spread through the Damascene countryside, where the mandatory authorities had to face guerrilla warfare by two main bands, one led by Hasan al-Kharrat in Eastern Ghuta, and the other by the Akash brothers in the Barada River Valley. In this case too, the French adopted particularly bloody methods. On 12 October, for example, the village of Jaramana was looted and burned, after an air and artillery bombardment had already almost flattened it. One hundred villagers were executed, and their bodies were brought to Damascus as trophies.

Instead of discouraging the rioters, however, the retaliations strengthened their purposes. After asking Sultan al-Atrash for assistance from the Druze, al-Kharrat and the Akashes planned to seize Damascus and capture Serrail. On 18 October, Kharrat's band, joined by Druze reinforcements and twenty Bedouins entered the capital city of Syria. They encountered no serious resistance from French gendarmes, who abandoned the city, firing randomly from armored vehicles. Conversely, they were helped, fed and encouraged by the residents, who built barricades from turned-up paving stones. In short, the insurgents were able to reach the ancient 'Azm Palace, which, besides hosting the French Institute of Muslim Art and Archaeology, was also the Damascene residence of the high commissioner. Unfortunately for them, Serrail was not in. Having found the palace empty, the rebels resolved to burn it.

The ephemeral success of the insurrection was but the prelude to an atrocious repression. On the same day, French bombing began with no warning. It lasted for two full days and resulted in more than 1,500 casualties, other than in the destruction of entire quarters. A delegation of Damascus' notables, including the prominent cleric Shaykh Muhammad Taj al-Din al-Hasani, negotiated with General Maurice Gamelin, the head of French troops, to put an end to hostilities. In order to ward off new bombardments, the Damascenes were required to pay a fine consisting of 100,000 Turkish gold lira plus 3,000 rifles by 24 October, which they did. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the mandatory authorities arrested Fakhri Ibn Hasan al-Kharrat and eventually executed him. Most of the other leaders of the revolt were also sentenced to death, but they

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*. French authorities officially acknowledged the lost of 'only' 76 lives among the insurgents, while the casualties were about a hundred according to confidential intelligence reports.

managed to leave the country before being captured and would not return until the mid-1930s.<sup>14</sup>

Although the rebellion against French rule was the minimum common denominator of the Syrian revolt, its heroes generally lacked a deep and authentic sense of a Syrian national identity and unity. When they did exploit a nationalist rhetoric, it was simply to pursue local objectives and to make alliances. Curiously, none of the main Arab nationalist circles and intellectuals of Damascus was involved in the unrest, which was orchestrated by tribal and local leaders from the countryside. This notwithstanding, the complex mixture of local claims and group interests which intersected in 1925–26 resulted in a mass call for Syrian independence. The revolt started by the Druze was the largest and longest-lasting anti-colonial insurgency in the interwar Arab East. It also provided the Middle East with an enduring model of popular nationalism and resistance.

The Great Syrian revolt was a terribly intricate and heterogeneous historical process. Even today, there is no consent among scholars on such crucial questions as how a Druze insurrection could escalate so rapidly into a countrywide rebellion, or what the real motivations behind the single agitators were. Solving this puzzle is not the purpose of my work. What is of interest to my research, is that an anti-colonial uprising in a League of Nations mandate was cruelly repressed by a power that was formally charged with the task of protecting the mandated populations and leading them to self-rule, that this power was requested to justify its conduct by the League, and that all this happened under the eyes of the international public opinion. After summarizing the Syrian events, I am analyzing how the world regarded them.

#### THE LEAGUE STEPS IN: THE PERMANENT MANDATES COMMISSION IN CHARGE OF SYRIA

As set forth in the Covenant, the functioning of the mandates system was secured and administrated by a Permanent Mandates Commission, which met normally twice a year to examine the reports from the mandatory powers and hear the representatives of the

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 100-108. The repression of the rebellion in Damascus marked the failure of the Great Syrian Revolt, although the French continued to face uprising in various regions of the mandate until 1927.



mandates, and addressed advisory reports to the council. The Commission was assisted by a small section of the League Secretariat, with the main task of gathering useful information for the work of the commissioners. In Pedersen's view, the work of the PMC was not meaningless, for three reasons.

First, this organ retained a certain degree of independence from the main powers. Its members were appointed by the Council without a fixed term. The first chief of the Mandates Section of the League was the Swiss political economist William Rappard, while most of the PMC commissioners were white European ex-colonial officials, including four nationals of the mandatory powers. They benefit from the prestige and political influence of the countries they came from, but, at the same time, they did not behave simply as speakers of their respective national governments.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, most commissioners had acquired a high degree of personal prestige and autonomy while working in the foreign ministries and colonial administrations of their own countries before being hired by the League; on the other, it was hard for national countries to control the PMC members after their appointment, due to the indefinite duration of their terms.

Furthermore, the League oversight on the mandates system proliferated and legitimized the gathering of information, even from non-governmental actors. Inhabitants of the mandates or interested outsiders had the right to petition the Council about alleged violations of mandates. According to the procedure drafted in 1922, petitions had to be addressed first to the governments of the mandatory power, which commented on them and forwarded them to the League Mandates Commission for investigation.

Finally, all the proceedings of the Permanent Mandates Commission were published and made readily available. The work of the PMC, moreover, was periodically reviewed by the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly (the one responsible for "Political Questions"), which was not hegemonized by white European countries to the same extent as the Council and PMC were. In several occasions, for example, the Haitian Dantès Bellegrade emerged as a harsh critic of the conduct of the mandatory powers during the Assembly debates.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The composition of the PMC was as follows: Marquis Theodoli (Italy, Chairman), Paul Beau (France), D. F. W. Van Rees (Netherlands, Vice-Chairman), Freire d'Andrade, Anna Bugge-Wicksell (Norway), Frederick Lugard (Britain), Pierre Orts (Belgium), Leopoldo Palacios (Spain), William Rappard (Switzerland), C. Yamanaka (Japan).

<sup>16</sup> Pedersen, "The Meaning of the Mandates System", pp. 568-572.

An extraordinary session of the Permanent Mandates Commission was held in Rome, from 16 February to 6 March 1926, to discuss the Syrian situation. Paul Beau, the French commissioner who had recently died, was replaced with Ernest Roume, who had served as Governor General of French West Africa from 1902 to 1907. Robert de Caix was accredited as official representative of the French government. A member of the International Labour Organization was also admitted to attend the session.<sup>17</sup>

A sub-committee consisting of Rappard, Orts and van Rees was charged with drafting the procedure to be followed in dealing with disturbances in Syria. Rather than addressing a questionnaire to de Caix, as suggested by the Portuguese commissioner Freire d'Andrade, they preferred to hold a general discussion touching on three main points: the causes of the revolt, French repression, and future policy. Crucial to the work of the Commission was the fact that the Syrian revolt had occurred in a chronological limbo between the coming into force of the mandate and the promulgation of an organic law for Syria and Lebanon, which was still to be approved by the French in 1926. At this time, no legal restrictions could affect the conduct of the mandatory power, except a moral obligation to act according to 'the spirit of the mandate'. Therefore, de Caix was asked to clarify, first of all, what this spirit was, according to Paris. He responded by quoting the shared assumption that 'the mandate is a provisional system, designed to enable populations which, politically speaking, are still minors to educate themselves so as to arrive one day at full self-government'. Several Syrian 'native elements', however, 'never understood or desired to understand the exact meaning of the mandate'. The task of the mandatory power, thus, included the necessity to 'correct the working of the native governors' when 'they [did] not fulfill their essential duties within a reasonable period of time'.<sup>18</sup>

A major part of the discussion among the commissioners was devoted to the determination of the causes, both general and immediate, of Syria's disorders. De Caix attempted to emphasize the responsibility of the Druze, whom the Damascene regarded as 'ignorant boors' for beginning the local insurrection that would ultimately spread through most of the mandated territory. The French, de Caix argued, had negotiated with some tribal leaders a system allowing the Jabal Druze to enjoy self-administration. However, 'political manifestations of the 'Druze nation' were not in the least

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<sup>17</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 27, Minutes of the Eight Session of the Permanent Mandates Commission (Rome, 16 February-6 March 1926), List of Members of the Commission and Accredited Representatives of the Mandatory Power, 7.

<sup>18</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 27, CPM 502, 503, 504, and 507.

democratic'. Druze society was still organized according to a feudal hierarchy, at the top of which was a plurality of competing landowners. Probably, the rebellion had been fomented by some notables who had not succeeded in being elected in the new administration established by France, and 'who showed no kind of inclination to improve the lot of mass of the population'. If a 'local explosion' had escalated into a general fire, it was because French reaction had been too soft: 'suppression had, at the beginning, suffered an unlooked-for reverse, which had even surprised the population as a whole'. As a consequence, 'elements of disorder' outside the Jabal Druze, like Hamah's Bedouins and the criminal bands of the Damascene countryside, were galvanized and took the initiative.<sup>19</sup>

De Caix's explanations were considered by William Rappard to be too narrowly focused on the immediate causes of the revolt and on the Druze region. He asked the French representative whether he found that the Syrian events could have long-term origins related to the mentality, religion, and the social and cultural milieu of the natives. Islam as such, de Caix answered, contained a degree of fanatic nationalism that induced most Muslims to reject any foreign influence, even in the form of help and assistance. This fanaticism 'scarcely existed or at least was latent in the 'normal state of mind' of the Syrians, but could emerge under 'special circumstances'. The response of France's accredited representative became strained when he started talking about Damascus. The Syrian capital, he pointed out, 'was less of a commercial city than other towns of the country, and concerned itself with matters of religious or theoretical character'. Aleppo, by contrast, was 'not so readily inflamed by doctrinal teaching', and 'was much more concerned with material than with theoretical religious or political questions'. This explained, in de Caix's opinion, why the main city of the mandate provided fertile ground for the spread of the revolution, which, conversely, did not interest the Northern coast and the west of Syria. In these parts of the mandate, moreover, non-Muslim religion minorities had welcomed the mandatory rule as an occasion to end the Sunnite hegemony on which the Ottoman administration was centered.<sup>20</sup>

Other possible causes of the insurrection were addressed by the commissioners, including foreign influences, the exaggerated expectations of the Syrians under the brief reign of Faysal, and their misinterpretation of article 22 of the Covenant. The Chairman of the PMC, Marquis Theodoli from Italy, moreover, pointed out that Syria's discontent

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<sup>19</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 27, CPM 508.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

might originate from a comparison with the case of Iraq, which the British had recognized as an independent kingdom. In response, de Caix conceded that

It was certainly indisputable that there were in Syria, thanks to its geographical position and to the existence of non–Moslem [*sic*] minorities, a greater number of persons [than in Iraq] who had already sought in Western education means to free themselves. [...] It was very doubtful, however, whether the most of the Syrian population could to–day more readily become a coherent nation than the mass of the population of Iraq.

In addition, the French thought that a negotiation with the Syrians would be in contradiction with the meaning and spirit of the mandate: ‘Could the minor negotiate with his guardian regarding the conditions under which the guardian should exercise his guardianship?’ This latter argument convinced the commissioners, and both Freire d’Andrade and Orts congratulated the Paris representative for that.<sup>21</sup> In sum, de Caix sought to prove that French authorities had no responsibility for the outbreak of the insurrection, while reassessing the civilizing and ‘educational’ mission of France as a mandatory power. Disorders, conversely, had resulted from the social, political and cultural backwardness of most Syrian (Muslim) communities, as well as from their misunderstanding of the mandates system.

Once the combustible material from which the fire originated had been dealt with, to borrow a metaphor from van Rees, de Caix had to address the firemen’s efforts to extinguish it. All PMC members considered repression perfectly compatible with the mission and authority of the mandatory power. The discussion concerned rather the appropriateness and proportionality of the measures taken by the French. ‘It was clear’, according to the minute drafter, ‘that repression must always be severe in the case of a rebellion or of a war, but everyone remained free to judge to what extent there had been excesses’. The first strategy adopted by de Caix was to minimize the gravity of French authority. He first attempted to stress how gentle French methods were if compared to Ottoman repression means.

Complaints had been made of the brutality of the French Administration, The truth was that it made a large use of clemency in a country which had become accustomed to quite other methods and that it had even shown to great clemency, especially in the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*. See also CPM 509-522.

period which had preceded the revolt. An excess of clemency had obviously been interpreted as a reason for taking liberties which would have been summarily suppressed during the Turkish rule.<sup>22</sup>

Although the French reaction was clearly exaggerated and scarcely defensible, de Caix tried to exempt the top mandatory rulers from any responsibility. An example of this was the discussion of the High Commissioner Serrail's role in the bombing of Damascus. De Caix explained that Serrail had been absent from the Syrian capital on 18 October because he had to conduct an inspection in the Alawite region, and, when he returned, he only authorized the use of guns and rifles. The rest of military operations were under the control of General Soulet. The commissioners' attitude toward the justifications of the French representative was often conciliatory. Marquis Theodoli, for example, acknowledged that excesses in the repression usually resulted from the arbitrary actions of subordinate officers 'who did not always conform exactly with the orders received'. Similarly, Freire d'Andrade deemed the Africans—whose employment, incidentally said, was illicit under article 2 of the mandate—responsible for most of the atrocities committed by the mandatory army. 'Black troops', he explained 'in individual cases, returned to their primitive condition, and, in spite of their officers, were guilty of excesses'.<sup>23</sup>

In some cases, on the contrary, the representative of the French government could hardly escape the blame, however 'gentle', of the commissioners, especially when dealing with precise allegations on circumscribed events. Besides official reports, the PMC also took into account the petitions forwarded by the French government as well as the press releases collected by the League Secretariat, and often referred to episodes reported in those materials when questioning de Caix. D'Andrade, for example, mentioned a petition by Fiazy Baty Attassy with a letter from the governor of Zebdani attached, in which the French air force was reported to have bombarded a village because its inhabitants were accused of sheltering bandits. How could the villagers be considered accomplices of the rioters, the Portuguese commissioner asked, if they were the first victims of the bandits' incursions, and, in any case, were not able to resist them? As a response, de Caix quoted official French sources providing evidence that the villagers had cooperated with the rebels. He also pointed out that, after all, bombing

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<sup>22</sup> CPM 508.

<sup>23</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 27, CPM 531.

‘was not a particularly barbarous method of repression as people could almost always hear the aeroplanes coming and had time to take shelter. Further’, he added, as if this could lessen French guilt, ‘the bomb-throwing was extremely inaccurate’. Freire d’Andrade concluded by remarking that, already when dealing with previous cases of repression, the PMC had deplored the use of air bombing against non-fortified villages. Although such a measure could impress the population and discourage rebellion, he argued, it was extremely likely to cause the death of women and children.<sup>24</sup>

As the end of the session approached, de Caix was asked what steps the French government intended to take in its future attitude toward the mandate. Even though most charges against the mandatory administration were groundless, the Paris representative responded, the new High Commissioner Henry de Jouvenel was working to improve it, enhancing ‘developments continuously more liberal in character’. Syrian and Lebanese natives had had a chance to participate in the drafting of their organic law, to be released in compliance with the first article of the mandate. This involvement consisted of two main steps. First, local notables were allowed to send reports to the French dealing with the needs of their own communities. Second, the councils of the federated states could elect, among their members, a constituent assembly to advise the mandatory rulers in the definition of the organic law. ‘What more could the populations of a mandatory land demand?’, De Caix rhetorically asked. ‘They might allege that they did not possess direct universal suffrage, but was such an innovation necessary in order to ascertain the true wishes of such country?’ He doubted, however, whether ‘the malcontents of Damascus would respond to this liberal policy of the Mandatory’. The chairman concluded the meeting by thanking the French representative, in the name of the entire commission, ‘for the intelligent, clear and invariably friendly manner in which he had replied to the numerous questions which had been put to him’.<sup>25</sup>

The tortuous accounts of the Syrian situation given by de Caix would certainly look risible and grotesque to contemporary eyes, just as the standards according to which the commissioners evaluated the legitimacy and appropriateness of the conduct of the Mandatory would seem, at the very least, questionable. Even so, the fact itself that some sorts of juridical and moral constraints to the behavior of a colonial power were recognized marked a significant innovation in the interwar international system. The efforts by the Paris delegate to emphasize the benevolent and progressive character

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 27, CPM 538.

of the mandatory rule, as well as his attempts to justify the French means of repression in legal and moral terms, prove that the oversight by the League of Nations was not ineffective.

#### THE GLOBAL SYRIAN REVOLT

The questioning of the mandatory rule took the shape not only of the conciliatory tones and soft criticism of most PMC members. Although the natives of the mandate did not have any representative in the Commission, they could petition the League to report alleged violations of the mandate or to advance particular claims. Most importantly, the League regulations sanctioned a discriminations between petitioners from within the borders of the mandates and from outside. These latter could address directly the League without passing through the filter of the mandatory governments. The number of the complaints directly sent by Syria's inhabitants was relatively exiguous if compared to the enormous number of petitions sent by the Syrian diasporas around the world. The Rome session of the Permanent Mandates Commission, for example, received telegrams from New York's League of Progress of Lebanon, the Syrian League of Nogoya-entre-Rios (Argentina), the Syrian-Lebanese Society of Bahia (Brazil), the Syrian Patriotic Committee of Valparaiso and the Syro-Palestinian Committee of Conception (Chile).<sup>26</sup>

An association based in Geneva, the Syro-Palestinian Congress, appears to rank first in terms of number of complaints addressed to the LoN. The organization had been founded in 1921 by a group of Syrian and Palestinian exiles with the purpose of influencing the terms of the League mandates over their home regions. Its members included some of the most prominent Arab intellectuals of the interwar years, such as Michel Loftallah, Muhammad Rashid Rida and Emir Shakib Arslan, who served, respectively, as the Congress's president, vice-president and secretary general. The latter, who came from a Lebanese Druze family, was also known as 'the Prince of Eloquence', for his prolific work as historian, poet and journalist; he was also renowned in the Arab world for his commitment to the Arab Pan-Islamic cause. A strict observation of traditional Muslim values and rules, he thought, was an essential component of social morality. Only in the name of the common religious credo, Arabs

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<sup>26</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 27, CPM 496, 513, 533, Annex II.

from Morocco to Iraq could unite and free themselves from the yoke of the West. As far as the Syrian question was concerned, the Congress opposed the territorial partition ensuing from the San Remo Conference, for they wanted Palestine to be united with French Syria and Lebanon in what they called the 'Greater Syria'. During the Great Syrian Revolt, Arslan and his fellow advocated the independence of their home country, or at least a form of autonomy similar to that granted by the British to mandated Iraq.<sup>27</sup>

According to the usual procedure, PMC commissioners had to send their responses to the petitions to the Council, which would in turn forward them to the petitioners. Given the impressive number of complaints received, however, the commissioners stated that they were not able to respond to all of them in detail and to conduct investigations on each reported episode. Nonetheless, the Spanish Leopoldo Palacios acknowledged that 'on a very large number of points the views expressed by M. de Caix and the petitioners were at variance', and that the French representative 'should be given an occasion for removing many misunderstandings and correcting many mistakes'. Rappard was more explicit: on the one hand, petitioners 'maintained that the whole country was ravaged by fire and sword'; on the other, the mandatory power 'would show a more moderate and probably more accurate picture'. The point for the commissioners was whether to keep questioning de Caix on the basis of the events as reported by the French or to refer to the allegations contained in the petitions. Roume argued that there was no need to begin the inquiry from the petitions, for the questions raised by the petitioners would automatically 'come up in the course of the discussion'.<sup>28</sup>

This was not the only circumstance in which the French commissioner tried, and managed, to limit the possibility for the petitioners to affect the work of the PMC. On the occasion of the extraordinary session of the Commission, Shakib Arslan had traveled to Rome at the head of a delegation of the Syro-Palestinian Congress. On 1 March, the PMC received a letter in which the Emir asked to be heard in person, '[i]n

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<sup>27</sup> Shakib Arslan is a more fascinating and sophisticated figure than it may result from my short presentation. To know more about him, see Mahmoud Haddad, 'The Ideas of Amir Shakib Arslan: Before and after the Collapse of the Ottoman Empire', in Nequín Yavari, Lawrence G. Potter, and Jean-Marc Ran Oppenheim (eds.), *Views from the Edge: Essays in Honor of Richard W. Bulliet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 101-115, Raja Adal, 'Constructing Transnational Islam: The East-West Network of Shakib Arslan', in Stéphan A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, and Kosugi Yasushi (eds.), *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation, Communication* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 176-210, and, of the same author, 'Shakib Arslan's Imagining of Europe: The Coloniser, the Inquisitor, the Islamic, the Virtuous and the Friend', in Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (eds.), *Islam in Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 156-182.

<sup>28</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 27, CPM 527.



the first place, in order to facilitate the difficult task of the Commission and enable it to discern the truth among conflicting statements and arguments'. Two different positions emerged among the commissioners on the possibility of hearing petitioners. Rappard and Lugard, on the one hand, were in favor, in principle, of such possibility, but doubted whether it could be legally admissible under the League Covenant. Freire d'Andrade, on the other hand, found nothing in the statute of the LoN preventing natives from being heard by the PMC, but thought that the commissioners should instead concentrate exclusively on 'information submitted in writing by qualified persons before a date to be fixed'. As for Roume, not only did he agree with his Swiss and British colleagues that no provision of the Covenant appeared to allow the PMC to hear natives or their representatives; he also pointed out that none of the petitioners could legitimately qualify themselves as 'delegated accredited in due form by the Syrian nation'. In the end, there was unanimous consent that Arslan's request had to be rejected.<sup>29</sup>

If the commissioners wanted to work solely on 'information submitted in writing', the Emir did everything he could to please them, for the Syro–Palestinian Congress overwhelmed the League with petitions for almost the whole duration of the French mandate. Thirty–five of the forty–nine letters and telegrams mentioned in the records of the tenth session of the PMC, for instance, were signed by the Prince of Eloquence. In the previous paragraph, I mentioned an episode showing how petitions mattered for the work of the Permanent Mandates Commission, Roume notwithstanding. Many other examples could be adduced, starting from the complaints sent by Arslan and his fellows. Now, however, I want to focus on the contents and language of their petitions, while, in the next paragraph, I show how they affected France's home debate.

A basic function of the petitions was to provide the Permanent Commission with a counter–narrative of Syrian events, challenging the official truth promulgated by French authorities and bringing out unknown or intentionally neglected events. On 4 February 1926, Shakib Arslan forwarded to the League a series of documents detailing numerous atrocities committed by the French in the Damascus, Hamah, and Wadi–el–Taym regions. In the introduction, the petitioner stated that the Syrians were, traditionally, a friendly and peace–loving people. The mandatory authorities, however, had imposed 'their vicious administration, their injustices, any sorts of vexations and

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<sup>29</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 27, CPM 534.

their contempt of the law of nations', making anarchy, insecurity and emigration spread around the mandated territory. The rebellion of the Syrians was but a legitimate fight to gain back their 'place under the sun' and to 'avenge their dignity'. The countrywide diffusion of the revolt, according to the Emir, was the result of the barbarous French repression of the Druze revolt, which involved indiscriminate terror against innocent civilians, women and children.

Successively, the document moves from general statements to precise descriptions of episodes, for example, listing a series of arbitrary and cruel actions undertaken by the French in the countryside against small villages or local agitators, either as retaliation for the riots or without any understandable motivation. In September 1925, the town of Harrack was seized by 400 soldiers, who arrested all male inhabitants and appropriated all their livestock. The same happened to the villages of Meleha, Ballat, Jersein Dein, Majdal and Jaramana. Three months later, the mandatory army had not succeeded in prevailing over rebels in the countryside of Hammoura. After filling their ranks with mercenaries from North Africa and North Caucasus, the French occupied the village, devastated it and killed a dozen teenagers and young adults. In some circumstances, the cruelty of French officers seems to have been particularly inhuman and unaccountable, and clearly contrasted with de Caix's exaltation of the clemency and benevolence of the mandatory administration. In August, sixty French soldiers seized the residence of an insurgent named Mohamed Abi Adjai, in the Jabal Amel district. Since the person wanted was not there, they burned alive his children—aged respectively nine and six—under the eyes of their mother and grandmother, who were then strangled. The following month, General Gamelin's troops, on their way to the Jabal Druze, were reported to have killed a young woman with a four-year old child just because she was Druze.<sup>30</sup>

Another purpose of the petitions, as a consequence of the questioning of the lawfulness and morality of French rule, was to advance claims for Syrian self-government. On 17 November 1926, Shakib Arslan and a few other members of his organization submitted a complaint demanding that Syria be granted the status of a nominally independent and self-administrating kingdom, like Iraq.<sup>31</sup> The Syrian students of Berlin, who wrote a petition on behalf of 'the Syrian colonies living in

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<sup>30</sup> LNA, Permanent Mandates Commission, 10<sup>th</sup> Session (Geneva, 4-19 November 1926), 'Syrie et Liban—Petitions, observations et rapports y relatives du Gouvernement français', CPM 368, petition from the Executive Committee of the Syro-Palestinian Congress. (\*)

<sup>31</sup> LNM, subect category VI (Mandates), reel 4, CPM 530, petition from S. Arslan, I. Djabri and R. Souh (17 November 1926).

Germany' two days later, went even further. They accused the French authorities of having been responsible for 'brutal and inhuman' acts, which not only resulted in the 'destruction of the most famous monuments of oriental history, and the slaughter of thousands of innocent lives', but also were 'ruining morally a people'. The petitioners started addressing a set of rhetorical questions to the League:

Does the League of Nations, in the full consciousness of its responsibility and duties, intend now to turn its attention to the Syrian situation and, since it authorized the French to give assistance to the Syrians, will it now call them to account for this brutal outrage? Or will it once more be satisfied with subterfuges and cleverly drafted reports by French representatives, and stand for all that has been done in Syria by futile discussions at a Conference?

France had clearly violated the terms of the mandate it had received, and the League could no longer legitimize its rule over Syria and Lebanon, which should be recognized as completely independent sovereign states. Furthermore, the complaint concerned the coverage of the Syrian revolt by both the French and British press. Both were blamed for representing the events 'only from the imperialist standpoint of the interested Powers, instead of that of civilization and social culture'.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to requiring the mandatory power to account for its conduct, the oversight system of the League of Nations allowed both the inhabitants of the mandate, and their supporters worldwide, to have a voice in the international arena through petitions. Most petitioners were non-state and transnational collective actors. Although they were not recognized with the same juridical status as French officials, they could access an arena to criticize the behavior of the mandatory power and to question the truthfulness of its reports. The authors of the complaints provided the Permanent Mandates Commission with alternative sources of information on which the inquiry on the mandatory administration could be based (and many times it was). Furthermore, the petitions often featured the same rhetoric of the progress of civilization and peoples' right to self-determination on which the legitimacy of the mandates system was grounded, and that the petitioners use to denounce the violations of the mandate and advocate the emancipation of the natives from foreign rule. But the huge amount of

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<sup>32</sup> LNM, subject category VI (Mandates), reel 4, CPM 334, appeal from the Syrian colonies in Germany (19 November 1926).

appeals and complaints dealing with the Great Syrian Revolt affected not only the work of the PMC, but also French domestic debate, as I will show below.

Besides petitions, the world press of those months reflects the global impact of the Syrian crisis. The League of Nations files contain numerous excerpts and translations not only from French, but also British, American, German, Italian, Swiss, Swedish and various Arab newspapers. It is significant how the mandates system and the conduct of the mandatory powers were evaluated by the League 'outsiders'. Among them, Germany and the United States are particularly worthy of consideration.

Not only was Germany excluded from the Geneva institution, it was also deprived of its prewar colonies, which were assigned as League mandates to France, Japan and the British Commonwealth. German colonial methods were generally deplored by the mandatory powers, which condemned Berlin's disregard for the needs and rights of the natives as well as the unrestricted exploitation of local populations and resources. The German ill feeling for its punishment and exclusion from international politics was exacerbated by the replacement of its colonial rule with a new guise of imperial domination under the pretext of civilization. Therefore, the Germans may be expected to have been particularly critical toward the League when the behavior of the mandatory powers did not appear very different from prewar imperialism.

This expectation seems to be confirmed by a leading article that appeared in the *Kölnische Zeitung* on 9 November 1925. The journalist portrays French atrocities in Syria primarily as a failure of the mandates system.

If the prompt settlement of the Greek–Bulgarian conflict must be considered as excellent League work, the bombardment of Damascus on the following day throws a dark shadow on its activity and proves once more the inefficiency of the Geneva organization.

The author pointed out that the Syrian insurrection appeared all but predictable in the light of the official reports on the French administration in the previous three years, which depicted the relations between the Mandatory and its mandate as working perfectly. Moreover, even after ascertaining that the things were different than reported by Paris, the League could do nothing about that, given France's international political influence. This proved, once again, that the Geneva system was but a comedy: 'The task

of interfering in time is of course much more difficult, ticklish and dangerous when the accused is a powerful state and seats on the Council of the League'.<sup>33</sup>

Although the United States were not complaining about colonial losses, the criticism of European imperialism was a pillar of American nationalism. During the 'League Fight', as the debate on the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles is often called, one of the recurring arguments among Wilson's adversaries was that the League of Nations was instrumental to the establishment of a new Eurocentric and imperialist international order. The so-called 'Irreconcilables' were the most strenuous opponents of the League proposal. These senators, whose vote proved to be determining for the rejection of the peace treaty, shared with the president the conviction that Europe's ancestral proclivity to bellicosity and imperial expansion was a major evil of international politics. However, they thought the US involvement in a world security system managed in concert with its partners beyond the Atlantic would mean America's endorsement of the status quo, rather than a contribution to its redefinition. Through the League of Nations, France, Britain and Japan would exploit the military power of the United States to consolidate and expand their colonial dominions, to the detriment of the national self-determination that Wilson cared so much about.

To contain this risk, Hiram Johnson and George Moses introduced two amendments to the Covenant before it was definitively rejected by the Senate, aiming to make the influence of the US in the Assembly and Council of the LoN equal to that of the British Empire. The Californian senator wanted the United States to be given as many votes as those comprehensively cast by any other country together with its colonies or self-administrated dominions. As a consequence of this norm, Washington would have six votes (the number of the members of the British Commonwealth). The senator from New Hampshire proposed instead forbidding dominions and colonies voting on disputes in which the motherland was involved and vice versa. Both amendments were passed by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate in February 1919 but were subsequently voted down by the plenum.<sup>34</sup>

When the mandates system came into force, the premonitions of the Irreconcilables seemed to materialize. In November 1922, in conjunction with an official visit by Georges Clemenceau to the United States, William Borah from Idaho delivered a bombastic speech to the Senate (as he commonly did).

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<sup>33</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 25, folder 48540: excerpts from an article appeared in the *Kölnische Zeitung* (9 November 1925). Neither the author nor the title are provided. (\*\*)

<sup>34</sup> Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition*, 172-180.

The [French] conduct in Syria can only be justified upon principles of imperialism, and the most obnoxious and indefensible imperialism. [...] [Britain and France] now are in Mesopotamia and in Syria, holding [them] by force of arms. [...] They are not only holding them in subjection by a military force, but they are exploiting their natural resources, which [...] belong to those peoples; they are associated with their prosperity and their future welfare; yet, under the color of a mandate and under the color of protection, their natural resources are now being taken from them.<sup>35</sup>

Criticism of French policies in the Middle East can only be expected to increase among American detractors of the League of Nations as news about the brutal repression of the Great Syrian revolutions spread worldwide. At the moment, I can only refer to the press releases collected in Geneva to test this hypothesis. According to Baltimore's *Sun*, the Syrian affair proved that nothing significant had happened in colonial relations since the Great War. While the imperial ambitions of the victorious powers were still very strong, the newspaper pointed out, 'the authority of the League to check these ambitions when unjustly exercised' was still very weak'.<sup>36</sup>

'All who care to know why the breach is widening between the peoples of the East and the peoples of the West are given excellent opportunities, these days, to instruct themselves'. This was the beginning of an article written by 'Uncle Dudley' for Boston's *Globe* on 30 October 1925. No significant differences, the author argued, could be found between the way in which Spain was destroying the liberty and seizing the territory of the Riff tribes in Morocco, and French conduct in Syria. Paris was carrying out the 'sacred trust' established in Geneva 'with the aid of armoured cars, tanks artillery, bombs and troops'. Once again, the League system was blamed for being ineffective. 'Will [the LoN] let this matter slide? Or will it decide that there is meaning in that cause which speaks of "the sacred trust of civilization"?'<sup>37</sup>

But of course it was the Arabs and pro-Syrian activists around the world who voiced the most vehement criticism of French policy. Paris's diplomatic sees around the world paid great attention to the activities of Syrian diasporas in their respective countries. On 30 November 1925, for example, Albert Sarraut, the French ambassador

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<sup>35</sup> *The Papers of William Edgar Borah, 1912-1940*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., box 779, 'Speeches and Statements, 1908-1922', speech by William Borah in the Senate of the United States, 23 November 1922.

<sup>36</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 25, folder 48540: 'The League and Its Mandates', *Sun* (12 August 1925). The name of the journalist is not specified.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Uncle Dudley', 'The Story of a Sacred Trust', *Globe* (30 October 1925).

in Turkey, wrote to Paris to inform his government that Ishan Djabri, former chamberlain of King Faysal and one of the closest Arslan's fellows, was campaigning in Istanbul on behalf of an alleged Committee for Arab Independence. He was interviewed by Constantinople's newspaper *Akham*. Introducing the interviewee, the journalist explained that 'accounts indicate that events in Syria were not an insignificant insurrection but the expression of an absolute will of independence'. He then gave voice to Djabri, who affirmed:

I will first tell you that those who are fighting against the French in Syria, today, are not rebels, as certain newspapers say, but people who want to escape the yoke of foreign powers, to live free, and to sacrifice their lives to their aspirations. . . . An Arab state forming a single block, not consisting of different names like Lebanon, Transjordan and Palestine, and not a colony of foreign powers under the guise of a mandate: this is the goal we are pursuing and will certainly achieve one day. . . . It is absolutely false that we are protected by a foreign country and that we desire a mandate for that country. Everything we want is that a nation which has enjoyed a high civilization for many centuries, and which has always lived free, be freed from slavery.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, a letter from the French General Consulate in Calcutta reported the 'great emotion' generated within the Indian Muslim milieu by the 'tendentious news' being circulated by 'certain press agencies in Cairo, Jerusalem and even London'. While newspapers managed by the Europeans limited to reproduce Reuter telegrams, abstaining from any voluntary comments, the indigenous press condemned the bombing of Damascus vigorously. As an example, an article is attached which appeared in *The Mussalman* on 3 November. The author of the piece displays remarkable rhetorical skills.

During the European world when the Germans made air raids here and there in their enemy countries, . . . threw bombs and thus killed some persons including babies, . . . the Christian conscience of the 'Allied' peoples was so grievously cut-raged and their humanitarian feeling so painfully wounded that the Germans used to be looked upon by them as mere two-legged creatures unworthy to be within the pale of humanity. . . . [W]hat is staggering to humanity, is one of the very countries who vehemently protested against German atrocities and condemned their conduct in no measured

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<sup>38</sup> Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris (from now on AMAE), Office du Levant, 1920-1945, 00260/209, Sarraut to Briand, 30 November 1925.

terms, has now been perpetuating barbarities the enormity of which beggars description and her allied sister countries have been looking upon the situation with apparent unconcern.

After telling about French military operations in the Syrian capital, the journalist commented ironically:

In accordance with occidental conception of civilization Damascus must have reached the highest pitch thereof in the course of the last few days and the League of Nations may congratulate itself on the unique success of the mandated system of rule devised by it. But we, uncivilized orientals, not imbued with occidental ideas of civilization, are unable to appreciate France's achievement in Syria and to us the benevolent acts of General Serrail are nothing but inhuman butchery and vandalism of the worst type.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, it was in the countries hosting the largest Syrian communities where the situation of the French Mandate was particularly debated about, as it was the case for Brazil, which also provided home to thousands of Lebanese. In a letter dated 12 December 1925, M. A. R. Contry, ambassador of France in Rio de Janeiro, explained that the Syria-Lebanese rivalry characterizing the French mandate was also reproduced between the communities of the two countries living in Brazil. On 10 December, the *Correio de Manhã* published a petition sent by certain Syrians of Rio. They denounced that Paris had no right of conquest over their country: 'We protest in the name of the principles consecrated by the League of Nations against France's bellicose attitude in Syria'. However, the diplomat try to discredit the signatories of the document, arguing that they could not claim to be representative of the Syrian population of Brazil: El Laham, for example, was a 'Mohamedan fanatic'; Hasem Salim had been responsible of two bankrupts; Salim Auar, a Lebanese Druze, was an 'agitated character, tormented by the desire of making people talk about him'. Conversely, preeminent and highly respectable Lebanese personalities had publicly supported the French mandate as an essential guarantee of the rights of their people vis-à-vis Arab arrogance, such as a certain M. Padua, who taught Arabic at the Pio-Americo College and was the editor of the Syrian-Lebanese section of the newspaper *A Vanguardia*. The same day the pro-

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<sup>39</sup> AMAE, Levant, 00260/194, 'Les musulmans indiens et les événements de la Syrie', 3 December 1925, excerpts from 'Civilizinf in Full Swing', *The Mussalman*, 3 November 1925.



Syrian petition appeared in the *Correio de Manhã*, a march of Lebanese paraded in front of the French Embassy to express their attachment and solidarity to Paris.<sup>40</sup>

In sum, an inquiry into several national archives would be needed in order to have an exhaustive idea of the stands of the different country vis-à-vis the Syrian situation. However, the evidence resulting from press reviews and diplomatic correspondence gives us the measure of the resonance of Syrian events in international public debates.

#### AN IMPERIAL IDEA AT STAKE: FRANCE QUESTIONS ITSELF

The press may also be a good starting point to test the French domestic reaction to the Syrian affair. Most newspapers, tended to publish short pieces on the Syrian situation in general rather than addressing single episodes or specific issues. On 26 September 1925, Marcel Cachin, a prominent communist jurist and deputy, and director of *L'Humanité*, wrote an article titled 'Syria and the League of Nations'. He denounced how both 'capitalist France and Britain' controlled the Geneva organization, and were exploiting it to colonize the Middle East. In the particular case of the Syrian mandate, Cachin explained, 'the great pacifist discourses of all the chatterboxes and advocates of the great powers' looked 'not only ridiculous, but also obnoxious'. The great hypocrisy and emptiness behind the League's rhetoric of international morality and peoples' rights was proved by the representative of the Syrian subjugated population, who tried to be heard by the Permanent Mandates Commission, but were 'ignored as if they did not even exist'. Most of all, the French did not hesitate to kill thousands of innocent civilians, bomb entire cities and pillage villages as a retaliation against Syrian rebels. The nationalist upheavals in the mandate were downgraded by official French propaganda to public order disturbances orchestrated by criminal and bloodthirsty local rebels. 'What here would be adorned with the name of patriotic feeling', the journalist wrote, 'there is called rebellion and banditry'. However, he continued, oppressed peoples would inexorably fight until they got their freedom. All French proletarians, in

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<sup>40</sup> AMAE, Levant, 2299/408, Contry to Briand, 'Manifestations politiques de Syriens et Libanais resident au Brésil', 12 December 1925.

the meantime, were invited to go on strike for an entire day as a sign of solidarity with colonial peoples.<sup>41</sup>

At the opposite end of the political spectrum, Albert Londres also declared that an international conspiracy was underway in Syria. The French, this time, were portrayed as the victims, while the whole game was orchestrated by the Arab leaders, 'greedy for money and honor', who were fomented by the Bolsheviks, the Turks and the British. The motivations of the leaders of the Syrian uprising, argued Londres, had nothing to do with national self-determination and patriotic sentiments; they were just a combination of 'disappointed political ambition and revived religious hate'. Syrian urban notables, landowners and tribal leaders resented being bypassed by the French administration. Most of all, they wanted to restore the Muslim domination over Christian minorities which had been granted under the Ottomans. During the period in which General Weygand had served as high commissioner, the situation had been under control, due to his 'unquestionable ascendancy' and his 'calm but ready' power. At present, however, the author of the article doubted that a political solution was still possible.<sup>42</sup>

*L'Information* provided a more moderate and maybe government-aligned account of the situation in Syria. A piece titled 'European Cooperation and Muslim Anarchy' pointed out that shifting the blame for the disorders in the mandate to the 'neighbors'—the British, the Bolsheviks, the Turks, was a childish and useless attitude. 'European solidarity', the author argued, had to be pursued not only within the borders of the Old Continent, but also, and most importantly, 'in the new lands', where the 'experience' of the Europeans was needed to 'bring to completion the civilization' of the natives.

Rather than being accused of absurd conspiracies, the British should be regarded as a good example of efficient and progressive colonial rule. Similarly, the Arabs could not be dismissed as a barbaric and uncultivated people. Heirs to a glorious civilization, they were simply prone to anarchy. In Egypt, London's colonial rule had been the best contributor to the Arab nationalist cause, since, for forty years, the British had bestowed on the natives with economic prosperity and the example of their political institutions.

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<sup>41</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 25, folder 48540, 'Correspondence Respecting Press Information on the Situation in Syria': Marrel Cachin, 'La Syrie et la Société des Nations', *L'Humanité* (26 September 1925). (\*)

<sup>42</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 25, folder 48540: Albert Londres, 'La situation en Syrie est très grave', *Le Petit Parisien* (14 November 1925). (\*)

Home of an ancient civilization, the Arab countries, dominated by the Turks for a long time, may need the experience of Europe [...]. In Syria, as well as in Morocco, it is not sure that a withdrawal of the ‘Protector’ or of the ‘Mandatory’ would not result in a recrudescence of primordial anarchy. If some intellectuals [...] claim strenuously Syrian unity, they are intelligent enough to understand that only French tutelage can lead to such unity.<sup>43</sup>

The pro-governmental press sought to portray French mandatory rule in Syria as benevolent and useful for the Syrians *in primis*, ignoring the atrocities that French soldiers were committing. Far-left newspapers denounced Paris’s conduct, and discredited the League of Nations as an imperial trust of international capitalism, while rightwing nationalists depicted Syrian disorders as caused and fomented by Arab Syrians themselves, due to their cultural backwardness, political ambition and religious intolerance, and called for a more assertive intervention by mandatory authorities. What is clear is that the French government proved to be concerned to some extent with the allegations advanced in the petitions addressed to the LoN, and conducted a formal inquiry as a response to those allegations.

Four reports are collected in the archives of the League of Nations. The first two deal with the Syrian revolt in general, with a distinction between its political and administrative aspects and the conduct of military operation. The third report was drawn up by General Gamelin to reply to specific accusations against its troops. Finally, a document was issued by the high commissioner for Syria and Lebanon detailing the atrocities committed by the insurgents. Councilor Daclin was in charge of the first investigation. He appears to be in substantial agreement with Robert de Caix’s argument that the insurrection had originated from the discontent of some Druze notables with their political marginalization after the establishment of the mandate. These personages had simply exploited a fictitious nationalist cause to pursue their own interests. The magistrate takes into account 35 different grievances of the Druze population against Carbillet’s administration which emerged from the petitions. After meticulously addressing each single complaint, he concedes that some were right. ‘Undoubtedly’, he states, ‘in the Jabal Druze there was a direct and personal administration’, which ensued, among others, in summary imprisonments and the arbitrary imposition of taxes.

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<sup>43</sup> LNA, OC, dossier 4284, box 25, folder 48540: ‘Collaboration Europeenne et anarchie musulmane’, *L’Information* (22 November 1925). The author of the article is not mentioned. (\*)

In no way, however, top French authority could be deemed responsible for Carbillet's personal misconduct.<sup>44</sup>

Colonel Raynal, who conducted the military investigation, confesses that he was 'keenly impressed' by 'the warm and penetrating style, the unquestionable mastery displayed by the narrator' in the petition sent by the Syro-Palestinian Congress on 4 February 1926—the one mentioned above. Most of the episodes reported in the complaints, however, were false or hugely distorted. As far as the battle of Hamah is concerned, Raynal argues that most of the atrocities that the petitioners charged to the French army were actually committed by the insurgents, who, for instance, set fire to the bazaars. When, conversely, the allegations resulted true, several circumstances appeared to justify the conduct of the mandatory troops, or, at least, to lessen their responsibility. If French soldiers fired indiscriminately on private houses, they could hardly have behaved in a different way, Raynal explains, because 'each corner' in Hamah 'hid an ambush'.

All episodes mentioned by the petitioners are dealt with in the report. When no clear evidence could be found, either for or against the accusations, Raynal relied on oral testimonies, as in the case of the rebel *Abi Adjai*, whose relatives were reported to have been barbarously slaughtered by French soldiers. Raynal interviewed, among others, *M. Pinçon*, the Inspector of the Administration of *Saida*, and *Colonel Garchey*, the Chief of Staff of the Army of the Levant. Both assured the colonel that French soldiers never entered the *Jabal Amel*. *Mgr. Lubos*, who served as curate in *El Klena*, near the village where the alleged massacre took place, confirmed that the accusations by the petitioners were absolutely false and slanderous. *Mohammed Bey el Assad*, the big Chief of the *Jabal Amal*, agreed, and added:

Everyone knows very well the sense of honor and discipline of the French Army. All conscientious people are happy with the presence of French troop in our country, which they saved from anarchy.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> LNA, Permanent Mandates Commission, 10<sup>th</sup> Session (Geneva, 4-19 November 1926), 'Syrie et Liban—Petitions, observations et rapports y relatives du Gouvernement français', 'Rapport d'enquête de M. le Conseiller Daclin, magistrat, chargé de mission sur les faits d'ordre politique et administrative dénoncés à la Société des Nations'. (\*)

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Rapport d'enquête du Colonel Raynal, en retraite, chargé de mission sur les faits dénoncés à la Société des Nations (partie militaire)'. (\*)

According to General Gamelin, ‘means of any sorts’ were employed by pro-Syrian petitioners ‘in order to deceive the universal consciousness’. In his report, which mostly deals with the Druze rebellion and its repression, he adopts the same strategy followed by de Caix when facing the Permanent Mandates Commission. His main purpose is to show that the reaction of the French to the disorders, however fierce, was soft and clement if compared to the methods of the Ottomans. In 1906, for example, General Taher Pasha, since his troops were not able to defeat the Druze, resolved to burn entire villages and confiscate the herds of the inhabitants. Even so, the Druze persisted in their cowardly and unfair fighting techniques, which included mass attacks against isolated units and the mutilation of the corpse of the enemies.<sup>46</sup>

After rejecting all the allegations advanced in the petitions, the French sought to reverse the charges against Syrian rebels by showing how cruelly and arbitrarily they had behaved. This was the aim of the report prepared by the office of the high commissioner in Beirut. Besides French officers, the authors of the document also heard locals and a number of religious leaders from all the confessions present in Syria. According to their testimony, the Orthodox village of Hawran, with a population of about 6,000, was devastated by the insurgents. After massacring 200 people, they appropriated their goods and burned the village. Of Hawran’s evacuees, a thousand died due to famine or cold. On 20 November 1925, a vehicle travelling to Damascus was blocked by the rebels. Its 25 passengers were forced to get off and immediately executed. In the following January, the Druze occupied the village of Hina, in the Wadi-el-Ajama district. The inhabitants who were not able to flee were robbed or killed. Among them, eight, including three women, were ‘cut to pieces’.<sup>47</sup>

Though ‘ideological’ and factious when dealing with the traditions, political culture and motivations of the rebels, the authors of the four reports (and in particular of the first two) appear to be acting in good faith when inquiring into specific allegations. The petitions addressed to the League of Nations forced the French officials to conduct investigations on precise episodes, and, sometimes, to admit mistakes or abuses by the mandatory authorities. Paris’s officials and the petitioners, though they were never in contact, seem to have engaged in a trial, with the latter playing the role of the prosecutor and the former of the defender. Who played the jury? At first instance, the members of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., ‘Rapport du general Gamelin sur les accusations portées contre le commandement français par les auteurs des petitions adressées à la Société des Nations’. (\*)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., ‘Rapport sur ‘Les crimes commis par les insurgés’, rédigé par le bureau du Haut Commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et Liban’. (\*)

the PMC were the intended addressees of both the petitions and the reports. The whole play, however, went on stage under the eyes of the public opinion. In this section, I quoted a few newspaper excerpts to illustrate the impact of the Syrian situation on the French domestic debate. In the last paragraph, I will deal with the ‘international public opinion’, to use one of Woodrow Wilson’s favored expressions.

## CONCLUSION

Although the French firmly denied all allegations of the misconduct of the mandatory authorities, the epilogue of the Syrian crisis was the replacement of Serrail with Henry de Jouvenel. Unlike his predecessors, the new high commissioner did not come from military hierarchies. A trained journalist and left-leaning politician, he had served as Minister of Education and Beaux Arts in the Poincaré cabinet. The new head of the mandate promulgated the organic law for Syria and Lebanon and inaugurated a policy of ‘honorable cooperation’ with Syrian elites. French difficulties in handling the rebellion, Michael Provence argues, proved Paris that it needed the support of the natives to rule the mandate. The Damascene urban notables, who did not take part in the Great Syrian Revolt and negotiated the end of the hostilities in the capital, were co-opted into a National Bloc based on big urban notables and landowners. This group would make up the majority of the federal elective council until Syria was given nominal independence.<sup>48</sup>

Did this ‘conservative reconciliation’—to borrow Susan Pedersen’s words—result from political calculations or from the pressure imposed on Paris by the oversight of the League of Nations? Maybe both factors played a role, or, rather, interest calculations in the Wilsonian era also included concerns with public opinion and international reputation.<sup>49</sup>

Certainly, I can conclude that the supervision by the League of Nations forced France to defend its conduct in the international arena and to justify it according to new moral and legal standards. The pressure from Syrian diasporas and natives, who sent their complaints to the League of Nations, obliged Paris to account for a myriad of alleged atrocities and mistakes. More in general, the petitions system allowed new non—

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<sup>48</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 141-154.

<sup>49</sup> Pedersen, ‘The Meaning of the Mandates System’, 574-575.

state transnational actors to access the international debate and to articulate, there, a new anti-imperialist discourse.





## CONCLUSION

*It is a new day in imperialism when an international body . . . can sit in judgement over the actions of great imperial powers. What these powers could at one time do with impunity cannot now be done without the fierce light of word opinion being thrown upon it.*

E. Asirvatham, *Forces in Modern Politics* (1936).

On the centenary anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War, Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela co-edited a volume re-evaluating the conflict from an ‘imperial standpoint’. In the introduction, the two scholars maintain that, if we want to appreciate WWI in its global dimension of a conflict ‘for the survival and expansion of empires’, its chronological extremes should be extended from the Italian-Turkish and Balkan Wars of 1911–13 up to the Treaty of Lausanne which, in 1923 closed the ‘Eastern Front’. Hence, seven years after *The Wilsonian Moment*, Manela must have realized the chronological and analytical incompleteness of his early work, as implied in the recognition that not only ‘the spectacular appearance of President Wilson on the international stage’, but also ‘the yet uncertain but growing specter of revolution in Russia and elsewhere in Eastern and Central Europe together made for a volatile mix of ideas, examples, and potential sources of support for the enemies of empire everywhere’.

Furthermore, in substantial revision of his earlier claim that the window of opportunity for the demise of empire outwardly opened by the Wilsonian rhetoric ended, abruptly, with the delusionary outcome of the Paris Peace Conference, Manela agrees with Gerwarth that the war and its aftermath of anti-colonial insurrections ‘ignited

a crisis of imperial legitimacy' and 'launched a process of imperial decline, which would ultimately lead to the violent collapse of a global order based on territorial empires and replace it by one predicated on the nation state as the only internationally legitimate form of political organization'. Although it took another world war to complete the process of imperial dissolution, the two editors argue, the Great War 'was a crucial watershed in that process'.<sup>1</sup>

In 2013, David Reynolds embarked in another scholarly effort to trace the 'long shadow' of the First World War in the twentieth century, coming to an opposite conclusion to Manela and Gerwarth's. The Great War, he states, inaugurated an 'imperial moment' in which London's and Paris's empires 'lurched to their zeniths'. The British, in particular—Reynolds's books focuses mainly on the United Kingdom, Ireland and the United States—'regarded the Arabs as an inert, backward mass, unready for nationhood, who should be managed by the old imperial practice of client regimes. And this could be accommodated to the new verities of Wilsonian self-determination and the mandates system'.<sup>2</sup>

As this thesis should have proven, both points of view are exaggerated. More precisely, David Reynolds's notion of the 'imperial moment' can be accepted, but subject to further qualifications. After 1919, Britain and France touched the peak of their imperial hegemony; nevertheless, they felt considerably vulnerable and nervous about their imperial status. As numerous excerpts of diplomatic correspondence and press cuttings of the time reveal, both 'Western' governments and public opinions shared the perception that colonial empires at large were under the combined threat of the spread of anti-colonial ideologies, diplomatic intrigues and native unrest. In the Spanish and Italian cases, such preoccupations overlapped with broader crisis of legitimacy and consensus of the national governments.

As a consequence, despite numerous reasons for inter-imperial tensions—like, for example, Italy's quest for territorial compensations in exchange for the recognition of the British protectorate over Egypt, France's claims on the Iraqi oil or London's anxiety about its commercial interests in Morocco—this shared sense of insecurity fostered a general predisposition to inter-imperial solidarity. The latter could either take the passive shape of non-interference in each other's colonial troubles, or result in active cooperation to crush rebellions, like in the Rif War. With its consistent effort to

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, 'Introduction', in Gerwarth and Manela, 1–16.

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds, 85–103.

legitimize and institutionalize the control of former Ottoman and German possessions by wartime Allies, the League of Nations was an emanation and a tool of this inter-imperial solidarity—I will return on this point in a few pages.

Therefore, Manela and Gerwarth's portrayal of the 'long Great War' as the beginning of imperial decline appears too radical as well, and their chronological focus, from my point of view, inadequate. As I have argued in the previous chapters, especially in Egypt, and Morocco, post WWI upheavals resulted less from Wilsonian or Leninist 'moments' than from previous intra-imperial dynamics. Nevertheless, the events of 1914–18 radicalized tensions between colonies and metropolis or undermined pre-existing patterns of cooperation. What is more, Middle Eastern nationalist attempts to revise borders and political regimes continued for a couple of years after the Lausanne Treaty. Yet, after the Rif War and the Great Syrian Revolt, however threatened by indigenous unrest and discredited among the more progressive sectors of international public opinion, overall, European colonial rule over the Middle East was more solid and internationally legitimated than it did in 1919.

The general picture of Middle Eastern events resulting from my case-studies is rather that of a 'war of imperial adjustment' lasting from the opening of the Paris Conference up to the 'pacification' of the Moroccan and Syrian theaters. It was an asymmetrical war, but in the opposite sense than usually meant. If we concentrate on the ends rather than on the subjects and means of the warfare involving imperial forces and indigenous insurgents, the latter appear more 'conventional' fighters compared to the former. Anxious about the preservation of their imperial status and pressed by war-exhausted and public-spending-intolerant national opinions, the European powers employed unrestrained military force to annihilate rebellions as quickly and definitively as possible, which included aerial bombing of unfortified civilian sites and, at least in the Moroccan case, chemical warfare—as we have seen, the controversy over the suspected British use of chemical weapons in Iraq is still open among historians. Metropolitan authorities accepted negotiations with indigenous elites only when facing the reoccurrence of insurgency—like in Egypt, out of a recalculation of costs and benefits—like in Iraq, or under international pressure—like in Syria.

Conversely, although insurgent violence reached impressive peaks of brutality, especially in Morocco, Middle Eastern nationalist 'agitators' conceived of armed insurrection in a fully Clausewitzian way, that is, as part of a broader political strategy. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the infatuation with internationalist ideologies

or the faith in ‘third’ international institutions never mislead anti-colonial elites up to the point of believing that they could get rid of European control on a complete and permanent basis. Instead, Sa‘ad Zaghloul and his neighbor ‘homologous’ exploited insurgency in combination with international claim-making and appeals to metropolitan public opinions as part a comprehensive effort to force imperial governments to negotiations and reshape colonial rule on more collaborative and progressive bases.<sup>3</sup> In sum, I would complement Natasha Wheatley’s argument by concluding that, alongside and in strict interaction with petitioning, ‘revolting’ became a way of life of post-1919 colonial subjects.<sup>4</sup> The ‘politics of revolt’ in this thesis’s title designates the political cycle of anti-colonial violence, imperial repression, international resonance and negotiations that characterized the ‘war of adjustment’ of the Euro-Mediterranean imperial system between 1919 and 1927.

At this point, some clarifications are needed on the interplay between nationalism and internationalism in the reconfiguration of interwar colonial empires, and on the place of Middle Eastern elites in that dynamic. In 1932, the famous Oxford Professor Hamilton Gibb edited a collective volume featuring contributions from some outstanding European Islamists of the time. Together, they reflected on the direction that the ‘Moslem world’ in its entirety had taken after the Great War. As Gibb remarked in the introduction, ‘down to 1914 the progress of nationalism as an active force in the Moslem world was on the whole slow, tentative and restricted to a few countries’. In a couple of years, disappointment with the Allied betrayal of the promise of ‘self-determination’, combined with ‘the feeling of revulsion at the most sordid aspects of European “civilization” displayed in the war . . . and the peace negotiations’ enhanced the ‘heightening of nationalist sentiment’. However, Gibb noticed,

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<sup>3</sup> The verb ‘to exploit’ appears the most appropriate in this context provided that the reader spoils it of any negative moral connotation—I will never forget the outraged reaction by an Egyptian student when I said in a classroom that the *Wafī* ‘exploited’ the Revolution of 1919. Here, I am referring to the fact that, in the various Middle Eastern countries, nationalist leaders not always launched insurgency or did not control it completely; even so, they found in it a source of popular legitimation and a negotiating weapon.

<sup>4</sup> Natasha Wheatley, ‘The Mandate System as a Style of Reasoning: International Jurisdiction and the Parceling of Imperial Sovereignty in Petitions from Palestine’, in Schlayegh and Arsan, 106–122.

The most surprising . . . feature of this reaction is that it did not lead back directly to an increased appreciation of Moslem solidarity but on the contrary issued in the form of regional movements each independent on the others.<sup>5</sup>

In line with this assessment, Cemil Aidyn has recently underlined the relative decline of Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian political projects under the shadow of nationalism in the 1920s.<sup>6</sup> At first glance, this stands in sharp contrast with the international-mindedness displayed by Egyptian, Moroccan and Syrian nationalists and with the regional networks of intellectual and material solidarity that already connected Middle East elites across the Ottoman space well before World War I, as illustrated by Andrew Arsan. This contradiction can only be solved, I argue, if we interpret interwar ‘nationalism’ and ‘internationalism’ along the lines of Glenda Sluga and Mark Mazower. As both authors convene, the international ethos of the 1920s rested on solid nationalist bases, provided that we understand ‘nationalism’ in its Mazzinian (and Wilsonian) rather than Herderian declination. The League of Nations consecrated the supremacy of European sovereign nation-states, emanated from them and proposed them as a model for the ‘advancement’ of former German and Ottoman colonies. In Mazower’s view, the Geneva system ‘took the old standard of civilization idea and recalibrated this for a world committed, eventually, to the Mazzinian paradigm of a society of nations’.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Glenda Sluga has narrated the history of the twentieth century as a consistent effort by international institutions—that is, by the LoN and the UN alike—to spread a virtuous and positive civic nationalism as a barrier against an aggressive and irrational one: over the entire century, the Australian historian argues, ‘conceptions of sovereignty, community and identity were the objects of trade and reinvention among diverse intellectual and social communities, and internationalism was imagined as the means of national independence and national rights, as well as the antidote to nationalism’.<sup>8</sup>

The Middle Eastern nationalist organizations and leaders featuring in this thesis actively participated in the internationalist ethos of ‘positive’ nationalism of their time, which calls into question their ambiguous stand vis-à-vis European hegemony. Despite the *Wafd*’s demand of ‘complete independence’ for Egypt ‘with her Sudan’ and the Damascene elites’ dream of a ‘Greater Syria’, both identified their constituencies with

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<sup>5</sup> Hamilton H. R. Gibb, ‘Introduction’, in Id (ed.), *Whither Islam? A Survey of Modern Movements in the Moslem World* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), 9–74.

<sup>6</sup> Aidyn, 127–170.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin, 2012), 165–173.

<sup>8</sup> Sluga, abstract from cover page.

the European-imposed boundaries of Egypt and mandate Syria. Iraqi nationalism originated as a consequence of and within artificial territorial partitions. Furthermore, and more significantly, by appropriating the language of capacity/civilization in their international claim-making, Middle Eastern nationalists took the European standard—and its implied world hierarchy—for granted. As Pankaj Mishra has convincingly shown, early nationalist movements and state-building programs across ‘Asia’ represented ‘alternative answers to the same question: how to reconcile themselves . . . to the dwindling of their civilization through internal decay and Westernization while regaining parity and dignity in the eyes of the white rulers of the world’.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, as I have repeatedly argued, the Middle Eastern advocates of national self-determination were, at the same time, alternative and organic to the Eurocentric imperial order that they challenged, and their outspoken repulsion to it implied a certain degree of fascination and ‘surrender’, which confirms my ‘conservative’ picture of the aftermath of WWI as a reaffirmation and re-legitimation, rather than ‘crisis’ of European imperialism.

Of course, within this broad picture, a comparative assessment reveals significant differences among my case-studies. First of all, a sort of ranking of the various revolts can be attempted on the basis of the reach of their international resonance, featuring the Great Syrian Revolt alone at the top, followed, more or less *ex aequo*, by the Egyptian Revolution and the Rif War, and, at the bottom, the Iraqi rising. The two years of quasi-death of the mandates system allowed Britain to repress the Iraqi insurrection safe from the League oversight and with little—however harsh—criticism by the French press. As we have seen, it was mainly in response to the widespread discontent of domestic politicians and press commentators with a full-scale military commitment in Mesopotamia that London eventually resolved to delegate as much as possible of the Iraqi ‘burden’ to indigenous administrators and welcomed the LoN ‘supervision’.

On the contrary, both Abd el Krim and the Syrian-Palestinian Congress managed to catch the attention of the English-speaking public (and to ignite anti-French sentiments in parts of it), as the *Wafd* did with the French Left and the American critics of Wilson. What is more, all the three actors carried out a massive and carefully planned petitioning campaign to activate the intervention of international institutions. In particular, as we have seen, the Egyptian nationalists already recognized an embryo of

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<sup>9</sup> Mishra, 1–11. As clarified in these same pages, the author refers to ‘Asia’ in its original Greek meaning, that is, as reaching Westwards up to the Nile and the Aegean Sea.

international governance in the Paris Peace Conference and saw continuity between it and the League of Nations. Yet, only the Syrians found a partially receptive and limitedly friendly environment in the Permanent Mandates Commission, while the League of Nations deliberately ignored the Egyptian and Moroccan crises. Conversely, the International Committee of the Red Cross took the humanitarian cause of the conditions of Moroccan combatants and prisoners very seriously, but its effort to send a mission to the Rif War failed due to the joint resistance by the Spanish branch of the RC and Madrid's government.

This 'ranking' remains more or less the same if, besides the quantity, we also consider the quality of the international resonance of the five risings—that is, the terms in which they were represented and understood outside local borders. In this case, again the Iraqi revolt features in the last place, for the intra-imperial coverage of the insurrection, as traceable through both the British press and parliamentary debates, almost exclusively concentrated on the economic and military costs/benefits of holding the Mesopotamian mandate, and, in particular, on the most effective way for HMG to exploit Mosul's oil without burdening His Majesty's taxpayers. With few exceptions, no real debate occurred around the reasons of the Iraqis' discontent or their national rights, or on the legitimacy and appropriateness of the British repressive methods.

Similarly, most 'Western' public talks around the Rif War can be classified in one or both of the following categories: on the one hand, the fascination and curiosity for the exotic and 'romantic' figures of Abd el Krim and his fellow tribesmen; on the other, public concerns with the atrocities of the Rif War—on both the Spanish and the indigenous sides, and the conditions of the wounded and prisoners of war (as evident, in particular, in the Red Cross and Red Crescent mobilizations). Compared to those two subjects, the Rif claims to independence and international recognition as a 'nation' received relatively limited attention. By contrast, the Egyptian and Syrian petitions, combined with the regular exchanges between the nationalist leaders of the two countries and some leading 'Western' newspapers, made the French, British and American publics familiarize with the origins and demands of the rioters, as well as with the excesses of repression in both cases. Finally, in the Syrian case, the scrutiny procedures of the mandates system brought Damascus's claims against the French mandate to the formal attention of the League of Nations officials. In general, the propulsive potential of the indigenous voices beyond their home borders depended on both the transnational networks of the nationalist leaders and the availability of

permeable intra-imperial, inter-imperial or international public spaces, like the internal debates of the French left or the humanitarian campaigns of the international Red Cross.

Did these varying degrees of international resonance affect decision-making by the imperial powers? All European governments monitored the public talks around their colonial affairs both within and outside national borders and produced their 'reactive' representations of opinion trends—to put it in 'Huckerian' terms—through press dossiers and commentaries. The Spanish and the French were especially concerned with the international campaigns of their Moroccan and Syrian subjects. That appears evident, for example, in Madrid's diplomatic pressure on London to obstruct the *Times* coverage of Morocco and in its effort to keep the ICRC out of the Rif War; similarly, the French intelligence records reveal a quasi-paranoiac attempt to control any single move of Shakib Arslan in Geneva and his contacts with European and American journalists.

Yet, at first glance, no evident correlation stands out between the international reverberations of the five revolts and their outcome. In extreme sum, the British and French administrations in Egypt, Iraq and Syria turned to a relaxation of the imperial authority and a higher degree of political empowerment and autonomy of local elites, while the Franco-Spanish repression in Morocco gave way to a stricter military and political control by the metropolitan powers. Thus, seemingly, the enormous difference in terms of publicity between the Egyptian Revolution and the Iraqi revolt did not make any significant difference for the British government, while, on the contrary, Morocco and Syria evolved in two opposite directions despite a comparable amount and intensity of condemnation by the international public opinion.

Here, my proposed disarticulation of 'international debates' into multiple public spheres may help making sense of the causal nexus between public opinion and decision-making. In a world of sovereign states and reciprocally 'loyal' imperial powers—international institutions notwithstanding, the intra-imperial public sphere remained the primary concern of the European governing elites, whose fortunes depended on the approval by their domestic public opinion. Clearly, the Egyptian and Mesopotamian military campaigns of 1919–20 were equally unpopular within the British public for their supposedly unnecessary costs, regardless of the motivations of the nationalists in the two countries. Overall, the Spanish public approached the Rif War as a test bench for the prestige of the country and the honor of the national army, which necessarily affected the scale and the means of the military operations ordered by Primo



de Rivera. Accordingly, Madrid's partially successful initiative to silence the international echo of the Rif atrocities aimed at keeping it far from the ears of the Spaniards. In a word, reputation beyond national borders mattered to the European governments to the extent to which it threatened to undermine their reputation in front of national electorates.<sup>10</sup>

In the Syrian case, as we have seen, the enquiry by the Permanent Mandates Commission resulted in a sort of tacit exchange between the League and Paris's officials. The 'pact' contemplated the disappearance of any direct and harsh criticism of French policy in the PMC's public report in exchange for Paris's formal compliance with the rules of the mandatory game. That publicity threat turned the international resonance of the Great Syrian Revolt into a potential political cost for the French government and contributed to the refashioning of the Syrian administration as a civilian and increasingly indigenous one. In sum, the mandates regime fully integrated the international public sphere into the 'politics of revolt' and turned it from the background into an ingredient of the colonial-metropolitan confrontation.

This latter point leads to the question of the specificity of the mandates system compared to previously existing forms of colonial rule, and the extent to which the two realms communicated with each other. The answer varies according to the standpoint. Egyptian and Moroccan nationalists considered the ethics of native 'well-being' and empowerment consecrated by the League Covenant as binding European rule over colonial subjects beyond the perimeter of the mandates system. In their petitions, they employed the standard of capacity/civilization codified by article 22 to prove their countries' qualification to sovereign statehood. Finally, they petitioned the League of Nations as a guarantor of international morality and a 'third' arbiter of international disputes independently on of the limits of jurisdiction fixed in the statutes of the Geneva organization. In fact, the League bureaucracy used precisely its lack of jurisdiction as a legal pretext to ignore Egyptian and Moroccan claims. That attitude perpetuated the underlying principle of the Paris Peace Conference that pre-existing colonial empires besides Germany and Turkey should not be altered by postwar settlements. Moreover, the cautious and, in the end, 'friendly' questioning of French administration of mandate Syria conveys a conservative and substantially anti-Arab image of the Permanent

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, Primo de Rivera's regime was not at all democratically accountable. Nonetheless, it stemmed out of a legitimation and consensus crisis of Restoration Spain, and claimed to represent the popular reaction against the corruption and ineffectiveness of the old political establishment. Therefore, it was extremely opinion-sensitive. Almost the same applies to Benito Mussolini in the early years of his dictatorship.

Mandates Commission. As Susan Pedersen has remarked, before the German entry, the mandates system ‘served less as a means of reconciling mandate populations to their rulers than of reconciling the quarrelsome imperial powers among themselves’.<sup>11</sup> In sum, the mandates system nurtured the ‘politics of revolt’ across Mediterranean empires, notwithstanding the League of Nations.

Finally, let us take the point of view of the imperial powers. In general, all of them interpreted the mandates system in terms of continuity with pre-existing colonial empires. Hence, Spain regarded the Franco-British partition of the former Ottoman Middle East as an implicit legitimation of its imperial ambitions and, at the same time, as a measure of its ‘inferiority’ as an imperial power. Similarly, the French government suffered the PMC enquiry on Syria as an abusive intrusion into its colonial affairs. It was not easy at all for Paris to reconcile its imperial strategy of *mise en valeur* with the mandates model of supervised indigenous administration. All these three powers resisted at their best indigenous and international pressure for a relaxation of imperial control. This was not the case for Britain. ‘Giving up’ Egypt and Iraq was an *ob-torto-collo* decision, as demonstrated by the massive and unrestrained military effort to crush unrest in both countries. Yet, alongside the early-postwar obsession with feared imperial losses, London experienced a massive domestic pressure to lighten the imperial burden. As a way out of these conflicting impulses, the British ‘discovered’ a substantial continuity and overlapping between their long-standing imperial tradition of ‘indirect rule’, and the underlying principles of the mandates system. Hence, HMG’s policy in Egypt and Iraq evolved along similar patterns, whether within or outside the mandates regime.

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<sup>11</sup> Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 394–407.

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