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- Peer Reviewed contents

Imperialism and national pride in the Italo-Turkish war (1911-12)

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Abstract

The author intended to highlight the fluctuating attitude of Giolitti's Italy during the war in Libya (1911-12), whose choice was supported by its imperialist ambitions linked to the building of a colonial policy considered as a means to build consensus on foreign policy, on the other, statements of influential intellectuals, public pressure and continuous diatribes between members of the parliament were to be taken into account. The historical reconstruction is enhanced by first hand sources: from the documents found in the Historical and Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to an interesting letter from Senator Pasquale Villari – preserved in the Vatican Library – which was a response to critics addressed to him by the Socialist deputy Filippo Turati, who firmly opposed the war in Libya. Expectations placed on the conquest of that territory – which would have led to mass emigration and would have revived Italy's economy by seeking closer commercial ties with the East – this would have scaled down as soon as the foreseeable integration difficulties appeared, in particular those connected to an administrative Western-style legal system in the new African colony yet linked to local customs and traditions.

Keywords: War of Libya; Italian Nationalism; Italian national pride

After the painful Abyssinian lesson, early twentieth century Italy under Giolitti was little inclined to engage in further adventures overseas. Historical memory and the need to find outlets for its industrial goods and emigrants, however, required Italy to re-launch its imperialist objectives and a corresponding international economic policy especially in the Mediterranean and the Orient. Putting this political program into practice meant engaging in good relations with Germany on one hand and Russia and France on the other. In the Balkans and the Orient it meant coming up principally against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which presented a potential obstacle. The Yugoslav political situation, which Italy necessarily had to adjust to, implied a rapprochement between Serbia and Russia, blocking Austria's route to Salonica, tending to exclude Albania and block its access to the Adriatic. It was thus decidedly anti-Austrian and consequently likely to put a chill on the Triple Alliance. Italy's history and affinities could thus find support in Europe and outside the Triple Alliance only from the two "friendly" though non-allied nations of Russia and France. As far as England was concerned, Italy did not break off those friendly relations which acted as a counterweight to rapprochement with France. The Italian government knew that England could not do without her and her ports for its Mediterranean fleet but as Italy had now given up her imperialist ambitions in the Red Sea and accepted the *fait accompli* in Tunisia she had no further need of England for the success of her projects in Tripolitania and the Orient but did need France. Italian diplomacy thus prepared her favourable international contingencies with a covert chess board of alliances, understandings and friendships.

Part of the Italian press was favourable to the control of the Adriatic which it saw as something resembling an inland lake (*mare nostrum*) while philanthropic bodies whose purpose was the promotion of Italian language and culture, such as the *Dante Alighieri Society*, demanded that territories like Malta in which the Italian language was still spoken alongside local languages should be

reunited with the homeland. Whatever the choices and calculations made of political opportunities, some of the alliances of convenience which Italy sought were downright contradictory. In addition to the difficulties already mentioned in maintaining the Triple Alliance whilst attempting to combat Austrian influence in the Balkans, Italian diplomacy was also intent on moving closer to Russia and, at the same time, aimed to undermine the Balkan balance of power and destroy the status quo guaranteed by the Austro-Russian agreement. It relied on England to keep the peace in the Mediterranean and at the same time planned to invade Tripolitania with the connivance of France. It backed radical-socialist France for secularisation and its struggle against the Holy See and, at the same time, tried to avoid provoking religious conflict in Italy where it was also looking for a conciliatory approach aimed at containing the demands of the workers' movement. These were the main elements which Italy's malleable policy was attempting to bring together and which German Chancellor von Bülow defined with ironic disdain as a "little waltz". When in September 1911, then, hostilities between the Italian kingdom and the Ottoman Empire began, even the usually well-informed foreign observers expressed surprise bordering on disapproval. The Italian government had exceeded European diplomatic expectations. The causes of the war were not related to prior difficulties between Italy and Turkey and in fact had very little to do with the two warring sides themselves. The Italian government had been subjected to external pressure. Having found out that Turkey was preparing to rent out a port on the Cyrenaica to a German company, England planned to occupy the threatened port if Italy did not hastily apply the rights granted it by the agreement signed in 1902 with France and ratified by the English government. This explains Germany's patent disillusionment at the outbreak of hostilities, considering that in Tripolitania and Cirenaica the country would have liked to have a distinctive influence. The same position was understood by Viennese newspaper *Die Zeit* which, speaking of Italian intentions in northern Africa, looked forward to the military invasion being Tripoli integrated part of the Ottoman territory. Germany should have misled Italy in proceeding with projects in

that region. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy's point of view could have not been different from the German one, "since from an Italian action in Tripolitania severe international complications could have emerged" (*Die Zeit*, 22 September 1911)¹.

Whilst expected, significant increase in French power in the Mediterranean unsettled Giolitti and the bourgeoisie. The occupation of Tripoli had thus become crucial to the strategic defence of Italy. An understanding of what was happening requires taking into account the delicate Italian political balance of power and the psychological pressures exerted on it by public opinion although this is hard to demonstrate. In July 1911 Italy's domestic status quo was shaken up. Inspired by the country's fiftieth anniversary celebrations people were showing signs of discontent with the petty machinations of parliamentary politics and sought in vain for the heirs to the great Risorgimento heroes whose valiant exploits were currently being exalted. Parliament was experiencing an equally chaotic phase with the Socialists, lured in and constrained by the government but holding the balance of power nonetheless, and a disoriented and insecure Liberal-Monarchist majority attempting to keep hold of Giolitti whilst jettisoning his program.

Italian expansion in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica was extremely popular with the Nationalists who considered this future colony a sort of "promised land"². To say nothing of the writers who were then praising Imperialism and the concept of the white man's civilization mission (D'Annunzio, Marinetti, Corradini). For them the North Africa adventure was to demonstrate that the Italians deserved their national status. Even poet Giovanni Pascoli, on November 1911, greeted this imperialist adventure enthusiastically in

¹ The same position, contrary to any Italian action in Libya, appeared in another Viennese newspaper (*Neue Freie Presse*, 23 September 1911). Giuseppe Avarna Duke of Gualtieri, meticulous Italian ambassador in Vienna, will send copies of such papers to the Foreign Ministry Antonino di San Giuliano.

² If certain scholars are to be believed, even the Second Congress of Italians Abroad held in Rome in June 1911 emerged as a clear nationalist success with the latter represented by Guglielmo Marconi, Giulio De Frenzi (Luigi Federzoni), Giovanni Preziosi, Amy Allemand Bernardy and other esteemed exponents of the conservative faction (Manzotti, 1969, p. 210; Monina, 2002, pp. 216-217).

his prose essay *La grande proletaria si è mossa*, as *L'Idea Nazionale* (11 April 1912) reminisces in its eulogy in his honour authoritative body of the nationalists in whose ranks had landed in mature age after having belonged to socialism. The same roman paper observes that , since the beginning of the expedition in Tripolitania and Cirenaica, various Italians living abroad, “from the greatest to the most dark ones, wanted to offer their new homeland something of their belonging. All, from Guglielmo Marconi, who ran to implant along our fourth bank powerful radio telegraph stations, to immigrant farmers in America, heard the beauty of this historic hour and, if they couldn't risk their life as the youngest and strongest, they offered intellect and money” (*L'Idea nazionale*, 1 February 1912).

In general, the conquest of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica was regarded favourably by right wing conservatives, the banking and industrial worlds, reformist Socialists (Leonida Bissolati) and the Maximalist faction. There were also a significant number of Catholics who saw occupation of these regions as a way of Christianising an area still embroiled in the slave trade. The Banco di Roma, which belonged to the Vatican, also had an important branch in Tripoli. It has, however, recently been clarified, that Pope Pius X generally and personally called for greater moderation from certain high-ranking prelates and resident bishops who had expressed support for the colonial wars in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica³. The Republican Party was divided on the subject of the attack between pro and anti-Tripoli factions and it was left to the revolutionary left (with Benito Mussolini and others) to express the fiercest opposition to the government in the name of Socialist pacifism and aversion to Imperialist wars. This latter attitude was echoed by intellectual Gaetano Salvemini for whom this African area was no more than a

³The Libya adventure was sometimes presented by part of the clergy and a certain Catholic culture as a sacred war (*Lettera di Attilio Simonetti, segretario della Società Antischiavista d'Italia*, Montefano di Macerata, 26 settembre 1911, in Archivio storico diplomatico del Ministero degli Esteri [from now on = ASD], Ministero Africa italiana, vol. II, 1859-1945, pos. 104/1). This stance was condemned in no uncertain terms by the Holy See, and by the Pope in particular, with the latter heading off any potential doubts on the matter by publishing a letter of reprimand of these misleading interpretations in the *Osservatore Romano* (Sale, 2011, pp. 61-70).

“box of sand”. In these months a number of newspapers which rejected the government’s propaganda (such as *L’Avantior L’Asino*) published satirical vignettes highlighting the futility of the war. So thought also newspaper such as *La Voce* and *L’Unità*, even if this last one tried to gain advantage from military expenses – often useless – that enabled the army to show their real action abilities always in doubt. While maintaining a political and moral judgment strongly opposed to the activity, the paper directed by Salvemini since the first issue, was confident in the ability of soldiers - as they were the ones responsible to battle and to give good evidence in battle - in the hope that the country could however, leave with honour as soon as possible: “Since this war Italy, already participating, must obtain every possible advantage; and one of these benefits shall be acquired, and has so far been obtained, fortunately for us, from physical skill tests, discrete military organization, good national framework given from our people”(L’Unità, 16 December 1911)⁴. Words that create reaction of the sheet of the left reformists *Avanti* that saw in that statement “a Nietzschean and nationalistic defence of the war’s usefulness to war for the sole prestige bought in the value of deployment and dexterity”(L’Unità, 30 December 1911).

But apart from these discordant voices, almost the entirety of the political class and the great national newspapers supported the occupation of the new colony which was given its ancient Roman name, Libya, from 1934 onwards. At the end of lengthy diplomatic efforts by Foreign Affairs Minister Antonino di San Giuliano, in the summer of 1911 Giolitti accepted the Italo-Turkish war as “historically inevitable” if Italy were not to miss her chance of obtaining one of the last available colonies⁵. At this stage of “soul spring” and national interests, deputies and senators had momentarily set aside the issues of wide or narrow suffrage, thinking only about the hoped enterprise on

⁴ On the opposition newspaper *L’Unità* and *The Voice* the war of Libya see also Marmioli, 2013, pp. 1004-1012.

⁵ In actual fact Giolitti justified his imperialist ambitions on humanitarian rather than nationalist grounds (Giolitti, 1922, pp. 333-334). This was also the standpoint of Pasquale Turiello, the greatest theorist of Italian imperialism, who considered conquering colonies to be of vital importance to Italy and complained that no action had as yet been taken to arrange this (Molinelli, 1988, p. 302).

Mediterranean beaches of Africa. As for Vittorio Emanuele III, without wanting to resize all government positions held by the minister of the war Paul Spingardi, he remained the most authoritative representative of the army: he was the sovereign, therefore, who gave the final approval, following then constantly evolving Libyan entire enterprise. For this reason, the newspaper *L'Idea Nazionale*, usually restrictive and careful for superlatives and descriptive exuberance, could only observe: "Greetings from the Kings to a part of the expeditionary force troops has given the most solemn consecration to the great enterprise about a settled Italy, now truly awake" (*L'Idea nazionale*, 12 October 1911).

The singing of patriotic songs - reminiscing chronicles of the time - a whole population accompanied soldiers to railway stations, docks: "In Naples, Bari, Messina; like Pisa, Milan, Turin, as in Rome, real capital today, these days will remain memorable. It is useless to recall the processions of thousands of people through the jubilant city, and the popular enthusiasm overflowing, and railway stations filled up to capacity, also on top of train roofs, of delirious people, eager to accompany firstly with their eyes and then with their heart, those who left. Those who were there - and who was not? - will keep indelible memories to soothe the pain of future meanness and cowardice" (*L'Idea nazionale*, 12 October 1911). It was intense, exaggerated, naive and folksy patriotism, like the "Tripoli beautiful saying of love" (Molinelli, 1966, pp. 317-318).

After a number of skirmishes in Tripoli, on the 29 September Italy declared war on Turkey⁶ as the nation ruling Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. An Expeditionary Force led by General Carlo Caneva (1845-1922) landed in the second half of October and rapidly occupied the most important coastal towns from Tripoli to Benghazi as far as Tobruk on the Egyptian border without, however, pushing inland. The army's lack of preparation - it had not received the necessary prior warning from the diplomats - and excessive optimism soon became clear. Despite the fact that Tripolitania and Cyrenaica had been a fixed objective of Italian foreign policy for decades,

⁶ Exactly at 2,30 p.m. (showed on *Comunicato Agenzia Stefani*, Rome 29 September 1911, in ASD, Affari Politici 1891-1916, serie P, b. 13).

neither the region's tribal society nor its geography had been sufficiently researched. After these initial successes, in fact, the war degenerated as a result of difficult terrain and resistance from its peoples who rebelled against occupation and launched a full-blown guerrilla war against Italy inflicting severe losses: 3,431 dead of whom 1,483 in fighting and 1,948 as a result of contagious diseases caught in the region. Turkish-Arab losses, however, were much heavier, at around 14,800 dead.

To block Turkish supplies to the region, cut the war short and drive the Ottoman Empire in the direction of peace, the Italian military command proposed to shift its sphere of action. The Italian Navy was sent to the Eastern Mediterranean where it occupied a number of Aegean islands called the Dodecanese - the name given to the twelve islands which the Italian government promised to return to Turkey when the latter withdrew its forces from the whole of Libya - and Commander Enrico Millo even undertook a raid in the Dardanelles straits with five torpedo boats on 18 and 19 July 1912 to demonstrate to Turkey that not even Constantinople was safe. Worried by the proximity of the Italian forces the Turkish government agreed to the peace negotiations which lead to a pact in Ouchy ratified by the Treaty of Lausanne (18 October 1912) giving up control over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica⁷, territories to which Italy had in any case already extended its sovereignty without waiting for international recognition. To guarantee recognition of its new possessions Italy also kept hold of the Dodecanese islands until 1947. Even though the Italian parliament was not convened in September 1911 to ratify the declaration of war, Italian morale was, however, hugely raised by this successful colonial venture whose importance was underlined by the establishment of a specific Ministry for the

⁷ In the following months an Arab correspondent will comment - from Rome - the first page of an Egyptian newspaper (*Al-Ahram*, 4 April 1913), in very favorable terms for Italy, the real extent of the Lausanne Treaty, so as to remove any illusion to the Ottomans. Refer also to *Lettera dell'Agenzia diplomatica di S.M. il Re d'Italia al Ministro delle Colonie*, Cairo 6 April 1913, in ASD, Ministero Africa italiana, vol. II, 1859-1945, pos. 172/1.

In fact, in the ambiguous Treaty of Lausanne, the sultan, in order to maintain link between the people of Libya and Turkey, refused to recognize the sovereignty, hinting to those North African regions that he granted them political autonomy.

Colonies on 20 November 1912 n.1205, by Hon. Pietro Bertolini. In this ministry not only will merge the duties performed until now by the Foreign Affairs Ministry for the territories passed under the sovereignty or protection of Italy, but also the Italian Colonial Institute, as confirmed by Giolitti to Di San Giuliano, thus leaving the new Pontifical Council full freedom of decision with regards to the initiatives to be undertaken in Libya⁸.

The positive implications of the war were thus noted in several ways with varying impact and motivations as the letter sent by Senator Pasquale Villari in November 1912 to Arcangelo Ghisleri, the then director of the Republican newspaper *La Ragione*⁹, on the subject of the criticisms directed at him by the strongly anti-war Socialist Filippo Turati who kept his original opinion on the matter as shows:

Dear Director,

Allow me to make a brief statement. I see that the Hon. Turati, responding to the *Corriere della Sera* in *Critica Sociale*, reiterates the assertions made by him in the Milanese City Council on the subject of an article of mine published last 24 October in the *Corriere*. In this article I set out the criticisms of those who were and are opposed to the Libyan war and added that, leaving to one side the hyperbole used in such debates and conceding a certain element of truth in them, the undeniable fact remained that the war was necessary, inevitable and supported with great enthusiasm by the vast majority of the Italian people. It raised the nation's self-esteem and its image abroad. In just a few months it contributed more to the political unification of Italy than anything else in many long years of peace had done. With expressions of considerable formal courtesy Hon. Turati argues that by not explicitly denying my adversaries' criticisms I implicitly accepted them. He thus attributes me with the opinions of my adversaries and states that I have engaged in the harshest criticisms of the war when what I have actually done is to demonstrate its historical and national value. "The certain fact", they write, is that a profound sentiment was developing in the country that this war would result in definitive nation building, in a new, great Italy recognised by all. Our soldiers

⁸*Lettera del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri al Ministro degli Affari Esteri*, Rome 30 July 1912, in ASD, Affari Politici 1891-1916, serie P, b. 14.

⁹ Ghisleri had also been an opponent of the Libyan war from 1911 and had thus clashed with certain members of the PRI although his opinion later changed and he abandoned his pacifist and anti-nationalist stance from 1914 onwards in favour of interventionism.

set off as new crusaders, acclaimed by the people who carried them on their shoulders¹⁰.

Totally unexpected, however, the statements - which troubled not just slightly the Italian front - issued by Giustino Fortunato and the Republican Napoleone Colajanni, who had continuously and strongly opposed the shipment of Tripoli. While siding in favour of neutrality, Senator Fortunato justified the military action since it had become inescapable:

Who more than I contrary to colonial adventures, and generally to war? Who more dubious, more timid than I of the new Italy? Who better than me is *certain* that Tripoli will be a fruitless enterprise, perilous and costly, even when necessary, and fatal? Well *long live the war*, though now clear that fifty years of national life were not vain, and something new, beautiful, promising is in the new Italy!... (Di Staso, 1912, p. 12).

Beyond shades and attitudes of intellectuals, few among democrats shared the exclamation of the famous southern Italian (“Long live the war”), even though agreeing with him that the war experience, for the first time after the Italy’s union, had revealed a new and beneficial national spirit. Along the lines of Fortunato, but more complex and perhaps for this reason most appreciated, the conclusion of Colajanni’s speech appeared in all newspapers of Italy, in which he emphasized the importance of the undertaking in North Africa thanks to which he had been able to regain some confidence in the army, proving Europe and the world organization, discipline and value of the Italian people (C. Maranelli, in *L’Unità*, 5 October 1912).

Moreover even Salvemini had to admit that the Italian troops in Libya were united not only by the danger but also by the feeling of national duty and honor, and that in this respect to the country they were all in agreement, as well as all watched with sympathy the “magnificent solidarity in the war” (G. Salvemini [reply letter to Carlo Maranelli], in *L’Unità*, 5 October 1912). This was basically the

¹⁰Letter from Pasquale Villari to Arcangelo Ghisleri, [s. l.], November, 1912, in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Villari correspondence, b. 71. Villari was referring in particular to Filippo Turati’s article in *Critica Sociale*, XXII, nn. 21-22, 1-16 November, 1912. On this debate see P. Villari in *Corriere della Sera*, 24 October 1912.

best result achieved by the company, admitted even by those who were averse to it, which ended with cheer, while remaining solemnly contrary. A rare and wide “harmony” which, with several distinctions from the political point of view, was obtained by giving proof of seriousness, in front of a company initially justified by the lure of great wealth to be conquered without fight, although the cost of the war in terms of human life and money was high and the material benefits low. It was in any case defined by Benedetto Croce and Gaetano Mosca in sentimental terms as a demonstration of national vigour. The judgment of the two famous intellectuals is confirmed by the debate emerged in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the kingdom after the suspension of work in both houses of Parliament (10 July 1911). Simply just remember the words of praise for the armed forces pronounced in the courtroom by the President of the Chamber Giuseppe Marcora 22 February 1912 - after a parliamentary recess of more than seven months because of the war - which roused vivid, general and sustained applause. From his seat he reopened the shareholders’ meeting:

If, in fact, the firm’s first start, to which the Government has set to protect dignity and interests of Italy, the unanimous consent of thoughts and intentions manifested in every region and in every class of citizens - not without astonishment and surprise of those who do not yet know the soul of our race - revealed to the civilized world that the new Italian lives, not only in the miraculous awakening of its material energies, but also in its unity and moral discipline, the admirable conduct of our soldiers and sailors has proven that it has become the formidable defence of the conscience and the mutual will of an entire people. [...] As we are now, we will always be; in harmony and ready for any sacrifice for the honour and greatness of Italy. This is, ladies and gentlemen, our duty. *Et sit nobis in animo constantia!* (AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 22 February 1912, p. 17140).

Equally strong appreciation appeared the next day, when the prime minister and interior minister Giolitti announced on November 5, 1911 Royal Decree n. 1247 by which the Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were placed under the full and entire sovereignty of the Italian Kingdom and once again the hall resounded with unanimous applause. Same thing happened with the rapporteur of the Commission, Mr. Ferdinando Martini, who, again on February 23,

1912, asked colleagues to vote without delay the aforementioned decree converting it into law, because “what was act of government is surely the will of the nation” (AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17144).

Statements that hid a dangerous presumption perhaps chauvinistic, which is supported by far more extreme expansionist theories would then have disoriented public opinion by pushing the country toward irreparable follies. However, in the name of a higher patriotic conception almost all political parties represented in parliament put aside all internal differences reaffirming confidence on the measures submitted by the Government regarding the war, albeit with several distinctions. Congressman Sidney Sonnino - albeit by constitutional opposition benches - asked that the decree vote, he declared he would have approve, is proposed to bring together maximum consensus of votes, “because the Assembly’s voice would express the will of the country” (AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17145).

The broad consensus on voting - also given by those who remained firm against Libya – grew from the general belief of serving a good and useful cause for Italy. While other deputies as Leonidas Bissolati motivated favourable thought of a part of the Socialist parliamentary minority group claiming primarily the political opportunity of their choice, “not to bring the Socialist Party and the working classes to isolate themselves in a hostile attitude to the rest of the Nation...”(AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17153).

For the first time after Italy’s unity was managing to conquer territories beyond the national border and the effort to achieve purpose was not only military, but had assumed an increasingly “civilian” and even beneficial distinctiveness, as said by Mr. Giulio Alessio, chief of the radical party, which, in giving the membership of its parliamentary group to its approach to the Government will declare:

We know that the mixture of races and the fruitful example of the institutions of economic freedom are the most effective means to release the populations’ retreats for those subject to their average economic age. Our mission, therefore, is unquestionably a civilizing mission(AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17159).

Incredibly hostile to the conversion into law of the decree on the sovereignty of Italy in Libya was the reformist socialist Filippo Turati, who, while appreciating the heroism and sacrifice of the soldiers who fought under the national flag, declared that the purported national consensus was based on a serious misunderstanding, namely that “ardor that unites all of us for the good and for the honour of the homeland” (AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17164).

Equally dubious - in the opinion of the Republican Eugene Church - were the words pronounced by the Foreign Ministry Antonio Di San Giuliano in his speech in Parliament of December 2 1910: “The Tripolitania must remain Turkish”(AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17170). Other similar statements of Di San Giuliano of 9 June 1911 were always given by Mr. Church – lined up against African shipping and against its annexation decree - on the basis of the official account: “Our policy, like the one of other powers, has as its base the maintenance of the territorial status quo and the integrity of the Ottoman empire” (AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17170). Foreign Minister’s statements-contradictory according to Republican Congressman - must be placed to the entire diplomatic and military planning of time, considering the changes in the international scenario and the government’s foreign policy, which had been unable to resist that “historical inevitability”, according to the prior definition of Giolitti, the strengthening of the Italian position in the Mediterranean, which took the same leader of Dronero to have to wear in a few months the role of “man of war”. A matter of prestige for Italy, which also weakened the opposition of the newborn nationalist political movement and which also allowed industry and finance to expand their markets through the colonial expansion. An additional motivation was provided by the socialist Enrico Ferri, who, though ideally opposed to any war, will specify in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies: “I cannot, however, forget the historical law, so that every civilized nation, drew a degree of economic and political development, inevitably passes through the colonial expansion

phase”(AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17175). For many members of parliament, therefore, the Libyan enterprise was an inescapable destiny, the same as in the nineteenth century had England, Belgium, France, Germany and Japan, and that in 1911-12 became Italy’s fate. Such shades of favourable vote with united nationalist leanings that Ferri gave to the decree, reaffirming those “new destinies of the people of Italy” (AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912,p. 17176)¹¹, led him to submit his resignation from the PSI few weeks later.

The war of Tripoli, not only Ferri but for the majority of politicians, was understood as a “not pleasant but urgent need of Italian history” (AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17175) to establish itself on the international stage, as always present in its meeting of February 23 1912, the Republican congressman Salvatore Barzilai, who fully agreed on the usefulness of signing the decree of sovereignty(AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17175).

Even he, for proclaiming sovereignty over Tripoli arguing with Filippo Turati, will pay his utterances with the output from the PRI (Colapietra, 1970, p. 27). Not all opposition deputies granted their vote for so-called “interests of the homeland”. For example, the Hon. Ettore Ciccotti, the only member of the South that expressly declared not to vote this decree, was not convinced by the regained prestige, honour, dignity, that were caused to the country with the conquest of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17151). Ciccotti will report directly to the President of the Council Giolitti, closing the general debate at the applause, sure of the fact that on these issues even opposing parties, constantly in opposition, had put aside their internal differences aware of the need to set aside, given the circumstances, the political ideas for a higher interest of national order(AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 23 February 1912, p. 17178). And so, despite some critical comments made during the debate, the result of the roll call vote on the Royal Decree of 5 November 1911

¹¹ Remaining on the theme of “destiny», we remember the study of a well-known orientalist of the early twentieth century on the discovery of an Arabic manuscript which reproduced a prophecy concerning the conquest of Tripolitania by Italy (Pacha, 1912, pp. 15-45).

n. 1247 - by which the Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were under the full sovereignty of the Kingdom of Italy, also taking into account the pressure of the national will - was largely favourable to Giolitti who managed to make it into law.

In subsequent rounds of the Chamber of Deputies patriotic statements took it in turns with many polemical remarks, voice of two deputies of the Socialist Party, as if to emphasize the divisions within their own party. Mr. Giuseppe Di Stefano Neapolitan, a member of the Democratic Left, 28 February 1912 was sent "to all those brave heroes who fight in the name of Italy and who hold high the banner of the Fatherland in those lands, which were so much a part of the Empire that Rome had in the world, an applause greeting, gratitude and affection"(AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 28 February 1912, p. 17328). In name of the socialist opposition on March 11, deputy Giulio Casalini, who already had expressed his dissent to the Libyan company voted by Parliament, believed that the huge sums spent on the war should have been used in the noblest works and production-reclamation, migration of peoples of the South, etc. -(AP, CD, leg. XXIII, 11 March 1912, pp. 17863-17866).

Testimonials unanimously in favour of "Italian patriotic soul" exempt from any discussion and distinction could be understood from soldiers' letters. They were sometimes ungrammatical, but it showed the sincerity, strength and faith in the country: for the fighters was a joy to see their writings in newspapers, not so much for the human desire but more for the interest of reading ones name, to share and maybe seek relief in the "new family" of the army or navy at that difficult time they were crossing (*Il Giornale d'Italia*, 25 January 1912)¹². The *Il Giornale d'Italia*, for example, reported deliberately highlighted in bold letter to a corporal who thanked the director of the magazine for having sent its fighters of the Ain Zara - where he too was - a copy of the same newspaper (*Il Giornale d'Italia*, 21 January 1912).

¹²In another newspaper was hoped to collect letters of soldiers in anthologies to spread amongst young people "manly education» as an alternative to "funny affectation or feminine discomforts so prevalent today in our schools" (P.S., in *L'Idea nazionale*, 6 December 1911).

But the military occupation of the new colony- between 1912 and 1913 welcomed by the European press, the *Petit Niçois* (22 August 1912) to the London *Times*¹³, as well as Consulates, legations and the Italian Embassies around the world¹⁴ - we know that it did not bring economic and occupational benefits which many had expected. In exchange for the treaty, Italy made a generous - and risky - concession to Turkey allowing it to retain its religious jurisdiction in Libya through a representative, who would have had to live on the African colony and thus, within certain limits, have a voice in political and judicial affairs by the end of 1911 and early 1912 some daily newspapers and specialised press were highlighting the need to renew the civil and penal judicial framework in Tripolitana and Cyrenaica: “a very serious and important matter and one for which an immediate, in the true sense of the word, solution must be found” (*Rivista di emigrazione*, V. 1-2, 1912, p. 59)¹⁵. It was now, in fact, seen as an anachronistic judicial body in Western terms requiring reform in human terms to free it from the irrational prejudices inherent in local traditions. It was an extremely complex task, as the *Rivista di emigrazione* noted: “this organisation is in fact rendered more difficult by the fact that, in this branch of civil life in particular, the Turks have left us a legacy of shameful measures and deliberations which make necessary a veritable “step by step” conquest of peoples and contexts used to viewing judges as vulgar grace or sentence vendors, for Italian justice too” (*Rivista di emigrazione*, V. 1-2, 1912, p. 59).

Without offending local and more generally Arab sensibilities, what was thus needed was to convince the Muslims living in Libya that justice was to be dispensed in the name of the King of Italy and under the jurisdiction of the Italian magistrate deputed to the post, leaving religious leaders jurisdiction over family law, faith based and civil matters relating to disputes worth no more than 500 lire.

¹³Whose articles 4, 5, 6, September 1913 were even reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ambassador in London (see the correspondence in fasc. “Stampa estera”, in ASD, Ministero Africa italiana, vol. II, 1859-1945, pos. 172/1).

¹⁴ See documentation kept in ASD, Affari Politici 1891-1916, serie P, b. 14.

¹⁵ On the review cited see Orazi, 2015.

Prefects, courts and the Court of Appeal were to have jurisdiction over all other matters. This was, ultimately, the only way to make the control inherent in a conquest felt.

As far as Italy was concerned, its new international status prompted it not only to offer an alternative to mass emigration, which was then mainly moving to the Americas, but also to revitalise its economy, seeking more intense trading links with the Orient, initially with China and then, even more emphatically, with Russia (especially the Caucasus), a market which was accorded significant importance after the conquest of the Dodecanese islands. The same *Rivista di emigrazione* mentioned above noted, in 1917, that “Italian exporters inclined to invest in those lands will certainly not regret the time and money expended and will soon be compensated by significant profits” (*Rivista di emigrazione*, X, 7-8-9, 1917, pp. 81-93).

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