

**INTIMATE CONNECTIONS: MARRIAGE AND MOBILITIES  
ACROSS THE MODERN MEDITERRANEAN AND THE RED SEA**

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## **Intimate connections: Marriage and mobilities across the modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea**

*The prism of marriage can be a unique opportunity to write a social and cultural history in the modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea. The progressive dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, followed by the different settings of colonial encounters and/or the nation-building processes, led to the reform and reordering of multiple and contemporary marriages practices in a complex and dense imperial space such as the Mediterranean and the Red Sea regions. Legal regulations of marriage in the (post)Ottoman space are the results of superpositions, interactions and convergences of multiple juridical practices and norms, that included religious, customary, and civil regulations. Here, mobility played a crucial role in establishing and breaking new conjugal bonds, thus tracing the intimate entanglements between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.*

Keywords: marriage, mobility, Mediterranean, Red Sea, entanglement, citizenship

## **Conexões íntimas: Casamento e mobilidades através do Mediterrâneo moderno e do Mar Vermelho**

*O prisma do casamento pode ser uma oportunidade única para escrever uma história social e cultural no Mediterrâneo moderno e no Mar Vermelho. A dissolução progressiva do Império Otomano, seguida dos diferentes cenários de encontros coloniais e/ou dos processos de construção da nação, levou à reforma e reordenamento das práticas de casamentos múltiplos e contemporâneos num espaço imperial complexo e denso como as regiões do Mediterrâneo e do Mar Vermelho. Os regulamentos legais do casamento no espaço (pós) otomano são o resultado de sobreposições, interações e convergências de múltiplas práticas e normas jurídicas, que incluíram regulamentos religiosos, consuetudinários e civis. Neste caso, a mobilidade desempenhou um papel crucial no estabelecimento e quebra de novos laços conjugais, traçando assim os envoltimentos íntimos entre o Mediterrâneo e o Mar Vermelho.*

Palavras-chave: casamento, mobilidade, Mediterrâneo, Mar Vermelho, emaranhado, cidadania

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## Entanglements in modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea

The prism of marriage and intimate ties can be a unique opportunity to write a social and cultural history in the modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea. It allows us to cross imperial and national borders by following neglected micro-connections and retracing “tender and tenses ties” (Stoler, 2001; Van Kirk, 1983), thus revealing conflicts, influences and cross-cultural interactions. By looking at the ordinary interplay of institutions, sexuality and affects, I suggest that the progressive dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, followed by the different settings of colonial encounters and/or the nation-building processes, led to the reform and reordering of multiple and contemporary marriages practices and intimate ties across the modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

Marriages and intimate ties could be conceived as the analytical lens to observe broader cultural, economic and social changes that crossed the (post) Ottoman space, from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. In other words, the prism of marriage and intimate ties could provide a fascinating contribution to an entangled history in a space – such as the Mediterranean and the Red Sea – that bridges Europe, Africa, and Asia.

This contribution primarily involves a critical literary review and the interconnection of existing scholarly works regarding marriage in the Mediterranean and Red Sea regions. This geographical scope encompasses areas ranging from Morocco to post-Ottoman territories, including Algeria, Egypt, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Anatolia. Secondly, my focus narrows down to the specific contexts of Libya, situated in the Mediterranean, and Eritrea, located within the Red Sea region. These two former Ottoman provinces, often considered peripheral within a complex imperial landscape, offer valuable insights for the study of “ordinary” unions and emotional ties across the Mediterranean and Red Sea. Far from conceiving of marriage as a universal category, a focus on marriage and intimate bonds in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea should lead us to conceive marriage as a process and practice to be situated cross-culturally and historically, here by paying attention to the interplay of law, affects and institutions. To retrace the conjugal ties in this connected space, it is particularly useful to follow contemporary ethnographers’ shift from the idea of a common analytical model of Mediterranean values, such as the gender-linked notion of honour and shame (firstly stressed by Peristiany in 1965), to their interest in the specificity of emotions and affective semiotics and practices in this space (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Stewart, 2015). The prism of conjugal ties is an analytical tool to explore broader cultural and social changes in a heterogeneous space – such as the modern

Mediterranean and the Red Sea – “constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny” (Massey, 2005, p. 9).

I resort to the category of Mediterranean – and its connections with the Red Sea – not as a coherent unity (because of climatic homogeneity, e.g. Braudel, 1966), nor in the sense of an “exception” (Herzfeld, 2005) but rather as an opportunity to create new scholarly interactions and agglomerations of European, African and Middle Eastern historiography (Horden, 2005). I am interested in multiple and heterogeneous “connectivities” (Horden & Purcell, 2006), interactions of ideas, people and objects across the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

In the field of religion, one useful concept is that of “crossed religions”, as proposed by the anthropologist Dionigi Albera (Albera & Couroucli, 2009) in the analysis of the phenomena of devotional mixing in the Mediterranean, a space that has been otherwise divided in the *longue durée* (notably between the Christian Church, the Ottoman power along the main ports of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean and the Arab-Muslim world that surrounds it). Indeed, we find even in the Red Sea these phenomena of religious mixing, materialized by pilgrimages to sacred places, in an otherwise divided space (notably between the Christian Church in the Ethiopian plateau, the Ottoman power along the main ports of the Red Sea and the Arab-Muslim world that surrounds it) (See Bruzzi, 2018; Bruzzi & Zeleke, 2015). Likewise, marriage practices and conjugal ties could reveal the reconfiguration of the intimate borders between Muslims, Christians and Jews, and provide a new analytical lens to observe the confluence, conflicts and superimposition of religious and secular spaces and institutions. To explore these multiple interactions and write an entangled history of the modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea, it could be useful to shift the focus to the (post)Ottoman space: the Balkans, the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, and the Red Sea region. This space is a fitting and complex frame to explore long-term phenomena affecting marriages and intimate ties during the progressive dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the nation-building processes. A long history of marriage has been traced in the Northern/Western/European Mediterranean, at least starting from the Middle Ages. This stream of literature features studies on Italy, France and Spain that have observed the crucial impact of the Protestant Reform and the Council of Trent in the regularisation and formalisation of multiple marriage practices (among many others Lombardi, 2008; Seidel Menchi, 2016), with growing attention to the interplay of mobility and marriage practices in the early modern period (Bernardi, 2020; Chauvard, 2018).

Historians of twentieth-century Europe and the West have observed the diversity and modern global changes of this public institution and intimate expe-

rience – from ritual romance and social obligation to same-sex union and private vows (Abbott, 2011; Coonz, 2006; Daumas, 2004; Giddens, 2013) – connecting the history of couples to wider political processes and conflicts in Europe, such as in France and Italy during WWI and WWII (Lussana, 2014; Passerini, 1999; Vidal-Naquet, 2006).

In contrast with the long history of marriage and affects in the Northern/Western Mediterranean, the (post)Ottoman space has been embedded from the one side in demography, anthropological and sociological perspectives on traditional “Balkan”, “Arab” or “Muslim” marriages patterns and family structures. From the other side, they have been embedded in normative legal works with extensive literature on family reforms and women’s human rights, especially in the postcolonial period (e.g. Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2001; Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2011; Voorhoeve, 2012; Welchman, 2004).

Demographic history has deeply marked the field by tracing changes in marriage models and household patterns. Although the existence of a Mediterranean model of family and marriage (high number of marriages, low celibacy and early age of the first marriage as firstly expressed in Hajnal and Laslett’s works) has been contested notably by looking at the Italian and Spanish cases (see Viazzo, 2003), the demographic models of marriage and household patterns have had a strong influence on the historiography of the family and historical demography in the modern Mediterranean. Italy and Spain are often regarded as representative of all Mediterranean Europe. Instead, it is only recently that the North-eastern Mediterranean has seen scholarly attention in the Mediterranean space (Boudjaaba et al., 2019; Gasparoni et al., 2019; Hirsch et al., 2018). Despite the attempts to cross the north/south border from a comparative perspective (Cerutti & Grangaud, 2017), a significant fracture between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean persists in the historiography.

Quantitative demographic works in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean have demonstrated significant changes in twentieth-century marriage practices, such as a lower rate of forced, arranged and early marriages, an increase in the age of first marriage, a significant growth in celibacy and free-choice marriages (De Bel-Air, 2008; Fargues, 1986, 2000; Kateb, 2001). On the other hand, sharp demographic differences have been observed between urban and rural societies rather than between the Northern Mediterranean and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean societies. Demographic evidence from the 1930s and 1940s in Istanbul suggest low fertility and a very late age of marriage comparable to many pre-twentieth-century Western European marriage patterns. Alan Duben and Cem Behar (1991) have analysed census data and other available quantitative

records and the written sources and interviews, finding that this demographic pattern began earlier and that fertility was quite low and marriage age quite late in Istanbul in the 1880s, thus countering the widespread view of premodern marriage as young with high fertility. In Egyptian villages, marriage strategies appear to be linked to property control and power struggles, whereas in the urban context, the increasing delay of marriages appears to be linked to rising prices and costs for families (Singerman, 2005; Singerman & Ibrahim, 2003). Algeria has been a flourishing ground of enquiry for the study of marriage, marital behaviour and family and social ties at the prism of demography, notably through quantitative analyses of marriage certificates of mainly Jewish and European immigrants since the second half of the nineteenth century; this has revealed a low level of interreligious marriages (in particular thanks to the works of Guy Brunet and Kamel Kateb). Changes in Arabic traditional marriage patterns have been noticed in the kin marriage pattern, which is often observed in ethnographic works as an “Arabic model” of marriage. Johnson suggests that this marriage pattern has increased over the course of the twentieth century, thus questioning the assumption that kin marriage is an old and immutable marriage tradition (Johnson, 2006).

In the Balkans, historical-anthropological literature on marriage and family patterns have focused mainly on Balkan family and household structures, so-called “zadruga”, which is grounded in customary law.<sup>1</sup> Based on ethnographic, demographic and sociological data on several villages and small towns located in today’s states of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia from the beginning of the eighteenth century until the second half of the twentieth century, their research has explored the extended family and household structures, which are traditionally denominated as “zadruga”, but for which Kaser coins the term “Balkan family”. Also, Kaser suggested considering the Balkans within “Eurasia Minor”, including Anatolia and the European parts of the former Ottoman Empire (Kaser, 2011, 2012). Although the epistemological value of identifying such regional family models has been disputed (Todorova, 2018), these studies have highlighted that the specific patrilineal structures of the “Balkan” and “Arab” family patterns evolved under the specific political, economic and ecological circumstances of the region (Kaser, 2008; Johnson, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Since the 1990s, a research group led by Karl Kaser (University of Graz) has undertaken a series of research on Balkan family and household structures. I would thank Nijna Bumann for introducing me to this literature and especially to her fascinating works (see her forthcoming PhD thesis and Bumann 2020).

Demographic evidence is an indicator of radical changes involving households and families in the modern Mediterranean, but they have shown relatively fixed, separated and closed models, marginalizing affective experiences and cultural and political changes. Fascinating traces of social and cross-cultural changes in marriage, conjugal and romantic love are instead expressed in a lively literary debate that developed at the turn of the twentieth century in Turkish and Arabic literature and the press within the nation-building process in the Middle East (Badran & Cooke, 2004; Baron, 1997, 2005; Vezzadini, 2016).

By being situated at the intersection of body and reproduction politics, marriage is a crucial issue in this period of formation of nation-states because it has functioned as a political instrument for the rise of modern nation-states. However, a cross-cultural history of twentieth-century intimate ties and affects across Mediterranean and the Red Sea societies is still an open field of inquiry. This is particularly the case because the role of emotions and sentiment remains largely ignored in marriage patterns and the history of affects in Middle East and African modern history (Abdallah, 2009; Cole & Lynn, 2009; Dakhli et al., 2011).

Marriage has been conceived merely as a juridical contract with a focus on Islamic family law in postcolonial states. Few historical works – but rather more sociological and anthropological analyses – deal with Muslim family law, women's agency and social practices (Joseph, 2000; Mahmood, 2012; Mir-Hosseini, 1993; Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2011).

National conservative reforms in matters of family law are often assumed to be rooted in the conception of inalterability and preservation of the Islamic family law. The latter was imposed in the context of national building process in the Middle East and North Africa (Sonbol, 2009).

A history of marriage has been studied in Egypt by looking at the interweaving of modernist and nationalist projects and domestic ideology in the frame of the modernisation process (Cuno, 2015). Ottoman marriage and family law reforms are usually analysed as part of the nation-building process in the (post) Ottoman space with the creation of an Ottoman citizenry and the establishment of a new family model (Altınbaş, 2014). In the Maghreb colonial legacy is seen as crucial to the development of a fixed structure of Islamic marriage, family and personal status law (e.g., in Algeria see Lalami, 2008; in Libya see Bruzzi, 2021).

With only few exceptions on Morocco (Aixela-Cabré, 2017; Hoffman, 2010; Marglin, 2016), little is known about the interactions between civil, customary and religious juridical practices in regulating and recognizing conjugal ties in the modern Mediterranean. Mediterranean and Red Sea historiography currently lacks adequate historical and comparative research on marriage practices to link

the progressive dissolution of the Ottoman Empire to the colonial occupation, the nationalist and modernist movements and the formation of modern national states.

The modern history of a social and juridical institution, such as marriage, involving public institutions, intimacy and gender relations, is still neglected, especially in a cross-cultural perspective that observes the transitions and superposition of Ottoman, colonial and national frames.

Although the mobility turn has gained increasing attention in Mediterranean history, the impact that these mobility processes have had on marriages and intimate ties across the modern Mediterranean remains significantly underplayed. A history of networks, migrations and exchanges has been traced through cross-cultural trade (Trivellato, 2009) and commercial litigations (Kaiser & Petitjean, 2016) across the early modern Mediterranean. The historiography on nineteenth-century migratory movements from Europe to North Africa has suggested how gender, mobility and cosmopolitanism articulated in a trans-Mediterranean perspective – from Malta and Sicily to Tunis or Slovenia to Egypt (Biancani, 2019; Clancy-Smith, 2012) – has occurred with conflicting norms and the coexistence of different and overlapping consular and religious jurisdictions.

This historiographical silence on affective and conjugal bonds across the modern Mediterranean, notably before the 1960s, is partly related to earlier historians' focus on the "authentic" Islam, "while ignoring culturally promiscuous Mediterranean cities populated by groups of multiple, frequently indeterminate, identities and allegiances" (Clancy-Smith, 2005, p. 63).

Along the Mediterranean and the Red Sea region, cross-cultural norms and practices have been studied within a series of partitions that avoid capturing continuity and ruptures beyond well-established partitions in the periodisation (Ottoman, colonial, national) and within linguistic and cultural area studies. In fact, although the colonial and postcolonial legacy has impacted the Mediterranean division into the European and Islamic Mediterranean, marking different and separated historiographical traditions, the nationalist narratives and nation-building projects have impacted a further partition of the region in smaller area studies along national borders (Cerutti & Grangaud, 2017).

## **Multiple entanglements: marriages and conjugal ties across Italy, Eritrea and Libya**

Conjugal ties are revealing of the multiple entanglements in a complex and dense imperial space such as Northeast Africa, relying on the Mediterranean to



the Red Sea. This space has been marked by economic and geopolitical tensions, and contended with the Ottoman, British, Egyptian, Ethiopian and French imperial aspirations. Since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Ottoman Empire, Britain, Italy and France have looked with great interest at the territories of North-east Africa to expand their spheres of influence from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. Also the Ottoman, Egypt, and the Ethiopian Christian Empires gradually penetrated the Southern regions of the Horn of Africa (Levine, 2014; Minawi, 2020).

Under Ottoman influence since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Libya and Eritrea were directly administered by the Ottomans after the second Ottoman occupation of Libya (1835-1911) and by Egypt after the Egyptian conquest of the Eritrean-Sudanese region (1820-1885). Between 1865 and 1866, Istanbul transferred its sovereignty over the western coasts of the Red Sea – including the Eritrean port of Massawa and the Sudanese port of Suakin – to the Egypt of Isma’il Pasha, who extended his empire along the African Red Sea coast. Despite the Egyptian defeat of Ethiopia in two battles in 1875-76, Egyptian troops continued their expansion to Harar (in 1875) and the Somali coast, while retaining control of Keren and Massawa until 1885. It was at this date that Eritrean port city of Massawa and the hinterland were gradually subjected to Italian occupation with the creation in 1890 of the colony of Eritrea, the first Italian colonial possession in Africa. The Italian military advance from the Eritrean coast to conquer the hinterland was halted by Ethiopia at the famous Battle of Adwa in 1896 that Fascist Italy sought to redeem in the 1930s. It was only after the Italian occupation of Libya (1911-1912) and the following military “pacification” campaign of the country that led to the proclamation of the General Governorate of Libya in 1934, that the Fascist regime launched the second Italian-Ethiopian war and proclaimed the founding of the Italian Empire in 1936. However, the empire was short lived as Italy lost its colonies during the Second World War (e.g. Ben-Ghiat & Fuller, 2008; Labanca, 2014; Taddia, 1986).

The Italian colonies of Libya and Eritrea were at the crossroads of multiple imperial spaces: Italian, Ethiopian, British, French, Egyptian and Ottoman. Here, legal regulations of sexualities and genders – including marriage – are the results of superpositions, interactions and convergences of hybrid juridical practices and norms, that included religious, customary, and civil regulations.

In the modern Mediterranean, recent legal historical works has focused on law, hybridity and gender (Marglin, 2016; Shlala, 2017), thus providing important insights for a history of modern marriage in this space. The study of court records in (post)Ottoman spaces has questioned the assumption of Islamic legal

studies that had long held that Islamic legal doctrines ceased to develop at the end of the ninth century and that, subsequently, a static and strongly patriarchal set of laws had shaped gender arrangements in Muslim communities. Women appeared regularly in courts of justice to conclude marriage and divorce contracts, ask for alimony, report abuse and violence against them, request maintenance payments from their husbands and ex-husbands and request custody of their children (the pioneering work of Tucker in 1985 and the recent one in 2020). Islamic court records are exceptional sources for women and gender history in the (post)Ottoman space. Legal “forum shopping” has been observed as a gendered legal strategy for women in the late Ottoman Empire, in Egypt, in Libya and in the Indian Ocean because women’s cases often fell among competing legal codes and crossed juridical boundaries (Bruzzi, 2021; Shlala, 2017; Stockreiter, 2015). In nineteenth-century Islamic Mediterranean societies, conversions could provide the occasion to get out of an unhappy marriage, such as in the case of Christian women’s conversion to Islam to obtain the right for divorce from their husbands (Clancy-Smith, 2005).

Jews and Muslims practiced legal pluralism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, until French, Habsburg, and Italian reforms limited their legal mobility in regions ranging from Morocco to Bosnia and Libya (Bruzzi, 2021; Bumann, 2020; Marglin, 2016).

Colonial reforms in matter of marriage deeply affected legal and social mobility in the Mediterranean region. Citizenship and religious differences were mobilized to mark juridical boundaries regarding marriage. In this respect, Egyptian legal history has shown how modern Egypt, which represented a model for the codification of family law in other modern Muslim countries, in the nineteenth century witnessed a shift towards privileging the religious side of marriage at the cost of the contractual nature of marriage that had prevailed instead before the nineteenth-century reforms (Sonbol, 2005).

The late Ottoman and colonial periods have been observed as dominated by differential juridical systems regarding marriage. Drawing from the Ottoman *millet* system (which assured to various non-Muslim religious communities juridical autonomy regarding their internal affairs, including marriage), the European colonial authorities in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea imposed a differential juridical system for family law, where different religious groups were judged according to their own religious laws (Christian, Jewish and Islamic) or according to national civil law, most notably for European citizens. So, for example, in French Algeria, and in Italian Libya, judges distinguished between civil courts with jurisdiction over property rights and Islamic courts with jurisdiction over

personal status law (family law). Although the “real” (property) status was modifiable, the “personal” status was considered unalterable (Surkis, 2010, p. 28).

Historians of colonial law have pointed out that from the earliest years of the Italian occupation of Assab Bay in Eritrea, the idea of a differential system of law (a legal dualism) was imposed with the Law n. 857 (5 July 1882), one for European citizens and one for the natives, in matter of family law, personal status and inheritance, thus marriage included. Customary and Islamic laws should have been applied to colonial subjects according to their personal status and custom, with the idea of fixing, not making them subject to change and preserving “local tradition” (Capuzzo, 1995).

However, in the practice this differential juridical system was constantly challenged by mobility process and juridical pluralism as it emerges in colonial Libya and Eritrea. Despite the general provision that was given to the colonial administrators and magistrates not to interfere in the family law of colonial subjects, in the ordinary practices, women and their family asked them to intervene – also on matters of personal status, family relations, marriages, successions, and all relations of private law. Since the first civil administration, regional residents were called upon to play a mediating role in the resolution of family conflicts.

It is noteworthy that the women themselves – both in Eritrea and Libya – came in person to request the intervention of the colonial authorities to settle disputes with their spouses, as in this case of a request to the father (an Eritrean askari) to pay the ex-wife child support. Mallet Gabrè, an Eritrean woman of 28 years old, addressed the colonial administration and lodged a complaint with the resident in the Mareb district after the divorce and the division of property with her ex-husband, Ailè Ailat, an Eritrean askari (a native soldier employed in Italian colonial army) in his thirties. A conflict had arisen between the two families of the ex-spouses which had resulted in the non-payment to the mother for the maintenance of their child.

In this respect, Ten. Teodorani, the colonial officer based in the Residence of Mareb area, reported on his activity of reconciliation between the two parties:

Nine months ago, they divorced, regularly dividing all their assets according to custom into two equal parts. The child’s upkeep for the first three years was to be paid for by the two parents in alternating months, but Ailé, following disagreements with his ex-wife’s relatives, has so far not given any of his share for the child’s upkeep. As a result, the woman filed a complaint. The parties came before the undersigned, and after lengthy discussion, reached the following settlement:

1. Ailè Ailat, for all the time that has elapsed since the day of divorce, pays to Malet Gabrè eight ghotò di grandò.
2. From now on, starting from the month of

December 1902, Ailé Ailat will give to his ex-wife, on a bi-mensual basis, for the maintenance of their common daughter and until the latter's third birthday, two ghubatà minus one cootò of grain.<sup>2</sup>

In such instances, reconciliation occurred through the physical presence of both parties, accompanied by an oath administered before a colonial official. However, in other cases, women sought alimony (both monetary and in the form of livestock) through male intermediaries or by submitting official letters of request to local authorities and colonial officials. Essentially, women's mobility was mediated by intermediaries or administrative documents that circulated within their communities. This situation is exemplified in the correspondence found in the collection titled "Lettere Tigrine" (Dirar et al., 1997) between local Eritrean authorities and officials. For example, one document (numbered 155) documents a marital dispute between Barhe Haylu, an Eritrean man who served as an askari in Tripoli, and his wife Amlasu. Amlasu, supported by her father Gabra Maryam, claimed resources that her husband had taken from her when he left for Libya. In this case, the woman's appeals to the colonial official, Commissioner Tornari of Akkele Guzay, were mediated through an official letter bearing a seal, written by the Mamhar Gabra Aywat (Document number 155 and number 88). This illustrates how women could seek assistance from various mediators to voice their grievances, ranging from their fathers to local Eritrean Orthodox Christian ecclesiastical authorities and ultimately to the colonial administration. The ordinary mobility of Eritrean and Libyan women within colonial societies sheds light on their utilization of various institutions and authorities to assert their rights and access resources. These women employed different approaches and engaged in diverse legal and administrative practices, depending on the specific authorities they were interacting with. This becomes especially significant when we take into account the historical context of legal pluralism that characterized the (post) Ottoman space, encompassing regions such as Eritrea and Libya.

Besides, the mobility of military troops connected these two Mediterranean and the Red Sea countries. During the first Italian-Turkish war led by Italy for the conquest of Libya (1911-1912), the colonial army began to systematically recruit native soldiers in Eritrea for their deployment in Libya. Transnational connections between Libya and Eritrea thus also developed in the military field. Italian land forces relied on the contribution of Eritrean askari battalions: in two

<sup>2</sup> "Udienza del 13 novembre 1902. Residenza del Mareb: Mantenimento di infante". Conti Rossini – Serie V – studi e appunti (BI), fasc. 4, Collection Carlo Conti Rossini, Accademia dei Lincei, Rome.

decades, around 10,000-15,000 men from Eritrea and Ethiopia were sent to the Libyan front (Zaccaria, 2018, p. 275).

These migratory flows of a mostly male and salaried working population had a significant socio-economic impact on marriage practices and mobility, both in Libya and Eritrea. This was expressed, in particular, in the economic-sexual exchanges, all those “sexual relations implying a compensation” (Tabet, 2004, p. 10), from marriage to sex trade. In fact, the phenomena of male and salaried mobility affected both the matrimonial market (e.g. with the introduction of currency in donations and matrimonial compensation) and the phenomena of prostitution that developed in the wake of the war economy.

The economic crisis that followed the colonial occupation and the 1911-12 Italian-Turkish war deeply affected marriage practices, especially marriage market that was related to handicrafts, especially goldsmiths, which made up the bride’s wealth. The crisis in the handicraft market during the European colonial occupation had an important effect on women’s wealth and marriage market in all the region. This phenomenon has also been observed in neighbouring Algeria where the expropriation of land by the colonists, urbanisation and the integration of the Algerian economy into the global economy contributed to the decline of handicrafts produced by women. The decline of handicrafts, in parallel with the expropriation of land by settlers, led to a surge in the market for sex for pay, making women particularly vulnerable (Clancy-Smith, 1999).

A similar phenomenon that has been observed in Algeria, with respect to the decline in craftsmanship and female wealth, has occurred also in Libya. The palethnologist Giuseppe Bellucci (1915) observed in this regard:

all the wealth of Libyan women is worn; one sees women, more in Cyrenaica than in Tripolitania, so laden with gold and silver ornaments, that together they sometimes exceed two kilograms in weight. This custom is remarkable, although it has an excuse in the fact that Libyan women would not really know where to keep their riches if they did not keep them on [...] where to put their jewellery in safekeeping? The most practical and convenient way is to wear them on one’s person. (Bellucci, 1915, p. 14)

This practice was also observed at the time among Egyptian peasant women, who used to wear the gold and stone jewellery that constituted their fortune. However, the interpretation of this practice deserves to be explored beyond the colonial imagination, given the symbolic and moral significance of the proliferation of images of richly bejewelled “Arab and Oriental” women portrayed in Orientalist photography at the time. In Algeria, the case of the Ouled Nail

prostitutes and dancers was emblematic (Ferhati, 2010): the ostentation of their wealth was far from reflecting the actual social status of those who wore it. On the contrary, one wonders whether this very ostentation of jewellery by women from the working classes was not rather a further indication of the devaluation of such goods, which were now in decline within the crisis of local marriage market.

The link between the marriage market and prostitution was very close. With the arrival of Italian soldiers, officers and settlers, who came to Eritrea mostly alone, without their wives and families, the market for sex for payment increased significantly (Pankhurst, 1974, p. 167). The spread of prostitution also in Cairo from around 1910 was part of the socio-economic crisis that afflicted Egyptian society. A crisis that affected the fundamental institution on which social reproduction rested, namely marriage. With the crisis of the matrimonial market, the increasing difficulties encountered by bachelors in accumulating sufficient wealth for the *mahr* (whose value as we have seen was increasing in the Red Sea region), prostitution became an alternative for those who could not afford to pay the legal marriage fee (Biancani, 2018, p. 89), but also for women who wanted to accumulate the monetary capital necessary for themselves and to form their own families.

The mobility phenomena generated several cases of staging legitimate marriages to disguise paid sex, the demand for which came largely from foreign soldiers on duty (Biancani, 2018, pp. 31, 77). Similarly, to what Biancani observed in Egypt, this occurred also in Libya. In the early years of the Italian occupation, the Tripoli Court of Appeal condemned an Eritrean askari from the 15<sup>th</sup> battalion serving in Libya for having tricked Miluda Bent Amor, a young Libyan woman of fourteen and fatherless, who lived in Dahra with her mother. After asking her to marry him, the askari staged a fake marriage. As Marongiu (1915) reported:

after the necessary negotiations, the bridegroom paid sixty liras with a promise to pay another 140 liras and a silver goose. Two fellows act as imam and muctar respectively to draw up the relevant deed. The trousseau is then brought. The bride, according to custom, is anointed with henna on her hands and feet and taken to the groom's house. After four days she was stripped of her jewellery and sent away: only then did she realize she had been the victim of a trick. (Marongiu, 1915, p. 81)

If on that occasion the colonial court pronounced itself in defence of the woman, diametrically opposed was the position taken by Italian magistrates in court cases involving Italian male personnel. The latter had to prove that they had no marital affection for their concubine or prostitute. While marital affect between colonizer and colonial subject was condemned, the sex trade, which followed

military campaigns, was instead recognized, accepted, and proliferated such as in Ethiopia during the war of 1935-41 (Barrera, 1996, p. 50). Economic factors deeply impacted both the local marriage market and the moral economy. Before the Italian occupation of Libya, the main local resource was sheep farming, while other productive sectors included agriculture, trade and handicraft production. In addition to handicrafts, pastoralism was also severely affected by the war in Libya. In particular, the fascist campaign of “pacification” of Cyrenaica in the 1930s led to a major demographic collapse and destroyed 90% of the livestock (Cresti, 2011). This was a severe blow to the Libyan economy affecting also transactions and marriage exchanges, which were made in livestock as well as in jewellery. While the pastoral economy and marriage exchanges in cattle were sucked into the war economy, the lira circulated in the economic-sexual exchanges, both in the sex market and in the maintenance allowances due to divorced women in Libya (D’Emilia, 1945).

Mobility and displacement of male population during the World War I (WWI) affected marriage practices, including longue-distance marriages and divorce, both in Eritrea and in Libya. The war in Libya produced an important demographic decline, due to a massive exodus of men deported or sentenced to severe punishment, which left many women alone in the country. During the WWI, the Court of Appeal in Tripoli was concerned with a number of trials concerning the divorce granted to women married to co-religionists who had fled or been deported or sentenced to severe punishment. The Muslim magistrate of Tripoli, of the Malikite legal school, pronounced himself in favour of recognizing the second marriages of these women in order to allow them to “continue to live honestly” (D’Emilia, 1945, p. 59).

According to the Public Prosecutor, the lawyer Antonio Marongiu (1915) – “our excellent qadi, in accordance with the dictates of his school, commendably cared for the fate of many young brides who, enabled to marry again, could continue to live an honest life” (D’Emilia, 1945, p. 59). In Benghazi, where the qadi was of the Hanafi legal school and therefore his appointment was still linked to Istanbul, a Libyan woman Om el Keir had her second marriage to Fighi Otman annulled. In that case, the qadi had considered that the woman’s marriage to Magidud el Areibi, who had been deported to Italy, was still valid. The woman therefore turned to the Court of Appeal in Tripoli to request the application of the Malikite legal school and to have recognized her second marriage, which had been annulled by the qadi in Benghazi.

Changes in marriage (and divorce) practices and their official recognitions were a political issue for competing juridical authorities on the ground. Here, in

this condition of juridical pluralism still in place, Libyan women tended to perpetrate a practice – already observed in the Ottoman space – that saw them enjoying a legal capacity that allowed them to strategically present themselves before different forums (from colonial courts to Islamic courts or other local authorities) to make requests for resources, annulment of recognition of contracts they had signed, maintenance in case of divorce and child custody. However, progressively their demands to the colonial authorities come up against an increasingly rigid interpretation of the law.

What used to be a flexibility in Islamic courts and customary law, in defining pronouncements, became increasingly stiffened by the imposition of an Islamic and customary law that was intended to be codified, fixed and written. This in fact limited their room for manoeuvre and their possibility of accessing different forums in a strategic manner to assert their claims. Libyan women's attempt, for example, to ask for the application of the Italian civil code, encountered the opposition of Italian magistrates who refused because – according to them – Muslim women had to be subject to a fixed Islamic or customary law based on their personal status law (Bruzzi, 2021).

Moreover, marriage was a site of administrative anxiety and a “driving wheel of nationality litigation and legislation” (Hanley, 2017, p. 138). Mixed marriages crossed religious, racial and class borders, by posing important questions on social mobility and citizenship status. As it has been observed in colonial Eritrea (Sòrgoni, 1998), also in Libya marriage between a metropolitan Italian citizen and a Libyan man was not recognized by Italian colonial jurisprudence. In 1927 the Court of Appeal in Tripoli sentenced that this mixed marriage was a “consensual rape”, an “error of fact”. The sentence was pronounced for the marriage of Giulia Hannuna and Bubacher Zlitni. Giulia, who was born in Tripoli in 1906 – before the Italian occupation – was also of Jewish origin, while Bubacher Zlitni, was an “indigenous Muslim” for colonial authorities. On 24 August 1927, when she was 20 years old, Giulia converted to Islam by making an act of abjuration and married Bubacher before a Muslim magistrate (qadi). However, the Italian judge didn't recognize the validity of the celebration of their religious marriage in front of the qadi because Giulia Hannuna was identified as an Italian metropolitan citizen. Her grandfather Angelo (b. Livorno 1825; d. Tripoli 1900) was a Jew from the Kingdom of Italy and therefore an Italian citizen. The Italian judge who analysed her case applied the principle of *ius sanguinis* and asserted that she was an Italian citizen, such as her father Hannuna Giuseppe. The latter, born in Tripoli in 1872, was registered, like the rest of the family, in the Italian consulate in Tripoli. Because of her Italian origin – according to the judge – she had to be subjected



to the Italian civil code, including in matters of family and marriage law. This judgment expressed how, Art. 29 of the Organic Law for the Administration of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica of 26 June 1927, which allowed the acquisition of Italian Libyan nationality by a woman married to an Italian Libyan citizen, could not be recognized in her case.<sup>3</sup> The question of the loss of metropolitan citizenship for an Italian citizen married to a Muslim had already been addressed on the eve of the Italo-Turkish war by the magistrate Edoardo Piola Caselli concerning a marriage between an Italian citizen and an Ottoman subject (Caselli, 1912). Edoardo Piola Caselli, then judge of the Mixed International Court in Cairo, argued that in the current legal and political conditions of the Ottoman Empire, there was no guarantee that a foreigner married to an Ottoman could enjoy all the public and private rights and duties of Ottoman subjects. There was no guarantee that she would enjoy the same personal status as her husband, the same family, patrimonial and inheritance treatment. He also noted that, in the event of marriage to a Muslim, she would be subject to Islamic jurisdiction, which denied inheritance rights to foreign nationals. With the ruling of 20 June 1910, he thus established that an Italian woman married to an Ottoman would maintain her Italian citizenship (Caselli, 1912, p. 22).

The incompatibility between the maintenance of Muslim personal status and metropolitan citizenship was a pillar of colonial rule that was not questioned at the cost of granting greater rights to indigenous Muslim women than to metropolitan women citizens, albeit resident in the Overseas Territories.

This can be observed firstly, in the recognition of their legal capacity and the separation of property, and, secondly, in the right to divorce. These two crucial women's rights were granted to colonized women, but not to Italian ones. The recognition of the legal capacity of married women in the (post)Ottoman space was in continuity with the previous Ottoman rule. In fact, in Libya – as it was the case in Algeria and in Egypt even during the colonial rule – local authorities acknowledged the legal capacity of Muslim woman married to a man of the same religion. Their legal capacity was regulated exclusively by Muslim personal status law and not by the provisions of the French and Italian civil codes. In fact, drawing from the Napoleon code, French and Italian women had to ask for their husbands' authorization to sign any property. The abolition of marital authorisation in Italy in 1919 was greeted with enthusiasm by Italian magistrates overseas

<sup>3</sup> Sentenza 31 agosto 1928, Finzi ff. presidente ed estensore Bubacher Ben Humeda. 'Ratto consensuale di cittadina metropolitana israelita da parte di indigeno – Matrimonio secondo le norme islamiche – errore di fatto', in *Giurisprudenza della Corte d'appello della Libia 1926-1932, raccolta e coordinata in collaborazione dal comm. dott. Fernando Valenzi e dal cav. uff. dott. Gabriele Nigro e cav. dott. Carlo Casoli*, Tripoli d'Africa, Stabilimento poligrafico editoriale P. Maggi, 1933, pp. 267-269.

in Libya, as Italian female citizens were finally granted a legal capacity which they had always granted to women colonial subjects (Bruzzi, 2021).

The colonial situation also challenged the norms to access to the citizenship for women. In Italy, as in France, women had a dependent citizenship from that of the man, father and husband, a *sui generis status*, since they could not pass on their nationality and keep it regardless of whom they married. The general rule was that the Italian woman followed her husband's nationality in line with the Latin maxim *uxor statum mariti sequitur* (Bartoloni, 2021; Donati, 2013, pp. 38-47).

However, the colonial situation complicated this principle in the case of mixed marriages. The Eritrean civil code of 1909 provided for the condition of "small naturalisation" (Art. 19) and the acquisition (Art. 12) of nationality for the native woman who married an Italian citizen. The latter, however, became subject again in the case of her husband's death (Bascherini, 2009, p. 274). In the 1930s, the new Fascist civil code promulgated on 1 July 1939 prohibited "the transcription of religious interracial marriages in civil registers, declaring them null and void for the Italian government" (Sòrgoni, 1998, p. 154). With this measure, interracial religious marriages were rendered null. If in Eritrea, where the Christian community was particularly important among the local population, recourse was made to racial rhetoric to differentiate between Italian citizens and colonial subjects, in Libya – such as in others colonial contexts in the Maghreb – this differentiation was played out by recourse to religious rhetoric, since the majority of the "indigenous" population was Muslim.

## **Conclusions: writing a history of "ordinary" unions and affective bonds in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea**

Marriage practices – including the so-called "traditional" – have a surprisingly novel story to tell us about the social and cultural changes in the modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea societies. An in-depth analysis of marriage process (including divorce) challenges the paradigm of fixed definitions of "traditional" marriage patterns. It shed a light on the multifaceted nature of intimate ties across the modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Crucial cultural and social changes can be observed if we investigate how intimate ties have been legally, religiously or socially recognized and eventually stigmatized.

From the second half of nineteenth century to the 1960s is a hinge period because gender norms became a crucial territory for religious, national and imperial conflicts in the context of a military, economic and political crisis after the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876), the progressive dissolution of the Ottoman

Empire and WWI, colonial rule until WWII and the following nation-state formations. As observed by Giomi and Zerman, while

seeking to consolidate competing imperial, national and confessional loyalties, the different actors involved confronted each other over the bodies of the populations concerned. Eminently gendered, these bodies became a tool with which to trace frontiers between “ourselves” and “others”. (Giomi & Zerman, 2018, p. 20)

The centralisation and modernising bureaucratic reforms of the Tanzimat period led to a secular registration system in matters of matrimony in the 1880s (Behar, 2004). With the progressive dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, gendered bodies and norms became a battlefield within the contemporary rush of European powers for the occupation of the Arab Mediterranean and throughout the European colonial occupation. The modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea is an entangled space to observe how Ottoman, colonial and national authorities managed “affective states, in assessing both appropriate sentiments and those that threatened to fly out of control” (Stoler, 2009, p. 59). By writing and “translating” the histories of marriage and intimate ties *in* the Mediterranean and *in* the Red Sea (and not by writing histories of “Mediterranean” or “Islamic” marriages), we can radically subvert stereotyped ideas of the “Mediterraneanism” by providing a locally and historically situated understanding of the changes in intimate experiences of couples. Regarding the debate on the controversial Mediterranean “exceptionalism” (Herzfeld, 2005; Horden & Purcell, 2006), we can oppose a history of “exceptional normal” affective ties and conjugal bonds. The prism of marriages and intimate ties provides fascinating and challenging insights for an entangled history in the modern Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Firstly, because the history of marriage and affects in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea are deeply entangled we should consider the interactions with the other sides of the Mediterranean to properly understand European modern history. This history, which is relevant in its own terms, further enhances our knowledge of European and modern history because the social and cultural changes in these parts of the world had a deep impact also on Europe. The definitions of “authentic” marriages and intimate ties (debates on morality values and respectability, on divorce, bigamy, mixed and inter-religious marriages, cohabitation and long-distance marriages, romantic love and early and forced marriages) are intertwined with the affective practices of the “others” that are enacted and inhabited across the Mediterranean and Red Sea societies. The polyhedral definitions of “authentic” marriages and affective ties reveal the tensions in terms of nationhood, citizenship, kinship and reproduction ties that crossed Mediterranean and

Red Sea societies from the late Ottoman reforms to the nation-building process, with the states drafting national borders and conjugal norms.

The late Ottoman Empire and the colonial occupation (or “quasi-colonial”, such as in the case of Habsburg Bosnia), WWI and the rise of the nationalist and modernist movements, WWII and the nation-building process up through the 1950s-1960s, represented a pivotal age for the reorganisation of marriage and intimate bonds across and among Mediterranean and Red Sea societies. This period brought about new marriage norms and patterns imposed within the nation-building process as “traditional”, here to the detriment of a plurality of co-existent intimate ties. The time frame from the second half of nineteenth century to the 1960s is a hinge period connecting imperial, colonial and national histories in which gender norms became a crucial field for religious, national and imperial conflicts in the context of military, economic and political interactions. Conjugal and affective bonds – which are at the heart of Mediterranean and Red Sea cosmopolitanism and the hub of multiple social ties, mixed and shifting identities networks – have been the target of colonial, imperial and national anxieties for drafting and regulating borders. The reform movement and the reorganisation of the Ottoman millet system inaugurated a crucial era for the bureaucratisation and drafting of conjugal norms for Muslim, Jewish and Christian (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox) communities, as well as for their superposition and interactions (and eventually also assimilation) to civil and customary norms during the colonial rule.

Global conflicts, such as WWI, deeply impacted marriage practices, raising wider regional debates on romantic love and the “crisis of marriage”, divorces, displacements and long-distance marriages that were affecting families during the conflicts not only in the Northern Mediterranean, but also on the (post) Ottoman space.

Changes affecting “ordinary” conjugal bonds and marriage institutions reveal broader changes in the global economy, monetary transactions and literary and visual cultures.

The analysis of values and goods exchanged along the marriage process (including property, dowry, *mahr* and nuptial gifts) can open the way to explore changes affecting material cultures and the moral economy, such as the raising of the global economy and the loss of value of other material cultures related, for example, to handcrafts (such as jewellery), local trade or pastoralism.

The twentieth-century debates on marriages and conjugal love could be observed also through the Turkish and Arabic press and movies, photography and literature – by looking, for example, at how nationalist and modernist movements – in the Balkans and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean – portrayed

idealized images of couples, middle-class nuclear family and conjugal love in the context of the national-building process and the formation of modern states.

Marriage practices and intimate ties are the lens for making these shifts from the macroscale to microscale to observe social and cultural changes within the progressive dissolution of the Ottoman Empire until the 1950s-1960s. We should question the assumption that the reform process and the (semi)colonial occupation marginalised and relegated to the “private sphere” marriages, affects, and sexualities in the (post)Ottoman space; on the contrary, the reordering of a plurality of marriage practices and affective ties was at the very core of the colonial, imperial and national anxieties for drafting borders across the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Thus, the way in which intimate ties and marriage practices have been legally (un)recognised by different political and religious authorities reveals broader geo-political conflicts and confrontations between imperial, national, religious, and local entities.

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