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Crossing Multiple Borders: Naturalizations in Italian History between Metropole and Colonies, 1871–1941

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ABSTRACT

The article offers a fresh perspective on naturalization in the past by taking as a case study colonial Italy between the metropole and its (East and North) African territories from the 1870s to 1941. Building upon recent historiography, and based on new archival materials, the inquiry advances the current scholarly debate as it provides – for the first time – a full discussion linking the two dichotomies ‘citizen/foreigner’ and ‘citizen/indigenous person’ to the question of naturalization; thus, focusing on aliens and colonial natives together, as complex counter-figures to the citizen. Also, the study brings to light hitherto unexplored individual petitions to reflect on naturalization dynamics and to carry out an original investigation that adds a new historical dimension to the multi-disciplinary debate concerning ‘the citizenship–mobility nexus’. In particular, the research throws into sharp relief the ‘crossing of multiple borders’ and the interconnections between the acquisition of Italian citizenship and different forms of mobility in the past and across Italy’s metropolitan and imperial spaces.

RIASSUNTO

Il saggio offre una nuova prospettiva sulle naturalizzazioni nel passato esaminando il caso di studio italiano tra metropoli e colonie dell’Africa orientale e settentrionale dagli anni Settanta dell’ Ottocento al 1941. Prendendo spunto dalla recente storiografia e basandosi su nuove fonti d’archivio l’articolo contribuisce all’attuale dibattito accademico in quanto presenta per la prima volta un’ampia discussione che collega le due dicotomie ‘cittadino/straniero’ e ‘cittadino/indigeno’ alla questione della naturalizzazione, rivolgendo quindi contemporaneamente l’attenzione a stranieri e nativi coloniali come complesse controfigure del cittadino; inoltre l’indagine porta alla luce dei dossier individuali non ancora esplorati al fine di riflettere sulle dinamiche riguardanti il fenomeno in oggetto e di apportare un’ innovativa dimensione storica al dibattito multidisciplinare incentrato sul ‘nesso cittadinanza-mobilità’. In particolare, la ricerca evidenzia l’attraversamento di molteplici confini e le interconnessioni tra acquisizione della cittadinanza e diverse forme di mobilità, in epoca passata, e tra spazi metropolitani e imperiali d’Italia.

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PAROLE CHIAVE naturalizzazione; cittadinanza italiana; stranieri; nativi coloniali africani; nesso cittadinanza–mobilità

Introduction

Naturalization is a ‘legal fiction’ (Sahlins 1994), and a historical concept that has shaped the borders of citizenship through its inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics (Brubaker 1992). A legal and historical institution, it also intertwines with the phenomenon of migration through a complex set of interconnections underpinning the ‘citizenship–mobility nexus’ (Carling 2017; Strumia 2024). In particular, international mobility across borders can turn into settled migration in the new country of destination where resident immigrants may decide to take the road to integration and full citizenship. Also, settled migration may well have an impact on how the host State regulates access to citizenship status through naturalization. Thus, international and settled migratory phenomena affect notions of citizenship and related policies. In turn, acquisition of citizenship papers through the naturalization procedure can be an enabling factor for further mobility in different geographic contexts. Therefore, migration has an impact on naturalization, and the latter influences the former – in a two-way tangled relationship. In addition, different paths to naturalization allow a person to cross the juridical borders of a State legal system, thus complicating the academic debate about multiple linkages between citizenship and mobility.

But what do we mean by ‘naturalization’? The term refers to the individual process that makes a noncitizen voluntarily become a citizen in the course of their life, and more precisely, makes that person ‘like a natural-born citizen’ (Orgad 2017, 339). As Peter Sahlins (2004) reminds us by going back to the early modern period, the alien was subjected to significant legal incapacities that could be eliminated only by acquiring the quality of ‘natural’. Subsequently, as a ‘veritable act of political-social magic’ (Sayad 1993, 26) that transformed foreign candidates into new citizens, the naturalization system was exported from the European continent to the empires – being shaped by the Euro-centric principles of ‘*civiltà/non civiltà*’ (Costa 2004/2005) that operated between metropole and colonies.

Until now, the multifaceted debate concerning ‘naturalization in Italian history’ has focused on questions of naturalizing and denaturalizing civilians of enemy nationality during World War One (Caglioti 2017); on citizenship and identity issues in peninsular Italy (Donati 2013, 69–89, 98–110) and in colonial Libya (Donati 2021; Berhe 2022a, 2022b); as well as on the personal experiences of an English resident in Umbria in the nineteenth century

(Magliani 2001), of an East African native in the wide Italian imperial space (Camilleri 2022), and of a number of Ottoman subjects living in colonial Eritrea (Camilleri 2018). Aiming to make a fresh contribution to a growing historiography, the present article approaches the key concept of naturalization by using the dichotomies '*cittadino/straniero*' (citizen/foreigner) and '*cittadino/indigeno*' (citizen/indigenous person) as theoretical frameworks, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial Italy as a historical case study between the metropole and its (East and North) African territories. 'Binary distinctions' among 'figures and counter-figures' have been discussed by political theorist Patricia Mindus (2014) in her functional theory of citizenship; also, reflections on historical categorizations differentiating citizens, subjects and foreigners can be found in the edited book by Simona Berhe and Olindo De Napoli (2022) as well as in Pamela Ballinger's latest monograph (2020). Building upon this literature, and based on new archival materials, the article advances the current scholarship in several ways: it provides – for the first time – a full discussion linking our two dichotomies to the question of naturalization; thus, directing the attention to aliens *and* colonial natives together, as complex counter-figures to the citizen. Also, it delves into naturalization dynamics in relation to the multi-disciplinary debate about 'the citizenship–mobility nexus' by bringing into sharp relief the 'crossing of multiple borders' and the interconnections between acquisition of Italian citizenship and different forms of mobility, in the past and between metropole and colonies. Thirdly, it brings to light hitherto unexplored naturalization petitions that were selected as empirical cases for their historical relevance since they involved both the petitioner's will to become Italian by submitting an individual application and the discretionary power of Italy's competent authorities in deciding to grant the requested status. Finally, bearing in mind the challenges created by holes and lacunas in the Italian archival records, the article contributes to research of rare and scattered naturalization sources that were collected in Rome in the State Central Archive, the Historical Archive of the Chamber of Deputies, the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the two Libraries of the Italian Parliament (Low Chamber and Senate).

The inquiry is divided into three parts. By using in turn the dichotomous pairs 'citizen/foreigner' in the Italian peninsula (Part I), 'citizen/foreigner' in the empire (Part II), and 'citizen/indigenous' in the colonial lands (Part III), the study examines naturalization and related petitions concerning different typologies of aliens (i.e. *italiani non regnicoli* and non-Italian foreigners) as well as different categories of natives (i.e. 'colonial subjects' in East Africa and 'colonial citizens' in North Africa). Furthermore, the analysis is enriched throughout with reflections on linkages between naturalization and mobility so as to shed light on the 'crossing of multiple borders' between metropole and colonial spaces.

Naturalization and the citizen/foreigner dichotomy in the Italian peninsula

The binary differentiation citizen/alien characterizes the prevalent perspective in juridical studies.¹ From this viewpoint, the citizen is the person who belongs to the polity in line with the traditional tenet of legal membership which draws its origins from ancient Roman Law, sixteenth-century French jurist Jean Bodin, and nineteenth-century German juridical thinkers (Mindus 2014, 114–115, 125–132). The citizens are thus the ‘insiders’ whereas all the other individuals are the ‘outsiders’ who constitute either the category of ‘foreigners’ or the group of ‘stateless people’ with no juridical link to any State.²

The figure of the foreigner, corresponding to ‘what the citizen is not’ has never been ‘historically unitary’ (Costa 1999, 1: 44). In Italy, during the years under scrutiny, it took a specific dimension in law, political debates and cultural discourses because the term ‘foreigner’ clearly referred to an international immigrant or settled migrant holding the legal citizenship of another country, but the use of the word was enriched with two additional denominations. ‘Non-Italian aliens’ referred to foreigners in general whereas so-called ‘*italiani non regnicoli*’ were those co-ethnic immigrants who originated from such countries as the Austrian-Hungarian empire, France, and Switzerland and who were seen as ‘belonging to Italy’ on the basis of historically variable criteria that included linguistic, cultural, geographic and sentimental factors (Donati 2013, 71–76; Cattane 2022).

These different denominations shaped naturalization as well, complicating our dichotomy in a significant way since the juridical line separating the status of Italian citizens from their counter-figures was not the same for the two groups of ‘aliens’ and could only be crossed by following differentiated naturalization paths. In particular, as ‘less foreign than the other foreign citizens’ (Cattane 2022, 455), the *italiani non regnicoli* enjoyed a privileged status as they were entitled to a facilitated procedure. Consider, for example, the fast-tracked naturalization of Carlo Schanzer, a foreign immigrant holding Austrian subjecthood who acquired Italian citizenship in December 1888. Born in Vienna, Schanzer moved and settled in Rome where, as part of his migratory experience, he was naturalized as an *italiano non regnicolo* simply by submitting a ‘certificate of *pertinenza*’ issued by the city of Trieste and was rapidly able to get Italian citizen status on account of the *italianità* of this Adriatic town (see APCD 1903: 10141–10151; Buzzati 1916, 504–506; Bufardeci 1923, 608–609).³ Thus, Schanzer first crossed Italy’s international frontiers as an unknown young foreign migrant, and then, in the course of his life, he was transformed into a well-known naturalized Italian citizen who, thanks to his close connections with Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti, was able to pursue a career as an Italian deputy, senator, and Minister of Foreign Affairs

(Polsi 2018). Moreover, in crossing the legal boundaries of Italy's naturalization system from alienhood to Italian national citizenship, he was obliged to renounce his Austrian subjecthood (APCD 1903: 10148) since at the time it was important that everybody had 'one homeland and not more than one' (Gorrini 1890, 7). Dual citizenship was in fact considered 'an anomaly, at best, and an abomination, at worst' (Spiro 2010, 111), to be avoided at all costs.

While Schanzer – a former *non regnicolo* – was entitled to take an easy bureaucratic route, the 'non-Italian aliens' – until the introduction of the 1912 citizenship law – had to go through a double naturalization regime which involved the *piccola naturalità* by royal decree as 'the first step' and the *grande naturalità* by law as a 'second step' (Donati 2013, 82–85). The first procedure made an alien candidate into an Italian by allowing a settled immigrant to cross the legal line of our dichotomy on the basis of residence, feelings of Italianness and other indicators of integration in the host country. The second and more demanding step involved crossing an internal boundary that separated the naturalized Italians (with no political rights at the national level) from the naturalized Italians who were entitled to the right to vote and to be elected in the Italian parliament.

In this respect, new archival evidence indicates that three non-Italian foreigners were successful in going through *piccola naturalità* in the 1870s and 1880s (see APCD 1888b, 1896a, 1904) – thus shifting status from 'naturalising individuals' to 'naturalised (made natural)' people (Sayad 1993, 26). These are the cases of: Edoardo Driquet, a Hungarian long-term resident in Florence who climbed 'the first step' by acquiring Italian citizenship in March 1874; Matteo Maurogordato, a Greek born in Marseilles, who resided in Livorno and was naturalized in March 1878; and Ermanno Kössler, an Austrian subject and settled migrant in the Tuscan city of Prato who received his Italian naturalization papers in July 1888. So, after physically making their way across the geographic borders between their respective countries of origin and the new country of destination and settlement, these three alien migrants decided to become Italian citizens, crossing the boundary that demarcated the notions of civic exclusion and inclusion.

Later on in life, though, these three Italians were not equally successful in climbing 'the second step' (i.e. *grande naturalità*). Our archival documentation shows that Driquet was allowed to acquire Italy's highest citizenship status in July 1896 in return for his participation in the military campaigns of Italian Risorgimento (APCD 1896a, 1896b; APSR 1896a, 1896b), and that Kössler deserved the same civic prize in June 1904 because he was an influential businessman in the wool industry, employing thousands of workers in central Italy (APCD 1904, 1). In contrast, Maurogordato's petition was turned down by the Italian Chamber of Deputies in June 1888 (APCD 1888c, 3389) despite the fact that the alien's profile included 'praiseworthy services' to the benefit of 'his new adopted homeland', such as taking part in public life after his first

piccola naturalità (APCD 1888a, 1). This means that creation of full '*cives italicos*' – to borrow the expression from a coeval parliamentary voice⁴ – could only occur through a long, discretionary, and elitist procedure reserved for influential figures and for those who, similarly to English resident in Perugia Evelyn Waddington, had friends in high places (see Magliani 2001).

Finally, as the years passed, and the history of Italian citizenship went through continuities and discontinuities highlighted in Donati's book (2013), it is worth mentioning here that, following the rise of Fascism to power, our citizen/foreigner dichotomy and related naturalization dynamics came to be shaped by fascist criteria which distinguished Italy's dictatorial period from the previous liberal epoch. On the one hand, the Italian State put great emphasis upon political conformity and support for the Regime. For instance, from the mid-1920s onwards, fascist authorities defined a foreigner 'deserving' Italian citizenship not only on the basis of the alien's feelings of Italianness, but also for 'feelings of attachment and devotion to the Regime', as in the petition concerning Belgian citizen and long-term resident Emilio Giuseppe Larondelle, who was naturalized in Alessandria in January 1928.⁵ On the other hand, State antisemitism was put into practice: for example, the Soviet citizen Gregorio Maltzeff, resident in Rome, was allowed to acquire Italian citizenship status in February 1941 as he was 'not of Jewish race' ('*di razza non ebraica*') and had 'show[n] feelings of affinity with our nation and the Regime, as he had even offered gold upon the occasion of the *Giornata della Fede*' – when, in December 1935, the Italians were asked to donate their gold rings in support of Italy's economic effort in the Ethiopian war.⁶ Hence, the juridical passage from foreignness to citizenship was prohibited for some targeted 'Others'.

In conclusion, by using the prism of naturalization and the conceptual dichotomy citizen/foreigner in the Italian peninsula, we were able to highlight the crossing of international frontiers by our selected immigrants who, upon settlement, asked for Italian citizenship. Also, the study of individual petitions has allowed us to grasp how these aliens could (or could not) traverse the legal boundaries separating the two elements of our dichotomous pair. In the next section, we shall go from the metropole to Italy's African territories to raise further points of reflection.

Naturalization and the citizen/foreigner dichotomy in Italy's African empire

The binary distinction *cittadino/straniero* followed Italy's national flag to colonial Africa. The territories under Italian imperial rule were inhabited by colonial natives – who made up the majority population – as well as by groups of foreign immigrants or descendants of foreign migrants who originated from Europe, Asia and other African regions. Because of this multi-

ethnic and multi-religious foreign presence, the Italian colonizers adapted an already articulated concept of alienhood to the specific colonial contexts and made a distinction between two broad categories: on the one side, the aliens of European origin and 'similar civilization'; on the other side, the foreigners – not native of the Italian colonies – who were deemed to belong to a lower civilization than the European one and who were defined, in East Africa, as 'assimilated to the colonial subjects' (Bersani 2022, 93). Civilization was the key concept and, despite the inconsistent use of the term as well as the different interpretations surrounding the notion, it circulated widely as a persistent logic in all the Italian (North and East) African territories (Donati 2013, 141–142; Camilleri 2020, 36–40; Berhe 2022a, 126). Also, this distinction – based on Euro-centrism – was fundamental not only in theory but in everyday life. In fact, while European aliens were subject to Italy's civil code and legislation as well as to their respective European national norms as British, French or German citizens migrating and settling abroad, the group of the 'assimilated to the colonial subjects' – as non-Europeans – followed religious principles and local customary rules.

The juridical borders legally separating foreigners from the Italian colonizers and settlers could be crossed through the procedure of naturalization which in the empire transformed alien applicants into naturalized Italian (metropolitan) citizens. With regard to the individual petitions submitted by European foreign residents in East and North Africa, we are able to discuss new archival sources from the 1920s and 1930s. First, the Europeans who successfully acquired Italian citizenship in the colonial lands fulfilled the five-year residence requirement of the 1912 citizenship law because colonial soil was made equivalent to metropolitan territory; also, they were all well integrated into the African socio-economic environment thanks to their employment and social status. For instance, the three brothers Oreste, Giovanni and Milziade Patzimas, who were Greek citizens born in the Eritrean town of Asmara and resident in the Somali city of Mogadishu, were active merchants when they naturalized in East Africa in the 1930s.⁷ As for Libya, the documentation indicates that four Maltese British subjects who naturalized in 1925 were born and resident in Tripoli, and worked either for the colonial State as civil servants or in other crucial sectors of the colonial economy.⁸ It was therefore important that these aliens be allowed to make their way across our dichotomy and join the circle of Italy's (metropolitan) citizenry with a view to strengthening Italian colonial rule in both East and North Africa.

Secondly, an aspect that clearly emerges from our archival material is that in the colonies too, as in the metropole, Italian authorities put renewed emphasis on 'renunciation of the original citizenship' upon naturalization in order to prevent cases of dual nationality. For example, in reference to Libya, the Italian authorities explicitly mentioned that in accordance with English legislation, the Maltese applicants who acquired a foreign citizenship lost *ipso*

iure the quality of English subjects; therefore, upon Italian naturalization there was no need to submit the certificate of renunciation as this requirement was fulfilled through a foreign (English) norm.⁹ This was the case for the four mentioned Maltese who were naturalized in the 1920s, but also for the two English subjects and tradesmen, Armando Tayar and Saul Labi, born and resident in Tripoli, who were granted Italian citizenship in 1936.¹⁰ Whether in the metropole or a colony, a person could not be a subject of two countries and have two legal identities.

Thirdly, the archival record illuminates another aspect of historical importance: the naturalizations granted to the Patzimas brothers reveal to the scholar different trajectories of international mobility from Europe to Africa and across Italy's empire. Born in Eritrea as Greek descendants of Hellenic immigrants to East Africa, our three European aliens shared a family history of international migration that predated the Italian colonial period. In addition, as they moved from Eritrea to Somalia, most probably for their commercial activities, they had to pass through different administrative frontiers within Italy's imperial space as international migrants. Thus, bearing in mind their economic dynamism, it is possible that the decision to apply for Italian citizenship was determined, among other factors, by the plan to undertake new forms of mobility between the colonies and the metropole (and vice versa), made possible because Italian papers enabled them to travel freely to and from Italy, as well as across the empire, with the right to stay, go and return.

Finally, with regard to the late 1930s and the radicalization of the Fascist regime, we can highlight further developments in parallel with peninsular Italy. In 1936, in assessing the profiles of the Greek merchants in the Horn of Africa and of Saul Labi in North Africa, the Italian authorities emphasized the aliens' 'worth' by mentioning their 'devotion to the Regime' – a political tenet which had been circulating between Fascist Rome and its colonial lands for years.¹¹ Also, the '*israelita signor Labi*', to quote Italy's Council of State in April 1936, was a British subject who deserved Italian citizenship status because, born and bred in Tripoli, 'he [had] demonstrate[d] attachment to Italy and to the Regime, and was an esteemed tradesman in flourishing economic conditions'.¹² In other words the inclusion of foreign Jews into the circle of the Italian metropolitan citizenry was still a reality in Libya in 1936 and, as shown by Labi's naturalization file, 'being a Jew' was not yet a principle of exclusion from naturalization in the colonies. The story was to take a different path from 1938 onwards, since Italian antisemitic practice spread in colonial Africa too, in various ways and according to the specific territory and local administration (see Sarfatti 2023).

To sum up, by focusing on naturalization and the dichotomous notions of citizen/foreigner in the context of the African lands, we have raised further points of analysis on the crossing of the juridical boundaries of Italian

citizenship by resident Europeans as well as related physical trajectories of international movements. At this point, it is time to bring the *indigeni* into our discussion.

Naturalization and the citizen/indigenous dichotomy in the African territories

The theoretical paradigm and juridical cleavage differentiating the Italians on the one hand and Italy's colonial natives on the other came to be delineated by the distinction between 'metropolitan citizenship' reserved for the colonizers, and the various 'colonial subjecthood(s)' and 'colonial citizenship(s)' that were introduced in the African lands at different times as part of a system of 'gradations' of belonging, participation and relationships to the centre (Pergher 2022, 55–59). Also, the crucial factor defining our dichotomy in the (East and North) African space was the codification by colonial jurists, and the application by colonial judges, of the indigenous *statuto personale*. The latter, based on religion and traditions, was seen as antithetical to metropolitan citizenship and in clear opposition to European legal thought, but was instrumental to imperial domination (Costa 2004/2005, 214–218; Saada 2003, 18; 2017, 117–119).

This citizen/indigenous duality reflected the fact that the 'decisive opposition of *civiltà/non civiltà*' coincided with 'Europe's self-identification' with the first term and justified its 'duty' to civilize through actions of protection, tutelage and education (Costa 2004/2005, 173–187). Law was to be involved *in primis* in these educative actions through the introduction of 'a double legal system'. Thus, the dichotomy was accompanied by a sophisticated discourse on legal pluralism which ultimately emphasized the subordinate status of the colonial order and the higher status of European law (Rosoni 2012). This is why a native who acquired metropolitan citizenship lost the personal statute automatically.

Acquisition of the *cittadinanza italiana metropolitana* was legally possible for more than half a century of colonial rule in all the African territories under scrutiny, until the relevant norms were abrogated in the 1930s (Camilleri 2018; Donati 2013, 190–192). Yet, even if legally possible, naturalization was such a rare phenomenon that in reality only a tiny number of *indigeni* went through the bureaucratic procedure. This rarity can be explained by the fact that in a context of power relations the very existence of naturalized indigenous subjects sharing the status of metropolitan citizen with colonizers presented a 'significant ambiguity' (Nuzzo 2004/2005, 494–496). Moreover, as the African natives who went through naturalization had to give up their personal statute and risk social exclusion from their local community of coreligionists, it is not surprising that the number of colonial naturalizations

granted was minimal in the Italian empire as elsewhere (Donati 2021, 161–163; Saada 2003, 20).

Highly exclusive, and viewed as a more demanding ‘concession’ than the path reserved for foreigners (Bersani 2022, 102–103), the natives’ naturalization is worth discussing because some Africans did become Italian metropolitan citizens – thus making their way across juridical and civilizational lines. First, in reference to East Africa it is pertinent to ponder on the naturalization of Sengal Workneh, a colonial subject who requested Italian metropolitan citizenship in Eritrea in July 1906 and was eventually naturalized in Naples in 1919 (Camilleri 2022). The native’s life and personal bureaucratic odyssey are particularly instructive in relation to our citizenship–mobility debate as Workneh was a migrant and a citizen-in-the-making, going through geographic routes, civic paths, political-administrative frontiers and juridical shifts of status. In particular, he was an internal migrant, as he moved across East Africa by first attending the Italian school in Massawa, and then by working as an interpreter for the colonial administration in Asmara (Camilleri 2022) – certainly holding the travel document ‘*foglio di via*’ which had been a requirement for internal migration in colonial Eritrea since 1903 to make the natives’ movements temporary and contingent (Rosoni 2012, 86). Further, Workneh personified international and intra-imperial migration from colony to metropole as he moved to Italy several times (Camilleri 2022), probably with another temporary ‘*foglio di via*’ valid for international journeys because, as illustrated by Chiara Giorgi (2012, 226–227), Italian colonial authorities preferred issuing provisional travel documents rather than proper international passports in order to control the movements of natives. In addition, Workneh went through circular migration as he was relocated to Eritrea, and then, by moving again from colony to metropole in 1914, he was exceptionally allowed to serve in the Italian Army and fight in the Great War. Eventually, it was thanks to this patriotic military participation and his ‘achieved level of European civilization’ that he was able to naturalize and become an Italian metropolitan citizen after years of bureaucratic delays and racist Italian discourse (Camilleri 2022).

Moving now from the Horn of Africa to Libya, it is worth highlighting that during the 1920s, in the post-World War One context, three North African colonial citizens – possibly members or relatives of influential Jewish families in Tripoli – successfully applied for Italian metropolitan citizenship while working in the service of the colonial administration in that city (Donati 2021, 161–163). Also, between 1928 and 1938 a total of eight Muslim Libyans were allowed to acquire metropolitan status (Pergher 2022, 51) – a figure that we can confirm with one of our primary sources.¹³ The only traces of these naturalization petitions by Muslim applicants that we were able to find concern the Libyan native Halifa El Gazzar: born in Bengasi in

1899 and holder of the colonial citizenship status '*cittadinanza italiana libica*', he received the favourable opinion of Italy's Council of State for metropolitan citizenship in January 1928.¹⁴ In addition to being monogamous and a resident of Cyrenaica, El Gazzar held a governmental public office and, as emphasized by the Ministry of Colonies, was 'a great devotee of Italy'.¹⁵ So, by working for the colonial State as the other Libyan candidates and Workneh did, the native El Gazzar was 'at the borders of two worlds' (Saada 2003, 21), had a role of mediation between the two societies, and was seen as those '*evolués coloniaux*' (Saada 2005, 5–6) who for a number of reasons decided to scale the colonial power's legal hierarchy. Taken together, the indigenous juridical transformations from 'African' to 'metropolitan Italian' were rare, shaped by an ambiguous language of civilization, and surrounded by a context of pervasive colonial racism (see Camilleri 2020, 2022; Berhe and De Napoli eds. 2022).

Conclusion

This study has shown that the history of Italian naturalization between metropole and colonies is a history of 'crossing multiple borders'. From a quantitative viewpoint, the research has discussed a total of twenty-one individual petitions: seven applications concerned foreigners in the metropole, nine dossiers pertained to European residents in the Italian colonies, and five were related to the *indigeni*. The sources at our disposal do not provide comprehensive statistical figures that could enable us to quantify the various facets of the phenomenon during the liberal and fascist periods under scrutiny. Yet, the number of documented cases – here and elsewhere in the historiography – indicates that individual naturalizations were by no means substantial and that they increased somewhat for foreigners while remaining exceptional for the *indigeni*. Apparently the non-Italian residents who went through grand naturalization in the metropole did not even reach the number of twenty by the end of the nineteenth century (Magliani 2001, 257; Donati 2013, 85); those who naturalized in the quinquennium 1906–1910 were 363, including twenty-three with political rights at the national level (Gallo and Tintori 2006, 136–137); and the foreign Jews who acquired Italian citizenship status in the peninsula between 1920 and March 1939 were 1,126 (see Pizzuti 2009 and 2018). Also, from metropole to colonies, it appears that the Europeans who naturalized in the Italian African territories were about ten – to whom one should add a dozen naturalization requests by foreigners of not European origin living in Eritrea (Camilleri 2022, 33; 2018, 58); finally, the *indigeni* who were granted the *cittadinanza italiana metropolitana* were only thirteen by 1938 (Donati 2021, 161–163; Pergher 2022, 51; Camilleri 2022). This means that in the absence of full official statistics, the

qualitative analysis of past individual cases, scattered in many different archives, remains fundamental for historical research and that, as shown here, is most useful in exposing the way in which different dimensions of mobility are entangled with the issue of citizenship acquisition.

The first and second parts of the article pertaining to foreigners in the peninsula and in the empire, respectively, illustrate that naturalization is premised on international mobility and settled migration because only aliens who crossed international borders and were resident in the host country or territory (i.e. peninsular Italy and African colonies) were allowed to submit a naturalization petition and take the road towards Italian citizenship after meeting specific residence and integration criteria. The individuals we studied were in fact settled international migrants, or descendants of immigrant families, who for a complex interplay of internal and external ‘push and pull factors’ (see Bonifazi 2007, 22–24) had passed through geographic frontiers between and within different territorial contexts – thus physically crossing political–territorial boundaries via spatial mobility.

Also, the three parts of the article taken together point to the fact that both aliens and natives could traverse – through naturalization and according to the discretionary power of the Italian State – the juridical lines that separate our binary distinctions; thus individually crossing legal boundaries through historical legal fictions. A major difference, though, that distinguished the colonial natives from the European foreigners is that indigenous people involved in metropolitan naturalization had to complete a long path towards full civilization – additionally making their way across the colonial epoch’s controversial line between ‘*civiltà*’ and ‘*non civiltà*’. Finally, once they naturalized, all of them – aliens and natives alike – could potentially undertake new forms of mobility because the acquisition of Italian citizenship and related Italian papers could encourage further departures. In these cases, to borrow the words of legal scholar Francesca Strumia (2024, 138) and apply them to our historical period, one can emphasize a simple but indisputable principle: ‘citizenship status enable[d] movement’. Our study therefore adds a new historical dimension to the debate, and invites us to consider naturalization as a precious academic lens through which we can examine the ‘crossing of multiple borders’, past and present.

Notes

1. The present article uses the English terms ‘foreigners’ and ‘aliens’ as well as ‘foreignness’ and ‘alienhood’ as synonyms. For a semantic history of the words ‘strange’, ‘foreign’ and ‘alien’, see Rothwell (2010).
2. This research leaves out the phenomenon of *apolidia* (statelessness) which would deserve a full examination alone. For an in-depth analysis of this issue, turn to Siegelberg (2020).

3. The Italian word '*pertinenza*' refers to the juridical link uniting an individual to a municipality on the basis of ethnic and linguistic criteria. Its historical origin goes back to nineteenth-century Austrian law (Donati 2013, 324).
4. Archivio Storico della Camera dei Deputati, *Fondo Disegni e proposte di legge e incarti delle commissioni 1848–1943*, vol. 472: 124.
5. Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), *Fondo Consiglio di Stato – Sezione I Interno (FCSSPI)*, Meeting 25/1/1928, folder 63 "Larondelle Emilio – Domanda per conferimento della cittadinanza italiana."
6. ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 25/2/1941, folder 135 "Maltzeff Gregorio, russo – Cittadinanza italiana."
7. ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 14/4/1936, folder 498 "Patzimas fratelli Oreste, Giovanni e Milziade (cittadini ellenici) – Domanda di concessione della cittadinanza italiana."
8. ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 25/3/1925, folder 302 "Mifsud Salvatore – Domanda per conferimento della cittadinanza italiana", as well as folder 299 "Giordanella Francesco – Domanda per conferimento della cittadinanza italiana", and folder 305 "Costa Salvatore – Domanda per conferimento della cittadinanza italiana". Also, ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 11/3/1925, folder 244 "Cachia Salvatore – Domanda per conferimento della cittadinanza italiana."
9. ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 25/3/1925, folder 302.
10. ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 7/4/1936, folder 467 "Tayar Armando (cittadino inglese) – Domanda di concessione della cittadinanza italiana", and folder 471 "Labi Saul (cittadino inglese) – Domanda di concessione della cittadinanza italiana."
11. ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 14/4/1936, folder 498; ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 7/4/1936, folder 471.
12. ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 7/4/1936, folder 471.
13. Typed document issued by the Ministry of Italian Africa, 3 October 1938, in Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *Fondo Ministero Africa Italiana – Gabinetto Archivio Segreto 1°*, box 167, folder xiv.
14. ACS, *FCSSPI*, Meeting 4/1/1928, folder 1315 "Halifa El Gazzar: Domanda per il conferimento della cittadinanza metropolitana."
15. Ibid.

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