

## Visualizing the Egyptian 1919 Revolution: Unveiling Some Hidden Aspects of the British Policy in Egypt through Photo Analysis

Fatma Mohamed Fowzy\*<sup>a</sup> Doaa Adel Kandil<sup>a</sup> Omaina El-Shal<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, Helwan University, Egypt.

<sup>b</sup> Faculty of Archaeology and Tourism Guidance, MUST University, Egypt.

\*E-mail: [fatma.mohamed.post@fth.helwan.edu.eg](mailto:fatma.mohamed.post@fth.helwan.edu.eg)

### ABSTRACT

The Egyptian 1919 Revolution marked a turning point in Egypt's modern history. Despite the cardinal importance of this event, there is a considerable lack of scholarly works examining the visual heritage of the revolution. This research seeks to address this gap by analyzing largely ignored photographic sources to uncover the hidden aspects of the British policy during the revolution. Adopting a visual analytical approach, this research examines photographs taken during the revolution to explore the ways in which the British used visual media to control public opinion and suppress resistance. Through analyzing these photographs, while at the same time consulting contemporary archival sources and comparing them all together, the research reveals the often-overlooked role of visual media in shaping the historical narrative of the revolution. The findings of this study highlight the complex ways in which the British sought to manipulate information and conceal much of their policies and tactics during the Egyptian 1919 revolution.

### KEYWORDS

British Policy, 1919 Revolution, photographs, Saad Zaghlul, Visual Heritage.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Visual heritage, particularly in the form of photographs, holds immense value in capturing moments, preserving memories, and conveying historical narratives. Each

### المخلص

ثورة ١٩١٩ المصرية كانت نقطة تحول في تاريخ مصر الحديث. وعلى الرغم من أهميتها، إلا أن هناك نقص كبير في الدراسات التي تتناول التراث البصري لهذه الثورة. يهدف هذا البحث إلى سد هذه الفجوة من خلال تحليل المصادر المرئية التي تم تجاهلها إلى حد كبير لكشف جوانب السياسة البريطانية المخفية أثناء الثورة. يتناول هذا البحث الصور التي التقطت خلال الثورة لاستكشاف كيفية استخدام البريطانيين وسائل الإعلام المرئية للسيطرة على الرأي العام وقمع المقاومة، باستخدام المنهج التحليلي البصري. يكشف البحث عن دور الوسائط المرئية الذي غالبًا ما يتم تجاهله في تشكيل السرد التاريخي للثورة، من خلال تحليل تلك الصور ومقارنتها مع المصادر الأرشيفية المعاصرة. تسلط نتائج هذه الدراسة الضوء على الطرق المعقدة التي سعى البريطانيون من خلالها للتلاعب بالمعلومات وإخفاء الكثير من سياساتهم وتكتيكاتهم خلال ثورة ١٩١٩ المصرية.

### الكلمات الدالة

السياسة البريطانية، ثورة ١٩١٩، الصور، سعد زغلول، التراث المرئي.

photograph offers a glimpse into a specific moment and carries its own historical and cultural significance. Photography as a visual heritage is not limited to individual snapshots but extends to archives, and curated collections that document significant events. This is why photographs could promote a better understanding of the past. Nowadays, online platforms and digital archives facilitated broader access to such visual heritage opening up new possibilities for investigating and interpreting it. The visual heritage of the 1919 Egyptian revolution is no exception. This heritage constitutes a gold mine of information capable of constructing another historical narrative of the revolution.

It should be noted here that the 1919 Egyptian revolution was a country-wide revolution seeking national independence. It was the time when all segments of the Egyptian society united in their struggle for liberty (F. O. Document 1919). Nevertheless, such unity and solidarity among Egyptians hardly appear in the photographs taken amidst this event which arouses much surprise.

Through examining the content of some Egyptian and Foreign documents and comparing them with the photographic coverage in newspapers, this paper sheds light on the discernible discrepancy between published materials and actual occurrences on the ground. It also raises concerns about the potential manipulation of photographs by the British occupation authorities to conceal facts and mislead public opinion. It argues that the limited and rather lame photographic coverage was meant to hide the repressive measures taken on the ground to intimidate the revolutionaries and crush their resistance.

Needless to say, Egyptians were waiting with dying breath to gain their independence after the end of World War I. They placed their hopes on the 14 points announced by the American president Woodrow Wilson in his famous speech of January 1918. These “fourteen points” were probably a direct response to the Bolshevik demand for liberation of all colonized people. Accordingly, he included the Bolshevik term of self-determination in his fourteen points. Wilson’s ideas spread far beyond their intended audience and were embraced by national activists throughout the Middle East specifically Egypt (Maggie Clinton 2011, 175-179).

At this juncture, the Egyptians had already suffered a lot because of the exacerbated economic hardships which added fuel to fire. Things were aggravated with the suspension of cotton exports and the unjustifiable extension of the Martial law. Moreover, the use of corporal punishment had worsened the situation and kindled people’s resentment (Conditions in Egypt 1919, 16). On a wider scale, there was a mounting unrest in the international arena. This appeared vividly in the Maltese revolution and the Sette Giugno riots (Maggie Clinton 2011, 175-179) (The Sette Giugno Riots of 1919 n.d.). News of such unrest might have influenced the Egyptians and inspired them.

No wonder, the nationalist movement escalated, and a wave of public protest rose highly particularly among students and educated segments (Gifford 2020, 34). Amidst such ferment, Saad Zaghlul formed a delegation to travel to Paris to present the Egyptian case at the peace conference held there. However, the British occupation authorities refused their request and arrested him and his fellows and exiled them to Malta. Such British practices sparked the revolution of the Egyptians who were longing for salvation (‘Aşur 2005, 203).

The Times attributed the outbreak of the 1919 revolution in Egypt to the heavy bill which the Egyptians footed during World War I as well as to Ottoman and German instigation (Conditions in Egypt 1919, 16). This view which the Times adopted was probably based on the scene of the Turkish flag flown in some Egyptian villages (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.93, March 19 1919). In the same context, the Foreign Office documents stated that it was an anti-British, anti-Sultan and anti-foreign movement influenced by Bolshevik ideas and tendencies like the destruction of property:

“Extraneous influence was strongly suspected” (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO. 92, March 19 1919). Similarly, Earl Curzon assured General Allenby that the Nationalist committee who worked at Berlin during the war under Muhammad Farid Bey expanded their activism to Berne and Geneva and sent agents to spread disturbances in Egypt: “German Bolshevik have supplied them with gold and intend to distribute pamphlets by aero plane in Egypt from nearest Turkish territory” (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO. 147, April 5 1919).

On the other side, the prominent Egyptian writer Al 'Aqad ridiculed such British claims that attributed the revolution to Turkish and German influences, while ignoring the participation of 14 million individuals from various societal segments in this revolution (‘Aqād 1936, 230).

## 2. The Great Revolution in Cairo

The first spark of the revolution was attributed to university students, particularly those of the Law School, who led demonstrations and called for a strike. Zaghlul, a respected national figure and a former Minister of Education, inspired the students of the Law School to rebel. The revolutionary spirit soon spread among students of other schools like that of Engineering, Agriculture, Medicine, Commerce as well as Dar el ‘Aulum. It even reached Al Azhar institution and culminated into the ground breaking event of March 10th (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.75, March 11 1919) (Raf’ ai, Taurit sanat 1919: Tariḥ Miṣr Al Qaumi mn Sanat 1914 ila 1921, Vol.I, 1946, 126-130). The following day, tramway workers and wagoners initiated a strike. Shopkeepers except for Europeans closed their shops and abstained from selling their goods. Subsequently, advocates also joined the strike (‘Aqād 1936, 238). The angry masses soon poured into the streets demanding freedom and independence. The Foreign Office documents described Cairo’s peaceful demonstrations where “thousands took part headed by university intellectuals, without incident except where one interfered with by party of soldiers, one native casualty resulting” (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.89, March 18 1919).

The revolution soon found its way to other parts of the country turning into a nation-wide revolution, meanwhile the demonstrations which Cairo witnessed triggered the national sentiments and provided a blueprint to be followed elsewhere.

## 3. The spread of the revolution across the provinces



**Figure (1)** Encroachments on the rails, and locomotives of the railway between Tala and Tanta, (Courtesy of Samir el Ghazuli).

In no time, the revolution spanned across the entire country and its news flew far and wide. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, a train was prevented from leaving Shebin El Kom. (Raf' ai, *Taurit sanat 1919: Tariḥ Miṣr Al Qaumi mn Sanat 1914 ila 1921*, Vol.I, 1946, 159-170). On the following day, the revolution extended to Alexandria and Lower Egypt. News of unrest and disorder arrived from Tanta which was a town widely known for its resilience. Students of Al Azhar Institute and some other schools in Tanta participated in the demonstrations. The revolutionaries were met with gunfire from the British troops, leaving heavy casualties behind. As a result, more British reinforcements were sent to restore order to Tanta and bring things under control (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.78, March 12 1919).

The British authorities claimed that their troops were forced to fire on the crowds due to the irresponsible acts of the students who targeted the railway stations, rails, and locomotives between Tala and Tanta (Raf' ai, *Taurit sanat 1919: Tariḥ Miṣr Al Qaumi mn Sanat 1914 ila 1921*, Vol.I, 1946, 142) (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.78, March 12 1919). The photo shown above (figure1) depicts the response of the people, cutting the railway lines displaying one of the kinds of Egyptian riots.

It should be noted that World War I had left a wide impact on the Egyptian economy and added to the peasants' woes. This might have spurred some of revolutionary acts of the peasants. It seemed that they attacked the railway system to exert pressure on the exploitative occupation authorities whose vital interests were closely associated with this system. Presumably, it was a way of objection in the hope to draw attention to their fair cause. However, Bulfin, the British military leader, believed that these attacks were systematic ones meant to isolate the capital and cut off the food supplies to cause artificial scarcity, and invite food riots as the population faced hunger (Kitchen 2015). This was likely a far-fetched possibility that did not cross the minds of the revolutionaries who were overridden with bottled anger.



**Figure (2)** The revolution in the streets of Alexandria, *Zakirit Miṣr Al Mo'aṣra, Ṭawret 1919*, (Revolution, Zakirt Misr Al Mua'sira n.d.).

To the British chagrin, the revolution reached new heights and spread to Alexandria, Kafr El Sheikh, Mansura, Fayyum, Minya, Asyut, and Gerga. On March 12<sup>th</sup> for example, the revolutionaries marched from Al Morsy Abu Al 'Abbas square towards the governorate building at Ras Al Teen. Five days later a similar massive group was formed from students of high schools, industrial schools and religious institutes. However, the British soldiers surrounded them and fired their guns killing them in cold blood. Unfortunately, such bloody accidents continued along the month of April (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.89, March 18 1919). Unfortunately, no signs of such

attacks appeared in the photos. On the contrary they showed the streets of the city quiet and safe (figure 2).

Also, telegraph lines were cut off in several places in the countryside to interrupt the communication lines with Cairo as well as the railway lines from Tanta to Menouf (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.89, March 18 1919). The rest-houses at Sakha in Gharbiyya were turned down by the masses who came from Kafr El Sheikh. Unrest in Damietta was quelled by the Egyptian police with some losses. Large crowds assembled at Kalyub? and Wasta holding up trains cutting telegraph wires. Likewise, all communications with Upper Egypt were interrupted (F. O. Document, F.O.4071184 (1), NO.86, March 16 1919).

On the other hand, Abd Al Rahman Fahmy the secretary of the central committee of the *Wafd* party reported some British encroachments on the Egyptian villages such as Samalut near Minya and Al Badrashin in Giza, including incidents of looting agricultural products, excessive drinking, assaults on individuals, vandalism of shops, nighttime attacks of homes to steal money and gold, and acts of violence against women (Fahmi 1988, 215). Surprisingly, such British violations failed to stop the resistance of the downtrodden peasants who were determined to regain their independence at any cost.

It is noteworthy to say that the revolution did not only spread all over Egypt but also worked across class and gender boundaries. Extremely shocked by the explosive and rather unexpected situation, the British high officials in Egypt admitted that the revolution was “*national in the full sense of the word...and has won apparently the sympathy of all classes*” (F. O. Document 1919).

The accounts of contemporary Egyptian writers who eye witnessed the revolution like that of Abbas Al ‘Aqad shared the same view and regarded it an indicator of the rise of nationalism among Egyptians of all walks of life. He also refuted the British earlier claims that it was a mere unjustifiable act of rioting. Such national unity among all classes and religious communities in Egypt which appeared vividly at that time, together with the active participation of women provides ample proof of such growing national consciousness (‘Aqād 1936, 230).

#### 4. Participation of women in the Revolution



Figure (3) Egyptian women procession participating in the Revolution, (Revolution, FaroukMisr n.d.).



**Figure (4)** The Celebration of the people in the streets on April 8<sup>th</sup>. (Al Lataif Al Muṣaura 1919, 147-149).



**Figure (5)** Some local women celebrating on a cart, (Sabry, La révolution égyptienne : d'après des documents authentiques et des photographies prises au cours de la révolution, 21 photographies hors texte 1919).

To their credit, Egyptian women actively participated in the 1919 revolution, thus enduring hardships alongside with men. The first women's demonstration that took place on March 16<sup>th</sup> was led by Huda Sha'rawi, and other elite women. Approximately 300 upper-class women marched together, displaying flags and calling for Egypt's independence. They headed towards the house of Saad Zaghlul known as *Bayt Al Ummah* as it turned to be the destination of all nationalists then. The demonstration progressed along Qasr Al 'Ayni Street till it eventually reached Zaghlul's house. This women's march was a remarkable and rather unprecedented sight that highly impressed men at that time. Another women's demonstration was repeated four days later where women carrying flags were sieged for hours by the British occupation troops (Raf' ai, *Taurit sanat 1919: Tariḥ Miṣr Al Qaumi mn Sanat 1914 ila 1921*, Vol.I, 1946, 141,145). The American consul eye witnessed the blockade and intervened to lift it (Raf' ai, *Taurit sanat 1919: Tariḥ Miṣr Al Qaumi mn Sanat 1914 ila 1921*, Vol.I 1987, 234,235). The British Foreign Office confirmed the dispersal of a large women's procession, while a student demonstration occurred outside the American Agency concomitantly (F. O. Document, F.O.4071184 (1), NO.97, March 20 1919).

In his account of the revolution, Fahmy spoke of the participation of women from upper-class families and their walk amidst a vibrant atmosphere accompanied by applause from

onlookers and enthusiastic cheers and ululations "Zagharid" of other women at their homes (Fahmi 1988, 147).

The scene of those brave women who left their comfort zone and went into streets to defend their country had captured the attention of some foreign photographers, who were able to photograph them during their processions (Najār 2019, 67). Thankfully, they recorded this precious moment and preserved it for history (figure 3).

Besides, women organized a big campaign to boycott British products thus posing a threat to British economic interests and supporting the employees' boycott, with some tricks to get money instead of their salaries (I am not sure what this clause means, may be rephrase it) (Salim 2009, 35).

In the countryside peasant women likewise supported the revolution wholeheartedly. They backed men in this national struggle and participated in taking off the rails of trains. Unfortunately, the sacrifices made by poor women of the lower classes during the revolution were either ill-documented or entirely passed by.

On April 8<sup>th</sup>, women eagerly joined the momentous celebration held on the occasion of the release of Zaghlul and his return from exile. They stood next to men and shared with them the joy as much as they shared with them the pains earlier. In response, men recognized the importance of women's participation and their vital role in societal progress. The above photo (figure 4) shows women proudly carrying the national flag while their male family members were greeting the photographer of *Al Lataif* magazine (Al Lataif Al Musauara 1919, 176). The photos captured on this occasion revealed the diversity of women who took part in it. While elite women were in cars, lower-class women were on carts (Sabry, *Alṭaurah al Miṣriah mn Ḥilal Uṭaiq ḥaqiqiah U ṣuar Ultuqitat A'ṭnaa' Alṭaurah*, translated by: Magdi Kurḥan, vol. 2003, 61, 63). They all rushed altogether into the streets to welcome the return of Zaghlul and his fellows (figure 5).

However, these festive vibes did not last for long due to the continuation of the British militant attacks against the armless people (Raf'ai, *Ṭaurit sanat 1919: Tariḥ Miṣr Al Qaumi mn Sanat 1914 ila 1921, Vol.I 1987, 234, 235*).

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, women participated in the revolution again. This time women from all social classes joined the demonstration. This resulted in the martyrdom of one of them named "Shafiqa Muhammed" who breached the British blockade and stormed the office of the British High Commissioner (Salim 2009, 33).

With much determination, women continued to participate in subsequent events and joined funeral processions of the martyrs. For example, women marched again from al Hilmia to Dawawin Street on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1919 ('Aṣur 2005, 235-245). This time they protested against Milner's Committee and expressed their refusal to it. They were part of a notable demonstration where they proceeded towards Zaghlul's house without prior authorization and were cordoned off for hours under the sun as usual (Russell 1923, 207, 209).

Despite the involvement of Egyptian women in the political struggle on several occasions during the Egyptian 1919 revolution, the coverage of their remarkable contributions in newspapers was insufficient. The main focus was given to the changing attitude of Egyptian women, who were no longer confined to their houses rather than their courageous encounters with the British occupation authorities (Miḥaa'il, *Al ṣaḥafah Al Miṣriah U ṭaurit 1919 1993, 99,100*).

Women used to wear at that time black knee-level gowns and cover their faces with either a white or black *burqa'* as was the prevailing tradition then before putting it off. Before the eruption of the Egyptian 1919 Revolution, photographing women was limited.

However, it became a new trend in its aftermath thus documenting their activism in the 20s and 30s of the past century. They also shed light on their earliest careers especially when it comes to middleclass women. Photographs of women particularly in the nursing and teaching professions were commonly available as they were annually photographed in front of their respective work institutions (Ahram n.d.).



**Figure (6)** The female students of Al Saniyya School participating in the Revolution, (Revolution, FaroukMisr n.d.).

In other words, the use of photographs played a significant role in highlighting the national awakening that encompassed women. The rise of feminist consciousness in Egypt had coincided with the advent of modernization in the 19th century. Though limited, media portrayal of women's participation challenged the prevailing notion that women had not played a significant role in Egypt's nationalist movement. Early studies focused on Upper-class figures like Huda Sha'arawi and Safiyya Zaghlul, but some recent research highlights the leading role of middle-class women in the feminist cause (Ramadani 2013, 39-52). Notably, photographs capturing female students of Al Saniyya School have been discovered, further documenting their participation in the revolution (figure 6).

## 5. Participation of Different Religious Communities in the Revolution



**Figure (7)** Azharites in 1919 martyrs funerals, (Revolution, Procession- damaged slide-Taxiphote Slide n.d.).

The British authorities were much alarmed with the turn of events of the 1919 revolution (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.67, March 15 1919) as well as its fervent spirit that can be described as a “*Nationalist movement which was at first purely political is now taking a religious turn. Center of the religious disturbances was Al Azhar Mosque*” (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.144, April 4 1919). Rightly put, “*Al Azhar remains the center of sedition*” (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.146, April 4 1919). During the revolution, Al Azhar Mosque served as a gathering place for the revolutionaries and their very stronghold. Therefore, the British authorities ordered its closure except for prayers. They also blocked access to the mosque and imposed a siege on it. Starting from March 10<sup>th</sup>, scholars and students of Al Azhar institution participated in the revolution. They bravely went into demonstrations and shouted against the British occupation. Furthermore, they utilized their oratory skills and persuasive power to mobilize people and encourage them to take action while some of them fell martyrs and some walked in funerals (figure 7) (Gāzi 2021, 94-96).



**Figure (8)** Unity between Muslim and Copts which appeared in the flags raised during the Egyptian Revolution of 1919, (Al Lataif Al Musauara 1919, 157).

Feeling committed towards their homeland, Copts, likewise willingly participated in the 1919 revolution. The Archpriest Qommus Sergius Abdel Malak proved to be an influential figure who used to preach people which earned him the title of “preacher of the revolution”. Significantly, he delivered fiery sermons in mosques like Al Azhar Mosque, as well as in public squares like Opera Square and even led demonstrations from Al Azhar Mosque (‘Afifi 2001, 13-25). Such national unity continued to disturb the British authorities and arouse their worries: “*It became an established fact that some Coptic Priests preached to crowd from a pulpit in Al Azhar on Friday*” (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.99, March 22 1919).

It comes as little surprise that the revolution flags that were flown everywhere contained a crescent and a cross interwoven together. They became a symbol of the unrivaled spirit of 1919 (Ibrahim 2011, 61, 66). Equally important, many Copts had sacrificed their lives during the revolution to defend the national cause (Sabry, *Alṭaurah al Miṣriah mn Ḥilal Uṭaiq ḥaqiqiah U ṣuar Ultuqitat A’ṭnaa’* Alṭaurah, translated by: Magdi Kurḥan, vol. 2003, 51).

In the same context, they held a large nationalist meeting at one of the Cairene Coptic Churches while many Azhari sheikhs and Coptic Priests attended it. During this meeting the Coptic Patriarch gave an anti-British speech and confirmed that the Copts are firmly united with Muslims (F. O. Document, FO.141/781/8915, April 24 1919).

In short, the Coptic community had strongly supported the Nationalist movement and played a crucial role in the revolution.

It is quite evident that the Copts had put their trust in Zaghlul because of his religious tolerance. He acknowledged Coptic nationalism and made it very clear that all elements of the nation should be equally treated. This credibility had apparently facilitated the cooperation between Copts and Muslims in the course of the revolution. Regardless to their religious differences, both elements shared the same national dream of independence from British rule. One must take into account that the British authorities had deliberately excluded the Copts, denied them many privileges while at the same time favored Westerners and Maltese ever since the declaration of Egypt a protectorate (Miḥaa'il, Al Wiḥdah Al Waṭaniah fi Ṭawrit 1919 1980, 16). Such unfair treatment must have nurtured a sense of bitterness among the Copts, provoked their resentment and urged them to join the revolution and stand fiercely in the face of injustice (Terry 2015).

The above photo, was taken to prove the participation of the Copts in the revolution, as they all looked to the Khawaja "Khidig" from the shop of the famous photographer the Khawaja "Metry" (figure 8). The photo was taken on April 8<sup>th</sup>, when the British authority released Zaghlul and his friends and allowed them to travel to Paris. All people of Egypt no matter their religion united together and worked as one hand. The memorial photo was later published in the Egyptian press showing an Azhari sheikh hand in hand with a Coptic chaplain hoisting two flags; the national flag and the flag of tolerance and fraternity with the Crescent embracing the Cross. It is commonly agreed that this flag that distinguished the revolution had made its first public appearance during a Women's demonstration (ṣalaq 2010, 34). Members of the Young Men Christian Association appeared also in the photo standing nearby holding a panel with the name of their association (Al Lataif Al Musauara 1919, 157).

Out of fear, the British newspapers limited the publication of photos depicting interfaith unity and cohesion except for private ones. Undoubtedly such national unity had spoiled the British vicious policy of "divide to rule", which they always implemented to tighten their grip over Egypt. Therefore, they tried hard to conceal this national unity and color the revolution with a religious color rather than a national one (Miḥaa'il, Al Wafd w Al Wiḥdah Al Waṭaniah fi Ṭawrit 1919 1994, 158, 159).



**Figure (9)** Funeral of the Martyrs of the Goldsmiths' union, (Revolution, Zakirt Misr Al Mua'sira n.d.).

Part of the Jewish community in Egypt had also contributed to the 1919 revolution. The photo displayed above (figure 9) depicts the funeral procession of the fallen martyrs who belonged to the goldsmiths' union that was largely dominated by Jews. It is noteworthy to say that the symbols of the Crescent, Cross, and David star were combined together in the flag held by the mourners. Other photographs captured a coffin belonging to a Jewish person accompanied with a flag and carried across the streets: “Some Jews were seen participating in the Azhar students' parades, dressed in Azharite costumes. Jews in April 11, joined with Moslems and Copts in meeting at Al Azhar” (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.165, April 11 1919). Nevertheless, other contemporary accounts suspected their indulgence with the secret police (Şalaq 2010, 24).

## 6. Participation of Foreigners in the Revolution



**Figure (10)** Europeans next to Egyptians in the course of Egyptian 1919 Revolution carrying the flag of Italy, (Sabry, *La révolution égyptienne : d'après des documents authentiques et des photographies prises au cours de la révolution, 21 photographies hors texte 1919*).

To one's surprise, many foreigners who took residence in Egypt and lived peacefully there sided with the revolutionaries and sympathized with them. Apparently, they did not regard themselves strangers who should distance themselves from the ongoing events (figure 10). For example the photo in figure 10 revealed Italian flags being raised during the 1919 revolution. Such photographs challenged the British portrayal of the revolution as a chaotic uprising militating against Europeans. It confirmed that the revolutionaries did not target Europeans or attack their property. On the contrary, Europeans mainly Italians and Greeks, identifiable with their hats, had supported the revolution and joined the lines of the Egyptians while calling for independence. Some of them were even arrested by the British forces (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.117, March 22 1919).

*Journal du Caire* for example spoke of the participation of Europeans in the revolution (Sabry, *Alṭaurah al Miṣriah mn Ḥilal Uṭaiq ḥaqiqiah U ṣuar Ultuqitat A'tnaa' Alṭaurah*, translated by: Magdi Kurḥan, vol. 2003, 65). In the same context, Allenby explained to Earl Curzon in one of their correspondences that the Italian community in Egypt were agitated and were against the British occupation of Egypt. No wonder, the Italian Minister warned his community in Egypt that they were on no account to make demonstrations (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), No. 277, May 1 1919) most likely to save them troubles with the British and ensure their safety.

In his account of the large demonstration that took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, Fahmy stressed likewise on the inclusive engagement of various segments of the Egyptian society in it including some Europeans who actively participated after getting an official permission of the British authority (Fahmi 1988, 149,150). Similarly, the Italian intellectual Gioacchino Volpe described how the rise of the nationalist 1919 revolution destroyed all barriers that once separated European and native spaces (Volpe 1924, 335, 348-350).

On the occasion of the release of Zaghlul, some Europeans participated in the public celebrations and shared with them this moment of triumph (Najār 2019, 114). This provides evidence that the revolution as previously mentioned was not directed against the Europeans and that the revolutionaries had no intention whatsoever to harm the Europeans or damage their property (Fahmi 1988, 150) (Najār 2019, 66) as falsely propagated by the British.

## 7. The British Crackdown on the Revolutionaries



**Figure (11)** British-Egyptian troops attempt to quell riots in Cairo, (Riots n.d.).

In figure 11, British officials were seen instructing some officers of the Egyptian police who were armed with sticks to restrain the revolutionaries.

To suppress the revolution, the British authorities yielded to violence as openly stated in some British official documents. It was made clear that their use of force would eventually quell the unrest, but at the cost of significant bloodshed and deepening resentment (F. O. Document 1919). As a result, victims fell in these encounters. For example, thirteen native Egyptians were killed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March at Sayyeda Zaynab neighborhood while twenty-seven were wounded (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), NO.117, March 22 1919). It should be taken into account that the Egyptian population were “practically unarmed” (F. O. Document 1919) thus couldn’t withstand such forcible measures at the words of Sir Milne Cheetham. In other words, they met the peaceful resistance of the Egyptians with utter violence.

Accordingly, the number of casualties rose highly especially with the blind use of machine guns. A contemporary magazine published in French called *Bourse Egyptienne* reported 206 wounded natives in later encounters (Zaghlul Pasha's Charges 1919, 12). No wonder, members of the *Wafd* party and physicians protested such British brutality while people from several neighborhoods submitted petitions to Sultan Fouad regarding the encroachments of the British soldiers on pedestrians, women and children (Fahmi 1988, 242).

As the Egyptian revolution continued, many revolutionaries lost their lives each day. Foreign Press referred to the heavy death toll which the Egyptians shouldered as a result of the British suppressive measures that were taken to subdue the revolutionaries and mute their voice. According to official reports published on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1919, around 800 Egyptians were killed and 1,600 were injured during the British intervention (F. O. Document, F.O.407/185 (1), The Case of Egypt Presented by Joseph W.Folk. 1919). These estimated figures leave no doubt that the suppression of the Egyptian revolution was one of the Imperial post-war bloodier scenes that stained the hands of the British (Kitchen 2015, 249-267).

Such iron-fist policy adopted by the British authorities was not restricted to Cairo and major cities but was also extended to the countryside. British Tommies or soldiers were indulged in acts of violence such as serial rape, arson, pillage and flogging of the native Egyptians in the villages during the 1919 revolution ( Conditions in Egypt 1919) (Conference 1919, 90, 91). Such British violations must have inflamed the countryside and aroused the wrath of the peasants.

To escape responsibility, the British authorities had seemingly forced the Egyptian police on certain occasions to act on their behalf and perpetrate acts of violence to intimidate the peasants and bridle their will to resist.



**Figure (12)** Egyptian Locals were celebrating and standing on top of the trams on April 8<sup>th</sup>, (Revolution, Journées 8 et 9 Avril 1919- [damaged slide] - Taxiphote Slides n.d.).

Failing to contain the situation in Egypt, Sir Reinald Wingate was replaced by General Edmund Allenby who was appointed a Special High Commissioner of Egypt. He was given a free hand and was empowered to take whatever actions needed to maintain order (Magazine, Uaqā'a Al Miṣriah, Issue no. 26 1919). The departure of Wingate and the release of Zaghlul in its wake marked a notable change in the British policy. They realized at last that the harsh forcible measures were futile ones and less capable of calming the masses. However, this did not last for long because the British forces soon resumed their notorious practices during the public celebration of Zaghlul's return. The British reports confirmed that *"there were large peaceful demonstrations in the morning of April 8, in Cairo held by consent of authorities. Unfortunately, a fight took place this afternoon between a few of British troops and native Egyptians, resulting in several casualties"* (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), No. 63, April 8 1919).

The famous photos of the revolution were those of April 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> which were concerned with the celebration of the Egyptians in the streets in a rather chaotic manner and their ascension to the top of the tram (figure12) (Fahmi 1988, 220). Most of the

photos that reached us about the revolution were either photos of the celebration day or the funeral processions.

### 8. A news blackout

The outbreak of the World War I in 1914 and the imposition of the Martial Law on Egypt after declaring it a British protectorate had led eventually to the rise of a heavy-handed censorship that restrained the local press. As a result, all published content had to be approved first by the British occupation authorities. This left a profound impact on the media landscape, including the use of photographs, during the 1919 revolution in Egypt (Fahmy 2011, 150, 151). Furthermore, a ban was set on publishing photos that could provide information without getting the consent of the British authorities (Magazine, *Uaqāa''a Al Miṣriah*, Issue no. 43 1916).

It comes as no surprise that the previously mentioned British crackdown on the revolutionaries, and the terrible atrocities committed by their forces barely appeared in the photographic coverage of the 1919 Egyptian revolution. One can safely say that the British authorities were clever enough to wipe out all traces that might convict them.



Figure (13) A mass funeral, (Revolution, *Zakirt Misr Al Mua'sira* n.d.).



Figure (14) British Officers directing their cannons towards a funeral, (Courtesy of Samir Al Ghazuli).

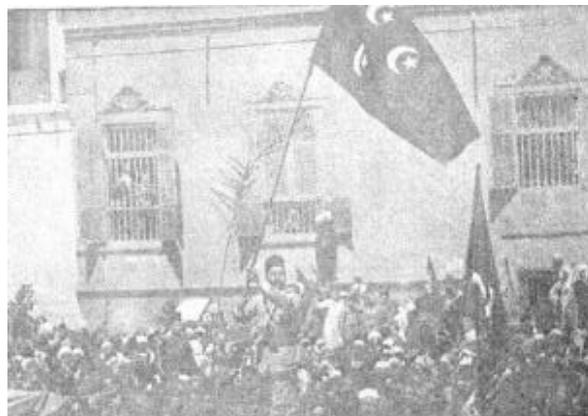
The only exception was a few scattered but rather illuminating photos that unveiled some of the events of the revolution and exposed the evils of the British occupation. Among those photos are the photos taken of the mass funerals where people gathered to bid farewell to those patriots who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their country. The funerals as appeared in (figure13) were very well-organized and contained all segments

of the society. Such photos had not only depicted the nation's grief and high esteem of the fallen martyrs but also stood as indelible evidence of the British massive brutality in dealing with the revolutionaries. On April 6<sup>th</sup>, the British admitted that “*about 5000 persons took part in the funeral procession of native killed, included Ulama, students, Egyptian Army officers, military and policemen, members of coastguards and palace police*” (F. O. Document, F.O.407/184 (1), An Account of the Progress of Events in Cairo and Provinces from April 6 to April 12 1919). More significantly, the British troops appeared in one of those few photos directing their weapons towards the funeral (figure14). This blunt and rather inconsiderate attitude of the British troops towards the natives amidst such rough time and their marked disrespect to people’s grief revealed the true face of the occupation. Sheikh Abd Al Wahab Al Najar confirmed in his memories that the deployment of armed cars in the streets to terrify the Egyptians was among the proposed measures taken to suppress the revolution (Najār 2019, 87).



**Figure (15)** Egyptian policemen beating captured Egyptian rioter at the Markaz, Kafr El Sheik, 1919, (Album n.d.).

The photographic record of the revolution in the provinces had failed likewise to show the British encroachment on the peasants. In contrast, the British usually circulated photos showing peaceful pedestrian activities in the countryside. Another exception is to be found in the above photo (figure15) that depicted the Egyptian police alongside with some British officers beating villagers after stripping them of their clothes.



**Figure (16)** The participation of the Egyptian Police in the Revolution, (Sabry, La révolution égyptienne : d'après des documents authentiques et des photographies prises au cours de la révolution, 21 photographies hors texte 1919).

Although the British occupation authorities tightened the noose on photographers, an Egyptian historian named Mohamed Sabry challenged this enforced news blackout. He utilized photography as a medium to reveal facts on the ground and deliver messages to the broader European/French audience. He collected photographs that truthfully and accurately conveyed the nature of the 1919 revolution and the extent of oppression that the Egyptians suffered from (Sabry, *Alṭaurah al Miṣriah mn Ḥilal Uṭaiq ḥaqiqiah U ṣuar Ultuqitat A'tnaa' Alṭaurah*, translated by: Magdi Kurḥan, vol. 2003, 25). Among such illuminating photos was a photo that showed the participation of part of the Egyptian Police in the Revolution despite the British restrictions (figure16).

The British admitted that Egyptian officers were concerned about the potential backlash if their men fired on the crowd alongside with the British troops (F. O. Document, F.O.4071184 (1), NO.98, March 21 1919). General Cheetham confirmed that discipline only prevented the Egyptian troops from turning against them (F. O. Document, F.O.4071184 (1), NO.116, March 22 1919).



**Figure (17)** An airplane crash through the roof of a tailor's shop, (The Illustrated London News 1919, 963).

Luckily, by the end of 1919, the *Illustrated London News* published a peculiar but largely insightful photo. This photo did not feature the ongoing events and repercussions of the 1919 Egyptian Revolution but rather depicted an airplane crash. The aircraft that was flying at extremely low altitude with two British airmen on board crashed at the roof of a tailor's shop resulting in the death of the clerk and the injuring of the airmen (figure17) (The Illustrated London News 1919, 963). The importance of this photo lies in showing the frequent presence of aircrafts hovering above the Egyptian sky during the revolution. For example, aircrafts flew over the mosque of Ahmed Ibn Tulun on April 5<sup>th</sup> (Fahmi 1988, 207) to shatter the morals of the revolutionaries and frighten them. Accordingly, the photo indirectly confirmed the use of aircrafts to suppress the revolution of the armless Egyptians. It was also one of the proposed inhumane measures for dealing with the situation. They even considered cannonading the residential quarters or dropping bombs on them (Najār 2019, 87). Furthermore, the memoirs of the revolutionaries contained long lists of British barbarian attacks on the civilians like killing children, breaking into houses and humiliating people while arrogantly shouting “*Egyptians deserve no mercy*” (Najār 2019, 109).

The album and collection held by the Imperial War Museum in London corroborated the endeavor of the British to conceal their strong-arm policy which they relentlessly

pursued to establish their hegemony over the supposedly inferior Egyptians while claiming superiority.



**Figure (18)** Hordes of Cairo's residents in the streets during the 1919 revolution, *Zakirit Mişr Al Mo 'aşra, Tawret 1919*, (Revolution, Zakirt Misr Al Mua'sira n.d.).

Despite the fact that the revolution encompassed Egyptians from different social backgrounds, the available photos failed to accurately represent the revolutionaries who acted in harmony. Instead, they predominantly focused on unorganized crowds and impoverished children, creating the impression that the revolution was led by a mob (figure 18).

The British press described the Egyptians who participated in the revolution as “*Ro ‘a ‘a*” or rabble and mob (Miḥaa’il, *Al ṣaḥafah Al Mişriah U ṭaurit 1919* 1993, 85). They were citing the same pejorative term that appeared in the official police reports of the revolution then. This was probably meant to stigmatize the revolutionaries and distort the image of the revolution. On the contrary, as a resource person Fahmy confirmed in his memoirs that the revolutionaries were not “*Ro ‘a ‘a*” but average Egyptians who belonged to all segments of the society and covered diverse spectrum (Fahmi 1988, 149).

## 9. Conclusion

The photographs of the 1919 Egyptian revolution, while falling short of accurately capturing the true essence of the revolution due to the heavy-handed British censorship that restrained the press, do convey the spirit of unity, solidarity, and cohesion among Egyptians no matter their backgrounds. On the other hand, the British authorities had tried through the photos which they circulated to blacken the image of the revolutionaries and portray them as horde of savages who lack the capacity of self-rule. This was supposedly meant to mislead the international public opinion and hide the facts on the ground. Consequently, they would find pretext to prolong the occupation and justify their crackdown on the revolutionaries.

The documents from the Foreign Office provide valuable insights into the hidden details within some of the available photos of the revolution. However, it is important to note that part of the visual legacy of the 1919 revolution had seemingly been twisted to serve the British interests. Therefore, consulting the contemporary archival sources and reading literary works produced at that time are indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of the revolution.

The majority of the revolution’s photos were likely taken by newspaper reporters and photographers, while only a small number of them were captured by individuals. Besides,

it is possible that some British soldiers were equipped with Kodak cameras or were assigned with documenting the events.

The photographic representations of the revolution often portrayed a disorganized and impoverished mob, overlooking the organized nature of the revolution initiated by various segments of Egyptian society. Despite the British efforts to conceal violations against the Egyptian population, funeral photographs served as indirect evidence of British brutality. The involvement of women in the revolution marked a significant societal shift documented by the photos. Furthermore, the photos had succeeded in recording the effective participation of all religious communities in the revolution as well as all the segments of the Egyptian society for the first time in the national resistance. Nevertheless, photographic records of rural areas fell short of exposing the British constant infringement of the peasants.

Photographs depicting the celebratory atmosphere of Saad Zaghloul's release and the lifting of travel restrictions provide genuine representations of the revolution, though images of chaos and vandalism are often prioritized. Moreover, the support which the revolutionaries received from some Europeans residing in Egypt was clearly manifested in the photos too.

Due to the urgent need to preserve the visual heritage of the 1919 Egyptian revolution, it is recommended to establish a permanent photo exhibition at "Bayt Al Umma" or Saad Zaghlul's house. This will ensure the preservation and accessibility of these valuable visual records commemorating this national revolution.

### Acknowledgement

I extend my gratitude to Samir Al Ghazuli, the son of the Egyptian photographer Mohamed Al Ghazuli, for generously granting me access to his father's photographic archive. It has been a valuable opportunity to view and utilize these historical photographs in my research.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

'Afifi, Mohamed. 2001. *Al Din U Al Siasa fi Mişr Al Mu'aşrah "Al Qumus Sirgius"*. Cairo: Dar Al ŝruq.

'Aqād, 'Abbas Al. 1936. *Sa'ad Zağlul: Sirah u Taḥiah*. Cairo: Matba'at Ḥigazi.

'Aşur, Sa'aid. 2005. *Aḥbar Al Maşrin fi Al Qarn Al 'Aişrin 1900-1925*. Cairo: Maktabat Al A'dab.

Ahram, Online. n.d. *The brave women of Egypt: A history in pictures*. Accessed April 15, 2023. <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/96011.aspx>.

*Al Lataif Al Musauara*. 1919. May 5: 176.

*Al Lataif Al Musauara*. 1919. April 28: 157.

*Al Lataif Al Muşaura*. 1919. April 21: 147, 149.

- Album, WWI Photographs. n.d. *National Army Museum New Zealand*. Accessed April 15, 2023. <https://nam.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/4572?keywords=&lsk=a46ca94362e192b2784783948399f8d5>.
- Conference, Paris Peace. 1919. "Egyptian delegation to the Peace conference, collection of official correspondence from 1918, to July 14, 1919." Paris: the Delegation. 90,91.
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), An Account of the Progress of Events in Cairo and Provinces from April 6 to April 12."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO. 147, April 5."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), No. 277, May 1." .
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO. 92, March 19."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.117, March 22."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.144, April 4."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.165, April 11."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.67, March 15."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.75, March 11."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.78, March 12." .
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.89, March 18."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.93, March 19." .
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/185 (1), The Case of Egypt Presented by Joseph W.Folk."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), No. 63, April 8."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.116, March 22."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.146, April 4."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.86, March 16."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.97, March 20." .
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.98, March 21." .
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.99, March 22."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "FO.141/781/8915, April 24."
- Document, Foreign Office. 1919. "F.O.407/184 (1), NO.87, March 17."
- Fahmi, 'Abd el Rahman. 1988. *„Muḩakirāt 'Abd el Raḩman Fahmi: Uaumiāt Miṣr Al Siāsiah, Vol. I*. Cairo: Al Haia'h Al Miṣriah Al 'Amah.
- Fahmy, Ziad. 2011. *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture, 1870-1919* . Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.

- Ġāzi, Imad Abu. 2021. *1919 Hikāiat al Taurah u al Tuar*. Cairo: Dar Al ūruq.
- Gifford, Jayne. 2020. *Britain in Egypt*. London: Tauris Publisher.
- Ibrahim, Vivian. 2011. *The Copts of Egypt: Challenges of Modernisation and Identity*. London: I.B.Tauris publisher.
- Kitchen, James. 2015. "Violence in Defence of Empire." *Journal of Modern European History, Vol. 13, No. 2* 249-267.
- Magazine, Official. 1919. "Uaqāa' a Al Miŝriah, Issue no. 26." March 25.
- . 1916. "Uaqāa' a Al Miŝriah, Issue no. 43." May 16: 2.
- Maggie Clinton. 2011. "Review The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism by Erez Manela, , spring, Vol.19, No.1." *The Arab Studies Journal* 175-179.
- Miĥaa'il, Ramzi. 1994. *Al Waŝd w Al Wiĥdah Al Waṭaniah fi Tawrit 1919*. Cairo,: Dar Al 'Arab.
- . 1993. *Al ŝaĥafah Al Miŝriah U tawrit 1919*. Cairo: Al Haia' Al Miŝriah Al 'Amah lil Kitab.
- . 1980. *Al Wiĥdah Al Waṭaniah fi Tawrit 1919*. Cairo: Al Haia'h Al Miŝriah Al 'Amah.
- Najār, 'Abd Al Wahab Al. 2019. "Muzakirat Al ŝaiĥ 'Abd Al Wahab Al Najār 'An Aĥdat Al Taurah Sanat 1919: Al Aiam Al Ĥamra'." *Al Azhar*, June: 67.
- Raf' ai, 'Abdel Raĥman Al. 1987. *Tawrit sanat 1919: Tariĥ Miŝr Al Qaumi mn Sanat 1914 ila 1921, Vol.I*. Cairo: Dar Al Ma'arif.
- . 1946. *Tawrit sanat 1919: Tariĥ Miŝr Al Qaumi mn Sanat 1914 ila 1921, Vol.I*. Cairo: Maktabit al Nahdah al Miŝria.
- Ramadani, Nabila. 2013. "Women in the 1919 Egyptian Revolution: From Feminist Awakening to Nationalist Political Activism." *Journal of International Women's Studies, Vol.14, March* 39-52.
- Revolution, 1919. n.d. *FaroukMisr*. Accessed August 4, 2023. [https://faroukmisr.net/revolution\\_1919.htm](https://faroukmisr.net/revolution_1919.htm).
- . n.d. *Journées 8 et 9 Avril 1919- [damaged slide] - Taxiphote Slides*. Accessed April 15, 2023. <https://digitalcollections.aucegypt.edu/digital/collection/p15795coll15/id/1157/rec/31>.
- . n.d. *Procession- damaged slide- Taxiphote Slide*. Accessed August 4, 2023. <https://digitalcollections.aucegypt.edu/digital/collection/p15795coll15/id/1645/rec/1>.
- . n.d. *Zakirt Misr Al Mua'sira*. Accessed April 15, 2023. [http://modernegypt.bibalex.org/NewViewer.aspx?albumName=IM\\_814&currentImage=IM\\_19439&ImageIndex=0](http://modernegypt.bibalex.org/NewViewer.aspx?albumName=IM_814&currentImage=IM_19439&ImageIndex=0).
- Riots, Wafd. n.d. *The British Empire*. Accessed April 15, 2023. <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/wafdriot.htm>.

- Russell, Thomas. 1923. *Egyptian Service* . London: John Murray.
- Sabry, Muhamed. 1919. *La révolution égyptienne : d'après des documents authentiques et des photographies prises au cours de la révolution, 21 photographies hors texte*. Pris: J.Vrin.
- . 2003. *Alṭaurah al Miṣriah mn Ḥilal Uṭaiq ḥaqiqiah U ṣuar Ultuqitat A'ṭnaa' Alṭaurah, translated by: Magdi Kurḥan, vol.* Cairo: Al Maṣru'a Al Qaumi lil Targama,.
- ṣalaq, Ahmed Al. 2010. *Al A'iam Al ḥamraa': Muzakirat Al ṣiḥ 'Abd Al Wahab Al Nagar'An Ṭaurit 1919* . Cairo: Dar Al Kutub U Al Uaṭaiq Al Qaumia.
- Salim, Latifah. 2009. "Al Mara'h u Ṭaurit 1919." In *Tis'aun 'Ama 'ala Ṭaurit 1919*, by Ahmad Al ṣalaq, 35. Cairo: Dar Al Kutub u Al Uaṭāa'iq Al Qaumia Markaz Tariḥ Miṣr Al Mu'aṣir.
- Terry, Stavridis. 2015. *The Egyptian Revolution of 1919: a struggle for self-determination, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3660.9120>, .*
1919. "The Illustrated London News." December 13: 963.
- The London Times*. 1919. " Conditions in Egypt." May 16: 16.
- The London Times, November 10*. 1919. "Zaghlul Pasha's Charges." 12.
- n.d. *The Sette Giugno Riots of 1919*. Accessed April 15, 2023. The Sette Giugno Riots of 1919 - Teleskola.
- Volpe, Gioacchino. 1924. *Fra Storia e Politica*. Roma.