

## Libya 1945\*

Lillo Arbib

**Abstract.** This paper is taken from a book by Lillo Arbib, published by the author at his own expenses (*Ebrei in Libia tra Idris e Gheddafi, 1947-1970. Pagine di storia contemporanea* ["Jews in Libya between Idris and Gheddafi, 1947-1970. Pages of Contemporary History"]). Israel: Bat Yam, 1970, pp. 1-24). It is a living testimony of the 1945 pogrom in Libya. At that time Arbib was the secretary of the Tripolitan Jewish Community. In 1948 he assumed the presidency of the Tripolitan Jewish Community. After the 1948 pogrom, he took part in the meeting on the American aircraft carrier Keasege, in which there was stipulated the agreement that made possible the mass exodus of the Jewish community to Israel.

**Keywords:** Jewish Community of Libya, Libya, Anti-Semitism, Zionism.



Cover of the book by Lillo Arbib, *Ebrei in Libia tra Idris e Gheddafi, 1947-1970. Pagine di storia contemporanea* ["Jews in Libya between Idris and Gheddafi, 1947-1970. Pages of Contemporary History"]. Israel: Bat Yam, 1970

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## Chapter I, Part I (May 1948)

Clouds of imminent war were gathering in the skies of the Middle East in the beginning of May 1948.

The defenseless Jewish communities in the Arab countries (Middle East and North Africa), where then living in a climate of terror owing to the imminent danger of finding themselves suddenly transformed in hostages and at the mercy of primitive frantic and irresponsible populations.

Great Britain, that had then the mandate on Palestine, declared to all the world her decision of renouncing to that mandate and decided to leave that country at the date of May 15, 1948.

Palestine, inhabited then by 300,000 Arabs and 600,000 Jews will be left to her destiny.

Hours of anguish and a very heavy atmosphere full of unforeseen, burdened on all, but especially on the Jewish population who were living minorities in the Arab communities (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and the Maghreb).

### **The situation in Libya**

Libya was an Italian colony from October 1911 to January 1943. On January 23, 1943, after the war events of WW2, Libya was occupied by the troops of the British -8<sup>th</sup> Army under the command of Marshal Montgomery.

From that date was established in the country a British military government (B.M.A – (British Military Administration) having as Chief Administrator in 1943 the Brigadier General Travers Robert Blackley.

In the Province of Tripoli was appointed the lieutenant Colonel C. Oulton, as S.C.A.O (senior civil affairs officer). Both the Chief administrator and the S.C.A.O belonged to the British Colonial Office and had a long experience in managing indigenous populations by the law of “divide et impera” .

From the beginning of British occupation, the government allowed a lot of Libyan exiles that left the country during the Italian Era (32 years) to return. The British administration brought with it also a lot of “imported Arab personnel” (wearing a red Fez on the heads), either Syrians, Palestinians or Egyptians, that were placed in all government services and in the police.

The return of the exiles and the presence of the “Red Fez”, succeeded in creating a nationalist conscience and agitation between the Arab population, whose political feeling weakened during the Italian period.

The leaders of Jewish community in Tripolitania, having their responsibility, were studying ways to maintain and defend the Jewish population amounting to 30,000 souls of which 25,000 in Tripoli the city and 5,000 in different centers in the inter land (Amrus, Tagiura, Zavia, Kussabat, Homs, Zliten and Misurata). In the precedent weeks, the streets of Tripoli were crowded by thousands of Arabs coming from Maghreb countries (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco). There were the Jihad (holy war) volunteers; they were all travelling in the *Balbia Road* (the highway between the Tunisian border and the Egyptian one), to fight the holy war against the Jews.

The bitter experience of November 1945 Pogrom, that left 140 dead Jews in Tripolitania, hundreds of wounded and invalids and damages for millions of Sterling (which no government agreed to refund ever), made the Jewish population very suspicious and wary.

The commercial and handicraft life was almost paralyzed, the *Suks* in the Arab city and the stores in the new city started to close at the first hours in the afternoon. The atmosphere was that of wait and see – but of What? What was supposed to happen? The notables Arabs understood that something had to happen, but nobody knew exactly what was boiling in the pot. Libya was fighting to obtain her independence. From other Arab countries were coming former exiles and the agents of the Arab League. The British intelligence service was represented by very outstanding clerks: Major Greatorex, Lieutenant Mc Dearden, who were doing very big efforts to collect from all Arab world the most violent exiles of the Italian period.

So, returned after more than 30 years, Hag Beshir Sadawy, Khaled Bey El Gargani, Mohammed Suehly, Taher El-Mraied, Ahmed On Sof and others.

They left Libya after Italian occupation of 1911, and after the breakdowns of peace talks between Italy and the Senussi Movement in 1919.

Used by the British, these people spoke about Libyan independence but in reality were acting on behalf of Arab League transforming Libya in a Vulcan.

Great Britain in that period had to achieve two different targets: coming close to the end of the mandate on Palestine she wanted to prove that all the Arab world was against the proclamation of a Jewish state in Palestine and in the same time wanted to prove that the Libyan populations were very primitive and still not ready for self-government, in the Annual Report of the B.M.A of 1945, we can read at page 11: "Since the middle of this year a plebiscite on the future of the country would decide on behalf of a British protectorate.

That is still true for the tribal regions, but in the cities nationalist ambitions are growing and therefore we are thinking about the complete independence or about a stronger union with the Arab League. The nationalist party is advancing.

### **Community situation**

Following the anti Jewish disorders of November 1945, the Jewish community had a long period of instability and financial difficulties.

The Presidency of the Community which had only administrative and educational powers, found itself mixed up in political decisions which it did not have the right to decide.

The president in that period, Zachino Habib (z.l.) ,was a British citizen, nevertheless had for various times to participate to the meetings of the National United Front (*Gebaa Wataneya*) and against his best advice, to make declarations that would in the end oblige the whole community.

These were moments of decision of the Libyan future: The Arab population, being under the influence of the exiles who returned home, and of the Arab League, under Abdurrahman Azzam Bey, a man who knew Libya very well, having participated in various insurrection movements against Italy, was inclined a total independence and refused whichever interlude of Italian or an Arab state provisional administration.

The president Zachino Habib (z.l.) had to give a declaration of sympathy for the movement promoted by the National United Front for the independence on behalf of all the Jewish population, the same Jewish population that was waiting for a decision on U.N in favor of an Italian *trusteeship*.

This way the president had to give his resignations and was substituted by a government commissioner by name of Shalom Nahum, up to then his deputy.

At the end of 1947, after new elections, the presidency was given to Dr. Maurizio Forti (z.l.) that stayed in power up to April 30, 1948.

During the presidency of Maurizio Forti Jews started a more active participation in Libyan political parties, a representative appeared in front of the UN *Quadripartite commission* in its session of January 23, 1948, and the community organized a ceremony on behalf of the exile Beshir Bey Sadawy that returned to Tripoli in the *Mehari Hotel*. In front of the UN Commission , the community was represented by Maurizio Forti and Rag. Lillo Arbib who explained to the members of the Minorities Commission, the position of Libyan Jews in that historical moment, the economic situation of the country and the opinion of the Jewish collectivity toward the future of the country. In order to better understand the events of that period, is interesting to remind that to better prepare the country to an autonomous government, the military administrations started a program for the institution of a court that was called "the Ahliya Court" with narrow competences specially for criminal law.

The official inauguration of The Ahliya Court was celebrated in Villa Volpi in Sciara Ben Ashur, the residence of the chief administrator Brigadier General Blackley on December 4, 1947.

In that occasion were appointed 21 magistrates of whom 15 Arabs and 6 Jews, all were chosen between the most cultured elements of the population.

The Jewish judges nominated in that occasion were: Lillo Arbib son of Simeon, Babani Meghnagi son of Abraham, Mushi Nahum son of Iedidiae, Joseph Habib son of Elia, Isacco Nahum Sembira son of Juda and Benjamin Racah son of Elia.

These magistrates remained on their function up to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Libya in 1952, up to the forming of Libyan Courts (in that occasion were abolished the Ahliya Court and the Rabbinical Court, and the personal statute of Jews was devolved to a single judge, namely Mr. Barbani Meghnagi, and the business of treating the personal statute of Arab population remained in the hands of the *Sharaitic Court*.

I think it to be very important that for our better understanding to remind here few sentences of the speeches pronounced by the brigadier General Blackley, Chief Administrator and by the Mufti of Libya Shaich Abul-Asad El Alam in that ceremony, as we can find in the Public Record of War Office no. 238/241 X 86848, pages 14, 15, 16 and 17 with the indication "secret".

### **From the speech of the Chief Administrator:**

«When I invited you to drink tea with me today, I had no intention whatsoever to make a speech.

But today all the Middle Eastern countries and the world in general think about what is happening in Palestine, and news about what happens in that country are strongly expected here in Tripoli, that's why I see it as necessary to dedicate few words to the attitude of B.M.A. about expressing these sentiments through public manifestations in Tripoli.

The B.M.A thinks that manifestations are to be accepted only if normal methods of making known the popular sentiments to the external world would be refused in Tripoli we enforced no restrictions.

Every political party and every private individual has the right to write and to telegraph to whoever political personality or political institution in whichever part of the world, and our political parties did that and more. They even sent their delegates to meet with different bodies outside the country.

For that reason here are not needed demonstrations. Here in Tripoli we do not want them, especially now that the population is hungry and life necessities will push irresponsible people to profit of general disorders to steal and plunder without limits.

Because the B.M.A has the supreme duty to maintain order and security in any case, we will give no permit for whichever demonstrations, and, in case it will happen by itself we will care about it in the most adequate matter».

After this long introduction, the Chief Administrator, wanted intelligently to remind the sad events of November 1945, with the following conclusions:

«Irresponsible people started the disorders of November 1945 causing the death of many innocent people.

According to my opinion, in that occasion we did not use the army enough early in order to help the civil power destabilize order. We did not understand how people of a community living side by side with another community for a 1000 years could attack it randomly.

Nevertheless, though I do not for see disorders in the immediate future, I want it to be very clear that the Military Distric Commander and I personally agreed on how to stop disorders least them blow.

I cannot give you the details of our program, I can only say you that if people have to be killed in future disorders, we want the trouble makers to be kicked ad not their innocent victims.

The best precaution of all against the disorders will be the example and the influence of responsible Libyans of every race and religion. I then ask all the people present here today and others like you to so in a way that the good name of this country will no more return to the reputation level of 1945».

To the speech of Brigadier General Blackley answered his beatitude the Mufti Shech Abulasaad El Alem. I will bring here few parts of his speech:

«My opinion is that is more convenient for us Libyans not to intervene in what is happening in Palestine in a way that could damage us and not help the Palestinians. We are Arabs and we have to express our sentiments of support and brotherhood to other Arab states, but we have never to degenerate in violence. Our sentiments toward the other Arab brothers can be expressed through protests and complaints or other pacific means that will give good results to the Palestinians and in the same time not damaging to us. Our national

duty today is to live in peace with the Jewish community as we lived for various centuries. We regret and deplore the disorders of November 1945 that were caused by irresponsible persons. Whichever future disorder between us and the Jews will have very bad consequences and its political consequences will fall on both communities whose interests are intertwined.

Therefore we have to do our best to prevent whichever risk, in order to give to the administration the sufficient time to care about the agricultural and economic interest of the country is the actual moment and to allow the administration to assist us in achieving our national aspirations. We will therefore do all the possible efforts in order to live in peace together and to collaborate for the maintaining of what is benefitting to us all».

The “Secret Relation” of the public record of war office, from which I have reported the two speeches was connected to a letter signed by civil liaison officer Major F.G McLean from which I report here a small part that will help us to have a more complete vision of the local situation.

«Some recent events in Italy and Palestine created naturally a certain tension between Muslims of Tripolitarians and the Jewish community. A recent declaration of a certain Mr. Cantoni (he means Raffaele Cantoni) Chief of the Union of Jewish Communities in Italy, that 30,000 Jews of Libya wanted strongly the return of an Italian administrations, had a big publicity in Europe, in Arab press and in the radio. Whichever would it be the truth, of that declaration, it produced alarm and desperation among the local Jews and a big nuisance among the Arab nationalists. The Jewish community hurried to inform Cantoni and the press that the Jews of Tripolitania are giving full support to Arab aspirations to independence».

The letter ends with the following words:

«Even if is still not sure that incidents will not break out, nevertheless the atmosphere is quiet and the Jews are dedicated to their normal activities.

The Libyan press gave a wide diffusion to the speeches of the chief administrator and the mufti and then the situation stayed sufficiently calm, except for few student parades during the month of December, under the auspices of various political parties.

The Jewish community, by its past, was having contacts, through very discreet, with various political parties. In the frame of these contacts, and in view of the lack of whichever protection by the occupying nation (military administration of an enemy occupied country B.M.A., the Jews tried to establish relations with Arab nationalist leaders in order to obtain a certain security. Being present in Libya after long years of exile, the nationalist chief Bashir Bey Sa’adawy, the Jewish Community Council decided to do a party on his honor in the Hotel Mehari. Between others Mr. Sa’adawy was chosen because of his old good relations with few Jewish families. I remember that after a message of salute to the Presidency of the Community, Mr. Sa’adawy said more or less that: “Your invitation to this nice ceremony made my heart happy from one side and from other saddened me.

I am sad having being invited by you as “Jewish Community” though you are a part of the Libyan people and the Libyan people is an indivisible unit of which you are an organic part».

To the ceremony were invited representative of various political parties, all the representative of the Jewish community, the representative of Greek and Maltese communities and some of the member of British military authorities.

Despite the attempts by the Jews to arrange toward excitement of the Arab population, caused by one side, by political activity for the achievement of the independence, and from other side, the inner need of the Arabs around the world to show their bitter reaction waiting for the decision of English American enquiry commission for Palestine, the Libyan Arabs made very massive psychological action in order to induce the Jews to become members of the National United Front, were made very heavy pressure also on Maccabi and Ben Yehuda organizations to obtain from them declarations in favor of Libyan Arab aspirations to independence.

To convince the low Arab people of Tripoli to agree, the Arab bosses told a fairytale about a dream by Mr. Abdulrahman Azzam Pasha, the secretary of Arab League in which he was admonished to care that no harm will happen to the Jews. Inside the Jewish community thought the

situation became unbearable and the presidency with all the council lived long days of crisis. The general economical situation was not enough prosperous, and the community was in a big turmoil because Passover was coming and the community had to provide as usual enough food for 11,000 poor people, to give them Kosher flour, Matzot bread, wine, meat and more.

During the month of March 1948, the community crisis got to its end with the resignation of the president Dr. Forti. The coming close of the end of the British mandate in Palestine (May 15, 1948) and the certainty that Jews would in the end proclaim their state, made the community crisis even harder and difficult to solve because no one of the members of council agreed to take on himself the community business in such a critical moment.

In all Arab countries were expected anti-Jewish disorders with the end of British mandate on Palestine.

Libya was in that period the most vulnerable between all the surrounding Arab countries, being under British military and administration and under members of the Colonial Office, notoriously hostile to Jews.

In the key places of the administration were the officials of the Intelligence Service and the British C.I.D (Colonial Intelligence Department) with years of service in the Middle Eastern countries knowing well the Arab populations, their language, their mentality and their customs.

The Chief Administrator was as I said before, Brigadier General Travers Blackley, coming from English-Egyptian Sudan, and Chief of the Civil Administration, was the Colonel C. Oulton (S.C.A.O), with function of superior on all the province, who did never hide his deep aversion toward the Jews.

Colonel C. Oulton was sadly famous because of his eye covered by a black monocle that made his face a disagreeable mask). The Jewish community Council was based on free professionals and merchants very known between Jews, Arabs and Italians, but nobody of them has the courage to put their candidature. Big pressure were done on me to accept the presidency and in various occasions I was reminded of my past and present time of active Zionist and Revisionist. Preparing to the proclamation of the Jewish state the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, was necessary to strengthen the Diaspora and to give it the necessary prestige in a difficult moment. I was convinced to answer to acts of force by Arabs, by acts of force by Jews even if British forces would intervene. After the pogrom of November 1945, the Jewish youth received a certain instruction in auto-defense and in using weapons. In May 1946 came from Palestine a Shaliah (a man in mission), who mixed with the Palestinian Jewish soldiers of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, having the precise function to teach youngsters to use arms. This person known with the name of "Dod" (uncle), was as well called "The invisible man". He had no fixed address and he was sleeping every day in a different place. Under his guide was organized a very efficient *Haganah* (defense).

He organized small groups, not known between themselves that went to train in empty places near Tripoli and bought weapons in the black market, and through Arab underworld, without the knowledge of the British. By this way were trained more than 150 boys and 50 girls. The group was strengthened by few tens of Jewish policemen out of service. Near the end of 1947, though the local police got strong suspicion on the activity of the "uncle" (in reality Israel Gorelik) and he was sent out of Tripoli. The community knew about the existence of this activity, but officially had to ignore it. Nevertheless, a very big help moral and material was given to the Hagana by the members of Council Zion Nemni, Dr. Andrea Viterbo, and in a very active manner, furnishing weapons by Mr. Vittorio Zard, the President of Maccabi club and by Mr. Ben Attia Refael called "Stalin", who was in contact with Arab smugglers in the border between Libya and Tunisia. Being sure to rely on this active force on the given moment, at least to defend the Jewish district (the Hara) I agreed to become president and my nomination was approved at unanimity by the council and was communicated according to the law to the British Chief Administrator, Brigadier General Blackley who with administrative decree confirmed it by April 20, 1948.

The decree concerning my nomination was published in Tripolitanian Gazette no. 10 of 1948, May 15, 1948, General Advice no. 474. I started my function on May 1, 1948, and I immediately contacted some of my collaborators to have precise news on the protection of the Hara and on its clandestine weapons. Who knows the structure of the Jewish districts of Tripoli, knows that it is based on an infinity of very narrow streets with building mostly on one floor and with low roofs connected one with the other and then simply defensible in case of necessity.

One of the main entrances was near the Spanish wall near the new gate (Fum el Bab), which through very near the Arab zone of the city, was at my advice very apt to be defended, The other gate was opened towards Giama'a Mahmud near the school "Pietro Verri" that was connected to other city neighborhoods all inhabited by Jews.

Other entrances were these of Bab El Bahr coming from the port area, and from the monument to the fallen, which while inhabited by fanatic Arabs has also a mixed population of Jews, Maltese and Italians.

Being sure of the collaboration of the youngsters, good trained by the Hagana and knowing logistic situation of the neighborhoods inhabited by the Jews, I was pleased to accept the propositions of the colleagues of the community council and I was elected president by unanimity, like I referred before.

Immediately after my election as president, had a secret meeting with my collaborators and I gave a free hand to the underground arming of the neighborhood of Hara, which being then still inhabited by a large population appeared like a stronghold. The Jews living in the new city could either depend on their proper self defense, or they could temporary transfer to the Hara in the building of Talmud Tora (Dar Serussi) or in other buildings belonging to the community. All the entrances and the exit of the Hara were reinforced and young ready to defend the Jewish honor optimally.

A Jewish doctor (Dr. Andrea Viterbo) member of the council of the community, would organize the first medical, medical aid, having his car protected by signs of International Red Cross. One of the first acts of my administration was sending a direct and personally signed letter to the Governor Blackley (protocol 351, dated May 14, 1948), explaining him the deep concern of our community for the Arab activity in general and for the local Arab press attitude toward the events in Palestine and what could happen around the 15 and 16 of May, with the ending of the mandate and the British leaving the Palestinian territory. The answer of governor Blackley was immediate. *The government anticipating the end of the British mandate in Palestine, had already taken all the measures necessary, giving emergency instructions and to the police and to the high command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army in order to properly curb whichever disorders* (letter 16/L of May 14, 1948). The Governor did not only send me a letter by hand, with his personal officer, he also phoned me and authorized me to reassure the Jewish collectivity that the government was watchful and had all the situation under control. I have to excuse myself to the reader in these pages having treated this delicate argument in first person and I will continue to do so for more pages to come.

Owing to the gravity of situation I had then to personally assume responsibility for very hard decisions getting active help from Rav Shelomo Yelloz Z.L, who in these days always supported me, maintaining continuous contacts with civil and military authorities in whichever hour of day and night. A strong moral support was also given to me by the Rabbi Hai Gabizon Z.L, by his various conferences in the synagogue and his appeals to the public with the words "Al Tira 'Avdi Ya'akov, Al Tira" (Do not fear, Jacob sons). However, the Jewish population was worried considering that some Arab circles were excited and they disturbed the Jews threatening and acting with arrogance toward them. Also in Cirenaica the situation was very serious. There was constituted a "Committee for the defense of Palestine" that had a permanent office in Benghazi in order to organize groups of volunteers to send to different Arab governments. In that committee there was a man called Mustafa Sarkazy who proposed to distribute pamphlets inviting the Arab population not to menace or attack the local Jews, having they nothing to do with Palestine. There was another

group headed by Abulssalam Besekri and Awad Zaakoub who insisted on instigating disorders against Jews. It looked that the Jewish community of Benghazi sent then a committee to the Emir Idris Essenussi asking for his protection. It looks that the meeting with the Emir did not achieve any big results owing to the facts that the Arab league headed by Azzam Pasha refused to accept volunteers of Cirenaica, declaring that they could not come with the flag of Senussi who was still not recognized as a sovereign and independent State.

Nevertheless in the city of Benghazi the situation was very tense and there were noticed various individual attacks against Jews.

The archive of the War Office reports that only the store of Mr. Sion Saadun was burned and destroyed in Omar El Muktar street, though eyewitnesses reported that there were a lot of destroyed and burned stones but there were not dead people.

The Emir Idris instead of addressing the committee members for the defense of Palestine and instead of convincing them not to menace and attack the local Jews, stormed the British military administration and in Benghazi and in Cairo with telegrams holding it responsible of every worsening of the local situation, a matter that would cause heavy damages to the position of Libya that was fighting to obtain her independence. In Tripolitania, the date of 15 of May passed without serious incidents despite the general excitement. The local newspapers gave information about the proclamation of the State of Israel and about the invasion of the Palestinian territory by the army of the various Arab states.

The general opinion was that the five Arab states that invaded Palestine would occupy all the territory of the new Jewish state and that war would end in a few days. However the overthrow of the general situation of was in favor of the small state of Israel, brought to a general unrest in the various Arab countries and to an excitement never known before.

In the city of Tripoli the Jewish community while on the one hand tried to maintain calm the population, could not on the other hand not help the youngsters in preparing the self-defense in case of accidents. As usual the Arabs chosen a holy Jewish day to begin anti-Jewish disorders. The afternoon of Saturday 12 of June, eve of Shavuot, started the first disorders. Groups of screaming Arabs armed of clubs, stones, knives and iron brass, started to march from the neighborhood of Bab El Horria, taking to the Street Sidi Omran intending to invade the Jewish district. Near the New Gate united to them big groups of Tunisian Arabs who came to be a part of the holy war (Jihad) against the Jews. Near the New Gate the Arab mob formed a strong opposition by the Jewish Haganah formed by youngsters, Jewish men and women armed of hand grenade and Molotov bombs. The rioters then withdrew heading to the zone of the local market in the Via Leopardi and to other not defended zones of the city, leaving in the back dead and wounded.

The heroine of the first day of disorders was Rina Bendaud who lost an arm because of the British bombardment in which was hit the synagogue "Haddad Abubi" in Sciarra Mizran. She was living in Sharia Hannuna, exactly on the border between the Jewish and the Arab neighborhoods.

Crying "Haganah arrived", and heading the Jewish defenders of the "hara", she repulsed the Arab invaders up to the center of the city inflicting them heavy losses.

The day after, first day of Shavuot, started back the violence though only in a smaller scale, because the British declared the state of emergency and the curfew.

Skirmishes and single aggressions continued the next days, in which Arabs "blew off steam" by burning and destroying the synagogue "Gerbi" in Palmi street; they burned, destroyed and sacked stones, deposits and garages belonging to Jewish societies in the industrial district of Via Petrarca.

The British authorities report (Public Record FO 3711/6 9422 - Arab-Jewish disturbances - Tripoli, June 12-13, 1948, Part II) reports 3 dead between Arabs and 11 between Jews. The *Corriere di Tripoli* no. 123 of Tuesday 15 of June, reports 13 dead Jews and 3 Arabs. In reality there were 13 Jews dead for the defense of the Jewish neighborhoods and in attack done by Arabs against lone unprotected families and one Jew killed by the police during the curfew, while between the Arabs there were more than 90 dead, counting that the Arabs use to hide their dead.



There were a lot of wounded from both sides.

The British report speaks about 8 heavily wounded and 18 lightly wounded between the Arabs and 10 heavily wounded and 6 lightly wounded between the Jews, while *Il Corriere Di Tripoli* of June 15, 1948, reports 22 heavily wounded and 16 lightly wounded between the Jews and 13 heavily wounded and 38 lightly wounded between the Arabs, plus the Italian and a police agent lightly wounded. The police arrested 197 people. Neither the British authorities nor the police or the Arabs expected such an immediate and massive armed reaction by the Jews. The use of arms and hand grenade by Jewish youngsters was not pleasing to the British military authorities that were expecting by the Jews only a defensive attitude. The third day of the disorders, the general governor Blackley invited me to come with him to visit the wounded in the civil hospital of Tripoli. The picture that was preset in our eyes was terrifying. While some Jews were lying in the first beds, wounded at their head by iron bars, tens of Arabs were lying on the floor covered by their woolen Barracass, almost all wounded by firearms and by shrapnel of hand grenades. General Blackley wanted to specially to emphasize the use of firearms by Jews and clapping me with one hand on the shoulder said me: "*Mr. Arbib, you know very well your job, my congratulations!*" In request by Arab elders there was a meeting in the afternoon Monday June 14 in the house of Taher Bey Caramanli, the sone of Hassuna Pascia, who was so loved by all the citizens, either Arabs or Jews.

To the meeting participated the Kadi and the Mufti, various Arab personalities and representatives, while from the Jewish side participated the Chief Rabbi, Yelloz, the President of the Community Rag. Lillo Arbib and various Jewish personalities representing the commercial and industrial walks of life of the country. At the end of the meeting it was drawn up an appeal to citizenship in order that peace and tranquility would be durably restored.

The *Corriere Di Tripoli* of June 15 published the text of the appeal which is included in the Appendix. *La Voce dell'Africa* (The Voice of Africa) of the June 19 delivered the news about the civil unrest from 16:30 of Saturday 12 of June, as well as about the meeting in house Caramnli of June 14 with a wealth of details and direct accusations toward the British administration of not trying to prevent this civil unrest. The article "Tripoli touristic city of massacres" brings a shorthand summary of the meeting that took place in an atmosphere and in an ambiance of exasperated souls.

The shorthand summary reported the speech of the president of the community Rag. Lillo Arbib and of the Chief Rabbi Yelloz who clearly expressed their accusations to the government for not presenting the worst, despite the continuous reports submitted by the Jewish community who provided an exact picture of the situation of tension and alarm in which the community was living from more than two months. After this sort of speeches the British officials representing the government proposed to draw up a statement to the population to calm tempers. The newspaper added that "*the statement is always a panacea for all the English evils*". The statement was drawn although its text was displeasing; someone suggested for the Mufti and the kadi to make an immediate visit to the Jewish neighborhood in order to speak to the Jews and calm them.

The visit to the *Hara* neighborhood, at the entrance to the Talmud Tora "Dar Serussi" was a real disaster, because the Arab elders were received by a crowd screaming "long live Italy" and "Aliya, aliya". The crowd pushed the kadi and the Mufti aside almost to suffocation and they stayed alive only by miracle. Fortunately we had not civil unrest in other centers of Tripolitania except for Amrus (a town 7 kilometers from Tripoli) where the Jews suffered various pillaging. The government took a smart decision by banishing immediately after all the Tunisian volunteers, who were carried by military trucks to Capuzzo near the Egyptian border. A big part of them was returned to Tunisia because of the refusal of Egypt government to receive them. Anyway the Tunisian volunteers left me a personal remembrance. I am stopping here my events relation to bring the text of my book concerning my meeting with the Tunisians.



**Lillo Arbib and his wife Nuccia Nahum Arbib**



**David Meghnagi**  
**in *The Last Exodus* (2018), by Ruggero Gabbai and David Meghnagi**