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BAIRU TAFLA, Hamburg

Review

ARAM MATTIOLI, *Experimentierfeld der Gewalt: Der Abessinienkrieg und seine internationale Bedeutung – 1935–1941*

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Reviews

I would have liked to see some analytical, critical comments on such basic questions as the attitudes of Evangelical mission organizations and individual Christians towards the spiritual and liturgical heritage of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. After all, the missionaries who were sent under the various mission organizations had their own national, cultural awareness, even in religious matters. How hard did they try to promote respect for an *Ethiopian* religious culture (in its different expressions) among their children in the faith? To work in Addis Ababa is, after all, to work in the vicinity of Orthodox centres of learning and worship. In a country that is being overflowed by a type of charismatic spirituality which has many of the marks of another culture, how much have Evangelical missions tried to lift forth the importance of an indigenous awareness of worship and language?

Having said that I would like to state that Launhardt has documented a very important part of the history of evangelical Christians in and around Ethiopia's metropolis. He has acted not simply as a copyist but as an engaged and historically conscious recorder of the events of a period with deep human dimensions in the Addis Ababa of 1919–1991.

Ezra Gebremedhin, Uppsala

ARAM MATTIOLI, *Experimentierfeld der Gewalt: Der Abessinienkrieg und seine internationale Bedeutung – 1935–1941*. Mit einem Vorwort von Angelo Del Boca = Kultur – Philosophie – Geschichte. Reihe des Kulturwissenschaftlichen Instituts Luzern. Herausgegeben von ARAM MATTIOLI und ENNO RUDOLPH. Band 3. Zürich 2005. 239 pages. Maps are integrated in the text pages. Price: € 32,80. ISBN: 3–280–06062–1.

Glancing at the title of the book under review and at the pictures that accompany it, a pessimist might imagine that the same old story is being presented once again under a different cover. There is of course a reason for such a presumption. The Fascist military campaign and its subsequent rule in Ethiopia of 1935–1941 is perhaps the richest era of Ethiopian history in literature and documentation. Numerous national and international historians and writers have dedicated books and articles of all sizes to the study of this period. The results of the studies are nevertheless monotonously similar. Italian cruelties and the bravery of the Ethiopian resistance fighters feature top in most of them. Another characteristic of the lot is that they focus on the causes and course of the war, a war of mere colonial venture as they thought it was.

Mattioli's book is refreshingly different from its predecessors in substance and analysis. The war is viewed not as a common colonial venture, but rather as an application of a set of newly developed weapons of war and the implementation of a racial philosophy which intensified the violence out of proportion. The revolutionary development of the weapons of destruction since World War I (including three types of poison gas which the Italians used) as well as the application of these deadly weapons on people, animals and plants are meticulously described and substantiated. The first victims of the Fascist cruelties were the Libyan civilians; but the spraying of poison gas, the indiscriminate bombing, the intentional incineration of villages, the arbitrary executions and the massive deportations in Ethiopia were probably unparalleled: "Jedenfalls machten die Italiener die Zivilbevölkerung in Abessinien eines der ersten Male in der Moderne überhaupt vorsätzlich zum Ziel und Objekt militärischer Gewalt. Im kollektiven Gedächtnis der Äthiopier und auch in ihrer populären Kunst ist das Massensterben bis heute präsent geblieben - trotz aller anderen Katastrophenerfahrungen, die das schwer gebeutelte Land seither erlebt hat." (p. 114).

The author, a faculty member of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte of the University of Lucerne, has done a great deal of research on racism, violence and dictatorship in various parts of the world and has published several historical works.¹ He regards implicitly the writers who treated the Italian period as somewhat cynical, as they ignored in their works the plight of those unfortunate victims: "Merkwürdigerweise hat die Forschung den kriegsbedingten Leiden der Zivilbevölkerung bislang kaum Beachtung geschenkt und die entfesselte Kriegsgewalt fast ausschliesslich aus der Sicht der Täter beschrieben." (Ibid.). He does not attempt to explain how this situation came about, but his citation of the words of the famous British historian, Eric J. Hobsbawm, at the beginning of his book implies the reason for their inhibition: "Denn das Schlimmste von allem ist, dass wir uns an das Unmenschliche gewöhnt haben."

On historical evidences, the author dispels (cf pp. 35 f. and 157–161) the assumption held by many writers that Italian colonial rule was humane and that Fascism (1923–43) was responsible for the racial praxis which was legalized in 1939. Racial segregation was practised in schools, hospitals, public entertainment places and transport in Eritrea as early as 1908. Individual Italians found guilty of breaching the racial regulations (including playing Bridge with native Africans) were punished by imprisonment or repatria-

¹ For a list of his publications, see www.unilu.ch/dokumente/dokus_gf/Bibliographie_Aram_Mattioli.doc

tion. The law of segregation was eventually extended to the whole of Africa Orientale Italiana.

Italian Africa suffered not only Fascist racial humiliation, but also international discrimination after independence. When Germany and Japan were required to account for their atrocities, the powers demanded nothing of Italy. In fact, the sprayers of poison gas (including Badoglio and Graziani) held high positions in the post-Mussolini government, and campaigned for the restitution of their colonies. When Ethiopia appealed to the relevant powers and the United Nations to call Italy to justice for the human and property destructions she had caused, she was ignored. As she insisted on her right to demand justice, the British foreign minister warned that Ethiopia had to drop her demand for Italy's punishment if she wanted to gain Eritrea.

A further merit of the book is that it goes far beyond the complexities of the 1930s and 40s. For the first time, we get a clear written account of the Italian society's knowledge of the war with Ethiopia. Until the 1970s, neither the press nor the scholars wrote anything critical about the war. The majority of the people, therefore, knew nothing about the atrocities until a few scholars and journalists (the leading one among whom was Angelo del Boca) told quite a different story in their publications. For the first time the public and the scholars alike were awakened to the reality and engaged themselves in an acrimonious debate which resulted not only in the enlightenment of the society but also prompted the president to offer an apology during his visit to Ethiopia in 1997.

There is hardly any book absolutely free of errors; only the type and number of errors make a difference in the quality of the work. This book has amazingly few mistakes, all of which are of little consequence. On page 23, we read that 'Abyssinia' was the old name of Ethiopia. Actually, that was the name Europeans frequently used to refer to Ethiopia. We have no evidence that Ethiopia named herself otherwise in the last eight hundred or so years. A strange transposition of the name of an Ethiopian personality occurs on pages 33 and 34 where Ras Mäkwännen is referred to as "Ras Walda Mikael Makonnen". A perplexing statement is also to be found on page 34: "Im Londoner Dreimächteabkommen vom 13. Dezember 1906 fand die äthiopische Souveränität eine weitere internationale Bestätigung. Grossbritannien, Frankreich und Italien verpflichteten sich darin, die Unabhängigkeit Äthiopiens zu respektieren und aufrechtzuerhalten". On the surface, the so-called Secret Tripartite Treaty looked as if the three colonial powers wanted to preserve Ethiopian sovereignty; in actual fact, however, they divided the country into their spheres of influence which, to the dismay of other countries with vested interests, could easily be turned

into colonial territories. Finally, the reader cannot avoid getting an impression that the African atrocities the Italians committed were exclusively against Libya and Ethiopia. This arises from the fact that, apart from the question of segregation, no abnormalities are mentioned in connection with Italian Somaliland and Eritrea. Arbitrary executions, arrests and deportations began in Eritrea as early as 1887 when the Italians had brought only a small portion of the territory under their control. A decade later began the campaign against Muhamad Abdille Hassan of Somalia (known to the British as the Mad Mullah) which was to last over twenty years and in which the nomads were repeatedly attacked with modern weapons on the suspicion that they might be harbouring the Somali leader.

These are marginal laxities and can by no means tarnish the value of the book which opens a new perspective in African and European studies.

Bairu Tafla, Hamburg

HAILE GABRIEL DAGNE, *Das entwicklungspolitische Engagement der DDR in Äthiopien. Eine Studie auf der Basis äthiopischer Quellen* (= Spektrum. Berliner Reihe zu Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft und Politik in Entwicklungsländern, Bd. 87). 115 S. Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2004. Preis: € 15,90. ISBN: 3-8258-7519-9.

Die Untersuchung der Afrika-Politik der DDR und insbesondere ihrer Beziehungen mit Äthiopien liegt noch in den Anfängen. Einen wichtigen Beitrag zu dieser Thematik lieferte die 1997 erschienene Arbeit von Ilona und Hans-Georg Schleicher über "Die DDR im südlichen Afrika".¹ Wichtige Aufschlüsse gibt auch die 1999 veröffentlichte Arbeit von Hans-Joachim Döring, einem Vertreter der kirchlichen entwicklungspolitischen Kreise der ehemaligen DDR, zur DDR-Politik in Afrika am Beispiel der Beziehungen der DDR mit Äthiopien und Mosambik.²

¹ ILONA SCHLEICHER – HANS-GEORG SCHLEICHER, *Die DDR im südlichen Afrika. Solidarität und Kalter Krieg*. Arbeiten aus dem Institut für Afrika-Kunde, Nummer 97, Hamburg 1997.

² HANS-JOACHIM DÖRING, "‘Es geht um unsere Existenz’. Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien" (Forschungen zur DDR-Gesellschaft), Berlin 1999.