



Aethiopia 16 (2013)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

GIOVANNA TRENTO, University of Cape Town

Review

UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR – SILVANA PALMA – ALESSANDRO TRIULZI –
ALESSANDRO VOLTERRA (a c.), *Colonia e postcolonia come spazi
diasporici: Attraversamenti di memorie, identità e confini nel Corno
d’Africa*

Aethiopia 16 (2013), 279–285

ISSN: 2194–4024

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig

Reviews

Matewos, but there is no sign of the character and intelligence that for example marked Menilek's widow *atege* Ṭaytu Bəṭul, and she comes across as dim and dull. Had she been more assertive, or indeed more intelligent, she would undoubtedly have made a much greater impact on the historical record, and we would consequently understand more about her than is actually the case.

The principal weakness of the book, however, is that it is written so much from within the frame of reference defined by its sources, that of the imperial administration in Addis Abāba, that it does little to extend our understanding of the Ethiopia of that time, and the dynamics of relations within the country – such as the shift in economic power from north to south, or the political implications of the vast late-19th century expansion of the national territory – or between Ethiopia and the colonial territories that then surrounded it. Though there are brief sketches of some of the principal political actors of the time (identifying *ras* Ḥaylu Tāklä Haymanot, mistakenly, as ‘a representative of the Tigrayan aristocracy’, p. 169), these are not integrated into any broader analysis of the significance of Zāwditu's reign, or even of the ‘verge of modernity’ that figures in the title. Nor is there any sense of how the reign related to the greatest cataclysm of modern Ethiopian history, the Italian invasion and conquest that took place only a few years after it ended. These issues will have to await a study that moves beyond the documentary sources uncovered by this book, and asks more searching questions than it attempts.

Inevitably, in a work originally written for a Polish Ph.D., there are numerous cases of awkward phraseology and translation, and the text would have benefitted from thorough editing by a native English-speaker. One particularly irksome feature is the constant use of the term ‘landlords’, as in ‘the role of the Shewan landlords’ as subtitle to the chapter on the 1916 *coup d'état*, presumably meaning *māk^wannənt*, when ‘aristocracy’ or ‘nobility’ would have been more appropriate. Overall, *Ethiopia on the Verge of Modernity* provides valuable material on this intriguing period in modern Ethiopian history, but still leaves many questions to be answered.

Christopher Clapham, Cambridge University

UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR – SILVANA PALMA – ALESSANDRO TRIULZI – ALESSANDRO VOLTERRA (a c.), *Colonia e postcolonia come spazi diasporici: Attraversamenti di memorie, identità e confini nel Corno d’Africa* = Studi Storici Carocci, Roma: Carocci, 2011. 406 pp. Price: € 37.00. ISBN: 978–88–430–5922–5.

The long, complicated Italian title of this book can be translated into English as: *Colony and Postcolony as Diasporic Spaces: Crossings of Memories, Identi-*

ties and Borders in the Horn of Africa. The four co-editors of this volume, published in Italy in 2011, are Italian and Eritrean scholars based in Italy: Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, Silvana Palma, Alessandro Triulzi and Alessandro Volterra.

The book is the outcome of a National Research Project that run at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” during the period 2008–10. The project was coordinated by Alessandro Triulzi, in collaboration with other Italian universities (Rome 3, Pavia, Venice, and Macerata).

The volume opens with an Introduction by Alessandro Triulzi; afterwards it is divided into three sections that consist of 16 articles in total; moreover, each section of the volume is introduced by a brief presentation written by one (or two) co-editor(s). The titles of the three sections of the volume are:

- 1) *La colonia come spazio di interazione tra culture* (“The Colony as Space of Interaction between Cultures”; introduced by Silvana Palma),
- 2) *Oltre la colonia: Attraversamenti e sconfinamenti in epoca coloniale* (“Beyond the Colony: Crossings and Trespassing in the Colonial Period”; introduced by Uoldelul Chelati Dirar and Alessandro Volterra), and
- 3) *Dal fronte alla frontiera* (“From the Frontline to the Frontier: Migratory Experiences between Utopia and Dystopia”; introduced by Alessandro Triulzi).

The subtitle of the already mentioned research project from which this book derives outlines quite clearly the general scope of the volume: *Towards a Transnational Analysis of Colonial and Postcolonial History: The Case of the Horn of Africa*. To accomplish this task, the volume embraces a perspective that is mainly historical, as African Studies in Italian academy are “traditionally” historical and linguistic studies (as exemplified by such institutions as the University of Naples “L’Orientale” to which this book is somehow connected), but it also aims at positioning itself at the intersection of African Studies, History of Colonialism and Migration Studies. Although this book is “designed” for Italian readers (as it was Calchi Novati’s *L’Africa d’Italia: Una storia coloniale e postcoloniale* [“Italy’s Africa: A Colonial and Postcolonial History”], Roma: Carocci, Frecce, 2005), it presupposes a vivid interest in various international scholarly trends, including Postcolonial Studies.

After decades of historiographical negligence towards its colonial past, Italy is experiencing a recent, increasing publication of academic volumes that aim at exploring different political, social and juridical aspects of Italian colonialism.¹ *Colonia e postcolonia come spazi diasporici* has to be read

¹ Without considering the previous work on Italian colonialism carried on by historian and former journalist Angelo Del Boca, in 2002 *Oltremare: Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana*, written by Nicola Labanca (Bologna: il Mulino, Collana Storica, 2002), set a milestone for the history of Italian colonialism in its whole. In the 21st century, an in-

within this recent scholarly wave. Moreover, the volume puts a special accent on mobility and makes the effort of drawing attention among scholars based in Italy towards the past and current, transnational migrations between the Horn of Africa and Italy, and in the Horn itself (to a certain extent, the book can thus be compared to “Northeast African Studies” special issue *Space, Mobility, and Translocal Connections across the Red Sea Area since 1500*, edited by Jonathan Miran in 2012).

In the past 20 years or so, Italian scholars (mostly anthropologists and sociologists, but also different scholars, including those who work in the field of comparative literature) have been displaying a genuine interest for Postcolonial Studies and Migration Studies (such as Sandro Mezzadra, Iain Chambers, Miguel Mellino, etc.). Such Italian scholarly interests in “the postcolonial” collide and interact with the fact that in the 21st century Italian colonialism has been receiving scholarly attention from the Anglophone world.² In the United States, the study of Italian colonialism has been thus positioning itself at the intersection of Italian Studies, Postcolonial Studies and History of Colonialism, but it has also been affected by a long run engagement of US academy in the study of Fascism, as exemplified by Ruth Ben-Ghiat’s works.

These multiple, interconnected fields of study find an echo in *Colonia e postcolonia come spazi diasporici*. For instance, in the contributions by Giulia

creasing number of Italian books have been exploring – with historical and/or anthropological approaches – various, more specific aspects of Italian colonialism in the Horn of Africa. Among others, we can mention: R. BOTTONI (a c.), *L’Impero fascista: Italia ed Etiopia (1935–1941)*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2008, fuori collana; B.M. CARCANGIU – TEKESTE NEGASH (a c.), *L’Africa orientale italiana nel dibattito storico contemporaneo* = Studi Storici Carocci, Roma: Carocci, 2007; L. CECL, *Il vessillo e la croce: Colonialismo, missioni cattoliche e islam in Somalia (1903–1924)* = Italia Contemporanea, Roma: Carocci, 2006; G. DORE – C. GIORGI – A.M. MORONE – M. ZACCARIA (a c.), *Governare l’Oltremare: Istituzioni, funzionari e società nel colonialismo italiano* = Studi Economici e Sociali, Roma: Carocci, 2013; C. GIORGI, *L’Africa come carriera: Funzioni e funzionari del colonialismo italiano* = Studi Storici Carocci, Roma: Carocci, 2012; N. LABANCA, *Una guerra per l’impero: Memorie della campagna d’Etiopia 1935–36* = Biblioteca Storica, Bologna: il Mulino, 2005; A.M. MORONE, *L’ultima colonia: Come l’Italia è tornata in Africa 1950–1960* = Quadrante Laterza, Roma – Bari: Laterza, 2011; B. SÖRGONI, *Etnografia e colonialismo: L’Eritrea e l’Etiopia di Alberto Pollera (1873–1939)* = Saggi, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001; G. STEFANI, *Colonia per maschi: Italiani in Africa Orientale: una storia di genere* = Documenta, Verona: Ombre corte, 2007; A. VOLTERRA, *Sudditi coloniali: Ascari eritrei 1935–1941* = Temi di Storia, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2005.

² J. ANDALL – D. DUNCAN (eds.), *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005; R. BEN-GHIAT – M. FULLER (eds.), *Italian Colonialism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; P. PALUMBO (ed.), *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, Berkeley, CA – Los Angeles, CA – London: University of California Press, 2003.

Barrera (who already published numerous articles in English and Italian on Eritrean women in colonial contexts) and Alessandro Triulzi (one of the book co-editors); the latter who is an Italian well-established historian of Ethiopia has also joined the above mentioned international scholarly trend in the past years, by publishing several articles on memory of colonialism, migration from the Horn of Africa and legacies with Italian colonialism (see, among others, Triulzi's chapter in the recent volume *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, edited by C. Lombardi-Diop and C. Romeo = Italian and Italian American Studies, New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2012).

By relying on the work of twenty contributors (including the four co-editors) divided into three sections, the volume focuses on different aspects of colonial life and politics in former Italian colonies; moreover, (particularly in its last section) it deals with memory of colonialism in the Horn of Africa, migration and legacies between the colonial past and the present days. Hence, the volume observes specific cultural and factual repositioning and changes by setting them in a wide time and space frame that encompasses and goes beyond Italian colonialism in the Horn of Africa, thus questioning and problematising some continuity between colonial and postcolonial periods.

The first article of the first section of the book *Alimentazione e colonialismo: Tentativi italiani di intrusione nei profile nutrizionali dei sudditi africani* ("Food and Colonialism: Italian Efforts of Intrusion into African Subjects' Nutritional Profiles"), by Federica Guazzini, is in tune with an international scholarly trend that has been increasingly focusing on food as cultural and historical production. Guazzini's article approaches issues related to Fascism's "scientific" racism in the colonies and also provides interesting information about food given by Italians to colonial subjects in various collective settings, such as hospitals, jails, barracks, work-places, etc. Gianni Dore's article *Stregoneria, controllo sociale, giustizia coloniale* ("Witchcraft, Social Control, Colonial Justice") focuses on Colonial Eritrea (especially the western Kunama area). Dore's article questions and problematises categories such as "magic", "witchcraft", "sorcery", "jinx" and the way they were employed by Italian colonial military officers and civil servants to get to know and rule colonized peoples. Antonio M. Morone's *Politica e istruzione nella Somalia sotto tutela italiana* ("Politics and Education in Somalia under Italian Administration") focuses on the decade of Italian fiduciary administration of Somalia in the 1950s, a period when Italians put a special stress onto schooling and education. Giulia Barrera's *L'aria di città rende liberi? Appunti sulla storia delle donne sole nell'Eritrea coloniale* ("Does City Air Make You Free?: Notes on the History of Single Women in Colonial Eritrea") focuses – despite, admittedly, limited access to available sources – on female labour migration and its social consequences for

women in Colonial Eritrea. For more than 15 years, Barrera has been carrying out interesting research on women, gender and colonial concubinage in Eritrea. She has published numerous (sometimes pioneering) articles on these topics without, unfortunately, ever completing an exhaustive book on women and gender relations in former Italian colonies, a book that would be most welcome. Silvana Palma's article *L'oro e la scrittura: La formazione della gioventù eritrea nelle scuole elementari dei primi anni Trenta* ("Gold and Writing: The Education of Eritrean Youth in Primary Schools at the Beginning of the 1930s"), focuses on the Italian school system in Eritrea. Palma, who has already accomplished an interesting scientific work on Italian colonialism and photography, is currently carrying out more extensive research on Italian colonial schools and educational tools in Eritrea.

The second section of the book focuses on colonialism and mobility within the Horn of Africa. Isabella Rosoni's article *Legislazione coloniale e mobilità degli individui: Il caso della Colonia Eritrea* ("Colonial Legislation and Individuals' Mobility: The Case of the Eritrean Colony"), explores various, wider issues related to migration and colonialism, with a special focus on colonial Eritrea. Massimo Zaccaria by working on the intersection between Eritrea's economic and social history and the history of Italian colonialism, already explored (among others) Italy's efforts of finding gold mines in the area. In this volume, Zaccaria's *Lo spazio dei credenti e i confini della colonia: Il pellegrinaggio a Mecca e il colonialismo italiano* ("The Believers' Space and the Colony's Borders: Pilgrimage to Mecca and Italian Colonialism") focuses on Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca from the Horn of Africa during Italian colonialism. Zaccaria deals accurately with this complex topic as a crucial political issue during colonialism, given Italy's pro-Muslims colonialist strategies in the region. Uoldelul Chelati Dirar's article *Attraversamenti di confine, politiche imperiali e strategie anticoloniali: L'attività del consolato etiopico di Asmara (1915–36)* ("Crossings of Borders, Imperial Politics and Anticolonialist Strategies: The Activity of the Ethiopian Consulate in Asmara [1915–35]"), interestingly retraces the establishment of the Ethiopian Consulate in Colonial Eritrea in 1914–15 and its multifaceted activity carried on by Ethiopians until the occupation of Ethiopia (from Eritrea) pursued by Fascist Italy in the mid 1930s. Alessandro Volterra's article *Disertori e patrioti: Soldati africani tra guerra e passaggi di fronte (1935–36)* ("Deserters and Patriots: African Soldiers between War and Frontline Passages [1935–36]"), approaches the understudied topic of deserters in colonial Africa, in particular desertions of Ethiopian officers and/or Eritrean soldiers of the Italian army during the Italo–Ethiopian war. Luigi Goglia is among Italy's prominent historians of Italian colonialism; here, Goglia's *Ascari partigiani: Il caso dei "neri" della PAI raccolti a Villa Spada a Treia* ("Partisan Ascari: The Case of PAI 'Blacks' Gather-

ing in Treia in Villa Spada”) presents an original case-study on a group of African soldiers that joined, as partisans, Italy’s *Resistenza* (liberation war) to Fascism in the 1940s. The final article of the second section, Luca Ciabbari’s *Dubai–Somaliland–Etiopia: Il fattore commerciale nella costruzione del territorio e dello Stato nella Somalia settentrionale* (“Dubai–Somaliland–Ethiopia: The Commercial Element in the Building of Northern-Somalia’s Territory and State”) outlines the emerging of Somaliland as commercial meeting point and the legacies with colonial politics and discourses by taking in consideration the interaction of various economic, commercial and political elements in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea area.

The third and last section of the book focuses on war, memory and migration. The first article of this section *Il sapore della libertà* (“The Taste of Freedom”) by Gabriel Tzeggai, is closer to a memoir than an academic article. Gabriel Tzeggai was born in Eritrea at the mid of the 20th century and moved to Italy years ago. Here he recalls his youth, the three-decade long Eritrean–Ethiopian war and the years he spent on the frontline in a way that is personal but at the same time also gives voice to a whole generation of Eritreans. The following article, *Il collegamento fronte/guerriglia in Eritrea: Utopia e distopia negli attraversamenti di frontiera pre 1991 e post 2001* (“The Link Frontline/Guerrilla in Eritrea: Utopia and Dystopia in Frontline Crossings before 1991 and after 2001”) by Ruth Iyob, deals with the Eritrean–Ethiopian war and its aftermath from an academic perspective. Ruth Iyob analyses and deconstructs Eritrea’s narrative of the nation; in doing so, her article problematically introduces the new category of “African neo-Fascism”. The remaining articles of the third section deal – at different levels – with the current ongoing migrations of individuals from the Horn of Africa to Italy through the Mediterranean Sea. Alessandro Triulzi’s *Memorie e voci erranti tra colonia e postcolonia* (“Memories and Errant Voices between Colony and Postcolony”) relies upon Triulzi’s activity as scientific editor of Rome’s Archive of migrant memories. Triulzi stresses the intellectual and political relevance for contemporary history-making of oral sources, memory and migration from the Horn of Africa. In the first part of his article, Triulzi also provides a general overview on Italian literary elaborations of Italian colonialism and Italian postcolonial and migrant literature. Surprisingly he forgets to mention the most important Italian writer and intellectual who described Eritrea and Italian colonialism in the 20th century: Pier Paolo Pasolini. The following article *Da Addis Ababa a Lampedusa: Cronaca di un viaggio* (“From Addis Abäba to Lampedusa: Chronicle of a Travel”) by Dagmawi Yimer (refugee, former Law student at the University of Addis Abäba, and co-director of the film on memory and migration *Come un uomo sulla terra/ Like a Man on Earth*, 2010), is the incisive account of the migration route that leads migrants from Ethiopia to Sicily’s Mediterranean

coasts, through Sudan, the desert, Tripoli and the Kufra prison in Libya (as also experienced by the author of this article). The article closes on a statement that sharply outlines historical and anthropological differences between Dagmawi Yimer's generation and the previous one: "We leave because there is nothing else to do. In Ethiopia, there aren't the conditions to sacrifice yourself or to die for your country, hoping in a change. Our death in Ethiopia would be a useless sacrifice". The last article of the volume, *Come in uno specchio: Il gioco delle identità a Lampedusa* ("Like in a Mirror: The Identities' Play in Lampedusa") by Gianluca Gatta, focuses on the Mediterranean Sea as a migration space, in between Libya and Sicily's Lampedusa island; it explores different, sometimes antithetic cultural and political categories connected to migration in this crucial area, until the recent Libyan revolts that led to Gaddafi's death. The book closes on a 15-page long Bibliography (that includes a short *Videografia*), a 10-page long index of names, places and peoples, and finally some meager information about the authors.

In its whole, this volume is grounded in a solid Italian academic, historiographical tradition of *Storia Politica* of the Horn of Africa; additionally, it intends to open up towards newer transnational and postcolonial perspectives. In some of its articles, this book also includes memoir and storytelling as sources for history-making.

Giovanna Trento, University of Cape Town

IAN CAMPBELL, *Ethiopia 1937: The Plot to Kill Graziani. The Attempted Assassination of Mussolini's Viceroy*, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2010. xlii + 492 S., Illustrationen, Karten. Preis: ETB 109,-. ISBN-10: 99-944-5234-7; ISBN-13: 978-9-994-45234-7.

Am 19. Februar 1937 wurde Marschall Rodolfo Graziani, Benito Mussolinis Vizekönig im faschistisch regierten Addis Abäba, Ziel eines mit Handgranaten verübten Anschlags. Sieben Menschen kamen ums Leben, fünfzig wurden verletzt. Graziani war anlässlich der Geburt des Prinzen von Neapel im Begriff gewesen, 3.000 armen Äthiopiern je zwei Maria-Theresien-Taler zu schenken. Er überlebte den Anschlag leicht verletzt und konnte das *Ospedale Italiano* nach wenigen Wochen verlassen. Die "Vergeltung" des Marshalls, der bereits in Libyen als "Hyäne" und "Schlächter" zu zweifelhaftem Ruhm gelangte, war grausam. Sämtliche Äthiopier, die sich zum Zeitpunkt des Anschlags in seiner Nähe aufgehalten hatten, wurden erschossen. In der Stadt kam es zu zahllosen Übergriffen. 700 Männer, Frauen und Kinder, die vorübergehend in der britischen Botschaft Schutz fanden, wurden auf dem Heimweg ermordet. Kirchen gingen in Flammen auf. Im nördlich von Addis