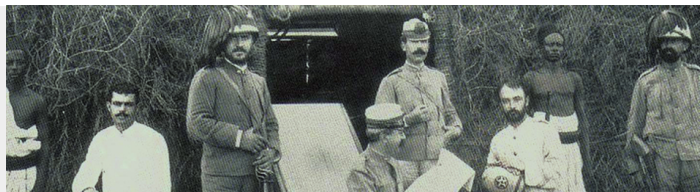


# RELUCTANT DECOLONISATION: ITALIAN SECRET ACTIVITIES IN THE HORN OF AFRICA 1947-1953

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Following the defeat in 1941 and the loss of African colonies, Italians worked out a new politics in the Horn of Africa and a strategy of keeping this geopolitical areas tied to Italy. Particularly in Eritrea, the main purpose of the former colonial power was determined to maintain political and economic hegemonic position over the country. The political changes after 1947 were connected to a relevant supply of secret funds from Rome to Italian community in Eritrea in order to consolidate the pro-Italian organisations for an eventual return of Italy as a trustee power. Funds were used also to undercut anti-Italian political movements and co-opt supporters. The secret organisation known as CAE - Comitato di Assistenza Eritrea - funded Eritrean political organisations and the press in order to contrast the partition of the country or the incorporation into Ethiopia. The Italian intervention, long lasting and intense, was strictly connected to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Italian community that dominated the colonial economy. The independence of Eritrea was seen by Italians as a priority in order to maintain their political influence.

Equally important Italian secret plans towards Somalia in order to gain consents within the international community and increasing economic and commercial interests in the area. Starting from 1948 Italian secret policy aimed to achieve different goals. First of all, Italian community living in the former colony was demanded to rectify the hostile attitude towards Great Britain. Secondly, Italian policy aimed to get close to the members of Somali Youth League and to moderate its anti-Italian features. In achieving that some pro-Italian members got secretly inside the League. To a large extent in both cases, Eritrea and Somalia, independence aspirations request and trusteeship were designed to protect the interests of Italy and increase the role of Italian settlers. New evidence from Italian archives not available before 2006 confirms this hypothesis. Little has been written by international scholars in a comparative perspective about this period, assuming that Italy lost the colonies and as a consequence did not have any interest in the Horn of Africa or any power connections. On the contrary, the documentation in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome shows another aspect of the secret action Italy had in the former colonies of Eritrea and Somalia after the end of colonial rule and the loss of colonies in 1941. A close examination of documents dealing with various sources reveals that Italian role was more complex than expected and Italian strategy more sophisticated. Both in Eritrea and Somalia de facto political engagement was relevant with the aim of dividing the national movements and forging national struggle, supporting small parties or minor coalitions, or funding new parties totally pro-Italian politics. We can assume these secret activities had a clear impact on the subsequent events and the future of the national struggle, destabilizing the politics of the Horn independent countries.

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## A New Strategy in Eritrea: 1947-1953

The first aim of this paper is to focus on the strategies that the Italian Ministry of Colonies (Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, MAI) put into place in order to shape Eritrean nationalism. It does not address the complex relations between the MAI and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that arose from the fact that colonial issues were taken over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the Italian expulsion from Africa in 1941. The second aim is to reconstruct the building blocks of Eritrean nationalism as they were articulated during the period being examined. This is necessary insofar as the concepts of nation and nationalism are still fluid and in the process of either transformation or consolidation. The third aim is to assess how the nationalist discourse of the 1940s was selectively utilized by nationalist historians in the late 1980s and 1990s. As nationalism deals with the construction or reconstruction of an imagined community, a selective memory of the past is an essential ingredient (Anderson B. 1983, *Imagined Communities*; Castells M. 2000, *The Power of Identity*, 29-30 for an incisive critique of Anderson).

The past is remembered not as it was, which in any case is impossible, but insofar as it reinforces the objectives of the present. But since the *present is a condition of constant dialogue with both the past and the immediate future*, it always creates and recreates grounds for questioning the memories it has received.

All communications between Italy and the Italian community in Eritrea were managed by Mario Martino Moreno, head of Political Affairs at MAI. The relevant archival material is organised under the heading Direzione Africa Orientale (DAO). The Italian community in Eritrea comprised about 25,000 people who were divided among three organisations. The first of these was the Comitato Rappresentativo degli Italiani in Eritrea (CRIE), which represented Italian interests and negotiated with the British Military Administration. The second was the Italo-Eritrean Association, which consisted of half-castes as well as Italians who considered themselves to be native Eritreans. Although the half-caste population was estimated at 10,000, the Italo-Eritrean Association was dominated by Italians throughout the period addressed by the present study. The third organisation was the Chamber of Commerce, which was exclusively Italian with the exception of a few members from other foreign communities in the country. The leaders of these three organisations belonged to a secret organisation led by Giuseppe Barbato known as the Comitato Assistenza Eritrei (CAE), which the MAI utilized to shape Eritrean political discourse. Barbato's official mission as an Italian civil servant was ostensibly to help Italians who wished to return home. The CAE organised the activities of the Italians, channelled funding and political opinions to Eritrean parties in direct contact with MAI, from whom they received instructions concerning their role. Two Eritrean politicians figure prominently in events during this period. The first is Ibrahim Sultan, the leader of the Moslem League (ML), the largest party advocating independence for Eritrea. Most CAE policy was directed to Ibrahim Sultan and the ML. The second is Woldeab Wolde Mariam (referred to as WW in the correspondence), a prolific writer, a politician of high calibre and a Christian. The CAE felt it important to bring Ibrahim Sultan and

Woldeab Wolde Mariam together in order to create the false impression that the independence movement was not based solely on the Muslim population of the country. The Unionist Party (UP), by far the largest party advocating union with Ethiopia, was always forced into the background by the political activities of the CAE.

Italy was represented in Eritrea after January 1949 by Count Figarolo Di Gropello, a liaison officer who reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was also a member of the CAE and eventually came to assume its leadership. The Italian community in Eritrea and their supporters in Italy enjoyed limited success during the visit of the Commission of Enquiry (November 1947). The Eritrean political space was in fact dominated by political parties that were rather hostile to the return of Italy as a trustee power. In fact, the only important achievement of the Italian community was the creation of a new party called New Eritrea Pro-Italy, which was established only forty-five days before the arrival of the Commission of Enquiry and consisted of former soldiers of the Eritrean colonial state, most of whom were Muslims. The former soldiers who were Christians were mainly members of parties that advocated either union with Ethiopia, or a transitional trusteeship under Great Britain. However, the Italians spent a considerable amount of money in order to make their voices heard. As a result, the Commission of Enquiry indicated that the New Eritrea Pro-Italy party had a clear political programme along with the support of about 10% of the population. The early months of 1949 were spent in arranging that petitions be sent to the United Nations from as many Eritrean organisations as possible. The contents of such petitions were by now well known. First, they had to be clearly anti-Ethiopian. Second, they must stress the territorial integrity of Eritrea and thus oppose any form of partition. Third, Italian trusteeship would be preferable, but the CAE would even support United Nations trusteeship. In this respect, the consistently friendly attitude that the CAE had adopted in their relations with WW paid a good dividend insofar as he and his group of intellectuals wrote a petition to the UN along the lines suggested by the CAE. It was thus sufficiently anti-Ethiopian, although not to the full extent desired (ASMAI, DAO busta 6).

The New Eritrea Pro-Italy's petition, written by the CAE and translated by Italian authorities, clearly stressed the three themes mentioned above, which were remembered and used by Eritrean politicians several decades later. It spoke of a racial hatred that supposedly divided the Eritrean and Ethiopian people. It stated that the pro-Ethiopian Unionist Party was only supported by very few unimportant Eritrean chiefs. It also claimed that sixty years of Italian colonialism had laid the foundation for the economic and political unity of the country (ASMAI, DAO busta 6.) It should be noted that the MAI repeatedly pointed out that the Pro-Italy Party was largely a Muslim organisation, and that its leaders lacked a representative base in the country. However, it was the only political party that the CAE created, financed, and managed. Its petition to the UN was one of many such writings that the party published in its CAE-run new organ known as *Luce dell'Eritrea* "The Light of Eritrea" (ASMAI, DAO busta 6). The CAE financed the newspapers of the Pro-Italy Party and the Moslem League. The Pro-Italy Party paper was regularly published, but that of the ML was dependent of the availability of funds from Rome (ASMAI, DAO busta 6).

Documentation at the MAI indicates that both Italy and the CAE placed a great deal of importance on the UN meeting in April-May 1949 concerning the future of Eritrea. There were in fact intense communications between Rome, the Italian Embassy in New York, and the CAE during April. The CAE managed to mobilise, and in some cases create, nine organisations that emphasised the main anti-Ethiopian theme, a position that Moreno described as *concetto fondamentale*, or the basic premise of Italian policy concerning the disposal of Eritrea).

These organisations were the following :

- The Muslim Youth League, created at the beginning of 1949, was led by the son of an influential ML leader assassinated on 27 March 1949. The CAE mobilised a delegation who would be despatched to the UN to make their views known.
- The Italo-Eritrean Association, composed of second generation Italians and half-castes, the Association was led by wealthy and powerful Italians.
- The Eritrean Chamber of Commerce, dominated by the Italian community that the MAI was concerned about the absence of Eritrean members.
- The Pro-Italy Party, often described as *il nostro partito* (our party), one of the four parties that had met with the Commission of Enquiry.
- The War Veterans Association, also members of the Pro-Italy Party. The Association was not a politically active organisation.
- The Liberal Progressive Party, one of the first four parties that met with the Commission, but it declined after its leader Woldeab Wolde Mariam left in 1948. It was revived and mobilised by the CAE in order to appear before the UN.
- The Muslim League (ML), the organisation that most interested the CAE insofar as it potentially represented up to 30% of the population. The CAE succeeded in strengthening its anti-Ethiopian position. The CAE even managed to disengage the ML from its pro-British position by April 1949.
- CRIE (Comitato rappresentativo degli Italiani in Eritrea) was the official organ of the Italian community. Its leaders were members of the CAE.
- The Association of Intellectuals, a group of eight individuals led by WW. It was supported by the CAE, but was not represented at Lake Success.

By the end of April 1949 the CAE had assembled eighteen people representing eight organisations, all of whom were equipped with various memoranda and petitions against partition and against the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia. Italy paid their entire travel costs and expenses to the UN headquarters at Lake Success (ASMAI, DAO, 1949, busta 5).

There is no doubt that fresh funding was flowing from Italy to Eritrea, and the CAE had no complaints at this time concerning any shortage of support. On 17 April 1949 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs even warned the CAE of the risk associated with inflating the number of representatives and of the costs involved (ASMAI, DAO, 1949, busta 2).

The mobilisation of support, driven as it was by Italy's basic premises (*concetto fondamentale*), was carried out in a political landscape where the main enemy was the Unionist Party. The CAE's policy of undermining the unity of the Unionist Party through various means of persuasion, the most important of which was financial support, was bound to create conflict between the Unionist Party and Italian interests. The CAE went about its campaign of persuading village leaders to withdraw their support from the UP, while the ML and the Pro-Italy Party continued to hammer away at the dangers of annexation and partition. However, the calm that had prevailed throughout 1948 was disrupted in the early months of 1949 by the rise of political terrorism. Political terrorism was defined by the BMA as criminal acts committed against Italians and their Eritrean supporters. Those who such acts stated clearly they were politically motivated. 25 Italians were murdered between 1947 and 1950.

The British interpreted this fact as a reaction to the CAE's generous funding of individuals and organisations opposing the objectives of the UP. Although they suspected that the terrorists received a degree of both financial and material support from Ethiopia, they could also explain the phenomenon as a local reaction insofar as there was neither a shortage of arms, nor a lack of men willing to use them. The Eritrean colonial army had totalled more than 60,000 men, most of whom had been disbanded with their arms. Italian sources, on the other hand, squarely place all the blame on Ethiopian funding, men, and arms. Such an accusation was quite well in line with the CAE's strategy of portraying the UP as a small organisation that would easily disintegrate had it not been for massive Ethiopian support. The Italians also accused the British Military Administration of failing to make available sufficient police resources for hunting down the terrorists. The UN session of May 1949 was thus faced by eighteen Eritrean representatives (six of whom were Italians) who had been mobilised and funded by the CAE. All of them were opposed both to annexation by Ethiopia and to the partition of Eritrea. Italy also had at its disposal an embassy staff that was reinforced by experts from the MAI. In contrast, the UP had a delegation of two people and could rely on no more than the skeletal staff of the Ethiopian Embassy. The strongest card of the CAE was undoubtedly the ML, who claimed to represent 75% of the population and 90% of the territory.

According to the census of 1939, there were more Christians than Moslems in Eritrea. The census conducted by the BMA in 1952, which lacked the precision of the 1939 census, indicated that the Moslem population was slightly more than 50% of the population. This erroneous figure continued to inform later activists in the 1970s and 1980s. The leaders of independent Eritrea, in the absence of a reliable census, have chosen to believe that the Eritrean population is equally divided between the two faiths.

Even if the representative capacity of the ML was not taken seriously, the UN session could hardly



remain unaffected by a vociferous group of Eritreans and Italians opposing the small UP delegation. But yet the question remains open whether these organisations that had been assembled by Italy and the CAE in fact represented the wishes of the majority of the Eritrean population. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a direct answer to this question. I shall instead attempt to answer the question in an indirect way by reconstructing the transformations undergone by these organisations along with the interactions between them.

### **Italy and Eritrean Parties: the Independence Bloc**

On April 1949 Great Britain and Italy put forward what is known as the Bevin-Sforza plan for the disposal of the former Italian colonies. The plan proposed that the western part of Eritrea be given to the Sudan, with the rest of the country, including Massawa, being annexed by Ethiopia. The BMA had openly proposed since 1944 that the best solution for Eritrea was to divide it along ethnic and cultural lines. The western part of the country was inhabited by Moslems who had a stronger connection with the neighbouring Sudan. The Eritrean highlands were inhabited by Christians who shared historical and religious ties with their cousins in northern Ethiopia (Longrigg S. 1944, *A short History of Eritrea*; Negash T. 1987, *Italian colonialism in Eritrea: Policies, Praxis and Impact*; Trevaskis, G. K. N. 1960, *Eritrea, A colony in Transition*).

The Bevin-Sforza partition plan, which came as a great surprise to the Eritrean organisations and to the CAE, was to be voted upon in three steps. The first paragraph, which provided that the territory, except for the Western Province, be incorporated into Ethiopia with appropriate municipal charters for the cities of Asmara and Massawa, was adopted by 36 votes to 6, with 15 abstentions. It should be noted that Ethiopia voted for the partition of Eritrea. Historians have not seriously examined the implications of the acceptance by the UP and the Ethiopian government of the partition of Eritrea. Both the UP and Ethiopia thereby signalled to the world that they were interested first and foremost in the historical and cultural ties between the Christian populated regions of Eritrea and Ethiopia. Ethiopia was also interested in obtaining an outlet to the Red Sea.

The second paragraph of the Bevin-Sforza partition plan, which called for the incorporation of the Western Province into the adjacent Sudan, was rejected by 19 votes to 16, with 21 abstentions. The plan was thus rejected and removed from the agenda. When the UN then adjourned its session to September, the door was opened for a new round of political agitation concerning the disposal of Eritrea (*Year Book of the United Nations for 1948-49*, 260).

While the CAE felt betrayed by the government in Rome, the Eritrean organisations were in complete disarray. According to Di Meglio: “Le improvvisate ed inaspettate decisioni dell’ONU [UN], in seguito all’atteggiamento del nostro Governo, che, rinunciando alle sue aspirazioni sull’Eritrea, ha favorito la tesi inglese e le pretese egemoniche dell’Etiopia, hanno suscitato in Eritrea una immensa ondata di sdegno e di sconforto non solo nella popolazione italiana ma anche nei vari settori di quella nativa. Oggi, da parte nostra ci vergognamo di fronte agli indigeni che ci ripetono già di essere “gli eterni

traditori e di non meritare né stima né rispetto” (ASMAI, DAO , 15. 5.1949, busta 4).

However, once the decision of the UN was made known, Italy and the CAE set into motion two strategies. The first was to call for the immediate independence of Eritrea, while the second was to bring the various political organisations together in a popular front for this purpose. The Italian colonial politicians knew that the Eritreans were more malleable once they were outside their country. The Eritrean organisations that were present at Lake Success were thus convinced to establish a popular independence front, later known as Independence Bloc, on 12 May 1949. They were advised and supported in doing so by Italians from the CRIE, the Italo-Eritrean Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Italian Embassy in the United States. The CAE considered the possible partition of Eritrea to be a serious threat to their interests in Eritrea, even though the idea had been rejected by the UN. In order to counteract this threat, the CAE mobilised Eritrean organisations in a campaign calling for immediate independence or, at the very least, a transitional period of UN trusteeship if the former was not in the cards. At the same time, the CAE were fully aware after the fateful UN decision of 15 May 1949 that Ethiopia would have a role to play in the future of Eritrea. This was based on an interpretation of the UN vote concerning the partition of Eritrea. The CAE reasoned that if the UN would in the future vote for independence after a period of UN trusteeship, Ethiopia would be one of the administering nations.

Ibrahim Sultan, the versatile and energetic leader of the ML, passed through Rome on his way to Asmara and met with Piero Franca, one of the architects of Italian policy in Eritrea, in order to determine whether Italy would review her partition plan and support the independence of Eritrea. Franca stated that Italy could change her policy if she were convinced that the ML, the Italian organisations, and the greater part of the Unionist Party could work together to attain this goal. The ML leader believed that this was possible, but he also warned that his party would fight for the annexation of Western Eritrea to the Sudan if Italy was not prepared to support Eritrean independence (ASMAI, DAO, 23.5.1949, busta 4).

Ibrahim Sultan was pleased that the United Nations had rejected the Bevin-Sforza plan, but he also knew that the UN could well vote for a similar decision in September. He also informed Franca that if his programme failed (either independence, or the Sudanese annexation of the western part of Eritrea including Massawa), he would go into exile and continue from there to fight for his cause. Ibrahim Sultan left Eritrea for Cairo and the Middle East in 1956. He continued to claim that 75% of the Eritrean population was Muslim (Sabby O. S. 1975, *History of Eritrea*). Moreover, he was not the only Eritrean leader to be entertained in Rome on the way home from the UN. The other representatives also had negotiations with the Italian authorities and they visited all the Latin American embassies as well, arguing for the continued rejection of the Bevin-Sforza plan (ASMAI, DAO, 25. 5. 1949, busta 4). The Latin American officials naturally requested further materials concerning the Eritrean question, and the experts at the MAI were only too willing to oblige. The official position of the Italian government was that it would remain bound by the Bevin-Sforza pact until it was certain that the new



movement for independence represented the explicit will of the great majority of the inhabitants of Eritrea. Although not completely convinced, Italy agreed to make funds available so that the Independence Bloc could send missions to Arab states and to the UN. He also promised that funding would be made available in order to support their propaganda activities (ASMAI, DAO, 4.6.1949, busta 4). These were not empty words. Only a few weeks later the MAI instructed the CAE to urge the ML and the Italo-Eritrean Association to intensify their activities and provide each of them with a million lire for this purpose (ASMAI, DAO, 10.6.1949, busta 4).

The Independence Bloc initially consisted of the ML, the Pro-Italy Party, the War Veterans Association, the Italo-Eritrean Association, and the small Liberal Progressive Party (LPP). These organisations were dominated by Muslim Eritreans except for the LPP. The Italo-Eritrean Association was more Italian than Eritrean. The ML, which had earlier claimed that 75% of the Eritrea population was Muslim, now felt itself to be in an even stronger position to claim that the newly established Independence Bloc represented the majority of Eritreans. The UP, with its minute delegation supported by the Ethiopian Embassy, was no match for the combined Eritrean and Italian diplomatic offensive. But the organisations mobilised by Italian funds that had made such an impressive appearance at the UN had a very fragile existence within Eritrea. Italian documents reveal that the Independence Bloc, which consisted primarily of the ML, existed inside Eritrea in not much more than name. The CAE in Asmara understood as early as 5 June 1949 that the ML had to establish an organic link with the LPP since the Pro-Italy Party, recently christened the New Eritrea Party, and the War Veterans Association were essentially one and the same organisation that had to be presented separately for propaganda purposes. However, the chances for such a development were initially not encouraging insofar as the LPP was a very small party led by a renowned district chief and his family followers.

The name Liberal Progressive Party was created by WW, who at this time was sub-editor of the government paper *Eritrean Weekly News*. While the party was known among Eritreans simply as Eritrea for Eritreans, its programme was not restricted to Eritrea insofar as it called for the incorporation of Northern Ethiopia into Eritrea.

The task facing the CAE was thus to assist the ML in assuming the leadership of the Independence Bloc while ensuring that the Italo-Eritrean Association, the CRIE, and the LPP followed suit. Nevertheless, by June 12 the CAE was in a position to inform the MAI that the ground was prepared for the new activities of the Independence Bloc, and that the ML and the Italo-Eritrean Association were due to hold their first informational meetings for their respective memberships. In addition, the parties would organise a Congress in Asmara for 23 June. At this point the UP presented no challenge to the CAE, who felt assured that Ibrahim Sultan would uphold the agreement reached in Rome and call for the independence of Eritrea (ASMAI, DAO, 11.6.1949, busta 4). But the British authorities were highly suspicious of the objectives of the Independence Bloc. According to later statements from the CAE, the British authorities approached Ibrahim Sultan and advised him to contact the UP and explore possibilities for a conditional union with Ethiopia (ASMAI, DAO, 12.6.1949 busta 4). Consequently, the

Asmara congress did not take place. The issue that the ML had to resolve before it could begin to function properly within the Independence Bloc concerned the role of the Italian organisations. Anticipating the opposition of the UP, Ibrahim Sultan had clearly indicated that the Italian organisations would be excluded from the Independence Bloc. Indeed, the LPP had already made it clear to him that it would join the Bloc only on such a condition. The only exception was the Italo-Eritrean Association, which was supposed to represent the interests of the half-castes and had also called for the exclusion of Italian organisations. The position of the Pro-Italy Party and of the War Veterans Association was as expected, namely, they would work with any organisation (implying the Italian organisations) that shared the political objectives of the Independence Bloc. But Ibrahim Sultan did not count on the political clout that the CAE had in the matter. The New Eritrea Pro-Italy Party changed its name to the New Eritrea Party on 14 June 1949. It also changed the name of its party paper from *Luce dell'Eritrea* to *New Eritrea* (ASMAI, DAO, 16.6.1949, busta 4). The CAE felt that the Independence Bloc was destined to have no chance of success without the active participation of the Italian organisations. As a result, Barbato informed Rome that he would dictate the resolution that the Independence Bloc was expected to adopt at its first congress (ASMAI, DAO, 19.6.1949, busta 4).

The records do not reveal whether Barbato managed to have his way with Ibrahim Sultan. What is recorded, however, is that the ML, the LPP, the New Eritrea Party, and the War Veterans Association all agreed to admit the Italo-Eritrean Association as a member of the Independence Bloc (ASMAI, DAO, 29.6.1949 busta 4). The Italian consul reporting on these developments advised that more Italians should join the Italo-Eritrean Association in order to protect the interests of the entire Italian community. The problem that surfaced a few weeks later was that the Italo-Eritrean Association did not represent the half-castes at all since no more than a dozen of the approximately 10,000 half-castes were registered members of the association. An issue of central concern for Italy was the fate of its population in Eritrea, who were expected to continue residing there and thus had to have their actual and future interests protected. The Bevin-Sforza plan was bad, but Italy had at least thereby attempted to defend the interests of its citizens by claiming a special status for Asmara and Massawa, where most of them were concentrated. However, both the Italian community as well as Italy came to believe that the idea of creating special charters for these two towns would not work. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented in Asmara from the beginning of 1949 by Count Di Gropello, was thus forced to entertain the notion that a union between Eritrea and Ethiopia was both inevitable and widely accepted throughout the country. Count Di Gropello advised the Ministry to explore how Italian interests could be maintained in such a case. On the other hand, the MAI argued that it was highly unreasonable to expect that either the Ethiopians, or the Eritreans would fight for the vested interests of the Italians once Eritrea formed a part of Ethiopia. The MAI thus emphasised that the most viable strategy at the moment was to campaign for the independence of Eritrea (ASMAI, DAO, 27.6.1949, busta 4).

The Independence Bloc planned to hold its first congress on 16 July 1949, in which the Italian organisations were also invited to participate. The congress was postponed, however, one reason

being that the UP would oppose the participation of the Italian community in the internal affairs of Eritrea. The ML itself did not oppose the postponement since it had to resolve a number of internal issues. The CAE was in fact convinced that the BMA, firm in its policy of partition, were only too willing to exploit internal conflicts within the ML. The Independence Bloc instead held a small meeting in the town of Keren, at which the ML and the LPP refused membership to WW's Association of Intellectuals on the grounds that an organization with such an elitist name would give rise to an inferiority complex in the other Bloc members. The meeting did agree, however, to send a delegation of three ML members to Pakistan, another delegation of four to the Arab countries, and a larger delegation of seven to Rome, London, Paris, and Lake Success. Moreover, the CAE members were to join the Eritrean group at Lake Success in order to assist the Bloc in organising their arguments. The total expenses of twenty-five million lire, equivalent to £12,500, were covered by the CAE.

The Independence Bloc was not officially constituted, however, and it did not hold its planned congress on 16 July. The various political parties of which it consisted continued to function separately. The UP, on the contrary, held a large meeting of more than 2,000 people and issued a statement charging that the Independence Bloc had been created in Rome and was both run and funded by the Italians (ASMAI, DAO, 28. 8.1949, busta 5). The UP further accused the ML and the LPP of illegal activities insofar as they permitted foreigners (Italians) to actively participate within the Independence Bloc.

In order to neutralise the impact of the massive campaign conducted by the UP, the Independence Bloc chose to distribute leaflets in both Amharic and Arabic concerning its political objectives. The outstanding task facing the CAE during the month of August was to persuade the parties comprising the Independence Bloc to choose the delegates who would represent them at the UN in September, when the Eritrean question would once again be reviewed. As they had done in May, the CAE mobilised seventeen people for this purpose, with the ML being permitted to send a delegation of five (ASMAI, DAO, 18.9.1949, busta 5). The CRIE was represented by two delegates, the War Veterans by one, the Intellectuals by one, the Independents by two, New Eritrea by one, the Italo-Eritreans by one, the Chamber of Commerce by one, and the Liberal Party by three. The CAE instructed these delegates to demand immediate independence after a transitional period of trusteeship by a nation or nations chosen by the UN (ASMAI, DAO, 18.9.1949, busta 5). In spite of the CAE's strenuous efforts, the ML, the LPP, and a splinter group known as the Nationalist Party concluded a secret agreement on 18 September that they would oppose the trusteeship of Italy. When the Italians came to know about the secret written agreement some days later, they managed to persuade Ibrahim Sultan while on his way to the UN to claim that he had signed under duress.

The Independence Bloc had to continually negotiate funding in order to pursue its objectives. In October 1949 Barbato wrote once again for increased financial support in view of the intense activities that lay ahead. He acknowledged receiving the regular monthly budget of ten million lire and an additional fifty million lire in connection with the travel costs for the Eritrean delegates sent to the UN

both in May and in September. Barbato argued that the creation of the Independence Bloc required such an additional outlay of funds that a monthly budget of fifty million lire would be a more realistic figure. He further appealed to his superior in Rome that the latter do all in his power to secure sufficient funding until such time that the government would decide to suspend political activities in Eritrea (ASMAI, DAO, 23.11.1949, busta 6). The CAE's average monthly budget for 1949 was in fact in the range of thirty million lire (equivalent to £15,000). This figure includes the ten million lire monthly that they regularly received from the MAI, but not the additional travel support received for the Lake Success delegation who departed on 19 September 1949. This amount of money is recorded in Italian archives. Moreno acknowledged in his letter to Barbato that he had received the funding (ASMAI, DAO, 13.12.1949, busta 7).

The CAE dished out thirteen million lire monthly (£6,500) to Eritrean political organisations from the formation of the Independence Bloc in May 1949 until the end of the year. Moreover, the CAE had an additional monthly budget of £5,000 for other political activities. The parties that formed the Independence Bloc may have received up to £70,000 during 1949. Increased funding became available in early 1949. There is no reason to doubt that the ML received funding before May 1949. Moreover, at the rate of £6,500 per month, the pro-Italian political parties must have received more than £70,000 between early 1949 and February 1950. It is important to note that the documentation to which I currently have access is incomplete. There is a need for a more systematic combing of the sources since certain key documents may still remain to be uncovered.

The British authorities who monitored Italian involvement wrote that Italy was putting such an amount of money into the system that the Unionist Party was provoked to maintain a hostile position against both the Italian community as well as the Eritrean organisations that benefited from Italian support. One way of putting the extent of Italian support into context is to consider the scale of local salaries and government revenues. For example, the average salary of CAE functionaries was in the range of £40 a month. The Eritreans who were employed by the CAE as watchmen were paid £5 a month. Most of the gainfully employed Eritreans earned between £3 and £5 per month. Moreover, the entire revenue that the British authorities managed to collect from the approximately 700,000 inhabitants of Eritrea (excluding the Italian and foreign communities) was only £25,000 per year. On 15 November 1949 the UN voted to send its own Commission of Enquiry to Eritrea in early 1950 in order to assess once again the wishes of the population. Great Britain as the administering power argued against this resolution on the grounds that the UN already had at its disposal the material collected by the Four Power Commission, which was sufficient for deciding on the matter. The Ethiopian government also opposed the decision for similar reasons and called for the partition of Eritrea. The Unionist Party, partly following its own guidelines and partly reflecting Ethiopian views, called for the implementation of the Bevin-Sforza plan.

By the end of 1949 the CAE had succeeded in creating, mobilising, and coordinating the activities of a number of Eritrean political organisations, for which the steady provision of funding by Italy was of

crucial importance. In addition, the large delegations that the CAE had sent to Lake Success in April and September at a cost of more than fifty million lire (£25,000) probably had the desired effect. When compared with the tiny UP delegation, they certainly gave the impression that the political organisations campaigning for independence were in the majority. But far-reaching tasks still awaited the CAE as 1949 came to an end, and they advised Rome that it had to choose between two difficult options. Count Gropello wrote from Asmara that the first, independence for Eritrea, would be difficult to maintain against the combined hostility of Ethiopia and Great Britain, both of which would use the UP to undermine the Italian position. Furthermore, if Italy chose to support Eritrean independence, she would have to take measures to neutralise the Ethiopian threat. On way in which this could be done would be to extend Italy's political activities into Ethiopia by fomenting turbulence and disorder in Tigray province, which bordered Eritrea, and in the Galla (Oromo) parts of the country. The second option was to neutralise British influence in Eritrea by opening direct negotiations with Ethiopia before Italy was overtaken by events and there still was a chance to do so (ASMAE, Affari Politici, Etiopia, December 1949, busta 6). Although funds remained a constant constraining factor, the CAE was nevertheless in a position to foment rebellion in Tigray. In his report Barbato asked for a monthly regular budget of 30 million lire to manage the growing financial needs of the Independence bloc. It is also in this document that he informed Rome that the CAE was financing political activities in Tigray. (ASMAI, DAO,12.2.1950, busta 7).

The UN Commission of Enquiry arrived in Eritrea in mid-February 1950. The UN Commission of Enquiry (made up of representatives from Guatemala, Burma, South Africa, Pakistan and Norway) stayed in Eritrea for a period of six weeks (February to March). With the exception of Norway, the other members of the UN Commission were favourable to Italy at the United Nations (Spencer J. 1984, *Ethiopia at Bay. A personal account of the Haile Sellassie Years*, 98). Mandated to ascertain the wishes of the Eritrean population, the UN commission of Enquiry was expected to present a final report to the UN.

The UN Commission of Enquiry's visit provided the CAE with an opportune moment to mobilise the organisations that formed the Independence Bloc, along with certain other groups as well. But the funding that the CAE had requested at the end of 1949 for the activities of the Independence Bloc proved to be insufficient. For example, the ML informed Barbato on the eve of the Commission's arrival that it could not accept such a small monthly allowance (£2,200) since doing so would instead serve to damage its reputation. The CAE was persuaded in the ensuing negotiations to increase this amount to £4,700 monthly for the first three months of 1950, and the ML also managed to obtain an additional £8,000 to consolidate its Youth League (ASMAI, DAO,12. 2.1950, busta 7).

The funding of the pro-Independence papers was also greatly increased. The Independence Bloc was made up of seven organisations. These were the ML, the LPP, the Independent Eritrean Party, the National Party, the New Eritrea Party, the War Veterans and the Italo-Eritrean Association. Although the CAE wanted to believe that about 70 percent of the Eritrean population would support the



independence bloc, there was significant uncertainty as to whether the Independence Bloc would manage to galvanise support. The ML wrote Gropello in early November 1949 was unwilling to share power with the other parties. Moreover, the Italo-Eritrean association was constantly accused of being high handed and unreliable. The Liberal Progressive Party continued Gropello was the weakest link as it was highly susceptible to the pressures from the BMA. The only organisations of the Independence Bloc that Italy count were the New Eritrea Party and the War Veterans both of whom were of little significance (ASMAI, DAO, 5.11.1949, busta 6).

However, the Independence Bloc for all intents and purposes ceased to exist in early 1950. First, one of the ML districts in the Massawa region broke away from the Bloc and its two leaders, who had attended the Lake Success meeting, transferred their allegiance to the Unionist Party. Moreover, these leaders created a new political party that came to be known as *Independent Moslem League*. The Independent Moslem League called for a conditional union with Ethiopia and argued that such a claim was in accordance with the charter of the United Nations. Second, the largest district of the ML broke away from the ML and constituted itself as the *ML of the Western Province*. This new political party called for the independence of the Western province of Eritrea with Agordat as its capital city.

Third, on 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1950, just about two weeks before the arrival of the UN Commission of Enquiry, the Independent Eritrean party (established in August 1949) left the Independence Bloc and announced that it would henceforth campaign for the independence of Eritrea united with Ethiopia. The CAE had heavily funded the formation of the Independent Eritrean Party in order to balance the allegation that the Independence Bloc was predominantly a collection of Moslem and Italian organisations. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, 1950 the CAE managed to put together some of those who were opposed to the radical change of policy of the party and reorganised them so that they can continue to keep the party name. WW who since 1948 had refrained from active political leadership was now persuaded to assume the leadership of the Independent Eritrean Party. The UN commission of Enquiry was approached by leaders of two political parties bearing the same name, i.e Independent Eritrean Party. Fourth, The small but symbolically important LPP then split, with a breakaway organisation known as the *Eritrean Liberal Unionist Party* emerging in February 1950. The remaining Pro-Italy Party and the War Veterans Association did not count for much in Eritrean politics. According to my assessment the most consistent and quite efficient were the Italian organisations, namely, CRIE, Italo-Eritrean and the Chamber of Commerce. These three organisations provided the UN Commission of Enquiry all the arguments refuting the British and the Ethiopian allegations that Eritrea was an unviable political and economic unit.

The CAE of course accused the British authorities of provoking a split within the ML in order to implement their policy of partition. The CAE further accused the Ethiopians for managing and for carrying out political terrorism both against Italian interests and against Eritrean who supported the Independence Bloc. There could indeed be substance in such allegations and the roles of these actors need to be further studied. Albeit important, these issues are not studied here since the main focus of



this paper is limited to the role of CAE in Eritrean political history.

Did the Independence Bloc represent the majority of the Eritrean population at the time when the UN Commission of Enquiry was in Eritrea? Although no clear answer emerges from the records that I have examined, the CAE continued to believe that the job of mobilising a majority was a question of funds. Writing in early January 1950, Barbato stressed once again the perennial issue of lack of funds. In this country he wrote political allegiance is highly marketable and the state that has more funds can buy the allegiance it seeks to have. Italy, Barbato wrote was highly disadvantaged because the funds for carrying out the activities it has initiated were just not enough to carry them through (ASMAI, DAO, 18.2.1950, busta 8).

The strategy of the UP in the early 1950 was remarkably different from what it pursued in 1949. Addressing the UN Commission of Enquiry the UP stated that it only represented the majority of the Eritrean population of the highlands and that it demanded their right to self-determination which is union with Ethiopia. The UP repeatedly stated that those who do wish to pursue independence for Eritrea on the basis of the majority ought not to impose their solution on the adherents of the UP. In effect the UP accepted the partition of Eritrea and that independence for the UP was equivalent to union with Ethiopia. This is an aspect of modern Eritrean history that has been consistently and conveniently denied by nationalist historians of Eritrea.

Few days after the departure of the UN Commission of Enquiry, Count Vittorio A. Zoppi, the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed Gropello to put an end to all political activities and to initiate a policy of reconciliation among all political parties in order to give the country some political stability. Zoppi further pointed out that political ceasefire was a fundamental premise for the future of the country (ASMAI, DAO, 29. 3.1950, busta 7). In his reply Gropello stated that there is indeed a favourable climate for political ceasefire and outlined the series of reconciliation measures that he has already undertaken. Gropello informed Rome that the Independence Bloc (through its organ "L'Unità dell'Eritrea") had picked up the reconciliation theme in a series of articles. In one of these articles the editors of the paper underlined that the Independence bloc entertains neither hate nor contempt against Ethiopia. On the contrary, if the Ethiopian leaders were farsighted enough, Eritrea would not have refused to be annexed to Ethiopia (ASMAI, DAO, 28. 4.1950, busta 7). At the same time Gropello warned that the Moslem Youth League, as well as the Italian community are now quite well armed and would respond to any armed activities from the UP.

The UN Commission of Enquiry presented two reports to the UN. The first report (written by members from South Africa, Burma and Norway) advised that Eritrea be united to Ethiopia in such a way that would guarantee internal autonomy. The second report (authored by members from Pakistan and Guatemala) called for the independence of Eritrea after a period of trusteeship (Spencer, J. 1984, *Ethiopia at Bay. A personal account of the Haile Sellassie Years*, 119). On 2 December 1950 the UN finally passed resolution 390A (V), which stipulated that, "Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown". A United Nations

Commissioner was appointed to draft a constitution in consultation with the British Administering Authority, the Ethiopian government, and the Eritrean people (Negash T. 1997, *Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Federal Experience*).

The Italian impact on Eritrean political consciousness took place during the years of 1947-1950, when the fate of the colony was discussed openly. Italy and the CAE did not believe that Eritrea would survive without their active participation. They consequently devoted several hundreds of thousands of pounds in order to create and mobilise Eritrean (so-called “native”) organisations concerning the merits of independence. They created organisations where there had been none. They also expended a great deal of energy in producing the requisite ideological underpinnings in terms of historical narrations, and in stressing the differences between Eritreans and Ethiopians. In so doing, Italy and the CAE left behind a considerable body of “material” that could be worked into serviceable memories. The political organisations that the CAE had supported and/or created, along with the material they helped to publish by means of the three political party newspapers that they financed, provided a rich legacy for future political activists. Beginning in the late the 1950s, the idea that it would have been better if had Eritrea been independent began to take shape, and a new imagined Eritrean community began to emerge. The essential ingredient of this political imagination was that Eritrea was more developed than Ethiopia. The seeds for this idea were explicitly created between 1948 and 1950 and widely disseminated through the political party papers that the CAE had created and financed. However, the role that the CAE had played in producing this image came to be forgotten during the 1970s. What instead remained was the memory of the multitude of political organisations and their anti-Ethiopian literature. This memory, the single and lasting contribution of Italy and the CAE to Eritrea, was brought into full use in the years between 1961 and 1991, during the struggle for independence from Ethiopia. Supporters of the ML took up arms in 1961 to liberate Eritrea from the Christian Ethiopian administration, and the early leaders of the Eritrean liberation front believed their country to be predominantly Muslim. During most of the years of struggle Eritrean organisations fought among themselves as much as they fought against Ethiopian rule. Their central argument was that the majority of the Eritrean people had voted for independence, and that the UN made a wrong decision in resolving the issue in the way it did.

The bulk of research dealing with the 1940s and 1950s was carried out during the period when Eritrean organisations were fighting to gain independence. Most of this research was inspired by the pioneering study that Trevaskis produced in 1960, the impact of which can hardly be overestimated. Briefly stated, Trevaskis argued that Eritrean political organisations of the 1940s were the result of the interventions of either Ethiopian or Italian interests. What is noticeable concerning most of the relevant body of work is the reluctance to question the impact of Italy and the Italian community on the formation and orientation of Eritrean politics. Nationalist historians have studied pro-independence political parties and their strategies as if these had not been shaped by the external forces that surrounded them. It is true that Italian archives have not been available, but even the British archives, although not perfect substitutes, could have been utilized in a much better way. One

remarkable exception is a substantial study from within Eritrea that acknowledges for the first time that the UP had a considerable following (Tesfai A. 2001, *Ainfelale -Let us not separate-*). This is not only by far the most balanced study to have been written in Eritrea, it was produced by a researcher having a long-standing commitment to the Eritrean cause. The fact that it does not take into account the roles played by Italy and the CAE can to some extent be understood because of the unavailability of Italian sources. This study challenges us to revise the image of Eritrean society, where a large part of the population in fact fought for union with Ethiopia. It is to be hoped that the author will be able to avail himself of the newly accessible Italian material in order to pursue his work further.

### **The Somalia Involvement in the Horn Strategy 1941-1953**

The last part of this paper deals with another Italian colony with the main purpose of discussing the role of Italy in the context of European 20<sup>th</sup> century colonialism in Africa. During the last decades historiography elaborated an old paradigm about a different Italian colonialism, an unusual colonialism, what we can define an "Italian style" of colonisation. A great bulk of studies made by Italian scholars during the 1960-1970 describes Italy as perpetrating "un colonialismo di brava gente", not interested in exploiting African colonies, based not on economic reasons but following a very poor economic politics, characterized by irrelevant colonial investments in the Horn. A detailed discussion of this point is available in recent historiography on Italian colonial rule in Africa (Taddia I. 2007, *Africa e Africa orientale italiana*; Carcangiu B. - Negash T. 2007, *L'Africa orientale italiana nel dibattito storico contemporaneo*, Taddia I. 2007, *Italy: The Last Empire*).

A colonialism having the purpose of building a modern civilisation based on humanitarian scope. Only recently this historiography has been deconstructed, since the young generation of scholars is more connected to international historiography. The Horn of Africa was not only a different case studies: exploitation, economic interests, settlers activities and financial investments are a part of a common discourse. Moreover, the secret political strategies as well have been discovered for the first time, as we have seen Eritrea is a relevant case. The main arguments developed in the first part of this presentation can be expanded and discussed in other regional areas of the Horn under the last years of Italian colonialism and the beginnings of the transitional period 1941-1953. Regarding Somalia, the second Italian colony in the Horn, we can emphasize some similarities in a different historical context, in a colonial territory that Italy did not want to leave and actually managed to control following the end of formal colonial rule.

Italian secret plans in Somalia were important as well, in order to gain consents within the international community and increasing economic and commercial interests in the area. As in the case of Eritrea, the files of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome dealing with Somali politics were equally unavailable to scholars, for a long period. Particularly the material included in *Direzione Politica*, Documentazione 1948-1960, is extremely interesting for our analysis. The topics discussed in a large number of files deal with the "Somaly Youth League" (SYL), the main nationalist party, and its relation with Italian administration, clans and political parties. Other files concern the issues on how

nationalism transformed the Somali society and the relations between modern nationalism and customary society. A very controversial matter, recently revisited by a great number of scholars who tried to analyze, having different perspectives, the role of Italy in shaping Somali political parties.

But what is more interesting and less investigated, is the comparative perspective between the colonies of the Horn. Therefore, we need to concentrate our attention on Somalia in a close relation to the Eritrean politics, with the aim of discussing the controversial Italian role. Usually, the former two colonies has been treated as two separated fields of investigation. In Somalia as well, Rome was able to demonstrate an unexpected control, using all its influence in secretly funding and co-opting parties, for achieving a new international prestige and not losing consensus at the international level. On the other side, Italian administration tried to be more flexible and in some circumstances even cooperative, using a conciliatory politics with newborn political parties and organisations. An unclear politics having ambiguities and hidden purposes.

Starting from 1948 Italian secret policy aimed to achieve different goals. First of all, Italian community living in the former colony was demanded to rectify the hostile attitude towards Great Britain. Secondly, Italian policy aimed to get close to the members of the "Somali Youth League" and to moderate its anti-Italian features. In achieving that some pro-Italian members got secretly inside the League. The Somali Youth League constituted Italy's main concern. To some extent Italian authority feared the League and in the first years of trusteeship tried to stop its spreading. For example, Italian administration created some consultative councils which were representative organs of Somali population. However, the majority of representatives had been selected by Italians within traditional members of Somali society rather than political movements. In doing that Italy assured herself the support of clans' leaders and kept political parties away from the actual administration. To a large extent in both cases, Eritrea and Somalia, independence and trusteeship were designed to protect the interest of Italy and the Italian community. New evidence from Italian archives not available before 2006 confirms this hypothesis. Still after the 1956 elections and continuing following the end of the Trusteeship in 1960, Italian government and community had a great influence in Somali politics. This is proved, because italians were against the presidency of Haji Mohammed Hussein in SYL, he was expelled from the movement. In many respects, under different strategies, Italy utilized the Somali nationalism for its own interests.

Since the new files of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were available, the first opportunity to discussing on Somalia was offered by master and PhD university students dissertations, in Bologna, Edimburgh and in Sweden, at Dalarna University, Falun. During the last decades, under the common programs and the establishment of a Master double degree, we shared historical knowledge on the former Italian Africa, using these extremely interesting ASMAE documents in the context of the international research and a relevant number of dissertations were supervised at European universities and institutes. We would like to focus on the merits of some young scholars that implemented this trend, working also on Italian Somalia on the basis of the historical contestualisation offered by the Eritrean

case already outlined. A new research on the Horn and the colonial past that can contribute to understanding the contemporary context and the emerging of new states-nations.

The most interesting dissertations are quoted in the following part of this presentation. On the basis of these premises, the last part of this paper discussion deals therefore with the secret Italian activities in Somalia in the historical period between the Paris peace treaty in 1947 until 1953. Particularly the first years of AFIS (Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana in Somalia), the Italian Trusteeship during 1950-1960, are fundamental to understanding the following decades of Somali history and independence politics developments. References on AFIS will be quoted in a separate section of the paper.

Recent studies cover different topics and offer an interdisciplinary approach very much appreciated. If we consider the traditional perception already outlined and developed mainly in Italy to analyze colonialism in a broad perspective, it is the beginnings of a new phase of research. The historical work conducted by Antonio Morone is one of the most interesting for his detailed and innovative analysis (Morone A. 2006, "L'Onu e l'Amministrazione fiduciaria italiana in Somalia. Dall'idea all'istituzione del trusteeship", 242, marzo; Morone A. 2011, *L'ultima colonia. Come l'Italia è tornata in Africa*; Morone A. 2010, "I custodi della memoria. Il comitato per la documentazione dell'opera dell'Italia in Africa", 23; Morone A. 2016, "La fine del colonialismo italiano fra storia e memoria", 12, 1-31). As the author emphasizes, The Ministero dell'Africa Italiana and AFIS show a long tradition of politics, reinforcing Italian influence until independence. A clear and deep continuity between the old colonial administration and the trusteeship.

Politics and administration under the trusteeship have been discussed in Italy by scholars of contemporary European history, African history and historians of international relations. The great bulk of historiography is based on written and oral documentation, memories, reports, private and public archives, but if we consider the archival documentation colonial item mainly concern Eritrea. The Eritrea colonial archives were sent from Asmara to Rome since 1950s and are available at ASMAE, but Somali records were largely destroyed following the Second World War. Scholars therefore had a limited availability of unpublished materials and also official colonial documentations regarding 19th and 20th century.

Relevant historiography includes different perspectives and disciplines: history, diplomatic relations, political science and scholars tried to contextualize the Italian experience among the other European colonial powers and administrations in Africa (Calchi Novati G. P., 1994, *Il corno d'Africa nella storia e nella politica*; Calchi Novati G. P., 1994, "Italy and the Triangle of the Horn: Too Many Corners for a Half Power"; Carcangiu B. M. 1997, "Gli Stati Uniti e la questione dell'Ogaden 1950,1960").



Italy has a long tradition of international studies concerning Africa and the features of Italian politics in the Horn focused on the role of diplomacy and international relations that constitutes an important phase of Italian research following the end of colonial rule (Varsori A. 1993, *La politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra (1943-1957)*, Varsori A. 1998, *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*; Rossi G. L. 1980, *L'Africa italiana verso l'indipendenza (1941-1949)*).

International scholars largely worked on Italian Somalia as well consulting Italian sources and providing the main historical background concerning modern history. However, when these reference texts were published, the files of the ASMAE, Direzione Affari Politici, were still unavailable to scholars (Cassanelli L. 1982, *The Shaping of the Somali Society. Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900*; Lewis I. 2002, *A Modern History of The Somali*; Gesheker C. L. 1997, *The Death of Somalia in Historical Perspective*).

British protectorate in Somaliland has another historical tradition and the two colonial areas rarely are interconnected. During the past decades Somaliland was the object of a more extensive research, not only in Europe and the United States. Moreover, in this area studies anthropological analysis, linguistic, social history, geography have a large space, continuing the British tradition of interdisciplinary studies. This is the main differentiation between this relevant scholarship and Italian scholarly investigation conducted in the field of history and diplomacy. We have to mention Somali scholars as well, like Abdi Ismail Samatar, Said Samatar just to quote the most relevant studies related to the modern period (Samatar A. I. 1989, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia 1884-1986*; Samatar S. 1982, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism. The case of Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hassan*; Samatar S. 2009, "Genious as Madness: King Tewodros of Ethiopia and Sayyid Muhammad of Somalia in Comparative Perspective").

Concerning Italian activities in Somalia, a great stimulus is represented by the already mentioned dissertations that give the opportunity to scholars to reconsider all the materials and analyze the main point of discussion. The first two dissertations examined in this peculiar context offer a different reading of documentation in spite of the fact that both authors referred to the same files (Urbano A. 2005, *La lega dei Giovani Somali e l'Amministrazione fiduciaria Italiana 1948-1960*, Università di Bologna). This work has been later on developed by the author Annalisa Urbano in a PhD dissertation at the University of Edinburgh dealing with the dynamic between the politics of nationalism and decolonisation in Italian Somalia (Urbano A. 2012, *Imagining the Nation, Crafting the State: The Politics of Nationalism and Decolonisation in Somalia 1940-1960*, University of Edinburgh). The second dissertation discussed at Bologna University by Giorgia Maniero treated the material under a different perspective concerning the role of Italy. It is interesting to underline this scholar worked on the same archival documentation, but had a distinct opinion on how to evaluate the colonial context and the relative documentation concerning politics and colonial rule (Maniero G. 2006, *La lega dei Giovani*



*Somali e l'Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana: affiliazione clanica e partiti nazionalisti*, Università di Bologna).

The great bulk of archival work has been conducted in the Archivio Storico del Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Rome and in the National Archives, London.

Many files were analysed, among the most interesting we can mention the following:

- ASMAE, Rome:
  - Carteggio AFIS: cassa 9, busta 2 "Partiti politici in Somalia";
  - cassa 9, busta 39 "Situazione politica in Somalia";
  - cassa 12, "Partiti politici in Somalia 1951-52";
  - cassa 19, busta 11 "Situazione politica";
  - cassa 19, busta 4, "Riservato";
  - cassa 9, busta 12 , "Gabinetto amministratore, istituzione del governo somalo".
- The National Archives, London:
  - FO, 371/146955, "Internal political Events in Somalia";
  - FO, 371/146956, "Internal political Events in Somalia";
  - FO371/1465 "Internal political Events in Somalia";
  - FO 37114696 "Political parties in Somalia";
  - FO 370/283 "Draft research Paper oh Greater Somalia question";
  - FO 371/13835 "political relations between Somalia and US".
  - CO, 822/2021, Relations between Kenya and Somalia;
  - Co, 822/2021 "Relations between Somaliland and Somalia".

Three periods are described as relevant in the Italian-Somali relations. The years 1950-1953 show a clear direct influence and impact on the local politics characterized by a greater financial support to the "Conferenza della Somalia" and an infiltration in the Somali Youth League ranks in order to boycott their activities under the administration of Giovanni Fornari. The second period shows a tentative closer approach to Somali Youth league, under the administrator Enrico Martino 1953-1955, in the contrast with the British politics. During the transfer of power between 1957 and 1960, the last years of AFIS administration with the direction of Enrico Anzilotti and Mario di Stefano, the conflict emerges again and SYL internal fracture caused the split of the league (1957) , with the opposition of Haji

Mohamed Hussein.

The different interpretations of the colonial items already mentioned are mainly related to the role of Italy towards somali nationalist leaders. The matter of discussion is concerning the non interference in somali politics and the marginal role of Italy, or on the contrary the continuing control and influence until the end of the trusteeship or even later on. The first interpretation emphasizes the italian favorable approach towards the SYL at the beginning of the activities of the national movement, in 1948-1950, in order to get support from the international community in view of the trusteeship. This vision, according to the second interpretation, is extremely controversial and seems not to be realistic. On the contrary, Italy since the beginnings and in all considered periods, preserved a strict control over local politics and absolutely did not play a marginal and conciliatory role. The first interpretation is proposed by Annalisa Urbano, the second one by Giorgia Maniero. An interesting discussion developed with the help of many files previously unknown by scholars. An analysis that certainly requires to be further investigated and compared to other forms of nationalism in the somali territories and other areas of the Horn.

What is relevant to point out, is the extreme difficulty to have a clear understanding of the political events only on the basis of colonial files. Moreover, official documentation appears to contrast, in some cases, the vision provided by oral memories and eyewitness reports. We need more documents, particularly from the Somali side. This is an important aspect of historical research on somali nationalism: try to identify the real political game with the help of multiple sources. But beyond any possible interpretation, Somalia represented the last chance for Italy to preserve in 1950s-1960s a political and economic continuity as well as a more relevant role in the international diplomacy. The first colony, Eritrea, was a diplomatic failure since 1952. Colonial issues became an instrument to gain more consent among the italian public opinion as well in a very critical phase of the country history.

The period of the BMA and the first years of Italian Trusteeship in 1950-1953 are the key issue to understanding Somali independence. A new wave of studies based on memories, confidential correspondence and unpublished papers, reveal the different historical background. The research conducted by Antonio Morone, one of the most interesting for his detailed analysis, has been already mentioned (Morone A. 2006 "L'Onu e l'Amministrazione fiduciaria italiana in Somalia. Dall'idea all'istituzione del trusteeship", Morone A. 2016, *La fine del colonialismo italiano fra storia e memoria*). The author is prolonging his research using more archival files and new memories in the context of national and international politics revealing a complex scenario and a surprising continuity of ruling systems and strategies already in use. New Italian parties used the old colonial apparatus reproducing negative results. A contradictory decolonization politics disregarding the role of somali nationalism developments. Somali critiques to Italian administration did not contribute to reverse a critical relationship until the end of the trusteeship, a relationship of continuing reconciliation and contradictions.

Other works must be quoted in the new historical context and the need to compare different post

colonial politics (Bulgarelli F. , 2012, *Italia e Somalia. I retroscena del riscatto 1943-1950*, Dissertation, Università di Bologna). This interesting work is based on the analysis of a great number of papers, informal documentation and memories: Sforza, De Gasperi Tarchiani, and also archives: Brusasca, Vedovato, Varsori. The author emphasizes the peculiar role of italians in Somalia in the 1940s, in comparison to the British politics.

On the other side, the British attitude towards the Italian administration in Somalia is also evidenced in another recent study (Zizzola D. 2014, *The Geopolitics of Decolonisation: Great Britain and Somaliland, 1950-1960*, PhD, Università di Pisa). However, the main argument of this dissertation is the legacy of British politics in Somaliland and the shaping of the somali political institutions. The changing attitudes of British administration, the crisis of the ideology of the Greater Ethiopia and the role of Ethiopian Somalis (in Ogaden and Reserved areas) are analyzed in Barnes C. 2017, "The Somaly Youth League, Ethiopian Somalis and the Greater Somalia Idea, c.1946-48", an interesting article based on archival sources and oral documentation. For the international context and the role of the main powers involved in the Horn we can mention another contribution ( Kelly S. 2000, *Cold War in the Desert: Britain, the United States and the Italian colonies, 1945-52*).

These studies must be encouraged to complete the previous ones already known by historians.

Particularly a scholar needs to be quoted, if we analyze the Somali-Italians relations during the AFIS period, we mean Paolo Tripodi. The author put a great attention on another argument that deserves to be considered: the different reciprocal attitudes between Somali and Italians as observed by using many sources (Tripodi, P., 1999, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia*; Tripodi P, 1999, "Back to the Horn: Italian Administration and Somalia's Troubled Independence").

Tripodi work is interesting, because it includes unusual aspects of the somali life and politics and concerns multiple oral sources as well. Oral documentation in the Italian Horn is not so diffuse like in the other European former colonies. International historiography lost an opportunity to collect directly the memories of Italian rule in the country and focus on their role into history. Now the memories of the main actors have been lost for ever. Somali attitude towards Italians show a clear opposition, with relevant examples. In a letter of Haji Mohamed Hussein addressed to the Italian Foreign Ministry undersecretary, Giuseppe Brusasca, in May 1950, we can see the complete opposition of the somali population to Italy's presence in Somalia : "The Italian administration caused serious moral and material damage to the country" (Tripodi P., 1999, "Back to the Horn", 364, document available in ASMAE, AFIS, "Report from the Italian Embassy in Cairo", box 2, file 21).

Another important leader of SYL, Abdullahi Issa, was in favor of Great Britain and against Italians as resulted in a secret document, related to 1952: "Italians employ silly and incompetent people of inferior clans. In order to keep the situation under control, AFIS bribes clan leaders. SYL members are

outside the administration because they oppose the return of Italians. This is, in any case, consistent with our ideas, and is confirmed by scarce results AFIS is producing in Somalia” (Tripodi P. 1999, “Back to the Horn”, 364, ASMAE, AFIS, “Secret Report 14 October 1952”, Box 2, File 3). There is a clear evidence that SYL used to accuse Italian administration to weak Somali nationalism and Somali unity increasing clan divisions. Moreover, the movement expressed a clear opinion against the revival of Fascism during the trusteeship, one of the main reason of the SYL opposition.

There was a diffuse perception that Italians had a poor knowledge of Somali society and their attitude towards somali people, during the AFIS administration, was considered in a negative way. Colonial mentality prevailed during the trusteeship, according to many somali observers (as reported in: Sheikh Mohamed Aden, 1991, *Arrivederci a Mogadiscio*, 24). The continuous politics of “divide and impera” was a phenomenon that in the long run deeply affected the decolonisation process. The creation of pro-Italian movements was a politics initiated in the late 1947s.

Particularly relevant the case already mentioned concerning the “Conferenza della Somalia”, a coalition of parties supported by Italy before the arrival of the UN Four Power Commission. This was the first italian consistent strategy to try to divide Somali nationalism. Financed by Vincenzo Calzia, a former executive official of the Ministero dell’Africa Italiana, it organised a firm opposition to the SYL. For more detailed informations about this movement see archival documents already quoted, particularly the first 4 files of ASMAI records. There is a clear evidence of a direct involvement of Italy in local parties, not only concerning the “Conferenza”. Italy had a very conservative attitude, promoting elders authorities and traditional leaders as prominent members, who had already a privileged position during the colonial period. A detailed report of these characteristics is provided by Morone A., *L’Ultima colonia. Come l’Italia è tornata in Africa*, 2011, For the analysis of the main political events during the UN Four Power Commision and Mogadishu violent riots in 1948 in which many Italians were killed see also 20- 21. This last historical event and the political consequences it produced are discussed in other essays (above all, Calchi Novati G. P., 1994, “Una rilettura degli incidenti di Mogadiscio del gennaio 1948 e il difficile rapporto fra Somali e italiani”, 223-243).

Change in politics occurred later on, but italian involvement in the process of Somalization in early 1950s was contradictory. In spite of the fact that a part of SYL tried to moderate its anti-italian position, AFIS was still committed to reinforce the smaller pro-Italian parties in order to strongly compete with the SYL nationalism (Tripodi P. 1999, *Back to the Horn*, 375-385). The main contradictions in conducting local government continued to influence in a negative way the Somali society and politics. The corruption, the prevailing of italian interests, the control of the political game, the bribing system contributed to degenerate the italian administration. Others political aspects are relevant as well, like the italian intent to limit the control of the trusteeship, as Antonio Morone clearly outlines. His recent studies contribute to his intensive and prolonged research on Somali colonial history in order to clarify the most controversial aspects emerged in contemporary international historiography as discussed mainly: (Morone A. “L’ONU e l’Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana, as

resulted in MAI, *Rapport du Gouvernement Italien à l'Assemblée Generale des Nation Unies sur L'Administration de Tutelle de la Somalie*, Rome Istituto dello Stato, vol. I-X, 1950-1960. A critical situation, a real watershed, dominated Somali-Italian relations following the Kismayo incidents in 1952, in which two Italian policemen and a Somali official were killed by a crowd of people manifesting against Italian repressive policy. This event contributed to the end of the presidency of Haji Mohamed Hussein, who was compelled to resign and leave to Cairo and was at the beginning of a new politics of uncertainty. The SYL was forced by Italians to expel the most radical members but the movement did not put an end to the protests. A critical approach to AFIS is mentioned also in some reports done by Italian officials, as documented by Italian archival sources as well, a significant phenomenon that deserves to be mentioned (see: ASMAE, Carteggio AFIS, cassa 19, busta 11 "Situazione politica"; ASMAE, Carteggio Afis, cassa 9, busta 2 "Partiti politici in Somalia").

Other interpretations of the crucial years 1950s-1960s and the Italian role came later on, engaging a continuous debate having many political implications in the country. Oral memories and deconstructed orality have an important role in a work published in 1996, that needs to be quoted in this context: the *mémoire* written by Claudio Pacifico, working in Italian diplomacy in Somalia during the last years before the disintegration of the Somali state and the change of politics in 1991. Claudio Pacifico worked as career diplomat in Somalia during the years 1987-1991 as First Counselor and Deputy Italian Ambassador in Mogadishu. He published a *mémoire* about his experience that provides an historical background of the Italian administration and the attitude towards the Great Britain (see: Pacifico C. 1996, *Somalia. Ricordi di un mal d'Africa italiano*).

In this *mémoire* he demonstrates a clear perception on Somaliland protectorate politics and the relations between Great Britain and Somali nationalism. He has also a clear vision about the relationships between Somali national movements and Italian administrators. The author emphasizes the importance of changes introduced by the administration in 1954 organizing the municipal elections and legislative elections in 1956. Moreover, he is really balanced analyzing the Italian role, reporting different opinions at the national and international level. In his examination of Italian administration he quotes, using Angelo Del Boca words, "Le critiche all'AFIS: fatti e misfatti" with the intention to mention what was one of the first accusations to the Italian government extended to all Italian politics in the Horn. Among the great number of volumes published by the author we quote the most relevant for this discussion (see Del Boca A. 1982, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale*, vol. III *La caduta dell'Impero*; vol. IV, 1984, *Nostalgia delle colonie*; Del Boca A. 1993, *Una sconfitta dell'intelligenza. Italia e Somalia*).

The last parts of the Pacifico *mémoires* represent the most interesting testimonies of his life history in a country definitely collapsed in 1991, but they do not concern the topic of this presentation. Just one mention about the last pages of the volume, having a significant title "Which lessons from the past?" in which he underlines the major failures of the West in Somalia. The first not to understand Somali people; furthermore, the lack of engagement and responsibility, characteristics that are a continuum

during the entire 20th century history.

We have to recognize that the Horn of Africa has a complex history as well as historiography. Italy, as a colonial power, produced a great number of sources, as well as the other European colonial countries. These sources are not completely examined so far by historiography for a number of reasons. First, the Italian scholarship did not re-emerge at the end of Fascism and the long tradition of studies on the Horn was suddenly interrupted. The second point to recall is the more traditional approach that contemporary historians of Africa had in the country. International historiography on the Horn changed this area studies, and the young Italian generation of scholars during the last two decades followed this trend. Another relevant point is the persistence of some stereotypes analyzing Italian colonialism. A complex of aspects that need to be considered.

We would like, instead of conclusions, raise some relevant issues concerning some possible future research. Italian diplomacy has been described by scholars as extremely weak, not having a role in the Horn after the Second World War, following the Bevin-Sforza agreement in 1941. But we have to point out that Italy changed the international alliances after the collapse of Fascism so quickly, and used the colonies to emerge in a new political context. Somalia was a key factor: the politics of economic control by the former colonial power and internal political interference were intensified after losing the chance to obtain the trusteeship in Eritrea. In the 1950s Somalia became the privileged country in this process, during the AFIS, while Eritrea had started this process in the late 1940s. Italy emerged as a “medium” power with a precise strategy: a new involvement in the Horn through the financial support.

In many respects decolonisation policy in the Italian Horn represents a unique case: a colonial power defeated in 1941, before the end of the Second World War, when Africa was lost for ever. In 1941 the Emperor Haile Selassie returned to Ethiopia, in 1942 Eritrea was under the British Administration; Somalia was occupied in 1941 by Occupied Enemy Territory (OETA) and in 1945 by the British Administration. A late colonialism, the last in Europe, an earlier decolonisation. But only apparently the Horn of Africa was out of Italian control. An episode we discovered just recently, using a perspective that includes African history as a primary source of understanding Italian history as well. In spite of this, following the defeat of Fascism, the colonial experience was completely removed from the collective memory in the country. As a result of this process, the history of Italian colonialism was not transmitted to contemporary Italian political culture and to the young generation as well. The Fascist era was the main concern of the Italian Republic following 1946. But we have seen as the documents about the development of a new engagement in the Horn changed this perspective, putting Africa on the spotlight and showing a real politics of power.

Italy lost its position and influence in Eritrea but not for long. The idea of an independent Eritrea manufactured by CAE survived and was strong enough to inspire a generation of Eritreans who paid dearly to revive it. They succeeded in 1991. In the case of Somalia, Italy left behind a history and legacy of conflict on the basis of clan and narrow political and economic gains. The fates of Eritrea



and Somalia were to a considerable extent shaped by the secret activities of the Italian Ministry of colonies, a ministry that refused to accept the treaty of Paris of 1947 that compelled Italy to renounce its colonies. These events demonstrated a case of reluctant decolonization: a former colonial power that controlled the Horn territories out of the colonial rule.

## Acronyms

ACS Archivio Centrale dello Stato

ASMAE Archivio Storico Ministero Ministero Affari Esteri, Rome

ASMAI-DAO Archivio Storico del Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Africa Orientale

BMA British Military Administration

CAE Comitato Assistenza Eritrei

CRIE Comitato Rappresentativo degli Italiani in Eritrea

DAO Direzione Africa Orientale (East Africa)

FPC Four Power Commission of Enquiry (1947)

LPP Liberal Progressive Party

MAE Ministero degli Affari Esteri (Foreign Affairs)

MAI Ministero dell'Africa Italiana

ML Moslem League

SYL Somaly Youth League

UP Unionist Party

TNA The National Archives, London

WW Woldeab Wolde Mariam (politician)

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