

ETHIOPIA AS AN IMAGE: THE CZECHOSLOVAK AND EUROPEAN PRESS OF THE 1920s AND EARLY 1930s

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This paper, based on my research in the National Archive of the Czech Republic, analyses the European (and mainly Czechoslovak) way of imagining Ethiopia during the period of the Italian-Ethiopian tensions. It thus characterizes the period of the 1920s and early 1930s. For a detailed insight into the world of the media with regard to Ethiopia, a large number of newspapers is discussed. Though Ethiopia was a member of the League of Nations, her position within the then world was far from being equal. The way Ethiopia was imagined by Europe corresponds to the way Ethiopia was treated. This means that imagining distant places and distant people is always accompanied by stereotypes which in times of war may legitimize an action as was the case with Fascist Italy. As the war was nearing, Ethiopia gained more and more sympathies around the world which complicates some further generalization. The multi-dimensionality of images is thus the main aim of this work.

Key words: Ethiopia, Czechoslovakia, Italy, myths, images

INTRODUCTION

The basic idea of the following chapter is that the image of Ethiopia was not created by Fascist Italians in the 1920s but only followed a long-lasting opinion that had been developing since at least the 16th century in Europe. It can also be seen as a conflict between idealized self-image and demonized counter-image, as a conflict between myths and images of the high and the low. That I will discuss mainly the image of Ethiopia presented in the European media is of great importance for the purpose of this work since the media especially with the beginning of the 20th century became the means of propaganda and the most important tool for extending influence and information. As discussed by

Mikkonen,¹ throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, media and the press have had a considerable impact on people's images and worldviews. Newspapers, diplomatic documents, correspondences of Europeans are thus the main tools for analysing the process of imagining Ethiopia before the 1935 invasion.

First, we have to start with a brief overview of the process of creating the concept of "the otherness" in regard to Ethiopia. Modern Ethiopia is based on the ancient Meroitic and Axumite kingdoms and as the Solomonic dynasty derived its origin from King Solomon and Israel, it is clear that there existed a long-lasting tradition of contacts with the Near East and Mediterranean. The first European came to Ethiopia in the 15th century and since that time we can see how Ethiopia was depicted. Beginning with missionaries and writers such as Alessandro Zorzi,² Manoel de Almeida or Bahrey,³ through the Czech Franciscan missionary Václav Remedius Prutký⁴ to the late 18th and 19th century travellers like James Bruce, Henry Salt, Walter Plowden and many others, Ethiopia tended to be depicted in a multi-dimensional way. On one hand, as a country with a long history and high Semitic culture that adopted Christianity in the early period, on the other hand, as a country of barbarous, uncivilized people with savage manners and vicious beliefs. These images coincide with general European thinking for which a nomad/pastoralist was the lower, while sedentarist was the higher. In the late 19th century, after the battle of Adowa where the Ethiopians defeated an invading Italian army, Ethiopia gained an image of the "pure" African kingdom that maintained its independence against the "white" European power and an Ethiopia-oriented millenarian ethos became a popular feature especially within the Afro-American community,⁵ while for Europe Ethiopia remained a somewhat backward country and a puzzle, since in European colonial thinking there was no space between "the colonizer" and "the colonized" in sub-Saharan Africa.

Andall and Duncan⁶ show that "Africa was seen by nineteenth century Europe as a land of unfettered sexual opportunity and this notion enjoyed unchallenged popularity in Italy until the late 1930s when legislation on inter-

¹ See MIKKONEN, J. *Historical Imagology and the Modern Press*.

² See CRAWFORD, O. S. G. *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524*. Including those collected by Alessandro Zorzi at Venice in the years 1519-1524.

³ See BECKINGHAM, C. F., HUNTINGFORD, G. W. B. *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646*. Being extracts from *The History of High Ethiopia or Abassia* by Manouel de Almeida Together with Bahrey's *History of the Galla*.

⁴ See ARROWSMITH-BROWN, J. H. *Prutky's Travels in Ethiopia and Other Countries*.

⁵ See GEBREKIDAN, F. N. *Bond without blood. A History of Ethiopian and New World Black Relations, 1896-1991*.

⁶ ANDALL, J., DUNCAN, D. *Memories and Legacies of Italian Colonialism*, p. 12.

racial sexual liaisons lightened". Lombardi-Diop⁷ named her promising study concerning 19th century Italian explorers in Africa "Gifts, Sex, and Guns" which appropriately correlates to previous statements.

For a better understanding of how the image of Ethiopia was developing in the first third of the 20th century, it is necessary to see the Italian Fascist view of Ethiopia in the context of a historical process that begun more or less in the 15th century with the first missionaries coming to Ethiopia. Image of Ethiopia as a country of black Christians, barbarians, backward pastoralists and vicious beliefs simply prevailed until the 20th century, as Ethiopia became the most prominent representative of Africa. Previous images and new-born myths were used by Mussolini's government and those regarding Ethiopian antiquity and nobleness were eliminated in order to legitimize the necessity to civilize the last African independent country. The fact that it resulted in a perverse and brutal war that violated several international agreements is already beyond the scope of this study.

CZECHOSLOVAK AND EUROPEAN PRESS IN THE 1920s AND EARLY 1930s

For the Czechoslovak press in the 1920s and 1930s Ethiopia was not an unknown country since several authors of honourable education, such as Dr. Alois Musil, from time to time had brought news from Ethiopia, as well as news concerning Ethiopian relations with major European countries. In *Venkov* in 1920s, Alois Musil⁸ wrote a series of articles where he tried to inform readers about local conditions and the troubles that Ethiopia, as a member of the League of Nations, was facing. Contrary to a majority of other newspaper articles written in Czechoslovakia in this period, Musil focuses mainly on the British economic and political ambitions in Ethiopia and writes with no scruples about the "predatory" policy of the British trade firms in Ethiopia.

Musil tries to explain the British-Ethiopian relations in a complex set of aspects, one of which is the creation of an image. He argues that it was especially the British press who continually wrote about "Abyssinia as a backward country that needs some country to come and to create a protectorate or a mandate". Musil almost cynically explains the British motives and reserved position toward the Ethiopian accession to the League of Nations. The British attitude can be best described as follows: "The Englishmen excelled in clear view, persistence and frequently unscrupulousness. What they did not reach in

⁷ See LOMBARDI-DIOP, C. Gifts, Sex, and Guns. Nineteenth-Century Italian Explorers in Africa.

⁸ Venkov, July 27, 1924, the article called "The Struggle for Abyssinia".

one way, they tried to reach in another way. They started to speak and write about slavery and began to assert that the Christian Abyssinia is the last supporter of slave traders who are destroying villages of pagan blacks and capturing women and girls." Musil, in defence of Ethiopia, claims that at the time of Ethiopia's accession to the League of Nations, there was already no slavery and that the slaves in Ethiopia are descendants of slaves from the 19th century. It is not the aim of this study to explore whether there existed slavery or not in Ethiopia in the first half of the 20th century, but what is more interesting is that it was not only Italy, as one might suppose who used massive propaganda in newspapers to create a public opinion leading to appropriate results.

Musil continued in his work for all the 1920s and in his article in the same journal⁹ four years later he gave readers a good overview of Ethiopia's international relations. Musil sees the position of Ethiopia as a country that was betrayed by its Christian partners, as he says that it would seem as if other Christian powers would do anything to strengthen power of their African Christian ally, but the opposite is true. In fact, he blames the European powers for hypocrisy, since on one hand they are boasting that they would defend interests of Christians all around the world, but on the other hand a brief look at the map of East Africa shows that behind these promises there is a stronger imperialistic effort. A very interesting look at internal Ethiopian policy is brought by Dr. Musil in this article as he considers Ras Tafari a leader who does not intend to incense local leaders against him and thus he gives them a free hand to oppress peasants and traders by new taxes and duties. Moreover, Musil states that Zewditu reigns and Tafari cares only about his own profit.¹⁰

In regard to Musil's accounts on imagining Ethiopia by the British press, it is true that the first major "campaign" against the "state of disorder" in Ethiopia was spread by the Westminster Gazette in 1922. In an article "The Scandal of Abyssinia", Ethiopia was portrayed in the following manner:

"Abyssinia is the only remaining free and independent native State in Africa. It is also the last home of open slavery. In its Capital, Addis Ababa, there are more slaves than free men. The British Legation itself is full of slaves, owned by the Legation servants, who would not take service if they were not allowed to bring their chattels with them. The Legation compound is British soil, yet not only do slaves who enter it not become instantly free, but if they have escaped from their owners can and do enter it without

⁹ Venkov, June 3, 1928, the article called simply "Abyssinia".

¹⁰ Venkov, June 3, 1928.

hindrance to recapture. That is an odd-enough fact; but still an odder one is that a great many of these slaves are British subjects captured by slave-raids into British territory."¹¹

The article continues with a discussion over the character of the Ethiopian slave state. Abyssinia was according to the Westminster Gazette independent only because the neighbouring powers did not have anyline of policy which they could follow in order to partition the territory. As the newspapers began to be interested in order and law in Ethiopia, it became popular to inform about the negative sides of Ethiopia's conditions:

"...there is nothing in Abyssinia that can be described as "order" and as for the "law" it is quite useless to appeal to it unless the complainant is rich enough to purchase the justice he seeks, and even then it may still be useless if the defendant happens to have a powerful protector."¹²

Images of distant people and distant places are almost always based on stereotypes and myths. The developing pattern of images of Ethiopia coincides with the same pattern of images of Africa that has been developing from the 15th century until nowadays. Analysing the media and their relevance in regard to Africa (in this case Ethiopia), we see somewhat general agreement among the major European newspapers. One of the key concepts of the study of media influence is their role in creating fragmented and ambiguous images as well as sensation-seeking "nature", since sensations bring more readers. On the other hand, objectivity means to present antagonistic views. When media present only one view, one can hardly consider them objective.¹³ Stereotyping the enemy is one of the oldest methods of propaganda. Stressing the differences between the "normal" and "abnormal", the "good" and the "bad" one, the "right" and the "wrong", the "acceptable" and the "unpleasant", the "modern" and the "traditional" propagandists tended to legitimize their approach usually leading to war.

In the case of Britain, military intentions were replaced by the economic motives of gaining control over water resources on the Nile. Africa has always been a question of such interpretations, oppositions, stereotypes and prejudices. While Africa had "tribes", Europe was represented by "nations." The word

¹¹ Westminster Gazette, January 18, 1922.

¹² Westminster Gazette, January 18, 1922.

¹³ See MIKKONEN, J. Historical Imagology and the Modern Press.

“tribe” bears a negative connotation meaning “backward”, “stateless”, “ignorant”, while a “nation” is allowed to undertake historical deeds, a nation makes progress, a nation is noble. One of the major aspects of propaganda is the tendency to eliminate the “good” and replace it by the “bad”, the “positive” by the “negative”. We can see a somewhat similar scheme in the Westminster Gazette series of articles in regard to Ethiopia, where the authors did not seek to inform the public objectively. A typical example of making differences between the “nobleness” of ancient times and the “primitiveness” of the present time can be seen in the following words:

“Trade conditions in Abyssinia are, to put it mildly uncertain. There is no stability, not at present any foundations upon which a stable commercial system could be built up. Abyssinia is almost as large as France and Germany combined; it is the home of an ancient “Christian” civilization; and it is one of the richest countries in the world – richer, we believe, than any other country in Africa of similar size. Yet it is decaying. Vast areas are going out of cultivation, partly owing to brigandage and partly to slave-raiding. One of the writers recently passed through an outlying district, which, when he first visited ten years ago, was a remarkably prosperous and populous country. The soil was so fertile that the hills were terraced for cultivation. Today it is possible to march through this district for days without meeting a single human being, the terraces are still there, but the people who should be sowing and reaping are either dead or slaves in the capital. The whole country-side is abandoned to the jackals and the hyenas.”¹⁴

While official Ethiopian and some European documents tended to oppose these statements widely extended first by the British, then by the Italian press and officials, contemporary Ethiopian intellectuals usually of non-Amhara origin agreed with the general conditions in Ethiopia as described by the European press. If one can make some generalizing statements going slightly beyond the scope of this work, one can state that the image of Ethiopia (or better to say Abyssinia) as an undeveloped country that with the help of European machine guns conquered the country of the Oromo and other people is increasing.

¹⁴ Westminster Gazette, January 19, 1925.

INTERMEZZO: DISCUSSION ON PERSPECTIVES

It generally coincides with the three basic ethno-nationalist perspectives on Ethiopian history which can be divided as follows: 1) nation-building perspective; 2) national oppression perspective; 3) colonization perspective. While nation-perspective regards to the process of empire-building during the second half of the 19th century, "national oppression" came into the political vocabulary of the Ethiopian elites within the 1960s evolution of the Ethiopian Student Movement, inspired by Marxism-Leninism. The colonial perspective is then connected to the Eritrean issue and the question of the Italian legacy as well as Ethiopian state from 1952 to 1991.¹⁵ In other words, rewriting the history of Ethiopia has a lot to do with Levine's¹⁶ suggestion of the "Amhara thesis", "Oromo anti-thesis" and "Ethiopian synthesis" which had to be reached by 1994 constitution but does not seem to be fulfilled. Ethiopia under the rule of Menelik II and Ras Tafari/Haile Selassie is usually depicted by the Oromo political leaders as the only African country that participated in conquering and occupying other African territories. The fact is that colonialism does not differentiate color of skin, religion or continent.¹⁷

Oromo intellectuals have seemed to adopt the vocabulary of those European activists that sought to emphasize Ethiopia's inability to resolve its own domestic problems and thus stressed the necessity of some foreign rule. The rule of the Abyssinians over the native population of southern Ethiopia is also suggestively described by the British writer Evelyn Waugh in his notes on the Ethiopian war, where he states that "peoples in the south and west treated with wanton brutality unequaled even in the Belgian Congo..." while in another place he continues with the statement that "the Abyssinian officials, with retinues which varied in size from royal guard to a standing army, lived upon the work and taxes of the original inhabitants; their function was not to protect but to hold in subjection; fighting was the only occupation they recognized".¹⁸ In many works the general view on the Amhara-Oromo relation can be summarized as follows: "Oromo were not considered human beings by Abyssinians, but property to be owned and sold. Oromo peasants were given to the colonial settlers and local landlords to be 'eaten'".¹⁹

¹⁵ GUDINA, M. Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History: the Need for a New Consensus, pp. 119-130

¹⁶ See LEVINE, D. Greater Ethiopia. The Evolution of Multiethnic Society.

¹⁷ HORVATH, R. J. A Definition of Colonialism, pp. 45-57.

¹⁸ WAUGH, E. Waugh in Abyssinia, p. 24.

¹⁹ MELBA, G. Oromia, An Introduction, p. 65.

What is common to both the European press and the opposition to the government in Ethiopia is its depiction of Haile Selassie as a ruler who violated international agreements or who exploited non-Amhara territories.²⁰ European colonial thinking was in this sense single-track as we can read in different contemporary sources that "Africa is Africa"²¹ which says even more about the then anthropological and colonial discourse than huge amounts of diplomatic and historical books. Ignorance was one of those features that "distinguished" Africans from Europeans and in this manner Haile Selassie was a ruler who "ignored" treaties, concessions, and agreements.²² On the other hand, it was not only Europeans who distrusted the Regent/Emperor. His efforts to build roads, develop the cotton industry, install telephones and telegraphs and thus to modernize the country encountered opposition from a part of the nobility, though more or less passive, as shown by the example of Fitaurari Habta Giorgis. During the 1920s, this Commander-in-Chief changed his opinion and became a slight supporter of Tafari's plans, which is explained by some sources²³ as a result of Ras Tafari's diplomacy and the tact with which he dealt with Fitaurari Habta Giorgis.

RAS TAFARI IMAGINED

Ras Tafari's charisma became the subject of many studies and works of travellers, diplomats, scientists etc. While some depicted him as a man interested only in his own property, others emphasized his progressiveness and nobility. The Reverend Ashley Brown, Chaplain of Aden wrote his impression on Ethiopia and the Regent:

"But at this difficult time a very great man indeed controls the destinies of this Ancient Empire, in the person of the Prince Regent. Like many of the members of ancient Abyssinian families, he is no darker than many a Spaniard, with clean-cut features. Indeed in his person he preserves the tradition of the personal beauty in the House of David. He has great charm, great dignity and superb self-control. He is a very simple man. His private wealth is enormous, and he has interests in most of the business enterprises in the Empire. [...] He dresses in the simple white cotton clothes of his people, with a coarse black wool burnous or

²⁰ MELBA, G. Oromia, An Introduction, p. 68.

²¹ Westminster Gazette 19th January 1925.

²² Il Giornale d'Italia 3rd September 1935.

²³ See A Letter by American Vice Consul Loder Park from December 28, 1926. In: DEP Vol.II, 1977, pp. 48-55.

cape in rainy weather. He wears no jewels, a surprise to me, as I have often seen Indian princes literally ablaze with precious stones. He is a strong man and a very clever man. It has needed both great strength and ability to rule his State of powerful nobles and turbulent people through stormy days.”²⁴

The Reverend's impressions show a distinctive way of imagining the Regent and Ethiopia since he stresses the ancient character of the state and nobility of ruling class, which is an opposite of the Italian propaganda shown mainly on the pages of the daily press where we can see a somewhat general tendency to eliminate any notes regarding the ancientry of Ethiopia. The Reverend's accounts on Ethiopia can be derived from his Christian affiliation since he (at some points) expresses his admiration for a state that was “Christian when our ancestors still worshipped their Teutonic deities”. For Brown, Ras Tafari was a “great statesman and patriot [...] who burns to lift his people out of the morass of ignorance and superstition in which their isolation for so many centuries has kept them”.²⁵

Almost in the same manner Ras Tafari was viewed by American Embassy, as may be well documented by correspondence of American Consul Addison E. Southard, who gives some interesting accounts on the background of Ethiopian high political levels:

“The Prince Regent is modernistic and progressive in his tendencies. The Empress is unusually conservative and reactionary. The various provincial rulers and higher government officials belong either to the “party of the Empress” or to the “party of the Prince.” This means, in effect, that they oppose, and intrigue against, each other in the various Councils and frequently deadlock on matters sometimes of the most vital importance and frequently insignificant. The members of the party of the Empress are more or less against the introduction of foreign influence and modern progress into Ethiopia. Their basic reason is that such introduction would open the way to political and territorial aggression by certain European powers. They point to what they consider attempts of this sort in recent decades by Britain, France and Italy.”²⁶

²⁴ An English Clergyman's Impressions on Ethiopia. In: DEP Vol. II, 1977, p. 67.

²⁵ An English Clergyman's Impressions on Ethiopia. In: DEP Vol. II, 1977, p. 68.

²⁶ Southard to the Secretary of State. In: DEP Vol. II, 1977, p. 77.

From a retrospective point of view, Southard's notes on the opposition between the Empress' and the Regent's cliques in regard to European influence seem to be in favour of Empress Zewditu since it was mainly from the economic point of view that the Europeans wanted to gain control over Ethiopia.

ETHIOPIA AS A COUNTRY OF SLAVERS?

As has been stated and it is with no doubt, first major campaign (rather than propaganda) against Ethiopia in the 20th century was lead by the British press. In the following part I will offer reader two articles that show how the British public opinion regarding Ethiopia was shaped and on which information was based in the 1920s. First, in the *Westminster Gazette*²⁷ series of articles, nothing can better illustrate the situation than the following part:

"Gangs of slaves, marching in misery, the men chained together in rows, and the women and children dragging themselves along side the main body, can be seen by any traveller in Southern Abyssinia today. Some of these slaves are captured on Abyssinian territory, others in British East Africa, others in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. [...] The European powers have contracted not to supply Abyssinia amongst other African countries, with munitions, nor with materials for their manufacture, but America, unluckily, has not signed the contract; and so it is to America that the Abyssinian Government has lately turned. Payment was made in advance, three months ago, and the cartridges and automatic rifles, exported from the United States, are now lying at the port of Djibouti [...] with its terminus of the Abyssinian railway. [...] The purpose of these articles is to describe the position as it appears, not merely to the writers but to every European who has spent even a short time in Abyssinia. If on any aspect of the question we have failed to convey a sufficiently precise view of the facts, we shall be glad to do our best to remedy the defect. Meanwhile, we hope that the American public will realize what is being done in their name, and that the British public will face the intrinsically impossible situation created by the presence of British slaves in the British Legation at Addis Ababa."

²⁷ Westminster Gazette 20th January, 1925.

The second article was written in the *Manchester Guardian*²⁸ a year and half after the previous but followed the same structure and form, let us quote from the following passage:

“The familiar features in the story may be catalogued as follows. First, Abyssinia is a rather scandalous country. The Abyssinians, at the very times when they have been falling under the shadow of Western economic expansion, have been importing Western lethal weapons in order to conduct systematic slave-raids against weaker and more uncivilised peoples in the interior-chiefly within the frontiers assigned to the Empire of Ethiopia occasionally in territories belonging to Kenya Colony and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Abyssinia’s successful application for admission to the League was possibly stimulated by the fear that this scandal might become the subject of international action, and Abyssinia was admitted on the distinct understanding that the Abyssinian Government would loyally co-operate with the League in the suppression of the slave trade. The central Government of Abyssinia, however, is by no means in effective control of the whole extent of its juridical dominants. The scandal remains and may at any time afford a pretext for interested intervention, if it does not necessitate interventions of a disinterested character. A second feature is that the known resources of Abyssinia are rich, while her unknown resources (...) are likely to be overestimated by those who desire to exploit them. A third feature is that Abyssinia has two European neighbours – Great Britain (...), and Italy in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland – who possess interests in her territory derived from contiguity like the interests of France and Spain in Morocco. Great Britain wants to store the surplus waters of Lake Tsana in order to make them available for extending irrigation in Egypt and Sudan. Italy wants to link her two East African Colonies by constructing a railway north and south to the west of the railway zone which in 1906 was assigned to France...Certainly France has no true grievance and no moral status for interfering, since she not only signed the 1906 agreement but has profited by it already. Nor is she a good friend to Abyssinia, for Djibouti and the Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway are reported to be the main channel through which Abyssinia has been receiving for many years consignments of arms which may

²⁸ Manchester Guardian 27th July 1926, author unknown.

ultimately prove her undoing. The party with genuine grievance is Abyssinia herself. Will she ventilate this grievance at Geneva?"

One of the most common features of all newspaper articles (in regard to Ethiopia) at least in former Czechoslovakia in the 1920s and 1930s was their interest in the ethnic, religious or geographical conditions of Ethiopia, which corresponds to the already mentioned aspects of "slavery", "barbarity" and "primitiveness". Many articles begin their words "Abyssinia is a country of black Christians", which became a cliché, though we may now suggest that a rough majority of Ethiopians are Muslims. One such example of an "ethnographic" cliché can be abstracted from *Polední list*:²⁹

"The Abyssinian population is rich in colour of skin, ranging from lemon yellow to dark ebony. There we even find whole villages of albinos, of whose origin there exist various rumours. The most important of many Abyssinian tribes is the reigning tribe of Amhara, who own about one eighth of the land."

The main amount of newspapers articles came in 1934 and 1935 as the tensions were nearing. The press continued to describe Ethiopian military potentials using expressions corresponding to the contemporary political and anthropological dictionary:³⁰

"The Abyssinians are good and brave soldiers and in their natural fortress and their climate they present a power, which cannot be underestimated by modern states. The regular army of Abyssinia has 100 thousand men in arms equipped with guns and machine guns and instructed by European advisers. Artillery has cannons of various origin. In the most recent times Abyssinia has even numerous cavalymen and a small number of airplanes. Besides the professional army there is also a trained reserve of 200 thousand of men at the Emperor's disposal. Finally, Abyssinia can also call up all men from 15 to 65 years, which means 2 million soldiers for whom, however, cannot be enough modern weapons. Abyssinia, thus, has quite strong defences and would surely be able to offer persistent resistance against a big invading army."

²⁹ *Polední list*, December 16, 1934.

³⁰ *Národní osvobození*, February 22, 1935.

Military preparations on both sides were largely discussed on the pages of the daily press,³¹ as Mussolini expressed his resolve to stress Italy's position in the world by massive enlargement of military equipment, weapons and guns. The European public was impressed by Italy's "fast division" composed of artillery, cavalry, a motorized unit as well as a unit of cyclists.

PRESS AND THE NEARING WAR

The Czechoslovak daily newspapers in most cases showed a certain neutrality towards Italy's preparations for war, though in some examples a hidden support for Ethiopia can be seen as in *Československé slovo*³² in February 1935, which informs about Mussolini's order to send more soldiers to the Horn as he was feeling displeased after Ethiopia (ironically) "showed total disregard for Italian armament". Others, such as *Polední list* rather follow the pro-Italian line emphasizing the fact that Italy gained almost nothing after World War I and that since Mussolini came to power he took care of his colonies constructing new roads, buildings, ports, hospitals, airports and so on.³³ *Národní politika* published a short interview with Dr. Borský where he states that Mussolini's intentions (February 1935) were to make peace among tribes which did not follow the orders of the Abyssinian Emperor.³⁴

At least a year before the Italian invasion events regarding Ethiopia was monitored in detail by newspapers and journals all around the world, including former Czechoslovakia. *Montagsblatt*³⁵ asked in September 1934 whether Italy was really striving for a protectorate over Abyssinia. The author answers that it is rather a matter of time whether it comes through diplomacy or military action.

Some newspapers, such as *Lidové noviny*³⁶ paid attention to discomfiture of the League of Nations after the WalWal incident and supposed that there would be no quick solution of the crisis. *Národní politika*³⁷ went further and criticized especially the British ambivalent attitude toward the crisis, when the journalist wrote that "on every map, the site of WalWal is sketched in the Abyssinian part, about 100 km in the interior. It is curious that the English newspapers are dry (meaning silent) about these cases. Perhaps because they stand on the clauses of

³¹ See e.g. an article in *Národní listy*, February 20, 1935 on the military preparations and equipment of the Italian army.

³² *Československé slovo*, February 22, 1935.

³³ *Polední list*, February 17, 1935, article "The Struggle for Abyssinia".

³⁴ *Národní politika*, February 14, 1935.

³⁵ *Montagsblatt*, September 24, 1934.

³⁶ See e.g. *Lidové noviny*, December 16 and 18, 1934.

³⁷ *Národní politika*, December 20, 1934.

the 1925 accord when Italy and England mutually guaranteed spheres of influence over Abyssinia."³⁸

Shortly after WalWal Alois Musil³⁹ doubted England would tolerate Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia. Italian newspapers stated that the reason for the military action was Abyssinian violation of agreements signed with Italy. According to them Ethiopia had given remarkable economic advantages to Japanese merchants, traders and emigrants while in Italians they saw dangerous neighbours. Half a year before *Le Temps* paid attention to the same aspects of the conflict by publishing a large article emphasizing the role of the Japanese.⁴⁰

In January 1935 the main topic of European newspapers was the position of France and Britain on the Ethiopian question. *Polední list*,⁴¹ quoting the French newspapers, wrote about a certain probability that France would give a free hand to Italy; *Československé slovo*⁴² discussed a reticence of Paris political circles concerning the Abyssinian crisis and the ambivalence of France regarding Austrian independence. The newspapers gave information about the willingness of France to agree with the policy of "appeasement". *Večerní Československé slovo*⁴³ was surprised by Italian readiness for new demarcation of the borders between Italian Somaliland and Ethiopia.

While the Czechoslovak newspaper mostly showed a certain incredulity towards the Italian intentions, the French *Petit Parisien*⁴⁴ understood that Mussolini, outraged by hostile displays, which were touching Italian prestige, wanted a quick and energetic gesture to remind that Italy was prepared and determined to even invade in order to defend its rights. The newspapers wrote, that it was surely possible to hope for a peaceful solution of the crisis. *The Times*⁴⁵ concluded that the Italian move could be condemned as illegitimate. The *Daily Telegraph*⁴⁶ thought that it would be tragic if the situation ends in war.

While the British and French journals were more optimistic and hoped for a peaceful solution the Czechoslovak newspapers already from the end of 1934 brought news about military preparations in Italy and discussed its threat. In

³⁸ Národní politika, December 20, 1934.

³⁹ Venkov, December 12, 1934.

⁴⁰ December volumes of Popolo d'Italia and Corriere della Sera quoted by Venkov, December 12, 1934.; *Le Temps*, April 7, 1934.

⁴¹ *Polední list*, January 3, 1935.

⁴² *Československé slovo*, January 3, 1935.

⁴³ *Večerní Československé slovo*, January 14, 1935.

⁴⁴ *Petit Parisien*, February 12, 1935.

⁴⁵ *The Times*, February 12, 1935.

⁴⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, February 12, 1935.

February 1935 when the public was concerned with the League's approach, *Lidové noviny*⁴⁷ warned of Mussolini who announced to his soldiers that they would go to Egypt and Somalia to defend the Italian interests which could be seen as a direct proof of creeping war.

Leftist journals and newspapers criticize not only Italian aggression and inability to make compromises but also European powers, which with their policy of appeasement gave Italy a free hand in Ethiopia. *Sozialdemokrat*⁴⁸ stresses the anti-war demonstrations against Mussolini in Italy, *Rudé právo*,⁴⁹ the most important leftist daily ironize negotiations between Mussolini and Laval, and Mussolini and Beneš already in the title of the article: "Laval agrees with Mussolini, Mussolini agrees with Beneš. And a result of this agreement? War." French daily journals were also alarmed by Laval – Mussolini's negotiation which they think would give a free hand to Mussolini for his action in Abyssinia.⁵⁰

In May 1935 European newspapers already discussed the date of the war. It seems as if nobody believed in a peaceful solution of the conflict, for example, *Večerní Československé slovo*⁵¹ asked in a title of an article "War in Abyssinia by May 20?" and answers with a subtitle "Harvests of international military industry – Italy will meet with the hardest resistance". *Giornale d'Italia*⁵² speaks about massive mobilization in Ethiopia and adds that Italy cannot allow her borderland to be persistently threatened. *Právo lidu*⁵³ quoted Alessandro Lessona who in Rome said "that according to the situation, the government cannot hesitate. The question of relations between both states must be solved once and forever clearly and in the interest of the safety of Eritrea and Somalia as well as with regard to the dignity of Italian policy." *Lidové noviny*⁵⁴ speculate that Italy already has one million soldiers in arms.

As I have found in the newspapers and journals of 1935, it seems that from May, and more probably from July, the European public had no illusion about the Italian-Ethiopian conflict. It was only a matter of time as we have already seen in some examples of the May volumes. In July 1935, *Popolo d'Italia*⁵⁵ claimed that the only solution in regard to Italian-Ethiopian dispute can be a "total solution". Economic expansion without military action would end like the

⁴⁷ *Lidové noviny*, February 17, 1935.

⁴⁸ *Sozialdemokrat*, March 15, 1935.

⁴⁹ *Rudé právo*, May 14, 1935.

⁵⁰ Quoted by *Rudé právo*, May 14, 1935.

⁵¹ *Večerní Československé slovo*, May 11, 1935.

⁵² *Giornale d'Italia*, May 9, 1935.

⁵³ *Právo lidu*, May 8, 1935.

⁵⁴ *Lidové noviny*, May 8, 1935.

⁵⁵ *Popolo d'Italia*, July 31, 1935.

Treaty of Ucciali. The communist, and thus anti-fascist daily *Rudé právo*⁵⁶ argues that all people from France are against Laval's policy of supporting Mussolini in his aggression against innocent Ethiopia.

*Lidové listy*⁵⁷ quoted from News Chronicle about the Abyssinian Ambassador Dr. Martin's visit to London where he tried to obtain a 2 million GBP loan. According to his words, first, "the money were supposed to be used for economic development, but war, which is brewing, has the first right. Abyssinia was loaded with a special war tax to which everybody had to contribute. It was supposed to bring 5 million GBP. First of all, we need a large amount of cartridges for our Mauser rifles since the war will last long. We have about 200 thousand Mauser rifles. Our artillery has some new cannons, others come from 1896 when we took the victory away from the Italians at Adowa."⁵⁸

The international wave of solidarity with Ethiopia also appeared on the pages of daily newspapers and journals quoting one from another about protests against Italian aggression and European passivity. *Národní politika*⁵⁹ quoted from *Il Temps* and *Echo de Paris* and published a large discussion over nationalist tendencies in African countries caused by the Italian-Ethiopian dispute:

"All natives not only in the French Somaliland, but also in the British colonies in East Africa, and even Southern Arabs talk only about the following war of the Abyssinians with the foreigners. Natives estimate the chances of the Abyssinians and the hopes "with the help of Allah" in this war and dream of a support which all coloured Africans have to provide their coloured brethren in Abyssinia, as soon as they are caught in danger, or in other words: The Italian-Abyssinian conflict has contributed much more in a couple of months to awaken an African nationalism that has fallen asleep since Lord Kitchener's capture of Khartoum, than the long-lasting, anti-foreign pan-African and pan-Islamic propaganda. This critical situation definitely requires our absolute attention. We cannot allow our great colonization work of the whole century that was sealed by our blood and our money to be threatened by the development of an action, which, geographically, has to be limited only to a given territory."⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *Rudé právo*, July 10, 1935.

⁵⁷ *Lidové listy*, July 26, 1935.

⁵⁸ *Lidové listy*, July 26, 1935.

⁵⁹ *Národní politika*, July, 25 1935.

⁶⁰ *Národní politika*, July 25, 1935.

The importance of "racial discourse" and growing chauvinism of Italy is underlined by the same article in discussion over Italian relations with Turkey and Japan. The Japanese press, according to *Národní politika*, understood the Italian-Ethiopian dispute as a conflict of the white race against "coloured" people. These racial aspects are supposed to find support in France and Britain. *Národní politika* does not fully agree by stating that it was the French Ambassador to Rome, H. E. Chambrun, who tried to persuade Mussolini about the racial aspects of the forthcoming conflict, but Mussolini did not reply.⁶¹ Later in August, Sir Samuel Hoare tried to convince Mussolini of the necessity to stop the war or to solve the problem in another way than militarily.⁶²

CONCLUSION: MULTI-DIMENSIONALITY OF IMAGES

August and September 1935 were undoubtedly months of unstoppable preparations for war, especially on the Italian side, and reflections of the Italian-Ethiopian "quarrels" can be well documented on the pages of daily newspapers. The *International News Service* interviewed Mussolini, whose following sentence was quickly picked up by newspapers around the world:

"The Abyssinian dispute could also be solved in a non-military way, if the leaders who now manage the fate of Abyssinia, give up their illusions of possible resistance, and not believe in hypothetical help from other countries and realize that it is in the real interest of Abyssinia to accept an Italian protectorate. I do not believe that a real and radical solution of the Abyssinian crisis could be found in Geneva. The Italian nation is spiritually integrated and ready to make sacrifices."⁶³

With regard to the previous statements, *The Times*⁶⁴ informed about Haile Selassie's persistent willingness to solve the problem peacefully without using weapons. His "neverending hope" and trust in the League of Nations is documented by an article about his military "operations" contrasting to Mussolini's conviction of Ethiopia as a dangerous country.⁶⁵ *The Times* spoke about the Emperor's decision not to send 60 thousand Wollamo and Konta men in arms to Addis Ababa because he wished to respect the will of the League of

⁶¹ *Národní politika*, July 25, 1935.

⁶² *Národní politika*, August 25, 1935.

⁶³ *Československé slovo*, August 15, 1935, the interview given on August 5.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, August 5, 1935.

⁶⁵ See e.g. *Československé slovo*, August 15, 1935.

Nations.⁶⁶ Ethiopian will to solve the dispute on the ground of the League and her absolute belief in the principles of the League are also documented in the words of Takla Havariat who told the journalists in Paris on August 4th 1935, that for Ethiopia it is enough to be a member of the League of Nations.⁶⁷

Positive reactions to Ethiopia's position among the great powers of Europe not only had a great impact in Africa, or Asia, but also the European public perceived the conflict as a clash between unequal entities. We can read that "the proud independent country of Abyssinia" would never accept a protectorate or any other solution leading to suppression of her sovereignty. A pilot, Roy Tuckett, offered Ethiopia his help in the war, when he sent a telegram to the Emperor. The British conservative member of the Parliament, Vivian Adams told journalists that "England cannot abandon the hardest precautions like turning off the coal supplies or closing the Suez Canal in the case that Italy stands on its position regarding Ethiopia".⁶⁸

*Rudé právo*⁶⁹ spoke about the support of white and black communists in Washington who protested against the Italian regime and its foreign policy. In general we can state that the so-called leftish newspapers (*Rudé právo* is a good example of those) tended more to see the conflict in racial (white and black), political (fascism vs. democracy) and even gender terms, since women were important for their role in the family life and economy of the country, their importance was stressed as an example of an article concerning the foundation of a women's committee for the defence of Ethiopia shows. Women involved in this committee gave their jewels as a symbol of their love for their homeland.⁷⁰

No other daily in former Czechoslovakia informed about these aspects of Ethiopian patriotism. While other newspapers usually informed about negotiations between governments of the involved countries, the communist daily did not miss the opportunity to point to the fact that the "peoples of" (whatever country) wish to stop the war and to express their support for Ethiopia. In general, the right-wing journals were more conservative and cautious, though it can be said without any dispute that the common feature of most European (and probably even American) papers was their (at least) moral support for Ethiopia in an unequal fight against the growing Italian aggression.

One interesting explanation why Ethiopia was attacked and threatened by Italy was expressed by Marcus Garvey whom we met earlier in this work. He saw the reason in the fact that Haile Selassie ignored any relationship with the black people and throttled their aspirations. On the other hand, his critical

⁶⁶ The Times, August 5, 1935.

⁶⁷ Lidové noviny, August 15, 1935.

⁶⁸ Národní politika, August 2, 1935.

⁶⁹ Rudé právo, August 3, 1935.

⁷⁰ Rudé právo, August 3, 1935.

comment is said to be the result of an attempt to regain attention, lost authority and prestige.⁷¹

This multidimensionality of imagining Ethiopia contributed to Mussolini's persuasion that other European powers simply would not oppose his expansion into Ethiopia⁷² and creating an image of Ethiopia became one of the means of conquest. One of the main points of the invasion was surely the economic, necessity to gain access to land suitable for agriculture. In my opinion, there are two reasons explaining the invasion in a symbolic way, or at least reasons that stay beyond the whole event. The first was, as examined by Del Boca,⁷³ the "Adowa complex". While for the Italians Adowa meant a point in history that needed to be revenged, for a part of the Ethiopian population it was a time when Menelik's "savage army killed millions of Oromo".⁷⁴ The second, the strategy was to create an image of a cruel enemy that presented a direct threat to the interests of the "peaceful nation of Italy". The enemy is always against our values and our values have to be defended by whatever means. Since ancient times, there has been a long tradition of imagining enemies as those who are against our interests and values and it is thus not so improbable that Mussolini in his rhetoric used something from ancient Roman propaganda against the rising Christian community. The values of enmity, the values of our enemies need to be put in contrast to our values of the good, the better. European rhetoric seem to follow this theory of rationalizing and legitimizing approach against the enemy by using strategic propaganda based on the values of enmity.

Abbreviations

DEP – Documents on Ethiopian Politics

⁷¹ SBACCHI, A. *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941*, p. 6.

⁷² SBACCHI, A. *Ethiopia under Mussolini. Fascism and the Colonial Experience*, p. 7.

⁷³ DEL BOCA, A. *The Ethiopian War, 1935-1941*, pp. 3-16.

⁷⁴ MELBA, G. *Oromia, An Introduction*, p. 66.

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