
Annalisa Urbano, Antonio Varsori, *Mogadiscio 1948. Un eccidio di italiani fra decolonizzazione e Guerra fredda*, il Mulino, Bologna 2019, pp. 296.

Annalisa Urbano and Antonio Varsori's book examines a dramatic episode of the long process that led to the breakup of Italy's colonial empire and to the United Nations decision to appoint Italy, the former occupying power, to oversee its trustee administration: the Mogadishu massacre of 11 January 1948. Urbano and Varsori investigate the origins of the massacre, its causes, protagonists and consequences, throwing

into relief previous studies' guilty silence concerning this event. (There are some exceptions: the works of Angelo Del Boca and of Giampaolo Calchi Novati, as well as previous works of Urbano and Varsori.) They use eyewitness accounts to compensate for the lack of photographic evidence with which to reconstruct and clarify the events of that day. Their investigation also makes ample use of a diversity of archival sources. The book combines an analysis of the wider international context with an account of the political and social situation of the former Italian colony during the forties. Regarding the international context, the authors correctly point out that the question of the Italian colonies was one of the most important problems awaiting settlement by the United Nations after the war. It was the cauldron that produced the episode, which left over 50 Italians and 14 Somalis dead and dozens injured on both sides. The settlement of the Italian colonies remained a hot issue throughout the second half of the 1940s; the question only reached conclusion in late 1949, when the three United Nations resolutions were adopted on 21 November. Over the years, Italy had tried hard to recover its pre-Fascist colonies, which it lost in 1941 to the British Army's offensive in East Africa. For its part, the British government sought to strengthen its influence in the Horn of Africa by developing plans for a "Greater Somalia" that would bring together all the Somali populations, Italian Somalia and British Somaliland. The authors examine events inside the former colony and the characteristics of the new British occupying administration. Somalia, occupied in 1941, was governed by the British Military Administration. This occupation government had to place itself between the Somalis and the Italians, two communities locked in fierce conflict.

In the book's four chapters (plus an introduction and a conclusion), the authors try to solve the problems concerning this little-known episode of Italian history in Africa by considering it from different points of view: "the social-political evolution of the Somali context, the complex relations between the BMA and the Italian community of Mogadishu, the various Somali political components and their interaction, bilateral relations between London and Rome, the influence on Italian

domestic politics, the international context characterized by the emerging Cold War, and the first activities of the United Nations” (p. 20).

The first chapter analyses the presence of the Italian population in Somalia from the Italian defeat to the Peace Treaty and the relations between the defeated country and the British government, showing that these relations grew steadily worse: Italy was bent on recovering the colonies, while Britain had no intention of giving up control over what it considered possessions of strategic value.

The second chapter focuses on the central topic, the Mogadishu massacre, analysing its genesis, the way it unfolded and the reactions of the various countries involved. The eyewitness accounts that the authors have collected are crucial for a faithful, detailed reconstruction of the events.

The third chapter investigates key developments following the events of 11 January 1948: the course of relations between the Italian and British governments and the investigations conducted to clarify the causes and responsibilities for the events of that day.

The final chapter focuses on the final phase of the debate on Italian colonies, the role of the United Nations in assigning the trusteeship to Italy, and the intervention of the Italian government in the Somali context to ensure a future voice in Somalia.

In conclusion, the authors state, to better understand the facts of 11 January 1948 “a wider time frame” must be considered and “different areas” assessed, including: the post-war return-to-Africa policy undertaken by Italy; the context of the 1948 election campaign in Italy; the “British imperial strategy towards the former Italian colonies”; the “nascent Cold War, which involved the great powers not only in Europe but also in Africa”; the desire of Somali peoples to free themselves from colonial domination and achieve independence; and the important role played by the United Nations (pp. 259-260).

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