



In Memoriam of a Retribution in Blood: The February 1937 Massacre in Addis Ababa and Its Lasting Legacy

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Introduction to the Events Leading Up to the Massacre

The political climate in Ethiopia during the 1930s was marked by a complex interplay of internal strife and external pressures, primarily driven by the ambitions of colonial powers. Following Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the country found itself engulfed in a struggle for sovereignty against a backdrop of rising nationalism. The decade witnessed the emergence of a robust Ethiopian resistance, fueled by a deep-seated desire for independence and the preservation of national identity. Emperor Haile Selassie's leadership galvanized the populace against foreign domination, fostering a sense of unity among various ethnic groups. However, this burgeoning resistance was met with increasing brutality from the Italian forces, who sought to quell dissent through a combination of military might and psychological warfare.

The rise of Fascism in Italy under Benito Mussolini played a pivotal role in shaping the colonial ambitions of the regime. Mussolini's government was driven by an ideology that glorified military conquest and promoted the idea of restoring Italy's imperial grandeur. Ethiopia, as one

of the few remaining independent nations in Africa, became a target for Italian expansionism. The Fascist regime's policies were characterized by a desire to assert dominance over the Horn of Africa, viewing the subjugation of Ethiopia as a means to demonstrate Italy's strength on the international stage. This aggressive stance not only reflected the ambitions of the Italian state but also resonated with a broader narrative of racial superiority that underpinned Fascist ideology.

Tensions between Italian colonial forces and Ethiopian nationalists reached a critical juncture with the assassination attempt on Marshal Rodolfo Graziani in February 1937. Graziani, a key military leader of the Italian campaign in Ethiopia, was targeted in a violent act of defiance by Ethiopian resistance fighters. This incident was emblematic of the escalating conflict and highlighted the desperation of Ethiopian nationalists in their struggle against colonial rule. However, rather than prompting a reconsideration of Italy's tactics, the assassination served as a pretext for a brutal military response. Eager to assert its authority and punish perceived insubordination, the Italian command laid the groundwork for the horrific events that would soon unfold in Addis Ababa, setting the stage for one of the darkest chapters in the history of colonial violence.

The Execution of the Massacre in Addis Ababa

The massacre in Addis Ababa, which unfolded in February 1937, was not merely a spontaneous eruption of violence but a meticulously planned military operation orchestrated by the Italian colonial authorities. Following the assassination attempt on Marshal Graziani, the Italian military sought to impose brutal retribution that would serve as a warning to both the Ethiopian populace and the international community.

Details of the Military Operation and Its Orchestration by Italian Forces

The operation was spearheaded by Graziani himself, who was determined to retaliate against what he perceived as a direct affront to Italian authority. The Italian military deployed thousands of troops, along with aircraft, to execute a strategy aimed not only at punishing those directly involved in the assassination attempt but also at instilling terror among the broader Ethiopian population. This campaign was characterized by its ruthless efficiency; soldiers were ordered to sweep through neighborhoods, targeting suspected insurgents and any individuals who might be associated with anti-colonial sentiments.

The violence commenced with coordinated attacks across the city, utilizing machine guns and artillery to maximize casualties. Ethiopian soldiers who had been conscripted into the Italian army were often forced to participate in the operations against their own people, highlighting the tragic complexities of colonial rule. The brutality of the attacks was compounded by the surrounding atmosphere of fear and panic, as families were torn apart and entire communities devastated in a matter of days.

The Targeting of Civilians and the Scope of Violence

What transpired in Addis Ababa was a deliberate campaign of terror that indiscriminately targeted civilians. Estimates suggest that tens of thousands of Ethiopians were killed during the massacre, with many more injured or displaced. The Italian forces employed a scorched-earth policy, destroying homes, shops, and places of worship as they moved through the city. The violence was not limited to gunfire; reports emerged of widespread atrocities, including executions, sexual violence, and the use of chemical weapons such as mustard gas, which was deployed in certain areas to further terrorize the population.

The targeting of civilians reflected a broader strategy of colonial repression aimed at quelling any hopes of resistance and asserting total control over Ethiopian territory. Graziani's orders were clear: the objective was to send a message that dissent would not be tolerated and that the consequences of rebellion would be catastrophic. This systematic annihilation of not just the suspected rebels but also innocent bystanders illustrated the profound cruelty inherent in Fascist Italy's colonial ambitions.

International Reactions and Media Coverage of the Massacre

The massacre in Addis Ababa did not go unnoticed by the international community, although responses varied significantly. Some Western nations, still reeling from the effects of the Great Depression and preoccupied with their own national interests, chose to remain largely silent in the face of such blatant brutality. However, journalists and activists present in Ethiopia documented the atrocities, bringing attention to the scale of violence through reports that reached newspapers and human rights organizations worldwide.

Media coverage painted a grim picture of the suffering inflicted upon the Ethiopian people, highlighting the moral failings of the international community in its inability to intervene. Some countries, particularly those with anti-fascist sentiments, condemned the actions of the Italian forces, but these protests were often drowned out by the prevailing geopolitical concerns of the time. The massacre ultimately served to galvanize anti-colonial sentiments within Ethiopia and among diasporic communities and anti-fascist movements globally.

In summation, the execution of the massacre in Addis Ababa was a chilling demonstration of the lengths to which colonial powers would go to maintain control. The brutal tactics employed by Italian forces, the extensive targeting of civilians, and the varied international reactions collectively underscore the historical significance of this dark chapter in both Ethiopian and colonial history. The events of February 1937 continue to resonate, reminding us of the human cost of imperial ambition and the enduring scars left by acts of state-sponsored violence.

The Aftermath and Historical Significance of the Massacre

Impact on Ethiopian Resistance and Nationalist Movements

The massacre of February 1937 catalyzed a surge in Ethiopian nationalism and resistance against Italian colonial rule. In the immediate aftermath, a wave of anger and grief swept through the

country, leading to an intensified commitment to oppose Fascist occupation. Various nationalist groups, including the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party and the Ethiopian Patriots, began to organize more effectively, fostering a sense of unity among diverse ethnic and political factions. This newfound resolve was not only a reaction to the atrocities witnessed but also a reaffirmation of a distinct Ethiopian identity in the face of colonial aggression. The massacre served as a rallying point, framing the struggle against Italian forces as a moral imperative that would resonate in the years to come.

Long-term Effects on Italian-Ethiopian Relations

The brutal events of 1937 indelibly marred Italian-Ethiopian relations. The massacre reinforced deep-seated animosities that would persist long after Ethiopia regained its sovereignty in 1941. The Italian military's actions were widely condemned, leading to a significant deterioration of Italy's international standing. For Ethiopia, the massacre became a symbol of the brutal realities of colonialism, shaping its post-war narrative and influencing its foreign policy in the decades that followed. The scars left by the event contributed to a cautious approach toward Italy in the years of rebuilding and development after World War II, with lingering distrust affecting diplomatic interactions. Furthermore, the historical memory of the massacre has been invoked in contemporary discussions on reparations and acknowledgment of colonial atrocities.

Legacy of the Massacre in Contemporary Discussions on Colonialism

The 1937 massacre in Addis Ababa remains a poignant reference point in contemporary discussions surrounding colonialism and its enduring legacies. As scholars, activists, and policymakers grapple with the implications of colonial histories, the events in Ethiopia serve as a stark reminder of the human cost of imperial ambitions. The massacre is often cited in broader discourses about the need for accountability and reconciliation in post-colonial contexts. In Ethiopia, memorials and educational initiatives have emerged to ensure that the memory of the victims is preserved and that the lessons of this dark chapter are not forgotten. The massacre continues to inspire discussions about justice for past wrongs, the importance of historical memory, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism on present-day societal structures and international relations.

Conclusion: Reflecting on the Lessons of the Massacre

Key Points Summary

In summarizing the key points discussed in this article, it becomes evident that the massacre orchestrated by Fascist Italy in Addis Ababa in February 1937 was not merely an isolated incident of brutality but rather a culmination of a broader context involving colonial ambitions, nationalist resistance, and the violent suppression of dissent. The political climate in Ethiopia during the 1930s, marked by rising tensions and the ascent of Fascism in Italy, set the stage for an extreme reaction to the assassination attempt on Marshal Graziani. The subsequent military

operation unleashed a torrent of violence against civilians, leaving an indelible mark on the collective memory of Ethiopia and highlighting the severe consequences of colonial aggression.

1. In addition to the massacre in Addis in 1937, Fascist Italians had undertaken the following crimes:

- (a) Massacre of 1 million people in other parts of Ethiopia;
- (b) Destruction of 525,000 homes;
- (c) Destruction of 2,000 EOT churches;
- (d) Destruction of 14 million animals;
- (e) Looting of vast quantities of Ethiopian properties including the over 500 cultural items currently in the Vatican's possession;

2. The very significant role of the Vatican which supported the Fascist Italian invasion of Ethiopia but is still reluctant to apologize to the Ethiopian people similar to what it has already undertaken to the Armenians, the people of Latin America, and the Jewish peoples heinous crime of six million massacred by gas Chamber.

3. The fact that it is high time now that the Italian Government pays an adequate compensation to Ethiopia similar to what it has paid to Libya.

4. It's also important that the concerned Ethiopian institutions including the Ethiopian Government, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, the Association of Ethiopian Patriots, etc. undertake their respective roles on behalf of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian peoples.

Importance of Remembering Historical Atrocities

The importance of remembering historical atrocities cannot be overstated. The Addis Ababa massacre serves as a stark reminder of the devastating impacts of imperialism and the lengths to which colonial powers will go to maintain control. Acknowledging this dark chapter in history is crucial not only for honoring the victims but also for fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamics of power, resistance, and the human cost of political ideologies. This reflection compels us to confront uncomfortable truths from our past, ensuring that such acts of violence are not repeated in the future.

Call to Action for Further Research and Education

Ultimately, this analysis calls for a renewed commitment to research and education on colonial histories. By engaging with the past, we can better comprehend the complexities of present-day international relations and the ongoing struggles of formerly colonized nations. It is imperative that we continue to explore the legacies of events like the Addis Ababa massacre, as they resonate in contemporary discussions on justice, reconciliation, and the enduring effects of colonialism. Only through this understanding can we hope to prevent history from repeating itself and work toward a more equitable and just world