

From the Farms to the Cities: Italian Plans for the Modernization of Ethiopian Agriculture

Alessandro Pes¹

¹Università di Cagliari, History, Cagliari, Italy

a.pes@tiscali.it

The conquest of Ethiopia in 1936 by Fascist Italy gave rise to an economic social and political reorganization of the Horn of Africa. Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Italian Somalia were grouped together into a new political institution: the Empire of Italian East Africa. Amongst the various and ambitious aims, one of the goals pursued by the Italian colonial government was to change the Ethiopian Economy making it more useful and profitable for Italian interests.

The Agricultural sector was identified as one of the most relevant for the Ethiopian Economy and the Italian government decided to focus on a plan for a radical change of the sector; the traditional Ethiopian agricultural system should be modernized to become one of the economical cornerstone of the Empire. In 1936 Fascist plans for the population of Ethiopia calculated in 5 millions the number of Italians moving from the mainland to the colony in a period of 5 years (1936-1941); the great part of this people was supposed to be the real actors of the agricultural modernization.

Despite the numbers of migratory flux from Italy to Ethiopia was lesser than the Fascist forecast, many Italians moved to Ethiopia and took part to the project. As Haile M. Larebo (1994) has pointed out, Italian farmers took the places of the Ethiopian ones and the so-called modernization of Ethiopian Agriculture caused the moving of many Ethiopians from the countryside to the cities. In other words, the Fascist plans for the modernization of Ethiopian Agriculture produced a process of urbanization and a changeover for the Ethiopian people involved in it, from a status of farmer to that one of proletarian.

This paper aims to describe this process and analyse its implications for the economic and social Ethiopian development.