

# Ah, We Have Not Forgotten Ethiopia: Anti-Colonial Sentiments for Spain in a Fascist Era

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## Introduction

Early 1938. Nancy Cunard, famous English heiress, activist and editor of *Negro Anthology*, writes a set of dispatches from Spain to Sylvia Pankhurst in London. They are for publication in the latter's influential newspaper, *New Times and Ethiopia News*. The Spain that Cunard is travelling through is now in the grip of a civil war, and, buoyed by his invasion of Ethiopia, being part of a colonial fascist project, Mussolini is now in military league with the Spanish *nacionales*. But, aside from Mexico and the USSR's official support, the republicans, on their side, are complemented by "international brigades" - groups of fighters who have crossed borders without the official sanction of their governments. Amongst them are Russians, Italians, Irish and British, to name a few. An American contingent forms the American Lincoln brigade, and in its ranks are around ninety African-Americans.

Cunard (1938b) is interviewing Salaria Kee, in Cunard's estimation, the "only Negro nurse from America in republican Spain". Kee, having been in charge of Vilapaz Hospital in Valencia, is now on her way to Benicasim. In the ten months that Kee has been in Spain she has met her husband, Sean O'Reilly, one of the first Irish fighters to join the international brigades. Although issues of racism and discrimination are not absent (Featherstone 2014, 25), the couple must be valuing their time together in Spain because, Kee admits, "I couldn't go to the Southern States with him" (Cunard 1938b). Kee also confesses to Cunard that she has only been a political person for a couple of years. And she remembers an incident in Harlem Hospital that might, possibly, have contributed to her rising internationalist conscience:

...there were some German doctors who'd had to leave Germany because of Hitler. We thought at first they might acquire the American colour feeling against us. One of them bought a Scottsboro badge; later I talked to him; I told him frankly what we'd thought. And this is what he said: "Listen Miss Kee. I have a little niece here who goes to school. Shared some of her sweets with a white and a coloured child, and when her mother asked her why she'd given the coloured girl most she said, "because I remember school in Germany; the Jewish children there were as badly spoken of, as badly treated as the Negro children are here. Now Miss Kee do you think I am going to be outdone by my niece? Don't you realise that we Germans who've left our country understand these race matters very well. Don't you know we feel very sympathetic to your people?"

Of the Valencians' assessment of Kee and O'Reilly, Cunard reports:

valour comrades whose good hearts have brought them to us; not only hearts, but intelligence, for they've understood our victory will help both the poor Irish and the Black peoples who are worse off yet – ah, we have not forgotten Ethiopia.

African American rights struggles, Irish self-determination, anti-Nazi confrontations with anti-Semitism: they all coincide and articulate through the anti-fascist struggle in Spain. But forming the background noise that enables the conversation to form as such is sentiment for the original victim of fascist military invasion - Ethiopia. Indeed, many African Americans who fight in Spain do so because they have previously opposed Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia due to a Pan-African race consciousness cultivated in the preceding Garvey era (see for example Yates 1989, 91–97). Their reasoning is iconically expressed by one volunteer as “this ain't Ethiopia, but it'll do” (see Collum, Berch, and Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives 1992). Likewise, a similar sentiment is possible to glean from the internationalism of some of the Spanish fighters that Cunard speaks to and reports of:

When this is over, when we have won ... when we have conquered the foreign invaders, we shall go and help to liberate other people who are suffering, like the Ethiopians; we want to aid them to become as free as we shall be ourselves (Cunard 1938a).

Witness, also, such a sentiment directly from the pen of republican fighters: *Solidaridad Obrera* (1938), the *Workers' Solidarity* newspaper of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, write to Pankhurst's newspaper and “trusts that Ethiopia will soon regain her independence”.

The International Brigades have not been entirely rehabilitated into the memory of cosmopolitan Europe, largely due to questions regarding the extent of their involvement with the Communist International (see Richardson 1982). Nevertheless, it is still interesting to observe the general lack of presence of Ethiopia in the literature on the Brigades and the tendency to paint their spirit of internationalism in fundamentally European – or at a push, European/North American – colours (for example Johnston 1968; Stradling 2003). Take, for instance, commentary on the British contingent of the brigades. During commemorations, fifty years on, the struggle is articulated as a “race ... to save not only Spain, but eventually Europe from barbarism” (Kaye 1985, 3–4). Elsewhere, the wider context in which the British members volunteered is painted as a “struggle of democracy against international fascism”, taking place “across Europe from Germany to London's east end” (Baxell 2004, 32). There is no expansion of this context to take in Ethiopia as constitutive of the international struggle. Occasional mentions of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia might be made, even accompanying references to the presence of colonial subjects in the battalions, but usually only in passing and with no challenge to the Eurocentric cartography it is placed within (for example Alexander 1982, 22, 35–36). Interestingly, Richard Baxell, in his book on British volunteers, quotes Sam Wild, a leader of the British battalion, explaining his reasons for volunteering:

Well, to me it was elementary. Here was fascism spreading all over the world, the rape of Abyssinia, the rise of fascism in Germany and the persecution of the Jews there, and the rise of the blackshirts in Britain with their anti-Semitism, and especially their anti-Irishism (Baxell 2004, 37).

Yet immediately afterwards, Baxter comments that “Wild makes no distinction between fascism in Germany, Italy, Britain or, crucially, Spain..”. Ethiopia has instantly disappeared from Baxell’s interpretation; Wild’s explanation has become *sui generis* European (Baxell 2004, 37).

This disappearing act is quotidian in wider narrations of Europe’s struggle against fascism, narrations that are designed to service a cosmopolitan European project. In these narratives it is as if fascism was only ever a fraternal challenge - either a mutation or realisation of Europe’s birthing of modernity – but, nonetheless, a challenge absent of a colonial dimension. This is especially the case for German theorists. Despite relying on the colonially induced language of social anthropology to make key arguments, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s 1944 explanation of fascism sidesteps an engagement with colonial legacies when it chooses to allegorise Greek myth in order to explicate the “dialectic of enlightenment” (see Broeck 2013). More recently Jürgen Habermas (Dietz 2011), in his plea to save European cosmopolitics from the imperialism of the EU, traces the commitment to freedom and democratisation back to the Second World War and the fight against fascism. Again, the colonial dimensions of fascism remain unremarked upon.

This chapter addresses the second theme of this edited collection, a complication and rethinking of Europe’s cosmopolitan foundations by dwelling on Europe’s colonial pasts. In many ways, anti-fascist internationalism in the 1930s, exemplified for instance in the Spanish brigades, is considered to be the modern genesis of European cosmopolitanism as a workable political project. But instead of a political tradition of *anti-fascist internationalism*, largely *sui generis* to Europe, I want to retrieve the tradition of *anti-colonial anti-fascism*, in which “Europe” is posited as not just part of the problem but as unable to express or solve the problem of fascism *sui generis* without addressing its colonial project and the conjoined struggles that this problem and project give rise to.

For this purpose I excavate contemporaneous considerations of the relationship between the violent Italian colonization of Ethiopia and the violent civil war in Spain. And, rather than focusing on the African American presence in the International Brigades (see most recently Featherstone 2014; Soto 2014), I examine perhaps the most important anti-colonial anti-fascist archive of the time - Pankhurst’s newspaper, *New Times and Ethiopia News* (NTEN). In what follows I firstly introduce the contours of NTEN and the ways in which it introduces the Spanish cause into a newspaper originally devoted to the Ethiopia cause. I then excavate an anti-colonial anti-fascist position from Pankhurst’s editorials between 1936-1939 (for an overview see R. Pankhurst 2006). Subsequently, I extract a broader living knowledge tradition of anti-colonial anti-fascism that is suggested by the various letters and extracts printed in the newspaper. I conclude by asking what lessons might this tradition impart for contemporary Europe, beset now, as it was in the 1930s, by austerity and racialized resentment?

### **New Times and Ethiopia News**

Pankhurst’s anti-fascist sentiments predate the Ethiopia crisis. They consolidate around the murder by Italian fascists of the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti in 1924 and lead Pankhurst to subsequently convene the Women’s International Matteotti Committee (R. Pankhurst 2006, 773). However it is the first foreign military adventure of Italian fascism – Mussolini’s invasion of independent Ethiopia – that returns Pankhurst to anti-fascist activities. Ethiopia, like Italy, is a full member of the League of Nations, the organization convened in the aftermath of the first world war to ensure peace and security for all sovereign states. In light of Ethiopia’s recognized independence

and Italy's clear aggression, Pankhurst begins publication of NTEN in May 1936 with a clear statement: "the cause of Ethiopia cannot be divided from the course of international justice" (S. Pankhurst 1936a). NTEN is published far and wide, with a distribution network in Sudan, Djibouti, India, West, East and South Africa, North America, South America and the Caribbean as well as mainland Europe. Hundreds of copies are sent *gratis* to politicians and other notables in Britain. And soon after the uprising of *Nacionales* in July 1936, two months into publication of NTEN, Pankhurst begins to fold the evolving struggle over fascism in Spain into the narration of the existing struggle over fascism in Ethiopia.

The newspaper relates the struggles over Ethiopia and Spain via a number of techniques. The changing front-page tagline of NTEN prompts the reader towards this relation. For example, the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1936 edition features two front page headlines - "How Ethiopia stands today" and "The present Spanish conflict" - while its tagline confirms "Two victims of fascism - Spain and Abyssinia". Indeed, the front pages regularly use juxtaposition to relate the two struggles. For example, on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 1936 front cover a headline of "Fascism at work", accompanied by pictures of Spanish children killed by fascists earlier in the month, sits alongside a secondary headline of "An Ethiopian woman tells of the Italian occupation". Hence, the fascist violence of women and murder of children are revealed to span the continental divide between supposedly civilized Europe and savage Africa.

Just as NTEN is designed to be a transmitter of information as well as opinion on the Ethiopian cause, so does the newspaper, between 1936 and 1939, reprint extracts from the Spanish press and anti-fascist press bureaus. In fact, for a while, NTEN makes room in its eight pages for a section entitled "What we hear from Spain", comprised of information compiled from statements issued by the press bureau of the Barcelona Generalitat. The paper also reproduces texts from the Spanish government, including a broadcast by the Spanish prime minister in its August 29<sup>th</sup> 1936 edition, letters from Spanish intellectuals, a statement from the Madrid Regional Defence Committee in early 1937, and, for a short time, eye witness accounts by English residents of Madrid and Barcelona. As the fascist powers expand their operations in 1938 so does the newspaper introduce a section on its back page entitled "New Times [note, minus Ethiopia News]: for justice and freedom against fascism". The front-page tagline of the newspaper around this period becomes a slightly more generic: "the voice of victim nations and defenceless minorities".

The newspaper is also well aware of the African-American influence in the international brigades, an influence that has more recently been remembered. NTEN regularly publishes Langston Hughes' poems, including his famous "Addressed to Alabama" (Hughes 1938a), "Madrid" (Hughes 1938c), "Poem for Clarence" (on the Scottsboro case) (Hughes 1938b), and "Song for Ourselves" wherein Hughes exclaims "Czechoslovakia! Ethiopia! Spain! One after another! ... Where will the long snake of greed strike again? Will it be here, brother?" (Hughes 1938d) NTEN also publish some poems by Nicolas Guillen the Afro-Cuban poet who has been travelling in Spain and reporting on the war, and who is translated into English by Hughes in Madrid, November 1937 (Guillen 1938).

Pankhurst is by far the most important navigator who takes the newspaper through its various engagements with fascism. And for this reason I want to now spend some time tracking her own editorial commitment to Spain as she continues to pursue the Ethiopian cause.

### **Pankhurst's anti-colonial anti-fascism**

On August 1<sup>st</sup> 1936, soon after hostilities between the Spanish Government and the *Nacionales* begin in earnest, Pankhurst writes an editorial entitled, presciently, “The fascist world war – Ethiopia and Spain”. This war against democracy began in Ethiopia, observes Pankhurst (1936b), and “now it has spread to Spain” with Italian and German assistance. Pankhurst then compares the military strictures suffered by both Ethiopia in 1935 and the Spanish government in 1936: both were debarred by key members of the League from purchasing munitions to defend themselves while having to reckon with a murderous Italian air force (see also S. Pankhurst 1936g). Crucially, Pankhurst notes that much of the fascist fighting force is composed of African “mercenaries” from Spanish Morocco. In this respect, Pankhurst deploys a trope formulated by Haile Selassie I in his groundbreaking speech at Geneva to the League in 1936 and picked up again, post-war, by Aimé Césaire (2000) in his *Discourse on Colonialism*: the brutality that Europe visits upon the colonial world eventually returns to visit Europe itself. Or, as Pankhurst (1936b) puts it, “the evil which Mussolini did in taking mercenary black troops to exterminate the Ethiopians is now being done in Europe.”

Additionally, Pankhurst claims that the racial disavowal of Ethiopians as victims of fascism is a technique that is now being deployed to disavow the new Spanish victims:

People stood by while Ethiopia was vanquished: this is only Africa; this is not a White Man’s country. They listened to the Italian propaganda: these are primitives, their customs are barbarous. Now people stand by again: they do not like Spanish politics; these are a disorderly people, fighting amongst themselves; they are anarchists, socialists, reds, strikers; it does not matter to us (S. Pankhurst 1936b).

Pankhurst underlines this point, once more, in the following issue, by referring to “race prejudice, class prejudice and religious prejudice” as a means by which government could “befog and distort the issues” so as to arrive at a pretence of “neutrality” with regards to both the Italian occupation of Ethiopia and growing Italian and German intervention in the Spanish civil war (S. Pankhurst 1936c). Alternatively, Pankhurst notes the institutional strength of voices in Britain who protest against “alleged atrocities” carried out by Spanish government supporters. These protests, she argues, are hypocritical in so far as those self-same voices “took no notice of the disgusting form of warfare conducted by the Italians in Abyssinia” (S. Pankhurst 1936e).

Pankhurst is adamant, from the start, that the fascist excursions into Spain should, just as was the case for Ethiopia, be placed on the agenda of the League. Pankhurst challenges the League to defend the democratic principles upon which it is putatively based. And if the League fails to “prevent the indefensible attacks which the Fascist Dictatorships are making on peaceable populations outside their own territory”, then it will have become practically useless (S. Pankhurst 1936d). In delivering this prognosis Pankhurst makes no colonially-induced division between the rights of populations living within and without of Europe. Indeed, Pankhurst categorises Ethiopia and Spain both as “small states” which have “witnessed with horror what collective neutrality means in the hands of the powerful governments which control the League” (S. Pankhurst 1936f). The Mediterranean, in this cartographic imagination, is an inland sea rather than a frontier of civilization.

Throughout 1937 Pankhurst folds the ever increasing victims of fascist expansion - Czechoslovakia, China etc – into a global story of anti-fascist struggle that begins in Ethiopia. This is not to say that within this narrative each situation remains entirely equivalent. For example, there is,

Pankhurst believes, an intensification of fascist barbarity. In April, she publishes news that some of the fascist troops in Spain have been instructed in chemical defence. Pankhurst muses,

with great simplicity of mind we had thought that the lowest depth of infamy had been touched when Rome ordered the use of poison gas against the unarmed population of Ethiopia; we have to confess our error, for poison gas in crowded Spanish cities will be yet more devastating than on Abyssinian highlands (S. Pankhurst 1937b).

Nevertheless, Pankhurst's narrative does not leave Ethiopia to cool in Africa as the conflict heats up on the European continent. In fact, at the beginning of 1938 she is still daring to believe that "the heroic struggle of Ethiopia and Spain will precipitate the fall of fascism in Italy and Germany" (S. Pankhurst 1938a).

By the summer of 1938 Pankhurst is reflecting on the ascendancy of the *Nacionales*. "The French frontier is sealed [to internationalist fighters for the republic]", she notes, "as Ethiopia was left to fight her lone, heroic fight, with her own unaided resources against the combined force of two foreign invaders" (S. Pankhurst 1938b). On February 11<sup>th</sup> 1939, writing just after Barcelona falls, and facing the defeat of the republic, Pankhurst restates the position of the newspaper: "our policy is international justice and good faith for small nations and great. Our policy is democracy against fascism" (S. Pankhurst 1939a). In this respect, Pankhurst admits "no withdrawal" from the position that "the Italians must clear out of Abyssinia, lock, stock and barrel, with all their blackshirts; the Japanese out of China, and the Italians and Germans out of Spain and all her possessions overseas (S. Pankhurst 1939a).

In two subsequent editorials, on the eve of World War Two, Pankhurst re-narrates the recent ascendancy of fascism. The invasion of Ethiopia, she asserts, "was the first adventure of fascism on the international plane" (S. Pankhurst 1939b). Pankhurst also argues that the army assembled to invade Ethiopia could not be demobilized in Italy for fear of an outbreak of revolution, and that the outlet for this martial force was none other than Spain. Pankhurst, then, intimately connects Ethiopia and Spain through the martial rise of fascism. And it is the European colonial project that is ultimately responsible for the connection. After all, European powers have always desired "to exploit the African people for the creation of wealth" and for this reason have feared the "one Black Empire" that might "stimulate aspirations throughout Africa" for self-rule (S. Pankhurst 1939c). Now, both Ethiopia and Spain have been declared "conquered and superseded" and the "two great powers" most responsible for the covenant of the League and the preservation of democracy in Europe – Pankhurst means Britain and France – are precisely the two colonial powers that have recognized fascist Italy's geopolitical claims (S. Pankhurst 1939c).

Through the historical and causal connection between African adventures and Spanish wars Pankhurst makes a moral case for debts Europeans owe to disavowed Ethiopia:

The Ethiopian question, though seemingly obscured and thrust into the background by other tragedies, remains today a fundamental part of all the problems of the day ... Only by giving justice to Ethiopia may we hope for the moral regeneration of Europe" (S. Pankhurst 1939b).

And so “Ethiopia therefore remains, as heretofore, the acid test of European politics. More so today than ever at the time of the sanctions” (S. Pankhurst 1939c). Indeed, it seems that for Pankhurst, courage to continue the anti-fascist struggle in Europe must be learnt from the Ethiopian struggle:

Remember Ethiopia and her glorious recovery, the great areas of her country now freed by her brave refusal to bow to the invader. At the fall of Addis Ababa few believed that Ethiopian Resistance could continue – and yet it does, and grows in strength. The end of the struggle between Fascism and justice has not yet come in Spain, any more than it has come to Ethiopia (S. Pankhurst 1939d).

Crucially, Pankhurst does not rescind her anti-fascist *and* anti-colonial narrative with the arrival of World War Two. In the 30<sup>th</sup> September issue, barely a month after Britain’s declaration of war against Germany, Pankhurst reminds readers that her paper has always believed fascism to be “a disease that would expand beyond national frontiers, polluting the world at large, unless extirpated root and branch”; and that “the special Northern brand of Fascism, against which we are at war, ... commonly called Nazism, does not alter this essential fact” (S. Pankhurst 1939e). Even at this point, Pankhurst pays homage to Haile Selassie I, now (but not for long) suffering in “silent exile”. This is no “servile homage paid to mere social position”, Pankhurst cautions, but rather the “expression of the earnest and impassioned feelings of people who are now themselves bearing the stress of a mortal context”. Pankhurst (1939e, 3) enjoins her readers to “remember his noble, prophetic words uttered at Geneva” in 1936, namely, that international morality was at stake, and for this reason “justice is one ...the battle of Ethiopia is ours: for freedom”.

Nevertheless, the relationship between anti-colonialism and anti-fascism is never simple or smooth. And in this respect, it is important to dwell upon a qualification that Pankhurst makes in early 1939 when, describing the newspapers position on “democracy against fascism”, she bids the Italians and Germans to clear out of “Spain *and all her possessions overseas* [my emphasis]”. Reading this one might ask: does Pankhurst wish to make Spain safe again for democracy or for Spanish empire?

Certainly the use by Franco of the “Army of Africa”, composed in the main of recruits from Spanish Morocco, complicates any mapping of discrete racial coordinates onto the anti-fascist struggle; the republic is supported by peoples of African heritage, *and* African soldiers fight on the side of the *Nacionales*. On the one hand this complication leads African-American commentators such as Langston Hughes to problematise the mapping of Black solidarity directly onto the Spanish cause, as had been done more easily with the Ethiopian cause (although, even with the latter, *ascari* from Eritrea and Somalia fight on the Italian side) (Soto 2014, 141). On the other hand, the presence of these African soldiers prompts some Spanish anti-fascists to reveal their colonially induced racism such that the Mediterranean becomes, once more, a frontier of civilization:

They’ve brought to Spain with the help of money of capitalists all over the world, the Moslem Moors, eternal enemies of Spain, who, in former times were fighting against them for seven centuries (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1936d).

Pankhurst’s own navigation through the tension between Spanish republicanism and imperialism can be gleaned quite early on in the publication of her newspaper. In November 1936 she is compelled to reply to a critique of NTEN by *Light*, a Muslim weekly journal printed in Lahore

(*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1936c). *Light* has taken issue with NTEN's stand on international justice: "to an oriental this sounds a mere platitude, for the orient knows by now too much to associate justice with a western people." If, by Orient, *Light* means "the coloured peoples of the colonies of the European Powers", then to these words Pankhurst replies "we can subscribe". However, she takes issue with the subsequent claim from *Light* that Western democracy and fascism are the same condition to the Oriental world. *Light* even asks "if it would not be, after all, a piece of good luck if the Moors come back to the rule of Spain?" Pankhurst counters:

To assume that the great medieval Arab civilization could be restored by hired soldiers in the service of just those forces by which centuries ago, it was destroyed, is playing on words.

She also seeks to remind *Light* that her newspaper,

in face of great difficulties defends the cause of Ethiopia, the cause of an African people, just as, years ago, the present editor of our paper defended the Moors of Morocco against the Spanish generals, who, it should be noted, were the same who to-day use hired Moors ... to fight Spanish democracy.

Pankhurst takes the position that the Spanish colonies are precisely the part of the polity most vulnerable to fascist rule and, hence, fascist oppression (a phenomenon that will manifest soon in Vichy France). In this respect she is aided by her publication of reports from Nancy Cunard, sojourning in Spain and Tunisia, that variously point out how many of the Moors have been forcefully conscripted into Franco's army and that there exists resistance to such conscription across North Africa (for example Cunard 1938d; Cunard 1938c). Rightly or wrongly, then, Pankhurst believes, along with Hughes, that democracy for the Moors can only be delivered by a democratic Spain. It is through this strategic logic, I suggest, that Pankhurst agitates for foreign fascist forces to "clear out" of Spanish colonies.

Through Pankhurst's editorials we therefore receive a sketch of anti-colonial anti-fascism. But it is also possible to glean in the letter columns, and various snippets of news and reports, cognate commitments that tie the fate of Spain to the fate of Ethiopia by various subjects of the British empire and beyond, including, but not only, African-Americans. We must remember that Pankhurst is empathically not a lone genius. As much as she constructs a framework through her editorials she is also mobilizing for this purpose materials from many intellectuals and commentators - white, Black and otherwise. In what now follows I shall use these additional fragments to excavate a broader political tradition of anti-colonial anti-fascism that is being expressed through the pages of NTEN.

### **Anti-colonial anti-fascism: A living knowledge tradition**

Similar to Pankhurst, various commentators in the paper make a point of arguing for an African point of departure to the problem of European fascism and the Spanish civil war. Opening the London Trades Council conference at Westminster central hall in September 1937, the secretary A.M. Wall argues:

All we see happening in Spain and in China today is a consequence of what history will call the "great betrayal", of the incapacity of the League to protect a member state against the most

obvious and cruel aggression. There is every day a new reason to remember Ethiopia (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1937b).

Later, in 1939, and on the cusp of a new world war, Alberto Cianca of the *Giustizia e Libertà* (the Italian anti-fascist resistance movement), speaking in New York, updates the same line of reasoning:

The invasion of Ethiopia is the starting point, the primary cause of the present uncertain political situation. Ethiopia explains the “Anschluss” [the joining of Austria to Nazi Germany]; it also explains the Spanish war. It is from the Ethiopian crisis that descends, by logic development, the Munich Crisis (Cianca 1939).

This chronology of inter-war fascism is succinctly stated by W.S. Auguste (1938) of Mauritius: “Ethiopia is the first victim of fascism, Spain second, China is third.”

The African point of departure is salient because it allows some commentators to take a comparative approach to analysing the character of fascist foreign policy as it comes back to affect domestic polities within Europe. And for that they find commonalities – rather than differences – between the brutality of the struggles in Ethiopia – an African polity – and in Spain – a European polity. Pierre van Paassen, a special correspondent in Spain, working for the *Toronto Daily Star*, comments in September 1936:

Here in Spain fascist civilisation is at work. There is no difference between the Blackshirts “civilising” Ethiopia and the Blueshirts of general Mola now establishing order and decency in Spain. The Spanish rebels, just as did the Italian fascists in Ethiopia, systemically destroy every Red Cross establishment, and where they pass every hospital is burned (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1936b).

Upon hearing “the horrible news from Spain” of the bombing of towns, Muganda Patriot (1937), “an African”, similarly writes to the NTEN in August 1937 that “as it was in Ethiopia, so it is now in Spain; thousands of people, men, women and children are being killed”. For this writer, fascism has now twice revealed itself to be a gospel of barbarism rather than a “gospel of peace”.

African points of departure also reveal the nature of great power politics in the League, and the way in which it has facilitated the proliferation of fascism. In September 1936 the national executive of the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction reaffirms its pledge not to recognize Italian sovereignty over Ethiopia. With reference to the growing international collusion between Spanish rebels and Mussolini’s armed forces, the executive considers that “some of the very unfortunate international aspects of the Spanish crisis ... are directly attributable to the lack of a firm policy on League questions and the consequent weakening of its authority” (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1936a). This point speaks directly to the failure of key League members to meaningfully act when Italy invades another full sovereign member of the League – Ethiopia. In fact this failure, now repeated in Spain, even leads the *Federated India* paper to argue that “Abyssinia and Spain would have managed their crisis much better if left to themselves, in the absence of deceptive assurances by great Britain and France” (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1937a).

I would suggest that such comparisons enable the cultivation of a deep sense of solidarity with Spain from those of African heritage who have supported Ethiopia. This is certainly the case with African American support, as is evident from the introduction to this chapter. In November

1937 the National Negro Congress in New York City pass a resolution demanding that “our government refuse to grant official recognition, in any way whatsoever, to the claim of conquest of Ethiopia by Italian fascism.” But whilst the congress hails the continued struggle of the people of Ethiopia it recognizes that the “struggle of the freedom of that country is also being carried out in the fight of the Spanish people against the forces of fascism” (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1937c). Likewise, Britain’s Black subjects in the Caribbean and African colonies express their solidarity with Spain. A poem written by W.R. Waddy, a sojourner of the continent and Caribbean waxes lyrical:

We pray to help Abyssinia, China and Spain, whose precious blood was shed wantonly.  
May these martyrs be numbered with the brave saints!  
O lord, save blood-stained Europe, and save England.  
Lift her out of sin and deception, and keep her far from the nauseous deceit of fascism (Waddy 1937).

Note well: this solidarity is also self-interested. Influential Sierra Leonean activist Wallace Johnson reminds his readers in April 1937 that “the aggressors against European peace are playing their part in Spain and plotting other attacks”. Mussolini now “has eyes on the British Empire”, and Germany wants its colonies back. “Let Britain beware” – and Africans too. For if Spain is disavowed Il Duce and der Führer might become their new overlords (Johnson 1937).

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom many supporters of the Ethiopian cause make clear their support for republican Spain. Mary Downes from Croydon protests that to recognize Mussolini’s title over that of Haile Selassie I “is to agree not only with murder and massacre in Ethiopia but with the same thing in Spain and in China” (Downes 1938). Around the same time people of Worthing sign a protest against the British recognition of Italian sovereignty over Ethiopia. In the same spirit of “elementary justice” they also urge:

that it is the duty of our government to insist that non-intervention in Spain should be rigidly enforced by all members of the non-intervention committee, or that the government of Spain should be enabled to enjoy its rights under international law to obtain necessary supplies and munitions (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1938a).

On a more practical assignment, workers on Tyneside pack a full cargo of foodstuffs for Spanish relief. The generosity of firms and especially ordinary sympathisers is to be noted, for as the organizers point out, “Tyneside is a poor place due to unemployment”. Additionally, “some of our Abyssinia workers here aided in this grand effort” (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1939a).

In the metropolises of northern Europe more cosmopolitan arrangements are being executed. At a service in July 1938, organised by Rev E. O. Iredale at St Clements, north London, the flags of Ethiopia, Spain, China and Austria are hung from the wall. Songs sung include: the Austrian worker’s traditional *das Lied der Arbeit*, Chinese soldiers farewells, the Catalan song of freedom - *Els Segadors*, an old Irish melody for the fallen, and the national anthem of the Spanish Republic. Representatives of the embassies and delegations of Ethiopia, China, Spain and the Basque country enter. Rev Iredale works his sermon around Matthew 25:40: “Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” And the

congregation join in intercession for the peoples of Ethiopia, Spain and China (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1938b).

August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1938, Paris. The Universal Conference against the Bombing of Open Cities and for the Peace Campaign convenes. Lord Cecil, a prominent figure in the League of Nations Union, presides, and present in the hall are Langston Hughes, René Maran (celebrated French Afro-Guyanese poet and novelist), Lorenzo Tazaz (Ethiopia's delegate to the League in Geneva) and Jawaharlal Nehru (future first prime minister of India) (Cunard 1938e). Also in attendance is William Pickens, the field secretary of the American National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Pickens, en route to Barcelona, declares "I shall do everything I can to help the Spanish republicans" (Cunard 1938f).

But perhaps the most powerful enunciation, in NTEN, of anti-colonial anti-fascism and its principled account of justice for all despite and beyond colonial and colour lines, comes from an anonymous Ethiopian student, published originally in the weekly paper of *Giustizia e Libertà* (Anonymous 1937). Writing in 1937 the student begins by acknowledging the "epic fight" being waged against the "same enemy" by the Spanish people. Yet he requests European democracies to not "lose sight of the struggle which a people in a distant land still pursues for the same idea of freedom." Simply because the location is Africa does not mean that a different idea of freedom pertains to that of Europe. Ethiopia is a term that encompasses "all the Africans now under fascism, be they Libyan, Eritrean, Somalian..." And the student reaffirms that, regardless of the prejudices of Europe, Ethiopia has "a profound sympathy with the Spanish cause". The student even charges Ethiopia with a responsibility to ensure that Franco and Mussolini "shall not be able to use black troops in the last battle of despotism against the Italian people."

Crucially, the student berates anti-fascists whose narratives of modernity have made them forgot their anti-colonialism. One such socialist writer is the prolific H.N. Brailsford, who, the student reminds the audience, has recently proclaimed that "Spain interests us more than Ethiopia", because, despite being "victims of unjust aggression", Ethiopia's "feudal monarchy has nothing to offer civilisation". While Brailsford claims that the case of Ethiopia "is only that of the failure of the League", in Spain "on the contrary, they are fighting for us". The student begs to differ: "We shall not be unjust to Spain, by being just to Ethiopia", and he reminds Brailsford that even Marx never attacked independence movements, even if the peoples were "semi-feudal". In any case, the student asks, "is it really true that Africa, and more especially Ethiopia, has nothing to offer to civilization?" Italy is not as old as Ethiopia. Still, muses the student,

let us define civilization as has been done by the great modern thinkers of Europe: Montesquieu, Voltaire, Vico, Hegel, Burckhardt and Croce. The conception all these great thinkers had of civilisation can be condensed in this formula: Civilization is consciousness of the universality of the human race.

### **Conclusion: We Have Not Forgotten Ethiopia**

The first winter of the new world war; and a reunion for supporters of the Ethiopia cause. Dr Charles Martin, head of the old Ethiopian legation, makes a speech in which he bemoans the disinterest shown to Ethiopia by the present government, Eleanor Rathbone MP replies:

But you are not forgotten. I cannot tell you in the constant discussions I have had lately over the origins of the war and of the peace terms, how often people have said to me that if we had stood firmly by Abyssinia, none of the other tragedies would have happened (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1939b).

To not forget Ethiopia is to remember that true anti-fascism was necessarily anti-imperial, and that the fate of European democracy was therefore intricately woven into the fate of its colonial rule. Of course, this anti-fascist anti-colonial memory holds many different political projects, all vying for life within its matrix. Some projects were radical, others reformist; some driven by class consciousness, others by race consciousness; liberal, socialist, communist positions collide. Yet in many ways, these differences are not as important as the deeper principle that they were all invested in: accountability for all, by all. Sylvia Pankhurst was one of those Europeans who sought to recover a tradition of natural justice that had been twisted and fractured by liberal imperialism and civilizing missions so that “their” justice always required “our” sacrifice: Europeans/Africans; civilized/primitives; Spain/Ethiopia. But Pankhurst begged to differ with this logic. “In the scales of international justice”, she asserted, “it is not, and cannot be, a question of Ethiopia *versus* Spain, but of justice and righteousness for each and all” (S. Pankhurst 1937a).

Pankhurst and her honourable colleagues at NTEN were not the only proponents of an anti-fascist *and* anti-colonial global justice. In truth, the seedbed of this movement lay in the Ethiopian defenders of Ethiopia, in the thoughts and actions of African-Americans fighting a proxy – yet for that fact no less principled – war in Spain, and in the multitude of organizing groups in the Caribbean and African colonies who sent precious pence and shillings to the Ethiopian relief funds. The seedbed lay with those who worried that Britain might hand over their colonies to Germany just as it had effectively surrendered Spain and Ethiopia to Italy, and with the Africans in all the Italian – and subsequently French – occupied territories and colonies who experienced fascism at its cutting colonial edge. These peoples could intimately apprehend that the fate of Spain would be that of Ethiopia would be that of themselves. Such an acute awareness was the kernel that made anti-colonial anti-fascism a political tradition that enjoyed such a wide constituency.

Yet (apart from within Ethiopia itself) none of these peoples raised grand armies, albeit not for want of trying. And so they have since receded into fragmented details on the margins of large history books on fascism, world wars, and miraculous European rebirths. They are largely marginalised even in memories of the International Brigades. Why is it difficult to remember such a profoundly democratic impulse that resonated so deeply and widely across the imperial, colonial and occupied world during the inter-war period? Why, when we do remember, should the writers, contributors, activists and fighters featured in NTEN feel to us, nowadays, so out of place, so precociously ... cosmopolitan?

I suggest that one reason might be the comforting but suffocating myth of a *sui-generis* cosmopolitan Europe. It is a myth that has lasted the sixty years of the project for European unity. It is still with us. The inheritors and purveyors of this myth have yet to summon the courage to embrace “and”. They have instead opted to defend “versus”. Austere white futures are currently placed in opposition to black and brown bodies. Racial/cultural hierarchies of moral investment are made by cosmopolitans who would know better if they only were aware of their colonial European pasts. For other traditions are always retrievable, and they reach across the race divide:

We [the Spanish people] are working and will always work to smash this modern beast called fascism. .. [I]t is necessary to take revenge for our dear dead friends and relatives. It is necessary not to leave the ground clear for them in Spain and Abyssinia, to enable them to go on to other countries (Guelke 1938).

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