half read 30 books or more a year, and more than a fourth read at least a book a week. And her respondents have a simple solution to the problem of "poor writing (variously defined as condescending, wordy, and pompous)": when they encounter it, they stop reading.

## OTHER NATIONS

# *Has Democracy Come to Ethiopia?*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

Since the murderous dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam took flight in 1991, ending 17 years of communist rule, Ethiopia has gone democratic, at least in appearance. It now boasts a written constitution, a three-branch federal system based on nine (ethnic) states, an elected national parliament, political parties, and an independent press. Does reality match the appearance? Paul B. Henze, a Washington-based RAND Corporation consultant, maintains in the *Journal of Democracy* (Oct. 1998) that it does. Two other scholars, invited to comment by the journal's editors, accuse him of a whitewash.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, born nearly four years ago, "now operates within a constitutional and legal framework that possesses all the universally recognized characteristics of a democratic system," says Henze, who has written several books about Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region.

True, the political process is dominated by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF), rooted in the northern province of Tigre, whose military forces overthrew Mengistu's regime. But opposition leaders have simply declined to participate in the political process, both during the transition to the new republic and since, Henze says. When elections were held for the new 525-member parliament in 1995, most opposition parties refused to put up candidates. In 1993, many opposition politicians strongly objected to holding the referendum in the province of Eritrea that resulted in its independence, after three decades of civil war.

Efforts by foreign embassies, pro-democracy organizations, and others to encourage opposition leaders to join the political process have only strengthened their "pervasive rejectionism," Henze says. Unfortunately, Ethiopians' historical experience "has not taught [them] to grasp the concept of constructive criticism."

International human rights organizations have condemned the EPDRF for various alleged abuses, including the detention of thousands of militants, some of them allegedly tortured, and the arrests of dissenting journalists. But Henze argues that injustices are "inevitable" in Ethiopia's circumstances. "What is noteworthy is that the country's leaders have resorted so seldom and so briefly to repressive actions and that they have consistently maintained their commitment to creating a more open, tolerant, humane, and prosperous society."

The critics have focused, for the most part, on conflicts involving intellectuals in the capital city, Addis Ababa, Henze says. The issues are of little importance to most of Ethiopia's 59 million people, 85 percent of whom are peasants. Moreover, the interest of the vast majority in opposition activity has waned, he says, "as the pace of recovery, reform, educational expansion, and economic development has accelerated." Ethiopia's gross domestic product grew at an average rate of 6.9 percent between 1992 and 1997, when production of coffee, its chief export, reached an all-time high. "Most elements of the opposition continue to avoid participation in elections in order to avoid exposing their lack of support among the electorate," Henze believes.

Richard Joseph, a political scientist at Emory University, Atlanta, charges that Henze has distorted the idea of democracy to justify "what are at best semi-authoritarian practices." Joseph cites a 1998 review by Human Rights Watch which charged that by sponsoring 16 ethnic political parties, the

regime purposely split the opposition and "ensured a quasi-monopoly of power." The review also said that the boycotted elections were indeed unfairly conducted.

Eager to get financial aid from Western countries and international organizations, all African regimes today "claim either to be democratic, or in transition to democracy," Joseph observes, "just as, 20 years ago they all claimed to be pursuing 'development,' 'nation-building,' and 'political integration.'"

John W. Harbeson, a political scientist at City University of New York, agrees. While the EPDRF represents a big improvement over Mengistu's regime, its constitutional structure is merely a façade covering "an essentially bureaucratic-authoritarian regime dependent upon the EPDRF's superior military muscle," he says.

"The EPDRF's leadership, whose core Tigrean constituency represents perhaps 10 percent of the population, has used its military supremacy to secure political hegemony," without much regard for rebuilding the political system on a democratic foundation, according to Harbeson. No doubt the opposition parties deserve some of the blame, he concludes, but the larger responsibility for the absence of true democracy in Ethiopia today lies with the ruling party.

## *The Dis-United Kingdom*

"The Rise of English Nationalism" by Robin Harris, in *The National Interest* (Winter 1998–99), 1112 16th St., N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036; "Identity Crisis," in *The Economist* (Oct. 3, 1998), 25 St. James's St., London SW1A 1HG.

For most of the United Kingdom's 292-year history, no clear distinction was made between being British and being English. But that may be changing. "Though most of the rest of the world has not yet grasped it, Britain is now Balkanizing," contends Harris, a freelance writer who served in Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government.

Consider the English football (soccer) fans. When the English national team played in the World Cup final in 1966, the stadium in London was a forest of waving Union Jacks, symbol of the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. During last summer's Cup competition in France, however, it was the Cross of Saint George, the national flag of England, that was "streaming from giant banners, painted on the faces of lager-louts in a hundred English urban centers, finally worn by chanting mobs in the back streets of Marseilles." Higher on the social scale, Harris says, "grumbles about the Scots" are increasingly common.

The feelings are mutual. A survey last June showed that most Scots regard themselves as Scottish rather British, and believe an independent Scotland is inevitable. On May 6, Scots are to go to the polls to elect their own devolved parliament within the United Kingdom, the first such legislative body since 1707, when the independent parliaments of Scotland and England agreed to merge. The new parliament is the gift of Prime Minister Tony Blair, who hopes Scottish voters will opt for his Labor Party rather than the secessionist Scottish National Party.

The decline of empire and the extensive secularization of what was once a self-consciously Protestant state have weakened the bonds holding Britons together, Harris argues. In addition, political correctness has made suspect "all of the more recognizable features of Britishness—language, history, tradition, ethnic homogeneity." Last summer's football hooligans no longer possessed, he says, "a sufficiently compelling British national identity, and they wanted to flaunt . . . a new identity that they had made their own."

But while English football fans may wave the flag of Saint George, the *Economist* points out, "they also love to belt out choruses of 'Rule Britannia.'" The London-based newsmagazine cites a recent survey showing that while 84 percent of Britons identify very or fairly strongly with England, Scotland, or Wales, 78 percent also identify with Britain. "Those trying to create an alternative English nationalism to the muscular, xenophobic and racially exclusive variety," the *Economist* says, "take heart from this willingness to embrace a variety of national identities."