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Review

RUTH IYOB, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941-93*

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RUTH IYOB, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941-93* = *African Studies Series* 82. Cambridge, the University Press, 1995 [repr. 1997?] 198 pages, two maps, hardback. Price: ca. DM 88. ISBN 0 521 47327 6.

The recent history of Eritrea is told in this book in a very clear and objective manner. It is not so much the discovery of new evidence or even a fresh interpretation of Eritrean history that wins credit for this work as the authoress' meticulous unravelling and sorting out of the intricate jumble of events muddled up by the propaganda of the multifarious internal and external partisans. The analysis revolves around the central question posed by the authoress herself: "Why did it take so long for Eritrea to emerge into nationhood?" The answer is naturally much more complex than what the question implies and, hence, explanations have to be sought in all the quarters of those directly or otherwise involved in the struggle.

The various approaches to the Eritrean question hitherto upheld by different writers are critically reviewed in the introduction while the subsequent nine chapters recount in detail the origins of Eritrean nationalism, the involvements of the different external forces, the developments of the various political factions and fronts as well as the conflicts among them. The numerous footnotes and the long list of sources attest to the fact that a great deal of effort has been put into the work. The table of contents and the index are also fairly accurate.

The book is nonetheless not without flaws, however minor they may appear in relation to the laudable contribution. Challenging the one or the other thesis and the arguments pertaining to it transcends the scope of a short book-review like this one. One can only refer to marginal points which nonetheless are not insignificant.

Though the language of the book is generally excellent, there are some cultural and historical terms and usages which could have been better employed or avoided as the case may be. For instance, on page 16 we read: "Roy Pateman echoed Habteselassie's legal argument for Eritrean self-determination, ...". The so-called family name is alien to Eritrean culture and there is no doubt that the authoress, as a native Eritrean, is quite familiar with both the culture of her home country and with the authority cited as "Habteselassie". References are also made repeatedly to the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Tawahdo churches and congregations as: "the Eritrean Coptic Church," "the Ethiopian Coptic Church" and "representatives from the Coptic Christians" (cf. pp. 66-73 and

84). Needless to say of course that there is no necessity to echo and perpetuate in academic works such a jargon of Western travellers and journalists who are either unaware of the history of the region or who deliberately insinuate subtle labels to establish their theories.

The book characterizes the Eritrean peoples by citing (cf. p. 11) as a motto to its introductory chapter a fallacious statement of G.K.N. Trevaskis that “They are not in any accepted sense a single people but a conglomerate of different communities which are themselves in most cases akin by culture and blood to their neighbors in Ethiopia, the Sudan and French Somaliland.” It goes without saying that none of the listed countries is “in any accepted sense a single people” either. Actually, the “conglomerate” aspect of Eritrean society is by no means unique, but rather in conformity with the well known pattern of almost all African states and of many others outside the continent which have not yet completed their process of assimilation. The quoted authority was certainly aware of this fact, but he preferred to single out Eritrea in the interest of the then prevailing political circumstance. This was of course the thesis held by the British officials in Eritrea who propounded it to promote their intention to erase Eritrea from the world map as a political entity by either dividing it between the Sudan and Ethiopia or by assigning it to Ethiopia, as it eventually turned out to be the case. From the point of view of academic research, it would have been more interesting and beneficial to explore, examine and establish the historical components which enabled this “conglomerate” society to survive the numerous alien invasions, and to maintain and perpetuate itself throughout the centuries.

Bairu Tafla

MANOEL BARRADAS, *Tractatus Tres Historico-Geographici (1634). A Seventeenth Century Historical and Geographical Account of Tigray, Ethiopia*. Translated from the Portuguese by Elizabet Filleul. Edited by RICHARD K.P. PANKHURST = *Aethiopistische Forschungen* Vol. 43. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996. pp. XX, 218. DM 108,-.

Manoel de Almeida and Manoel Barradas came together into Ethiopia at the very beginning of 1624, not long after the death of Pedro Paez. Almeida was younger than Barradas and, as member of the Society of Jesus, his junior by some seven years. Yet Almeida became the Superior of the mission in Ethiopia.