

**Martin Plaut and Sarah Vaughan. 2023. *Understanding Ethiopia's Tigray War*. London: Hurst and Company. 459 pp.**

This book is structured in five distinct parts, with a total of eleven chapters providing different perspectives on the escalation of the Tigray War. Through this structured approach, the readers understand all the factors that led to the war and contribute to a deeper understanding of wars in the Horn of Africa.

Part 1, "History," contains two chapters that lay out the complex history and politics of Tigray, Ethiopia explaining how the evolution of ancient empires has shaped the current politics. It discusses the power structures within Tigray under different regimes, from Haile Selassie to the Derg led by Mengistu, analyzing their impact on the region and the treatment of Tigrayans during this period. The section explores nationalism, regionalism, and identity politics through movements such as the Ethiopian Student Movement's activism against the Derg. The author examines the connections between historical events, power, and conflict dynamics and makes a compelling case that history alone does not control how wars are fought, but it shapes the conflicts. This section also looks at the Italian occupation's influence on nationalism and decentralization of the federal structure of Ethiopia. It also touches on modernization, questioning cultural preservation and reflecting on values, identity, and belonging.

The two chapters in "Living Memory" (Part 2), examine the evolution of politics in Ethiopia by observing how social media activism has become a powerful tool in Ethiopian politics. It details how centralization grew under EPRDF leadership from 1991 and how federalism was introduced to address ethnic diversity. This part explains how these shifts have had effects on national unity, explaining the protests across various ethnic groups.

The third part, "The Path to War," examines in two chapters the causes of disputes between the Tigray and the Ethiopian government, exploring power disputes, nationalism, and regional conflicts, including the involvement of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and other external parties. Part 4, "War," covers the major events of the conflict through personal stories. Despite the difficulties in media coverage, it emphasizes the victims' and refugees' perspectives, highlighting the need for a ceasefire and humanitarian intervention.

Part 5, "Impact of War," has three chapters. This part looks at the consequences of the war including the aid blockade that exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. The effects of misinformation, propaganda, and alliances with actors like Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates in supplying weapons and the roles they played in escalating tensions are examined. Comparisons are made of how other actors such as the United States, the European Union, and the African Union attempted to mediate, and the challenges faced in the process. The geographical dynamics in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region are discussed, including the involvement of actors such as Russia, China, and the Gulf states, raising questions on geopolitical interests influencing their responses to conflicts and human rights abuses.

The book offers scholarly, well-researched arguments with a clear transition between different historical periods and events giving fresh insights into the Tigray region. Detailed analysis including maps allows readers to visualize and understand territorial disputes and regional complexities. Incorporating personal stories and journalistic analysis engages readers

in highlighting the human cost of conflict by sharing the voices of ordinary individuals. The use of expert analysis, official documents, and statements together with academic research throughout the book adds to its depth and credibility. The book probes sensitive issues such as ethnic tensions and political instability evoking a range of emotions and prompting reflection on the challenges of upholding peace and unity in multi-ethnic societies. The accounts of human suffering, political upheaval, and violence confront readers with the devastating consequences of conflict on populations. The narrations of mass killings, systemic rape, ethnic cleansing, indiscriminate bombardment, starvation, and psychological trauma demonstrate the urgency to promptly address the humanitarian crises and hold perpetrators accountable. This encourages readers to reflect on the ethical responsibilities of the international community which was silent compared to other conflicts—in ensuring accountability and justice for war crimes and human rights abuses.

This book thoroughly examines Ethiopian history and politics and gives insights into the roots of the conflict in the region. Compared to similar works, it delivers in-depth research on regional conflicts, making it a valuable resource for academics, historians, and those seeking a deeper understanding of Ethiopia's history, politics, nationalism, regionalism, conflicts, and power dynamics. It thus is strongly recommended for those interested in governance challenges in multi-ethnic societies, power transitions, and the influence of international actors in conflict outcomes and broader African politics.

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