

practices? In Nigeria's case, this dilemma has an additional, vital dimension to the well-rehearsed arguments regarding efficiencies (as important as these remain). For few places in the world today are more synonymous with corruption. Checks, balances, political offices and layers of government, therefore, all need to be designed and empowered with this in mind.

LeVan's framework focuses on veto players and their effects on the political and economic performance of successive Nigerian governments. More specifically, he correlates the number and position of such players in the country's political system against a range of economic, development and democracy indicators. He situates these players in the Madisonian tradition, on the grounds that they can play crucial roles in improving a country's leadership. That is, they can reduce both its need for and dependence on Great Men and Women, and exposure to the criminal and inept. After tracing the number and influence of veto players in Nigeria, LeVan offers two comparisons in Ghana and Zimbabwe. Together, these countries represent alternative points on the perceptual, political and developmental compass. Using them is instructive.

So while LeVan's original, sophisticated and dense study will mostly appeal to postgraduate students and established scholars researching Nigeria, it also has much to offer those working in the fields of democratisation and comparative politics. This is an important and commendable book.

J.N.C. HILL

King's College London

Eritrea at a Crossroads: A Narrative of Triumph, Betrayal and Hope, by

ANDEBERHAN WELDE GIORGIS

Strategic Publishing and Rights Co. Pp. xv + 661. \$36.50 (pbk)

doi:10.1017/S0022278X1500066X

In *Eritrea at a Cross Roads: A Narrative of Triumph, Betrayal and Hope* Welde Giorgis endeavours to make a link between the long struggle for freedom, thwarted hopes and the betrayal of Eritrean revolutionary ideals. Once called 'the Hope of Africa', Eritrea has turned into a disappointing example of a dysfunctional state. Despite its achievements in leading the Eritrean people to liberation in 1991, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) failed in its attempt to create a modern state with a unique structure. The author offers a lengthy and nuanced analysis of the political, economic, social, diplomatic and refugee crisis Eritrea now finds itself immersed in. This sad state of affairs is attributed to the state's stifling of political and economic freedoms, and hence, a failure to translate into practice the rhetoric contained in texts produced both pre- and post-independence. In his concluding chapter, Welde Giorgis proposes some specific steps towards reforming the system.

The brief overview of pre-colonial history describes the dynamics of invasions, migrations and mixing of peoples and cultures in pre-colonial Eritrea. Giorgis then develops the argument around the classic debate of Eritrea's claim to nationhood versus the 'Greater Ethiopian' thesis that denied the historical political legitimacy of the state of Eritrea. His assessment of Italian colonial rule

brings to light its oppressive and discriminatory policies against its subjects, arguing 'whatever residual benefit accrued to Eritreans were marginal and totally unintended' (p. 48). Moving on to another political order, the author examined the post-war interim British administration (1941–1952). Despite its brevity this period is deemed significant, in that, during this period the imagining of the Eritrean nation started to take root and defined the political future of Eritrean society in the midst of political turbulence. In line with previous nationalist history, the author maintains that British intrigues and Ethiopian subversive activities were intended to bolster the idea that Eritrea lacked political and economic justifications to merit independence. He argues, however, that 'even while deeply discordant in many respects the political discourse articulated a strong popular desire for the freedom and independence of united Eritrea' (p. 93).

Giorgis takes us on a journey which explores the development of a distinct Eritrean national identity forged by the united resistance of diverse socio-cultural groups against Ethiopian domination. In large part, the centrepiece of the narrative recounts the saga of armed struggle with particular focus on the EPLF's capability to mobilize Eritrean society against Ethiopian domination. Embedded in the account is the author's personal history and involvement with the EPLF since the 1970s, leading up to independence in 1991 and after. Yet, liberation proved elusive as the EPLF and its successor in government, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, was unable to meet the structural challenges of nation-building and state construction. What were considered virtues in war-time conditions turned into liabilities when transplanted into a post-liberation peaceful era. Writing from an insider's viewpoint, the author provides the genesis of the 1998–2000 border war with Ethiopia and thoroughly analyses the ensuing political crisis. By virtue of the high government posts he held he was privy to the state's backstage politics and diplomacy that placed him in a privileged position to offer a deeper and authoritative insight into the state's *modus operandi*. The clarity with which he writes definitely adds an important perspective to our understanding of the post 2001 political crisis in Eritrea.

Narrative has been employed here as a methodology to account for how prior events or actions limit and orient subsequent ones in the Eritrean political trajectory. However, the author remains reticent on key episodes such as the 1973 reform movement within the EPLF, the demise of the Eritreans for Liberation in North America and the role of the clandestine party, which could have helped his readers when things started to go wrong for the EPLF. The author's major thesis is developed to offer an explanation of how the whims of an individual at the helm shaped the turn of events and led the nation to the quagmire it finds itself in. By so doing he places undue emphasis to the constraining function of EPLF culture stripping its members of their power of agency. In terms of conceptual frameworks reference is made to ideological categories such as Eritrean society, the nation, the diaspora etc. as cohesive and fixed entities precluding empirically based analysis into the complexity of actions of real people in real situations.

CHEFENA HAILEMARIAM
London School of Economics