

Cambridge University Press

0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991

John Young

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

In the wake of the overthrow of the Haile-Selassie regime in Ethiopia in 1974 and the coming to power of the military, a number of opposition forces launched insurrections. But only one movement, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), triumphed, liberating Tigray in 1989, and in an ethnic-based coalition which it dominated, assuming state power in 1991. This is the first chronicle of the history of that struggle, and it is based largely on interviews with peasants who formed the core of the Tigrayan revolution and the TPLF leadership. It provides the necessary background to understanding post-1991 political developments in Ethiopia. It also offers an explanation of peasant-based revolution that contrasts with contemporary approaches by Marxists, Skocpol, and in particular the works of Wolf, Paige, Migdal, and Scott, all of whom largely ignore the political considerations and the role of the revolutionary party, which Dr Young identifies as a critical element in his study.

Cambridge University Press

0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991

John Young

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Peasant revolution in Ethiopia

Cambridge University Press

0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991

John Young

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*African Studies Series 90*

Editorial Board

Professor Naomi Chazan, *The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for  
the Advancement of Peace, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

Professor Christopher Clapham, *Department of Politics and  
International Relations, Lancaster University*

Professor Peter Ekeh, *Department of African American Studies, State  
University of New York, Buffalo*

Dr John Lonsdale, *Trinity College, Cambridge*

Professor Patrick Manning, *Department of History, Northeastern  
University, Boston*

Published in collaboration with

THE AFRICAN STUDIES CENTRE, CAMBRIDGE

*A list of books in this series will be found at the end of this volume*

Cambridge University Press

0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991

John Young

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# Peasant revolution in Ethiopia

The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975–1991

---

John Young

*Addis Ababa University*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
 1975-1991  
 John Young  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521591980](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521591980)

© Cambridge University Press 1997

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without  
 the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1997  
 This digitally printed first paperback version 2006

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Young, John, 1951–

Peasant revolution in Ethiopia / John Young.

p. cm. – (African studies series: 30)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 59198 8 (hc)

1. Tigray Kifle Hāger (Ethiopia) – Politics and government.
  2. Peasant uprisings – Ethiopia – Tigray Kifle Hāger – History – 20th century.
  3. Hezbāwi wayāna ḥārenat Tegrāy – History. I. Title.
- II. Series.

DT390.T5Y68 1997

963'.4 – dc21 96–49360 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-59198-0 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-59198-8 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02606-2 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-02606-7 paperback

Cambridge University Press

0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991

John Young

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

To the peasants of Ethiopia

Cambridge University Press  
 0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
 1975-1991  
 John Young  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## Contents

---

<i>List of maps</i>	page xiii
<i>A note on names, transliteration and the Ethiopian Calendar</i>	xiv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Peasants and revolutions: theoretical directions</b>	<b>16</b>
Introduction	16
Peasant classes and revolution	17
Agricultural commercialisation	21
Factors outside the peasantry	23
Regime stimulus for revolt	27
Nationalist basis of revolution	29
Political leadership	32
Conclusion	36
<b>2 Historical and social background</b>	<b>38</b>
Introduction	38
Tigray: emergence and decline	38
Amhara-dominated empire	42
Emergence of modern Ethiopia	44
Tigray's entry into the modern world	49
The overthrow of the old regime	56
Conclusion	62
<b>3 Tigray on the eve of insurrection</b>	<b>65</b>
Introduction	65
Rural crisis	65
Urban Tigray	72
Revolt in the schools	76
Student movement and Tigrayan nationalism	80
Conclusion	88
<b>4 Struggle for opposition ascendancy: 1975–1978</b>	<b>92</b>
Introduction	92
Derg policies and peasant disaffection	93
Insurrection launched	96
Manifesto controversy	99
	ix

Cambridge University Press

0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991

John Young

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x	Contents	
	War against the nobles	100
	War against the EPRP	105
	Competing nationalisms	112
	Conclusion	114
5	Challenges and advances: 1978–1985	118
	Introduction	118
	Life under the Derg	118
	Military and political struggles 1978–1984	121
	Politics of refugees and famine	129
	Internal struggles	134
	Conclusion	141
6	Triumph 1985–1991	145
	Introduction	145
	The Derg's resettlement programme	145
	Revolt in the south	147
	TPLF and EPLF: a marriage of necessity	152
	March to victory	159
	From Tigray to Addis Ababa	165
	Conclusion	169
7	TPLF and the peasants	172
	Introduction	172
	Education and culture	172
	Church and religion	174
	Mobilisation of women	178
	Land reform	181
	Rural administration	187
	Conclusion	193
8	Conclusion	197
	Introduction	197
	Tigray: from revolutionary struggles to peace-time struggles	197
	Ethiopia: decentering the state	206
	<i>Notes</i>	217
	<i>Bibliography</i>	248
	<i>Index</i>	266



Cambridge University Press  
0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991  
John Young  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## Maps

---

- |   |                                |                  |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Ethiopia                       | <i>page xvii</i> |
| 2 | Tigray national regional state | 66               |

Cambridge University Press

0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991

John Young

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## A note on names, transliteration and the Ethiopian calendar

---

### *Names*

Ethiopians, whether Christian or Moslem, do not have family surnames and as a result the common practice, which is followed here, is to either write their names in full (that is the individual's name followed by his or her father's first name) or to use only their first names.

### *Transliteration*

While geographic names have common spellings, there is no consensus on the means to transcribe other Ethiopian words, including names of people, into the English language.

### *Ethiopian calendar*

The Ethiopian year consists of 365 days divided into twelve months of thirty days and a thirteenth month of five days (six in leap years). From 11 September, the beginning of the Ethiopian new year, to 31 December, the Ethiopian year runs seven years behind the Gregorian year; thereafter the difference is eight years. In this study Ethiopian dates and years have as closely as possible been translated into the Gregorian calendar.

Cambridge University Press

0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991

John Young

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Acknowledgements

---

My first note of appreciation must be to my interdisciplinary dissertation committee led by Dr Maureen Covell (Department of Political Science, Simon Fraser University), and including Dr A. H. Somjee (Department of Political Science, Simon Fraser University), Dr Michael Howard (Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Simon Fraser University), Professor Philip Stigger (Department of History, Simon Fraser University), and Dr Roy Pateman (Department of Political Science, UCLA). Each of these individuals unstintingly availed me of their time, guidance, very different perspectives, and were a constant source of support, both during the course of my dissertation research and in the subsequent period as I revised and extended it in preparation of this book. The dissertation research would not have been possible but for funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the two year period 1992-4.

In addition I must thank Dr Peter Koehn (former Director of International Programs, University of Montana) who served on my dissertation examining committee and has encouraged and advised me in this project. Dr John Sorenson (Department of Sociology, Brock University) was a valued consultant in the drafting of this book. Dr Christopher Clapham (Cambridge University Press Series Editor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Lancaster University) and Dr Peter Woodward (Cambridge University Press reviewer, Department of Politics, University of Reading) provided much appreciated criticism and suggestions.

There are far too many Ethiopians that have been of enormous help to thank even a fraction of them. None the less, note must be made of the ever-obliging faculty of the College of Social Sciences at Addis Ababa University. In particular I wish to thank Ato Merera Gudina (former Chair, Political Science and International Relations Department, Addis Ababa University), Ato Kassahun Berhanu and Ato Yacob Arsano (both of the Political Science and International Relations Department, Addis Ababa University), Ato Tecklehaimonot Gebre-Selasie and Dr Adhana Haile

Cambridge University Press

0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
1975-1991

John Young

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

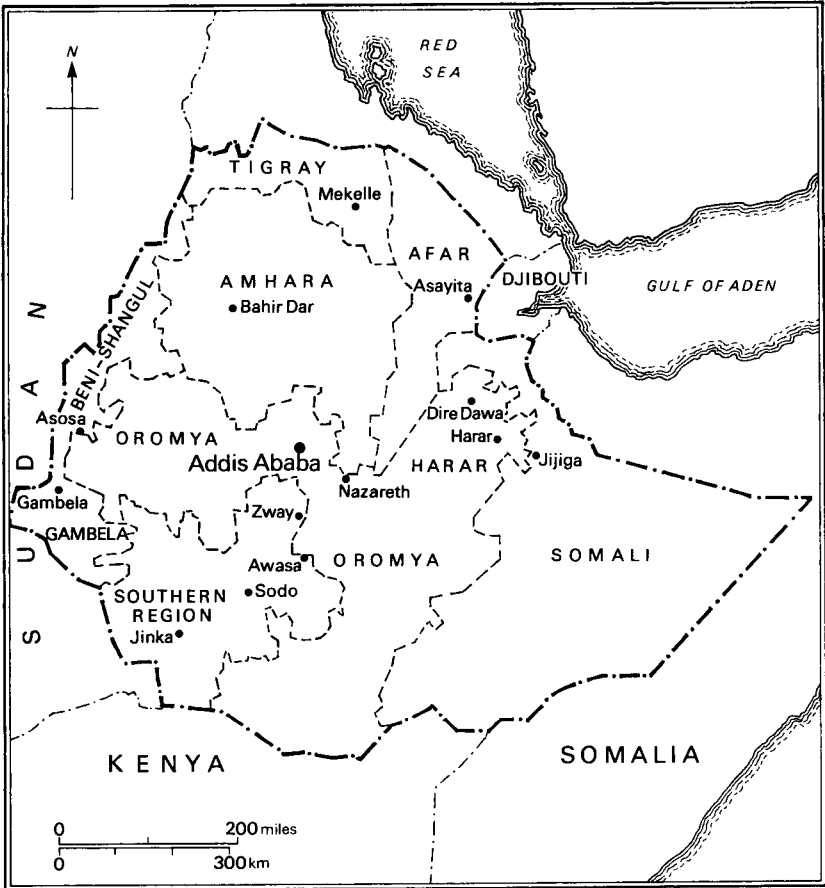
xiv Acknowledgements

Adhana (both of the History Department, Addis Ababa University), and Ato Haile-Selasie Woldegerima (Vice-President, Addis Ababa University). The assistance of the late Sudanese scholar, Dr Ahmed Karadowie, must also be acknowledged. Ato Gebru Asrat (TPLF Chairman of Tigray) and Ato Haile Kiros (EPRDF Director of Foreign Relations) must be singled out for their assistance and for opening the doors that made this research possible. And lastly I must thank Ato Berhane Embza, who served as my translator in Tigray in 1993, and Ato Dawit Kahsay who served as my translator in 1995–6.

I also want to thank Dr Stephen McBride (Chair, Department of Political Science, Simon Fraser University) for his encouragement and guidance, and Mr Bill Souder (Department of Political Science, Simon Fraser University) and Mr Ian Attfield (UN Emergencies Unit, Addis Ababa) for their technical assistance and patience with their computer-ignorant friend. Thanks must also be extended to Ms Gayle Smith, Ato Seleh Abdulkader Kebire, and Ato Gebregzi Tsehaye, all from Addis Ababa, and Ato Daniel Gebremedien, Ms Barbara McKenzie, and Dr Robert Thompson, all from Vancouver.

Lastly, the person I am most indebted to is my wife, Dorothea Geddert, who assisted in the peasant interviews in Tigray, proofread various drafts of the dissertation and book, translated German materials used in this research, and had the patience to live with me during this project.

Cambridge University Press  
 0521026067 - Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front,  
 1975-1991  
 John Young  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)



Map 1 Ethiopia

Prepared by the Information Section of the UNDP Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia. Revised June 1996. The designations used above do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever of the UN regarding the legal status of any country, territory, or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of its boundaries.