Eritrea, the newest nation-state in Africa, gained independence from the Ethiopian state after a prolonged and bitter conflict. This book is the first comprehensive analysis of the country’s political history over the past three decades. It examines the origins of Eritrean nationalism, and charts the development of its various nationalist movements, assessing the programmes and capabilities of the parties contending for power. It also analyses the regional and international context within which the battles for independence were fought.

‘... an extremely useful and ... balanced account of the history of the Eritrean liberation movement’, *African Affairs*
The Eritrean struggle for independence
African studies series 82

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 the series will be found at the end of the volume
The Eritrean struggle for independence

_Domination, resistance, nationalism, 1941–1993_

Ruth Iyob

_University of Missouri – St Louis_
This book is dedicated to the memory of

Dr. Iyob Teklu
1926–1977

A gentle father, a loyal friend, and an intellectual of his time who did not live long enough to witness the dénouement of contemporary Eritrea’s narrative.
## Contents

*Acknowledgements*  
*List of abbreviations*  
*Map 1 The principal towns of Eritrea*  
*Map 2 The boundaries of Eritrea*  

Introduction  

### Part I

1. The Eritrean question in perspective  
2. Regional hegemony in the post-World War II order  
3. Eritrea and the African order  

### Part II

4. The origins of the Eritrean conflict  
5. The federation years: 1952–1962  
6. Secular nationalism: the creative radicalism of the ELM  
8. The EPLF’s quest for legitimacy  
9. Building the Eritrean polity  

*Notes*  
*Bibliography*  
*Index*
Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed in the making of this book. I owe a special debt to Victor T. Le Vine who read and commented on the multiple versions of the draft and provided me with constant encouragement and support. He has been a wonderful friend, colleague and mentor. Special thanks are due to Edmond J. Keller for help and encouragement through difficult times. His comments were incisive and right on target. I am also very grateful to René Lemarchand for inspiration and support. I learned a great deal and benefited enormously from all these contributions but any errors or misinterpretations are mine.

I would also like to thank Dr. Richard Joseph at the Institute of African Studies and the Department of Political Science at Emory University for providing me with a postdoctoral fellowship which enabled me to complete this work. I am indebted to Dean Eleanor Main, who facilitated two field trips to Eritrea and Ethiopia to bring my research to date. I would like to express my appreciation to Harvey Klehr who allowed me a great deal of flexibility in my teaching schedule and to Cornell Hooten and David Davis for giving me much-needed computer assistance in the preparation of the final draft.

I would like to acknowledge the various people, institutions and organizations who assisted me in my archival research abroad. Special thanks are due to the FORD Foundation, the Graduate Division of the University of California at Santa Barbara; to Member Alemseged of the Research and Information Center on Eritrea (RICE), Dr. Carla Ghezzi of the Istituto Italo-Africano, Dr. Fessehatzion Petros of the EPLF office, and the representatives of the ELF and ELF-UO in Rome for allowing me access to their archives. Dr. Alexander Naty took time out from his research to familiarize me with the Institute’s holdings and Solomon Abraha and Michael Ghezzhei provided me with the logistical support which made my stay in Rome productive.

I would also like to express my gratitude to those people who shared their ideas, experiences and materials with me. Special thanks are due to Woizerot Zewdi Gebremeskel Wolde who made her father’s papers available to me.
xii Acknowledgements

and Dr. Tekie Fessehatzion and Roy Pateman who generously shared their collections. Special thanks are due to Sewit Becresion who came to the rescue with her computer and printer for the final printout. Time and space do not permit me to thank all those who enriched my work in one way or another. Their contributions are appreciated. A final word of thanks to Jessica Kuper of Cambridge University Press who was encouraging and supportive during the evolution of the manuscript to its present form.

Friends and colleagues eased the burden of the long hours of research and re-writing. I owe special debts to Dr. Belai Ghiorgis for his constant support that never failed to spur me on; Menbere and Mekbib Surafi who opened up their minds and homes to me; Mengesha Yohannes for his unfailing friendship and sense of humour and Charlene N. Kass for sharing my moments of sorrow and triumph. I am grateful to William Hughes for his critical comments and editorial help; to Boris Young for widening my horizons and introducing me to the vast literature on resistance and nationalism; to Kelly Hwang for initiating me into the art and technology of computer-based research; to Zion Yohannes, Almaz G. Dh-ar and Semai G. Berhe who were always there when needed. I would also like to thank Haruhiro Fukui who always made time to hear my ideas and encourage me to pursue my research further and Fernando Lopez-Alves, who kept my flair for the melodramatic in check. Without their friendship and support the arduous task of completing this work would have been a lonely and alienating endeavor.

My deepest gratitude goes to my extended family – Mehret, Ararat, Senait, Salome, Hendekye, Aradom, Hannibal, Simon and Biniam Iyob; Lul Ghiorgis; Bev, Selwyn, Brad and Kirby Hotchner; Dianne, Byron, Sally and Eric Samuelson; Habitit Beyene and Kufirom Ghiorgis; Mildred and William Gellerman; Joe and Belle Innis; James, Anita and David DeClue – for their unwavering faith in me.

Abbreviations

ALF  Afar Liberation Front  
ANC  African National Congress  
BMA  British Military Administration  
CFM  Council of Foreign Ministers  
EDF  Eritrean Democratic Front  
EDM  Eritrean Democratic Movement  
EDMEL  Eritrean Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrea  

EFLNA  Eritreans for Liberation in North America  
ELF  Eritrean Liberation Front  
ELF-PLF  Eritrean Liberation Front-People’s Liberation Front  
ELM  Eritrean Liberation Movement  
EPDM  Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement  
EPRDF  Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front  
EPLA  Eritrean People’s Liberation Army  
EPLF  Eritrean People’s Liberation Front  
EPRP  Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party  
ETEL  Eritrean Toilers’ Emancipation League  
EWVA  Eritrean War Veterans Association  
FPC  Four Powers Commission  
FPLC  First Panel of Legal Consultants  
FRELIMO  Frente de Libertação de Moçambique  
IAE  Intellectual Association of Eritreans  
IEA  Italo-Eritrean Association  
IEP  Independent Eritrea Party  
IEUP  Independent Eritrea United with Ethiopia Party  
IML  Independent Moslem League  
LPP  Liberal Progressive Party  
LUP  Liberal Unionist Party  
MFHE  Mahber Fikri Hager Ertra  
ML  Moslem League  
MLWP  Moslem League of Western Province
List of abbreviations

MPLA Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
MTA Mahber Teatre Asmara
NDP National Democratic Program
NEP New Eritrea Party
NEPIP New Eritrea Pro-Italia Party
NGO Non-governmental organization
NMPM National Moslem Party of Massawa
NPM National Party of Massawa
OAU Organization of African Unity
OLF Oromo Liberation Front
PAFMECA Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa
PDY People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PGE Provisional Government of Eritrea
PLO Palestine Liberation Organization
POLISARIO Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y Rio de Oro
RICE Research and Information Center on Eritrea
SCP Sudanese Communist Party
SLF Sidama Liberation Front
SNM Somali National Movement
SPLC Second Panel of Legal Consultants
SSF Somali Salvation Front
SWAPO South-West Africa People's Organization
TGE Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
UN United Nations
UNOVER United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea
UP Unionist Party
WSLF Western Somali Liberation Front
ZANU Zimbabwe African National Union
Map 1: The principal towns of Eritrea