# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: PROFILE

- Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1
- Area ...................................................................................................................................... 1
- Climate ................................................................................................................................. 2
- Major Rivers .......................................................................................................................... 2
- Major Cities .......................................................................................................................... 3
  - Asmara ............................................................................................................................... 3
  - Nakfa ................................................................................................................................. 3
  - Massawa ............................................................................................................................. 3
- History .................................................................................................................................. 4
  - Ancient Times .................................................................................................................. 4
  - Decline of the Empire ...................................................................................................... 5
  - 19th and Early 20th Centuries .......................................................................................... 5
  - Post-Independence Era ..................................................................................................... 6
- Government ........................................................................................................................... 7
- Media .................................................................................................................................... 8
- Economy ................................................................................................................................ 8
  - Agriculture ....................................................................................................................... 9
  - Industry .............................................................................................................................. 9
  - Service Sector .................................................................................................................. 10
- Ethnic Groups ....................................................................................................................... 10
  - Tigrinya Christians ......................................................................................................... 10
  - Jabarti (Jeberti)—The Muslim Tigrinya ......................................................................... 11

CHAPTER 1: ASSESSMENT ...................................................................................................... 12

CHAPTER 2: RELIGION ............................................................................................................ 13

- Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 13
- Orthodox Christianity ......................................................................................................... 13
- Islam ..................................................................................................................................... 14
- Religion and Government .................................................................................................... 15
- Law and Religion .................................................................................................................. 16
- Influence of Religion on Daily Life ..................................................................................... 17
- Religious Holidays/Events ................................................................................................. 18
  - Eastern Orthodox Christian Church ............................................................................. 18
  - Muslim Holidays ............................................................................................................ 20
- Buildings of Worship .......................................................................................................... 21
  - Churches ........................................................................................................................... 21
  - Mosques ............................................................................................................................ 22
- Behavior in Places of Worship ............................................................................................ 22
Chapter 1: Profile

Introduction

Tigrinya is a Semitic language spoken by nearly seven million people living primarily in the Horn of Africa, including the nation of Eritrea.¹ The language is one of two that are indigenous to Eritrea.² Tigrinya speakers, who make up about half of the Eritrean population, are mostly Christians who live in the highlands of the southwestern part of the nation.³, ⁴, ⁵ In Eritrea, the Tigrinya is the largest ethnic group, and its members exert great political and economic influence.⁶

The small country of Eritrea in the Horn of Africa struggled for three decades until it achieved its independence from Ethiopia in 1993.⁷ It is a fragile democracy near failed states like Somalia, and countries in political turmoil, like Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen.⁸, ⁹ Eritrea has two principal ethnic groups, Tigrinya and Tigre, seven smaller groups, and is roughly half Christian and half Muslim.¹⁰, ¹¹

Area

Eritrea is about equal in size to the state of Pennsylvania: 117,600 sq km (45,406 sq m). Its coastline on the Red Sea measures 1,151 km (715 mi). Eritrea shares borders with several other countries in the Horn of Africa. Its smallest border is with Djibouti (109 km, ¹²

---

© DLIFLC | 1
or 67 mi) to the south. The Ethiopian border to the west is the longest and runs for 912 km (566 mi). To the west and north is the Sudanese border, which is 605 km (376 mi) long.12

Eritrea can be divided into three geographic sections: the coastal plain, the central highlands, and the western lowlands. The coastal plain runs along the Red Sea Coast and stretches inland for 6 to 89 km (10 to 55 mi). There are several depressions that are as much as a hundred meters below sea level.13 One such place is the Danakil Depression, one of the hottest and driest places on earth.14 The capital, Asmara, lies in the central highlands at an altitude of nearly 2,360 m (7,742 ft).15 The western lowlands contain plains and ragged hills sloping toward the western Sudanese border.16

Climate
The climate of Eritrea varies by geographic zone. The coastal plain, with little annual rainfall, is hot and arid, and summer temperatures can rise to over 50°C (120°F). The highlands, by contrast, are moderate and have an annual rainfall of about 51 cm (20 in) and an average annual temperature of 20°C (68°F). The climate of the western lowlands is similar to that of the coastal plain, although summer winds can cause sandstorms. Rainfall is unpredictable, and in barren years, the land yields few crops.17, 18

Major Rivers
Eritrea has four rivers, all of which flow into Sudan; Three are seasonal or temporary, and one flows year round. None of the rivers are navigable. Of these, two rivers run through the Tigrinya region of Eritrea. The Setit (called Tezeké in Ethiopia) is a permanent river flowing along the western border with Ethiopia where it continues into Sudan. The seasonal Gash (also known as the Mareb) flows west along the Ethiopian border into Sudan.19

---

Major Cities

Asmara

Asmara is the capital of Eritrea and home to 649,000 residents.\(^{20, 21}\) The capital escaped the war damage suffered by other cities and is considered one of the cleanest and safest cities in Africa.\(^{22, 23}\)

Nakfa

Nakfa, once the capital of the former Sahel province, holds a special place in the minds of Eritreans. It was the home of the Eritrean Peoples’ Liberation Front (EPLF) during the civil war. Though heavily damaged during the war, it was completely rebuilt. The country’s currency, the \textit{nakfa} was named after this town. Today, it is a major commercial center.\(^{24, 25, 26}\)

Massawa

Massawa is the largest natural deepwater port on the Red Sea. The town consists of two islands linked by a causeway and is Eritrea’s main point of access to the rest of the world.\(^{27}\) The city is well linked to Amara by road, rail, air, and aerial tramway. It is one of the hottest cities on earth with an average temperature of about 30°C (86°F).\(^{28}\)


\(^{21}\) Hans van der Splinter, “History of Asmara,” 2011, \url{http://www.asmera.nl/asmara.htm}

\(^{22}\) Hans van der Splinter, “History of Asmara,” 2011, \url{http://www.asmera.nl/asmara.htm}

\(^{23}\) Lonely Planet, “Introducing Asmara,” 17 February 2009, \url{http://www.lonelyplanet.com/eritrea/asmara}

\(^{24}\) Hans van der Splinter, “Nacfa (Nakfa) Eritrea,” n.d., \url{http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-nacfa.htm}


\(^{27}\) Hans van der Splinter, “Massawa (Mitsiwa, Massauwa) Eritrea,” n.d., \url{http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-massawa.htm}

\(^{28}\) \textit{Encyclopædia Britannica Online}, “Massawa,” 2011, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/368514/Massawa}
History

Ancient Times

The ancient Egyptians made one of the earliest references to the land that is Eritrea today. Emissaries of the pharaohs from the 5th dynasty (c. 2400 B.C.E.) visited and traded with people of the Land of Punt, bringing ivory, ebony, marble, alabaster, gold, and frankincense back to Egypt. Illustrations of their journeys and the people of Punt can be seen in the art of the pyramids.29

When the Greek-Egyptian rulers, the Ptolemys (323 B.C.E.– 50 C.E.), replaced the pharaohs, they continued trade at the Red Sea ports on the Eritrean coast.30 They called the area aithiopiai, or “land of the burnt faces,” and later coined the name Eritrea from erythros, meaning “red.”31, 32

As Christianity spread across the eastern Mediterranean, the native tribes of the Tigre and Tigrinya areas founded the empire of Aksum, which lasted 800 years. The Aksumite Empire was the first significant power to convert to Christianity.33 Its temples were in the center of present-day Eritrea. Speaking the Semitic Ge’ez language, the people of Aksum learned Greek and established a broad trade network with countries along the Red Sea such as Yemen, Arabia, Sudan, and Egypt, as well as lands beyond, like India. By the 4th century, the Aksum king, Exana, had converted to Christianity and permitted the establishment of Coptic settlements. (The term “Coptic” refers to the Christian religion in Egypt, brought there by Saint Mark in the 1st century C.E. Coptic also refers to an Egyptian language spoken in the 2nd century C.E.)34, 35, 36

---

30 The Ptolemys were a series of Macedonian Greek rulers of Ancient Egypt.
Decline of the Empire

The forces of the Persian Sassanid Empire and, later, migrants from the new Islamic states, brought about the decline of the Aksum empire. The earliest Muslim immigrants to settle in Eritrea date from Islam’s earliest years (early 7th century C.E.).

By the turn of the 10th century, Christian tribes had withdrawn from the Muslim coastal areas of Eritrea and formed several Coptic Christian dynasties that lasted into modern times. The Egyptian Arabs of the Middle Ages called the Ethiopians (also later called Eritreans) Abyssinians.

In the late 16th century (1557), the Ottoman Turks established settlements in the port city of Massawa. As an Islamic power, the Turks remained in the coastal areas until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century.

19th and Early 20th Centuries

In the 19th century, European powers like Britain, France, and Italy were in search of trade outposts and wanted to secure a colonial presence in East Africa. In 1890, Italy was first among the powers to establish a colony in the Ethiopian province of Eritrea. With a firm hold on Eritrea, the Italians went on to colonize the province and make it a showcase among European colonies in Africa. In 1930, Haile Selassie was crowned emperor of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa, the capital city.

In 1941, the British forced the Italians out of Eritrea, where they remained during the war years. At the end of World War II, Eritrea was given to Ethiopia by the United Nations. Armed resistance to Ethiopian rule grew in the second half of the 20th century.

---

century as the aging Emperor Selassie grew weaker. In 1974, he was overthrown in a coup by a Communist military junta. Mengistu Haile Miriam established himself as dictator and his bloody reign of terror was rife with war crimes and atrocities until he fled for Zimbabwe in 1991.45, 46

Post-Independence Era

Following the collapse of socialist Ethiopia, Eritrea held democratic elections and declared its independence in April 1993. Isaias Afwerki, the nominally Marxist revolutionary leader of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), was elected as President. An era of internal growth and border conflict began.47

Since gaining its independence, Eritrea has engaged in several bloody conflicts with Ethiopia over the final border between the two nations. The UN and the Organization for African Unity (OAU) have acted as peacekeepers, intervening to stabilize relations between the two countries.48, 49 In 1997, Eritrea adopted a constitution that was attuned to human and civil rights. However, in recent years, the government has begun to let slip the very freedoms it originally proposed to protect.

In 2010, Eritrea began to pursue peace with its neighbors and took steps to improve relations with the international community. Yet, early in 2010, despite efforts by its president, Eritrea was accused of inciting trouble in the region by escalating border disputes with Djibouti and Ethiopia. In March 2010, economic and military sanctions were instituted by the EU. Three months later, in June, Eritrea agreed to make peace with Djibouti and withdrew its troops from the border. Eritrea’s domestic agenda is largely unchanged. President Afwerki’s government continues to follow a government-controlled economic model, depends heavily on its defense, and has cracked down on political

---

dissent in the country. All of this has created a perception that Eritrea is likely to become a failed state.50

**Government**

Following independence in April of 1993, a transitional government was formed. The Transitional National Assembly was established as the legislative body. This legislature immediately accomplished two things: the election of Isaias Afwerki as president of the country and the establishment of a Constitutional Commission to draft a new constitution. However, in the subsequent eight and a half years, the “transitional” government has yet to fully implement the constitution, although it was ratified in May 1997.51

According to the constitution, the government was to be composed of three branches: the executive, the legislative and the judicial. The executive branch is the president and the cabinet. The president is responsible for naming the various ministers, authorities, commissions, and offices. The cabinet is composed of 17 ministers with the president acting as chair.52, 53

The only legal and recognized party is the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ).54 The government’s refusal to put the constitution into effect led to criticism from within the PFDJ, which resulted in a government crackdown on protests and media. This has caused many to flee the country.55 The original Transitional National Assembly was composed of 150 members: 75 non-elected members from the PFDJ and 75 elected by popular vote. This body has not met since 2002, and elections due in 2010 have been postponed indefinitely.56

According to the constitution, the judicial branch is composed of the Supreme Court. It is designed to operate independently of the legislative and executive branches. The court system is to extend through village, district, provincial, and national levels. However,

---


© DLIFLC | 7
there is no working Supreme Court. Instead, there is a High Court that acts as an appellate court at the civil, criminal, commercial, and shari’a benches. There is also a Special Court, appointed by the president to prosecute corrupt officials, but the accused in such proceedings have no rights.⁵⁷

Media
In September 2001, the government of Eritrea shut down the private press for allegedly endangering national security. To date, Eritrea remains the only nation in Africa with no privately owned news media outlets. The France-based international NGO Reporters without Borders ranked Eritrea at the bottom of its press freedom rankings, below North Korea.⁵⁸ One independent radio station does broadcast to Eritrea. Based outside of the country, Radio Erena, broadcast from France, is the only independent news source available.⁵⁹

In 2009, there were 48,500 telephone landlines available to subscribers and 141,100 cell phone users. There were also 480 pay phones in the country. Internet service was introduced in November of 2000 and by 2008 there were nearly 200,000 users in the country.⁶⁰, ⁶¹

Economy
Less than 15 years since its independence, Eritrea remains a struggling democratic state with an agricultural economy.⁶² It is among the poorest nations of the world. Still, the ultimate goal is to achieve economic independence. Beginning in 2009, the government refused all international food aid and expelled NGOs. According to some reports, by 2011 the country achieved food security, meaning people have access to enough food and no longer live in fear of starvation. Successful government intervention also led to a 50% reduction in food prices, and some farms are able to harvest three crops per year.⁶³

---

Eritrea’s economy grew at an estimated rate of 2.2% in 2010. The economy is heavily dependent on revenues from taxes paid by members of the Eritrean diaspora. The government hopes to increase revenue through the development of several international mining projects. According to *The Economist*, Eritrea will be the fastest growing global economy in 2011. The GDP is anticipated to expand at the rate of 17%, due mainly to a boom in the mining sector.

*Agriculture*

Although nearly 80% of Eritreans are employed in the agriculture sector, it accounts for only around 12% of the country’s GDP. Major issues include erratic rainfall, lack of money and investment in the sector, an absence of modern farming equipment, and depleted soils. Among the main crops are barley, beans, sorghum, and wheat. A further problem is that nearly 25% of the best land is not being farmed because of the lingering effects of the war with Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000.

In addition to the goal of becoming self-sufficient in food production, the government intends to become a food exporter by 2015. However, some reports suggest that food can be scarce and that there are high levels of undernourishment in the country. These reports directly contradict government sources.

*Industry*

There are currently around 1,000 manufacturing enterprises in Eritrea, all but a handful of which are privately owned. Most of the manufacturing is located in the urban centers, most particularly in the capital city of Asmara. Industry contributes to just over 20% of the nation’s GDP. At the same time, the industry and service sectors combine to employ only 20% of the population. The industrial sector is showing some growth at a current

---

rate of about 8%. Eritrea’s main industries include food processing, beverages, clothing and textiles, light manufacturing, salt, and cement. The country has signed a contract with a Canadian mining company to begin extracting gold, silver, cooper, and zinc in 2010.71, 72

**Service Sector**

The service sector accounts for nearly 68% of the nation’s GDP but employs only 20% of the population.73 The bulk of the service sector is financial, principally from six banks in which the government is the majority holder. The profitability of these banks derives largely from foreign exchange transactions. Tourism is poorly developed and contributes only minimally to the GDP.74, 75

**Ethnic Groups**

Eritrea is a multicultural nation. It has nine principal tribes or ethnic groups, the two most prominent being the Tigrinya (55%) and the Tigre (30%). The remaining seven groups make up less than 5% each of the Eritrean population.76 The Tigrinya people occupy the highlands of Maakel and Debub Provinces and live in the capital city of Amara.77 The Tigre are located primarily in the northern highlands and the western lowlands.78

**Tigrinya Christians**

The Tigrinya people are descended from the early Semitic people who came to the area around 1000 B.C.E. They believe themselves the descendents of Menelik I, the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. For the most part, Tigrinya are Orthodox Christians, although an estimated 8–10% are Muslim. Some are also Roman Catholic and about 1% are Evangelical Christians.79 Like many Eritreans, the Christian Tigrinya depend largely on subsistence farming. Most live in rural areas.80

---

75 In the UNWTO tourism statistics for 2008, Ethiopia only had 330 visitors, so it’s likely that tourism to Eritrea was negligible as well. [http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/pdf/highlights/UNWTO_Highlights10_en HR.pdf](http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/pdf/highlights/UNWTO_Highlights10_en_HR.pdf)
Jabarti (Jeberti)—The Muslim Tigrinya

The Jabarti, a Muslim subgroup of Tigrinya speakers, live in the highlands. They preserve the general culture of the region and observe shari’a law only in matters of personal status and family law. The chief families of the Jabarti group claim to be descendants of Uthman ibn Affan, the third Khalifa and his wife Ruqayya who was a daughter of the Prophet Mohammed. The Jabarti have generally maintained good relations with their Tigrinya speaking Christian neighbors. Their common language and concerns have helped create a strong bond between these groups.  

The Jabarti are primarily artisans and merchants, many of whom are in the capital city. The rest rely on agriculture for a living. They are less rigid in their prayers and rituals than many Muslim groups and few of them perform a hajj, or pilgrimage. Similarly, relations between the sexes are more relaxed and Jabarti women are said to have a higher social position than those in other Muslim groups.  

---

Chapter 1: Assessment

1. Tigrinya is spoken by about 50% of the Eritrean population.
   True
   Tigrinya is one of the most widely used languages and is spoken by about half of the population.

2. Tigrinya speakers live mostly in the western plateau region of the country.
   False
   Tigrinya speakers are largely concentrated in the central highlands.

3. Tigrinyans are largely Christian.
   True
   Approximately 90% of the Tigrinya speakers are Coptic Christians, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The remaining 10% are Muslim.

   False
   The country declared independence in 1993. It adopted its current constitution in 1997, though the government has never implemented it.

5. Nakfa is the capital of Eritrea.
   False
   Asmara, the capital city, is located in the central highlands and is home to the Tigrinya people. Nakfa holds a special place for Eritreans, because it was the home of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) during the civil war.
Chapter 2: Religion

Introduction

All religious groups are required to register with the government. Although the 1997 Constitution provides for freedom of religion, the government has failed to approve most registrations for any religious groups except the four principal groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, Islam, and the Roman Catholic Church. This is another example of the government’s failure to implement the constitution.\(^{85}\)

Although reliable data is difficult to obtain, estimates are that 50% of all Eritreans are Sunni Muslim, 30% Orthodox Christian, and 13% Roman Catholic. Those remaining are Protestants, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhists, Hindus, and Baha’is. About 2% practice indigenous religious beliefs.\(^{86}\)

Major Religions

Orthodox Christianity

The majority of Tigrinyans are Eastern Orthodox Christians. Only 10% of Tigrinyans, the Jabarti (Jeberti), are Muslim.\(^{87,88}\) Religion and tribal membership give people their identity.

Coptic Christianity came to Eritrea, then a province of Ethiopia, in the 4th century C.E. The emperors of the Aksumite Empire, who ruled Ethiopia from the 1st to the 9th centuries CE, converted to Christianity in the 4th century. Many of the emperors saw themselves as heirs to King Solomon of biblical tradition. Today, the Tigrinyan Christians trace their heritage to these Coptic emperors.\(^{89}\)


The Eastern Orthodox religions are similar in many ways to Roman Catholicism. Several differences led to the split between the two religions in 1054. Orthodox Christians do not believe that the Pope is infallible, nor do they subscribe to the belief of Immaculate Conception. In addition, Orthodox Christians embrace several more sacraments (e.g. baptism and communion) than do Roman Catholics. Perhaps the most significant difference between these faiths lies in their beliefs about the nature of Christ. Catholics believe that God became man to pay the debt of “original sin,” whereas Orthodox Christians believe Christ was a man who voluntarily gave his life. Once Christ ransomed himself on the cross, he rose to heaven.90, 91

In July 1993, the bishops of Eritrea appealed to Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church requesting separation from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In September of that same year, the request was granted and the process of establishing an independent Eritrean Orthodox Church began. Today there are 1,500 Orthodox churches and more than 15,000 priests in the country.92

Islam
Most Muslims in Eritrea are followers of Sunni Islam. Muslims believe that Muhammad, the last of the prophets, received the Quran as a revelation from God. He preached Islam, a life of submission of one’s will to God, to believers who came to be known as Muslims. In the 7th century C.E., some of the earliest Muslims were welcomed to the shores of Eritrea by Ethiopian emperors.

Eritrean Muslim beliefs and practices were adopted over time in varying ways. The Shafi’i school of Islam, considered the most relaxed in terms of personal and social regulations, was adopted by the Tigrinya speaking Jabarti earlier than any other form of the religion. Other forms of Islam were adopted later by other ethnic groups throughout what is now Eritrea.93, 94

---

Muslims in Eritrea follow the Five Pillars of Islam as a part of their faith. The first of these is the shahada, the declaration of faith that “There is no god but God and Muhammad is God’s messenger.” The salat is the requirement to pray five times a day. Sawm is the required fast during the month of Ramadan. Zakat is the expectation that Muslims should be generous by sharing their wealth. The fifth pillar is the hajj which requires all able Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.95

The Jabarti practice a form of Islam that is less orthodox than other forms. For example, women may hold a higher position than in other forms of Islam. Additionally, the Jabarti rarely make a hajj, or pilgrimage.96

**Religion and Government**

President Isaias Afwerki’s government has become increasingly repressive. The government recognizes only four religious denominations: the (Coptic) Orthodox Church of Eritrea, Sunni Islam, Roman Catholicism, and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. Even these sanctioned religions are not free to operate without government interference.97

In May 2002, the government closed all institutions of worship not belonging to the four officially recognized religions. No religious groups have been registered since 2002 despite numerous applications by the Methodist and the Presbyterian Churches, among others. Practicing an unregistered religion is regarded by the government as illegal; members of dissident sects and non-traditional religious groups have been detained and imprisoned. There are numerous reports of arrest, detention, and torture.98

**Exchange 1: May I enter?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>May I enter?</th>
<th>ke-atu eKh-el-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, but you must remove your shoes.</td>
<td>ewe ChamaKha gen ketewets-o al-leka.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even the military is not exempt; its members are banned from attending Protestant prayer meetings. Attending such unsanctioned meetings can result in imprisonment. Possession

---


of religious literature, including Bibles, results in severe punishment for military personnel—due perhaps to the ruling party’s Marxist past.99

The government also appoints religious leaders and monitors religious activities. Recognized religious groups must submit reports of their activities to the government twice a year. In December 2010, the government ordered these groups to no longer accept money from abroad. Security elements in the government target reformists in the Orthodox Church, arresting religious activists and preventing meetings. The government also revoked the exemption of Orthodox priests, monks, and deacons from mandatory national service, creating a severe shortage of clergy. The current government-appointed administrator in charge of managing church affairs and finances is not a member of the Orthodox clergy. Furthermore, all monies collected by the church must be paid into a government account, effectively giving the government firm control over religious institutions.100, 101

Government interference is not limited to the Christian churches. Muslim religious activities or groups regarded as radical by the government are not permitted. The official position is that the government is working to avoid the radicalization of Islam and the creation of national tensions.102

**Law and Religion**

Because the Constitution has yet to be implemented, the current executive branch of government holds the power to make laws.103

The government does not officially recognize customary law, or law that is recognized but not backed by a strong individual or institution. Yet, in practice, customary law plays a significant role. In 2001, the Community Courts were issued a mandate to apply customary law. Similarly, shari’a law is not formally recognized as a source of law, yet it enjoys de facto status in the legal system. Issues of personal status and marriage are enforced by shari’a chambers of the civil court system for Muslims.104, 105

---


Influence of Religion on Daily Life
Religion plays an integral part in the daily life of most Tigrinya people. Older Eritrean Christians often have a tattoo of a cross on their foreheads. It is common to take a sick family member to church to be “showered” in holy water and prayed over by a priest. People will travel long distances to a church in order to perform these rituals if their community does not have a church nearby.

There are myriad cultural practices connected to the Orthodox Christian rituals and calendar of the church. These practices affect even those who do not regularly attend services. People will often carry small icons in their pockets or hang them in their cars. Many Christian Tigrinya fast on Wednesdays and Fridays when they abstain from meat and dairy products of any kind. There are also rituals regarding meat; most Tigrinya Christians will not eat meat from an animal that has not been blessed. Many wear white as a symbol of their faith.

Exchange 2: Do I need to cover my head?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do I need to cover my head?</th>
<th>re-eseyke kegulbebo-do yegeb-ani.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

For Muslims, dress is also an indicator of religion. Muslim women wear scarves that cover the entire heads. Like their Christian counterparts, there are restrictions on diet. Muslims may not eat pork and should not eat meat from any animal that has not been blessed.112 Everyday life includes dedication to the five pillars of faith (charity, profession of faith, fasting, pilgrimage, and prayer five times daily).113

Religious Holidays/Events
Eritrea has a number of religious holidays including those of both the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church and Islam.

Eastern Orthodox Christian Church
The holidays of the Eastern Orthodox Church follow the Julian calendar (12 months with a leap year every four years) rather than the Gregorian (Roman) calendar (no leap years). Therefore, some of the traditional Christian holidays fall on different dates.114

Christmas is celebrated on two days in Eritrea. Catholics and most other Christian groups celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25th. Orthodox Christians in Eritrea also celebrate this day. However the Orthodox, leddet or Christmas, is celebrated on 7 January according to the Julian calendar.115 Prior to leddet, the Orthodox Christians fast for 40 days and eat no meat, poultry, or dairy products. 116

Exchange 3: Who conducts the mass this morning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Who conducts the mass this morning?</th>
<th>lomi negeho sere’ate Qedaseh zemereH men ey-yu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Father Alem.</td>
<td>ab-ba alem ey-yom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Timket, the Feast of the Epiphany, comes two weeks after Christmas on 19 January. This holiday celebrates both the birth of Christ and his baptism. On the eve of Timket, Orthodox Christians participate in religious processions with drumming and singing. They follow behind a priest and go to the river where they reenact the baptism of Christ.

Good Friday is a public holiday commemorating the day that Christ was crucified. Tensae is Easter and is the Sunday following Good Friday. It is a colorful holiday with processions through the streets that marks the resurrection of Christ. Orthodox Christians follow a strict vegan diet for the 40 day period before Easter.

Keddus Yohannes is the Orthodox New Year celebrated on 11 September. Most families slaughter a goat or a sheep or even a chicken. Old chants are recited by children. Bundles of dried sticks and twigs are prepared as torches, hoyona hoye, to be lit and carried through the streets in the evening. Many families attend church services. Girls go singing through the neighborhoods and are given gifts of food and money. Boys visit neighborhoods and wish people a happy new year and also receive gifts of food and money.

Meskel or Mashkela, September 27, is a commemoration of the finding of the True Cross upon which Christ died in 326 C.E. On this day celebrations with flaming torches and huge bonfires are held. An actual piece of the cross is held in Gishen Mariam Monastery in Wollo.

Muslim Holidays

Muslims celebrate holidays that follow the lunar calendar, include Eid A-Maulid Anbi, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.127

*Eid al-Mawlid al-Nabi (Mouloud)*, the birthday of Muhammad, is celebrated in the third month of the Islamic calendar. In 2011, it fell in February.128 Eritrean Muslims go to the mosque to remember and reflect on the Prophet’s life and teachings. Following the mosque visits, there are many parties and much feasting with family and friends.129

*Eid al-Fitr* marks the end of Ramadan and falls in the 10th month of the Islamic calendar. Muslim Eritreans celebrate with morning prayers at mosques. Afterward is a time for celebration with friends and family, gift exchange, and a great feast to end the month-long fast of Ramadan.130

*Eid al-Adha*, the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice, celebrates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his only son. This holiday is celebrated in the 12th month of the Islamic calendar.131

In addition to these public religious holidays, there are two additional important religious days for Muslims in Eritrea.132 These are Lailat al-Miraj and al-Ashura. *Lailat al-Miraj* commemorates the day the Prophet ascended to heaven. On this day mosques are brightly decorated, and Muslims attend services in the evenings. After communal prayers, special prayers are said before retiring.133 *Al-Ashura* is a day of voluntary fasting. For Sunnis, it is a joyous day celebrating Moses’ victory over the Egyptians.134

---

Buildings of Worship

The capital of Eritrea, and principal city of the Tigrinya area, Asmara, hosts three impressive religious buildings. They are the Catholic Cathedral (built in 1922), the Khulafa al-Rashidin Mosque (1938), and the ancient Orthodox Cathedral, Nda Mariam.135, 136, 137

Churches

The principal faith of Tigrinya is Eastern Orthodox Christianity.138 Orthodox churches are frequently oblong or rectangular, resembling a ship. They are nearly always oriented east to west with the main entrance on the west side symbolizing a move out of darkness (or sin) and into the light. Roofs are often shaped like the flame of a candle. Each cupola on the roof has a cross.139, 140

Within the church are several divisions. The first is the narthex or vestibule. The main body, or nave, is separated from the sanctuary by a screen with doors. In the most traditional churches, there are no pews; worshippers do not sit during the service. At the easternmost end of the church is the altar with two rooms.141

Exchange 4: Does he say the mass in English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Does he say the mass in English?</th>
<th>bQwanQwa engliz dyom zeQed-desu.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>aykwennen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Orthodox churches or cathedrals, some ancient, some modern, often contain ornate medieval icons depicting the lives of the holy family or the saints.142 They also have a wooden replica of the Ark of the Covenant, or tabot, which contains stone tablets on

---

140 St Anthony Orthodox Church, “Inside an Orthodox Church,” 2011, http://www.stanthonyorthodox.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=91&Itemid=93
which are inscriptions in the ancient Ge’ez language.\textsuperscript{143} The \textit{tabot} is kept in the sanctuary, which has 12 doors to commemorate each of the 12 tribes of Israel. The sanctuary may only be entered by the priest or patriarch on ceremonial occasions.\textsuperscript{144}

\textit{Mosques}

The design of mosques may vary from region to region but all have several common features. The first is the \textit{qibla} wall, the one which faces Mecca. In the center of the qibla wall is a small concave niche called the \textit{mihrab}. There is a covered area in front of the qibla called the \textit{haram}. The area where one washes before praying is called the ablutions area. Depending on the specific mosque, this could be inside or in the courtyard surrounded by a wall called the sahn. The staircase where the prayer leader stands is called the \textit{minbar}. There are no pictures of humans or animals inside any mosque. Decorations in mosques often take the form of calligraphy, often of quotes from the Quran.\textsuperscript{145}

The \textit{Kulafah al-Rashidin} mosque is the most famous mosque in Asmara. It is a mix of Italian and Muslim architectural styles. Built in 1937–1938, the mosque occupies an important position in the city—at the intersection of the city’s two largest squares and markets.\textsuperscript{146}

\textbf{Behavior in Places of Worship}

\textit{Church Etiquette}

The Tigrinya people are usually very polite and eager to extend invitations. Yet, a visit to a church or a mosque should not be undertaken without approval or preparation. There are some courtesies that should be observed when visiting an Orthodox church.

\textbf{Exchange 5: What day and time is confession?}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>What day and time is confession?</th>
<th>nay nuzazeh me’aleten se’aten me’as ey-yu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Friday and Saturday at 5:00 in the afternoon</td>
<td>‘areben Qedamen se’at Hamushte deHri Qetri ey-yu.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{145} San Francisco State University, Middle East and Islamic Studies, “What is a Mosque?” n.d., \url{http://bss.sfsu.edu/meis/TeachingMaterials/files/What-Is-A-Mosque.pdf}


© DLIFLC | 22
The church in the Orthodox religion is a place of significant spirituality and should always be approached with reverence. Even when passing by a church, it is respectful to make the sign of the cross. Behavior in Orthodox churches is highly ritualized. Men and women usually worship in separate areas.\footnote{Orthodox Christian Information Center, “Orthodox Church Life: Church Etiquette,” n.d., 54–57, http://orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/guidech2.pdf}

For worshippers, dress should be formal. Never wear shorts. For men, a shirt and a tie are best. Shirts should button to the neck. T-shirts, sleeveless tops, or loud colors are to be avoided by both sexes. Women should wear dresses or skirts. A woman must always cover her head with a scarf. Jewelry, makeup and perfume are also frowned upon. In Eritrea, shoes should be removed before entering a church. Observing these courtesies as a guest would show respect and be much appreciated.\footnote{Jean-Bernard Carillet, Stuart Butler, and Dean Starnes, \textit{Lonely Planet: Ethiopia and Eritrea} (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 21.}

Do not take pictures unless you have asked for and received permission. In particular, avoid taking pictures of people worshipping.

If you are in doubt about what to do and what to avoid, be sure to ask your guide. Avoid loud talk, laughter, eating, or smoking in or near churches or cathedrals.

Remember, chewing gum may be interpreted as eating by people of both faiths who might be fasting.

\textit{Mosque Etiquette}
There are general rules to be observed for visiting any mosque.\footnote{If in doubt about specific conventions pertaining to visiting a mosque, feel free to ask a local or a cleric in the mosque.} Males and females worship separately. Shoes should be removed.\footnote{World Travel Guide, “Eritrea History and Culture,” 2011, http://www.worldtravelguide.net/eritrea/history-and-culture} When visiting any mosque, clothing should be clean and modest. Shorts are never worn and long sleeves are preferred although short sleeves (but not sleeveless) are permitted. Women should make sure to wear loose fitting garments covering the neck, arms, and legs. Scarves should completely cover the hair.\footnote{Hounslow Jamia Masjid and Islamic Centre, “Etiquettes of Visiting a Mosque,” 2009, http://www.hounslowmasjid.co.uk/page2/page10/page30/page30.html}
If there are people praying do not disturb them. Turn off all cell phones. Do not bring food or drink into the mosque.\textsuperscript{153}

Chapter 2: Assessment

1. Islamic law is the official basis for law in Eritrea.
   **False**
   There is no official recognition of shari’a law in Eritrea. However, it is used in cases of family and personal status for Muslims.

2. Both Christian and Muslim Tigrinyans observe ritual fasts.
   **True**
   Muslims traditionally fast during the month of Ramadan. Many Orthodox Christians fast on Wednesdays and Fridays when they abstain from meat and dairy products.

3. Both Muslims and Orthodox Tigrinya people separate men and women during worship.
   **True**
   Both religious groups have separate worship areas for men and women.

4. The west facing wall of a mosque is called a *mihrab*.
   **False**
   The *mihrab* is a niche in the west facing wall of a mosque. The wall is called the *qibla*.

5. The government carefully monitors the activity of all religious groups in Eritrea.
   **True**
   All religious groups are required to register with the government. The government also appoints religious leaders and requires twice yearly reports from religious groups.
Chapter 3: Traditions

Introduction
The Eritreans are a proud, optimistic, hardworking people deeply committed to their independence. They exhibit a deep sense of national pride and value self-sufficiency.\textsuperscript{154}

The Tigrinya-speaking population is a highly communal society. They have formed a number of associations to foster cohesion and assist community members. Maintaining strong community bonds and kinship are high priorities.\textsuperscript{155}

With a long history of poetry and literature, the Tigrinya people place a high value on oral skills—poetry, puns, folktales, and riddles. Many heroic cultural figures exhibit verbal talents, sometimes even outwitting the devil.\textsuperscript{156, 157}

Eritrean traditional law allows a crime against a person to be resolved with \textit{lex talionis} (blood feud). Blood feuds still occur among the Tigrinya people. Families of victims are allowed to seek satisfaction either by inflicting damage on the perpetrator or by seeking financial restitution in the form of blood money.\textsuperscript{158}

Exchange 6: Good Morning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good morning!</th>
<th>deHan-do Hadirka?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Good morning!</td>
<td>Yem-mesgen deHan-do Hadirka?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Codes of Politeness
Eritreans in general, and those of the Tigrinya-speaking provinces of Ma’akel and Debub in particular, are very hospitable to foreigners.\textsuperscript{159} They readily reciprocate acts of everyday courtesy.

Friendly hellos and handshakes are welcome among young and old alike. Those who know each other well commonly kiss alternate cheeks in greeting, usually three times.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{156} Countries and Their Cultures, “Tigray,” 2011, \url{http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Tigray.html}
\textsuperscript{159} Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” in \textit{Africa in Focus: Eritrea}, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 227.
Exchange 7: Good Afternoon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good afternoon.</th>
<th>deHan we’al.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Good afternoon.</td>
<td>deHan we’al.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In rural areas, two males greeting each other may simultaneously bump their right shoulders before shaking hands. This ancient Eritrean custom is common in the tribes.\textsuperscript{161}

Tigrinya people also greet each other by making brief eye contact and bowing their heads slightly. When using this greeting, it is important not to hold direct eye contact for too long; this can be interpreted as aggressive or may convey anger or dissatisfaction. When greeting others, hats should always be removed as a sign of respect.\textsuperscript{162}

Exchange 8: Good evening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good evening.</th>
<th>deHan amsi.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Good evening to you.</td>
<td>neseKhawen deHan amsi.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Foreigners should be careful not to cross gender barriers with handshakes or extended interaction. That is, foreign males should not shake hands with Eritrean women, and foreign women should not shake the hand of an Eritrean male.\textsuperscript{163} When greeting across genders, a nod and waiting for the woman to extend her hand first is considered appropriate behavior.\textsuperscript{164}

Exchange 9: Good night.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good night.</th>
<th>deHan Heder.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Good night.</td>
<td>deHan Heder.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{160} Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” in \textit{Africa in Focus: Eritrea} (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 226.

\textsuperscript{161} Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” \textit{Africa in Focus: Eritrea} (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 226.

\textsuperscript{162} Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” \textit{Africa in Focus: Eritrea} (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 227.


Greetings usually come with smiles, handshakes, and inquiries about the health and welfare of one’s family.165

Exchange 10: Are you doing well?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you doing well? deHanhdo tek-kayed al-leka?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes. ew-weh deHan ey-ye.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 11: How are you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>How are you? kamey al-leKha?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Fine, thank you. tseboQ yem-mesgen-no.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When greeting Eritreans, it is common to use one’s first name preceded by a title.166

Exchange 12: Hi, Mr. Kinfe. (informal)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Hi, Mr. Kinfe. selam ato kenfe.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Hello. selam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 13: God bless you and your family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>God bless you and your family. amlaKh ne’aKhan nesedraKhan yebareKh.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thanks to God. amen kebru yesfaH.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dress Codes

The traditional clothing of the Tigrinya people is white, which reflects their Christianity. On more formal occasions, women will wear ankle-length dresses (zurya) with long sleeves. Men also wear a gown-like white garment known as an ejetebab. Both men and women wear the tilfi, a handmade gown designed with various decorations. The tilfi and zurya are worn at celebrations, including weddings.167

---

Men also wear ankle-length pants that are baggy above the knee but tight below the knee and fitted, long-sleeved shirts that extend to just above the knee. Both men and women wear a shawl or toga around their shoulders, known as a *gabbi*.\(^{168}\)

In the cities, Eritreans like to wear formal clothing, with Western suits usual among office employees. Women in urban areas dress fashionably, but modestly. Among young people in the capital city of Asmara, Western dress is typical. Among the Muslim Jabarti (Jeberti), it is common to dress in a style reflecting Islamic tradition. Military style clothing is also commonly seen.\(^{169}\)

**Exchange 14: Is this okay to wear?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this okay to wear?</th>
<th>MeKhdan Qe-bul deyu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tigrinya women adorn themselves with various ornaments and jewelry. These can include tattoos, especially a cross on the forehead for Christians. Other common adornments include gold or silver jewelry resembling a rose worn on the ears (*kutisha*) or a coin-like piece worn around the neck (*stelini*).\(^{170}\) Tigrinya women pierce only their ears.\(^{171}\)

**Exchange 15: How should I dress?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>How should I dress?</th>
<th>YeHayesh?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kamey en-teh-teKhedenku</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


Hospitality and Gift Giving

Hospitality is important in Eritrea. Guests are accorded the highest level of consideration in Eritrean households and offered the best of everything the family has, including food. It is not uncommon for guests to be offered gifts, including animals, as a welcoming gesture. It is common for the Tigrinya to invite guests to dine with them in their homes, and politeness requires one to accept this invitation. Before dining, the host may ask guests to wash their hands; this invitation is extended after the meal as well.172

If you are invited into a person’s home, it is a good idea to bring a gift. Something useful such as sugar, tea, or coffee would be appreciated.173

Exchange 16: I really appreciate your hospitality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I really appreciate your hospitality.</th>
<th>be-aQebablaKhum beta’mi Hegus ey-ye yeQenyeley.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>You’re welcome.</td>
<td>ghenzebka.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eating Habits and Cuisine

Family members usually take their meals together, eating from a large tray called a me’adi. On this tray may be one or several hot, spicy stews, or tsebhi, made of vegetables, chicken, beef, or mutton. Surrounding the tsebhi can be several smaller dishes of yogurt and hilbet, a bean paste that resembles Mexican refried beans.174 It is not uncommon for women and children eat from a separate me’adi. If there are guests for dinner, women and children usually wait until the male guests have been served before eating.175

Because Tigrinya Christians believe that God is watching over diners during the me’adi, unnecessary physical movement is considered inappropriate. The elder member at the me’adi blesses each person by giving them each a piece of bread. Diners should only take food directly before them, never reaching in front of others,176 Eat with the first three

---

fingers of the right hand. The left hand is used for the bathroom and toilet only, never to eat or pass something to another person. Licking one’s fingers is also a sign of poor manners.177

Eritrean food reflects a number of influences. *Injera* is a soft, pancake-style bread made from sorghum or wheat.178 It is eaten with stew-like sauces called *tsebhi* or *wat*, which may be hot and spicy and may or may not include meat. This type of food is very common in rural areas. In urban areas, food choices are more varied and often reflect Italian influences.179

Many dishes are vegetarian. This partly reflects that among the Tigrinya faithful, there are 150 fasting days during which a vegan diet must be followed. Neither the Tigrinya Christians nor Jabarti (Jeberti) Muslims eat pork.180

**Exchange 17: The meal was very good.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>The meal was very good.</th>
<th>beta’mi tseboQ meghbi neyru.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thanks.</td>
<td>yeQenyeyeley.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Basic etiquette extends throughout the evening, until the dinner has ended. As guests, foreigners might be asked their opinion of the country. It is polite to discuss the things one finds enjoyable. Discussion of religion, politics, or other potentially controversial subjects may cause offense and should be avoided. Likewise, loud talk or laughter is not appreciated. Lastly, it is impolite to express admiration for pieces of furniture or ornaments; a host might feel obliged to offer the item to his guest. If a guest is offered a gift upon leaving the house, it would be impolite to refuse. Gifts are received with both hands and a humble “thank you very much for your hospitality.” 181

**Favorite Pastimes**

The Tigrinya are enthusiastic fans of recreational and spectator sports. Watching national and international football matches (soccer, in the U.S.) on television at home or in cafes is a favorite pastime for many. Cycling is also popular; both men and women have taken up this sport through cycling clubs. There are traditional games, as well. Children often play a pitch game called *gebetta* (also known as *mandala*) which uses 48 dried peas and 6 empty cups. There is also a traditional hop-and-squat singing game for girls called *fti fti*. To win, a player must catch pebbles thrown in the air while picking up others off the ground.\(^{182, 183}\)

There is a strong café and coffee culture in Asmara. Residents often hang out and visit with friends and families. The government offers recreational and educational activities for children via government-run youth clubs.\(^{184}\)

**Nonreligious Celebrations**

Eritreans observe seven nonreligious celebrations that are commonly marked by speeches, public demonstrations, cultural shows, and educational events. The first of these is New Year’s Day. Fenkil Day, commemorating the attempt to liberate the city of Massawa, is observed on 10 February. International Women’s Day falls on 8 March and celebrates women and their contributions. International Labor Day is on 1 May. Liberation Day, or Independence Day, falls on 24 May. Martyr’s Day, on 20 June, is usually celebrated by planting trees in public gardens and is a day of remembrance for those who fell in the struggle for Eritrea’s independence. The last of the public holidays, Start of the Armed Struggle Day, is on 1 September; it honors the day in 1961 when Eritrea began its armed struggle against Ethiopia. Public celebrations are usually marked by noisy processions through the streets and displays of folk art and music.\(^{185, 186}\)

---


\(^{185}\) F. Tilbury et al., “Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali & Sudanese Communities in Western Australia” (paper prepared for East Metropolitan Population Health Unit, Murdoch University, 2004), 14, [http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/ docs/africancommunity.pdf](http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/ docs/africancommunity.pdf)

Exchange 18: Will you celebrate the festival next week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Will you celebrate the festival next week?</th>
<th>nay zemets-e semun festa keteHw-weso diKha?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dos and Don’ts

Do

- Be courteous at all times and greet local people where appropriate.
- Dress neatly and conservatively, avoiding short trousers and short sleeves.
- Ask permission before you take a person’s picture.

Don’ts

- Don’t sit in a way that exposes the bottom of your feet.
- Don’t take pictures of either women or public installations.
- Don’t smoke or drink alcoholic beverages outside of cafes or restaurants or on public streets.
- Don’t discuss politics, religion, or sex in public.
- Don’t attempt to talk to women.
- Don’t shout or speak in a loud voice or use profanity (even in English).
Chapter 3: Assessment

1. Fenkil Day celebrates the Eritrean struggle to liberate the city of Massawa.
   True
   Fenkil commemorates the 1990 liberation of Massawa. Eritrean freedom fighters scored a decisive victory after waging a two-day battle.

2. Tattoos are a common form of adornment for women.
   True
   Many women decorate themselves with tattoos. The image of a cross on the forehead is common among the Tigrinya Christian women.

3. *Injera* is a large tray upon which food is served.
   False
   *Injera* is a pancake-like bread that is a staple food. The *me’adi* is a flat tray upon which dishes for the meal are served.

4. Blood feuds are no longer practiced among the Tigrinya.
   False
   Families of victims are allowed to seek revenge against a perpetrator by inflicting bodily damage, in some cases death, or by seeking financial restitution known as blood money.

5. It is appropriate for males to shake hands with females in Eritrea.
   False
   It is inappropriate to shake hands across gender lines (unless invited). Foreign women should not shake hands with Eritrean men.
Chapter 4: Urban Life

Introduction
Eritrea is a largely rural country, with only about 22% of its population living in urban centers. The rate of rural people migrating to the cities is estimated at 5.2% per year. Today, there are about 20 urban centers throughout the nation. The capital, Asmara, is one of six major cities and is located in the Tigrinya-speaking Ma’akel Province. It is the largest city in Eritrea, having a population of 649,000.

Urbanization Issues
The process of modern urbanization in Eritrea began in the colonial and post-independence periods. Asmara was planned as the capital and a center of industry. However, Italian efforts at urbanization were aimed more at controlling the population than economic development. The landscape and the occupants’ ability to defend it were often the deciding factors when determining which areas would serve as urban centers. Asmara was originally built with a series of racial zones; the center was reserved strictly for Italians and other Europeans, the second zone was for Italians and their colonial subjects, while the third was exclusively for colonial subjects. Industrial areas were located in the fourth zone. These racial zones were policed to prevent interaction and mixing, a practice that continued until just before World War II.

Exchange 19: May I use your phone?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>May I use your phone?</th>
<th>telefonkum keteQemel-lando?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>Her-ray teteQemel-la.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Fascists redesigned the capital into three zones with the intent of better separating the Eritreans from the Italians. The buffer between these two populations was a market area.

---

containing commercial and administrative buildings. The Eritrean zone was 2.5 times more densely populated than the Italian zone.\textsuperscript{192}

The Eritrean members of the Italian military were known as ascari. During military campaigns, they were allowed to have their families near them and moved to the cities, especially Asmara. It was this policy that led to a rapid urbanization of the area.\textsuperscript{193}

**Urban Work Issues**

More than 50% of Eritrea’s population live in poverty. Approximately half of these poor live in rural areas, with the rest in the cities. These urban poor are concentrated in low-skill occupations and are employed primarily in the informal sector.\textsuperscript{194}

A major problem in the urban areas is the repatriation of refugees and ex-fighters from Eritrea’s most recent wars. Most (more than 72%) decided to return to Eritrea’s urban centers, an influx that has created extra stress on the social service sector. Increasing the population’s educational levels is a key strategy for dealing with the employment issues in the cities. Many of the reeducation and training programs have been designed for men, despite the fact that many of the returning fighters are women who are constrained by traditional attitudes toward female employment.\textsuperscript{195}

**Exchange 20: What is your phone number?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>What is your phone number?</th>
<th>Qutsri telefonka kendey ey-yu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>My phone number is 13-25-47.</td>
<td>Qutsri telefoney ‘aserte-seleste ’esran-Hamushten arb’an-shew’aten ey-yu.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{194} The World Bank, “Eritrea Poverty Assessment, 2011,” [http://go.worldbank.org/F2GIHRJ7C0](http://go.worldbank.org/F2GIHRJ7C0)

Exchange 21: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a medical clinic nearby?</th>
<th>ma-ekel Hekemna ab Qereba yerkeb-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, over there.</td>
<td>ew-we, abti al-lo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other problems typical of cities beset Asmara. Water-borne ailments such as diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever caused by poor and inadequate sanitation are prevalent. Untreated sewage is released into streams. About 20% of the population use public latrines, pit latrines, or open fields.

The need for improved sanitation and housing are growing problems. Plans to improve education, training, housing, and sanitation are currently underway or in the process of being developed.

Healthcare

Eritrea’s healthcare system is improving. Key medical facilities are available in the cities, particularly the capital of Asmara. The Ministry of Health has created decentralized health facilities judged to be clean, well organized, and supplied with basic medicines and equipment. According to a World Health Organization report, key medicines are available in 95% of health facilities, and 60 different medicines are produced in Eritrea. Patients receive free treatment for chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Private healthcare is available, but it is too costly for most.

---

Exchange 22: Is there a doctor here?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a doctor here? dokter-ke yerkeb-do abzee?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No. yel-len.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modern medicine is not widely practiced in Eritrea. Unless the medical problem is serious, most people do not seek treatment. Herbs and other local ingredients are used to treat common illnesses.\(^{204, 205}\)

Exchange 23: My knee is broken doctor, can you help me?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>My knee is broken doctor, can you help me? dokter berkey tesebire al-leKhu, ketHekmeni teKh-el-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, I can help you. ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the altitude of some urban areas such as Asmara, travelers may suffer from altitude sickness. Visitors with heart problems or high blood pressure should take their necessary medications with them. Pharmacies are poorly stocked, and it is difficult to obtain prescription medications. Thus, it is advisable to bring what is needed due to severe shortages.\(^{206, 207}\)

Exchange 24: Do you need my help?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you need my help? Hagezey-do yed-lyeka ey-yu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes. ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 25: Do you know what is wrong?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you know what is wrong? eti gudlet tefelto-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No. ayfelton.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{205}\) Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 304.


Education

Eritrea has a literacy rate of 59%. The government believes that the country’s development depends on a more educated populace and promotes education throughout the nation. Primary and secondary education in Eritrea is fully coeducational and mandatory for all children between the ages of 7 and 13. Elementary education includes five grades, and middle school includes grades six through eight. Elementary school is taught in the students’ native language, but English is the medium of instruction for secondary education. Despite efforts to expand education, nearly 60% of children have no access to elementary education, 90% have no access to middle school, and 86% have no access to high school.

Exchange 26: Do your children go to school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do your children go to school?</th>
<th>deQ-Kha temherti yeKhedu-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon completion of middle school, students must pass national examinations to attend secondary school. Those attending secondary school choose between science and commerce. Students who enroll in technical and vocational education and training learn technical, arts, crafts, or business skills. Asmara has several excellent private schools (e.g., Semaetat Secondary School) for Eritrean families who want their children to have a European-style education. The public secondary schools of Asmara accommodate pupils from the immediate area and those commuting from outlying settlements. After successful completion of secondary school, students can attend the University of Asmara to study in one of its arts, business, education, science, or engineering programs. This university, founded in 1954 by an Italian religious order, has more than 2,500 students enrolled in degree programs.

---

Exchange 27: Is there a school nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a school nearby?</th>
<th>bet-temherti ab Qereba-do al-lo?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Restaurants**

Dining out in Eritrea can be a rewarding experience but requires patience. The idea of eating out is a relatively new one. Eritreans tend to eat early. Sundays can also be problematic because markets are closed.\(^{214}\)

Exchange 28: Are you still serving lunch?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you still serving lunch?</th>
<th>mesaH yer-rkebekum-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 29: I’d like a coffee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I’d like a coffee.</th>
<th>bun delye al-leKhu.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>Her-ray</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are a number of restaurants in the capital of Asmara that serve a variety of cuisines, including Eritrean, Italian, and Indian.\(^{215}\)

Exchange 30: Can you get me my bill?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can you get me my bill?</th>
<th>Hesabey-do ketemtse-al-ley meKhe-alka?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>Her-ray</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


Dessert is not a traditional part of a meal, but when served it is usually some kind of fruit salad. Alcoholic drinks are commonly served, including the local beer known as Asmara Beer.\textsuperscript{216}

If you are eating traditional Tigrinya food, you will probably sit at a low, round table on stools. Before you eat, you may be asked to wash your hands by a waiter carrying a brass water container. Since there will probably be no silverware (unless you request it), you will eat with your right hand, dipping your bread into the small bowls.

**Exchange 31:** Put this all on one bill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Put this all on one bill.</th>
<th>kul-lu eti Hesab ab Hade ateQalel-lo.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>Her-ray.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 32:** I’d like some soup.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I’d like some soup.</th>
<th>gele mereQ delye neyre.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>al-len-na Her-ray.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 33:** What type of meat is this?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>What type of meat is this?</th>
<th>ezi entay ‘aynet sega ey-yu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Lamb.</td>
<td>Sega beg-gi-‘e.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If asked how you are enjoying the food, do not hesitate to compliment the cook.\textsuperscript{217}

**Exchange 34:** This food is delicious.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>This food is delicious.</th>
<th>ezi megbi beta’mi meQ-Qur ey-yu.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>te’um yehabka.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{216} Jean-Bernard Carillet, Stuart Butler, and Dean Starnes, “Eritrea: Food and Drink,” in *Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 312–313.

\textsuperscript{217} Jean-Bernard Carillet, Stuart Butler, and Dean Starnes, “Eritrea: Food and Drink,” in *Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 313.
When the meal is over, waiters will clear the table quickly and efficiently. This is not a prompt for you to leave, but simply a sign of good service.

Exchange 35: Do you have any dessert?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have any dessert?</th>
<th>mezazemi meQ-Qur megbi yerekeb-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, we have fruit.</td>
<td>ew-we feretat al-len-na.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 36: Do you have any more water?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have any more water?</th>
<th>may-do ketewesKheni teKh-el?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>Her-ray.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may be invited to wash your hands again; if not, you may wash in the bathroom.

Exchange 37: Where is your bathroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Where is your bathroom?</th>
<th>sheQaQ-kum abey ey-yu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Over there.</td>
<td>abti neyew.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Marketplace
Shops in the city open at 8:00 a.m. However, traditional markets, especially those offering fresh produce, meat, or fish that has been trucked up from the coast, may open as early as 7:00 a.m. Shops generally close at 1:00 p.m. and resume business from 2:30–10:30 p.m.\textsuperscript{218}

Exchange 38: Will you be going to the market today?

| Soldier: | Will you be going to the market today? | nab edaga keteye diKha lomi? |
| Local: | Yes | ew-we. |

Exchange 39: Can you take me there?

| Soldier: | Can you take me there? | nab-u-do ketewesdeni teKh-el? |
| Local: | Yes, I can. Follow me. | eKh-el ew-ewe, teKheteleni. |

Wise Tigrinya shoppers, eager to get the freshest and best, may be out early. Only major businesses, such as hotels and car rental agencies, accept international credit cards. Otherwise, cash is best at the popular markets.\textsuperscript{219}

Exchange 40: Do you accept credit cards?

| Soldier: | Do you accept credit cards? | kredit kard teQebelu-do? |
| Local: | No. | ayneQebeln. |


The Eritrean Nakfa is not convertible outside the country. You should convert money only at “himbol” exchanges in towns or at the airport.220

Exchange 41: Do you accept U.S. currency?

| Soldier: | Do you accept U.S. currency? | nay amerika batera teQbelu-do? |
| Local:   | No, we only accept nakfa.     | ayneQebeln, naQfa teraH ina neQbel. |

Exchange 42: Is the market nearby?

| Soldier: | Is the market nearby? | shuQ ab Qereba dyu? |
| Local:   | Yes.                  | ew-we.              |

Exchange 43: How much longer will you be here?

| Soldier: | How much longer will you be here? | abzi kendey ketetsenH iKha? |
| Local:   | Three more hours. | kab Heji seleste se’atat. |

With the exception of downtown shops, where goods are sold at a fixed price, customers can be seen bargaining or haggling over prices at the markets. It is not impolite to haggle, but do not bargain unless you know the fair value of an item and you intend to buy.221

Exchange 44: I can give you this much money for this.

| Soldier: | I can give you this much money for this. | bezi-en kewesdelka eKh-el ey-ye. |
| Local:   | No.                                  | aydel-ln.               |

Exchange 45: Can you give me change for this?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can you give me change for this?</th>
<th>Sherfi nay ezi-en tereKheley-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>ayreKhbelkan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The idea of “caveat emptor” (buyer beware) should be kept in mind in Asmara. It is acceptable to examine an object you might want to buy.

Exchange 46: May I hold this and inspect it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>May I hold this and inspect it?</th>
<th>Hize ker-eyo eKh-el-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 47: Do you have any more of these?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have any more of these?</th>
<th>kemzi ‘aynet zeyada yerekebeka-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>yeb-l-leyn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some items are available in different sizes and colors than those on display. A buyer many ask if other varieties are available.

Exchange 48: Do you have this in a larger size?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have this in a larger size?</th>
<th>kabzi ‘bey-y zebele al-lekum-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, we do.</td>
<td>ew-we, al-len-na.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 49: Do you have this in a different color?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have this in a different color?</th>
<th>kemezi ‘aynet gen kal-e Hebri al-lekum-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Street Vendors

Street vendors in Asmara abound in small squares and side streets away from the center of the city. Beware of those selling food, however. Westerners are rarely accustomed to the strains of bacteria one is likely to encounter. Food that is raw or not completely cooked should be avoided.222

---

Exchange 50: Did you prepare this food?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Did you prepare this food?</th>
<th>ezi megbi nesKha-do addaliKhayo?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>ay-anen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 51: Is this food fresh?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this food fresh?</th>
<th>ezi megbi Hadish dyu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some street vendors may brazenly insist that you buy something. In these encounters, it is best to give a firm, but polite refusal.

Urban Traffic and Transportation

In 2004, Eritrea was listed as the most dangerous country in the world to drive in, and conditions have worsened since. Pedestrians and bicycles use the middle of the road without regard to oncoming traffic. At night, lights and reflectors are not used.223

Exchange 52: Is there a gas station nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a gas station nearby</th>
<th>ab Qereba me’edel gaz yerkeb-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, on this road.</td>
<td>ew-we, abza gwedena ba’la.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Speed limits in the city are generally 35 km/hr (21 mph) except for the two main arteries, Martyrs Avenue and Edgeth Avenue, where 50 km/hr (30 mph) is permitted. Streets within the city limits are generally well paved and the highland breezes keep vehicle air pollution to a minimum. However, in outlying districts the roads are full of potholes. During the rainy seasons these roadways become even worse as large pools of water collect.224

---


Exchange 53: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a good auto mechanic nearby</th>
<th>abzi kebabi te’uy mekanik yerkeb-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, two kilometers from here.</td>
<td>ew-we, kel-lte kilo-metr kabzi.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 54: Do you know how to fix this?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you know how to fix this?</th>
<th>nezi me’ray teKh-elo-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>ayt-elon.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cars

Driving in Eritrea can be dangerous, especially at night when street lights may not be working. Travel on secondary roads should be avoided, particularly at night. Mines are also a risk in these areas. In cities, speed limits are rarely obeyed and pedestrians pose a danger because most people travel by foot and can clog city streets.225 Visitors can rent cars and/or drivers. For travel in and around the major sites a 2 wheel drive (WD) vehicle is likely sufficient, but when traveling to more remote areas, a 4WD vehicle is a must. A driver is usually included in the fee when renting a 4WD vehicle.226

Exchange 55: Can I rent a car from you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can I rent a car from you?</th>
<th>abzi kebabi nay kray mekina krekeb eKh-el-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>aytrekebn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is an efficient network of local and national buses, mini buses, car rentals, and taxis.227 The buses are crowded and uncomfortable and leave a stop only when full. When possible, bus travel should be avoided.228

---

Exchange 56: Will the bus be here soon?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Will the bus be here soon?</th>
<th>eta awtobus Qeltifado temets-e teKhewn?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, in 10 minutes.</td>
<td>ew-we, deHri ‘aserte deQayQ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taxis are available in the cities but are not metered; prices must be negotiated before starting the journey. Taxis may also be hired for travel outside the cities to the villages and smaller towns.229, 230

Exchange 57: Can I get a cab around here?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can I get a cab around here?</th>
<th>abzi botazi botazi taksi krekeb eKh-el-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the public and private bus and taxi services, in 2003 a railway from the Red Sea to Asmara was completed. The steam train travels through some spectacular scenery in the mountains.231

Exchange 58: Is there a train station nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a train station nearby?</th>
<th>medeber babur ab Qereba al-lo-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Asmara International Airport, 25 km (15 miles) from the city center has domestic flights to most of the major cities in Eritrea.232

Exchange 59: Which direction to the airport?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Which direction to the airport?</th>
<th>menged-di eyerport beyan ey-yu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>That way.</td>
<td>beti ab-bilka.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Street Crime and Solicitations

Beggars

There are beggars on nearly every street corner in Asmara, including main public places such as bus stations, marketplaces, mosques, and churches. Most beggars are women. On special saint’s days, beggars begin forming lines that can be about 400 m long. Begging is a crime in Eritrea, and the government has begun rounding up and detaining beggars.233

Exchange 60: Give me money.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local:</th>
<th>Give me money.</th>
<th>seldi habeni.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>No, I don’t have any.</td>
<td>yebl-leyn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Crime

The incidence of violent crime in Asmara has been fairly low in recent years and Westerners are generally quite safe. Petty crime, such as pickpocketing and auto break-ins, is a constant concern for police.234 There are some precautions one can take. Do not walk around alone at night; many outlying streets have no lighting. Thieves and criminals tend to target people who appear lost, so always try to appear as if you know your way around.

---


Chapter 4: Assessment

1. Nearly half of all Eritreans live in urban areas.
   False
   Eritrea remains largely rural; only about 22% of the population live in urban areas.

2. Areas were chosen for urbanization in Eritrea based on whether they could be defended.
   True
   The decisions regarding which areas to urbanize were based largely on considerations of how easily the area could be militarily defended.

3. The repatriation of Eritrean refugees has put stress on urban social services.
   True
   Nearly 72% of repatriated Eritreans live in the cities, causing stress on the social service sector including housing and education.

4. People’s accessibility to healthcare is worsening in Eritrea.
   False
   The central government built a number of health facilities throughout the country that are supplied with key medicines.

5. Begging is legal in Eritrea.
   False
   Although there are beggars on nearly every corner, it is illegal. The government has been placing beggars in detention in an effort to reduce begging.
Chapter 5: Rural Life

Introduction
Most of Eritrea’s population lives in the countryside. Since independence, rural dwellers have faced the redistribution of land from communal and private ownership to state ownership. Women who were once combatants have returned to their villages armed with new legal rights that challenge traditional roles. Although infrastructure improvements such as roads and railroads are impressive, much remains to be done. Likewise, further improvements in education, healthcare, and landmine removal are necessary.

Land Distribution
Tigrinya Christians are largely farmers with three customary land ownership systems. Resti is land owned by extended families in which the head of each nuclear family owns a parcel for his lifetime. Gulti is land granted by an emperor to individuals for distinguished service. Diesa is a tenure system under which the village land is periodically redistributed among residents and considered common property of the community.235

After independence, the government passed several land reform acts and declared that all land belonged to the state. The state recognized only three types of land rights: the right to use and gain profit from land owned by another (usufruct); household land in rural areas; and leasehold land. Because the state owns all land, all rights are temporary and cannot be transferred.236

Exchange 61: Do you own this land?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you own this land?</th>
<th>nayzi meryet wan-na diKha?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All rural citizens, regardless of sex or ethnicity, are guaranteed the right to own land provided they meet requirements of age, military service, and residence. Rights to the

land cease upon the death of the holder.237 While
the law does not discriminate, men have benefitted
most from land reform. Women are often
subsumed under male households and there is a
reluctance to distribute land to women, despite
their existing legal rights.238

Land guarantees had the effect of pitting the
Tigrinya owners of large commercial farms against the Kunama, who live on communal
land. Ex-combatants (including women) and former refugees were resettled illegally on
what was to be protected communal land, an action that violated the rights that were
meant to last the life of the occupant.239, 240 Jailing these newcomers and asserting other
land rights has been viewed as an attempt by the majority Tigrinya to assert power over
the lowland groups. The majority of state employers and officers are Tigrinya.241

Rural residents who know the area well can be excellent sources of information.

**Exchange 62: Do you know this area very well?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you know this area very well?</th>
<th>ezi kebäbi atsebiQka-do tefelo?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-w.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


240 Luca G. Castellani, “Recent Developments in Land Tenure Law in Eritrea, Horn of Africa” (working paper, Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, June 2001), 14, [http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/12800/1/ltcw37.pdf](http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/12800/1/ltcw37.pdf)

Rural Economy

Nearly 80% of the population work in agriculture, and 50% of those are subsistence farmers. The Tigrinya live mostly in the highlands in Ma’akel and Debub Provinces, and farm small pieces of land, usually less than one hectare (2.5 acres). The main crops are wheat, barley, sorghum, beans, chickpeas, and linseed. For the most part, these farmers do not use modern machinery but rely instead on draft animals and manual labor. A few have been able to install irrigation systems, thus ensuring three growing seasons per year. This advancement has raised their standard of living considerably.

Exchange 63: Where do you work, sir?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Where do you work, sir?</th>
<th>entay ey-yu seraHka?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>I am a farmer.</td>
<td>Harestay ey-ye.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Historically, the Jabarti were the most economically advanced Muslim community in the region. Ethiopian rulers prohibited the Jabarti from owning land, so many went into crafts and small trade occupations in the villages. Today, many of those historical influences are still present. Many of the crafts and tradespeople in the villages and towns are from the Jabarti group.

Nevertheless, there are some Jabarti Tigrinya farmers raising corn, millet, barley, and wheat. They also raise cattle, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, chickens, bees, and camels from which the hides are used in the leather export industry.


Gender Roles

Women have a significant role in agriculture. In the highland areas, where most Tigrinya live, women participate in planting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, etc. Yet, despite this contribution, women still suffer from discrimination. Work done by women is often undervalued; therefore, women are at a disadvantage in terms of opportunity and available resources, including land for agriculture.\(^{246}\) Efforts to improve the position of women are especially important since current estimates are that between 33% and 40% of all Eritrean households are headed by women. Such households are generally poorer and likely to suffer from food shortages.\(^{247, 248}\)

Exchange 64: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you the only person in your family who has a job?</th>
<th>kab sedraKha seraH zel-lek-ka nesKha teraH diKha?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>aykwenkun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eritrean women typically have three societal roles: working in agriculture, taking care of the home and children, and civic responsibilities. Often this means that women are working 15 hours a day or more. The dual responsibilities of home and work have long prevented women from gaining an education or access to job training.\(^{249}\)

Women farmers produce and sell less than their male counterparts partly because of competing demands on their time, poor education, and a lack of information, skills, and equipment. In some cases, women who do own land are forced to rent it to men, who then farm it; as a result, these women must work for others for low wages.\(^{250}\)

---


\(^{250}\) Belainesh Seyoum Saare, “Women, Gender Analysis and Agriculture in Eritrea: Women as Effective Agents of Change” (master’s thesis, Athabasca University, Alberta, Canada, November 2009), 35,
Rural Transportation

Of the 4,010 km (2,492 miles) of highway linking the cities and rural areas of Eritrea, only 874 km (543 miles) are paved. This includes the roads between the cities of Asmara, Massawa, Mendefera, Dekemhare, Baretun, and Keren. The roads in mountainous regions and through the cliffs are not maintained. They may be narrow and winding and have no safety barriers. Driving in rural areas is dangerous, and travel after dark should be avoided. Eritreans often travel on foot, sometimes creating hazardous situations on the road.

Travel on paved or unpaved roads requires that drivers be alert to livestock, pedestrians, or unpredictable local drivers. Poor road lighting in rural areas and the poor condition of local vehicles also complicate driving. These factors, combined with a scarcity of traffic police heighten the risks of driving in the country.

Exchange 65: My car broke down, can you help me?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local:</th>
<th>My car broke down, can you help me?</th>
<th>mek-kina tesebiratni-mo ketHegzeni-do meKhe-alka?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>I need to check with my commander.</td>
<td>feQad Halafyey kerekeb allen-ni.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Healthcare

The absence of adequate healthcare in rural areas is a major challenge facing the Eritrean government. The healthcare situation is compounded by drought and lack of clean water, malnutrition, and poverty. The focus of humanitarian aid provided by the UN and by international organizations such as USAID has been to assist the Eritrean government in establishing a network of small rural district clinics. As the government continues to close down foreign missions and their healthcare facilities, the work of mainstream international agencies like the UN and USAID has become critical.


Organization (WHO) estimates that there are only 5 physicians for every 100,000 people in Eritrea.\(^\text{255}\)

Most healthcare facilities in the country are inadequate. Hospitals are mainly located in urban areas, and those are understaffed and poorly equipped. In rural areas, modern medical facilities are scarce. Travelers need to carry their own prescription medications because pharmacies are poorly stocked. In the case of a medical emergency, patients would likely require evacuation to a facility offering adequate care. Travelers are advised to keep potable water with them; water sources in rural areas (even tap water), should be considered contaminated. Travelers may experience altitude sickness in the highlands where elevations approach 2,134 m (7,000 ft). Symptoms include shortage of breath, nausea, fatigue, and headaches.\(^\text{256, 257}\)

### Education

Although schooling is mandatory for all children between the ages of 7 and 13, many children do not attend. Children in rural areas have less access to education than urban residents have and may have to walk long distances to schools. Lack of value for education of young girls also plays a role in low enrollment. According to the Ministry of Education, nearly 234,000 children between the ages of 7 and 11 are not in school.\(^\text{258}\) Approximately 50% of Eritrean children will drop out of elementary school. Most of these are from the poorest groups, particularly in the rural areas.\(^\text{259}\) Around 13% of high school students will actually graduate. UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Education to create Complementary Elementary Education for children in some remote villages.\(^\text{260}\)

---


In the two education districts serving the Tigrinya, there are only 25 secondary schools serving a population of more than 130,000 eligible students. These schools represent just over 60% of the available secondary schools in Eritrea. In 2002, there were only about 70,000 students enrolled at this level.\(^{261}\)

**Who is in Charge?**

There are three levels of local government administration in Eritrea: the village/area, the sub-region, and the region. The president or his representative permanently appoints the local government minister and the chief administrators for the three levels. Each administrator is accountable to an immediate supervisor rather than to a popular constituency. Regional administrators are not accountable to elected regional people’s assemblies but rather to the minister of the local government.\(^{262}\)

**Exchange 66: Does your leader live here?**

| Soldier: Does your leader live here? | meraHiKhum abzi deyu zeQmet? |
| Local: | Yes. | ew-we. |

Village administrators and elders (or chiefs) are expected to support the ideals of the revolution over ancient tribal practices.\(^{263}\) In 1996, the elected village councils were abolished and replaced with the megaba’aya, comprised of all village residents over the age of 19. This group has the power to discuss programs in the village, to make comments and recommendations, and to approve programs. The megaba’aya also arranges for the election of committee members who implement the programs. This group meets every three to four months. The permanently appointed village/area administrator chairs the group. This new system effectively removes any decision-
making power from the people’s assemblies, giving it over to the government-appointed administrators.264

**Exchange 67: Can you take me to the administrative head of this community?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can you take me to the administrative head of this community?</th>
<th>nab ameHadari ‘adi ketewesdeni teKh-el-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *baito zoba* is the only remaining people’s assembly in Eritrea, but it has no authority to implement policies or levy taxes on its own; it can only recommend solutions to the government. Still, the *baito zoba* must collect local revenues based on the national government. To ensure that the *baito zoba* will not recommend anything that runs counter to national priorities, government-appointed regional administrators can ignore any recommendations made by the *baito*. The minister of local government determines whether such polices violate central government regulations.265

**Exchange 68: Respected elder, we need your help.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Respected elder, we need your help.</th>
<th>kebur ab-bo, Hagezkum yedlyen-na al-lo.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>I can help you.</td>
<td>Her-ray keHegzekum eKh-el ey-ye.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Borders
Overland travel between Eritrea and Sudan is not advised due to danger from bandits and insurgent activity. The procedures for crossing the border between the two countries are fluid and subject to change at any moment. The border between Ethiopia and Eritrea is closed.266 It is also dangerous to travel near the border with Djibouti, including the port of Assab. There have been military clashes in recent years, and there is risk of further conflict.267

Checkpoints
There are many checkpoints throughout the country and in the cities. Travelers must be prepared to stop and show their passports and travel permits, which must be obtained through the Ministry of Immigration and Nationality.268

Weapons
Since 2000, the trafficking of weapons has increased in the Horn of Africa. This is particularly true in the border regions between Eritrea and Ethiopia, where weapons remain from the 30-year war of liberation. There have been reports that weapons have been transported across the Ethiopian border into the hands of Tigrinya-speaking Ethiopians.269 Saudi Arabia has alleged that weapons have been smuggled from Eritrea to Yemen to support rebels in that country.270 Most recently, Eritrea has been accused of training, financing, and arming groups in Somalia. It is also accused of being heavily involved in human trafficking in the Sinai region.271

269 Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), Small Arms Control and Disposal: Research, Consultancy & Support (Bonn, Germany: Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2001), http://www.saligad.org/fieldwork/gashbarka.html
Landmines

There are an estimated two million land mines and other unexploded ordnance in Eritrea, believed to be left over from the 30-year war of liberation from 1961–1991. These mines are around the cities and populated areas, near rural farmland, water sources and along borders, especially those with Ethiopia. The risk of injury from land mines is high. Of the 4,176 communities in the country, landmines endanger 481. The affected areas cover about 130 sq km (50 sq mi). Mines pose a nationwide problem, with the highlands and north most affected. Many of the detonations have occurred on the well-travelled roads near the Gash Barka region in Western Eritrea. These mines were laid recently and were not remnants of the earlier wars. Unless the local government has certified the riverbed as being safe, one should avoid it.

Exchange 70: Is this area mined?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this area mined?</th>
<th>ezi bota neta gwi zetezer-o dyu?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-ewe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 5: Assessment

1. Nearly 80% of Eritrea’s population is involved in agriculture.
   **True**
   Although 80% of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, it accounts for only about 12% of the nation’s GDP.

2. The Jabarti Tigrinya are traditionally pastoralists.
   **False**
   Historically forbidden to own land, the Jabarti developed a strong tradition as craftsmen, artisans, and tradespeople.

3. Among the Tigrinya, women are engaged in all stages of the agricultural cycle.
   **True**
   Tigrinya women plant, harvest, and process the food.

4. Village leaders are accountable to the village residents.
   **False**
   Village leaders are appointed by the central government and are not accountable to the people that they represent.

5. It is safe to drink tap water in most places in rural Eritrea.
   **False**
   Tap water should be considered contaminated. People are advised to take bottled water with them.
Chapter 6 Family Life

The Typical Household
As in most African countries, the family is the basic social unit for the Tigrinya-speaking peoples of Ma’akel and Debub Provinces. Most rural Eritreans live with large extended families with as many as six children.

Among the Tigrinya, Christians and Muslims have clear ideas of how men and women should interact. In both communities, men and women have distinct roles. Men cultivate the fields while women take care of house and hearth. Most household management duties are the woman’s responsibility, but the man is considered head of the family and responsible for its finances. Both parents take responsibility for teaching children social norms.

Exchange 71: How many people live in this house?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier: How many people live in this house?</th>
<th>abza geza kendey ze-aKhlu sebat yenebru?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local: Ten.</td>
<td>‘aserteh.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In some places, women also clear the land, weed the fields, help with the harvest, tend the livestock, and grind grain into flour. Despite these responsibilities, they still hold an inferior status. Men decide how any surplus produce will be distributed, and they completely control formal bartering.

---

Among the Tigrinya, women may participate in activities beyond the traditional roles of housewife and taking care of children. Even so, there are gender divisions of labor and women face discrimination when they enter nontraditional roles. However, Tigrinya women are active in political life and may attend public events and meetings.  

Among the Tigrinya Jabarti (a Muslim sub-group), women have a higher status than women in other African Islamic countries for two reasons. First, women comprised about one-third of the military forces in the Eritrean People’s Liberation Force (EPLF) during the civil war were women who served alongside men. Second, the Shafi‘i branch of Islam is generally more liberal regarding the role of women. The government’s modernization policy, with its commitment to gender awareness, has helped elevate the status of women despite traditional views on gender roles.

---


---

Exchange 72: Are these people part of your family?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are these people part of your family?</th>
<th>ezom sebat abalat sedraKha deyom?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>aykwenun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 73: Does your family live here?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Does your family live here?</th>
<th>sederiKha abzi deyom zenebru?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 74: Did you grow up here?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Did you grow up here?</th>
<th>abzi-do ‘abiKha.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Status of Women, Children, and the Elderly

Women
Although women have a legal right to equal pay, protection against domestic violence and discrimination, and equal educational opportunities, these laws are unevenly enforced. For example, data show a considerable gap between literacy rates for males and females. The rate of literacy for women is 54.5% and 77% for men. Violence against women is commonplace. Although illegal since 2007, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is widely practiced, pervasive, and seldom prosecuted.

Children
Children are very important in Tigrinya families and are free to play around the home and socialize. It is also common to see children from rural areas engaged in household tasks and agricultural activities. In cities, children work as hawkers selling cigarettes, gum, and nuts.

Child slavery is illegal in Eritrea. However, many children in Eritrea are forced to participate in the commercial sex trade. It is estimated that more than 5% of Eritrea’s prostitutes are between the ages of 14 and 17.

The Elderly
The elderly hold a special place in traditional Eritrean society. They are afforded great respect and their advice is both sought and valued. The approval of elderly family members is part of any major family decision, and they often assist in resolving family conflicts.

Marriage and Divorce

Marriage

According to the Constitution of 1997, marriage is prohibited for both males and females under the age of 18. However, in many parts of the country, women still marry early, some as young as 12.  

According to the United Nations, 38% of girls in Eritrea between ages 15 and 18 are married, divorced, or widowed. Among the Tigrinya Christian community, marriages are monogamous but among the Tigrinya Jabarti, polygamy is legal, and men may have as many as four wives.

Exchange 75: Do you have any brothers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have any brothers?</th>
<th>aHwat al-lewuKha-do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, I do.</td>
<td>ew-we al-lewuni.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Christians and Muslims alike, the family plays an important role in arranging marriages. The law in Eritrea does not prohibit such arrangements, but it does mandate that the bride and groom approve the marriage beforehand; i.e., individuals cannot be forced to marry. The practice of the dowry has been legally abolished but continues in practice. In cities, it is more common for young people to find their own mates.

Exchange 76: Are you married?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you married?</th>
<th>be’al Hadar diKha?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>aykwenkun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Western-style courtship, including dating, engagement, etc., does not exist in Eritrea. Men and women do not spend time alone in each other’s company prior to marriage. Traditionally, a boy’s family approaches the girl’s, and there are many inquiries about the social standing of each family. When all parties agree, a date is set and planning begins. Girls may be betrothed as early as age 8, with the actual marriage taking place when she is 14 or 15.  

**Exchange 77: Is this your wife?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this your wife?</th>
<th>ezi-a-Khe be’alti betka deya?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>aykwenetn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marriage is primarily an anchor of economic and social relationships among the Tigrinya people in the highlands of Eritrea. It involves contracts requiring acknowledgment by the community and the church. Although officially illegal, a dowry must be paid by the bride’s family to the couple or to the groom’s family. A dowry paid to the couple can include money, animals, jewelry, or other necessities. A dowry paid to the family of the groom typically includes cash. In the highlands, the dowry is the responsibility of the bride’s father. If the dowry is not high enough, many young women cannot wed. Therefore, in the highland region, married women tend to be from families that could afford the highest dowries. A married woman whose family provided a high dowry is granted more respect from their in-laws and the community. The groom’s father provides jewels and dresses to the bride as her dowry.

**Exchange 78: Is this your entire family?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this your entire family?</th>
<th>ezi-atom sedraKha deyom?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>aykwenun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


Divorce

Eritrea has a high divorce rate, but specific numbers are difficult to obtain.\textsuperscript{309, 310} The divorce process is regulated differently among the Christians and the Muslims. Among the Christian Tigrinya, a wife can initiate divorce proceedings. The rule of customary law usually favors men in terms of custody and the division of marital property. A committee of elders will attempt to reconcile the couple, but if that is not possible, the committee settles matters of property division and custody. For men, there is little stigma resulting from divorce, and they often remarry. Far fewer women remarry. Thus, financial realities make it difficult for women to divorce.\textsuperscript{311}

The situation is even more severe for Muslim women. A woman can also initiate divorce, but men have a tremendous advantage in matters of property division and child custody. Traditionally, a Muslim woman who divorces is often forced to return to her parents’ home or to work at a menial job with little hope of remarriage.\textsuperscript{312}

Family Events

Weddings

Within the Tigrinya groups, marriages are performed by a communal covenant (qal-kidan) on the wedding day. Around noon on that day, the groom’s family arrives at the bride’s home. After their arrival, the community elders proclaim the marriage official based on their communal laws and regulations. Following the legal procedures, guests eat and drink in celebration. After eating, there is much music and dancing.\textsuperscript{313}

After the feast and celebration, the bride rides a horse to the groom’s house to begin a two-week to one-month honeymoon. Young couples may establish a temporary home at the family home of the bride or the groom. However, they are expected to set up their


own household when they are able. Once they have established their own place of residence, they are eligible to own land and avail themselves of community services.314

**Exchange 79: Congratulations on your marriage.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Congratulations on your marriage.</th>
<th>enQwa’ Hegus mer’a geberelkum.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>amen yeQenyeyely.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 80: I wish you both much happiness.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I wish you both much happiness.</th>
<th>nekelteKhum zeyada Hagos emn-neyelkum.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>yeQenyeyely.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Childbirth**

The birth of sons is anticipated and celebrated. After a boy is born, the placenta is buried inside the hut, symbolizing the adult male who will remain. The placenta of a girl is buried outside, signifying that she will live apart with her husband.315 It is also traditional for women to utter a shrill, howling sound seven times to celebrate the birth of a male child but only three times to celebrate the birth of a female child. Boys are christened 40 days after birth, but girls are usually not christened until their 80th day.316

**Exchange 81: Are these your children?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are these your children?</th>
<th>ezi-atom deQ-Kha deyom?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>ew-we.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Funerals

Among Tigrinya Christians, a person’s death will prompt a messenger called a *me’eyeti* to deliver the information about the death and when the funeral will be held. In the rural areas this often involves someone standing on the roof of a house or on a hilltop, shouting the news that a person has died and announcing specifics about the funeral ceremony.317

The body of the deceased is washed and wrapped in a white cloth known as a *megnez*. The body is then placed in a coffin and transported to the church, where a requiem mass is held. During this time, mourners do not cry or wail. Both men and women may attend the funeral rites.318

Exchange 82: I sympathize with you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I sympathize with you.</th>
<th>ane teKhañáli Hazenkum ey-ye.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thank you so much.</td>
<td>beta’mi nemesgneka.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mourners come with gifts (often grain, coffee, or money) for the grieving family. The burial of the deceased is accompanied by loud wailing and sobbing. Ceremonies marking the death also occur 12 days, 40 days, and one year afterward.319

Exchange 83: I would like to offer my condolences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I would like to offer my condolences to you and your family.</th>
<th>ne’aKhañ nebete sebkan tsen’at yehabkum kebel edeli.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>Hesem ayterkeb.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A brief period of mourning follows the burial, during which one may offer the appropriate condolences. Orthodox Christian burial usually follows death by three days, before which one may express condolences to family members. Muslims are required to conduct burial ceremonies within 24 hours of death, if possible. Muslim funerals are attended only by males.320

Exchange 84: Please be strong.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Please be strong.</th>
<th>tsena’e aKha-elo dem-ma yehabka.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thank you so much.</td>
<td>keKh-elo ey-ye yeQeneley.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tigrinya Names

Most names in the Tigrinya culture have a specific meaning such as the spring rains or the dawn.\(^{321}\) It is custom for children in Tigrinya families to take their father’s first name, either as a surname or, if the family or clan is well known, as a second name. Sometimes the grandfather’s name is added as a third name to further distinguish among individuals.\(^{322}\) For example, in the case of Mr. Feiven Ammanuel Tewolde, Feiven would be the man’s personal name. Ammanuel would be the name of his father. Tewolde could be a clan or tribe name, or possibly the name of his grandfather. Because it is common to address Tigrinya people by their first names, he would customarily be addressed as Mr. Feiven.\(^{323}\) Likewise, in the case of Natsinet Alazar Berhane, Natsinet would be her first name. Alazar would be the name of her father, and Berhane would be either a clan name or possibly the name of her grandfather. In public she would be addressed as Mrs./Miss Natsinet.\(^{324}\)

Women in Tigrinya culture do not change their names when they get married.\(^{325}\) However, women are often given a new name by their mother-in-law when they move to the husband’s home. Only the first name is changed, however.\(^{326}\)

Chapter 6: Assessment

1. Most Tigrinya-speakers live in nuclear families.
   False
   Eritrea’s mostly rural families are extended, with parents, children, and grandparents living in the same house. Families are large, often with up to six children.

2. Women’s roles confine them to the house, and they do not work in the fields.
   False
   Among the Tigrinya, women help with weeding, harvesting, and tending livestock in addition to their household obligations.

3. Women among the Tigrinya Jabarti enjoy higher status than their Muslim counterparts elsewhere in the country.
   True
   Although women’s status is still inferior to men, Jabarti women have higher status than women in other African Islamic groups.

4. The dowry system is legal in Eritrea.
   False
   Although the practice of giving dowries is widely practiced among the Tigrinya and other groups, it is technically illegal.

5. Only males may participate in Tigrinya funerals.
   False
   Among Tigrinya Jabarti, only males may participate in funerals. However, among the Christian Tigrinya, both males and females are welcome.
Final Assessment

1. Eritrea was once part of Sudan.  
   True / False

2. The majority of Tigrinya-speakers are Orthodox Christians.  
   True / False

3. It is acceptable for foreigners to greet a member of the opposite sex by shaking hands.  
   True / False

4. Only the right hand should be used to touch food.  
   True / False

5. There is little adequate healthcare in the rural areas.  
   True / False

6. The patriarch of the largest clan is also the head of the village.  
   True / False

7. Most children in rural areas are enrolled in school.  
   True / False

8. Both husbands and wives are permitted to divorce in Eritrea.  
   True / False

9. Eritrea has nine principal ethnic groups.  
   True / False

10. The Dutch were the major European colonizers of Eritrea.  
    True / False

11. The Constitution of Eritrea was never ratified.  
    True / False

12. The form of Islam practiced by the Jabarti is less orthodox than most other forms.  
    True / False
13. The government officially recognizes all religions in the country.
   True / False

14. Members of the military are banned from attending Protestant prayer meetings.
   True / False

15. Shari’a law is officially recognized in Eritrea.
   True / False

   True / False

17. The traditional color or clothing for Tigrinya Christians is white.
   True / False

18. Many Tigrinya will seek out traditional remedies rather than using modern medicine.
   True / False

19. Eritreans commonly eat out at restaurants.
   True / False

20. People may not legally marry before they reach the age of 18.
   True / False

21. Most marriages among the Tigrinya are arranged.
   True / False

22. Women take their husband’s name when they marry.
   True / False

23. Tigrinya may not own land until they establish their own household.
   True / False

24. The unit of currency is the Eritrean pound.
   True / False

25. All news media in the country are state owned.
   True / False
26. It is mandatory to remove shoes when entering an Orthodox Church in Eritrea.
   True / False

27. Christmas is celebrated on two days in Eritrea.
   True / False

28. Under Eritrean law, all land rights are temporary and cannot extend beyond the
dead of the owner.
   True / False

29. Driving after dark is generally safe.
   True / False

30. Village councils are elected by the residents over the age of 19.
   True / False
Further Reading

**Books and Articles**


**Websites**

