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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



Courtesy Wikimedia
Eritrea Map

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,

¹ School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, “The Tigrinya Language,” n.d., <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/atlas/tigrinya/language.html>

² *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Eritrea: Ethnic Groups and Languages,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

³ Hans van der Splinter and Mebrat Tzehalea, “Languages in Eritrea,” n.d., <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-languages.htm>

⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, “Ethnic Groups: Eritrea,” in *The World Factbook*, 12 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2075.html>

⁵ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 5: Society,” in *Eritrea (Africa in Focus)* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO LLC, 2011), 168.

⁶ Jake Patterson, ed., “Culture of East Africa: Eritrea,” n.d., <http://journeythroughafrica2.pbworks.com/w/page/11956219/Culture-of-East-Africa>

⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Eritrea,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

⁸ F. C. Gamst, “Eritreans,” in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life: Volume 1 Africa*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 203–204.

⁹ Al Jazeera, “Yemen: A Failed State?” on the Riz Khan show, 17 January 2010, <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/rizkhan/2010/01/2010157245823603.html>

¹⁰ F. C. Gamst, “Eritreans,” in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life: Volume 1 Africa*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 205.

¹¹ Countries and their Cultures, “Eritreans: Religion,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Eritreans.html>

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}



© Charles Roffey
Southern Eritrea

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

¹² Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Geography," in *The World Factbook*, 8 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

¹³ F. C. Gamst, "Eritreans," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life: Volume 1 Africa*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 205.

¹⁴ The Geological Society, "Earth's Hottest Place," *Geoscientist* 20.02 (February 2010), <http://www.geol Soc.org.uk/gsl/geoscientist/features/page7072.html>

¹⁵ Mongabay, "Population of Asmara, Eritrea," 2010, <http://population.mongabay.com/population/eritrea/343300/asmara>

¹⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: Land," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

¹⁷ Hans van der Splinter, "Eritrea: Climate," n.d., <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-climate.htm>

¹⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: Climate," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea>

¹⁹ Mongabay, "Eritrea," 2005, http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_profiles/2004-2005/Eritrea.html

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}



© Charles Roffey
Asmara

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 *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

²⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: People," in *The World Factbook*, 8 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

²¹ Hans van der Splinter, "History of Asmara," 2011, <http://www.asmera.nl/asmara.htm>

²² Hans van der Splinter, "History of Asmara," 2011, <http://www.asmera.nl/asmara.htm>

²³ Lonely Planet, "Introducing Asmara," 17 February 2009, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/eritrea/asmara>

²⁴ Hans van der Splinter, "Nacfa (Nakfa) Eritrea," n.d., <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-nacfa.htm>

²⁵ Hans van der Splinter, "Currency and Exchange Facilities," n.d., <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-nakfa.htm>

²⁶ Maps of World, "Nafka," 2009, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/eritrea/travel/nakfa.html>

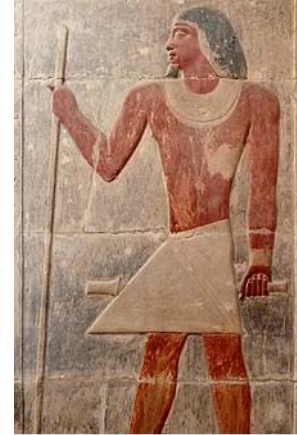
²⁷ Hans van der Splinter, "Massawa (Mitsiwa, Massauwa) Eritrea," n.d., <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-massawa.htm>

²⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Massawa," 2011, <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



Courtesy Wikimedia
Art from 5th Egyptian Dynasty

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}

²⁹ Ian Shaw, *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 101.

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

³¹ John W. Turner, “Historical Setting: The Aksumite State,” in *Ethiopia A Country Study*, eds. Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), <http://countrystudies.us/ethiopia/5.htm>

³² Online Etymology Dictionary, “Eritrea,” 2010, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=e&p=20>

³³ Stuart C. Munro-Hay, *Aksum: An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 202.

³⁴ Encyclopedia Coptica, “The Christian Coptic Orthodox Church Of Egypt,” n.d., <http://www.coptica.net/EncyclopediaCoptica/>

³⁵ G. Mokhtar, ed., “Chapter 16: Christian Axum,” in *Ancient Civilizations of Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 225–226.

³⁶ John W. Turner, “Historical Setting: The Aksumite State,” in *Ethiopia A Country Study*, eds. Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), <http://countrystudies.us/ethiopia/5.htm>

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.).³⁷

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.³⁸

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.³⁹



Courtesy Wikimedia
Aksum Empire map

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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

In 1941, the British forced the Italians out of Eritrea, where they remained during the war years.⁴² At the end of World War II, Eritrea was given to Ethiopia by the United Nations.^{43, 44} Armed resistance to Ethiopian rule grew in the second half of the 20th

³⁷ Jonathan Miran, "A Historical Overview of Islam in Eritrea," *Die Welt des Islams, International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam* 45, no. 2 (2005): 180,

<http://www.wvu.edu/liberalstudies/documents/Miran%20Islam%20in%20Eritrea%20WI%202005.pdf>

³⁸ John W. Turner, "Historical Setting: The Zagwe Dynasty," in *Ethiopia: A Country Study*, eds. Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), <http://countrystudies.us/ethiopia/7.htm>

³⁹ Atlapedia Online. "Eritrea." 2011, <http://www.atlapedia.com/online/countries/eritrea.htm>

⁴⁰ John W. Turner, "Historical Setting: Italian Rule and World War II," in *Ethiopia: A Country Study*, eds. Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+et0028%29>

⁴¹ Evelyn Waugh, *The Coronation of Haile Selassie*, (London: Penguin Books, 1937).

⁴² John W. Turner, "Historical Setting: Ethiopia in War II," in *Ethiopia: A Country Study*, eds. Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+et0030%29>

⁴³ Bamber Gascoigne, "History of Eritrea," Historyworld, 2001, <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad18#2121>

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



Courtesy Wikimedia
Isaias Afwerki

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

⁴⁴ John W. Turner, "Historical Setting: Growth of Secessionist Threats," in *Ethiopia: A Country Study*, eds. Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+et0034%29>

⁴⁵ Bamber Gascoigne, "History of Eritrea," Historyworld, 2001, <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad18#2121>

⁴⁶ Bamber Gascoigne, "History of Ethiopia," Historyworld, 2001, <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?groupid=2114&HistoryID=ab92>

⁴⁷ Bureau of African Affairs, U. S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

⁴⁸ Bureau of African Affairs, U. S. Department of State, "Background Note: Eritrea," 9 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

⁴⁹ Hans van der Splinter, "Background to the Border Dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia," n.d., <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-ethiopia.htm>

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



© Charles Roffey
Government building in Asmara

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,

⁵⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Eritrea: Year in Review 2010,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1724913/Eritrea-Year-In-Review-2010?anchor=ref1091302>

⁵¹ Travel Document Systems, “Eritrea Africa: Government,” 2011, <http://www.traveldocs.com/er/govern.htm>

⁵² United Nations, “The Constitution of Eritrea,” 2 July 1997, <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un-dpadm/unpan040909.pdf>

⁵³ Travel Document Systems, “Eritrea Africa: Government,” 2011, <http://www.traveldocs.com/er/govern.htm>

⁵⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, “Eritrea: Government,” in *The World Factbook*, 8 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2011: Eritrea,” 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2011/eritrea>

⁵⁶ Law Library of Congress, Library of Congress, “Legal Research Guide: Eritrea,” 4 April 2011, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/eritrea.php>

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 official, 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



© Sailing Nomad / flickr.com
Pay phone

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

⁵⁷ Luwam Dirar and Kibrom Tesfagabir, "Introduction to Eritrean Legal System and Research," GlobaLex, March 2011, <http://www.nyulawglobal.org/Globalex/Eritrea.htm>

⁵⁸ BBC, "Eritrea Country Profile," 30 November 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1070813.stm

⁵⁹ Reporters without Borders, "Radio Erena: An Independent News Source for Eritrea," 16 March 2010, <http://en.rsf.org/eritrea-radio-erena-an-independent-news-16-03-2010,36687.html>

⁶⁰ Novatech, "Country Profile: Eritrea," 2008, 5, http://www.bk-conseil.com/espacinformation/documentation/ict/Eritrea_Country_Profile.pdf

⁶¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Communications," in *The World Factbook*, 21 October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

⁶² *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Eritrea: Economy," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191577/Eritrea/37655/Economy>

⁶³ Madote News, "Eritrea Becomes Food Secure," 29 May 2011, <http://www.madote.com/2011/05/eritrea-wins-war-on-food-security.html>

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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵



© Charles Roffey
Eritrea farmland

Agriculture

Although nearly 80% of Eritreans are employed in the agriculture sector, it accounts for only around 12% of the country's GDP.⁶⁶ 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 2000.⁶⁷

In addition to the goal of becoming self-sufficient in food production, the government intends to become a food exporter by 2015.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹

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.⁷⁰ 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

⁶⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 8 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

⁶⁵ Finfacts, "Global Growth to Slow say Economist Intelligence Unit; Eritrea to be 2011 Growth Leader," 17 December 2011, http://www.finfacts.ie/irishfinancenews/article_1021275.shtml?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+finfacts/xRCH+%28Finfacts+Ireland+Business+%26+Finance+Portal%29&utm_content=NewsGator+Online

⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 8 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

⁶⁷ Globserver, "Eritrea: Agriculture," 11 April 2011, <http://www.globserver.com/en/eritrea/agriculture>

⁶⁸ Madote, "Eritrea Wins War on Food Security," 29 May 2011, <http://www.madote.com/2011/05/eritrea-wins-war-on-food-security.html>

⁶⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Eritrea Food Security Country Brief, January –April 2011," 20 May 2011, [http://www.foodsec.org/web/publications/pubshome/pubsdetail/en/?dyna_feff\[backuri\]=%2Fweb%2Fpublications%2Fbriefs%2Fcountries%2Fafrika%2Feritrea%2Fes&dyna_feffuid=75270](http://www.foodsec.org/web/publications/pubshome/pubsdetail/en/?dyna_feff[backuri]=%2Fweb%2Fpublications%2Fbriefs%2Fcountries%2Fafrika%2Feritrea%2Fes&dyna_feffuid=75270)

⁷⁰ United Nations Trade Point Development Center, "Eritrea: Introduction," n.d., <http://sunsite.icm.edu.pl/untppdc/incubator/africahp/eri/er.htm>

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, copper, 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 descendants 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

⁷¹ Nevsun, "Welcome to Nevsun Resources," n.d., <http://www.nevsun.com/>

⁷² Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 8 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

⁷³ Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 8 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

⁷⁴ U.S. Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Eritrea," September 2005, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>

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

⁷⁶ CIA World Factbook, "Ethnic Groups: Eritrea," 12 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2075.html>

⁷⁷ F. C. Gamst, "Eritreans," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life: Volume 1 Africa*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 205.

⁷⁸ E. D. Thompson, "Tigre," n.d., <http://www.modaina.com/tigre-2.html>

⁷⁹ Orville Jenkins, "The Tigrinya (Tigray-Tigrinya) People," 30 June 2010, <http://orvillejenkins.com/profiles/tigrinya.html>

⁸⁰ Rachel Sponzo, "Tigrinya," *Encyclopedia of World Cultures Supplement*, 2002, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Tigrinya.aspx>

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.⁸¹



© thecomeupshow/ flickr.com
Tigre man
passing out phamplets

The Jabarti are primarily artisans and merchants, many of whom are in the capital city.⁸² 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.^{83, 84}

⁸¹ J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1965).

⁸² Jeberti. "From Guerillas to Government," 2001, http://www.jeberti.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56:from-guerillas-to-government&catid=40:history&Itemid=2

⁸³ J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1965).

⁸⁴ Mohammed Nur Said Wagneu, "The Rise of Islam: The Negashi Eritrean Jeberti," *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, IV (1987): 203–223, http://www.jeberti.com/Or_index.php?jbr=rise

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.
4. Eritrea gained independence in 1997.
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



© Charles Roffey
Eritrea women praying

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

⁸⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," in *2010 Report on International Religious Freedom*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4cf2d09ec.html>

⁸⁶ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," in *2010 Report on International Religious Freedom*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4cf2d09ec.html>

⁸⁷ Government of Australia, "Eritrean Community Profile," n.d., 5, <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/pdf/community-profile-eritrea.pdf>

⁸⁸ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea," in *2007 Report on International Religious Freedom*, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90096.htm>

⁸⁹ Eritrean Orthodox Diocese of North America, "Eritrea and Christianity," 24 September 2008, http://tewahdo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=143:eritrea-and-christianity&catid=67:eritrea-a-christianity-&Itemid=120

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}



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Catholic church in Asmara

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}



© IHH / flickr.com
Eritrean muslims

⁹⁰ St. George Melkite Greek Catholic Church, “Eastern Christianity,” 1997, <http://www.melkite.org/eastern.htm>

⁹¹ Michael Azkoul, “What Are the Differences Between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism?” St. Nectarios American Orthodox Church, 1994, http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/ortho_cath.html

⁹² Eritrean Orthodox Diocese of North America, “Eritrea and Christianity,” 24 September 2008, http://tewahdo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=143:eritrea-and-christianity&catid=67:eritrea-a-christianity-&Itemid=120

⁹³ Jonathan Miran, “A Historical Overview of Islam in Eritrea,” *Die Welt des Islams, International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam* 45, no. 2 (2005): 177–215, <http://www.wwu.edu/liberalstudies/documents/Miran%20Islam%20in%20Eritrea%20WI%202005.pdf>

⁹⁴ Global Security, “Shafi’i Islam,” 2011, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-shafii.htm>

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



© Wikimedia User: Optimist on the run
Rural church

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?

Soldier:	May I enter?	ke-atu eKh-el-do?
Local:	Yes, but you must remove your shoes.	ewe ChamaKha gen ketewets-o al-leka.

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

⁹⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Pillars of Islam,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/295625/Pillars-of-Islam>
⁹⁶ J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1965).
⁹⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “USCIRF Annual Report 2011- Countries of Particular Concern: Eritrea,” 28 April 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c36e.html>
⁹⁸ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Eritrea,” in *USCIRF Annual Report 2011: Countries of Particular Concern*, 28 April 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c36e.html>

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}



© Carlsten ten Brink / flickr.com
Mosque and cathedral view

⁹⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Eritrea,” in *USCIRF Annual Report 2011: Countries of Particular Concern*, 28 April 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c36e.html>

¹⁰⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Eritrea,” in “*USCIRF Annual Report 2011: Countries of Particular Concern*, 28 April 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c36e.html>

¹⁰¹ Crosswalk, “Eritrea Imposes New Controls on Orthodox Church,” 2006, <http://www.crosswalk.com/news/religiontoday/1457982.html>

¹⁰² United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Eritrea,” in *USCIRF Annual Report 2011: Countries of Particular Concern*, 28 April 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c36e.html>

¹⁰³ Foreign and International Law, Library of Congress, “Legal Research Guide: Eritrea,” 4 April 2011, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/eritrea.php>

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

Religion plays an integral part in the daily life of most Tigrinya people.¹⁰⁶ Older Eritrean Christians often have a tattoo of a cross on their foreheads.¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸



© Charles Roffey
Asmara man in white

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.¹⁰⁹ 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.¹¹⁰ Many wear white as a symbol of their faith.¹¹¹

Exchange 2: Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	re-esitye kegulbebo-do yegeb-ani.
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

¹⁰⁴ Foreign and International Law, Library of Congress, “Legal Research Guide: Eritrea,” 4 April 2011, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/eritrea.php>

¹⁰⁵ Luwan Dirar and Kibrom Tesfagabir, “Introduction to Eritrean Legal System and Research,” n.d. <http://www.nyulawglobal.org/Globalex/Eritrea.htm>

¹⁰⁶ Luis Alberto D’Elia, “Mobilizing for Action: Eritrean Community,” Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, December 2008, 91, http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing_Action_Report/ERITREAN%20COMMUNITY.pdf

¹⁰⁷ Countries and Their Cultures, “Eritrean Americans,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Du-Ha/Eritrean-Americans.html>

¹⁰⁸ Luis Alberto D’Elia, “Mobilizing for Action: Eritrean Community,” Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, December 2008, 91–92, http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing_Action_Report/ERITREAN%20COMMUNITY.pdf

¹⁰⁹ F. Tilbury et.al., “Listening to Diverse Voices Multicultural Mental Health Promotion Research Project- Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali and Sudanese Communities in Western Australia,” East Metropolitan Population Health Unit and Murdoch University, Perth, 2004, 13, <http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Luis Alberto D’Elia, “Mobilizing for Action: Eritrean Community,” Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, December 2008, 92, http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing_Action_Report/ERITREAN%20COMMUNITY.pdf

¹¹¹ Orville Boyd Jenkins, “Amhara-Tigrinya Clothing,” 6 November 2006, <http://orvillejenkins.com/peoples/amharaclimbing.html>

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



© Charles Roffey
New Years Service

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?

Soldier:	Who conducts the mass this morning?	lomi negeho sere'ate Qedaseh zemereH men ey-yu?
Local:	Father Alem.	ab-ba alem ey-yom.

¹¹² Luis Alberto D'Elia, "Mobilizing for Action: Eritrean Community," Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, December 2008, 92, http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing_Action_Report/ERITREAN%20COMMUNITY.pdf

¹¹³ F. Tilbury et.al., "Listening to Diverse Voices Multicultural Mental Health Promotion Research Project-Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali and Sudanese Communities in Western Australia," East Metropolitan Population Health Unit and Murdoch University, Perth, 2004, 13, <http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

¹¹⁴ F. C. Gamst, "Eritreans," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life: Volume 1 Africa*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 205, <http://gen.lib.rus.ec/get?nametype=orig&md5=CDA0BEEA05C6A2E04D964791173AB76C>

¹¹⁵ Q++Studio, "Eritrea Public Holidays 2011," n.d., <http://www.qppstudio.net/publicolidays2011/eritrea.htm>

¹¹⁶ Matthew Dennis, ed., "Eritrea: Holidays and Celebrations," World Geography and Culture Online, Facts On File, Inc., 20 July 2011, <http://www.fofweb.com/wgco/Print.aspx?iPin=EHCI0560&WinType=Free>

Timket, the Feast of the Epiphany, comes two weeks after Christmas on 19 January.¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸



© thecomeupshow/ flickr.com
St. Joseph's Cathedral, Asmara

Good Friday is a public holiday commemorating the day that Christ was crucified. *Tensae* is Easter and is the Sunday following Good Friday.¹¹⁹ 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.¹²⁰

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.^{121, 122} 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.¹²³

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.^{124, 125, 126}

¹¹⁷ Q++Studio, "Eritrea Public Holidays 2011," n.d.,

<http://www.qppstudio.net/publicolidays2011/eritrea.htm>

¹¹⁸ Matthew Dennis, ed., "Eritrea: Holidays and Celebrations," World Geography and Culture Online, Facts On File, Inc., 20 July 2011, <http://www.fofweb.com/wgco/Print.aspx?iPin=EHCI0560&WinType=Free>

¹¹⁹ Q++Studio, "Eritrea Public Holidays 2011," n.d.,

<http://www.qppstudio.net/publicolidays2011/eritrea.htm>

¹²⁰ Matthew Dennis, ed., "Eritrea: Holidays and Celebrations," World Geography and Culture Online, Facts On File, Inc., 20 July 2011, <http://www.fofweb.com/wgco/Print.aspx?iPin=EHCI0560&WinType=Free>

¹²¹ Hans van der Splinter, "Asmara Eritrea-September 10th 2002," 2002,

<http://www.asmera.nl/eritrea2002/eritrea-2002-10.htm>

¹²² Q++Studio, "Eritrea Public Holidays 2011," n.d.,

<http://www.qppstudio.net/publicolidays2011/eritrea.htm>

¹²³ Matthew Dennis, ed., "Eritrea: Holidays and Celebrations," World Geography and Culture Online, Facts On File, Inc., 20 July 2011, <http://www.fofweb.com/wgco/Print.aspx?iPin=EHCI0560&WinType=Free>

¹²⁴ Hans van der Splinter, "Asmara Eritrea-September 27th 2004," 2004,

<http://www.asmera.nl/eritrea2004/eritrea927.htm>

¹²⁵ Q++Studio, "Eritrea Public Holidays 2011," n.d.,

<http://www.qppstudio.net/publicolidays2011/eritrea.htm>

¹²⁶ Matthew Dennis, ed., "Eritrea: Holidays and Celebrations," World Geography and Culture Online, Facts On File, Inc., 20 July 2011, <http://www.fofweb.com/wgco/Print.aspx?iPin=EHCI0560&WinType=Free>

Muslim Holidays

Muslims celebrate holidays that follow the lunar calendar, include *Eid A-Maulid Anebi*, *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



© John Brantley
Asmara mosque

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

¹²⁷ Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, *Lonely Planet: Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 359–360.

¹²⁸ Q++Studio, "Eritrea Public Holidays 2011," n.d.,

<http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2011/eritrea.htm>

¹²⁹ Matthew Dennis, ed., "Eritrea: Holidays and Celebrations," World Geography and Culture Online, Facts On File, Inc., 20 July 2011, <http://www.fofweb.com/wgco/Print.aspx?iPin=EHCI0560&WinType=Free>

¹³⁰ Matthew Dennis, ed., "Eritrea: Holidays and Celebrations," World Geography and Culture Online, Facts On File, Inc., 20 July 2011, <http://www.fofweb.com/wgco/Print.aspx?iPin=EHCI0560&WinType=Free>

¹³¹ Matthew Dennis, ed., "Eritrea: Holidays and Celebrations," World Geography and Culture Online, Facts On File, Inc., 20 July 2011, <http://www.fofweb.com/wgco/Print.aspx?iPin=EHCI0560&WinType=Free>

¹³² Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, *Lonely Planet: Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 359–360.

¹³³ Sanatan Society for Scientific Spirituality, "Lailat-ul-Miraj," n.d.,

<http://www.sanatan.org/en/festivals/islam/lailatulmiraj.htm>

¹³⁴ A Global World, "Ashura Is a Religious Observance for Muslims Around the World," n.d.,

<http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/ashura-islam/>

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}



© Charles Roffey
Orthodox Church

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?

Soldier:	Does he say the mass in English?	bQwanQwa engliz dyom zeQed-desu.
Local:	No.	aykwenun.

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

¹³⁵ Sirak Habtemichael, “The Asmara Cathedral: An Architectural Wonder,” 25 January 2010,

<http://www.shabait.com/categoryblog/939-the-asmara-cathedral-an-architectural-wander>

¹³⁶ Edward Denison and Guang Yu Ren, “Eritrea: Refinding Africa’s Modernist Experience” (ArchiAfrika Conference Proceedings, Modern Architecture in East Africa around Independence, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, July 27–29, 2005), 71–79,

<http://archnet.org/library/pubdownloader/pdf/9951/doc/DPC1627.pdf>

¹³⁷ Countries and Their Cultures, “Eritreans: Religion,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Eritreans.html>

¹³⁸ Orville Boyd Jenkins, “The Tigrinya (Tigray-Tigrinya) People,” 30 June 2010,

<http://orvillejenkins.com/profiles/tigrinya.html>

¹³⁹ Orthodox Christian Information Center, “Orthodox Church Life: Church Etiquette,” n.d.,

http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/catechism_ext.htm

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

¹⁴¹ Holy Trinity Orthodox Mission, “The Orthodox Church,” n.d.,

http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/catechism_ext.htm

¹⁴² Hans van der Splinter, “Religious Sites of Asmara,” n.d., <http://www.asmera.nl/asmara-churches.htm>

which are inscriptions in the ancient Ge'ez language.¹⁴³ The *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.¹⁴⁴



© fever_free / flickr.com
Mosque in Massawa

Mosques

The design of mosques may vary from region to region but all have several common features. The first is the *qibla* wall, the one which faces Mecca. In the center of the qibla wall is a small concave niche called the *mihrab*. There is a covered area in front of the qibla called the *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 *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.¹⁴⁵

The *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.¹⁴⁶

Behavior in Places of Worship

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.

Exchange 5: What day and time is confession?

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

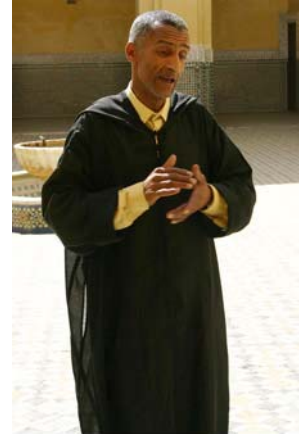
¹⁴³ F. C. Gamst, “Eritreans,” in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life: Volume 1 Africa*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 205.

¹⁴⁴ Stuart Munro-Hay, “The Tabot and the Ark: The Mysterious Altars of Ethiopia,” in *The Quest for the Ark of the Covenant* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co Ltd, 2005), 27–33, http://mindseyedub.com/Quest_for_the_ark.pdf

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

¹⁴⁶ Edward Denison, “Asmara: What to See,” in *Eritrea* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2007), 118.

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.¹⁴⁷



© Kristen Harvey
Mosque tour guide

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.^{148, 149}

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.

Mosque Etiquette

There are general rules to be observed for visiting any mosque.¹⁵⁰ Males and females worship separately. Shoes should be removed.¹⁵¹ 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.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Orthodox Christian Information Center, "Orthodox Church Life: Church Etiquette," n.d., 54–57, <http://orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/guidech2.pdf>

Orthodox Christian Information Center, "Orthodox Church Life: Church Etiquette," n.d., <http://orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/guidech2.pdf>

¹⁴⁹ Jean-Bernard Carillet, Stuart Butler, and Dean Starnes, *Lonely Planet: Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 21.

¹⁵⁰ If in doubt about specific conventions pertaining to visiting a mosque, feel free to ask a local or a cleric in the mosque.

¹⁵¹ World Travel Guide, "Eritrea History and Culture," 2011, <http://www.worldtravelguide.net/eritrea/history-and-culture>

¹⁵² 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.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Hounslow Jamia Masjid and Islamic Centre, "Etiquettes of Visiting a Mosque," 2009, <http://www.hounslowmasjid.co.uk/page2/page10/page30/page30.html>

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.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.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.^{156, 157}



© Carlsten ten Brink / flickr.com
Eritrea railroad worker

Eritrean traditional law allows a crime against a person to be resolved with *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.¹⁵⁸

Exchange 6: Good Morning

Soldier:	Good morning!	deHan-do Hadirka?
Local:	Good morning!	Yem-mesgen deHan-do Hadirka?

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.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.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ CultureGrams Online Edition, “Eritrea,” *ProQuest*, 2011, 25 July 2011.

¹⁵⁵ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 5: Society,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 170.

¹⁵⁶ Countries and Their Cultures, “Tigray,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Tigray.html>

¹⁵⁷ F. C. Gamst, “Eritreans,” in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life: Volume 1 Africa*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 207.

¹⁵⁸ Lyda Favali and Roy Pateman, “Chapter Five: From Blood Feud and Blood Money to the State Settlement of Murder Cases,” in *Blood, Land, and Sex: Legal and Political Pluralism in Eritrea* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 73–84.

¹⁵⁹ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 227.

Exchange 7: Good Afternoon

Soldier:	Good afternoon.	deHan we'al.
Local:	Good afternoon.	deHan we'al.

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.¹⁶¹



© Charles Roffey Friends

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.¹⁶²

Exchange 8: Good evening.

Soldier:	Good evening.	deHan amsi.
Local:	Good evening to you.	neseKhawen deHan amsi.

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.¹⁶³ When greeting across genders, a nod and waiting for the woman to extend her hand first is considered appropriate behavior.¹⁶⁴



© Carlisten ten Brink / flickr.com Women in Nefasit

Exchange 9: Good night.

Soldier:	Good night.	deHan Heder.
Local:	Good night.	deHan Heder.

¹⁶⁰ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 6: Culture," in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 226.

¹⁶¹ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 6: Culture," *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 226.

¹⁶² Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 6: Culture," *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 227.

¹⁶³ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 6: Culture," *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 226–227.

¹⁶⁴ Culture Crossing, "Eritrea: Greetings," n.d., http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=64

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



© RockshandyP2 / flickr.com
Asmara youth

Exchange 10: Are you doing well?

Soldier:	Are you doing well?	deHanhdo tek-kayed al-leka?
Local:	Yes.	ew-weh deHan ey-ye.

Exchange 11: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	kamey al-leKha?
Local:	Fine, thank you.	tseboQ yem-mesgen-no.

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

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

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Kinfe.	selam ato kenfe.
Local:	Hello.	selam.

Exchange 13: God bless you and your family.

Soldier:	God bless you and your family.	amlaKh ne’aKhan nesdaKhan yebareKh.
Local:	Thanks to God.	amen kebru yesfaH.

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

¹⁶⁵ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 226.

¹⁶⁶ Countries and Their Cultures, “Tigray,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Tigray.html>

¹⁶⁷ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 229.

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



© Sailing Nomad / flickr.com
Eritrean woman

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?

Soldier:	Is this okay to wear?	ezi kedan-zi meKhdan Qeb-bul deyu?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

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?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	kamey entehteKhedenku yeHayesh?
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¹⁶⁸ Countries and Their Cultures, “Tigray: Clothing,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Tigray.html>

¹⁶⁹ Commonwealth of Australia, “Eritrean Community Profile,” 2006, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/_pdf/community-profile-eritrea.pdf

¹⁷⁰ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 230.

¹⁷¹ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 231.

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



© Sailing Nomad / flickr.com
Eritrean hospitality

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.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	be-aQebablaKhum beta’ mi Hegus ey-ye yeQenyeley.
Local:	You’re welcome.	ghenzebka.

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

¹⁷² Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 228.

¹⁷³ Culture Crossing, “Eritrea: Gift Giving,” n.d.,

http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=23&CID=64

¹⁷⁴ F. Tilbury et.al., “Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali & Sudanese Communities in Western Australia” (paper prepared for East Metropolitan Population Health Unit, Murdoch University, 2004), 11,

<http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

¹⁷⁵ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 228.

¹⁷⁶ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture,” *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 229.

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



© Carlsten ten Brink / flickr.com
Woman makes injera

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.

Soldier:	The meal was very good.	beta'mi tseboQ meghbi neyru.
Local:	Thanks.	yeQenyeley.

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

¹⁷⁷ F. Tilbury et.al., “Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali & Sudanese Communities in Western Australia” (paper prepared for East Metropolitan Population Health Unit, Murdoch University, 2004), 11, <http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

¹⁷⁸ F. Tilbury et.al., “Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali & Sudanese Communities in Western Australia” (paper prepared for East Metropolitan Population Health Unit, Murdoch University, 2004), 11, <http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ Kjetil Tronvoll, “Eritrea,” *EveryCulture*, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Eritrea.html>

¹⁸⁰ Olivia Warren, *Taste of Eritrea: Recipes from One of East Africa’s Most Interesting Little Countries* (NY: Hippocrene Books, 2000), 14–15.

¹⁸¹ Virtualtourist.com, “Eritrea TravelGuide: Local Customs,” n.d., http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Africa/Eritrea/Local_Customs-Eritrea-BR-1.html

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}



© brassynn / flickr.com
Eritrea's cycling team

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}

¹⁸² Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Cultural Profile Project, "Eritrea: Sports and Recreation," n.d., <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/eritrea/index.html>

¹⁸³ F. Tilbury et.al., "Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali & Sudanese Communities in Western Australia" (paper prepared for East Metropolitan Population Health Unit, Murdoch University, 2004), 8, <http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

¹⁸⁴ F. Tilbury et.al., "Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali & Sudanese Communities in Western Australia" (paper prepared for East Metropolitan Population Health Unit, Murdoch University, 2004), 8, <http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

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>

¹⁸⁶ Matt Phillips and Jean-Bernard Carillet "Eritrea Directory," in *Lonely Planet: Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2006), 359–360.

Exchange 18: Will you celebrate the festival next week?

Soldier:	Will you celebrate the festival next week?	nay zemets-e semun festa keteHw-weso diKha?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

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.¹⁸⁷ Today, there are about 20 urban centers throughout the nation.¹⁸⁸ 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 649,000.¹⁸⁹



© Mika Hiironniemi
Asmara street view

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.¹⁹⁰ 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.¹⁹¹

Exchange 19: May I use your phone?

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	telefonkum keteQemel-la-do?
Local:	Sure.	Her-ray teteQemel-la.

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

¹⁸⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: People," in *The World Factbook*, 21 October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

¹⁸⁸ Kanchan Singh, "Urbanization in Eritrea," 18 May 2002, <http://www.dankalia.com/archive/1000/1112.htm>

¹⁸⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: People," in *The World Factbook*, 21 October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

¹⁹⁰ Kanchan Singh, "Urbanization in Eritrea," 18 May 2002, <http://www.dankalia.com/archive/1000/1112.htm>

¹⁹¹ Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, "From Warriors to Urban Dwellers: Ascari and the Military Factor in the Urban Development of Colonial Eritrea," in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 175 (2004): 533-574, <http://etudesafricaines.revues.org/4717>

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



© Charles Roffey
1930s style building, Asmara

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.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.¹⁹⁴



© Carsten ten Brink / flickr.com
Asmara man working

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.¹⁹⁵

Exchange 20: What is your phone number?

Soldier:	What is your phone number?	Qutsri telefonka kendey ey-yu?
Local:	My phone number is 13-25-47.	Qutsri telefonney ‘aserte-seleste ’esran-Hamushten arb’an-shew’aten ey-yu.

¹⁹² Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, “From Warriors to Urban Dwellers: Ascari and the Military Factor in the Urban Development of Colonial Eritrea,” in *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 175 (2004): 533-574, <http://etudesafricaines.revues.org/4717>

¹⁹³ Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, “From Warriors to Urban Dwellers: Ascari and the Military Factor in the Urban Development of Colonial Eritrea,” in *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 175 (2004): 533-574, <http://etudesafricaines.revues.org/4717>

¹⁹⁴ The World Bank, “Eritrea Poverty Assessment, 2011, <http://go.worldbank.org/F2GIHRJ7C0>

¹⁹⁵ Amanuel Mehreteab, “Sustainable Employment for Women in Urban Areas: Problems and Prospects,” *Institute for African Alternatives*, 9 February 2002, 24–28, <http://www.ifaanet.org/publication/Urbanemploymentforwomen%5B2%5D.pdf>

Exchange 21: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	ma-ekel Hekemna ab Qereba yerkeb-do?
Local:	Yes, over there.	ew-we, abti al-lo.

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.^{196, 197} About 20% of the population use public latrines, pit latrines, or open fields.¹⁹⁸

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.¹⁹⁹

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.^{200, 201}

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.²⁰² Private healthcare is available, but it is too costly for most.²⁰³



© alexandernortrup / flickr.com
Newborn in hospital

¹⁹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, "Eritrea: People," in *The World Factbook*, 21 October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

¹⁹⁷ African Development Bank Group, "Asmara Water Sys Upgrading," 2011, <http://www.afdb.org/en/projects-and-operations/project-portfolio/project/p-er-e00-003/>

¹⁹⁸ African Development Bank Group, "Asmara Water Sys Upgrading," 2011, <http://www.afdb.org/en/projects-and-operations/project-portfolio/project/p-er-e00-003/>

¹⁹⁹ Italian Development Cooperation, "Water and Sanitation," 2011, <http://www.itacasmara.esteri.it/itacasmara/english/sectors/Acqua.html>

²⁰⁰ USAID, "Eritrea," 2000, <http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/bj2001/afr/er/index.html>

²⁰¹ World Health Organization, "Eritrea," *Country Cooperation Strategy at a Glance*, 2009, http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccsbrief_eri_en.pdf

²⁰² World Health Organization, "Eritrea," *Country Cooperation Strategy at a Glance*, 2009, http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccsbrief_eri_en.pdf

²⁰³ Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Australian Government, "Eritrean Community Profile," 2006, 14, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/_pdf/community-profile-eritrea.pdf

Exchange 22: Is there a doctor here?

Soldier:	Is there a doctor here?	dokter-ke yerkeb-do abzee?
Local:	No.	yel-len.

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?

Soldier:	My knee is broken doctor, can you help me?	dokter berkey tesebire alleKhu, ketHekmeni teKheI-do?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	ew-we.

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?

Soldier:	Do you need my help?	Hagezey-do yed-lyeka ey-yu?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

Exchange 25: Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	eti gudlet tefelto-do?
Local:	No.	ayfelton.

²⁰⁴ Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Australian Government, "Eritrean Community Profile," 2006, 14, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/_pdf/community-profile-eritrea.pdf

²⁰⁵ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 6: Culture," in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 304.

²⁰⁶ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Eritrea," *Smartraveller*, 23 July 2011, http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Eritrea#Health_Issues

²⁰⁷ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea Country Specific Information: Medical Facilities and Health Information," 30 December 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1111.html#medical

Education

Eritrea has a literacy rate of 59%.²⁰⁸ 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.²⁰⁹ 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.²¹⁰



© Book Aid International / flickr.com
Eritrean children reading

Exchange 26: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	deQ-Kha temherti yeKhedu-do?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

Upon completion of middle school, students must pass national examinations to attend secondary school.²¹¹ Those attending secondary school choose between science and commerce.²¹² 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.²¹³ 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.

²⁰⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, “Eritrea: People,” in *The World Factbook*, 21 October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

²⁰⁹ UNESCO, “Eritrea,” *World Data on Education*, 7th ed., September 2010, http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Eritrea.pdf

²¹⁰ Harry Hare, “ICT in Education in Eritrea,” *Survey of ICT and Education in Africa: Eritrea Country Report*, April 2007, [http:// www.infodev.org/en/Document.401.pdf](http://www.infodev.org/en/Document.401.pdf)

²¹¹ Maps of World, “Eritrea Education,” 2009, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/eritrea/education/>

²¹² Maps of World, “Eritrea Education,” 2009, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/eritrea/education/>

²¹³ UNESCO, “Eritrea,” *World Data on Education*, 7th ed., September 2010, http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Eritrea.pdf

Exchange 27: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	bet-temherti ab Qereba-do al-lo?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

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



© thecomeupshow/ flickr.com
Asmara restaurant

Exchange 28: Are you still serving lunch?

Soldier:	Are you still serving lunch?	mesaH yer-rkebekum-do?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

Exchange 29: I'd like a coffee.

Soldier:	I'd like a coffee.	bun delye al-leKhu.
Local:	Sure.	Her-ray.

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?

Soldier:	Can you get me my bill?	Hesabey-do ketemtse-al-ley meKhe-alka?
Local:	Sure.	Her-ray.

²¹⁴ Edward Denison and Edward Paice, "Asmara: Where to Eat," in *Eritrea* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2007), 96–97.

²¹⁵ Lonely Planet, "Restaurants in Eritrea," 2011, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/eritrea/restaurants>

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.²¹⁶



© mmmmyoso / flickr.com
Eritrean food

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.

Soldier:	Put this all on one bill.	kul-lu eti Hesab ab Hade ateQalel-lo.
Local:	Sure.	Her-ray.

Exchange 32: I'd like some soup.

Soldier:	I'd like some soup.	gele mereQ delye neyre.
Local:	Sure.	al-len-na Her-ray.

Exchange 33: What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	ezi entay 'aynet sega ey-yu?
Local:	Lamb.	Sega beg-gi-'e.

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

Exchange 34: This food is delicious.

Soldier:	This food is delicious.	ezi megbi beta'mi meQ-Qur ey-yu.
Local:	Thank you.	te'um yehabka.

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.

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.



© Food Stories / flickr.com
Coffee

Exchange 35: Do you have any dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have any dessert?	mezazemi meQ-Qur megbi yerekeb-do?
Local:	Yes, we have fruit.	ew-we feretat al-len-na.

Exchange 36: Do you have any more water?

Soldier:	Do you have any more water?	may-do ketewesKheni teKh-el?
Local:	Sure.	Her-ray.

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

Exchange 37: Where is your bathroom?

Soldier:	Where is your bathroom?	sheQaQ-kum abey ey-yu?
Local:	Over there.	abti neyew.

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.²¹⁸



© Charles Roffey
Asmara shopfront

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

Soldier:	Will you be going to the market today?	nab edaga ketekeyd diKhalomi?
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-we, 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.²¹⁹

Exchange 40: Do you accept credit cards?

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

²¹⁸ Maps of World, “Eritrea Shopping,” 2009, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/eritrea/arts-and-entertainment/shopping.html>

²¹⁹ Foreign Commonwealth Office, Government of the United Kingdom, “Eritrea,” 5 July 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/sub-saharan-africa/eritrea>

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



Courtesy Wikimedia
Eritrean Nakfa

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



© Charles Roffey
Asmara shopfront

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.

²²⁰ Foreign Commonwealth Office, Government of the United Kingdom, “Eritrea,” 5 July 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/sub-saharan-africa/eritrea>

²²¹ Maps of World, “Eritrea Shopping,” 2009, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/eritrea/arts-and-entertainment/shopping.html>

Exchange 45: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	Sherfi nay ezi-en tereKhbeley-do?
Local:	No.	ayreKhbelkan.

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?

Soldier:	May I hold this and inspect it?	Hize ker-eyo eKh-el-do?
Local:	Sure.	ew-we.

Exchange 47: Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	kemzi ‘aynet zeyada yerekebeka-do?
Local:	No.	yabl-leyn.

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

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

Soldier:	Do you have this in a larger size?	kabzi ‘bey-y zebele al-lekum-do?
Local:	Yes, we do.	ew-we, al-len-na.

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

Soldier:	Do you have this in a different color?	kemezi ‘aynet gen kal-e Hebri al-lekum-do?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

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



© Charles Roffey
Market in Agordat

²²² “Eritrea,” *MDtravelhealth.com*, 2011, <http://www.mdtravelhealth.com/destinations/africa/eritrea.php>

Exchange 50: Did you prepare this food?

Soldier:	Did you prepare this food?	ezi megbi nesKha-do ad-daliKhayo?
Local:	No.	ay-anen.

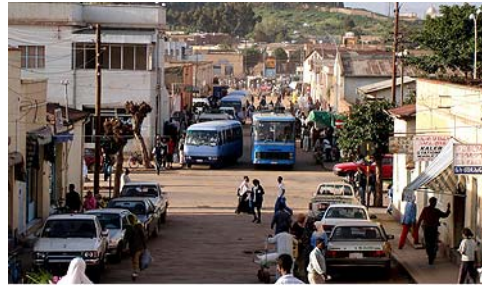
Exchange 51: Is this food fresh?

Soldier:	Is this food fresh?	ezi megbi Hadish dyu?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

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



© ti jac / flickr.com
Street traffic in Asmara

Exchange 52: Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station near by	ab Qereba me'edel gaz yerkeb-do?
Local:	Yes, on this road.	ew-we, abza gwedena ba'la.

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

²²³ Overseas Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report," 4 July 2011,

<https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=10791>

²²⁴ Karin Caesar and Katarina Rosengren, "An Analysis of the Situation for Cyclists in Asmara with Emphasis on Safety Aspects: Minor Field Study" (master's thesis, Department of Technology and Society Traffic Engineering, Lund University, Sweden, 2003), 7,

<http://www.tft.lth.se/fileadmin/tft/dok/publ/5000/thesis114scrPart1.pdf>

Exchange 53: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby	abzi kebabi te'uy mekanik yerkeb-do?
Local:	Yes, two kilometers from here.	ew-we, kel-lte kilo-metr kabzi.

Exchange 54: Do you know how to fix this?

Soldier:	Do you know how to fix this?	nezi me'ray teKh-elo-do?
Local:	No.	ayk-elon.

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?

Soldier:	Can I rent a car from you?	abzi kebabi nay kray mekina krekeb eKh-el-do?
Local:	No.	aytrekebn.

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



© Charles Roffey
Bus transportation in Asmara

²²⁵ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea: Country Specific Information,” 30 December 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1111.html#traffic_safety

²²⁶ Lonely Planet, “Eritrea: Getting Around,” 2011, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/eritrea/transport/getting-around>

²²⁷ Lonely Planet, “Eritrea: Getting Around,” 2011, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/eritrea/transport/getting-around>

²²⁸ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea: Country Specific Information,” 30 December 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1111.html#traffic_safety

Exchange 56: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	eta awtobus Qeltifado temets-e teKhewn?
Local:	Yes, in 10 minutes.	ew-we, deHri 'aserte deQayQ

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?

Soldier:	Can I get a cab around here?	abzi botazi botazi taksi krekeb eKh-el-do?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

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?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	medeber babur ab Qereba al-lo-do?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

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?

Soldier:	Which direction to the airport?	menged-di eyerport beyan ey-yu?
Local:	That way.	beti ab-bilka.

²²⁹ Hans van der Splinter, "Transport in / to Asmara," n.d., <http://www.asmera.nl/asmara-transport.htm>

²³⁰ Hans van der Splinter, "Asmara Public Buses," n.d., <http://www.asmera.nl/asmara-busses.htm>

²³¹ Don Phillips, "High in the Mountains, A Symbol of Eritrea's Rebirth," *New York Times*, 15 February 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/14/travel/14iht-eritrea.html>

²³² Eritrea Embassy, "Welcome to Eritrea: Public Transport in Eritrea," 2011, http://eritrea.embassyhomepage.com/eritrean_railway_eritrea_bus_asmara_airport_taxi_eritrea_domestic_a_iports_eritrea_ferries_eritrean_motorway.htm

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



© thecomeupshow/ flickr.com
Kids selling on the street

Exchange 60: Give me money.

Local:	Give me money.	seldi habeni.
Soldier:	No, I don’t have any.	yembl-leyn.

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.

²³³ Mussie Hadgu, “(III) Eritrea, A Nation in Overall Crisis: Coping Strategies in Hard Times,” *Asmarino Independent*, 16 April 2009, <http://www.asmarino.com/en/eyewitness-account/133-iii-eritrea-a-nation-in-overall-crisis-coping-strategies-in-hard-times->

²³⁴ Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Government of Canada, “Travel Report Eritrea: Crime,” 27 June 2011, http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/report_rapport-eng.asp?id=83000

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.



© Charles Roffey
Village life southern Eritrea

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?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	nayzi meryet wan-na diKha?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

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

²³⁵ 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), 2–3, <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/12800/1/ltcwp37.pdf>

²³⁶ 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), 9–11, <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/12800/1/ltcwp37.pdf>

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



© Charles Roffey
Village homes

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?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	ezi kebabi atsebiQka-do tefelto?
Local:	Yes.	ew-w.

²³⁷ 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), 9–13,

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/12800/1/Itcwp37.pdf>

²³⁸ 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), 35–37,

http://library.athabascau.ca/drr/download.php?filename=mais/Saare_B%20MAIS%20701%20DTPR%20Posting%20Nov%202009.pdf

²³⁹ Andrea Lo Bianco, *Land Tenure Rights and Practices of Pastoralists and Implications for Poverty Reduction: A Comparative Study on Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tanzania* (Rome, Italy: International Land Coalition, 2006), 67–68,

http://www.landcoalition.org/pdf/08_Land_Tenure_Rights_and_Practices_of_Pastoralists.pdf

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/Itcwp37.pdf>

²⁴¹ Andrea Lo Bianco, *Land Tenure Rights and Practices of Pastoralists and Implications for Poverty Reduction: A Comparative Study on Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tanzania* (Rome, Italy: International Land Coalition, 2006), 68,

http://www.landcoalition.org/pdf/08_Land_Tenure_Rights_and_Practices_of_Pastoralists.pdf

Rural Economy

Nearly 80% of the population work in agriculture, and 50% of those are subsistence farmers.²⁴² 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.²⁴³



© Carlisten ten Brink / flickr.com
Well water

Exchange 63: Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	entay ey-yu seraHka?
Local:	I am a farmer.	Harestay ey-ye.

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.²⁴⁴ 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.²⁴⁵

²⁴² 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), 9, http://library.athabascau.ca/drr/download.php?filename=mais/Saare_B%20MAIS%20701%20DTPR%20Posting%20Nov%202009.pdf

²⁴³ Andrea Lo Bianco, *Land Tenure Rights and Practices of Pastoralists and Implications for Poverty Reduction: A Comparative Study on Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tanzania* (Rome, Italy: International Land Coalition, 2006), 64, http://www.landcoalition.org/pdf/08_Land_Tenure_Rights_and_Practices_of_Pastoralists.pdf

²⁴⁴ David Pool and James Curry Oxford, “From Guerillas to Government,” in *The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), http://www.jeberti.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56:from-guerillas-to-government&catid=40:history&Itemid=2

²⁴⁵ James Stuart Olson, *The Peoples of Africa: An Ethnohistorical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 249–250.

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



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Girls selling cactus fruit

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?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	kab sedraKha seraH zel-lek-ka nesKha teraH diKha?
Local:	No.	aykwenkun.

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

²⁴⁶ 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), 9–11, http://library.athabascau.ca/drr/download.php?filename=mais/Saare_B%20MAIS%20701%20DTPR%20P%20osting%20Nov%202009.pdf

²⁴⁷ International Fund for Agricultural Development, “Enabling the Rural Poor to Overcome Poverty in Eritrea,” November 2006, 3, <http://www.ifad.org/operations/projects/regions/Pf/factsheets/eritrea.pdf>

²⁴⁸ 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), 29, http://library.athabascau.ca/drr/download.php?filename=mais/Saare_B%20MAIS%20701%20DTPR%20P%20osting%20Nov%202009.pdf

²⁴⁹ 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), 22, http://library.athabascau.ca/drr/download.php?filename=mais/Saare_B%20MAIS%20701%20DTPR%20P%20osting%20Nov%202009.pdf

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.²⁵¹ 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.²⁵² Eritreans often travel on foot, sometimes creating hazardous situations on the road.²⁵³



© thecomeupshow/ flickr.com
Road to Massawa

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.²⁵⁴

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

Local:	My car broke down, can you help me?	mek-kina tesebiratni-mo ketHegzeni-do meKhe-alka?
Soldier:	I need to check with my commander.	feQad Halafyey kerekeb al-len-ni.

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. The World Health

http://library.athabascau.ca/drr/download.php?filename=mais/Saare_B%20MAIS%20701%20DTPR%20Posting%20Nov%202009.pdf

²⁵¹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Eritrea: Transportation,” in *The World Factbook*, 21 October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>

²⁵² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, “Eritrea,” *Smarrtraveller*, 23 July 2011, <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw/cgi/view/Advice/Eritrea>

²⁵³ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea: Country Specific Information,” 30 December 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1111.html

²⁵⁴ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea: Country Specific Information,” 30 December 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1111.html

Organization (WHO) estimates that there are only 5 physicians for every 100,000 people in Eritrea.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.^{256, 257}



© Sailing Nomad / flickr.com
Water not potable

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.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.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.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ World Health Organization, "Eritrea: Health Profile," Global Health Observatory, 04 April 2011, <http://www.who.int/gho/countries/eri.pdf>

²⁵⁶ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea: Country Specific Information: Medical Facilities and Health Information," 30 December 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1111.html#medical

²⁵⁷ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Eritrea," *Smartraveller*, 23 July 2011, http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Eritrea#Health_Issues

²⁵⁸ Capital Eritrea, "UNICEF Supports a Revived Commitment to Nomadic Education in Eritrea," 1 April 2010, <http://www.capitaleritrea.com/press-release/unicef-supports-a-revived-commitment-to-nomadic-education-in-eritrea/>

²⁵⁹ Ravinder Rena and Ali Suleman, "Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers Towards Teaching: A Case Study on the Eritrea Institute of Technology," *Review of Higher Education in Africa* 2, no. 1 (October 2010): 2, <http://www.spreadcorp.org/reviewHigherEdAfric/ravi&suleman.html>

²⁶⁰ Miriam Mareso, "A Second Chance at Education for Children in Eritrea," *UNICEF Newslines*, 29 January 2009, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/eritrea_47651.html

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



© Charles Roffey
Boys in Eritrean village

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-

²⁶¹ Abrehe Zemichael, “Girls’ and Women’s Education and Their Empowerment Among Pastoral Societies: Case Study of Eritrea” (paper, Drylands Coordination Group, 29 September 2005), <http://www.drylands-group.org/noop/file.php?id=1871>

²⁶² Kjetil Tronvoll, “The Process of Nation Building in Post-war Eritrea: Created from Below or Directed from Above?” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (1998): 466, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/161793>

²⁶³ Kjetil Tronvoll, “The Process of Nation Building in Post-war Eritrea: Created from Below or Directed from Above?” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (1998): 466–69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/161793>

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?

Soldier:	Can you take me to the administrative head of this community?	nab ameHadari 'adi ketewesdeni teKh-el-do?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

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.

Soldier:	Respected elder, we need your help.	kebur ab-bo, Hagezkum yedlyen-na al-lo.
Local:	I can help you.	Her-ray keHegzekum eKh-el ey-ye.

²⁶⁴ Kjetil Tronvoll, "The Process of Nation Building in Post-war Eritrea: Created from Below or Directed from Above?" *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (1998): 467–68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/161793>

²⁶⁵ Kjetil Tronvoll, "The Process of Nation Building in Post-war Eritrea: Created from Below or Directed from Above?" *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (1998): 468–69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/161793>

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



© Charles Roffey
Eritea, Djibouti border country

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

²⁶⁶ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Eritrea: Country Specific Information," 30 December 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1111.html#safety

²⁶⁷ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Eritrea," *Smartraveller*, 23 July 2011, <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Eritrea>

²⁶⁸ Jean-Bernard Carillet et al., *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, 4th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 320.

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>

²⁷⁰ Adam Gonn, "Saudi Trying to Stop Eritrean Weapon Smuggling to Yemen," *Asmarind Independent*, 17 November 2009, <http://www.asmarino.com/news/389-saudi-trying-to-stop-eritrean-weapon-smuggling-to-yemen->

²⁷¹ "UNSC Should Extend, Stiffen Sanctions Against Eritrean Regime," *Gedab News*, 14 July 2011, <http://awate.com/unsc-should-extend-stiffen-sanctions-against-eritrean-regime/>

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 1961–1991.²⁷² These mines are around the cities and populated areas, near rural farmland, water sources and along borders, especially those with Ethiopia.²⁷³ The risk of injury from land mines is high.²⁷⁴ 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.²⁷⁵ 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.²⁷⁶



© United Nations / flickr.com
UN demining operation

Exchange 70: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	ezi bota neta gwi zetezer-odyu?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

²⁷² UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Eritrea: Two Million Land Mines and UXO,” *IRIN*, 22 November 2001, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=28446>

²⁷³ United Nations Development Programme, “Eritrea: Action Capacity Building Programme (MACBP),” 2011, <http://www.er.undp.org/recovery/MA.html>

²⁷⁴ UNICEF, “Eastern and Southern Africa: Eritrea,” *Humanitarian Action for Children*, 2011, http://www.unicef.org/hac2011/files/HAC2011_4pager_Eritrea.pdf

²⁷⁵ United Nations Mine Action Service, “Eritrea,” *Electronic Mine Information Network*, n.d., <http://www.mineaction.org/country.asp?c=10>

²⁷⁶ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Eritrea: Country Specific Information,” 30 December 2010, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1111.html#safety

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.²⁷⁷ Most rural Eritreans live with large extended families with as many as six children.^{278, 279}



© Charles Roffey
Family gathering

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.^{280, 281} 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.²⁸²

Exchange 71: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	abza geza kendey ze-aKhlu sebat yenebru?
Local:	Ten.	‘aserteh.

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.²⁸³

²⁷⁷ F. Tilbury, et al, “Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali & Sudanese Communities in Western Australia” (paper, East Metropolitan Population Health Unit, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia, 2004), 6, <http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

²⁷⁸ Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia, “Eritrean Community Profile,” 2006, 12, <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/pdf/community-profile-eritrea.pdf>

²⁷⁹ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 5: Society: Marriage,” *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 192.

²⁸⁰ EveryCulture, “Tigray: Family Life,” *Countries and Their Cultures*, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Tigray.html>

²⁸¹ Cultural Orientation Resource Center, Center for Applied Linguistics (firm) “Eritrean Refugees from the Shimelba Refugee Camp,” *COR Center Refugee Backgrounder 5* (3 December 2010), http://www.cal.org/co/pdf/files/backgrounder_shimelba.pdf

²⁸² Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 5: Society: Marriage,” *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 192.

²⁸³ Amanuel Mehreteab, “Sustainable Employment for Women in Urban Areas: Problems and Prospects,” *Institute for African Alternatives*, 9 February 2002, 15, 9 February 2002, <http://www.ifaanet.org/publication/Urbanemploymentforwomen%5B2%5D.pdf>

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.²⁸⁴



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Eritrean women

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.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁶ Second, the Shafi'i branch of Islam is generally more liberal regarding the role of women.²⁸⁷ The government's modernization policy, with its commitment to gender awareness, has helped elevate the status of women despite traditional views on gender roles.²⁸⁸

Exchange 72: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	ezom sebat abalat sedraKha deyom?
Local:	No.	aykwenu.

Exchange 73: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	sederaKha abzi deyom zenebru?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

Exchange 74: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	abzi-do 'abiKha.
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

²⁸⁴ National Food Information System of Eritrea (NFIS), "Baseline Study on Livelihood Systems in Eritrea: Phase 1; Preliminary Identification of Livelihood Systems Through Research on Secondary Sources," 6–7, January 2005, http://www.chr.up.ac.za/chr_old/indigenous/documents/Eritrea/Report/Base%20line%20study%20on%20Livelihood%20Systems%20in%20Eritrea.pdf

²⁸⁵ Art Madsen, "Unique Problems Associated with Eritrean Women's Health," *Transnational Research Associates*, n.d., <http://www.transnational-research.com/eritrea.htm>

²⁸⁶ Tanja R. Müller, "The Making of Elite Women Within Revolution and Nation Building: The Case of Eritrea" (paper for the seminar at the African Studies Centre, Leiden University, 26 February 2004), <http://www.ascleiden.nl/pdf/seminar260204.pdf>

²⁸⁷ J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1965).

²⁸⁸ Kjetil Tronvoll, "Eritrea: Gender Roles and Statuses," *EveryCulture*, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Eritrea.html>

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.²⁸⁹ 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.²⁹⁰ Violence against women is commonplace. Although illegal since 2007, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is widely practiced, pervasive, and seldom prosecuted.²⁹¹



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Elderly man

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.²⁹²

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 17.²⁹³

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.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹ UNHCR BO Ankara, "Eritrea: Risk Groups and Protection-Related Issues," January 2005, 12, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4236f8ef4.pdf>

²⁹⁰ "Literacy Rate; Adult Female (%Females Ages 15 and Above) in Eritrea," *Trading Economics*, 2011, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/eritrea/literacy-rate-adult-female-percent-of-females-ages-15-and-above-wb-data.html>

²⁹¹ UNHCR BO Ankara, "Eritrea: Risk Groups and Protection-Related Issues," January 2005, 12, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4236f8ef4.pdf>

²⁹² Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 4: Economy: Trade and Finance," in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 128–129, 192.

²⁹³ Global March Against Child Labour, "Eritrea," *Worst Forms of Child Labour Report, 2005*, <http://www.globalmarch.org/worstformsreport/world/eritrea.html>

²⁹⁴ F. Tilbury, et al, "Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali & Sudanese Communities in Western Australia" (paper, East Metropolitan Population Health Unit, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia, 2004), 6, <http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

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 12.²⁹⁵
²⁹⁶ According to the United Nations, 38% of girls in Eritrea between ages 15 and 18 are married, divorced, or widowed.²⁹⁷ 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.^{298, 299}



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 Eritrean marriage

Exchange 75: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	aHwat al-lewuKha-do?
Local:	Yes, I do.	ew-we al-lewuni.

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.^{300, 301} In cities, it is more common for young people to find their own mates.³⁰²

Exchange 76: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	be'al Hadar diKha?
Local:	No.	aykwenkun.

²⁹⁵ Kjetil Tronvoll, "Eritrea," *EveryCulture*, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Eritrea.html>

²⁹⁶ Capital Eritrea, "Life of Women in Rural Eritrea," video posted on 14 December 2010, <http://www.capitaleritrea.com/video/life-of-women-in-rural-eritrea/>

²⁹⁷ Mary Zeiss Stange, Carol K. Oyster, and Jane E. Sloan, eds., "Eritrea," in *Encyclopedia of Women in Today's World* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2011), 497.

²⁹⁸ Mary Zeiss Stange, Carol K. Oyster, and Jane E. Sloan, eds., "Eritrea," in *Encyclopedia of Women in Today's World* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2011), 497.

²⁹⁹ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 5: Society: Marriage," in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 190.

³⁰⁰ Tesfa G. Gebremedhin, "Chapter 3: Women and Tradition: Traditional Marriage Arrangements," in *Women, Tradition and Development: A Case Study of Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 2002), 49.

³⁰¹ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 5: Society: Marriage," in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 190–191.

³⁰² F. Tilbury, et al, "Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali & Sudanese Communities in Western Australia" (paper, East Metropolitan Population Health Unit, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia, 2004), 6, <http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/docs/africancommunity.pdf>

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.^{303, 304}



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Eritrean family

Exchange 77: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	ezi-a-Khe be’alti betka deya?
Local:	No.	aykwenetn.

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.³⁰⁵ 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.³⁰⁶ 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.^{307, 308}

Exchange 78: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	ezi-atom sedraKha deyom?
Local:	No.	aykwenun.

³⁰³ Tesfa G. Gebremedhin, “Chapter 3: Women and Tradition: Traditional Marriage Arrangements,” in *Women, Tradition and Development: A Case Study of Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 2002), 36–47.

³⁰⁴ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 5: Society: Marriage,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 189–192.

³⁰⁵ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 5: Society: Marriage,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 191.

³⁰⁶ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 5: Society: Marriage,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 191.

³⁰⁷ Tesfa G. Gebremedhin, “Chapter 3: Women and Tradition: Traditional Marriage Arrangements,” in *Women, Tradition and Development: A Case Study of Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 2002), 36–38.

³⁰⁸ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 5: Society: Marriage,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 189–192.

Divorce

Eritrea has a high divorce rate, but specific numbers are difficult to obtain.^{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.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.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.³¹³



© Charles Roffey
Traditional Eritrean wedding

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

³⁰⁹ Tesfa G. Gebremedhin, "Chapter 3: Women and Tradition: Traditional Divorce Process," in *Women, Tradition and Development: A Case Study of Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 2002), 49.

³¹⁰ Suad Joseph, ed., "Women, Gender and Public Office: Eritrea," in *The Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 1, <http://www.danconnell.net/sites/default/files/women.pdf>

³¹¹ Tesfa G. Gebremedhin, "Chapter 3: Women and Tradition: Traditional Divorce Process," in *Women, Tradition and Development: A Case Study of Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 2002), 53–54.

³¹² Tesfa G. Gebremedhin, "Chapter 3: Women and Tradition: Traditional Divorce Process," in *Women, Tradition and Development: A Case Study of Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 2002), 54–55.

³¹³ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 5: Society: Marriage," in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 190–191.

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.

Soldier:	Congratulations on your marriage.	enQwa' Hegus mer'a geberelkum.
Local:	Thank you.	amen yeQenyeley.

Exchange 80: I wish you both much happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both much happiness.	nekelteKhum zeyada Hagos emn-neyelkum.
Local:	Thank you.	yeQenyeley.

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



© Charles Roffey
Eritrean children

Exchange 81: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	ezi-atom deQ-Kha deyom?
Local:	Yes.	ew-we.

³¹⁴ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 5: Society: Marriage," in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 191–192.

³¹⁵ Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), <http://www.jeberti.com/history/ETHIOPIANS.htm>

³¹⁶ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., "Chapter 5: Society: Women and Marriage," in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 181.

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



© Charles Roffey
Assab Catholic church

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.

Soldier:	I sympathize with you.	ane teKhafali Hazenkum ey-ye.
Local:	Thank you so much.	beta’mi nemesgneka.

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.

Soldier:	I would like to offer my condolences to you and your family.	ne’aKhan nebeta sebkant sen’at yehabkum kebel edeli.
Local:	Thank you	Hesem ayterkeb.

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

³¹⁷ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture: Funeral Ceremony,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 231.

³¹⁸ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture: Funeral Ceremony,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 231–232.

³¹⁹ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture: Funeral Ceremony,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 231–232.

³²⁰ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., “Chapter 6: Culture: Funeral Ceremony,” in *Africa in Focus: Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 231.

Exchange 84: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	tsena'e aKha-elo dem-ma yehabka.
Local:	Thank you so much.	keKh-elo ey-ye yeQenyeley.

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



© Charles Roffey
Boy carrying firewood

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

³²¹ EveryCulture, "Tigray," *Countries and Their Cultures*, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Tigray.html>

³²² EveryCulture, "Tigray," *Countries and Their Cultures*, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Tigray.html>

³²³ Countries and Their Cultures, "Tigray," 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Tigray.html>

³²⁴ Harborview Medical Center, University of Washington, "Tigrean Cultural Profile," *EthnoMed*, 2011, <http://ethnomed.org/culture/tigrean/tigrean-cultural-profile>

³²⁵ Harborview Medical Center, University of Washington, "Tigrean Cultural Profile," *EthnoMed*, 2011, <http://ethnomed.org/culture/tigrean/tigrean-cultural-profile>

³²⁶ EveryCulture, "Tigray," *Countries and Their Cultures*, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Tigray.html>

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
16. Males and females eat separately among the Tigrinya people.
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 death 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

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