

Eritrea's Loss of Traditional Institutions: the Country's Loss of Its Essence

Habtu Ghebre-Ab¹

¹University of Cincinnati, History/Social Sciences, Cincinnati, Ohio

hghebreab@hotmail.com

Eritrea has had a turbulent existence in its brief post-independence history. The most devastating event that has shaken the very foundation of its long war of independence has been the border conflict with Ethiopia in 1998-2000, and the utter destabilization it has caused in its governance. While much has been commented upon the resultant deterioration of rule of law, lack of transparency, the constant eroding of the democratic and human rights of its citizens, little attention has been given to the subject of the tragic eroding of traditional institutions, namely the Eritrean Orthodox Church and its monasteries. As the largest and most ancient institution that has served as the repository of learning and culture for the past 1500 years, the weakening and dismantling of these institutions – by design and as the result of the unintended consequences of ill-conceived policies - is contributing to the loss of the very essence of the country.

The paper will examine the government policies that have become detrimental to the very existence of these traditional institutions, the extent to which these policies have wreaked havoc on them and the long-term consequences to the identity and essence of its people.