

Leaving Eritrea, Entering the World – Migrants in the Making

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Tens of thousands of Eritrean citizens are leaving their country every year since the end of the Ethio-Eritrean border war, most of them young people deserting the coercive national service or secondary school students avoiding their forced conscription. To cross the border alive is just a first step. The further geographical as well as biographical trajectory can rarely be planned and scheduled in detail. Beyond the refugee camps in Ethiopia or Sudan a world of opportunities and restrictions opens up, communicated, imparted and discussed among Eritrean migrants in different stations and stages of migration. Staying behind rarely is an option; hopes and expectations towards a better life are aiming elsewhere. Again risks have to be taken to seize an uncertain chance; numerous examples of success and failure here or there are constantly rumoured and transmitted through the means of modern communication technology. While waiting in a less privileged place of a hierarchical world for one's chance to move on, daily life in these foreign places has to be learned and coped with. Disillusionment, disappointment and often enough despair have to be faced. Migrants may be born in the moment they reach foreign ground, but experiences ahead and lessons to be learned will deeply transform their habitus before they eventually reach more stable phases of life. In this presentation I would like to shed a light on existential questions, knowledge transformation and learning processes in the migration from the African Horn, referring to typical places, biographical episodes and shared experiences.

The presentation is part of the ongoing research project "Dynamic worlds of imagination – learning processes, knowledge and communication among young urban migrants from Eritrea and Ethiopia" in the Bavarian university's research network "migration and knowledge" (formig).