

Eritrean Refugees and Tigrayan Modernisation

Wolbert Smidt¹ and Fesseha Berhe¹

¹University of Hamburg, Germany

wolbertsmidt@yahoo.de

Tigray, Eritrea's neighbor, is developing rapidly on all levels: it is marked by rapid economic change, the foundation of numerous new educational and academic institutions (many of them with staff originating from Eritrea), new government authorities, cultural institutions, new infrastructure etc. On the other hand the Tigrayan society is still marked by strong traditional structures, both religious and cultural is predominantly rural, enrooted in ancient historical, cultural and socio-political traditions. In this contrast of modernity and tradition, Eritrean refugees play an interesting role, both practically and in the internal discourse. This paper examines this role and suggests that Eritreans and Tigrayans from Eritrea play a crucial role in the modernisation process, in which the traditional "space of peace" of ancient Tigrayan society is transformed into a modernized new entity with new contradictions and dynamics.