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Introduction: Postliberation Eritrea

Tekle M. Woldemikael

Twenty-two years ago the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), armed with Kalashnikov rifles and tanks, entered Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, announcing that it was liberating Eritrea from Ethiopian rule. The thirty-years' war between the Eritrean nationalist front and the Ethiopian government has been termed the long struggle (*gedli*) (Cliff and Davidson 1988). Right after winning the war, in 1991, the EPLF was on the world stage, struggling to establish a new political order in Eritrea, replacing the Ethiopian regime that had ruled from 1952 to 1991. This had included a ten-year federation (1952–1961) and thirty years of direct rule (1962–1991).

Eritrea is the name given in 1889 by the former Italian colonial administration to a strip of land on the Red Sea coast of North East Africa. In 1992, the EPLF leader Isaias Afwerki declared that the Eritrean People's Liberation Front would be the provisional government of Eritrea, thus assuming the role of running the state institutions left by the collapse of the Ethiopian administration. Soon after conducting an internationally supervised referendum on April 23–25, 1993, the provisional government of Eritrea declared itself an independent state. As a new African state, Eritrea received immediate membership in the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations as well as recognition from the major world powers and the neighboring African countries. This support gave the new state legitimate power along with authority over its territory and citizens. The referendum gave the new Eritrean state an international mandate to rule the Eritrean population and the land. The referendum was the crowning achievement of the EPLF, which had just won the longest armed conflict in Africa's history. In 1994, the EPLF conducted its first postliberation congress and reconstituted itself as the only party of the new state, calling itself the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ).

The authors in this special issue treat the PFDJ's construction of dominance and the rupture of the national consensus that had been established by a referendum and a declaration of independence in 1993. The essays deal with the fragments of culturally constructed social divisions, such as young people, refugees, and diasporas, and their relationship to the nation and the state. The Eritrean state can be characterized as a state of exception (Agamben 1998, 2005), a state in which the leader of the nation, Isaias Afwerki, used the crisis following the border war with Ethiopia (1998–2000) as a cover to exert absolute control over the society and state and consolidate his power

over the nation. The papers focus on the structures of domination and subordination that have emerged in postliberation, postindependence Eritrea. They contend with the cultural politics of Eritrea and show how certain people's exclusion is unsustainable in the long term. They pay special attention to young people, the generation of Eritreans who are fully affected by the domination of, and exclusion and disconnection from, the dominant culture. The articles collectively bring into question the popular wisdom that Eritrea's political instability would end once the political issues of the war between the liberation movements and the Ethiopian government ended. This demonstrated that gaining sovereignty or autonomy was insufficient to resolve the political, economic, and social crisis in Eritrea

This introductory essay is divided into five parts including (a) a brief exploration of the rise and fall of Eritrea from the group of African Renaissance states and (b) how it became a state of exception ruled by an arbitrary and absolutist state; (c) how the absolutist state created a bifurcated social hierarchy in which the population was divided into "citizens" and "subjects" with differentiated gradation of citizenship in relation to the state (Mamdani 1996, Ong 1999); and (d) how this "graduated citizenship" has created a "Refugee-Diaspora Nexus" that could explain the current refugee crisis in Eritrea. This introductory essay ends with a brief description of the articles in this volume. Collectively, the articles provide a deeper examination of the refugee-state-diaspora nexus through five case studies: (1) Assefaw Barigaber's exploration of how globalization has facilitated the flow of refugees from Eritrea; (2) Victoria Bernal's discussion on how the information revolution has provided spaces for political engagement for Eritrean diasporas; (3) David Bozzini's discourse on political jokes among Eritrean youth conscripted for national service as a form of resistance to the power structure in Eritrea and also its limitation; (4) Amanda Poole's examination of how the Eritrean state functions as a gatekeeper state that financially supports itself through receiving ransoms from families of refugees and managing remittances and diasporas, which becomes a basis for its claims of self-sufficiency and autonomy from outsiders; and (5) Jennifer Riggan's essay on how debates on national duty in Eritrean classrooms link directly to the deeper and practical meaning of citizenship of the refugee-diaspora nexus through how the students imagine emigration as a form of fulfilling national duty.

A Brief Description of the Rise and Fall of an African Renaissance State

In the early the 1990s, Eritrea, along with South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda and Ethiopia, was put on pedestal in the Western mass media and powerful global political circles as one of the emerging African states that was expected to play a leading role in the recovery of Africa from decades of corruption, poverty, inequality, and violence. They were dubbed Renaissance African States that were expected to charge forward in African economic, cultural,

and scientific growth. Unfortunately, by 2001, Eritrea was demoted from this chosen group and is one of Africa's most oppressive countries that generates one of the largest number of refugees leaving the country to neighboring countries for safety and security.

The expectation that the flow of refugees from Eritrea to the neighboring and Western countries would stop after the end of the thirty-year war between Eritrean nationalist movements and the Ethiopian government has proven elusive. On 24 May 1993, Eritrea declared its official separation from Ethiopia and became the newest independent state in Africa and the first successful case of an African country's breaking away from another African state. Foreign journalists and Eritrean scholars wrote that Eritrea was different from the rest of Africa; they believed that the newly independent Eritrea could become a showcase for African development and recovery. The new sovereign nation-state of Eritrea was expected to generate economic opportunities and provide a stable political culture for its people. The enthusiastic reception Eritrea received was partly due to the perceived malaise that postcolonial African countries had entered after their successful decolonization. Many writers and analysts were seeking a success story from sub-Saharan Africa, something that could set an example for African recovery and development; they believed that Eritrea could play this role because they were impressed by the Eritreans' show of a new identity of self-sufficiency, confidence, and unity. In the early 1990s, Isaias Afwerki, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia were dubbed the new generation of African leaders, leaders of this African renaissance (Oloka-Onyango 2004). This honeymoon did not last long. Post-war Eritrea brought neither peace nor prosperity to the population under its control, nor did it resolve the crisis of citizenship and identity affecting its population. This is not surprising, considering that Eritrea had long been in a state of crisis, first as colony of Italy, then under Ethiopian rule, and then subsequently during thirty years of nationalist war that destroyed the social and economic infrastructure of the society. The structural challenges of nation building and constructing the new Eritrean state were nearly insurmountable. Eritrea, a nationalist movement turned into a state, did not have either the economic and political resources or the organizational capacity to tackle the challenges effectively.

After the border war with Ethiopia in 1998–2000, which cost about 70,000 lives on both sides, with Eritrea admitting a loss of 19,000 soldiers, over half a million people were displaced within the country. This unresolved border war immersed Eritrean in a quagmire of consequences, leading to an economic and political crisis of citizenship and, subsequently, a new surge of refugees from Eritrea into neighboring countries. The no-war, no-peace stalemate between Eritrea and Ethiopia had placed both countries in an ongoing economic and political crisis, with Eritrea suffering more. In addition, a shortage of rainfall had put Eritreans on the verge of a major famine. Even though Eritrea emerged with great fanfare and the blessing of the United Nations in 1993, by 2009 Eritrea reached a new low. Its

international reputation had plummeted following the United Nation's accusation that Eritrea was supporting the Somali insurgents known as Al Shabab, who sought to overthrow the emerging government in Somalia. On 23 December 2009, the Security Council imposed arms-and-travel sanctions against Eritrea (United Nations 2009). Additional sanctions were imposed on Eritrea on 5 December 2011 for not heeding UN sanctions and continuing to provide support to armed groups seeking to destabilize Somalia and other parts of the Horn of Africa (Reuters 2011). As a result, by 2013, the economic and political crisis in Eritrea had reached an alarming intensity. Many years after its official independence, the state continued to experience persistent shortages of electricity, water, bread, and fuel.

The Eritrean state made policy choices that stifled economic growth and political stability and made the nation uninhabitable for its growing youthful population. The government attempted to transform traditional Eritrean society into its own image of a modern society. This top-down method of transformation tended to create a new class structure of hierarchy of statuses: an oligarchy, with the top leaders occupying the most privileged and highest status and the lowest status occupied by people who left the country to avoid forced conscription and forced labor (Djilas 1957). The PFDJ saw itself as a vanguard party, seeking to bring quick economic progress and prosperity and establish a classless society where everyone could be part of a popular state. It sought the nationalization of the country's labor and natural resources, bringing them under the firm control of the state.

The ensuing policy, designed to expand the sovereignty of the state over the population, is the immediate cause of the current economic, political, and citizenship crisis as well as the refugee crisis it has spawned. The more Eritrea pursues a stringent policy to protect its national sovereignty and control the economic and political sphere, the more it generates continuous economic failure, political instability, and social upheaval, including new refugees, who join the Eritrean diaspora communities around the world. All the articles in this present volume examine, directly or indirectly, the disastrous consequences of this misguided policy. To understand it and how it came about, it is imperative to contextualize this moment in a larger historical context and explain how the new ruling class, the PFDJ oligarchy, is partly but not entirely responsible for the outflow of young people as refugees. The refugee crisis in Eritrea can be explained using a perspective that sees Eritrea as a state of exception (Agamben 1998, 2005; Schmitt [1922] 1985), a product of long-term violence, war, and colonization. It is a crisis that has deep roots in Eritrea's political history, involving colonial violence, liberation, and civil and border wars, and it is therefore not amenable to shortcuts and an easy solution.

Eritrea as a State of Exception

The idea of a state of exception comes from Schmitt and Agamben. Schmitt argued that a state of exception occurs when a sovereign exceeds the rule of law for the public good in a state of emergency (1985). Developing Schmitt's ideas, Agamben (1998, 2005) explored the increase of power of the government in response to crisis as a state of exception, in which a leader, under the guise of a threat to his or her sovereignty, suspends the constitution and treats the population under his or her control as subjects, stripping them of their human and political citizenship and individual rights. Agamben believes the role of politics is to create justice and produce a good life for citizens. Therefore, the question for him is whether a sovereign creates justice for a few or for many. In a democratic and open system, the wider and more inclusive the citizenship rights are, the bigger the circle of people who have an expansive understanding of citizenship. In contrast, in a state of exception, citizenship is narrowly defined and includes only a fortunate few. This does not mean that a state of exception does not have rules or laws, but that laws are made only to serve the interests of the sovereign. Citizenship is narrowly constructed, benefiting and providing a good life for a few members of the ruling elite. The suspension of the constitution gives the sovereign absolute power to keep the population at the level of bare existence, merely bodies that have no rights and protections. In the words of Agamben, a person who is reduced to bare life is a *Homo sacer*, a man who can be killed but not sacrificed: his killing will not be considered as dying, but as sacrificing, for the state or nation (1998, 2005).

The state of emergency in Eritrea began when Italy, a European power, intervened in Eritrea. It has lasted a long time, starting with the colonization of Eritrea, which reduced the people's political, economic, and cultural ties with neighboring areas and divided ethnicities, histories, kin groups, authority structures, and regional economies. Although the Italian presence in Eritrea was short-lived and the area settled by Italians was a small part of the country (mostly urban), the new configuration produced a fundamental transformative, long-term effect on Eritrean society. Colonialism cast a shadow on the people, from which they have not been able to escape. The newly configured area called Eritrea was a conglomerate of different ethnicities, histories, religions, and cultures that did not consider themselves part of a single national entity. Eritrea was tied to Italy, a nation in Europe, a continent that had a global reach. Eritrea was one of the colonies that was hierarchically integrated into a colonial and world capitalist system (Wallerstein 1976). Whether people who call themselves Eritreans were aware of it or not, they were being realigned, and their society was being reconfigured into a different constellation, a hierarchically organized global system of nation-states. They were in a peripheral region of the world, a source of cheap labor and raw materials for the benefit of the industrial north, mostly Europe, North America, and Japan. Local populations were thrown into a crisis of historical continuity, belonging, identity, and citizenship.

In addition to the long-term history, we need to analyze the microhistory and recent events in Eritrea, where these factors are significant in the continuing crisis of identity and citizenship. After the end of the nationalist war, Eritrea continued to be a state of exception. It never demilitarized its soldiers, nor did it lift the state of emergency for the entire population. In the 1990s, it retained a bitter memory of its nationalist war. According to Haben, its government introduced a special court in 1996 “allowing the office of the President to go after the alleged corrupt officials of the Red Sea Trading Co. with zero tolerance or least leniency. In other words, the President can do what he wish [*sic*] with zero accountability” (Haben 2010). The formation of the special court predates the Eritrean constitution, ratified in 1997. Immediately, however, the government suspended the implementation of it. Engaged in a border war with Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000, the state expanded the state of emergency—its state of exception—to the whole society indefinitely. Like other states of exception, it established a new regime of truth, its own version of reality, by which it justified imposing arbitrary rule and made its leader, President Isaias Afwerki, an absolutist head of state, unaccountable to any government body.

The state of exception in Eritrea became more entrenched after the border war with Ethiopia (2008–2010), which produced a leader and a state obsessed with national security and sovereignty. The war started out as a border skirmish in May 1998, but it quickly escalated into full-blown trench warfare, similar to that of the Great War. The war greatly damaged both countries, with both sides losing more than 70,000 soldiers. It left 1.4 million people displaced, and both sides still disagree over the demarcation lines of their shared border (Reuters 2008). Ten-plus years of neither war nor peace have further weakened Eritrea’s sovereignty. Eritreans are now more determined to defend national security and sovereignty at any cost. After the war, the Eritrean leader and his supporters became obsessed with national security. The more Eritrea pursues a stringent policy to protect its national sovereignty, the more refugees it generates—mostly young people who join the ranks of global refugee communities around the world. Thus, the policy of expanding the control of the state over the population to maintain its security and sovereignty had the unintended consequence of making Eritrea one of the countries that has produced the largest number of refugees in the last ten years (ICER 2011). These are the new homeless, who have to live by their wits to survive. They enter refugee camps to gain access to refugee rights and seek asylum in safe havens in the West. They do not necessarily leave the country voluntarily. The state’s denial of their citizenship rights and its treatment of them as bare lives is the main impetus for their exodus.

The first victims of the state of exception were migrants from Tigray, a province bordering Ethiopia, and other Ethiopians who had lived in Eritrea as an integral part of the society until they were forcibly sent to Ethiopia right after the nationalist front took control of Asmara in 1991. Religious minorities and leaders, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, and various Christian groups and Muslim clerics who had been imprisoned for

being unpatriotic followed them. Many of the persecuted groups left the country and became exiles or refugees. After the 1998–2000 war, two more groups followed: people displaced by the war who left their homes and took refuge in Ethiopia and Sudan and young people pressed into national service. An incredible number of young people have fled from all corners of Eritrea to escape national service. This demonstrates that citizens in an oppressive, absolutist, closed state—a state of exception—will either protest the status quo when permitted or exit to another state (Hirschman 1970). To become an exile or a refugee suggests a lack of confidence in the government. The national liberation war was noisy and violent, but a stealth revolution (*selahtha maabel*) is silently being waged in Eritrea: young people leaving the country will prevent the state from reproducing itself in the future.

Subjects and Citizens in Postliberation Eritrea

In the last twenty years of independence under the leadership of President Afwerki, the Eritrean state has created a differentiated, hierarchical, unequal system of citizenship. This hierarchy ranges from what may be called super citizenship for the top echelons of the government and party members, to local persons' status as subjects, with few rights and little chance of upward mobility. This system of citizenship mirrors what Mamdani observed in other postcolonial African states: that many countries, after achieving independence, reproduced a two-tier system—citizens and subjects—similar to colonial social hierarchies. The citizens were the European colonizers and settlers who had established themselves as the dominant racial group, assuming rights and privileges of modern citizenship, and the subjects were the colonized indigenous populations, seen as uncivilized and racially inferior, ruled through customary laws that ostensibly preserved their tribal cultures, authorities, and communities. The postcolonial African states continued the practice of bifurcated domination by privileging the educated elites and administrators over urban and rural dwellers. As with the so-called civilizing mission of the colonial elites, the African political elites claimed they were liberating and developing their societies, transforming them through revolution or social reform (Mamdani 1996). The bifurcated social hierarchical approach serves as an analytical tool, but the reality of social hierarchies can be more complex, as they do not always fit into two neatly contrasting types. Mamdani's insight is relevant in the Eritrean case because it lets us explore the emergence of differentiated social hierarchies among its population, especially between state and society. His framework needs to be revised to include the effects of globalization, plus the information revolution regarding the power of the African states over their citizens.

Giddens, drawing from Marshall's (1950) classification of citizenship into civil, political, and social rights, argues that these three rights are arenas of contestation or conflict, and each is linked to a distinctive type of surveillance, which, he argues, is necessary to the power of the superordinate groups

and acts as an axis for the operation of the dialectic of control (1987:205). According to Ong, while European states have confronted these contestations sequentially over decades, postcolonial Asian and African states have had to deal with them simultaneously, mostly in an era of globalization. Newly industrializing regimes, eager to meet capitalist requirements, have evolved into what she calls a system of graduated sovereignty, by which she means that citizens in zones differently articulated within global production and financial circuits are subject to different kinds of surveillance and in practice enjoy different sets of civil, political, and economic rights (Ong 1999:41). Ong's concept of flexible citizenship complicates Mamdani's classification of subject and citizen, which primarily focuses on classes and power structures. Ong argues that in an era of globalization, Southeast Asian governments have sought to accommodate corporate strategies of location by becoming flexible in managing their sovereignty. Flexible citizenship, as a product of graduated sovereignty, allows the differentiation of populations into graduated scales of citizenship, or graduated citizenship. Ong uses the concept of flexible citizenship to "describe the practices of refugees and business migrants who work in one location while their families are lodged in 'safe havens' elsewhere" (Ong 1999:214).

Eritrea, dealing with globalization, has adopted a strategy similar to what Ong has called graduated sovereignty and citizenship. Citizenship is defined by an individual's "sacrifice for the nation" (Bernal forthcoming). Those who died in the nationalist war or the border war with Ethiopia are considered martyrs. When a former guerrilla fighter dies, for any reason, including natural causes, he or she is automatically called a martyr and buried in the local martyrs' cemetery. This is because the EPLF and the PFDJ have elevated the martyr as a symbol of Eritrean culture: "The martyr . . . is not only a central figure in the Eritrean national imaginary, but represents the essence of the social contract between Eritreans and the state in which the citizen's role is to serve the nation and sacrifice themselves [*sic*] for the survival and well-being of the nation" (Bernal forthcoming). Therefore, in Eritrea, a new hierarchy of citizenship, based on sacrifice to the nation, has evolved. This differentiates the people into graduated scales of citizenship, ranging from full citizenship—granting civil, political, and economic rights to members of the party—to treating local people as subjects and forgetting and abandoning the refugees. The practice of assigning citizenship unevenly has grave consequences.

There are in Eritrea two broad ideal and typical strata, with intersecting and crisscrossing boundaries. This includes citizens, the former guerrilla fighters, often called *tegadelti* in Tigrinya, and subjects, known as *hafash* in Tigrinya, meaning 'masses'. The masses include all those who were not members of EPLF and are not members of the new party, PFDJ (i.e., civilians in Eritrea and in the diaspora). The government sometimes uses the term *gebar*, meaning 'taxpayers', to refer to them. The government-run media translate the terms *gebar* and *hafash* as 'nationals'. These analytical categories are imprecise, but they do fit effectively with reality. The

tegadelti, estimated to be 95,000 ex-combatants, are the power elites. They are mostly former members of the EPLF and current members of the PFDJ. Their superiority is based upon their belief that they deserve more than the rest of the population because of their participation in the armed struggle (Article 19 2013). They receive a higher salary, better housing, and special treatment for services and goods in all government institutions. Although they represent only a small fraction of the population, they dominate government positions, including at least 50 percent of national assembly seats, constitutionally reserved for them; in addition, they control the executive branch, specifically the ministerial cabinet (Article 19 June 3, 2013). Among the *tegadelti* is a hierarchy, in which higher government and military officials (*laalewot halefti* 'higher authority') occupy the highest position; these personnel include government bureaucrats, military officers, and party officials and intellectuals. The membership of the oligarchy is not publicly acknowledged, but we get a glimpse of it when there is a breach within the ruling class. A breach happened in 2001, when fifteen top officials of the government questioned President Isaias's leadership, particularly his handling of the 1998–2000 border conflict with Ethiopia. The state-controlled media accused them of disloyalty, treason against the state authority (meaning Isaias Afwerki), and conspiracy to surrender to Ethiopia. Eleven of them were arrested without charge, and they remain in prison; the other four are out of the country, living in exile. Additionally, we can infer who might be in the inner circle. On 21 September 2013, government media showed pictures of 150 administrators, regional PFDJ, heads of regional administration, and subzonal administrators participating in a PFDJ-organized retreat (Eritrea Profile 2013a), and on 2 October 2013, these media showed videos of twenty ministers at a cabinet meeting (Eritrea Profile 2013b). These meetings are often convened at the president's whim. For the cabinet meetings, the videos were released for propaganda and served no other purpose. Under the powerful elites are disparate groups of *tegadelti* who have higher status because they are considered to have sacrificed their youth for the nation and are thus valued more than the *hafash*. They occupy differentiated, hierarchical positions in a complex of patron–client relationships. Although the entire edifice makes the government look like a bureaucracy that functions as an efficient, modern, rational legal system, in fact it is not. As with many African patronage systems of governance (Berman 1998), all Eritrean government services, from top to bottom, are done within the patron–client relations of loyalty, friendship, acquaintance, and future favors for service rendered.

The subjects are placed in two groups: diasporas and locals. Diasporas live abroad and are assigned a higher status than locals. They are expected to fulfill their obligations to the regime, such as paying a two-percent diaspora tax and/or giving money for government-sponsored funding initiatives, such as martyrs' trust funds and war-disabled patriots' funds. Locals call diasporas *belles*, referring to a sweet cactus fruit widely sold in the streets of Asmara and other towns during the summer. Because diasporas flock into Eritrea

during the summer at the same time *belles* are harvested, locals apply the term to them and call their arrival *belles-times*.

Locals are urban and rural people of diverse classes and statuses. They lack power and are marginalized by the elites and political leaders. Refugees (*segre-dob* 'those who crossed the border'), who fled their country to avoid national service and conscription or were displaced by war, have the lowest status. National service began in 1995, drafting teenagers over the age of sixteen and adults under the age of forty. It initially entailed six months of training and one year of service; however, it soon developed into two years or more in military service. Since the border war with Ethiopia, it has turned into unending military service. Even boys and girls are mandated to enter military-training camps for at least one year when they reach the age of sixteen. If they have finished tenth grade, they are required to finish their eleventh grade in a military camp called Sawa, where they receive military training in addition to their formal, nonmilitary education. The prospect for gainful employment and upward mobility for all people in Eritrea is almost nonexistent. Eritrea's employment sector is heavily monitored and managed while being policed by the state.

Since 2002 the military national service has been tied to a development program campaign called Warsai-Yikealo in which the youth are required to perform their national service as forced labor for an indefinite time period (Kibreab 2009). This glaring difference of life chances, rights, and privileges among preferred citizens, diasporic citizens, and locals has triggered an insatiable desire for most working-age young people to seek better opportunities and rights in exile. They are leaving in droves, through every country that borders Eritrea. They are abandoned by the Eritrean state; they are, to use Hannah Arendt's words about refugees, stateless people (Arendt 1943).

A new generation of Eritreans, mostly young, has started to oppose the regime indirectly inside Eritrea, and openly abroad. Diasporas who openly support opposition groups or groups who criticize the government face the possibility of arrest by the government. Diasporas who make negative statements about the Eritrean regime jeopardize their preferred citizenship and may be classed as an enemy of the state, subject to arrest and torture upon arrival on Eritrean soil.

The Refugee–Diaspora Nexus

Rapid globalization in recent years has made it possible, either by choice or pressure, for immigrants to maintain strong ties to their countries of origin, even when they are integrated into the countries that received them (Levitt 2001). In response to globalization, countries are distinguishing residence from national membership and extending their boundaries to those living outside of them. They have created mechanisms to facilitate immigrant participation in the national development process over the long term and from afar (Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003). Intensified globalization has enabled the

new Eritrean state to enhance its power and its relationship with Eritreans abroad.

Eritrean diasporas valorize the Eritrean nation-state and give the sovereign the power to decide and have flexible sovereignty over them. They support the state, mitigating the sense of alienation in their host countries. They hope for preferred citizenship in Eritrea—their only chance in the world to be preferred citizens, where they will be more equal than others. With the added resources they have in exile and things being so affordable in Eritrea, they are more than happy to do what the sovereign asks of them. The Eritrean state and the diaspora have become a mutual admiration and support unit. The state does not have much responsibility to meet the basic needs of the diasporas: they are citizens of other nations, and their needs are taken care of by their adopted new countries, mostly democratic nations in Europe, North America, and Australia. In relation to the Eritrean state, they are required to pay taxes and contribute to war efforts; in return, they are given some scarce resources in Eritrea, such as free land, where they can build houses. Their houses in Eritrea may serve as resting places for summer vacations or places of residence when they retire. Diasporas are the strongest supporters of events that celebrate holidays and parties initiated by the government. They dance the night away and spend a lot of money at these parties. Although they could have asked for more representation in Eritrean politics, they cannot afford to antagonize the state and thereby cut their connection to home. They need a place they can call home so intensely that they are willing to accept the state of exception, where normal rules are suspended indefinitely and the regime routinely makes arbitrary decisions. Such mutual benefit works at the expense of the captive citizens inside Eritrea and the refugees in refugee camps. Diasporas, government officials, members of the single party, and former guerrillas are treated as sovereign subjects, with rights that the local subjects do not receive. Eritreans, especially young people, dream that—through a process of transformation by leaving the country as refugees and then returning as diasporas, with a higher status and resources to spend lavishly—they will become part of the sovereign subject.

A paradox of Eritrea's refugee crisis is that today's refugees are tomorrow's diasporas—a phenomenon that I call a refugee-diaspora nexus. Refugees have to find a suitable home within centers of global powers, the global north, and then they can become new diasporas and attain preferred citizenship with significant rights in Eritrea. Refugee status seems a rite of passage, rife with danger and risks, where only a few become successful diasporas. If everything works out, a refugee becomes a diaspora who will be resettled in a third country, hopefully Europe, the United States, Canada, or Australia; he or she will then be able to come back home to visit—proud, rich, and supportive of the status quo. In the context of the refugee-diaspora nexus, however, many Eritreans cannot move freely in and out of the global north: they are neither refugees, slated for resettlement in a third country, nor in a party-sanctioned diaspora, and they therefore do not have privileged

citizenship status in Eritrea. Many are in legal limbo, have not reached their destination or goals, and are still waiting to be resettled in a third country.

The Papers in this Volume

Each of the papers in this volume takes as its starting point the state of exception in Eritrea itself which has produced various forms of bifurcated and/or graduated citizenship.

Assefaw Bariagaber in his article uses social-psychological concepts of imitative behavior as an explanation for the outflow of young people from Eritrea. According to him, emigration from Eritrea is an externally induced imitative behavior, effected as a result of the diffusion of social media, such as the Internet, movies, and mobile phones among Eritrean young people, who have used technology-based social networks to flee to neighboring countries and eventually to industrialized Western countries. He contends that learning from others enables young people to escape, take chances, and face dangers, including rape, death in the Sahara and Libyan deserts, being taken hostage in the Sinai Desert, and drowning in the Mediterranean and Red seas. He argues for looking at Eritrea in the context of emigration from Africa in response to the pull of the information revolution and globalization.

Victoria Bernal explores how the information revolution has influenced Eritrean politics and public life through the participation of Eritrean diasporas in social media by creating their own websites to discuss and participate in Eritrean politics. She shows how these websites serve as a public sphere, countering a lack of a free press and free space for civil society in Eritrea. She argues that online websites are now an integral part of Eritrean national politics, safe for civil society and dissent because of their location outside Eritrea. She contends that their significance has increased since 2001, when the state increased its repression of public discourse inside Eritrea. She focuses on the political activities that take place on three sites—Dehai, Asmarino, and Awate—and examines the decentering effect of these media in challenging the top-down method of governance in Eritrea, where the mass media are under the strict control of the state.

David Bozzini conducted two years of fieldwork, from 2005 to 2007, in Eritrea and studied people enrolled in national service there, exploring their political imagination, jokes about bureaucracy, superiors, positions relative to the state system, and citizenship. He states that the blocked social and economic mobility for conscripts in Eritrea leads them to resignation and a deep desire to seek exile. He suggests that jokes and other subversive discourse against state power and ideology may inadvertently promote some of the dynamics of the power system that they contest, and he thus highlights the limits of resistance and subversive discourse.

Amanda Poole argues that we should look at Eritrea's state-society relations as a manifestation of a larger African issue, involving the state-society relations of a gatekeeper state. She suggests that the flight of

citizens from Eritrea and their continuing connection through remittances and ransoms can be understood if we conceptualize the Eritrean state as a gatekeeper state, one that has acquired the capacity to manage massive emigration and use remittances, taxes, and national service to further its nation-building project. Remittances and ransoms have made it possible for the Eritrean state to claim self-sufficiency and autonomy from outside forces, such as nongovernmental organizations, and other dependency from foreign aid. Since the 1998 border conflict, young men and women in national service have been transformed into sources of unlimited and cheap forced labor (Kibreab 2009).

Jennifer Riggan directly addresses the question of graduated citizenship and the effects of the bifurcation of citizen and subject under the Eritrean state of exception. She takes up the question of how valorization of diaspora communities in Eritrea itself produces an imagined future in which leaving the country becomes central for high-school students. This is an unintended consequence of a governmental policy that ascribes greater citizenship to diasporas, rather than people in Eritrea, especially young people. This graduated citizenship has reshaped the way young people redefine emigration as a way of fulfilling their national duty, after they become diasporas and contribute remittances and diaspora taxes. Riggan observes a classroom debate among high-school students in an English class, where students consider leaving their country a patriotic act. She shows that they are reworking the state-sponsored idea of citizenship into a citizenship that justifies leaving the country within the logic of global market forces, going against locally defined duty and sacrifice, and thus protecting the national sovereignty and power of the Eritrean state.

Taken together, all of these papers address the challenges of Eritrea's strategy of nation-state formation in an era marked by global flows. The government's attempts to act as a gatekeeper between Eritrea and the rest of the world by attempting to regulate flows of people, money, and ideas about nationalism produces graduated categories of national citizen and subject each endowed with very different rights and duties. However, Eritreans themselves are aware of these categories, and, in response, they apprehend and produce alternative forms of belonging to the nation be it through the Internet, other forms of media, Eritrean classrooms, or political humor that circulates more broadly.

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