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In Between Nations: Ethiopian-Born Eritreans, Liminality, and War

In 1998, seven years after Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia, renewed war between the two countries created rigid borders where fluid boundaries previously existed. This border making was not only an attempt to physically delineate the border between the two countries but was also a symbolic process that attempted to definitively differentiate Ethiopian from Eritrean. However, alternative nationalisms were formed in the spaces that lay in between the two nations by people who inhabited those spaces. The national identities of Eritreans born in Ethiopia, known as Amiches, ran counter to state-produced forms of nationalism in both Ethiopia and Eritrea. Amiches defined their understanding of belonging by imagining attachments to two different national spaces. In this article, I use the concept of liminality to explore the dangers that Amiches experienced when confronted with this border-making process and the sense of community that emerged from their liminal state. [Eritrea, Ethiopia, ethnic cleansing, liminality, nationalism, borders, Amiche]

Rupture, Ritual, and the Reshaping of Nationalism

In the fall of 1999, I watched as buses and trucks laden with people came pouring into the town of Assab, Eritrea, honking their horns. A police car, siren blaring, preceded them, calling people to come out of their homes, businesses, and schools to welcome the newcomers. The onlookers cheered, clapped, and waved palm fronds and branches from trees. Some of the people inside the buses smiled faintly and waved back, but most looked exhausted. The tops of the buses and the line of trucks that followed were laden with suitcases, furniture, rolls of bedding, and anything else that people had been able to gather together when they were forced out of Ethiopia. These deportees of Eritrean descent had made the grueling journey through the desert from Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, across the front lines between Ethiopia and Eritrea, to Assab, the port town at the southern tip of Eritrea. The political event had the celebratory air of a parade or a festival, yet there was a marked disconnect between the dejected looks on the faces of the passengers and the elation of the onlookers.

Whenever a new batch of deportees arrived in Assab, their names were publicly posted outside the locations where they were to be housed. Assab's largest hotels, as well as some unused housing on the outskirts of town, served this need. Assab's

Eritrean residents, the majority of whom had relatives in Ethiopia, made the rounds of these makeshift urban “camps” for displaced people, meticulously checking each name, looking for relatives, former neighbors, or friends.

The evening following the parade described above, I accompanied two friends, Iyasu and Hailu,¹ teachers in Assab, as they searched for relatives and friends who might have arrived. Like many of Assab’s residents, they were Amiches, which meant that they had grown up in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and had moved to Eritrea after its independence in 1991. The mood was marked by excitement mixed with anxiety, as Iyasu, Hailu, and others crowded around a typed list of names taped to the cement wall outside the hotel.

As successive waves of deportees arrived from Ethiopia, these actions became routine. Those who found a familiar name would seek out that person and invite that person home, provide coffee, a meal, and perhaps a place to stay. This extended a politicized welcome to the newly deported. The process was repeated with each batch of deportees. Everyone knew it was likely that eventually parents, siblings, and best friends would show up. Although at one level these reunions were joyous, they also marked the severing of long-standing linkages to Ethiopia.

The two very different kinds of rituals just described—political and politicized—provide examples of the uneasy coexistence between the state’s attempt to define national identities and informal processes that blurred state-produced identity categories. In many ways the parade was similar to other spectacles of Eritrean nationalism in that it attempted to incorporate everyone into an experience of total nationalism that celebrated the ability of citizens to transcend suffering (Woldemikael 2009). The official welcome parade was a state-produced political ritual of nationalism that marked deportees, a population whose relationship to the Eritrean state was tenuous, as Eritrean. However, this particular ritual also moved deportees across a threshold from Ethiopia, where their citizenship status had been ambiguous, to Eritrea, where they were expected to behave as full Eritrean citizens. In contrast, the checking of the lists of deportees was a ritual of a very different sort. This more intimate and communal ritual was an effort on the part of a population, which had always occupied the space between the two nations, to continue to maintain a hybridized sense of identity and community that was constructed out of blurred boundaries and an attachment to the two nations. This informal ritual of welcome also moved deportees across a threshold, but it did so in a manner than celebrated the hybridity of a community that had straddled the border for decades.

Amiche identities are, in many ways, a counterpoint to official state attempts to define Eritrea and Ethiopia as distinct and separate. These Eritreans, who were born and raised in Ethiopia, were liminal in the sense that they did not fit into prescribed national categories. They were both Ethiopian and Eritrean in some ways. They connected to both nations on their own terms, but by virtue of being both, they were also neither. This sense of attachment to two national spaces began before Eritrea’s independence in 1991, and continued after, thus these identities reflected both the historical blurriness between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the ongoing reworking of the relationship between the two nations.

Amiches' ability to cultivate identities that blurred the boundaries between nationalisms became increasingly difficult starting in 1998, when Eritrea and Ethiopia found themselves at war over their physical border. War created rigid borders where fluid boundaries between the nations previously existed, and solidified what had been loose systems of classification on which national belonging to each country was based. In the midst of this process, states and majority populations recalibrated how they classified and characterized Eritreans who had lived in Ethiopia.

Deportations of Eritreans from Ethiopia were one such mechanism of differentiation. Between 1998, when the border war began, and 2000, when both countries signed a cessation of hostilities agreement, approximately seventy-five thousand Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin were deported from Ethiopia (Human Rights Watch 2003).² The war and deportations also ruptured the lives of Amiches who had resettled in Eritrea, but who maintained deep linkages to both nations. At the same time, totalizing forms of state-produced nationalism in Eritrea made it clear that the attributes of Amiche identities that many Eritreans identified as Ethiopian were unwelcome. This meant that there was pressure to change styles, tastes, language, and beliefs in order to act Eritrean, not Ethiopian.

In this article I explore the uneasy relationship between official processes that produced boundaries around identities and informal processes that blurred these boundaries. Groups who carve out identities in the in-between spaces between nations face a particular crisis when both states to which they claim belonging suddenly redefine them or particular components of their identity as a dangerous and "other." These in-between groups produce anxieties for the legitimacy of the nation itself. Processes of fixing the categories around identities and cleansing the national body of impure elements are a response to such anxieties (Appadurai 2006). I argue that state practices of classification and cleansing fundamentally alter, but do not destroy, the ways in which in-between groups blend and blur categories of national belonging.

The focal point of this article is a group of Amiches whom I initially met in 1995 while living in the port town of Assab. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork on state formation in Assab during several periods between 2000 and 2005. This article draws on that fieldwork, as well as observations made between 1995 and 1999 during visits to Assab preceding the onset of formal fieldwork. The ethnographic discussion of this group of Amiches is contextualized within discussions of broader political changes in Eritrea and Ethiopia.

I examine anxieties about national identities that resulted in state-sponsored processes of cleansing in Ethiopia and Eritrea and explore the ways in which Amiches resiliently produced alternative forms of national identification in the face of these anxieties. The article moves back and forth between ethnographic discussions of Amiches' lives and a discussion of the political circumstances that altered the structures of belonging, against which their national identities were constituted. In the next section, I theoretically frame these ideas by applying the concepts of liminality and *communitas* to the complex identity politics that mark contemporary nation-states. I then explore how anxieties over defining the nation and claiming loyalties of national citizens played out in Eritrea and Ethiopia in the years leading up to the 1998 border

war. Despite tensions between these two nations, Amiches developed hybrid forms of national identity based on the ways that they imagined that they were spatially linked to places located in both nations. I diagram this process in the fourth section and look in greater detail at the state policies and practices in Ethiopia and Eritrea that reclassified Amiches in order to fix their identities as Eritrean following the border war. The final section concludes by suggesting that, despite this alteration of the conditions in which Amiche identities were structured, the sense of connection and community among Amiches was resilient and allowed them to form identities that presented a covert counter-narrative of national belonging.

Liminality, Border Making, and “In-Between” People

Nation-states rely on the illusion of a loyal citizenry whose sense of belonging to the nation is uncomplicated and total. Nations are founded on a myth of purity and distinctness of the national population; this purity may take the form of homogeneous religious and ethnic identity or allegiance to a common way of imagining the nation (Anderson 1991; Appadurai 2006). However, the reality is that nations are inevitably diverse and comprised of members who may belong to the nation in different ways and to different degrees. The nation-state is thus an inevitably incomplete project, permanently challenged with producing an illusion of unity and a sense of common belonging where one can never exist (Appadurai 2006).

The incompleteness of the nation-state is particularly apparent in places where processes of state formation are relatively new and populations within nations have historically had social and political loyalties to entities other than the officially recognized nation-state. Permanent incompleteness is also heightened as a result of processes of global mobility, the increased salience of identity politics, and the growing power of subnational actors. Arjun Appadurai describes this as “the new economy of slippage and morphing which characterizes the relationship between majority and minority identities and powers” (2006:10). The paradox of the nation is that even as it aspires to produce bounded, clearly defined identities, there are always residents of the nation that fall in between statuses—people, like Amiches, who are both insiders and outsiders.

This impetus toward purity and the inevitable blurring of this purity produces a condition that Appadurai calls “the anxiety of incompleteness” (2006: 8). As “slippage” becomes the norm, states and members of majority populations respond by imposing increasingly stringent categories in a vain attempt to maintain the nation’s purity. These processes also produce the impetus for violent cleansing of those defined as not fitting into these more stringent categories. In this context, the minor differences between people who live in close proximity and share a common lifestyle are often the most threatening, as they “are a constant reminder of the incompleteness of national purity” (Appadurai 2006:84). Those who thrive in the space of slippage and blurriness and evade categorization may be the most at risk “since they further lubricate the slippery two-way traffic between the two categories” (Appadurai 2006:11).

So what happens to those whose very identity thrives on the slipperiness of categories in contexts of deep anxiety over the purity of the nation? This is the question

raised by the case of Amiches after the onset of the border war. The concept of liminality helps to explore the deep sense of danger produced around the existence of a group who inhabits these slippery spaces, while the concept of *communitas* allows us to understand the resiliency of blurring boundaries, even when doing so is dangerous.

Liminality, according to Victor Turner (1969), refers to those who are in a transition between symbolically and ritually delimited stages and therefore defy categorization. Liminal beings are outside the laws that govern any particular stage or category (Turner 1969:95). While Turner's conceptualization of liminality refers to existing outside what would otherwise be discrete, identifiable "stages," it is also a useful concept to illuminate the dangers that emerge when the stages, or categories of belonging, are themselves shifting and uncertain. Mary Douglas argues that beings who are between "form" and "formlessness" are regarded as impure and taboo and are, thus, threatening to the entire community (1985:104). Appadurai (2006) suggests that increased ethnic violence and cleansing may result from more people finding themselves in what we might understand as liminal positions. This is not because they choose to exist in a state that defies categorization, but because the categories themselves shift, draw inward, and become more rigid as the anxieties of incompleteness play out.

Liminal peoples may be tolerated by (and in many cases are necessary to) societies, but are always viewed as a threat to the ideal of a bounded social structure and its requisite categories. Thus, rules and procedures are necessary to contain those who are in in-between stages so that they do not pollute others, and to provide for a clear re-entry into a new stage (Douglas 1984; Turner 1969). Both Turner and Douglas note that liminal beings are often separated from the majority; placed in isolated, contained spaces; and ritually cleansed. This process may result in targeting certain signs and symbols of belonging to the liminal status that come to be seen as markers of impurity by the larger population.

Perhaps the most seminal work on liminality, political identity, and violence is Liisa Malkki's (1995) study of Hutu refugees in Tanzania. Like Amiches in my study, Hutu refugees do not easily fit into any particular national category and thus fundamentally challenge the ideal of a benevolent, caretaking nation. Refugees are nationals who cannot go home because their nation cannot or will not care for them. For this reason they threaten the very sacredness of the "national order of things" (Malkki 1995: 5) and their existence fundamentally calls into question the effectiveness of nations to order social and political life. So, too, Amiches' mixing of national identifications threatened the sacred notion of Eritrea and Ethiopia as separate and distinct nations.

Lacking the ideological package of the nation to define their identity, those who are outside the framework of the nation-state system form their identities from a compilation of experiences, narratives, myth, and memory. Hutu refugees in Malkki's study carved out identities differentially depending on the degree to which they chose to assimilate into their new country. Similarly, Amiche identities were constituted from varied responses to their treatment by both states and filtered through the community that they associated with. Amiches, refugees, and others who exist in the

blurred space between national categories must creatively and communally contend with shifts in how others understand and categorize them.

Faced with the realization that they are incomprehensible to the larger society, liminal communities draw inward, shift these categories, and define their identities in ways that do not adhere to predictable social structures. Turner's concept of *communitas* may illuminate this process. According to Turner, *communitas* refers to a sense of egalitarian camaraderie and community that exists within liminal spaces or among liminal beings (Turner 1969:96). *Communitas* consists of not only the alternative values and practices embedded in liminal communities, but an alternative to broader social structures themselves.

Communitas for Amiches not only revolved around an unstructured set of social codes, values, and practices, but also around an alteration of the structures of state-produced nationalism. These identities fluidly and spontaneously arose in response to changing circumstances and changing rules of belonging imposed by both nations. Amiche identities were not national in the sense of state-produced nationalisms, but by definition they engaged both nations, and therefore challenged the structures of belonging of the nation itself. The slipperiness of identities inherent in *communitas*, however, is precisely what makes the liminal community threatening to an established political or social entity. In the context of anxieties over nationalism in Eritrean and Ethiopia, Amiches' ongoing blurring of the rules and their attempt to belong to both nations made them a threat in both places.

Anxiety, State Control, and the Remaking of Nationalism in Eritrea and Ethiopia

Anxieties over the process of legitimizing national narratives and determining national belonging have long existed in Eritrea and Ethiopia; however, when the border war broke out, many of these anxieties crystallized. Historically, Eritrea and Ethiopia have been politically, economically, and culturally interconnected. Discussions of nationalism in Eritrea and Ethiopia thus necessitate an understanding of the intertwined historical processes of nation-state formation in what became two distinct, independent nations. The border war might be seen as eruption that emerged out of an ongoing tension to cope with the lingering, unresolved blurriness between the two nations (Gilkes 2005; Negash and Tronvoll 2000; Plaut 2005; Reid 2005).

In 1991, Eritrea gained its independence, and the communist, military regime in Ethiopia was replaced by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), later renamed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). In both Eritrea and Ethiopia, revolutionary fronts that fought together gained power. At this time, both governments were faced with shoring up a sense of nationalism within their own borders and each chose a radically different approach to doing so. Eritrea continued to produce and promote a homogenous, national, Eritrean identity, which was based on the common goal of a collective "struggle" for liberation. In doing so, it sought to transform its effervescent sense of transnational patriotism into a sustained sense of national attachment (Hepner 2009). In contrast, Ethiopia was reconfigured

as an ethnic federation that promoted nationalism through ethnicity. This reconfiguration was, in part, an effort to redress centuries of hegemonic rule over Ethiopia's marginalized peoples, redistribute state power, and redefine nationalism according to the views from the periphery (Clapham 2002; Donham 2002). Below I discuss the anxieties produced in this moment of transition, and the ways that the rapidly changing relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia contributed to these anxieties.

There are highly divergent views regarding the salience of the historical interconnections between Eritrea and Ethiopia for the development of these respective national identities. Eritrea became an Italian colony in 1890. In 1889, Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia signed the Treaty of Wuchale, which delineated the border between what remained the independent nation of Ethiopia and what would be the Italian colony of Eritrea. Italy then ruled Eritrea until it was stripped of its colonial holdings in 1941. In 1950, following ten years as a British protectorate, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia and later annexed. In 1961, Eritrea began its thirty-year war for independence from Ethiopia. In one interpretation of history, the territory of Eritrea was wrongfully snatched from the sovereign nation of Ethiopia as a result of the imperial ambitions of Italy. In another interpretation of history, Ethiopia was the imperial power seeking to incorporate Eritrea into its own empire.³ These different historical claims frame popular imaginaries of each nation and its respective other (Iyob 1995, 2000; Sorenson 1993). New governments in both countries had to contend with these imaginaries as they sought to reshape their respective nations according to new configurations of power after 1991.

The challenge for independent Eritrea has been to continue to promote a compelling, totalizing form of national narrative and to effectively disseminate it through a transnational field in the midst of increased challenges to the legitimacy of the state. Even before independence, Eritrea sought to assert its sovereignty not only over Eritrean territory but over all Eritreans (Hepner 2009). This required ensuring that Eritreans around the world identified primarily as Eritreans rather than as Ethiopians or as citizens of other countries in which they resided. After independence, this process involved the continued dissemination of a homogenizing form of nationalism, the strengthening of already powerful political and administrative institutions to organize Eritreans transnationally, and the development of new tools to attach Eritreans to the nation, such as the Internet (Bernal 2004, 2005; Hepner 2008, 2009; Woldemikael 2009). This transnationally shared sense of nationalism drew on narratives of Eritrea's thirty-year struggle for independence that valorized personal sacrifice and militarism (Hepner 2009). Administrative structures were set up to issue Eritrean identity cards (which I discuss below) and to provide a means for Eritreans around the world to pay a 2 percent tax to the Eritrean government. These structures enabled Eritreans who resided outside the country to understand themselves as Eritrean nationals, even if they held other citizenship. They also served as channels through which Eritreans could experience their national community and funnel much-needed resources to the state (Bernal 2004; Hepner 2009).

When the border war began, this same outpouring of nationalism and financial support provided the necessary means for Eritrea to engage in the conflict; however,

as fighting came to an end, intensified criticism of the Eritrean government's handling of the war effort began to weaken many of these transnational attachments (Hepner 2008, 2009). Increased political repression and the failure of the government to demobilize those conscripted into national/military service led many Eritreans to believe that the national ideals of sacrifice and service had become empty and meaningless. Within Eritrea's borders, the government compensated for this weakening of nationalism through the increased use of coercion and violence; however, these measures only further alienated Eritreans from the state and its version of national narratives (Poole 2009; Treiber 2009). Although there was still widespread support for the government among its diaspora, some Eritreans started to opt out of participation in the government-sponsored national community. As alternate, non-state Eritrean communities and institutions began to crop up, the government continued to operate a powerful set of institutions that organized and commanded the loyalties of Eritreans around the world, but it no longer had exclusive control over the production of national identities (Hepner 2008, 2009). This began to reveal the problems of governing a transnational, rather than a territorial, community. Thus the central anxieties for the Eritrean state relate to the production of a centralized, homogenous sense of Eritreanness in a transnational field where alternate forms of identity are increasingly imaginable.

In contrast, Ethiopia struggled to produce a sense of national attachment in the face of the decentralization of state power and fragmentation of the nation. Ethiopian national narratives have traditionally contended that the Ethiopian state dates back to the fourth-century Axumite Empire and the subsequent claim that a succession of Ethiopian emperors can trace their lineage back to the union of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The "center" of this imagined nation encompassed what are now the highlands of Eritrea and Ethiopia. Highland populations included the Amhara ethnic group, which has been politically dominant through most of Ethiopia's modern history, and the Tigrinya speaking ethnic groups, referred to as Tigrinya in Eritrea and Tigrayan in Ethiopia (Clapham 2002).

This narrative, which linked Eritrea and Ethiopia and dated their common national origins to the fourth century, also legitimated the successive reign of Ethiopian highland Christian people over what is now sovereign Ethiopian and Eritrean territory, and over many people who did not share this religious or ethnic history (Clapham 2002; Donham 1999). Implicit in this vision of "greater Ethiopia" was a form of manifest destiny that justified the incorporation of non-highland, non-Christian peoples into the Ethiopian nation (Donham 2002; Sorenson 1993). In this narrative, Eritrea played a central role but was also linked to the Ethiopian highlands and, more specifically, to Tigrinya-speaking Ethiopians.

Events in 1991 presented a significant rupture to these older national imaginaries in Ethiopia (James et al. 2002; Sorenson 1993). As with many former empires whose national pride revolved around the nation's success at forcefully acquiring territories, when the era of the empire came to an end, the nation struggled with its legitimacy. Although the Ethiopian revolution in 1974 replaced the Emperor Haile Selassie with communist military dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam, the core tenets of

these national narratives remained largely unchanged (Donham 1999). However, this was not so in 1991, when Eritrea became independent and Mengistu was deposed by the TPLF. Because of the centrality of the Eritrean highlands, the loss of Eritrea challenged the narrative as a whole (James et al. 2002). Additionally, for the first time in Ethiopia's modern history, its leadership did not hail from the Amhara population. This, coupled with the decision to introduce an ethnically based federal system of governance, meant that the national narratives that I described above were weakened (Bariagaber 1998; Mains 2004). However, despite the present devolution of power to ethnically based, semi-autonomous regions, traditional symbols of the Ethiopian nation and allocation of power in the state proved hard to displace completely (James et al. 2002; Mains 2004; Sorenson 1993). The anxiety for Ethiopia has thus been to reinvent the nation without relying on historically compelling, but hegemonic, narratives that link Ethiopia with Christianity, highland peoples, and Eritrea.

In order to validate new national narratives, both countries had to reinvent their relationship with each other in order to purge themselves of their deep linkages. Sovereign, newly independent Eritrea had to assert its independence politically, economically, and culturally. Eritrean nationalism thus required absolute loyalty to Eritrea from Eritreans around the world. Hybrid attachments and identifications with other nations challenged this loyalty, particularly when these attachments were to Ethiopia. In contrast, Ethiopia, newly reconfigured along ethnic lines, had to contend with two things that related to Eritrea. First, Ethiopia had to cope with the loss of the former, imagined center of the nation—a center that was partially located in the Eritrean highlands. Second, and more significantly, the fact that many of Ethiopia's ethnic groups spanned the Eritrean–Ethiopian border meant that a distinction had to be made between Ethiopians and Eritreans within certain ethnic groups. This was especially problematic in cases where ties between those who shared common language, ethnicity, and social institutions were stronger than national bonds (Abbay 1998; Mahrt 2009; Negash, and Tronvoll 2000; Tronvoll 1998, 1999).

Amiches were an uncomfortable marker of the lingering interconnection between the two nations. Although the Eritrean government nurtured a sense of nationalism and loyalty among its transnational community around the world, and exploited this community's attachments to multiple nations, Amiches' attachments to Ethiopia were threatening. While connections between Eritrean transnational communities and their country of residence were generally seen as an asset to Eritrea, Amiches' deep connection to Ethiopia was seen as suspect. Amiches' hybrid attachments to both nations not only complicated Eritrea's process of disentangling itself from a country it regarded as its former colonizer, but it also raised questions about the loyalties of Amiches themselves.

These dual attachments were equally problematic for Ethiopia. Because Amiches did not fit into an officially recognized Ethiopian ethnic category, there was uncertainty as to whether Amiches were to be regarded as ethnic (Ethiopian) or national (Eritrean). The presence of a group that was liminally situated, not only between Eritrea and Ethiopia but also between ethnic and national categories, produced particular anxieties amidst Ethiopia's attempts to redefine national identity through ethnicity. It was

unclear whether Amiches were insiders or outsiders, and thus they blurred the edges of an ethnically based nationalism. For each respective country, the heightened anxieties produced by Amiches' in-between status resulted in different responses toward them; however, both countries attempted to provide definition to Amiche identities. These responses are addressed below, but first I turn to a discussion of Amiches and their construction of themselves as hybrid.

From *Adi* to Addis to Assab: Multidirectional Movements and the Imagined Nation

In contrast to state-produced forms of national identity that revolve around notions of purity, Amiches are, by definition, a hybrid. The term *Amiche* itself reflects this hybridity: *Amiche* comes from the Automotive Manufacturing Company of Ethiopia (AMCE), a company whose vehicle parts were manufactured in Italy and assembled in Ethiopia. Like AMCE vehicles, Amiches had parts (parents) that came from one country (the Italian colony of Eritrea) and were assembled in another (Ethiopia). Amiches grew up in Ethiopia, were educated in Ethiopian schools, indoctrinated into Ethiopian discourses of nationalism, and required to participate in Ethiopian nationalist projects, such as literacy campaigns. And yet, conversations with Amiches suggest that being Amiche was synonymous with being Eritrean.⁴ But being Amiche also drew on an array of other identities that constituted a particular way of understanding their symbiotic attachments to both places.

This section looks at how Amiches narrated their lives and described a sense of belonging to two national places. In looking at the ways that these identities were formed out of movements between two countries, I pay particular attention to Amiches' decisions to migrate to the town of Assab, which was itself a liminal space prior to the border war. As I noted above, this article draws specifically on data collected amongst a group of Amiches who grew up in Addis Ababa, and who then migrated to the Eritrean town of Assab following independence. Most of these Amiches returned on their own to Eritrea after independence, although some were deportees and some had returned before 1991.

Benedict Anderson (1991) argues that the movement from national periphery (village) to regional capital and eventually national capital created a national consciousness among the national elite. As more and more people began to make these "pilgrimages," the presence of fellow migrants facilitated the spread of national imaginaries and situated the capital city as final destination and center of the nation. Migration from villages to urban centers in Ethiopia might be seen as a similar type of journey; however, I argue that for Eritrean migrants and their offspring, there was a bi-directional movement that resulted in binding them to two nations, by allowing them to imagine their membership in communities that would eventually come to be attached to two national spaces.

Zecarias's story is indicative of the journeys taken by many Amiches' parents. Born in 1940, Zecarias was the son of a priest in a small village. As the priest's son, he was an elite member of the community and was expected to eventually become a priest

himself—a process that would have required leaving the village for his education. Instead, Zecarias and several close relatives of similar age became aware of the possibility of setting off to larger cities and towns to find work. When he was roughly eighteen, in the late 1950s, Zecarias set off for Ethiopia, eventually ending up in Addis Ababa.

Zecarias's life reflects a movement from an Eritrean village in what was then the periphery of Ethiopia to the cosmopolitan and commercial center of Ethiopia; however, his movement to Addis Ababa did not preclude maintaining attachments to his home *adi* (village). Years later, he returned to Eritrea to find a wife, whom he brought to Ethiopia, where they raised their family. He then helped his younger brother and several other relatives make their way to Addis Ababa.

The *adi* embodied a particular imagined space that would eventually come to represent the national space of Eritrea for most Amiches. In fact, while the word *adi* is often used to literally refer to a village, it can also mean country, home or, more generally, a place that one comes from. Amiches could identify their paternal *adi* and maternal *adi* as could all Eritreans. *Adi* was the place of origin and was constantly evoked in stories parents told their children. One interviewee told me, "Our family always talked about their country. They would talk about corn being tossed [roasted] on the fire. They would say things like, 'Oh the corn from our country is very sweet. Everything from this country is sweet'" (interview with author, November 19, 2003). *Adi* not only evoked an imagined homeland through stories, but Eritreans who relocated to Addis Ababa worked to maintain a tangible network of contacts with their *adi* as shown through Zecarias's return to find a wife and his bringing several relatives to Addis. Eritreans also returned home for weddings, funerals, and other social obligations. For Eritreans who grew up in Ethiopia or elsewhere, a trip to Eritrea would include an almost mandatory visit to one's home *adi*.

What is interesting about the constitution of national identity among Amiches is that it complicates Anderson's (1991) understanding of the national pilgrimage as inherently moving toward a single national center and creating an attachment to an indivisible national whole. A journey to *adi* is a counter pilgrimage that reflects a complimentary national imaginary. For Eritreans in Ethiopia this imaginary was evoked through the tangible understandings of locality embodied in parents' memories and stories, in visits from relatives, and, ultimately, in each individual's journey "back to *adi*." Unlike Anderson's model of pilgrimage toward the national center, this journey back to *adi* is a movement back to the periphery to find one's roots.

If the concept of the *adi* was indicative of one way of imagining national space, the imagination of Addis Ababa, as well as the lived social experience in Addis, reflected another equally important spatial imaginary: Amiches' attachments to Addis Ababa reflected a self-identification with being an urban, modern, cosmopolitan person. Their ability to speak flawless Amharic; their feelings of being at home in a large city and able to navigate its complex geographical, social, and political structures; their affinity for Ethiopian films, music, and art; and their sense that they were on the road to prosperity were all attached to their identity as a person who was from Addis. Amiches' parents' movement from the village to the urban centers in Ethiopia

instilled in them a particular notion of progress that linked economic success with modernity and an urban existence. This sense of progress was embodied in their attachments to Addis Ababa.

In the years following Eritrea's independence in 1991, many Amiches eventually found their way to the port town of Assab. It was no surprise that the town of Assab was an attractive place for young Amiches. Located on the Red Sea, at the far southern tip of Eritrea, Assab was, in many ways, peripheral to Eritrea and was therefore an ideal point of entry for Amiches wishing to return to Eritrea at independence. Politically it was, and is, under Eritrean political and administrative jurisdiction. Historically, as the point from which the Italians began their conquest of Eritrea and the last town in Eritrea to be liberated from Ethiopia, it was and is highly significant and is an important symbol of the Eritrean nation. In contrast, for Ethiopia, Assab embodies Ethiopia's desire for access to the sea, which is often seen as essential for Ethiopia's ability to become a modern, developed nation.

In many ways, Assab was a town in limbo, a symbolically significant place for Eritrea and Ethiopia, but marginalized by both states. Prior to 1999, getting to and from Assab, particularly from other parts of Eritrea, was difficult. Most of the roads between central Eritrea and Assab were, literally, riverbeds, until construction of a new road began in earnest in 1998. Most travelers to central Eritrea would fly on one of the planes that took passengers twice a week to Asmara or travel by boats whose schedules were somewhat erratic. Because Eritrea primarily utilized its northern port, Assab was not well integrated into Eritrea economically; however, it continued to serve as Ethiopia's main port until 1998.

The majority of the town's population had migrated from somewhere else, mostly from Ethiopia. This meant that, culturally, Assab had a much more Ethiopian "feel" to it, according to its residents. Amiches who moved to Assab after its independence described it as: "Assab was a kind of place that was crowded by young people who came from different places, mostly from Ethiopia. Wherever you go, you find young Amiches. It was almost like living in a party" (interview with author, January 14, 2003). But as he also noted, "There was this fever, this excitement for independence. This independence fever was not cooled down, so everyone wanted to do something for his country." Thus, for Amiches, Assab culturally resonated with Ethiopia, but it was also marked by the effervescence of Eritrean independence. Amiches in Assab had partially fulfilled the national ideal of returning to serve the homeland, but they had not returned to its center (Asmara, the capital) or to their personal, national center (their *adi*), but instead to Assab, which served as a threshold, or *limen*, of sorts.

One of the things that marked Assab as partly Ethiopian was the presence of Amharic as its *lingua franca*. Prior to independence, Amharic was imposed on Eritreans as the state language of Ethiopia and became the required language of instruction in schools. Eritreans experienced Amharic as the language of an unwelcomed colonizer. However, for Amiches, Amharic was not the language of a hegemonic Ethiopia, but the language of their cosmopolitan Addis Ababa. Although almost all Amiches grew up speaking Tigrinya (the dominant language of the Eritrean highlands) at home, they tended to be more comfortable speaking Amharic. The sheer numbers of Ethiopians

and Amiches in Assab meant that it became the default lingua franca in the town. Speaking Amharic was a means through which Amiches identified each other in Eritrean contexts where other languages were being spoken; conversely, for most Eritreans, it evoked memories of domination and colonization.

Another factor that was significant about Assab for young Amiches was the relative ease of moving back and forth between Assab and Ethiopia. Starting at its independence, the Eritrean government severely restricted travel to and from Eritrea by requiring exit visas to leave the country. From Asmara, it could be very difficult to secure an exit visa to travel to Ethiopia. From Assab, however, restrictions were relaxed, meaning that Amiches could travel with relative ease across the border. If the journey to and from the *adi* represented symbolic ties to an ancestral past, then these journeys taken during annual vacations from Assab to Addis Ababa represented an actual journey home.

Perhaps most significantly, Amiches felt that in Assab they had found a space that would allow them to create a different kind of community and an alternate form of national belonging. The lived, everyday experience of nation in Assab was neither Eritrean nor Ethiopian, but distinct to Assab. Iyasu explained to me: “People are collected here from different areas—from Ethiopia, from Eritrea, from highlands and from lowlands, and they are a mixture and. . . that makes you different in terms of culture. . . you would be free. . . You are developing your own culture and your own society here—a different society” (interview with author, November 19, 2003). Iyasu’s comments seem to resonate with Turner’s (1969) notion of antistructure, or social forms that exist outside the fold of social rules or norms and are enabled by a sense of *communitas*. *Communitas*, according to Turner, and particularly what he terms spontaneous *communitas*, often revolves around affect and pleasure. Amiches’ sense of community largely revolved around listening to Amharic music, going to bars, and generally socializing in what Iyasu and others claimed was a place that was “free” of social restrictions. This sense of *communitas* was also marked by symbols that denoted belonging to a liminal group. Speaking Amharic and listening to Amharic music became such symbols for Amiches in Eritrea. Furthermore, Assab became a space where Amiches and others lived outside given structures and formed identities based on common experiences rather than society or state-produced ideas about who they should be. Iyasu’s comments about young people migrating to Assab to form their own society reflect this sense of *communitas*. But significantly, what enabled Assab to function in this manner was, in part, the fact that the people who lived there were outside the full reach of the Eritrean and Ethiopian states. Because this was Eritrea, Ethiopia did not govern Assab, and because of the large proportion of Ethiopian citizens in Assab (including Amiches) and the flows of people, goods and popular culture between the two countries, Eritrea did not control the production and experience of national culture in Assab as tightly as it did other places.

Assab was an ideal place for Amiches because of its hybrid and cosmopolitan character, but the border war changed this. The closure of the border and the deportations of Eritreans from Ethiopia severed Amiches’ personal links with Ethiopia. The port in Assab closed when Ethiopia stopped using it, and by the year 2000 all of Assab’s

Ethiopian residents had left, making Assab an isolated, remote Eritrean outpost. The transformation of Assab was in many ways mirrored by the process of identity reformation that faced Amiches at the onset of the war. Before I examine Amiches' process of redefining identities in the face of the border war, I turn to a discussion of how contestation over the physical border between Eritrea and Ethiopia produced new categories of belonging.

Border Making: Legal Liminality and Total Citizenship

The process of recalibrating the rules that determined national belonging in Eritrea and Ethiopia crystallized during the border war, although it started before and continued after. Here I examine this shifting political field of belonging and show how Eritrea's and Ethiopia's struggles to define nationalism and categorize "others" within their respective nations both reflected the specific national anxieties in each nation and positioned Amiches with regard to those anxieties. Above I noted that each country's sense of nationalism faced a certain crisis. In both cases, border making took on a new importance. In this process, Amiches, for the first time, were definitively categorized as Eritrean, whereas before they had largely been able to identify as somewhat Eritrean and somewhat Ethiopian. Meanwhile, the Eritrean government, whose sovereignty they were partially able to evade prior to the border war, now attempted to control their processes of identity formation. Below I discuss the shift in policies and practices that brought about this reclassification of Amiche identities, and then I look at the processes by which Eritrea sought to homogenize their identities and to purge the visible attributes of their attachments to Ethiopia.

After independence, the issue of dual citizenship was left intentionally vague and set aside, a problem to be dealt with later. Ethiopian laws do not allow dual citizenship, forcing anyone who wants another country's citizenship to choose. However, following Eritrea's independence, Ethiopia did not make provisions for Eritreans—Ethiopian citizens residing in Ethiopia—to officially have to select their citizenship (Human Rights Watch 2003). In Eritrea, the 1992 proclamation on nationality declared that anyone with an Eritrean parent was Eritrean, but the particular legalities governing how those residing in other countries would declare formal Eritrean citizenship were not specified. On the basis of the 1992 proclamation, the Eritrean government issued identity cards to all citizens. In many cases, Eritreans, especially those who were currently residing or had recently resided in other countries, had to bring witnesses or provide documentation that at least one of their parents was Eritrean. These cards then provided the means for determining who was eligible to vote in the 1993 referendum on Eritrean independence (Bernal 2004; Hepner 2009). In 1993, when Eritrea voted for its independence, 99.8 percent of Eritreans, including those living in Ethiopia and in other countries, voted for independence.

In effect, the 1992 proclamation on identity and the identity cards that followed created a means of categorizing identity that allowed for Eritreans residing elsewhere to remain in a legally liminal state as far as citizenship law was concerned (Hepner 2009). The proclamation and the identity cards created a national identity category without requiring anyone who was placed in that category to choose a citizenship.

Eritreans living in Addis Ababa and other parts of Ethiopia were not told that they had to relinquish their Ethiopian citizenship in order to acquire an Eritrean national identity card, nor were the estimated million other Eritreans around the world. In fact, doing so would have been illegal according to international law because Eritrea did not yet exist as an officially recognized state in which one could legally have citizenship (Amnesty International 1999; Byrne 2002).

In 1999, when the deportations began, the meaning of the national identity cards shifted for Eritreans living in Ethiopia, because the cards became key to determining who was Eritrean and, therefore, eligible for deportation. Ethiopian officials claimed that anyone who had an identity card, which signified that they had voted in the referendum, had effectively chosen Eritrean citizenship (Human Rights Watch 2003). The national identity cards, which had previously enabled the creation of identity categories that legally and culturally straddled the two nations, were now being used to make the distinction between the two rigid.

At the time of independence, the Ethiopian government largely accepted the presence of Eritreans in Ethiopia and made no move to strip them of their citizenship or to ask them to choose their nationality (Human Rights Watch 2003). Thus, when the border war erupted, it came as a great surprise to most Eritreans that they were targeted for deportation. These deportations and the stripping of Ethiopian citizenship signified Ethiopia's intolerance for previous identity categories that were legally liminal. The government transformed previously vague and unclear rules of belonging into categories that were fixed and rigid. Furthermore, they used the full force of the state to enforce these categories so that it was impossible to be both Eritrean and Ethiopian.

As I noted above, those who identify simultaneously with two nations find themselves in an extremely dangerous position when ongoing political struggles are suddenly infused with the desire to categorize and purify along ethno-national lines. Ethiopia's efforts to reconstitute itself as an ethnic federation took place at a time of already existing ethnic and political tensions (Negash and Tronvoll 2000). Isolated incidents of ethnic cleansing had occurred as ethnically defined regions were purged of non-ethnic members (Clapham 2002). The logic of this cleansing process was easily applied to Eritreans in Ethiopia.

The border war temporarily galvanized Ethiopians around a renewed sense of "us" fighting against a common "them," but it also addressed an even more specific anxiety for the Tigrayan-led government. Many Ethiopians already questioned the loyalties of the Tigrayan government, especially given their own ethnic loyalties and their historical sympathies to Eritrea. As the Tigrayan government of Ethiopia struggled to legitimately rule an ethnically federated Ethiopia, they could not be seen as being overly accommodating to Eritreans (Latta 2005; Plaut 2005). The war in general, and the deportations more specifically, was thus an effort to draw a strict border between the Tigrayans of Ethiopia and Eritreans in Ethiopia, most of whom came from Tigrinya-speaking backgrounds. In many ways, we might understand the deportations as the Tigrayan-led government showing Ethiopia its loyalties. This made Ethiopia-based Eritreans vulnerable not only because they were from a country against which

Ethiopians were rallying but also because the logic of ethno-national purity now targeted them as the blurry “other,” to be cleansed in order to produce a clearer sense of what was “Ethiopian.” The politics of the border conflict, combined with the redrawing of Ethiopian identity categories, rendered it impossible for Amiches to be Ethiopian.

The war intensified Eritrea’s need for total loyalty to the master narrative of what it means to be Eritrean. While the state had a great deal of influence over the transnational community, it had less direct control over cultural expressions of national identity within these transnational communities than it did within its own borders. Prior to the border war, this, in part, enabled Amiches to develop the hybrid sense of being discussed above. Once in Eritrea, however, the state began to exert controls over the cultural attributes of their identity and engaged in efforts to clean up the identities of Amiches to make them more Eritrean.

Initially, deportees were welcomed and incorporated into the Eritrean population by the state, and were interviewed and registered as Eritreans. They were provided money, housing, and assistance seeking jobs (Human Rights Watch 2003). The welcome parade with which I began this article reflects the tone of the deportees’ initial experience: they were understood to be Eritreans with all national rights and duties.

However, less formally, the vestiges of what was regarded as “Ethiopian” identity were seen as undesirable. As the deportations continued, the numbers of Amiches rose throughout Eritrea. They brought with them a more urban orientation and a tendency to speak Amharic and to listen to Amharic music, leading some government policies and practices to limit this cultural influence. This was partially a response to the increase in Amiches in Eritrea, but also, more generally, it was a process of cultural-border making. Ethiopian music has always been popular in Assab and elsewhere in Eritrea. When the border war began, bars notably began to play only Eritrean music, typically patriotic songs. Several shop and bar owners told me that playing Amharic music in public places was officially banned. The use of Amharic in public institutions, always an informal practice, was discontinued. And speaking Amharic in public, generally, was frowned upon and, some people believed, illegal.

Interestingly, these policies were enacted most stringently in Assab. The shift away from speaking Amharic in public institutions in Assab was dramatic. For example, a teacher who I’d known for many years, refused to speak Tigrinya in a high school staff meeting in 1997, but in the same school in 1999 would only speak Tigrinya. He was not alone. Even more interesting, the prohibition on playing Amharic music in public was largely ignored in Asmara, where it remained popular, but the ban was strictly enforced in Assab, where suddenly it was no longer heard. The symbolic meanings attached to the Amharic language and music, once a marker of this liminal space and people, suddenly took on a new meaning and became a more significant threat to the Eritrean population.

For some, the eschewing of all that was attached to Ethiopia extended to the Amiches themselves, who were regarded as a negative influence on society. I was sitting at an upscale bar with a couple from Asmara one evening, when a table full of young

people speaking Amharic began to laugh at a mentally impaired beggar who had come into the bar. The couple with whom I was sitting, who were from Asmara, began to immediately complain how Amiches lacked dignity and behaved badly in public by laughing at the unfortunate. They went on to berate the general immoral behavior of Amiches, complaining that they were bringing bad influences into Asmara. They pointed to the waitresses, both of whom were dressed in pressed uniforms and looked clean-cut and respectable, and complained that the Amiches were coming in and working as prostitutes, like these women. During this time period, Amiches were popular scapegoats for a variety of social ills, including the increase in beggars, prostitutes, con artists, general immoral behavior, and young people trying to escape from the country. Amiches came to embody a polluting influence that was associated with the immoralities of Ethiopia but were experienced as even more dangerous precisely because it came from Eritreans who were tainted with Ethiopia's influence.

Other policies seemed designed to incorporate Amiches into a larger national-military body, effectively to inscribe a more pure, holistic, homogeneous national identity on them. Many newly deported Amiches were conscripted into the Eritrean army within months or weeks of their deportation. Although mass conscriptions were controversial and problematic for all young Eritreans, for Amiches this was one of the effects of living under the Eritrean state that they had been able to avoid while in Ethiopia. Like Ethiopia, Eritrea was eager to categorize Amiches as Eritrean; however, unlike Ethiopian policies of deportation that excluded Amiches from the broader Ethiopian national whole, Eritrean policies sought to incorporate them into the Eritrean national body. This process of inclusion required purifying Amiche identities and attempting to strip them of all tastes, styles, preferences, and linkages that signaled any affinity for Ethiopia. While, for Ethiopia, the affixing of identity was an effort to solidify the blurry line between Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples, for Eritrea it was an effort to more firmly extend the sovereignty of the state over a particular hybrid transnational population whose hybridity derived from its linkages with Eritrea's enemy.

Samuel's Wedding: National Structures and Amiche Communitas

In conclusion, I turn to the question of what has happened to the Amiches' communities in the face of border making. How have Amiches' understandings of their national identity and its relationship to their communities adapted to changed circumstances and changed structures of belonging?

The Amiches never set out to adopt a formal political identity, but because their deep attachment to Ethiopia threatened Eritrea, their identities became highly politicized. Their processes of building identities were not framed in opposition to either nation, but rather in opposition to the idea that any one nation could fully claim them and determine their identities. In many ways, their liminal position resulted in their unintentional defiance of the structures of belonging that mark national forms themselves. Situated in this limen between national "form" and "formlessness," the Amiches engaged playfully with the question of Eritrean national identity but refused to adopt a national identity as structured by the state. They embraced a sense of "antistructure" inherent in *communitas* (Turner 1969).

Among Amiches and their deported families, there has always been a general sense of belonging to the Eritrean nation and respect for its struggles for independence, but there has also been a frustration with a government that has narrowly attached “Eritreanness” to tropes of military, sacrifice, and refusal of all that is Ethiopian. For Amiches, unlike other Eritreans, this frustration often found a quiet voice in stubbornly clinging to the markers of Amiche identity. During the time period I have discussed here, Amiches tended to marry and socialize with each other, and they tended to speak in Amharic privately to one another and at home but became adept at speaking Tigrinya outside these private circles, particularly in public situations. Many of them insisted that their children speak Tigrinya; in fact, older children who were deported largely blended in with other Eritrean youth. Many older Amiches also blended in, at least on the surface, but there were spaces of *communitas*—spaces in which they recalled the common bonds of childhoods in Addis, speaking Amharic, and having a different way of being national that came from growing up outside of their current nation.

I close with an example of a wedding, a ritual that we might not typically think of as producing political identifications; however, given the ways that the cultural markers of Amiche identity were politicized, I argue here that even personal rituals produced political, or counter-political, attachments. Ritual, David Kertzer (1988) argues, is key for producing not political beliefs but a sense of political belonging. I began this article by noting the ways that government-sponsored ritual attempted to incorporate Amiches into a common sense of national belonging, but also noting counter-rituals of belonging that existed outside formal structures. Drawing on Durkheim, Kertzer suggests that through common experiences, people come to understand a common sense of belonging (1988:9). This applies to government-sponsored rituals as well as politicized, non-government rituals.

In the summer of 2004, I attended the wedding of Samuel, an Amiche. Samuel had met his wife in Assab, where he had lived for many years. Although his wife was originally from the Eritrean highlands and not an Amiche, their wedding was still marked by an Amiche sense of community in several ways. The day before the wedding, Samuel was a nervous and harried groom. He was worried about routine wedding-related details in general, but particularly about a shortage of money. He needed the equivalent of about US\$300 (about three months’ salary for a midlevel civil servant) to pay for the food and services in advance. Figuring out how to pay for the wedding is not an unusual worry for someone on the day before the wedding, but in Samuel’s case, some of his concerns stemmed from being Amiche, and, therefore, not having extensive family and kin networks in the highlands, and some from the geographical distance between Assab and Asmara. The bridal couple’s friend, Ezekiel, had agreed to lend Samuel a large sum of money, but his bus from Assab was late and he would not arrive until the day of the wedding—assuming that the bus would not be further delayed, which it often was.

Luckily, there was a uniquely Amiche solution to the problem. Iyasu, the teacher mentioned above, figured out how to give Samuel money prior to Ezekiel’s arrival. I was aware that Ezekiel had not yet arrived from Assab, so I asked Iyasu to explain

how he had resolved the problem. Woldu, a mutual friend of theirs who also lived in Assab, had given money to Iyasu to deliver to Woldu's relative in Asmara. Iyasu reasoned that Woldu would not mind if Samuel used this money, and then Ezekiel would pay Woldu's relative. By describing the complicated path of this money, I hope to highlight the web of trust involved. I expressed surprise at the faith with which such a large sum of money changed ownership so many times, and commented that it would have been easy for someone to lose track of it. Samuel and Iyasu immediately answered that because they were Amiches, they could trust each other, though they doubted if they would have so much mutual trust with people from Asmara. Their collective experience as Amiches allowed for the construction of unstated rules and the creation of a sense of community in which they were bound to each other and knew they would pay back each others' debts.

The wedding itself was celebratory. Most of the wedding music was Tigrinya, but as the couple started to depart, the groomsmen and other friends spontaneously started singing an Amharic wedding song. While some of the bride's relatives and friends looked mildly uncomfortable, the groom's party was oblivious, and continued singing raucously. This was also common at Amiche weddings that I attended. While the official music of weddings was traditional Tigrinyan wedding music, outside the ceremonial space of the wedding celebration, between the tent and the car, in the threshold between the wedding celebration and this next phase of their lives, Amharic songs were sung, an echo of Amiche identity spontaneously arising as this displaced community sought to remember itself and to constitute a new limen between nationalized spaces.

Following the onset of the border war, official national narratives were revamped. This rewriting of nationalism, combined with the creation of new systems of classification and rituals of political purification, had a powerful effect on Eritreans born in Ethiopia. The result was that Amiches, who had occupied liminal spaces, were now pressured to adopt a more pure form of nationalism. The example of an Amiche wedding illustrates the ongoing experiences of *communitas*, which seek to engage the symbols and practices of belonging by evoking memories and cultural habits in the form of song, dance, and language. It demonstrates that *communitas* can be resilient, although not necessarily resistant, in the face of border-fixing practices, especially when people find themselves uprooted and discriminated against in their new "home."

In the midst of purifying national projects, what becomes of groups whose very identity is intentionally impure or hybrid? Liminal groups pose challenges to the idea of a total or pure nation, but ultimately leave these powerful narratives unaltered. As Amiches flexibly and fluidly combined two nationalisms, their ongoing processes of identity reformation challenged the idea that a nation can remain contained.

At present, the border war is at a stalemate, with the conflict neither resolved nor active. The deportations of Eritreans from Ethiopia have tapered off and have not been reported since 2002 (Human Rights Watch 2003). The relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea has been somewhat reconfigured yet again, with each country supporting opposition movements in the other, as well as supporting opposing factions in Somalia. In 2003, Ethiopia made official provisions for Eritreans who

resided in Ethiopia at the time of independence to declare Ethiopian citizenship, but many have not officially declared their citizenship due to delays in processing and fears of discrimination (Refugees International 2008). Meanwhile, increased human rights abuses have led tens of thousands of Eritreans to flee to refugee camps in Ethiopia. As opposition to the Eritrean government has increased and as ever-growing numbers of young people flee illegally across the border, the Eritrean state grows more anxious about its ability to complete its national project. This has led to increasingly stringent demands that citizens declare their loyalties in an unambiguous manner. In many ways, Amiches' struggles to assert their identities in often small and stylistic ways have become subsumed under broader Eritrean struggles against political repression. Still, in a country where there are few means to express any identity other than those officially sanctioned by the government, Amiches' performances, narratives and practices of identity provide a subtle form of resilience, perhaps even resistance, amidst demands for absolute loyalty to a totalizing state.

Notes

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1. All personal names of people in this paper are pseudonyms. Identifying features of research subjects have also been changed in order to comply with human subjects protection protocols.
2. In this article, I focus on ruptures brought about as a result of the border war from the perspective of Amiches, who are Eritrean or of Eritrean descent. A similar examination could be done of Ethiopians who were born and lived in Eritrea; however, to do so would be beyond the scope of this article and my research. It should be noted that following Eritrea's independence, and again following the border war, a large number of Ethiopians were expelled from Eritrea. It is estimated that 125,000 Ethiopians were deported from Eritrea following Eritrea's independence in 1991 (Negash and Tronvoll 2000). It is also estimated that 70,000 Ethiopians were either deported or voluntarily repatriated from Eritrea during the border war, a claim that the Eritrean government has denied (Human Rights Watch 2003).
3. There are a number of historiographical debates regarding the salience of the colonization of Eritrea, its subsequent federation with and annexation by Ethiopia, and the impact of these events on the development of nationalism in both

countries (for a discussion of these debates, see Iyob 1995 and Sorenson 1993). Historically, the highlands of Eritrea have had political and social linkages with the Ethiopian highlands dating back to the fourth century; however, governance over Eritrea's eastern coast and areas bordering Sudan has shifted throughout history. For Eritreans, Italian colonization is credited with territorially consolidating the Eritrean nation, which had not been consolidated previously, and with instilling the beginnings of a national consciousness in Eritreans (Iyob 1995). In contrast, narratives of "greater Ethiopia" and scholarship seeking to validate these narratives have sought to show the historical linkages between ancient Ethiopian empires and territorial claims of the Ethiopian nation-state in the 18th and 19th centuries (Levine 1974). These narratives of greater Ethiopia are partially responsible for claims that the Italian colonization of Eritrea was a violation of Ethiopian sovereignty. Thus, it is no surprise that many sources that seek to promote an Eritrean perspective on history not only refute the greater Ethiopia narrative but illuminate the ways in which it legitimated Ethiopian rule over Eritrea. Nonetheless, it seems clear that prior to the beginning of the war that resulted in Eritrea's independence, as national sentiments in Ethiopia and Eritrea were just beginning to crystallize, the lived realities of nationalism were complex and multifaceted. Colonial-era sources suggest that the political field in Eritrea was split between predominantly Christian, Tigrinyan-speaking highlanders who supported union with Ethiopia and predominantly Muslim lowlanders who supported Eritrean independence (Trevaskis 1960). In a nuanced, compelling analysis of historical documents from the colonial period, Irma Taddia (1994) argues that a variety of social processes, including but not limited to Italian colonialism, were responsible for rising loyalties, among both highland Eritreans and Ethiopians, to an Ethiopia that would include Eritrea.

4. Data for this article were obtained during field work in Eritrea, with Amiches who voluntarily chose to relocate to Eritrea after independence, as well as with Amiches who were deported following the onset of the border war. All Amiches I interviewed and talked with in Eritrea between 1998 and 2005 identified themselves as Eritrean nationals who had strong linkages to Ethiopia. However, it should be noted that Amiches who never repatriated or returned to Eritrea may have a very different sense of national identity. Further research needs to be done on this population.

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