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Deportees: A Year Later

By Marc Michaelson

ASMARA, Eritrea

November 1999

Introduction

n August 1998 I interviewed several Eritreans who had recently been deported from Ethiopia, personal victims of the Ethio-Eritrean border war that began in May. Behind pretenses of "national security," more than 17,000 Eritreans had been expelled. A year later the number has more than tripled to 62,000:

Approximately one third of the deportees are rural folk — farmers who lived and worked in Tigray for decades.2 in 1998, some deported farmers temporarily settled in Shambuco, a sub-zone capital some 25 kilometers southeast of Barentu. Among them was Gebreneguse Habtekere, a slim, gray-bearded, elderly man deported from Bagoweini village. He was born in Eritrea, but moved to Tigray as a young adult more than fifty years ago. Throughout the long civil war (1974-91), Gebreneguse farmed, raised animals and eked out a subsistence existence. But when the Ethio-Eritrean border war broke out in May 1998, Tigrayan authorities confiscated his livestock and forced him and his family to leave Ethiopia.

Zait Mehare lived in Dembe Jefecke when she was expelled. Her son was stuck in prison and she had no information about his condition when we first spoke. Zait seemed more bitter than worried. Infuriated by her treatment, she told her story in a



- Note: The names of some deportees have been changed to protect their relatives who remain in Ethiopia.
- ² Tigray is the northernmost region of Ethiopia, bordering Eritrea.



steady, sharp-edged tone. At the time, Zait was lodging temporarily with relatives in Shambuco, waiting out the war before resettling more permanently.

Despite their more dire living conditions, rural deportees received less publicity and assistance than urban deportees, many of whom were well-educated, prominent Addis Ababa elites — civil servants, businessmen and managers working in international agencies. Others, like 50-year-old Saba Tekeste, whose husband is a barber, lived more modest, middle-class lives.

Saba arrived at a makeshift reception center in Dekamhare on August 6th, 1998. Detained in the middle of the night by Ethiopian police, Saba was imprisoned and then sent on a harrowing, three-day bus ride to the border. She and other deportees were forced to cross the tense no-man's-land at night, on foot, in an area strewn with mines. Eritrean troops, uninformed of their crossing and on high alert for an Ethiopian offensive, began shooting. Upon recognizing them as civilians, the soldiers ceased fire and assisted the deportees along the final few kilometers.

While Saba's four children were left behind in Addis, several other children were deported in her group. In Dekamhare, I interviewed Dawit Gebremariam (13), Senait Berhe (10), and Harnet Kidane (12), all of whom arrived with a father or uncle. Ethiopian authorities routinely separated families to maximize the stress and humiliation of those expelled. Dawit had never been to Eritrea, and Senait didn't speak any Tigrinya, the Eritrean national language. They were deported solely because their parents were born in Eritrea.

Just over one year has passed since I first met these deportees. In October 1999, I tried to track them down to see how they were doing, coping, integrating and settling into their new homes. The current article is an update — a look at the lives of deportees a year later.

When Ethiopian fighter planes dumped their bombs on Shambuco, most people fled for cover in the bush. Not Gebreneguse Habtekere. He was trapped in his home, bedridden with fever and immobilized by the general afflictions of old age. Gebreneguse watched helplessly as explosives rained on his neighborhood, igniting grass roofs and spreading into a wind-blown sea of fire.

The attack occurred near noon on a day in late February 1999. Gebreneguse was alone in the house; his wife and son were in town when the planes arrived. He watched the destruction and ensuing pandemonium, as people ran about, trying to rescue their homes, relatives and belongings in a feverish effort to salvage something in the chaos.

He recalls the scene: "I was sick and couldn't see how many people died there. I saw one man burned in his hut..." Gebreneguse's son Tesfu interrupts, "Others were killed. I saw four people dead."

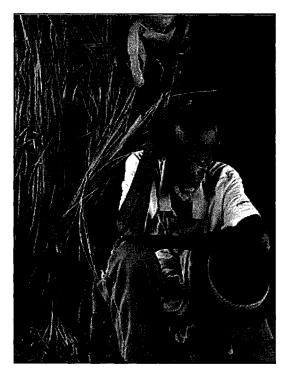
In the late afternoon, Tesfu returned to his father af-

ter a futile attempt to extinguish the fire in his own home. Fearing further attacks, they packed a bit of flour and left the town. They walked for two and a half hours, rested a while, and continued to Geza Irab, where they spent the next two weeks with relatives.

Ethiopian planes periodically flew sorties over the area; no bombs were dropped, but everyone felt vulnerable. In search of safer ground, Tesfu decided to move the family even farther from the border. Near Koytobia, some 40 km north of Shambuco, they constructed a makeshift shelter camouflaged under a tree canopy. For the next ten weeks the family stayed there, uncomfortable and exposed to the elements, but invisible to over-flying planes.

On May 17th (Gebreneguse remembers the exact day), the family moved into a grass hut on the fringe of Koytobia, generously lent by a Nara² friend of his son's. The shelter is decent, and they subsist on government-provided food rations. As we chatted, the atmosphere in the compound had a light, relaxed feeling of rural

³ The Nara are a small ethnic group living in some parts of southern Eritrea.



Gebreneguse Habtekere, Koytobia, Eritrea, October 1999

normalcy — women plaiting hair and boiling coffee, children playing and laughing, babies crying.

Gebreneguse's family is relatively fortunate — most of the war-displaced live in shoddy, makeshift tent camps; some shelters are little more than a sheet of blue UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) tarpaulin propped up by sticks. The conditions are spartan; the camps lack even the most basic water, health and sanitation provisions. The Eritrean government has tried to provide bare necessities — food, blankets, shelter — but the existence is

extremely rugged. For the war-displaced, the present is taxing and the future uncertain. But few worry about the long-term; they are all-consumed by the exigencies of day-to-day survival.

Gebreneguse shows the wear-and-tear of forced nomadism. He is an old man, perhaps in his seventies, and has lost quite a bit of weight and energy over the past year. He is visibly more frail; his hearing and sight have begun to fail him. At times during our interview Gebreneguse became confused; his son Tesfu corrected him when his memory failed. Still he conveyed his experiences with a persistent inner spirit, emphasizing key points with animated gestures of his long bony arms.

Gebreneguse lived in Ethiopia for more than 50 years. Now he harbors deep-seated resentment toward this Ethiopian government: "I've lived through the British and Italian colonialism (sic). They hunted soldiers; none ever intentionally harmed civilians. This Ethiopian government is the first that persecutes *people*."

Where will Gebreneguse's family go next? "I hope [the Nara house owner] will not say 'go out.' If he does, we will get a tent from the government and make do. We can not build a hut like this. We have nothing. We lost our cattle, donkeys and sheep in Tigray. We are waiting for the government to help us."

Resettlement is not on the immediate agenda. Politicians, bureaucrats and expatriates in Asmara are bracing for another season of war, as chances of a peace breakthrough dwindle. Only after the war ends can the government begin the massive tasks of resettlement and re-integration. And only then will some semblance of normalcy be restored to these tattered lives. Gebreneguse put it simply: "If there is no peace, there is no rest."

After our interview, Gebreneguse offered tea and local bread, displaying characteristic Eritrean hospitality even in the midst of dire hardship, Just before leaving the compound, I asked one more question: "Do you have any family members on the front line?"

"Yes," came the proud response. Three of Gebreneguse's sons are in the army — one on the Zalanbessa front, one on the Badime front, and one is training at the national military camp at Sawa. Tesfu, the only other son, looks after the family. If not for a physical disability, he too would have volunteered to fight.

By any measure, Gebreneguse has endured an incred-



Gebreneguse's current house on the outskirts of Koytobia

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Zait Mehare, Aba Are, Eritrea, October 1999

ibly trying and difficult year. But Zait Mehare's has been tougher. On the road back to Bashuka, I found Zait living in a roadside tent in Aba Are. A year ago Zait made a powerful impression. She was filled with anger, and spoke vigorously of her expulsion from Tigray. She was small, but fiery and determined — tough as nails.

Zait is now a shadow of the person she was a year ago. The fight is gone, her energy sapped. For much of the past year, Zait has battled a series of illnesses — itching, fever, faintness and general malaise. Most likely these maladies flourished in the harsh physical, psychological and emotional environments where Zait has been forced to dwell. She says she feels better now, but she looks frighteningly bony and depressed. Eyes downcast, Zait still speaks firmly, but the bonfire has reduced to a spark.

Like Gebreneguse, Zait was caught in the air raid on Shambuco. Her sons came to rescue her, but there was fire everywhere. Surrounded by burning houses, they saw no escape route, and thought they might die there. Later, when the fires receded, they fled to the bush — first for two weeks in Bashuka, and then to Aba Are. Zait and her family (two sons and two daughters) continue to exist precariously on the support they receive from the Eritrean government.

When we first met, Zait's third son was detained in Tigray. I ask her what became of him: "He was in prison for three months. The authorities took our cattle and sent him to Eritrea, forcing him to cross the Mereb River during high water. He went to Deda, but there was shelling there so he moved to Wedas, but there was also shelling there. Then he came to Shambuco [where I was living]."

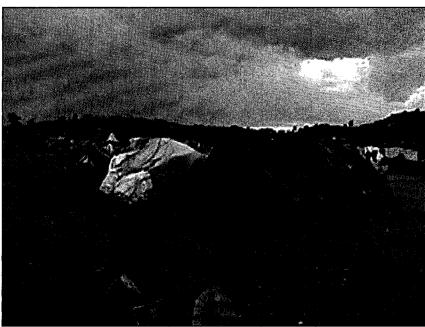
"Where is he now?"

"He is doing national military service in Sawa." Incidentally, Zait's two sons-in-law also recently departed for Sawa. Nearly ten percent of this small country's population has been mobilized by Eritrea for the war with Ethiopia. Every family has someone at the front, and the deportees are no exception.

Tracking down the urban-based deportees proved startlingly easy. The ERREC (Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission) is the government agency charged with registering and servicing the deported and displaced. ERREC is housed in a two-story, grey-metal pre-fab building in the Tiravolo section of Asmara. The building looks and feels flimsy and temporary. In fact, ERREC was slated for closure, its responsibilities set to be integrated within other ministries.

ERREC's dismantling was to be a psychological victory for the new nation, signaling that relief, reintegration and rehabilitation activities had been successfully concluded. In reality, a couple of hundred thousand refugees remained in Sudan, ex-fighters were not fully reintegrated into new civilian roles and the need for relief, especially food aid, had not magically evaporated. Still, ERREC's closure was in the pipeline — a symbol, doubtless exaggerated, of Eritrean progress and dogged self-reliance.

The planned closure was eclipsed by the Ethio-Eritrean border war in May 1998. In July, Ethiopia began



Tents in Aba Are, home to Zait Mehare and others displaced by the border war

deporting busloads of Eritreans, dumping them on the tense border. Thousands were also displaced by the fighting. The war created a new humanitarian emergency. The deportees arrived empty-handed — homeless, penniless, jobless. Urgent relief and longer-term resettlement assistance were required. The crisis breathed new life into ERREC, and the agency was mandated to coordinate relief efforts.

At ERREC I met Meretab, Director of Research and Human Resources, and he quickly shuttled me downstairs to Saba Mengist, the point person for the computer database of deportees. Saba's spacious office is shared with data-entry staff, some of whom, zipping skillfully about in wheelchairs, appear to be disabled ex-fighters from the liberation struggle.

ERREC's deportee registration process is extremely thorough and painstakingly precise. Upon arrival in Eritrea, deportees complete a lengthy questionnaire. Included on the form is the name of a local "sponsor" who functions as a contact point and assumes general respon-



Saba Tekeste, Asmara, September 1999

sibility for their early resettlement. Most often these sponsors are relatives who have long lived in Eritrea.

I presented Saba with a list of four deportees I had interviewed in Dekamhare last August. One was a household head but the other three were children, and I assumed they would be difficult to locate. In three minutes I had the first sponsor contact number in my hands — that of Saba's namesake, Saba Tekeste. Saba Mengist then asked me to come back in two days and she would give me whatever information she could find. But there was no need to wait — by the end of the day she called and said she'd found telephone numbers for all four deportees. Within a week I tracked down three of the four.

Saba Tekeste opens the door, sees me and her face

ignites with a broad, electric smile. During our previous meeting, I never saw her high cheekbones inflate, nor this uninhibited grin revealing a large mouthful of crooked white teeth. A year ago, having just arrived in Dekamhare after the brutal trip from Addis Ababa, Saba was exhausted, distressed, angry and worried. That first interview was tense as Saba harshly narrated the story of her recent trials in a voice rough with resentment.

A year later, Saba is a woman transformed. She is still wrapped in a traditional white *gabi* (cotton cloth) but she now oozes happiness. She appears relaxed, elated, healthily plump and comfortably at home.

We meet in Saba's aunt's house. After registering in Dekamhare, Saba came directly to Asmara, and spent the first month in this well-outfitted home. Initially, she felt uncomfortable, unsettled, unnerved. Her husband and four children dominated her thoughts, and she channeled all her physical and emotional energy into preparing for their inevitable arrival.

The aunt welcomed her to stay, and Saba's brother entreated her to move in with him, but she would have none of it. After just one month in Asmara, Saba rented her own place in the Godaiv neighborhood, and anxiously awaited the rest of her family.

"I used to come to this house to watch the news on TV — to see the deportees arriving, hoping I would see my husband and children among them," she says. Saba had no idea when they would be deported, and she worried about their welfare in Addis Ababa, a city increasingly hostile to Eritreans.

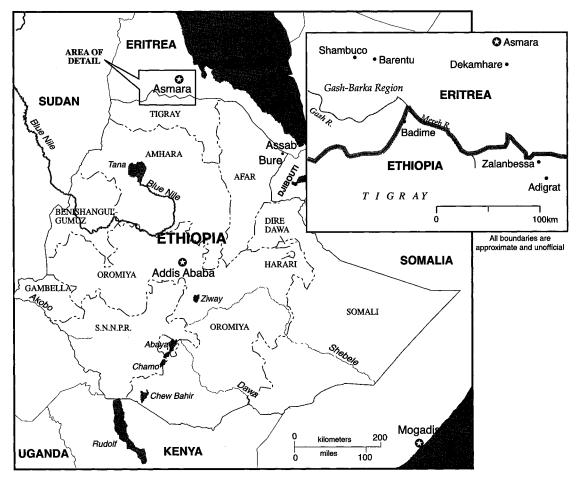
Saba refused to visit relatives in the distant countryside for fear that her family might arrive in her absence. Praying for their safe pas-

sage, she awaited her loved ones with the trepidation of a sailor's wife peering out at a foreboding sea.

On November 13, 1998 Saba's prayers were answered. Her husband Yohannes and four children appeared on her doorstep: "I cried when I saw them. I had such a deep happiness." Like all of the later deportees, they traveled through Bure on the eastern Assab front, and were then transported by boat to Massawa and bus to Asmara. The journey was arduous, but in the end the family was reunited.

Since then, Yohannes has found work as a barber, and her two youngest children, Medhin (10th grade) and Eyob (8th grade), have matriculated into local secondary schools. Another daughter, Alem, graduated from the Italian High School in Addis Ababa last year and has recently

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started work at a printing press in Asmara. Meheret, the eldest daughter, departed for obligatory military training in Sawa in March. She completed the six month course and is soon to be reassigned.

* * *

In Asmara's upscale Tiravolo neighborhood (just a few hundred meters from the ERREC office), my translator Russom and I search for the elusive entrance of Freedom Junior Secondary School. Russom is a jovial, enthusiastic, frizzy-haired Eritrean journalist who previously reported for the Voice of America (VOA), the U.S. government's official foreign news service. We first met during my previous visit to Eritrea, and I found him to be uncharacteristically open-minded for an Eritrean journalist. Russom seemed eager to exchange ideas, search for interesting stories, and not merely report honey-soaked portrayals of Eritrea as heaven-in-Africa. That desire notwithstanding, Russom is still Eritrean — he understands the restrictive press boundaries in his country, and is careful not to overstep them.

As we look for the Freedom School, students from a nearby primary school lead the way. A minute of casual conversation reveals that several of these boys are themselves deportees. Such is the case in Asmara — one can barely sneeze without spraying a deportee. They are ev-

erywhere — in the schools, cafes, businesses and bars.

We arrive at the Freedom School only to find the large metal gates jealously guarded by a tough old man, undoubtedly a holdover from the fascist period and still aiming to make Mussolini proud. We bang vigorously on the door and beg to pass, falsely proclaiming to have an urgent appointment with the headmaster. He holds firm. Ten minutes of additional pleading and the guard relents. He opens the gate but a crack, and raises a big, scary stick as a warning to the others — no entry, no way.

It is recess. All the students roam freely in the massive compound. Small groups sit in the meager shade of young trees and chat; others run around, playing games, chasing girls and doing the usual kids-at-recess stuff. In the back of the compound, we find a group of teachers gathered outside the school offices. It's payday, and our visit has interrupted the process. They ask us to return in the afternoon, and promise to check the rolls for Harnet Kidane, a 13-year-old deportee I met last year in Dekamhare, just after her deportation.

Harnet was deported with her maternal uncle. Her father had been deported a few months earlier, her mother and three of her four siblings arrived two months after her. Like many young deportees, Harnet had to regress a grade to polish up her rusty Tigrinya language skills. She

repeated 5th grade last year and entered 6th grade this year. Harnet says she likes Asmara. "It is cleaner and not as rough as Addis Ababa." She misses her friends in Addis, but has made new ones, many of whom "have the same problem as me." They discuss their deportations sometimes; the common experience functions as a bond, and helps them to process their feelings and cope with the changes.

Like most children, Harnet is resilient and has quickly adapted to her new environment.

She remembers the deportation, but is not as deeply scarred and perpetually tormented by residual anger as are the adults. One incident, however, remains permanently etched in her mind: "We were put in jail for several days and told we were going to Eritrea. Just before our departure, my brother came to see me and say good-bye. I ran over to greet him at the door, but the guard stopped me and slapped me. I can't forget it."

A year ago, I wrote that "Harnet emits toughness; she is a tomboy with thick braids and searing eyes." She is still tough, but the searing eyes have mellowed and softened. The rasta-style braids have been untangled and combed back in a more conservative smooth, straight bunch. Harnet also smiles shyly a few times, something she never did in Dekamhare. Certainly the school yard is a more relaxing, safe environment than the registration center had been a year ago.

During the course of our chat, the morning shift has been released and the schoolyard has emptied. We pass Mussolini's protégé on our way out and meet Harnet's younger sister and brother waiting patiently to walk home together. Having kept them late, we offer a ride. I am surprised by the long drive, and ask why they go to



Dawit Gebremariam and his father Berhane, Asmara, September 1999



Harnet Kidane, Asmara, September 1999

school so far from their home. "It takes us one hour walking each way. There is a closer school, but my father wants to toughen us up. He said he knows we won't use the extra time to study anyway..." The two siblings smile sheepishly from the back seat, acknowledging that their father knows them all too well.

Interviewing these child deportees a year ago, I discovered little about their family backgrounds. I was thus surprised to find 14-year-old Dawit Gebremariam living in Asmara's equivalent of the lap of luxury. In Dekamhare he was just a quiet, polite, mild-mannered kid, ripped from his home and exhausted from a grueling journey. This time, I tracked him down through his father's small import shop in the heart of Asmara.

Dawit's father Berhane arrived with the second group

of deportees in July 1998, a sign of wealth, power or prominence. The first rounds of deportees were nearly exclusively well-educated and well-to-do. Berhane owned a successful import-export business in Addis Ababa, as well as two trucks that transported goods from the ports in Assab and Djibouti.

What has happened to his business and vehicles in Addis Ababa? Later arrivals told him the government has locked up his house and business. After Berhane's deportation, the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia suddenly called in his bank loans. His wife, left with no means of income, was unable to pay and the two trucks were confiscated.

Berhane had been a rich man, but in the course of a few days he lost it all, and was deported to Asmara empty-handed. Shortly thereafter, he secured a bank loan and

started a new import business from scratch.

Like Harnet's family, Dawit's was expelled in stages — his father in July, Dawit and his uncle in August, other relatives and a brother in October, his mother and youngest brother in November. Why all this cumbersome separation of families? Why didn't Ethiopia just deport them en masse? Berhane believes: "They were just being evil, splitting people. When I was deported, my wife was sick. My youngest son, just 10 years old, had to go out at night to call taxis to take her to the hospital. He was the only one left, and he had to take care of his mother."

Dawit's family appears to be adjusting and adapting to their new home exceptionally well. After a long illness, his mother's health has greatly improved; the entire family is together again; Berhane is earning a solid living; Dawit and his brother are in school, making new friends and hovering in rank near the top of their classes.

The family rents a spacious new apartment near Asmara's airport, and the conditions are far from spartan. We sit in comfortable, puffy-cushioned easy chairs and talk; the salon is nicely furnished with a large wooden credenza, a full-size refrigerator, dining table, television and new sofa set. Dawit and his family seem to be doing just fine.

I ask Berhane his thoughts on the war and the future: "We are longing for peace. We were living peacefully there. We did nothing against the government, but they did bad for us. The [Ethiopian] people are our brothers. We are only resentful toward the government. We are praying that there will be a [peaceful] settlement." He pauses and rubs his head, troubled and unconvinced of his last statement's viability. "It is in God's hands."

But weren't the deportations a tit-for-tat affair with Eritrea reciprocating in kind? No, they were not. While many Ethiopians living in Eritrea lost their jobs (and thus their source of livelihood), they were not picked up by the government, imprisoned en masse, forced onto buses and dumped at the border. Still, due to fear or lost jobs, many Ethiopians decided to leave.

Many others have chosen to stay. In Nacfa I met two bar girls from Tigray. Genet came from Shire four years ago and Alem came from Adigrat. The two girls openly admitted they were Ethiopian, displaying a comfort level that only exists in an atmosphere free of repression. In Ethiopia, Eritreans rarely admit their origins publicly, for fear that doing so may prove to be the functional equivalent of pressing the eject button in a fighter plane. They may be hurled out of there, and fast.

Severed communication is the major source of distress for those like Genet, whose families are physically close (just a few hundred kilometers away in Tigray) but worlds away. No telephone, post or other communications traverse the hostile border. Messages can only be transmitted through foreign channels — for example, sending a letter from Eritrea to a relative in Germany who then packs it in a new envelope and forwards it to Ethiopia. The peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia, intermarried and interconnected through centuries of co-habitation, have been ripped apart by the lingering border war.

My brief, benign encounter with Genet and Alem is not meant to imply that life for all Ethiopians in Eritrea is a picnic. It certainly is not. While many Ethiopians have been able to continue to live relatively normal lives in Eritrea, others are harassed and live in hardship. The Eritrean government has clearly stated its policy: Ethiopians are welcome to continue living in Eritrea, and they should not be mistreated or abused in any way. No evidence of wholesale, state-sanctioned abuse has emerged, but isolated incidents doubtless occur behind closed doors, out of the public eye.

A recent confrontation in Asmara exemplifies the heightened level of tension, and the complexity of the issue. A hundred or so rural Ethiopians, previously farmers in Eritrea's southern Gash-Barka region, have been pushed out of Gash-Barka and landed on the streets of Asmara. In October 1999, they were living as a group on the streets with little access to shelter, food or other basic sustenance. A few were reported to have died due to the adverse conditions.

During my stay in Asmara, one international journalist, accompanied by the Ethiopian Consul, attempted to interview some of these Ethiopians living on the street. They were immediately confronted and questioned by Eritrean plain-clothes security officers. Soon after, a spontaneous mini-riot broke out. A few Eritrean women attacked the journalist and some of the Ethiopians, yelling at them to leave. Children, caught up in the excitement, threw rocks at the car. A few Eritrean policemen watched this fracas from afar, but did not intervene. And, the incident apparently opened the Ethiopians to further abuses later. Their presence is unwelcome, and tension levels are such that a minor incident can snowball into a potentially violent confrontation.

Someone should be looking after the basic needs of these Ethiopians. On the surface it appears that they are being mistreated and neglected by the Eritrean authorities. However, there is more to the story. First, these Ethiopians have registered to leave — they want to return to Ethiopia. Despite efforts by the Eritrean government and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to arrange safe passage, the Ethiopian government has refused, saying they can not guarantee their safety crossing the war zone.

If truly concerned about the welfare of these citizens,

the Ethiopian government could provide them with shelter in their massive diplomatic compound in Asmara. Ten months ago, during my previous visit to Asmara, I found several hundred Ethiopians temporarily residing in the Ethiopian Embassy, awaiting repatriation. Recent visitors to the Ethiopian compound say it is empty. Apparently the Ethiopian government finds it more advantageous for propaganda purposes to leave the Ethiopians on the street as evidence of mistreatment at the hands of Eritreans.

* * *

Not all of the deportees, even the urban ones, have experienced seamless transitions. Wrenched from lives of stability, many deportees are stuck in a confused neither-here-nor-there state of purgatory. They have lost their Ethiopia lives and have not yet been able to sink new roots in Eritrea. They wander the calm, clean, tree-lined streets of Asmara, minds cluttered with turmoil and uncertainty.

Some Addis Ababa business owners, like Berhane, have started new enterprises in Eritrea. But the current business climate is not all that conducive to investment — war is looming, the 60 million-strong Ethiopian market is inaccessible and government resources are tied up in the expansion of arsenals, not enterprises.

Tekle, another deportee, runs a shipping business. He is managing, but appears frustrated by the paltry levels of trade and profit. He now plans to wait out the war in the United States. Tekle believes it will take time — perhaps five years or more — after peace is restored for substantial trade relations to resume. Trust is low, new trade agreements will need to be negotiated and in the interim businesses will suffer. Tekle says he plans to return to Eritrea eventually, but his short-term economic assessment is bearish.

In Asmara, the deportee presence is already being felt. In the short term, there have been some negative effects, including a rise in petty crime and street begging. This is partially due to the depressed state of the Eritrean economy. The war is taking its toll, and even in the best circumstances, integrating 60,000 sudden arrivals into Eritrea's small economy would entail considerable stress and strain.

In the longer term the deportees hold profound transformative potential. They bring with them a wealth of skills, experience and education. They have lived and worked in the more open, liberal climate of Ethiopia, and may eventually prove a force for change in Eritrea. Small signs indicate that the deportees may emerge as a force for reform.

For example, Mohamed is a deported journalist who

spent time in prison in Ethiopia for his critical reporting. Eritrea has much less press freedom; all newspapers, public and private, are censored by the Ministry of Information. Now Mohamed is writing for a small private paper in Asmara, and has been warned several times for controversial stories. He is taking risks, gently nudging the censorship "envelope," and trying to open the media sector.

Likewise, a group of deported businessmen organized an *ad hoc* association to pressure the government. They wanted Eritrea to sue Ethiopia for the value of their confiscated goods and property; and they wanted special loans designated for deportees to help them start new businesses. The *ad-hoc* deportee businessmen's association petered out after a relatively short time. However, several of them still meet informally on a regular basis. Like other deportee interest groups, they may later push for change; for example, liberalization of the business codes.

Currently hovering overhead, however, is the border war, and as long as it continues, Eritreans will remain focused on narrower imperatives of national survival. Eventually peace will come, and with it heightened pressure for reform. The Eritrean government will be lobbied by deportees, national service youth, the Diaspora and others who have, yet again, made considerable sacrifices for the "nation."

Just as independence provided Eritrea an opportunity for radical transformation and new directions, so too will the eventual peace with Ethiopia. How will the Eritrean leadership respond? Will they liberalize and open new social, political and economic spaces? Or will they continue to strictly coordinate and control all development arenas — be they businesses, the press or civic associations?

When the war ends, Gebreneguse Habtekere, Zait Mehare and other rural deportees will be obliged to start life anew. They will need new homes, land to cultivate and basic tools. Many urban deportees will also face formidable tasks, as they resettle, rebuild careers and adapt to life in Eritrea.

Some of the most interesting impacts of the deportations will reveal themselves in the decades to come — when the younger deportees grow up. Eritrea's future will fall, in part, into the hands of Dawit, Harnet and the thousands of children who were deported with them. Will they remember being uprooted? How will they perceive Ethiopia, the country that rejected them? Will they ever return to Ethiopia in peace time, to visit or possibly even to live? And how will they contribute to their new Eritrean homeland? Will they go to Sawa for military training? Will they rebuild roads in the national service? Will they be a force for development, for change, for peace or for war?

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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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[EUROPE/RUSSIA]

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