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Deportations: Personalized Escalation of the Ethiopian-Eritrean Border Conflict¹

ASMARA, Eritrea

September 1998

By Marc Michaelson

Saba Tekeste and her husband were sleeping soundly in their Addis Ababa home when they heard a loud pounding at the door at 4 a.m. on Friday July 31st. They awoke with a start and nervously answered. It was the police, there to pick her and her husband up and bring them to the station.

The police were polite, not rough, rude or insolent. They told her she could bring whatever she wanted. Saba knew exactly what was happening; she had heard from others the stories of arrest, questioning and deportation. Yet knowing what lay ahead provided little consolation. Her mind and heart raced as she began gathering clothes and other items in a frenzy. The policemen tried to comfort her and calm her down, urging her to take her time. But she couldn't think straight. What do you pack at 4 a.m. when you know you're leaving your home for the last time?

Eventually she stuffed an old rice sack full of clothes, and along with her husband and the four policemen, left for the station. Her children, three daughters (ages 21, 19, 16) and one son (age 13) were left behind. She and her husband would spend the next three days in police custody awaiting deportation.

Ultimately, the police acceded to Saba's pleas that they not deport both parents, leaving the four children to fend for themselves. One of the parents

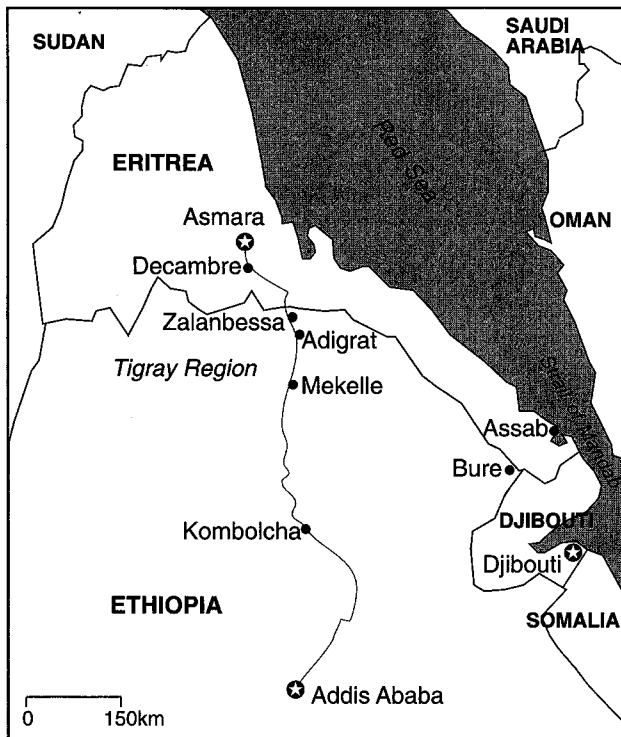
would be allowed to remain. They decided her husband should stay, as he could look after the children's safety and well-being better than she alone.



Saba Tekeste

On Monday, Saba and a large group of fellow deportees were taken to Janmeda, on the northern outskirts of Addis Ababa, where they began the long trek by bus to Eritrea. They spent the first night in Kombolcha and the second in Mekelle, the capital of the

¹ Note: Some of the names of the deportees have been altered to protect their family members who remain in Ethiopia.



northern Tigray region. At 4 a.m. on Wednesday, exactly five days to the hour that she was first awakened by the police, Saba and the others on the bus were dumped near Fatzi, a town north of Adigrat near the disputed border area of Zalanbessa. The authorities yelled at them, telling them they'd better run fast across the border before day-break to avoid the fighting.

Saba says she and some of the other strong ones carried their bags on their heads or backs, tied in place with *gabris* (traditional white robes). Others just left their belongings right there, knowing they would be unable to carry them for a long distance. As it turned out, they had to walk more than 10 kilometers, initially in the dark. Some sympathetic Ethiopian soldiers quietly warned them not to deviate from the road because the area was strewn with landmines. Saba says tiÖy were horrified, not knowing where they were going, every step holding the chance that they'd be blown up by a mine. Many of the children among them cried as they made their uncertain trek north.

Then shots rang out. The Eritrean troops, holding their positions, saw the approaching mass of people, and in the dark of night thought it might be Ethiopian troops launching a surprise offensive. One of the deportees believes this is why they were forced to cross at night; he thinks the Ethiopian authorities knew they'd be shot at as they entered the Eritrean-controlled area, unidentified and with no

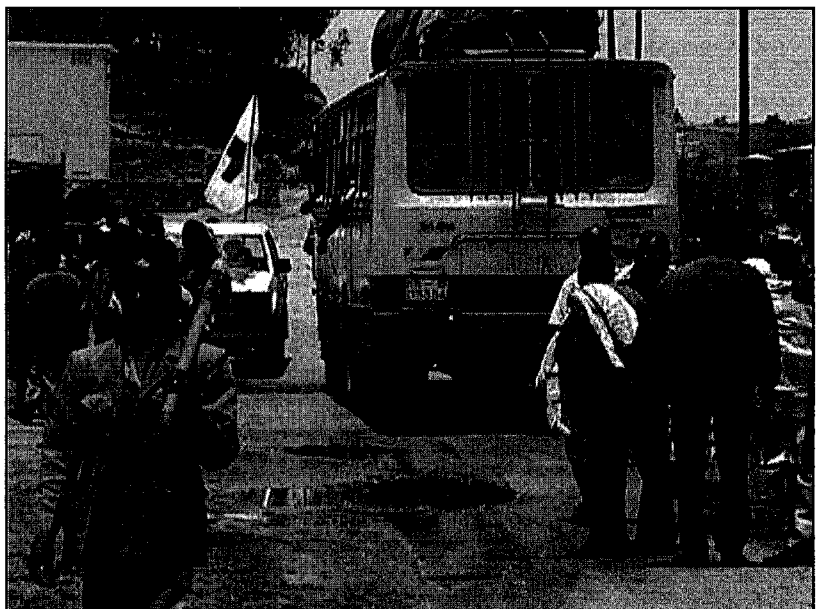
prior notice. Fortunately, when the Eritrean soldiers saw the women's bright white *gabris*, and heard the crying children, they realized it was civilians. Some of these troops met them, helped them with their bags and escorted them safely along the way. The group reached Zalanbessa at 2 p.m. on Thursday, ten hours after they began the scary walk to their new homeland.

I interviewed Saba at a reception center in Decamhare, about 37 kilometers southeast of Asmara, the Eritrean capital. She and 1,040 other new arrivals were being registered at a makeshift site on the campus of a technical high school in that town.

Saba is about 49 years old, but that seems a rough estimate judging from her hearty laugh when I asked her age. There is no common profile among the deportees; they are men and women, the elderly and children of all ages. Like most, Saba had been living in Ethiopia for a very long time. She was born and raised in Gundet Seraye, a small Eritrean village, at a time when Emperor Haile Sellasie ruled Ethiopia and the British were administering Eritrea after ousting the Italians in 1941.

Saba moved to Ethiopia 25 years ago, and has lived in Addis Ababa, where she married, ever since. Like most of the deportees, she held an Ethiopian passport, and has been a citizen of Ethiopia since long before Eritrea's independence. Now she has joined the swelling ranks of the expelled, having been forcibly ejected from her home and separated from her family.

Saba will be forced to restart her life and be left with the trauma of her deportation experience. She says she will worry about her family's security back in Addis



Busload of deportees arriving at Decamhare reception center

Ababa, wondering when she will see them again.

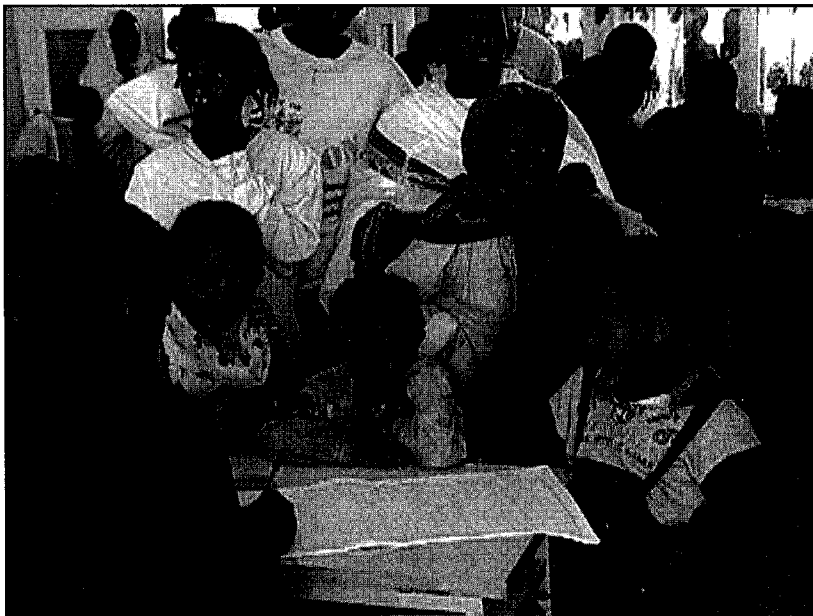
The mass expulsion of more than 17,000 ethnic Eritreans from Ethiopia represents a new, personalized battle-front in the three-month-old Ethiopian-Eritrean border conflict.

In press releases and in newspapers, the Ethiopian government has admitted to deporting only a small fraction of the people who have been arriving by the busload at the border. However, independent observers, journalists and UN employees, appearing at deportation points without prior notice and without government accompaniment, have witnessed mass arrivals at various border crossing and reception centers. The deportees are being registered meticulously, and impartial parties are confirming the reality on the ground.

The Eritrean government, to this point, has not reciprocated. Quite the contrary, they have bent over backwards to avoid giving the impression of deporting Ethiopians. When the conflict erupted in May of this year, many Ethiopians (especially casual laborers, but some permanent employees as well) lost their jobs. With no source of livelihood, many of these Ethiopians wanted to leave Eritrea, but most have been refused exit visas. The Eritrean government wants to make sure it is absolutely clear that all departing Ethiopians are leaving voluntarily, and they are therefore requiring ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) accompaniment across the border. This process has been extremely slow; only 330 Ethiopians have thus far been able to cross, while more than 2,000 exit-visa applications have been submitted to the Eritrean government.

Even the few who have been permitted to leave Eritrea have been used for propaganda purposes, creating the false impression that both sides are expelling the others' foreign nationals. For example, after 278 Ethiopians were allowed to leave Assab via boat to Djibouti, an *Addis Tribune* report (August 7) spoke of them as "deportees." The Ethiopian Government Spokesperson said: "They had been living and working in Assab and were allowed to leave only if they could afford the exorbitant cost imposed...The adults aboard considered it a miracle that they had been able to leave Eritrea and were very concerned about other Ethiopians who had not been allowed to do so." This statement contradicts the very nature of deportation. These Ethiopians wanted to leave, they were not forced to do so.

In media coverage of the deportation story, respon-



Family being registered at the Decamhare reception center

sible journalism has thus fallen by the wayside. Despite the evidence and independent confirmations, the international press has curiously squelched the story of the deportations. Reuters and Associated Press have refused deportation articles submitted by their reporters in Asmara, claiming they don't believe them. Instead, these wire services have pieced together wishy-washy stories outlining "tit-for-tat" allegations (often unverified, and some patently false), giving readers misleading impressions. In these cases, responsible journalism has been abandoned in favor of mushy and often inaccurate even-handedness.

The Ethiopian government has reserved the right to deport any foreign nationals it deems threaten national security. During conflicts and wars, governments routinely detain or expel foreigners whom they perceive to be a threat. In this case, the Ethiopian government has said that only spies and those sending money to support Eritrea's expansionist military are being expelled.

However, the current deportees represent a broad spectrum of the population; and the arbitrary selection of who stays and who goes is hardly indicative of a disciplined rooting out of espionage agents. Rather, the deportations appear purposefully designed and carefully orchestrated for randomness and chaos. For example, sometimes the mother is sent and the father is allowed to remain; other times the father goes and mother stays. Sometimes the children are allowed to come along, sometimes they are forced to stay behind, and sometimes some children are forced to go and others forced to stay. There appears to be no rhyme, reason or consistency in the deportation selection process.

This absence of patterns is not confined to the selection of deportees; it permeates the other depor-

tation processes as well. Detainees are held at a variety of sites around the city and moved frequently. The buses heading toward the border depart from different places, follow different routes, and discharge their passengers at different locations along the border, at different times of the day and night.

The breadth of expulsions — covering all ages, genders, and classes — indicate an odd variation on the theme of ethnic cleansing. Ethiopian nationals of Eritrean ancestry, many of whom were born in Ethiopia, are being systematically uprooted and sent to a land they don't know.² Others grew up in Eritrea but have spent their entire adult lives and careers, often 20 years or more, in Ethiopia. Some of the deported children have never even been to Eritrea and don't speak the country's predominant language, Tigrinya.

The populations of Ethiopia and Eritrea are intricately interconnected, mixed together in families and communities over the centuries. The question of identity is a strange one—how and why does one identify as an “Eritrean”? Often, among those who have lived in Ethiopia for extended periods of time, they say it is in their blood or ancestry; others say it is a feeling they have, a common language, culture, history.

This issue of identity is already complex. Further complicating the situation is a peculiar form of dual citizenship that has emerged since the overthrow of the Derg³ in 1991. The vast majority of those expelled hold Ethiopian passports, and are therefore legally Ethiopian citizens. However, during the 1993 referendum on Eritrean independence, the Ethiopian government encouraged all “Eritreans” to register and vote. Ironically, the authorities are using that very same registration list to expel those people now. After the referendum passed, most of these “Eritreans” kept their Ethiopian passports, but were additionally given Eritrean identification cards, enabling them to acquire Eritrean citizenship if they so desired. Even more curious is the fact that these “Eritreans” were permitted to and strongly urged to vote in the last Ethiopian election. Needing support for their fragile coalition government, the ruling EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front) government actively sought the “Eritrean” community's financial support and ballots.

Eritrea, Africa's newest country, officially obtained its independence from Ethiopia in 1993, after a 30-year liberation struggle. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, leaders of the

TPLF (Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front) and EPLF (Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front) respectively, worked together to overthrow the Marxist regime of Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991. Until earlier this year, their two governments enjoyed cordial relations and cooperated closely to rebuild their war-devastated countries and pursue peace in the fragile Horn of Africa.

Both Meles and Isaias were considered to be among the vanguard of a new breed of populist African leaders—firm in principle, tough on corruption and committed to development of the people, not their personal bank accounts. The policymakers and pundits began to talk of an African Renaissance, a new era of good governance, peace and prosperity.

In May all of that hope and those great expectations were thrown into question. A dispute between the two nations over their border escalated, and a series of battles were fought in the areas near Badame, Zalanbessa, and Bure. Numerous diplomatic initiatives, from the United States and Rwanda, the OAU (Organization for African Unity) and even Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, have failed to bring the two sides to the negotiating table.

After all of the efforts to rebuild their war-battered countries, the mortars are once again lobbing shells, pounding towns and displacing citizens on both sides of the border. After all of the efforts to promote peace and stability in Somalia and Sudan, and to strengthen the conflict-prevention mechanisms of subregional institutions like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Ethiopia and Eritrea find themselves locked in a military and diplomatic stalemate of their own. Just two months after President Bill Clinton visited Africa and lauded the leadership of Isaias and Meles, Americans are being warned against all travel to Eritrea and some regions of Ethiopia. How fragile and fleeting progress can be....

While the border conflict began as a largely political dispute, the deportations represent a massive personalized escalation of the conflict. This is perhaps the most worrisome development for the long-term relationships between the two countries. With some ingenuity, flexibility and the swallowing of some pride (by no means an easy task in these parts), a political solution to the border crisis is eminently attainable. What will not be so easy is erasing the pain, bitter feelings and tension created by the expulsions.

Ethiopians and Eritreans have lived together, have intermingled and intermarried, for centuries. Different colonial experiences and the long liberation struggle not-

² Some of the deportees were born in Ethiopia, but by virtue of one or both of their parents being Eritrean, they are also classified as such, and expelled. There is a distinct irony in this policy as some of the highest leaders in the current Ethiopian government have at least one Eritrean parent. (Ethiopia: The Top 100 People, *Indigo Publications, Isabelle Verdier, 1st Ed., 1997, Paris*).

³ The Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) headed by Mengistu Haile Mariam that succeeded Haile Selassie in 1974. In 1975 it abolished the hereditary monarchy and established a socialist-style administration.

withstanding, there has been remarkably little animosity between the people of the two countries.⁴ That is not to say there are no antagonisms or points of contention. Many Ethiopian nationalists, particularly from the Amhara nobility that lost considerable power and prestige in the aftermath of Haile Sellasie's fall in 1974, remain angry about the separation of Eritrea. Likewise, many Eritreans remain suspicious of Tigrayans, who they say provided intelligence information to the Derg government from within Eritrean towns.⁵ Much of the tension is rooted deeply in historical power struggles beginning hundreds of years ago.

Still, most Ethiopians have proven extremely sympathetic to their departing neighbors. Yonas and Tekle, aged 11 and 13, were deported with their mother, Tirhas, in mid-July. The bus trip north took five days. When they arrived in Adua, Tigray, on the third day, a bitter argument ensued between their mainly Amhara and Oromo military escorts and the Tigrayan local authorities.⁶ The Tigrayan military authorities were insisting that the escorts leave the deportees in their hands, instructing them to return to Addis Ababa. The escorts refused, saying that they had been ordered to accompany the deportees all the way to the border. The argument became vicious and weapons were leveled by the two sets of Ethiopian military officials.

One of the Amhara military escorts happened to be the neighbor of one of the deportees on the bus. He told his departing friend that the Tigrayan authorities wanted them to leave so that they could confiscate the deportees' personal effects. He and his colleagues sympathized with the plight of the deportees, and wanted to ensure, at the very least, their safe passage. Ultimately, the Tigrayan military authorities backed down, and the buses proceeded, two days later, to the border where they crossed by bridge.

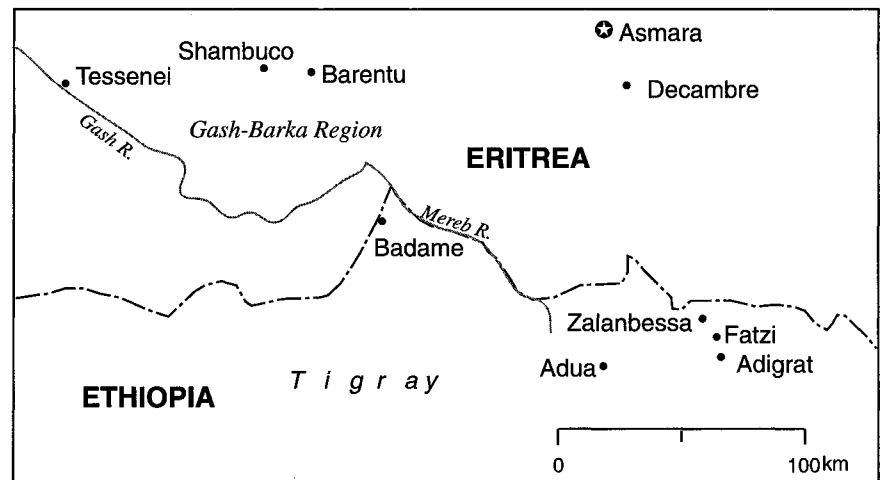
Stories such as these are common. Many of the Ethiopian police and military authorities have treated the deportees with utmost respect and sympathy. Neighbors, friends and colleagues have also reached out, bringing them clothes, food and other essentials while they are in detention awaiting departure. On the road, some deportees reported receiving food and water from strangers. This kindness not-

withstanding, the deportation experience has been a wrenching one, and will not be easily forgotten. Families have been divided, pride bruised, and in some cases, property allegedly confiscated. The deep resentment and anger will be harbored for decades to come.

Saba and Tirhas and her children represent the most visible group of deportees—those coming from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. Many of the Addis Ababa deportees are prominent, wealthy and highly educated people. Tirhas, for example, was a finance manager for a major Addis Ababa company. Others include the recently pensioned general manager from the sugar company, the program director of *Radda Barnen* (Norwegian Save the Children), and the owner of the Nile Construction Company, a \$7 million enterprise. When such prominent citizens are expelled, people take notice. However, there is another category of deportees and displaced, much less visible but equally affected: peasant farmers.

Along the Ethiopian-Eritrean border, thousands of nationals from both countries have been displaced because of the fighting. The Ethiopian government recently claimed that over 200,000 of its citizens had been displaced by the fighting. On the Ethiopian side, Eritrean farmers are being expelled, forced to flee with their families on extremely short notice, often on foot. Many have had to leave their livelihoods—farm tools, livestock and most of their possessions—behind. From August 11-13, I traveled to Gash-Barka Region in Eritrea's western lowlands, where I met some of these farmers.⁷

The capital of the Gash-Barka Region is Barentu, a



⁴ Eritrea was colonized by Italy for 50 years and Britain for 10 years before being federated with, and eventually forcefully annexed by, Ethiopia in 1950. Ethiopia was never colonized, but was briefly occupied by Italy from 1936-41.

⁵ Tigray, a northern province of Ethiopia, borders Eritrea. Many Tigrayans live and work in Eritrea and likewise a considerable number of Eritreans live and work in Tigray.

⁶ The Amhara and Oromo are two of the major ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

⁷ My traveling companions included a physician, an Associated Press photographer, and a student from the University of Asmara.

town of approximately 20,000 people, lying 250 km by road to the west of Asmara. Barentu's main street is a narrow dirt road lined with trees planted during the colonial period. At the entrance to the town small kiosks with clothes and basic foodstuffs dominate the right-hand side of the road, a series of tiny cafes serving sugary tea, coffee and *fool* (a hearty bean dish with chopped egg and vegetables) line the left. Along the road leaving the city center heading west toward Tessenei are the governments' administrative offices, perched symbolically atop a gentle hill.

Sticking to protocol and in need of some direction, we met with Woldemichael Ghebrensaie, the regional director for social services. His office is responsible for overseeing the provision of services to the displaced and deported who have been flowing over the border for the past three months. After we presented our credentials (in the form of a letter from the Ministry of Information approving our research agenda), Woldemichael gave us some basic information and a list of potential sites to visit. Currently, he said, there are 8,000 deportees and 54,000 displaced people residing in the region. Most of these are located in four affected sub-regions bordering Ethiopia: Guluj, Shambuco, Lalagash, and Mulki.

The Eritrean government has been trying to provide shelter and basic necessities (food, health care) for these people, but their sheer numbers are stretching the government's capacities. Already the government has given more than \$3 million in cash payments to the deported and displaced. According to an official at ERREC (Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission), each family is given 1,500 *naqfa* (U.S.\$200) to help them get settled, as well as a food allowance of 65 *naqfa* (U.S.\$9) per person per month for six months. The government and some donors have also provided in-kind materials like blankets and tents.

The humanitarian needs are considerable, but the international community has been relatively slow in responding to this crisis. However, that may soon change as our trek was preceded by two major assessment missions—one from the United Nations OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance) in Geneva and the other by USAID OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance).

After meeting with Woldemichael, we set out for Shambuco, 35 kilometers east of Barentu on the main road to Mendafera. There we met Kidane and Franco, Shambuco's Administrator and Vice Administrator. They provided us with a guide to help locate the deportees in town and a municipal government official to accompany our group. Seven deported families have taken refuge in

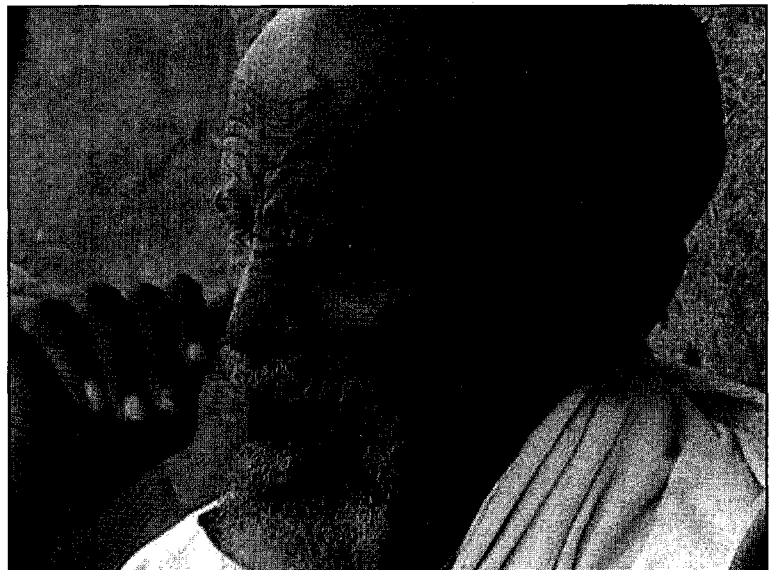
Shambuco, and we met members of four of them.

In Shambuco the deportees were being hosted by local families. As Worku Tesfaye-Mikael, the Commissioner of ERREC, told me when we met the previous week, the Eritrean government is trying to avoid setting up refugee "camps" for the deported and displaced. To whatever extent possible, affected families are being hosted by other families (usually relatives). While this puts considerable strain on the host family and the community's scarce resources, it allows the displaced to feel somewhat "at home," living in a familiar environment during an otherwise traumatic transition period. Such traditional support systems are preferable to tent camps and prevent the formation of a refugee mentality.

This strategy and attitude emerged from the long and hard-fought liberation struggle, when many people were displaced due to Ethiopian air bombardment of Eritrean towns. Now, in an ironic historical twist, the new Ethiopian leaders, who were trained by and fought alongside the EPLF to overthrow that very Ethiopian government, is creating another set of Eritrean "refugees." History sometimes repeats itself in strange ways.

Among those we met in Shambuco was Gebrenguse Habtekere, an elderly man who came with his wife and daughter from their hometown of Bagoweini in Ethiopia. Gebrenguse was born in Eritrea, but had lived in Bagoweini since he was 18 years old. When the border conflict erupted, he recalls, the Ethiopian army arrived with large units of soldiers, tanks and trucks. The military authorities called all the residents together and told them they had to leave within one day.

Because of this abrupt departure, Gebrenguse was forced to leave behind nearly all of his possessions, including ten cows. He had planted maize and other grains, but will have no harvest this year. He says his Ethiopian



Gebrenguse Habtekere



A visitor holding Fiore, the 8-month-old son of Bajou Gereweller, who is sitting in the background

neighbors were also forced to leave Bagoweini, but they fled to other Ethiopian towns.

Two of the other families staying in Shambuco were much larger and both came from Heret village. Aberet Mbaye came with 12 people, including her husband, children and grandchildren. One of her daughters, Bajou Gereweller, sat shyly in the doorway with her eight-month-old son Fiore, as we chatted. Dawit Berhe arrived in Shambuco with his wife and six children. Both Aberet (48 years old) and Dawit (35) were born in Heret, Ethiopia. They have lived in Ethiopia their entire lives and are Ethiopian citizens, but they have Eritrean "blood," an Eritrean identity. When the border conflict broke out, they were forced to leave their lifelong homes to resettle in the land of their ancestors.

The most vocal and fiery of the deportees we met in Shambuco was a woman named Zait Mehare from Dembe Jefecke village, near Badame (one of the key contested towns along the border). Zait said she was put in prison for two weeks and continually asked where she was from. She says the authorities didn't believe her when she told them she lived in the Ethiopian village of Dembe Jefecke. Eventually, they released her and instructed her: "Go to Badame, *your* place;" the *your* was emphasized with disdain. Zait's son is still in prison, and she is clearly embittered by the experience. She had to leave behind three cows and a donkey. If given the opportunity, she says she would go back, "to get her things," but never again to live in Ethiopia.

From Shambuco we headed south on a rocky backroad, twisting down towards the

Mereb River to the villages of Follina and Sifreye Genet. Some 30 tents are scattered along the hillsides of Follina. In areas where the local population can not adequately absorb arrivals, the Eritrean government has provided tents as temporary housing. Deported and displaced farmers have been trickling over the border on foot and wading across the Mereb for the past two months.

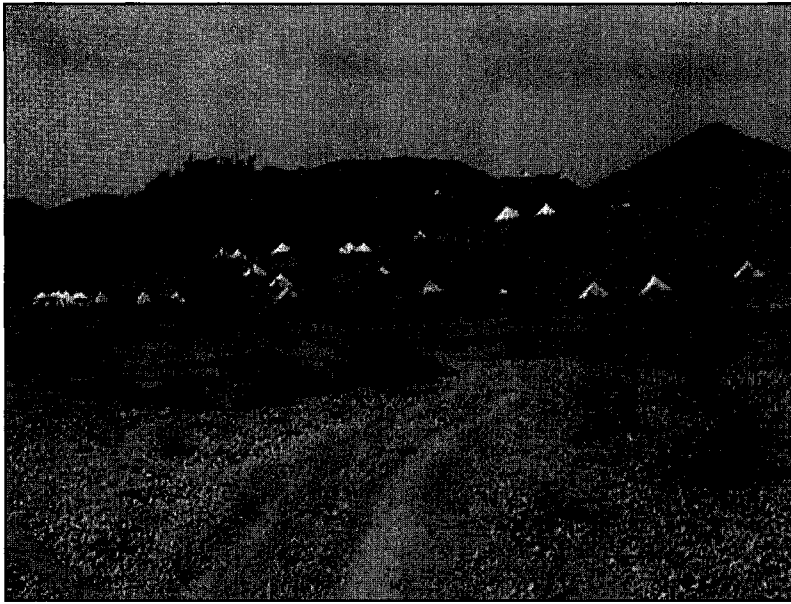
Our group heard similar stories from farmers in these two villages. In Follina, after we interviewed Beyene Belaye and his wife Ngisti Gebrehiwot, our guide from the sub-regional administrative office in Mulki, Habteab Fessehai, was surrounded by men from the tent village. They rifled off a slew of questions and requests, asking for certain services (like health care) and supplies (blankets, cooking utensils, water containers) to supplement what they'd already received. Habteab appeared somewhat overwhelmed at first,

but handled them calmly and with poise. After a half hour of this ad hoc meeting, Habteab turned and asked if we were ready to leave (he needed to be rescued). As we left, Habteab told them he would do what he could. At Sifreye Genet, this scene was repeated, albeit in much abridged form; it was late in the day, and time to head back to Asmara.

The most innocent and vulnerable of the deportees are the children. UNICEF has conducted a series of interviews and surveys, elaborating deportee profiles and determining their conditions and priority needs. A UNICEF report expressed concern for children left behind (when one or both of their parents is deported), some of whom are left with inadequate care. Fifteen per-



Zait Mehare



Tent camp at Sifreye Genet

ported a month earlier and his mother is still in Addis—he came with his uncle. That seemed curious, since most children were deported with one of their parents. I asked him why he came with his uncle, and he said he wanted to come because his peers were tormenting him, yelling “Shabia, Shabia, go away!”⁸ He cried to his mother to let him leave; when his uncle was detained, she agreed to let him go.

Dawit’s face was emotionless as he gave this account; he seemed withdrawn and exhausted, probably in part due to the long journey he’d just completed and the trauma of being uprooted in such a manner. However, when I asked him how he felt about coming to Eritrea, he smiled faintly and said “I’m happy to be here.”

I also spoke with two girls, Harnet Kidane (age 12) and Senait Berhe (10).

Harnet emits toughness; she is a tomboy with thick braids and searing eyes. Senait, by contrast, is soft-spoken, shy, and can’t help but smile and giggle every few seconds.

Senait was born in Addis Ababa and was a fourth grader before being deported with her father. She came to Eritrea once, when she was five years old, to visit her grandparents. She speaks no Tigrinya, the primary Eritrean language, only Amharic. Senait’s father was

cent of the children were left with no caretaker at all.

Asmarom Legesse (retired emeritus professor of anthropology, Swarthmore College), has also collected numerous deportee case studies and written a series of articles published in *Eritrea Profile*, the sole English language newspaper in Eritrea, published weekly by the Ministry of Information. In a piece published in the August 1 edition, Asmarom catalogs the deportees’ human rights that have been violated, including articles 9 and 10 from the Convention on the Rights of the Child: the forcible separation of children from their parents and denial of the right to family reunification.

On the day I visited the Decamhare reception center there were large numbers of children deportees around. Many clung closely to their parents or guardians, others wandered around the campus in small groups. I spoke with three of these children to hear their stories and get their perspectives on what is happening to them.

Dawit Gebremariam is 13 years old and was born in Addis Ababa, where he recently finished the fourth grade. Both of his parents were born in Asmara, but he had never been to Eritrea. This is his first trip.



Dawit Gebremariam

Dawit told me that his father was de-

⁸ *Shabia* is an Arabic word that refers to the EPLF (Eritrean Peoples’ Liberation Front) and *Woyane* is a counterpart term for the TPLF (Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front). In Ethiopia, particularly since the beginning of the border conflict, *Shabia* is spoken with derision to identify the “invading” government of Eritrea and the *Woyane* are the “heroes” repelling Eritrean aggression. In Eritrea, *Shabia* is a word used with pride to describe the heroic revolutionaries who liberated the country and are protecting it from the “expansionist” *Woyane* government in Ethiopia.

born in Asmara, but was working as a driver in Addis Ababa. Her mother is still there, with her two sisters aged 14 and 7. I asked Senait why she was deported; she just shrugged and bowed her head. My translator pushed the issue with her, and she smiled and said "I don't know. I'm only a kid."

Harnet interjected confidently, "I know why. We were sent because there's a fight between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and both of my parents are Eritrean." Harnet was deported with her uncle and one sister. Her father was deported a month earlier, and her mother is still in Addis Ababa with her two brothers and three sisters.

Harnet was detained for three days, Senait for two days, before being deported. Both said they were not treated badly while in custody. As for the trip, Senait said she was afraid and cried often. Harnet, ever tough, says she wasn't afraid, but she was sad to leave her sisters and mom behind, so she cried as well. Their accounts of the bus trip and late night drop-off at the border matched Saba's description of events. They may have both been on buses in her convoy. When asked if they would ever go back to Ethiopia, both replied no. Harnet said she has learned from the experience.

Most observers are baffled, finding it difficult to understand the true objectives of Ethiopia's deportation policy. Clearly it is not merely an effort to root out spies and collaborators. Dawit and Senait hardly qualify as secret agents. Some people contend the deportations are retribution for defeats the Ethiopian military suffered on the battlefield. Others believe they are designed to distract and burden the Eritrean government, forcing them to divert resources and manpower to provide for the new arrivals. Perhaps more alarming is the possibility that the deportations may signal a defensive move in preparation for a prolonged war looming on the horizon.

In the short term, the deportations are increasing tensions in an already sensitive, dangerous conflict situation. Pride means a great deal to both Eritreans and Ethiopians, and the deportations are wounding pride. While the bullets have subsided over the past six weeks, the propaganda war has intensified. Both sides are launching accu-



Senait Berhe and Harnet Kidane

sations of inhumane treatment of their nationals. As the accusations continue, it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate fact from fiction. Misunderstanding and suspicion are becoming more and more pervasive.

The ultimate implications of the deportations and the border conflict generally are not yet known. Certainly the deportees have been deeply scarred by the experience. Hard-working, law-abiding citizens and innocent children have been treated like criminals. Just months ago, many of them were respected, prominent members of the Addis Ababa community. Today they are refugees, homeless and trying to pick up the pieces. The farmers among them lived a fragile subsistence existence before their empty-handed deportation. They will find it even more challenging to rebuild their livelihood.

In a very real sense, the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea and their futures are intimately connected. What harms one ultimately harms the other. The mutual interests of the two countries are inseparable. From continued conflict and war will inevitably emerge losers — people will die, recently rehabilitated infrastructure and new industries will be destroyed and international investment will be repelled. The same is true of the deportations — breaking up families and separating people by ethnicity and nationality can only end negatively. The deportations are a subtle and unwitting form of self-mutilation; they need to stop before the pain becomes further heightened, and their damage enduring. □

Index to ICWA Letters by Marc Michaelson

Entries refer to ICWA Letter (MM-1, etc.) and page, with Letter number given before each page entry

A

Addis Ababa 1.3, 1.4
Adigrat 3.2
Ark of the Covenant 1.6
Asmara 3.2
Aweke, Aster 1.5

B

Badame 3.4, 3.7
Bagoweini 3.6
Barentu 3.6
Bole airport 1.1, 1.3
Bure 3.3

C

coffee ceremony 1.7
culture 1.7

D

Debre Zeyit 1.4
Decamhare 3.2
Dembe Jefecke village 3.7
deportation 3.2
Derg government 3.5
doro wot (stew) 1.7

E

EPLF (Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front) 3.4
Eritrea 3.1
Eritrea Profile 3.8
ERREC (Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission) 3.6
Ethiopian Orthodox Church 1.4
Ethiopian-Eritrean border conflict 3.3
ethnic groups 3.5
Amhara, Oromo 3.5

F

Fatzi 3.2
Fessehai, Habteab 3.7
Follina 3.7

G

Gash-Barka Region 3.6
Ghebretnsae, Woldemichael 3.6

H

Habtekere, Gebrenguse 3.6
Heret village 3.7

I

injera (flat bread made from fermented batter) 1.3
Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) 3.4
Isaias Afwerki 3.4

J

Janmeda 1.6, 3.1

K

khat 1.8
kitfo (ground beef with spiced butter) 1.8
Kombolcha 3.1

L

lakes 1.4
Bishoftu 1.4
Legesse, Asmarom 3.8

M

Mariam, Mengistu Haile 3.4
media 3.3
Mehare, Zait 3.7
Mekelle 3.1
Menelik 1.6
Mereb River 3.7
Mulki 3.7

O

OAU (Organization for African Unity) 3.4

P

pickpockets 1.7
police 1.7

Q

Qaddafi, Muamar 3.4

R

religion 1.4

S

Shambuco 3.6
Sheba 1.6
Sifreye Genet 3.7
Solomon 1.6

T

tabot (holy slab) 1.6
tala (barley beer) 1.8
tej (honey wine) 1.8
Teskaye-Mikael, Worku 3.6
the Derg 3.4
tibs (sautéed meat) 1.4
Tigray region 3.2
Tigrinya 3.8
Timket, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's celebration 1.6
TPLF (Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front) 3.4
tradition 1.8
transportation 1.4

U

UNICEF 3.7
United Nations OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance) 3.6
USAID OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance) 3.6

W

White Horse Whiskey 1.8

Z

Zalanbessa 3.2, 3.4
Zenawi, Meles 3.4

Institute Fellows and their Activities

Adam Smith Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University.

[EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Shelly Renae Browning. A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

[SOUTH ASIA]

Chenoa Egawa. An enrolled member of the Lummi Indian Nation, Chenoa is spending two years living among mesoAmerican Indians, studying successful and not-so-successful cooperative organizations designed to help the Indians market their manufactures, agricultural products and crafts without relying on middlemen. A former trade specialist for the American Indian Trade and Development Council of the Pacific Northwest, Chenoa's B.A. is in International Business and Spanish from the University of Washington in Seattle.

[THE AMERICAS]

Paige Evans. A playwright and former Literary Manager of the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York City, Paige is looking at Cuba through the lens of its performing arts. With a History/Literature B.A. from Harvard, she has served as counselor at the Buckhorn Children's Center in Buckhorn, Kentucky (1983-84), as Arts Editor of the International Courier in Rome, Italy (1985-86), and as an adjunct professor teaching a course in Contemporary American Playwrights at New York University. She joined the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1990.

[THE AMERICAS]

Whitney Mason. A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called *The Siberian Review* in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the *Vladivostok News* and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

[EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Marc Michaelson. A program manager for Save the Children in The Gambia, Marc has moved across Africa to the Horn, there to assess nation-building in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and (conditions permitting) availing and unavailing humanitarian efforts in northern Somalia and southern Sudan. With a B.A. in political science from Tufts, a year of non-degree study at the London School of Economics and a Master's in International Peace Studies from Notre Dame, he describes his post-graduate years as "seven years' experience in international development programming and peace research."

[sub-SAHARA]

Jean Benoît Nadeau. A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization."

[EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Susan Sterner. A staff photographer for the Associated Press in Los Angeles, Susan received her B.A. in International Studies and Cultural Anthropology at Emory University and a Master's in Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt. AP gave her a wide-ranging beat, with assignments in Haiti, Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexican border; in 1998 she was a co-nominee for a Pulitzer Prize for a series on child labor. Her fellowship topic: the lives and status of Brazilian women.

[THE AMERICAS]

Tyrone Turner. A photojournalist (Black Star) whose work has appeared in many U.S. newspapers and magazines, Tyrone holds a Master's degree in Government and Latin American politics from Georgetown University and has produced international photo-essays on such topics as Rwandan genocide and mining in Indonesia (the latter nominated for a Pulitzer). As an ICWA Fellow he is writing and photographing Brazilian youth and their lives in rural and urban settings.

[THE AMERICAS]

Daniel B. Wright. A sinologist with a Master's Degree in International Relations from the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University, Dan's fellowship immerses him in southwest China's Guizhou Province, where he, his journalist-wife Shou Guowei, and their two children (Margaret and Jon) will base themselves for two years in the city of Duyun. Previously a specialist on Asian and Chinese affairs for the Washington consulting firm of Andreae, Vick & Associates, Dan also studied Chinese literature at Beijing University and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary of Pasadena, California.

[EAST ASIA]

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