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## The Struggling State

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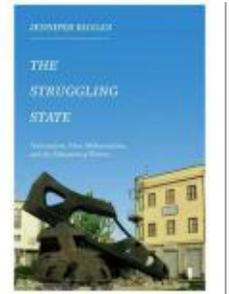
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## The Teacher State

### *Morality and Everyday Sovereignty over Schools*

#### A Tale of Two Walls

The Junior Secondary School compound was surrounded on three sides by a wall topped with broken glass and by the Red Sea on the other. This was a relatively small compound, and most of the school and students were within eyesight of a teacher, guard, or administrator at all times. Yet the wall had not been doing a particularly good job of keeping students in place. Large numbers of students had been drifting in late or fleeing from the school compound during the day. Students in the Junior Secondary School were supposed to not only remain in the school during school hours but also have their time and behavior regulated. In early November 2004, teachers could no longer stand the lack of control they had over students. For a week, they warned students that they would lock the school gate promptly at 7:20 and that any latecomers would not be allowed in. On the appointed day and time, the school gate was locked, preventing approximately forty students from entering. The students who were locked out were in an uproar. They began yelling and banging on the gate. Some threw rocks at the school. Determined not to let them in but knowing he could not allow this disturbance to continue, the school director called the police. When the police arrived, the students dispersed, but a handful were arrested and spent up to two nights in jail.

While the director and teachers of the Junior Secondary School were

barring its gates against latecomers and calling on the police to help defend the school walls, down the road, the Senior Secondary School was having its own struggles over walls. This school's compound was not enclosed, a situation that had become a source of great frustration for teachers. It was a large compound containing two football fields, a basketball court, and several unused buildings. The school could not afford to enclose the compound with the type of concrete wall that surrounded most Eritrean schools, so students and others could move freely in and out. Teachers constantly complained that because of the lack of enclosure, they could not enforce rules about arriving on time or attending classes. Students often cut class or disrupted other classes. The school director came up with a possible solution: Used shipping containers were donated to the Senior Secondary School and set up to enclose the compound. However, teachers quickly realized that they did not solve the problem. The makeshift walls were easy to climb, students could slip through gaps between the containers, and the compound's large size made it impossible to police. The walls were porous.

Both scenarios reflect teachers' preoccupation with containment and enclosure and with having the power to determine who belonged inside and outside. In the former case, teachers' preoccupation with containment was so powerful that it led teachers, who were themselves subject to state coercion and the arbitrary use of force by the state, to subject their students to a similar type of arbitrary force. This action, while clearly relying on the force of law (the police), was extra-legal and, therefore, a good example of Giorgio Agamben's (2005) notion of the state of exception. In the latter case, teachers' preoccupation with containment led them to extreme, but ultimately futile, ingenuity. Both cases were responses to teachers' decisions that it was time to retake control of their schools.

This preoccupation with enclosing school compounds was reflective of the logics of encampment. The camp, according to Agamben (1998), is a political space that is contained for the purposes of disciplining individuals and managing populations (see also Gupta 2012). The entire country of Eritrea functions according to these camplike logics, contained—its borders sealed—to biopolitically produce a mass of soldier citizens.<sup>1</sup> Camps are a particular manifestation of sovereign control over population and territory that is demarcated by a space of exception, in which the full force of the law exists under conditions in which there is no law (Agamben 2005). Indeed, Eritrean citizens enclosed within the country had few rights guaranteed by law at the time of my fieldwork.<sup>2</sup>

Within the larger national camp were a series of smaller camps—for example, the military camps that dappled the entire country. Furthermore,

the prohibitions on moving freely throughout the country meant that each town often felt very camplike. Like military camps and the nationwide camp, school spaces were enclosed for the purpose of discipline, but discipline to a very different end—to produce educated citizens. One of the logics of many types of camps, including schools, is that force can be used against those within the camp with impunity. Building on Carl Schmitt ([1922] 2005), Agamben (1998: 173) notes, “The camp is the space of this absolute impossibility of deciding between fact and law, rule and application, exception and rule, which nevertheless incessantly decides between them,” and yet someone has to make these impossible, incessant decisions—the one who “decides on the exception” is the sovereign. Within the space of Eritrean schools, teachers decided on these exceptions and were sovereign over school space and student bodies.

Many scholars have begun to reexamine sovereignty from an actor-centered perspective, arguing that the conventional definitions of sovereignty need to be expanded to look at the work of particular agents in producing sovereignty in a variety of specific locales (Chalfin 2010; Gupta 2012; Herzfeld 1997). Conventionally, sovereignty references the state’s right to exert control over its territory and population. It demarcates a nation-state as a distinct entity and sets the terms for its interactions with other nation-states. Sovereignty allocates the right to delineate borders and to control what happens to populations residing within those borders. But, as with other functions of the state, sovereignty is performed in everyday encounters between subjects and citizens. One omission in Agamben’s analysis of devolved sovereignty is that it does not allow for an examination of the agency of actors to whom sovereignty devolves.<sup>3</sup> His work falls short of explaining how and why everyday sovereigns enact sovereignty the way they do. As Caroline Humphrey (2007: 433) notes, Schmitt and Agamben’s notion of sovereignty “fails to take account of what the ordinary participants bring to the equation. Their everyday life ‘throws in’ its own exigencies and excitements. These burst beyond the confines of the notion of sovereignty and qualify it by responding to a different logic.”

Exploring teachers as sovereign over school space and student bodies complicates Agamben’s framework of devolved sovereignty, because teachers bring their own morality, beliefs, and experiences to bear on their decisions about how schools should run. In seeking to contain and discipline students, teachers tried to transform students into their ideal of educated citizens.<sup>4</sup> Their decisions to use coercion, violence, and force, while not quite the same as those of other state actors, may illuminate and help us understand the confluence of prejudices, stereotypes, ideologies, and beliefs

that frames decisions to use violence and force among other types of state actors, such as police, military personnel, and bureaucrats. My exploration of teacher sovereignty shows that debates over what it meant to make moral subjects and how to produce such subjects were central to their processes of deciding on the exception—or, in other words, deciding on the appropriate use of force. Building a makeshift wall, locking students out, and calling the police on students were extreme actions that teachers viewed as necessary because they believed that schools were facing a moral crisis that they had little support from the Ministry of Education and parents in resolving. The preoccupation with walls reflected anxieties about their loss of sovereignty at a time of moral crisis. At times, it appeared that teachers believed that their efforts were all that prevented society from falling apart.

In their efforts to claim sovereignty over school spaces and student bodies, teachers were the state, but their *being* the state was shaped by the intersection of how they *saw* or imagined the state (often as inept and at other times as punishing), *saw like* the state (or imagined order, civilization, progress, and their role in bringing it about), and *were seen as* the state (or, in other words, were imagined to be the state by students and parents). The fact that teachers acted *as* the state but not *for* the state raises questions about the locus of the state, even, or perhaps especially, in a place like Eritrea, where the state is thought of as centralized and all-powerful but often operates on the basis of personal decisions by state actors themselves. When acting as the state, teachers responded not only to their own sense of morality—a morality deeply wrapped up with their sense of duty to build a better nation and the ideals of discipline, obedience, and authority—but also to their sense of being abandoned by the state. Additionally, their being the state was in constant tension with parent and student imaginaries of what the state should be.

Much of this book has focused on how teachers were coerced by other state actors, policies, and processes. As a result, teachers behaved evasively along with students and thus were complicit in producing the disorder that they found so problematic. Teachers also attempted to reorder the school in the face of disorder and felt a moral imperative to do so. This chapter specifically sheds light on how and why teachers chose to use coercion, force, and violence when acting as the state. One of my key emphases here is that teacher debates over what constituted this moral imperative were built on clashing notions about obedience and authority over young people. The first half of this chapter shows how the preoccupation with containing school space reflected that moral imperative. Walls not only served to protect and defend sovereign space—in this case, sovereign school space—but

also enabled processes of categorization and sorting. Walls also demarcated spaces in which teachers had authority and could set the rules, define appropriate behavior, manage their students and classes as they saw fit, and, if need be, punish. But despite the fact that within this enclosed space of the school teachers acted with impunity, they still responded to moral logics—logics that often varied among teachers and required debating and negotiating what it meant to produce educated citizens. With this in mind, the latter half of the chapter turns to a discussion of corporal punishment, where these debates became particularly pointed, to show how competing notions of punishment, obedience, and authority were contested among teachers. As teachers debated what was “good” for students, they attempted to act on an ethos of care, but some students and parents experienced what teachers took to be forms of caring as arbitrary acts of violence. The intermingling of—and ambiguity between—caring and violence is not only reflective of a state of exception where no clear laws or policies govern the use of force but also manifests the maddening state in which the benevolent state is inextricable from the malevolent one.

### The Work of Walls: Controlled Spaces

There were several interrelated components of the work of walls. Walls enabled *control* by creating spaces that could be contained and enforced. Walls created clear divisions between and around spaces, which was essential because space indexed and defined morality, discerning good from bad spaces and people. Walls were also tightly linked to notions of sorting. Below, I talk about each of these components of the work of walls: control, morality, and sorting.

In the quotation below, Teacher Woldemikael reminisces about his own schooling and the value placed on a well-contained, well-controlled school:

[My high school] in Addis [Ababa] was very nice compared to this one. . . . [T]here was a lot of staff. There is the director, unit leaders, typists, secretaries, storekeepers, guards, many people. The school was *well fenced* with good classrooms. Many classrooms. It was *guarded*. *A guard by himself has great authority. He has the power to let you in and out. He can even punish you.* He had that power even. If you are beaten by a guard, you will not say anything. *Unit leaders are highly respected. You will not stay in front of them.* He controls the students . . . the whole students. We have two campuses in our school, and he could control the whole campus. *We had three [unit*

*leaders]. They were all very respected. If you see him in the street, you will run away. Run away!* If they see classes not occupied by teachers, they will do something. (Interview, Woldemikael; emphasis added)

A “nice” school, according to Woldemikael, was a school that had resources devoted to keeping students in and making sure that they behaved respectfully while inside. There was not only a fence but also a whole range of school personnel situated as authority figures. Even the guard, typically a powerful but uneducated and, therefore, lower-status school employee, had the power to make determinations of who could get in and who could not, thereby regulating and determining who was and was not worthy of being inside school space. Students knew that it was their role to obediently accept and respect this wide array of authority figures. As we can see from Woldemikael’s description of his own “nice” school, the notion of a contained (fenced and guarded) school is closely linked with notions of control, respect/fear, and punishment, which are, at one level, prevalent in all forms of modern schooling but are also culturally specific principles in Eritrea.

The management of space was thought to be central to maintaining control. Properly managed spaces, such as those described above, were thought to enable control and thus were key to socializing students properly. Teachers idealized the concept of “control,” which referred to specific practices of managing and regulating students. “Control” referred to a process of making expectations about behaviors and norms clear and finding persuasive ways to hold people accountable to those expectations. One teacher defined control as denoted by the pairing of “expectations” and “inspections”—or, in other words, clear rules and policies and a means to monitor and hold students accountable for these expectations. In Tigrinya, the concept of “control” links two interrelated words, both of which translate into “control” in English—*m’kutsitsar* and *m’elay*. *M’elay* means “to manage” or “to guide” and has the more positive connotation of guiding a flock of sheep. Thus *m’elay* tends to refer to the positive, “guiding” work, such as the gentle regulation and management of school space, students, and classrooms. It would be considered ideal practice under “normal” conditions. *M’kutsitsar*, on the other hand, literally means to check up on, thus addressing a more assertive form of control, as one research subject told me. The meaning embedded in *m’kutsitsar* assumes that something is going wrong, or will go wrong, that needs to be corrected through “controlling” activities. *M’kutsitsar* as a more active form of control refers to actions that must be taken when there is a problem to correct or to prevent a problem from arising. Taken together, the two forms of control refer to practices of good management. Teachers

suggested that, just as students needed to be controlled to behave appropriately and therefore learn, teachers themselves also needed to be controlled by the administration. Through talking about the ways in which schools and teachers ought to be controlled, teachers constructed a set of ideals of how schools should function through clear and consistent hierarchies and systems of accountability. Walls were key to making this happen.

In contrast to Woldemikael's idealization of the resources devoted to containment in his own childhood, below Iyasu describes the problems caused by the lack of a wall in the Senior Secondary School. The lack of a wall indicated that the school was not attractive or controlled. He complains about the lack of a wall in the quotation below and explains what it indicates about the school:

Still, the school doesn't have any wall around the compound, and the number of students coming from rural areas . . . is increasing. So we cannot treat those students with the experience we have or with that infrastructure of the school. Our canteen, if you observe, should be good, and there should be some kind of gates that can keep the students in the compound, and actually we are lucky in that aspect. We have a lot of space, but we should rearrange these things and motivate the students to use this compound. Making the school compound more attractive would motivate the students to not go outside. My belief is that this will help the good environment. Then I believe that no one would be motivated to go outside. (Interview, Iyasu)

Iyasu linked motivating students with having an attractive space as well as having a "gate," better "infrastructure," and a contained compound. Interestingly, he also suggested that these provisions were particularly necessary in light of the increased number of students "from the rural areas," which was a reference to the Afar students in the schools. As I discuss in more detail below, Afar/rural students were thought of as less socialized in the ways of schooling and particularly in need of controlled space. As Iyasu suggested, many teachers believed that, due to the large number of students "from the rural areas," containment and a positive school space were essential to control them because teachers did not have the experience to "treat" or teach them. Similarly, at the time of my fieldwork, in light of the lack of "bright future" for the students, teachers generally thought that self-discipline was on the decline and that external discipline was necessary. Walls, thus, were thought to be essential not just to keep students in the

school but to regulate external influences. One component of the work of walls thus was to create not only a controlled and controllable space but also a nice, motivating space, a civilizing space of sorts. Teachers' attitudes about space and order here were reminiscent of James Scott's (1998) discussions of the production of orderly spaces as one component of what he calls high modernist ideology and "seeing like a state." Similar to the state-planned cities and villages that Scott (1998) discusses, teachers derived their understandings of space, order, and control from ideological assumptions of what constituted modernity. Space for teachers was also a means to index and define morality; "good" people were in "good" spaces, or in spaces where they belonged. To do their work, schools needed to both be "good" spaces and keep students in, protecting them from bad influences, so that they would become "good" people.

### *Good and Bad Places: Moralizing Space and Spatializing Morality*

Space was deeply moral and moralizing, as I describe below. Morality, as it is understood in Eritrea, is not so much about moral lessons, language, or content but is embodied in practice (Mahmood 2005; Zigon 2008). Resonating with Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron's (1990) notion of habitus and Michel De Certeau's (1984) conceptualization of the "practice of everyday life," Jarrett Zigon (2008) depicts morality as "embodied dispositions" (see also Bourdieu 1977). One's morality is apparent through the way one behaves rather than through one's beliefs. One is moral because one acts in the right way. Teachers envisioned moral students as embodying discipline, diligence, and hard work, but moral students also knew how to maintain a particular set of relations with authority and understood how to engage in everyday performances that indicated respect. These performances required knowing where to be and not to be and how to act in particular places and, thus, were highly spatial.

Teachers' moral coding of space and the morally transformative power they ascribed to certain spaces resonated with Mary Douglas's ([1966] 1984) notions of purity and impurity. Anxieties about purity often emerge at times of categorical indistinctness—for example, during the liminal phase, which, as I illustrated in the previous chapter, had become an endless condition in Eritrea. Morality is also incarnated through notions of cleanliness that are equated with order and care versus uncleanness that is equated with disorder and chaos. The profound moral distinctions between states of purity/cleanliness and impurity/disorder index a much broader array of concepts (Douglas [1966] 1984). For example, as Douglas notes, that which is clean

or pure often comes to represent hope, development, civilization, and progress. According to Eritrean teachers, “good” spaces for students were ordered spaces that were well cared for and controlled, as I noted above. In contrast, “bad” spaces were spaces where disorder reigned and where no one was “controlling” students. The space of the school was supposed to be not only ordered and clean but also emblematic of progress. In contrast, in other spaces, students were not monitored and “good things” were not taught to them.

Teachers’ imagined geography of the town of Assab illuminates these categories of moral and immoral spaces and makes clear which categories of people were allowed to be in certain spaces. Through this imagined geography, teachers effectively articulated a sense that there were clear, student-free zones. Morality was articulated through the ascription of value to particular spaces, but this was only one valence of the imagined morality of space. Space was also thought to have the capacity to *make* people moral or immoral largely because certain spaces were more controlled. Teachers’ memories of their own schooling or their earlier years of teaching more often than not provided an outline of their moral imaginary of school space. These accounts, in most cases, tended to create a somewhat idealized portrait of a time when schools were better controlled and students were acting like students.<sup>5</sup>

Teacher B’ruk, who grew up in Assab, depicts this imagined geography of moral and immoral spaces and explains the implications of students finding themselves in the “wrong” space in response to my asking during an interview about the school he attended:

When I was grade 9, we were very disciplined. Up to grade 11 and 12, I would not enter into any tea room that had a teacher in it. Especially in Campo Sudan or Assab Kebir. No student would go to that area. Because of the bars and tea rooms, that area was a bad area. No lady was wandering around that area. So you would never see a student either. The teacher didn’t do anything if he saw a student, but the student would feel bad. At that time, not only my mother controlled me, but the place, the society controlled me. But now it’s different. Then, I didn’t observe students going to [tea shops] in Seghir or anything. Then, no one would sell students tea, because they knew. But now, they sell them tea. (Interview, B’ruk)

B’ruk equated discipline with avoiding certain spaces, thus drawing a clear line between a moral imaginary of a disciplined student and a division of

public space. The disciplined students would not find themselves in a public space with their teacher. Furthermore, B'ruk articulated an imagined geography of the town of Assab, distinguishing its “bad” areas. These bad areas, Campo Sudan and Assab Kebir, are neighborhoods in Assab noted for having many bars and tea rooms. Although many students lived in these areas, they had a bad reputation because sailors and truck drivers frequented them when Assab still functioned as Ethiopia's main port; they had a reputation as places where people drank too much, got into fights, and could find prostitutes. Magnus Treiber's (2010) comparison of good and bad bars in the capital city, Asmara, and the different social groups attracted to these bars reflects a similarly imagined spatial geography. According to Treiber (2010: 11), so-called clean bars are typically recently renovated, more expensive, and places where people go to socialize rather than to drink heavily. Clean, therefore, is often equated with civilized, tempered behavior and modernity. In contrast, “bad” bars are not renovated and, like Assab's bars in Campo Sudan and Assab Kebir, are reputed to be dangerous, dark, and in a state of disrepair.

B'ruk also noted in his response to me how this separation of spaces was maintained. It was not teachers who upheld this moral ordering of space. Indeed, he went out of his way to note that a teacher “wouldn't do anything” if he saw a student. Rather, a student behaving improperly would have an internalized sense of shame for entering the same space as a respected adult. Similarly, other teachers commented that if students saw an authority figure, like a teacher, while outside in a public space, they would be “afraid” and would “run away.” In Tigrinya, the notion of fear is often linked with shyness or embarrassment and is a characteristic that is often valued, particularly for those that are supposed to be subservient, such as students. Students should be appropriately fearful, or shy, when they encounter teachers in public spaces. Fear not only indicates respect and deference for authorities when a student encounters them in unexpected spaces but is also produced through notions of authority based on maintaining hierarchies and distinctions between student and nonstudent spaces. Another key point that B'ruk made was that a properly functioning society would help keep students “in their place” by not selling things to them when they were out of place (i.e., not in school). B'ruk lamented that shop owners sold students tea, which he saw as a violation of the separation of spaces and an indication that society was not helping students understand where and what their place was.

This same moralization of space applied to teachers as well. Some teachers described their own moral transformation when they became teachers. This transformation involved not only changing behaviors but also, more

importantly, choosing to occupy only certain spaces that were regarded as morally appropriate for a teacher. Woldemikael noted that when he became a teacher, he could no longer “go everywhere.” Because he had to be respected as a teacher, he had to limit the kinds of places that he frequented. Instead of going to smaller bars in some of the seedier areas of town, he went to the “big hotels,” which were thought to be more respectable and were places where he was not likely to run into his students. Woldemikael also noted that as a teacher, he had to start spending more time at home as well. Home, of course, is the most moral space of all. Students are supposed to spend most of their time in the home engaged in the moral activities of reading and working. Woldemikael had become “like a student,” mostly staying home and engaging in these activities.

Schools not only were coded as good, moral spaces where “good” students could be found but were also thought to have a moralizing influence. As Iyasu notes:

The longer you stay there [in the school], the longer you learn something from the school. You meet with your fellow students and with your teacher. You might ask him something and you look at the walls and you might see the [educational] pictures on the walls. . . . If you stay in the school, you learn something. If you stay out of the school, you learn something different, especially staying in the bars. What do you do when you see a student sitting in a bar with a bottle of beer? You don't feel good. So if you make the school attractive, you can keep students in the school longer, and they can learn more academic things. They learn a lot from the society. But if the students stay in the school, they learn more academic things. (Interview, Iyasu)

The school compound was filled with positive educational and social influences, so it would motivate the students to become the type of moral person that teachers sought to create.

Despite the fact that teachers idealized certain spaces as appropriate for students and other spaces as inappropriate, the behaviors of those who inhabited them were inevitably blurred and, in reality, always had been. For example, while teachers may have categorized certain kinds of recreational spaces as “good” and “bad,” there was no shortage of teachers recreating in “bad” bars, particularly given that a teacher's salary seldom allowed them to frequent the more expensive, modern “hotels.” Additionally, the perceived clear-cut distinction between good and bad spaces shifted over time as eco-

conomic realities changed. Campo Sudan, once thought to be the roughest neighborhood in Assab, especially at night, was far less raucous once the war began and the port and truck route to Ethiopia closed. At the same time, the clean, “good” bars and more upscale hotels fell into some disrepair as the economy, and their businesses, floundered.

Similarly, teachers often encountered students in spaces where they “should not be.” Ideally, if this were to happen, students would show some sort of “fear,” manifested through the type of shame or embarrassment that Woldemikael mentioned above or by running away and avoiding meeting their teacher in a public space, as many teachers noted was the correct reaction. In blurred spaces, according to teachers, students should respond with proper deference, respect, and fear to maintain the appropriate moral stance between teacher and student. Teachers noted that when students did not “fear” teachers, they could not know right from wrong, and they lamented that students did not seem to have fear anymore. As Woldemikael notes:

I mean, there is no one to be afraid of. I mean, afraid of, I mean it in a positive sense meaning respecting . . . a deep respect. The fear that comes out of deep respect, not to be shocked of someone, to be frightened of someone. That deep respect is not there. (Interview, Woldemikael; emphasis added)

The lack of fear was a by-product of the blurring of the boundaries between spaces where students should and should not be. Many teachers made comments suggesting that students feared less because they were less controlled.

### *Spoiled Students and Polluting Influences*

Teachers’ worries about the moral and moralizing properties of “good” and “bad” spaces were reflected in their anxieties about a variety of polluting influences that they believed to be making students “less moral.” Teachers often talked about the students and the “teaching-learning process” becoming “spoiled.” When I asked what was causing this “spoiling,” teachers described a variety of what we might think of as “polluting” influences. Interestingly, the elements that were thought of as “spoiling” the students were typically regarded as foreign, outside influences because they were unfamiliar to the teachers. Although these attributes of “foreignness” varied depending on which teacher was characterizing it, definitions of what is foreign, in general, differentiate between what or who belongs on the inside and what or who is an outsider. As such, these distinctions can be seen as a

means to code who, or what kind of person, belongs to the nation and the community of educated nationals.

For younger teachers who had spent little or no time outside the Eritrean highlands, the entire city of Assab was foreign due to its proximity with Ethiopia and the fact that historically it had had a large number of Ethiopians residing in the town. These younger teachers, who were relative newcomers to Assab, often suggested that Assab's students had picked up bad habits or a sort of bad "culture" from the Ethiopians that made them "not like the highlands," as one teacher told me when I asked for his explanation of the behavioral difficulties in schools.<sup>6</sup> Teachers who had lived in Assab for a longer period of time did not talk about Assab as being corrupted by Ethiopian influences but rather seemed to celebrate its hybridity and cultural diversity (Riggan 2011).

Other teachers blamed what they perceived to be a condition of moral decline on the number of Afar students, many of whom came from rural desert areas. Afar students, most of whom came from remote parts of the South Red Sea region, historically had little access to schooling, something that the Eritrean government had been trying to rectify since independence. Larger numbers of Afar students began attending schools in Assab in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the government expanded access to elementary and Junior Secondary Schools in the South Red Sea region. Despite the fact that Afar students were by no means the only ones who were misbehaving, many teachers attributed the shift in student behavior to Afar students attending in larger numbers. Teachers, the vast majority of whom were from the majority Tigrinya ethnic group and most of whom were raised or lived for many years in cities, tended to have a civilizational prejudice toward the Afar and regarded them as somewhat "backward," largely because they were more rural. Additionally, some teachers, who, with some very notable exceptions, tended to have a fairly cursory knowledge of Afar culture, often took cultural differences as evidence that the Afar did not care about education.<sup>7</sup> They often talked about the amount of money the government was spending on education in the rural areas and spoke of the Afar students as if they were ungrateful for what the government was doing for them. Furthermore, as I discuss in more detail below, teachers suggested that the Afar notions of respect and authority were quite different from those of the Tigrinya people. Tigrinya notions of respect tended to be hierarchical, and strict codes of behavior proscribed how children should behave in the presence of adults. Indeed, both the overall norms for classroom behavior (that students should be silent, obedient, and respectful) and the beliefs about how students should behave in spaces where adults were

present derived from patterns of child-rearing and beliefs about childhood prevalent in Tigrinya culture. Tigrinya teachers who had worked in Afar areas often commented warily that Afar families were “very democratic” with regard to child-rearing and that “even the smallest child could speak” in a gathering of adults. Additionally, teachers noted that Afar families did not practice corporal punishment, implying that this made it difficult to ensure that children would respect adults. B’ruk’s reference above to students going to “tea shops in Assab Seghir,” an Afar area, was an indirect complaint about what teachers interpreted as permissiveness in Afar culture, in which students could go where they wanted and act like adults. Teachers believed that the proximity of this very different culture was affecting their ability to control students. Their response was to contain students in the school so that teachers could free them from other influences.

Students having money was also referenced as a corrupting influence. Money and the desire/necessity to earn money took students into the world outside the school, with its plethora of potentially bad influences. Many teachers attributed blurred social spaces to conditions of economic decline, which, for example, led tea shop owners to sell tea to students rather than send them back to school where they belonged. At one level, working students were seen in pragmatic terms. The fact that students needed to work meant that they did not have enough time to focus on their studies. However, students’ work was also seen as locating them in nonstudent spaces and exposing them to influences that were inappropriate. Working students, some of whom were employed as taxi drivers or in bars, had access to money, which gave them the capacity to engage in such practices as smoking and drinking. Teachers thought of students who worked as blurring the boundaries between student and adult spaces and behaviors. These students could engage with adults who might not know that they were students and therefore in need of protection from negative influences. Having access to adult spaces and participating in adult activities, such as smoking and drinking, would make these students see themselves as adults and would make it more difficult for teachers to command their respect and obedience in the classroom. Although teachers acknowledged that students had to work to support their families, there was a perception that once a student began to earn money, he or she would no longer see the value of being a student. Finally, another less common explanation for students’ out-of-control behavior was their increased level of exposure to Western media. Several teachers suggested to me that the problem with students was that they listened to too much Western music and watched too many Western movies, which depicted students in America as being disrespectful toward their teachers.

Although teachers had a variety of perceptions of what was “spoiling” students and education, all spoke to fears of what was foreign, different, or potentially uncontrollable. Significantly, all of these polluting influences also blurred teachers’ normative sense of the distinction between the categories of child/student and adult/teacher. Cultural patterns that were thought to derive from “Ethiopian” or from “Afar” culture were depicted by teachers as problematic because they pushed students to behave in a more egalitarian way with their teachers, challenging hierarchical notions of authority. Students’ needing to work also put them in the world of adults, further blurring these lines. Additionally, each of these foreign influences in some way made it difficult for teachers to distinguish a student from a nonstudent and, in turn, made it difficult to know how to treat students. It is also important to recall that the merging of military training and education put into place by the 2003 policies, which I discussed in previous chapters, fundamentally blurred the distinctions between the roles of teacher and student. This profound blurring of categories provided the backdrop against which teachers’ concerns about and interpretations of other forms of category blurring were conceptualized. Concerns about blurred roles led to deep moral anxieties about their ultimate inability to categorize in the face of these broader political and policy changes.

### *Sorting Small from Large*

Sorting and categorizing are key functions of the camp. Camplike enclosures enable and require sorting. Walls themselves sort by differentiating between students and nonstudents, keeping one group out and another group in. At the same time, within the enclosure, student life was ordered in very specific ways. I now turn to a fuller discussion of teachers’ efforts to sort and contain as a manifestation of teacher sovereignty that responded to these particular concerns about moral blurriness and the capacity of schools to contain and maintain categories.

When teachers in the Junior Secondary School locked out students, they were effectively giving them a choice to respect the rules of school space and time or to face consequences—to act like a student by coming to school on time or to fail to act like a student and be locked out. The walls effectively categorized those who were “acting like students” and “not acting like students.”

Ultimately, the “nonstudents” were locked out. They were regarded as a polluting influence and abandoned by teachers. Beyond the school wall, these nonstudents were relegated to the much more violent forms of sover-

eignty enacted by the police or military commanders. Young people who were not students in Eritrea would eventually be rounded up and forced to join the ranks of those in National Service or, if they chose not to, would have to find a way to evade service by escaping the country or living as a fugitive within the country. Any of these outcomes—service, escape, or the fugitive life—effectively relegated these nonstudents to a condition that Agamben (2005) calls “bare life,” or life that is abandoned by and inconsequential to the state, rather than life that is cultivated, nurtured, and protected. Within the school walls, teachers made their best effort to help students who were “acting like students” to do well to avoid the fate that would befall those who were outside the wall. Teachers cultivated those who acted like students. However, in light of the 2003 policy changes, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between who was and was not a “real” student, in part because students and nonstudents alike all wound up the same place—Sawa—and in part because many young people who were seeking to evade service were using school as a means to do so. This made it difficult for teachers to do this work of cultivation and caring. Locking the school gate was one attempt to clarify these distinctions. The intensive process of sorting students within the school that occurred a few days earlier was another.

Within a few days of the “lockout” of late students, grade 8 teachers gathered the entire grade, approximately two hundred students, in the large field in front of the flagpole in the center of the school compound. They lined the students up and walked among them, sorting them by size and “character.” Children who were either physically small or known by the teachers to be age-appropriate for their grade were placed in one group and asked to stand on one side of the field. Students who were known to the teachers or by reputation to be “repeaters and disturbers” or who simply appeared to be physically big or old were put in another group. Two groups were created for students who were somewhere in the middle. The sorting was very public, and teachers openly negotiated with each other about which group students were to be put in. At first they had too many students in the “repeaters and disturbers” group and had to place some of them in one of the in-between groups.

Teachers were sorting students into new sections based on age and reputation for behavior. This sorting, along with the lockout, was a strategy to regain control over the school. Teachers had decided that the overly large number of older, disruptive students made it impossible for them to control their classes and that sorting students into different sections by age, number of years repeated, and level of “disturbance” they caused would improve

the situation. Students in one section, 8A, were seen as the innocents who could do no wrong; if they misbehaved in class, the act was usually just seen as youthful exuberance rather than deviance. One section was created for students who were known to have repeated grades multiple times and had reputations for causing trouble. Indeed their section, 8D, became known as the “disturber section.” The other sections were somewhat ambivalent and created for students in the middle. The teachers’ approach to sorting was, effectively, to isolate the big from the small, the innocent from the poorly behaved, those who should be in school from those who should not.

Some context of what was going on at the time of these incidents illuminates why teachers in the Junior Secondary School felt the need to sort and categorize students at this moment. Education was, in theory, open to everyone through the end of the Junior Secondary School level—grade 8.<sup>8</sup> At the end of grade 8, all students took the highly competitive National Examination, which determined whether they would go on to the Senior Secondary School. Although a school rule stipulated that students were supposed to repeat grades only once, there was no consistent national policy about this. Because of this, students could keep repeating grades for as long as they wanted to, and increasing numbers of students seemed to be doing so. The Junior Secondary School teachers were frustrated because the regional Ministry of Education officials in Assab had not developed or enforced a consistent rule regarding how many times students were allowed to repeat a grade. Students quickly figured out that they could fail grades in Junior Secondary School and thereby indefinitely delay their terms of National Service. Ministry of Education officials, not wanting to upset parents by removing their children from school, tended to support this de facto policy that allowed students to stay in school. Teachers in the Junior Secondary School believed that students were using schools as a strategy to evade military service rather than taking schooling seriously, something that challenged their ability to distinguish between students and nonstudents. They believed that larger numbers of nonstudents were filling their classrooms simply because these people were using school as a means to avoid service. Teachers worried that older students would negatively influence younger students and that this negative influence would prevent teachers from having a positive influence on the younger students. They commented that classes were increasingly hard to control due to these older students. In addition, the number of disciplinary incidents had increased, including fights between teachers and students, something attributed to the higher number of older students.

Teachers in the Junior Secondary School were responding to exceptional

times, times when rules regarding student promotion were unclear. Teachers both did and did not have control in their school. They did not have the ability to promote students into the Senior Secondary level, because students were promoted only when they passed a national exam, and many Junior Secondary students had been intentionally failing this exam for several years. Nor did teachers have the ability to remove a student from the school permanently, because only the Ministry of Education could do that. But they could and did decide how to organize, discipline, and manage students within the enclosed space of the school.

The sorting process was reflective of the state of exception in several ways. The state of exception is marked by a lack of clarity between law (rules) and the enactment of the exception to these rules by an array of state actors who become sovereign over citizen bodies (Agamben 2005). In the absence of clear rules regarding promotion policy, Junior Secondary School teachers created a mechanism for sorting that was an exception to Ministry of Education rules and policies (or lack thereof). By sorting students, teachers were acting of their own accord and not according to a “higher” authority. Tracking, ability grouping, and other forms of sorting that are widespread elsewhere are almost unheard of in Eritrea. When they occur, they are almost inevitably a school-based practice rather than a national policy. This made the teachers’ decision to sort students even more remarkable. In fact, the regional Ministry of Education administration threatened to force teachers to change the grade 8 groupings, saying that this was unprecedented in Eritrea, which left the director caught between his teachers and the administration (he ultimately sided with the teachers). Additionally, as the actors who were sovereign over this sorting mechanism, they made decisions about the exceptions based on highly subjective, arbitrary, intimate, and interpersonal criteria for what was good and bad. The decisions that teachers made about each student were based on observing students and understanding their reputations. Ultimately, teachers were pleased with the results of their efforts and believed that these categories would make it easier to manage students. In fact, the sorting was perceived to have worked so well that the grade 7 teachers also considered sorting their students, although they never got around to doing so.

Although these large numbers of older, repeating students presented a pragmatic problem for teachers, teachers’ worries about older students reflected deeper moral concerns related to the purity of the student identity. Teachers worried that the blurring of adult and child categories would result in “matter out of place” (Turner 1969). Similarly, teachers described older students in their classes as being out of place. They often made such

comments as “How can you teach a class when you have a big man sitting next to a small boy?” Indeed, the age range in classes was striking. In an average class of sixty students, as many as half of the students might be well into their teens, while the other half was a grade-appropriate age. Thus, the problem with older students was not just a pragmatic problem of management but a moral hazard of category blurring. Teacher sovereignty emerged in response to this sense of moral breakdown. When the capacity of the state to provide appropriate stability to schools was found unsatisfactory, teachers took things into their own hands.<sup>9</sup>

Similar but less extreme forms of sorting happened every day in the Senior Secondary School. For example, at different points in time, teachers would position themselves at the school gate after school had started to catch late students and punish them. At some points, teachers would decide to crack down on students not in uniform and would stand at the school gate to send home or punish students who failed to show up dressed appropriately. However, these efforts in the high school were short-lived. The key reason for their failure was the lack of a wall around the school compound. If students were turned away at the gate, they could circle around and find another way into the school compound. Thus, in the Senior Secondary School, the preoccupation with control related to figuring out how to build a wall, something that was seen as essential for the functioning of the school.

Some of the Senior Secondary School teachers also talked about problems of blurred categories, but they did so in different ways. One day I came upon two teachers discussing a particular student. Teacher Mateos was noting that this student was married, had children, and despite this was trying to continue with his schooling. Teacher Iyasu began to laugh with embarrassment and then shook his head and put his head in his hands. He then told us that the student had come to school late the day before and that Iyasu had beaten him. Teacher Iyasu said he wished he had known this particular student’s circumstances, because if he had, he would not have beaten the student. Discipline was not universally applied but was applied differently based on understandings of different students’ circumstances. This “adult” student who was in school was matter out of place, and, because he was out of place, this teacher made what he considered the rather embarrassing error of beating him (that is, he should not have beaten an adult, an equal).

In contrast, many Senior Secondary School teachers described being furious when students came to school smelling like cigarettes and beating them for having smoked outside school. Although few teachers want their students to smoke, in Eritrea smoking has a particular moral value as well.

It is considered immoral for women to smoke, and most adults would not smoke in front of their parents. Students' smoking was seen as a behavior that was morally out of place and inappropriate for their age. Teachers had similar reactions if they found love letters in students' notebooks. Similar to smoking, love and romantic relationships were seen as immoral acts that were antithetical to being a student. Indeed, if a love letter was found in a student's possession, it was often seen as such a moral aberration that several of the teachers would come together to discuss it and strategize about what action to take. Romantic relationships, like smoking, were intended for adults and thus had no place in the school.<sup>10</sup> When students engaged in these practices, they threatened teachers' sense of moral categories, because they were engaged in behaviors restricted to adults.

### **Being Seen as the State: Part I**

There was a great deal of controversy over teachers' decision to sort students. Effectively, state actors (teachers) believed they were working against their own state institution (the Ministry of Education). Teachers faced opposition from students, Ministry of Education officials, and parents. Indeed, many teachers expected that the Ministry of Education would eventually force them to detrack the grade 8 students and braced themselves to fight back against the ministry. Teachers were criticized for these measures, but they defended their right to divide students and the necessity of doing so. Ultimately, they were not forced to detrack the students, but this sorting (and their defense of it) revealed that teachers were willing to place themselves in an antagonistic relationship with the community and their superiors to take back control of the school.

This controversy illuminates the ways that teachers not only saw (imagined) the state (which I've discussed in previous chapters) and "saw like" the state (by embracing their understanding of how to order schools and educated students); they also were "seen" as the state. In their study of governance and governmentality in India, Stuart Corbridge et al. (2005) capture the notion that the state is brought into being through techniques of governance, technologies of power inherent in governmentality, *and* the way citizens themselves understand, interpret, and "see" the state. My phrase "being seen as the state" references this idea of people "seeing" teachers as the state. Although my main focus here is on the morality and beliefs that framed teachers' utilization of technologies of power and techniques of governing schools (ordering, organizing, containing, sorting, categorizing, and punishing), it is also essential to remember that in utilizing these technolo-

gies of power, teachers were “seen” by students and parents as the state even though they would not see themselves that way. These tensions between how teachers saw themselves, saw the state as an entity “out there,” and were seen as the state accounted for a number of tensions and struggles over legitimacy. Teacher sovereignty, as with many forms of devolved sovereignty in the state of exception, was always riddled with struggles and tensions over legitimacy and questions about the limits of the use of force. Teachers struggled against each other; against other state actors, such as their own supervisors and administrators; and against students and parents to define the appropriate limits to their use of force. They were seen as the state, but not always in a positive light. As an entry point into this examination of how teachers were seen as the state, it is useful to look at the reactions of students who were placed in the infamous section 8D, the section allocated for “overage students” and “disturbers.”

One of the reasons why teachers’ sorting of students was controversial among students and parents was because the division of grade 8 students coincided with other, more coercive encounters with the state—both within the school and in the nation as a whole. In Chapter 2 and elsewhere, I suggest that despite the fact that different state institutions and actors may behave completely autonomously, imaginaries of the state create linkages between discrete actions of different state actors and institutions. These linkages characterize and delegitimize the state while they simultaneously imagine it as coherent and translocal. In Eritrea, an imaginary of the coercive, punishing state plays this role (Riggan 2013b). The fact that the sorting of students and the lockout occurred within days of each other and that many of the locked-out students had been assigned to 8D made this particular class believe they were targets of coercion and state punishment. More broadly, around this same time period, in an attempt to reduce the number of students who were enrolling in school simply to receive an ID and thereby avoid military conscription, the Ministry of Education announced that grade 8 students would not be given student ID cards.<sup>11</sup> Many saw this policy as another government effort to militarize schools and target students. While this was happening in Assab, a massive *gifa* took place in Asmara, during which the infamous Adi Abeto incident occurred. Although the events that occurred in the school, the incident of *gifa* in Asmara, and the changed Ministry of Education policy on student ID cards were not directly connected in any way, teachers’ actions—locking students out of the school, calling the police, sorting students—need to be examined as imaginatively and discursively linked to the larger notion of the punishing state.

A few days after the students were locked out of the school, I spent sev-

eral mornings in the 8D classroom, which gave me a chance to hear about how these students felt about the teacher's actions. When I first walked into the class, I was struck by how cramped the room seemed when full of adult-sized bodies. Indeed, if the categorization of 8D were simply based on student size, it would seem that they were distinct from other classes of students. Otherwise, student behavior during their classes struck me as rather ordinary. A few more students than usual appeared to have their heads down on their desks, sleeping. One difference I did note was that when the teacher left the room at the end of each period, the majority of students also left the room, a behavior that teachers generally regarded as problematic.

The few students who remained chatted with me. I asked them what they thought of this new arrangement. A few said it was good to have all the older students together, but many had complaints. One girl told me that she thought the teachers did this so the students in 8D would not copy from other students. Her thoughts reflected teachers' assertions that 8D students performed poorly academically and needed to rely on copying from "clever students" to pass. A couple of other students mumbled something about Sawa that I could not completely make out. Then, interestingly, students almost immediately brought up the arrests that occurred outside the school wall and coincided with the separation of the classes. I did not ask them directly about these arrests, yet the fact that students brought them up on their own shows that they linked the arrests with the sorting process.

For students, being separated into age-based categories, being locked out of school, and having the police called on them were linked as punitive actions and thus reflected the broader sense that the state was punishing in Eritrea. They told me that the police arrested approximately twenty students, and they narrated the events of that morning as if it were a police raid on the school. In contrast, teachers depicted this event as necessary to keep the peace and as only affecting a small number of students. Students described the police infiltrating the school and seeking out particular students for detention. Students in 8D believed the police were particularly targeting them. Later I asked teachers about this discrepancy between teacher and student narratives, and they said that only one student was taken out of the school, while the others were taken from in front of the school, where they were causing a disturbance. In contrast, the students linked sorting the students with locking the gate and calling the police. They imagined the series of events as examples of arbitrary, unpredictable, and inappropriate force used by teachers against students.

The story that one particular student who was taken out of his classroom by the police told me illuminates the way students experienced being

the victims of state force. This student made a point of coming over during the break between classes to sit down next to me and tell his story. He told me that he was only fifteen years old (slightly old for grade 8, but not unheard of) and “very small” (in size), so he did not know why he was assigned to 8D. He then told me that he was, in fact, not late the day that the police arrived and was already in the school when they came to arrest students. According to the student, one teacher brought the police into the classroom where he was studying and had him arrested. The teacher hit him and then handed him over to the police. The student told me that he spent two nights in jail.

The student’s story was somewhat vague. When I spoke to the teacher involved, he told me that he thought the student had been one of the disturbers outside the school wall but that the student had managed to slip inside while the police were arresting the other students. To rectify the situation, the teacher brought the police to the student and had him arrested. Later, when the student was released from jail, the teacher realized his mistake. The student told me that when he got out, the teacher apologized and bought him a sandwich. “Now we are OK,” the student said.

Several dynamics were revealed in this incident. While teachers saw locking the school and calling the police as a necessary means to rectify the situation of moral decline in schools, students experienced it as an arbitrary and violent use of state force against them. This also shows that while teachers thought they were being fair, the sorting mechanisms through which students were labeled disturber and nondisturber resulted in the arbitrary and exceptional use of force against students. Under a state of exception, where there are no clear laws or rights, exceptional force can be used simply because an authority figure wills it. Arguably, this is what happened to students in this school. Furthermore, students believed they had been categorized unjustly and singled out for punishment for a reason that they could not entirely fathom, thereby linking teacher actions with the broader coercive state.

In this particular student’s case, the teacher admitted to having been wrong. But it was also curious that the teacher could make it right so easily by buying the student a sandwich. This speaks not to the use of extreme force against students but rather to the rationalization of the use of force, which is far more ordinary and mundane. The use of punishment, including corporal punishment, is highly intimate. It binds teachers and students in a particular relationship of authority that is intimate and familial in many ways. We see state power that is sometimes violent, sometimes nurturing, but always engaged in a process that brings students and teachers

into a close and familiar relationship with each other. Students were sorted not on the basis of arbitrary categories thought up in a remote office in Asmara. These categories were developed in the school itself, based on a sense of moral order, a threat to that order, and an intimate knowledge of the students themselves.

### Teacher Sovereignty and Student Bodies

Teachers' sense that they were supposed to act in a fair and even legal manner often clashed with their sense that they had to do whatever it took to make students moral. This mandate to make students moral was so important to teachers that they were willing to use their power to subject students to coercion and even violence, effectively punishing students much as other state actors punished teachers. Although technically illegal, corporal punishment was ubiquitous throughout Eritrea at the time of my fieldwork. The law was typically ignored. The vast majority of teachers carried sticks or pieces of hose with them to class, and it was common for them to have students kneel and/or extend their palms to be slapped with the stick or hose if they arrived late, talked in class, failed to do their homework, or behaved in any other disruptive way. Teachers were positioned to decide on the exception, in Agamben's sense. Sometimes this literally involved deciding when to make exceptions to the law prohibiting the use of physical violence against students, and sometimes this involved deciding which type of force or coercion to use when the law was ignored, as it often was. But teachers' decisions on the exception also drew on their sense of moral crisis. Two imaginaries of the state were reflected in this conflict between legality and morality—on the one hand, that the state should be fair, predictable, and orderly, and on the other hand, that the self-imposed mandate that teachers shape students into moral beings might transcend fairness and regulatory predictability. These different imaginaries often came to a head around several contested instances of corporal punishment, which I discuss below.

Much emphasis has been placed on the sovereign's capacity to kill or do physical harm. In Agamben's depiction, this capacity is absolute. What I emphasize here is how debates over the efficacy, appropriateness, and morality of using force frame and temper this capacity. The everyday sovereign may act with impunity vis-à-vis the law under the state of exception, but there are always forces and factors that shape and constrain the use of force. What made debates over corporal punishment complicated was the variety of perspectives on what the conditions, limits, and purpose of violence should be, which were infused not only by the broader political context

and the sense that teachers were on their own but also by a sense of fairness and wanting to enact “law” fairly. Several anecdotes illustrate the range of approaches to corporal punishment and their contested nature.

*“Corporal Punishment Is the Only Way”*

One morning, in between classes at the Junior Secondary School, Teacher Paolo struck up a conversation with me. “I’ve decided to give up corporal punishment,” he announced somewhat proudly. He explained to me that it was not fair to use corporal punishment with the Afar students, because they were not accustomed to it. Sometimes they would even hit the teacher back when beaten, and he wanted to teach and avoid fights. Paolo was a thoughtful teacher who seemed to grasp some of the subtleties of cultural differences. I told him I admired his sensitivity and eagerness to experiment with different approaches and that I looked forward to hearing whether he was successful. Although other teachers talked about limiting their use of corporal punishment, this was the first time I had ever heard anyone plan to give it up entirely.

There was a widespread sentiment among teachers that students would not respect them if the teachers did not hit them. Teacher Haile explained to me that in teacher training, they were taught that corporal punishment was bad for children, but once they began teaching, they found that they could not control their classes without it and that there was no support for not using it:

We had learned that corporal punishment was not allowed and not good for students, but the students wouldn’t take us seriously. You want to look like a good teacher, but you can’t do that as long as you avoid this corporal punishment. Students push you. Senior teachers tell you corporal punishment is the only way. (Interview, Haile)

Paolo eventually came to a similar conclusion. When I interviewed him several months after his bold declaration that he was not going to use corporal punishment and asked how it was going, he explained why his plan did not work: “I was not successful. I went back to physical punishment. But I am trying to do other things. Before I was punishing them all of the time, but now only when the students become crazy.”

Like many teachers before him, Paolo came around to see corporal punishment as a pedagogical necessity, but one that could and should be used sparingly. He learned that while a teacher could limit his or her use of cor-

poral punishment, it was difficult to teach without it. In fact, in my own experience teaching in Eritrea, I admit that I inadvertently came to a similar realization. Although I never resorted to hitting students, I did make them kneel down at times and, once, when faced with a thoroughly unmanageable class, I called the school director, who, much to my shock and dismay, hit the students.

Several points are illuminated by Paolo's bold experiment. First, it reflected the strength of the belief that students would not respect their teacher if he or she did not resort to corporal punishment. This attitude was so widespread that most teachers never considered *not* resorting to corporal punishment. It was a daily part of schooling in Eritrea, as it is elsewhere. But Paolo's experiment also reflected a sense that there were limits and alternatives to the use of force. Paolo's attitude, like that of many teachers, was that corporal punishment was part of a teacher's pedagogical tool kit, necessary to create an orderly climate for teaching, but to be used sparingly and strategically. There were other understandings of the pedagogy of punishment, however. Some teachers believed not only that corporal punishment was necessary to create orderly conditions in which students could learn well but also that violence itself would make students more moral.

### *“He Is a Very Stupid Boy”*

Four teachers and the school director sat in a semicircle around a student who was kneeling on the ground in front of them. They questioned him sternly for several minutes, and then the director stood up and asked him to stretch out his arm. He hit the student several times on his palm with a stick. The boy, who was obviously in pain, at one point pulled his hand back and was roughly ordered to put it back for more blows. He cried out in pain, and a smile flickered across one teacher's face. After the boy had been dismissed, I asked what he had done. One teacher answered, “He is a very stupid boy.”

Another added, “He is very bad.”

Finally, the director explained to me that the boy had disappeared from his home and from school for three days. His mother and sister had been looking frantically for him, and his mother had asked for the assistance of the school staff in disciplining her child. Corporal punishment was used here as a means to teach the student a lesson—that running away was bad. The assertion that the boy was “stupid” combined with the blows suggested that they hoped he would learn something from his punishment.

“His parents are divorced,” another teacher added, as if this explained

things. In this instance, teachers were rather directly being asked to stand in for the student's father and were being placed in a disciplinary role by the student's mother. State actors—teachers—were acting in the place of the parent. This suggested that the teachers' sense of their moral role as disciplinarians extended beyond education and into the realm of the family. Indeed, the teachers' sense of their moral mandate linked the realms of the home, school, and state.

This case illustrates the pedagogical role of the use of force, something that is prevalent in schools and other state institutions, such as the military. Corporal punishment was used to teach students to be better people. Inflicting pain showed the punished subjects that they had done something wrong and trained them not to do it. Teachers and parents thought pain would teach young people the difference between right and wrong. The pedagogical role of state violence illuminates Begoña Aretxaga's (2003) concept of the "maddening state." In the instance recounted above, a state employee beat a student at the request of a mother. The state here was simultaneously caretaking and violent, or, more precisely, violent in its caretaking. Much of teachers' work as sovereigns over school space and student bodies reflected a similarly maddening condition. One way to think about this is that many teachers assumed that beating students showed that they cared about their development—students needed to be punished sometimes so that they would learn properly. On the other hand, beatings could incline toward the brutal and sadistic. The maddening nature of state violence is reflected in the use of corporal punishment in other state institutions as well. Arguably, when corporal punishment is used in the military, it has a similarly pedagogical role. Military trainees are often beaten (or worse) for not correctly learning skills—for example, failing to shoot a target or committing minor infractions of rules. The logics of this use of corporal punishment suggest an attitude among military trainers that is similar to that of teachers—violence has a pedagogical role. However, at times, in schools and elsewhere, force was used to assert dominance without any specific lesson being taught other than the lesson that the punished subject should obey the authority figure. The anecdote below illustrates this.

### *"He Will Learn Respect"*

Every day, teachers would drag chairs out of the sweltering cement tea shop and sit in the shade overlooking the Red Sea. Often they would call to students to bring them cups of tea, sandwiches, sodas, or cigarettes. Students gave teachers a lot of space unless they were summoned. One day, a student

whom I recognized from one of the grade 6 classes I had recently observed was standing and talking, jokingly, with three teachers—Lemlem, Beraki, and Yakob. He was a student who was large for grade 6 but did not seem to act his age. He seemed very eager to participate in his classes and was animated, playful, and enthusiastic. Teachers often seemed annoyed with him even though he was engaged in his studies. The other students often laughed mockingly at his enthusiastic attempts to participate in class.

Lemlem, Beraki, and Yakob were trying to get the student to dance. “He is going to show us how Michael Jackson dances,” Lemlem said to me. Lemlem and Yakob explained to me that the student had been “dancing like Michael Jackson” in the staff room the previous day, to the amusement of the other teachers. I looked at the student and became aware of the fact that the student did not want to dance and was looking apprehensive. The teachers were becoming more and more insistent that he dance, and he was becoming more and more visibly nervous about doing so, saying that the other students would laugh at him. Beraki, in particular, was getting increasingly angry because of the student’s refusal to dance.

At this point, Weldeyesus, another teacher who was known for his liberal use of corporal punishment, had arrived and became involved in the situation. He began talking to the student in a fairly calm voice. I became distracted and looked away for a minute, and the next thing I knew, Weldeyesus had clubbed the student on the side of the head.

“Is this because he won’t dance?” I asked, incredulous. They said yes. By this point, two other teachers, Ezekiel and Haile, had arrived and watched the situation unfolding. It became clear that they were also unhappy about Weldeyesus’s hitting the student. The student, who was crying by this point, was made to kneel down. Ezekiel, Haile, and I were furious and said, “If he doesn’t want to dance, why make him dance?” The other teachers ignored us. Beraki, Yakob, and Weldeyesus seemed intent on punishing the student. At that point, break time was ending, and Lemlem, Ezekiel, and Haile had to leave.

A few minutes later, Weldeyesus made the student run around the field. The student returned and sat on the wall near us, and Yacob, his homeroom teacher, spoke to him for a while. After some time, the student was excused.

I was deeply shaken by this experience, not so much because of the physical violence done to the child, which was not uncommon, but because of the reason for his punishment, which felt like an exception to the pedagogical role of corporal punishment as I understood it. The student was not doing anything wrong. He was not breaking a rule. He just did not want to dance for his teachers.

Finally, I asked Beraki and Yakob, the only teachers who remained seated around the table at that point, “How can you expect a student to learn right from wrong when you give him the same punishment for not dancing as you do for doing something else? What will he learn from this?” My question reflected my understanding, at that time, that corporal punishment was typically used pedagogically—to teach students to behave appropriately and to follow rules.

Yakob’s answer revealed a very different manifestation of the pedagogy of punishment. He glared at me and answered without hesitating, “He will learn respect.”

A few minutes later, I saw the student walking quickly across the school compound with his books in hand. He was trying to leave the school grounds. Weldeyesus happened to be crossing his path and saw him, stopped him, hit him a few times with his fists, and kicked him before sending him back to class.

The incident described above, like other instances of corporal punishment, was an enactment of sovereign power. The teacher/sovereign commanded the student body. This sovereign could make student/citizen bodies dance, hop, kneel, sit, or stand at whim. At various times, teachers did all of these. Teacher power here was very much the coercive power of the state, with its capacity to command the bodies of its subjects. If the student body failed to comply, the teacher/sovereign could punish it, thereby inscribing sovereign power on that body. However, unlike the incidents that I described previously in which corporal punishment was used pedagogically to teach specific lessons (do not run away from home; sit quietly and do not talk in the classroom), here it was used to teach absolute obedience to authority. The only lesson being taught was that students must obey teachers no matter what, even when the teacher was making an innocuous request like asking the student to dance. This was an empty but essential lesson for life in a coercive state—obey your superiors, because otherwise they will beat you.

There are thus two notions of corporal punishment: (1) that it should be used sparingly, strategically, pedagogically, and as a technique to create order; and (2) that it should be used to assert dominance and authority and produce obedience and subservience. The distinctions between the two are sometimes subtle but significant. In these distinctions between the pedagogical role of force and the authoritarian/coercive one, we can see two different state effects prevalent in Eritrea at play and in tension with one another. On the one hand, the state orders and disciplines; state actors might use force to produce order, but always with constraint and purpose.

On the other hand, the state punishes arbitrarily and with impunity, producing the coercive state effect. These distinctions played out in debates among teachers, and later parents, over several controversial instances of corporal punishment, which I discuss below. However, the overall political climate, the moral crisis of disorder, and a sense of threat to teachers' sovereignty over school space also influenced the outcome of these debates over corporal punishment.

### *Lions versus Laws*

The following controversial case of corporal punishment illustrates the distinctions between teachers' understandings of the roles and limits of corporal punishment. I became aware of this case when some members of the discipline committee brought it to my attention and explained it to me as it developed. It involved a fight between a teacher and an older grade 7 student who was probably in his late teens. The teacher slapped the student in the face in the classroom for not completing his homework assignment. The student raised his hand to defend himself and backed away, arguing that he was being punished unfairly. The teacher dragged him out of the class and continued fighting with him in the staff room. This particular teacher was known to treat students strictly and harshly. The atmosphere in his class was absolutely silent, and he did not tolerate the most minor disturbance. Several of his students commented to me that he was generally disliked and feared by the students, in part because of his strictness and in part because he often failed many students.

The discipline committee consisted of three teachers and the director. One of the teachers, Ezekiel, almost never hit students and was frustrated with the increased emphasis in the school on using force discipline. He told me that he had recently walked out of a discipline committee meeting in frustration at the teachers' insistence on emphasizing control rather than learning. Another teacher on the committee, Weldeyesus, used corporal punishment on a regular basis and was frustrated that more of the teachers were not stricter. The third teacher on the committee occupied the middle ground. Teklay often carried a stick with him to his classes and would use it when he felt it was warranted, but he used it pedagogically, not to terrorize or assert authority over students.

Members of the committee debated whether the student or the teacher should be punished. Yosef, the teacher involved in the incident, wanted the student punished for fighting with him. In many cases if a student fought with a teacher, this kind of behavior could warrant suspension or expulsion

from school, depending on the severity of the fight. On the other hand, the student and many of the teachers believed that Yosef was the one who needed to be punished for continuing to beat the student even after he had stopped fighting. Punishment for teachers would include a letter from the supervisor that would go in a teacher's permanent file. Teachers feared having such a letter in their files because it could impede future opportunities, such as transfers, training sessions, or any other opportunities that came up. Yosef very much hoped for a transfer to Asmara and a chance to continue his education, and a negative letter in his file would have a detrimental impact on either possibility.

Ezekiel and Teklay initially convinced Weldeyesus that, according to the disciplinary rules of the school, Yosef needed to be punished because he had continued to beat the student long after he needed to defend himself and because he had been too harsh to begin with by hitting the student for not completing his homework. Additionally, according to the law, the student was in the right, since corporal punishment was officially illegal. Although Weldeyesus argued against this view, he could not argue against the logic that Yosef had broken the law. However, in a second meeting, Weldeyesus came across more strongly, having apparently discussed the issue with Yosef. He commented in this meeting that he believed that only three teachers in the school were "like lions." He was clearly disappointed that more teachers were not willing to be "lions" and, furthermore, were not willing to defend the lions. He considered himself and Yosef to be among the few teachers who cared about correcting students' behavior. Ezekiel held his ground, contending that Yosef was fundamentally in the wrong and that the rules of the school were very clear in this case. Teklay agreed with Ezekiel, and Weldeyesus, outnumbered, was forced to comply with their decision.

Predictably, Yosef was furious at this decision. In the meeting when they told him the outcome of their decision, he banged on the director's desk and threatened Ezekiel, accusing him of defending the students. The student was suspended for two weeks (Yosef thought he should be expelled), and Yosef would have a permanent letter placed in his file. Ezekiel continued to argue that he was simply following the "law" of the school and upholding the right principles. According to Ezekiel, a teacher could not complain about a student fighting with him when the "law" clearly said that the teacher did not have the right to hit the student in the first place. This was an interesting instance because, although teachers often noted that corporal punishment was illegal, no one attempted to adhere to these laws.

I would argue that this was not a debate over the legality of corporal punishment itself. Rather it was a debate about the nature of teacher sov-

ereignty, or, in other words, a debate about when and how teachers could make decisions about the exception. A variety of issues were at stake. Did teachers have the “right” to use unchecked force against students? Could they act with total impunity? Or were there limits to their use of force? As is apparent by the ubiquity of corporal punishment as well as the range of instances of corporal punishment discussed in this chapter, the legality of the everyday use of corporal punishment was not questioned, and yet members of the discipline committee evoked the law in this instance to enable other teachers to place limits on Yosef’s use of force. Yosef, according to some teachers, had gone too far. He had decided on the exception inappropriately, and other teachers held him accountable for making the wrong decision.

Questions about the limits of the use of force not only challenged teacher sovereignty but also reflected different assumptions about student subjectivity. Teachers who stood by their right to use unchecked force tended to believe that a moral, respectful student was one who would not question authority and would do whatever the teacher ordered. If they did not, they could be punished in as brutal a manner as the teacher chose. This stance was reflected in Weldeyesus’s claim that teachers should be “lions” and also in the incident where the student was beaten severely for not dancing like Michael Jackson. In contrast, teachers who believed that force had limits believed that students needed to be taught to be moral and respectful and that force was a key means to do so, but that students also had rights and that teachers had responsibilities to constrain their use of force. The perspective that emphasized law was, thus, less about enacting the law and more about evoking it as a stand-in for limits to teacher sovereignty.

Weldeyesus’s and Yosef’s assertions that (1) teachers should be “lions” and (2) if they cared about education, they had to be willing to be brutal gained purchase during this particular time period. At a time when all teachers perceived that students were increasingly out of control and in need of greater discipline and control, this argument was powerful. At the same time, teachers such as Yosef were increasingly frustrated with their own work and lives. Their frustration, combined with deep-seated beliefs about the efficacy of corporal punishment, made them far less amenable to alternate perspectives about the use of force in punishing students. Below, I complicate this even more by exploring another controversial instance of corporal punishment that was, in many respects, very similar, except that in this case teachers found themselves in solidarity with each other rather than challenging each other’s use of force.

### *Teacher Rights*

As we saw above, some teachers were often extremely defensive about their “right” to use force against student bodies even when other teachers suggested that their use of force had extended the boundaries of what was commonly regarded as appropriate. In many ways, this perceived right to use force against student bodies was the epitome of teacher sovereignty. The following incident illustrates the interplay of these particular tensions.

This highly controversial disciplinary incident involved the school director’s hitting a student for failing to obey him. The director warned the student not to leave his classroom and later found him outside the class. He took the student into his office to punish him by hitting him on the palm with a piece of rubber hose, but the student apparently flinched away from the swing, resulting in the director’s hitting the student in the stomach with the piece of hose. No one witnessed the incident. The student was later taken to the hospital, where the doctor considered surgery. Although ultimately it was decided that no surgery was necessary, there was much talk about the director’s facing charges for physically hurting the student. The director realized that he hit the student inappropriately and visited the family, which was the culturally appropriate action to take under the circumstances; the court decided several months later that he was required to make a monetary reparation of 1,000 nakfa (roughly \$50, the equivalent of a bit less than one month’s salary) to the family.

Several factors were interesting about the conversations about this incident that occurred among teachers over the course of several months. First, the level of solidarity among teachers and the support they had for the director were striking. Even teachers who never or seldom hit students advocated for the director in this case. In fact, no teacher in the school condemned or criticized the director’s actions. Unlike the case discussed earlier in which some teachers claimed that they were “lions” and other teachers stood by the “law,” here teachers were in agreement that the director had not behaved inappropriately. Second, many teachers commented that by attempting to run away from punishment, the student had brought a harsher punishment on himself. Running away from a punishment was thought of as a moral aberration. Blaming the student for running away indicated that teachers thought of this incident as a reflection of the general “out-of-control” environment in the school—morally aberrant students were not accepting their punishments, leading to greater extremes of violence and problems for everyone.

Other narratives that circulated around this event illuminated the larger issues at stake in Eritrea and reflected several imaginaries of the state. It was notable that at the time of the incident, teachers frequently complained about the ineffectiveness of the (government-run) hospital. A wide array of Junior Secondary School teachers engaged in this discourse of complaining about the hospital and together recounted many harrowing tales about the same hospital and doctor. When discussing the director's case, one teacher described another teacher's wife's miscarriage, blaming it on the negligence of the hospital staff. Stories circulated that this doctor had a habit of performing unnecessary surgeries. One teacher even said he had heard nurses complaining that this doctor seemed to perform surgery to "practice" on his patients. Another teacher noted that when his sister gave birth, this same doctor wanted to perform an unnecessary cesarean section on her. These tales of an inept hospital and doctor served to discredit the accounts that the school director had seriously injured the student by casting suspicion on another state institution—the hospital. Although many of the teachers did have a good deal of evidence to doubt the doctor and the hospital (which suffered from shortages of well-trained and educated manpower), the timing of these tales of hospital horrors was strategically placed to discredit the doctor and, thus, vindicate the director. At the same time, these stories of hospital incompetence also projected an imaginary of another state institution—and, by extension, the state itself—as incompetent.

Another narrative that emerged in response to this incident related to the lack of Ministry of Education support for teachers' efforts to regain control over schools. When discussing the accusations against the school director, teachers brought up the lack of ministry support for their reorganization of grade 8, for their broader efforts to better control students, and for their specific efforts to have certain older students removed from school. This was notable because the boy who was injured by the director was neither an older student nor a grade 8 student and thus had no direct connection to these complaints. However, teachers narrated the accusations against their director as evidence of the lack of support for their work by the Ministry of Education. The criticism that the director had behaved inappropriately was seen as further evidence of the lack of support by the ministry, thereby making teachers feel somewhat akin to vigilantes in working on their own to reclaim control over their schools.

It is interesting that there was widespread solidarity in support of the school director's case while there was criticism in Yosef's case. One reason for solidarity was that the director was generally seen as a fair person, whereas Yosef often was not. But, even more significantly, teachers saw these accu-

sations against their director as an attack on the school and on their work as teachers. The narratives I discussed above—the narrative of the inept state and the narrative of being abandoned by the ministry—served to galvanize teachers in support of the director, but they also reflected imaginaries of the impotent, incompetent state, one that could not or would not support the work teachers were trying to do.

## Being Seen as the State: Part II

Parents provide a different commentary on teachers' use of force, and in these comments we find another way in which teachers are "seen as the state." Two meetings were called for teachers and parents shortly after the start of the spring semester in February 2004. The semester was getting off to a late start, and students were still not showing up for school. At the first meeting, Ministry of Education officials responded to pressure by teachers to get parents to help send their students to school by telling parents that they would face "consequences" if they did not send their children to school. This approach suggested that parents were complicit in the disordered and chaotic conditions of schooling. At the same meeting, the Ministry of Education told teachers to "be serious" about taking attendance and following other procedures, such as cleaning the classrooms, suggesting that a teacher's failure to do his or her job properly also produced conditions of disorder and chaos. While the "consequences" parents would face were not made clear, the threat to parents effectively functioned to remind them that it was their responsibility to send their children to school. This reminder, combined with the pressure on teachers to tighten mechanisms of controlling students, was enough to get the semester off to a start. Almost immediately following this meeting, students started showing up for school, and the semester was able to begin.

Although the school got started a few weeks later in mid-March, parents and teachers continued to be disturbed by the conditions in schools and the behavior of students, so another meeting was called for them—this time by the town's administration, with the meeting itself run by the mayor. Unlike the previous meeting, which was intended to specifically address the issue of students not coming to school, there was no clear objective or outcome to the second meeting. Also, in contrast to the previous meeting, which placed the responsibility for student behavior on parents, this meeting seemed to give parents a chance to vent their feelings and the teachers a chance to reply. In this meeting, a debate ensued as to who was responsible for the failure to control the students. Parents blamed teachers' lack of motivation

for the disorderly condition of schools, while teachers blamed parents' failure to make their children come to school. Everyone, however, was generally anxious about students' "immoral" behavior. What was in tension here was a perspective in which teachers were "seeing like a state" and being seen as the state. Teachers were aspiring to impose a system of regulatory, disciplinary order on students such that they could accomplish their goals of transforming them into educated citizens. In doing this, teachers believed it necessary to enforce regulations, to utilize technologies of categorization and containment, and to use force if need be.

Meanwhile, parents were "seeing the state" but seeing it in two ways—as overly coercive, controlling, and punishing on the one hand, but also as inept, disorganized, and irresponsible on the other. Parents' complaints suggested that teachers were too strict and unfair in their punishments at times, thereby depicting teachers *as* the punishing state. Specifically, several parents found it unjust that particular students had been dismissed from school for disciplinary infractions. They also found teachers' reasons for suspending students from their classrooms unfair. Parents complained in particular about relatively new procedures in both the Junior Secondary School and Senior Secondary School whereby late students were locked out. At the same time, parents complained that teachers were not able to "control" the students and often questioned teachers' motivation, or lack thereof, accusing them of not doing their jobs properly and suggesting that this failure was the reason for schools' being out of control. Parents picked up on the tight controls that teachers tried to put in place, which I have described in this chapter, but also on the evasiveness and disorder that I discussed in the last chapter. In effect, their imaginaries of the teacher state reflected the condition of impotence. The teacher state, as imagined by parents, was simultaneously disorderly and coercive.

## Conclusion

Teachers experienced these years as a time of moral crisis. Teacher sovereignty, which was enacted through practices of containment, categorization, and corporal punishment, was a response to this condition of moral breakdown. I began this chapter with a discussion of encampment and the work of walls. Walls enabled control and categorization by demarcating good from bad spaces and good from bad people. Encampment enabled teacher sovereignty, because within walled-off spaces teachers could act with impunity on student bodies—they decided on the exception. Students were at the whims of teachers who could decide when force was appropriate and

inappropriate, but, significantly, teachers' use of force was also framed and constrained by a number of factors, complicating our sense that just because state actors can use force, they will.

The state is imaginatively produced on the basis of everyday encounters between citizens and state actors, such as those I have described in this chapter. Teachers were imagined as the state, sometimes criticized as inept, and sometimes regarded as overly coercive. Interestingly, these are the same two poles that framed Eritreans' imagination of their state more broadly. Recall in Chapter 2 that Eritreans complained that *gifa* was overly coercive but then also attempted to make sense of *gifa* by commenting that the state had to resort to these measures because it was too inept to catch those who legitimately deserved to be detained; on the one hand, the state is seen as punishing, but on the other hand, it is seen as unfortunately stumbling in its efforts to create order.

In closing, I suggest that we can draw many parallels between teacher sovereignty and the sovereignty of other state actors, including police, military personnel, and bureaucrats. All of these state actors "see like the state" in the sense that they, by virtue of their own education and training and their appropriation of "high modernist" ideologies, have been disciplined and socialized into believing in the ordering of space, the clear organizing of categories, and the imposing of procedures to order and organize (Scott 1998). Other state actors authorized to use force are similar in many respects to Eritrean teachers, although there are clearly differences between teachers, whose state function is to socialize and teach, and the police or military, whose state function is to use force. By its very nature, the state of exception authorizes state actors to use force with a good degree of impunity—to decide on the exception. But deciding on the exception also requires making a decision that often is not constrained by law, regulation, or procedure. What I have shown here is how the confluence of political conditions, frustration with the political and social climate, a sense of being criticized by other state actors and by "society," and, most importantly, culturally specific notions of morality all help determine how decisions to use force are made. What constitutes morality and what constitutes an appropriate way to produce moral subjects is not constant but rather shifting, contested, debated, and negotiated. I suggest that this framework might illuminate the decisions to use force among all kinds of state actors in Eritrea and elsewhere. Having said this, it might be tempting to read the school as a microcosm of the country, teachers as a microcosm of the state, and the use of force against students as an indication that they are being socialized as mindless, obedient automatons primed for authoritarian rule. Indeed, some work on school-

ing for democracy has made the argument that students are pedagogically primed for authoritarian rule (Harber and Mncube 2012). My argument, however, is that teachers are not merely mirroring the state by using force but constituting the state. The teacher state, in Eritrea and elsewhere, is certainly reflective of the ongoing state of exception, which allows teachers to act with a good deal of impunity and strips students of any legal rights. But teachers are not merely mirroring the broader state, because they enact the state of exception on the basis of their own unique prejudices, assumptions, beliefs, stereotypes, and morality, all of which are contested and debated. The teacher state is, thus, a manifestation of the state of exception, but one that is demarcated by teachers' own attitudes about education, morality, the future of the nation, and their students.