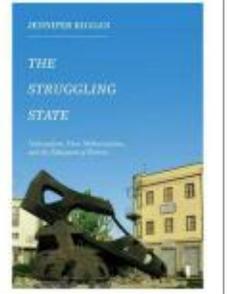# The Struggling State

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Escape, Encampment, and the Alchemy of Nationalism

Escape

September 12, 2005, was the day after New Year's in the Ge'ez (Orthodox) calendar. It had been a tense two months as we tried to get an exit visa for my husband. My fieldwork was finished, my funding was ending, and our nerves were growing frayed by the constant uncertainties of the coercive state—would my husband be sent to the desert, transferred to Asmara, or left indefinitely in Assab? Would we have enough money to live on with my funding ending? Would a war break out again, drawing everyone into the military? Would he be detained in another round of *gifa*? Would we be able to stand the constant stresses as our lives were incessantly controlled by the state? Would things worsen and become more repressive, or was this all temporary? Our long process to receive the exit visa was grueling and full of hopes and fears.[1] Several days before the New Year's holiday, miraculously, we had an exit visa in our hands, and on New Year's Eve, we bought plane tickets. It is hard to describe the emotions of those days. We were eager because it finally looked like he was leaving after years of trying, but we could not feel excited because so many things were likely to go wrong. Few people had the power to let us leave, while many had the power to stop us. I slept little during those days, anticipating, hoping, but trying not to hope too much.

On New Year's Eve, we had tea with a trusted family member who warned us in hushed tones not to tell *anyone* we were leaving. Common

wisdom was that a jealous person might tip off someone with the power to bar our departure. We knew this was a real possibility. It had happened to people we knew. For this reason, Eritreans often leave without telling even their closest relatives and friends of their plans, especially if they are leaving illegally and making a dangerous trek across borders, but even if they are leaving legally with an exit visa by plane. Departure is shrouded in secrecy for fear of the plethora of state actors who have the ability to block their escape.

We packed in a daze and ate a meal at my in-laws' house in Asmara. My father-in-law worked for Eritrean Airlines, but when he departed for work that evening, we did not tell him we were leaving that night, fearful that, out of excitement, he would share our plans with someone at the airport who would then prevent us from getting on the plane. But aside from not telling my father-in-law, we did not do a very good job of taking our relative's advice. We took two cars full of friends and relatives to the airport with us, probably making far more of a spectacle of ourselves than we should have. As we crammed our belongings and our friends into two small cars, our dog, which we would be leaving with my brother-in-law, ran in manic circles around us, yapping. She would not come to me. I hugged and kissed friends and relatives, including my mother-in-law, who would not be making the trip to the airport with us. She was a small, strong woman, and her hands engulfed mine as we kissed multiple times on each cheek. Greetings and salutations in Eritrea are always full of restrained emotion and were particularly so that evening. I remember the calm, kind expression on my mother-in-law's face, an expression that could, and often did, quickly break out into broad laughter and always reflected her faith that everything would work out, despite the fact that she had lived through multiple wars and multiple dictators. That night her expression only hinted at the combination of happiness and loss that she must have been feeling. I know she was worried that she would not see us again for a very long time, if ever.

It was a cold summer night in Asmara, foggy and drizzling slightly. We hugged everyone good-bye, thanked them all for coming, and entered the bright fluorescent haze of the airport. Walking up to the check-in counter was surreal. The mixed emotions of the past weeks crystalized. I could not help but become giddy as we inched toward the check-in counter and got closer to getting on the plane. I also could not believe we were really leaving, not only because this was something we had dreamed of and longed for but also because we knew that it still might not happen. Hope, fear, and disbelief were inseparable. I felt like I was walking around in several bodies at the same time, each in its own emotional state.

The airport was chaotic. A throng of passengers negotiated their wildly oversized bags, jostling and pushing each other, loading and unloading bags from the scales at the check-in counter. I felt distant from all of it. My hands shook as I handed our passports and tickets to the airline employee. As we passed through immigration, my husband was pulled into one of the small offices next to the immigration counter. "Go ahead. It's OK," he told me, but as the door shut behind him, I froze. I went on through security and up to the departures lounge, but I do not remember anything until he joined me a few minutes later. Then, as we waited for our flight, a man wearing civilian clothes with a badge dangling around his neck approached him and asked to see his passport. He flicked through the document while we tried not to look nervous. I felt cold and tried not to show that I was shivering. He handed the documents back without making eye contact, and we began boarding the plane shortly after.

As we climbed the staircase to the plane, we turned around and saw through the fog a group of Eritrean Airlines employees clustered together, wearing thick jackets to keep out the cold. I could make out the thin frame of my father-in-law, standing slightly to the side of the group. We know he saw us. We wanted to wave but were afraid of doing so. Staring at each other through the fog, across the tarmac—that was how we said good-bye.

Even once we were sitting on the plane, bound for Rome and then New York, we half expected that a government official would barge onto the plane, tell us they had made a mistake, and whisk my husband away, imprisoning him (metaphorically and perhaps literally) in Eritrea forever. We did not start breathing until we stumbled out of the airport in Rome into the September sunlight, seeing the world differently, somehow changed, free.

This book ends, as it began, with a departure. The evacuation of Assab in 2000 profoundly and permanently changed the town. Many did not return. After that, the town came to feel like a military encampment, a place where people were forced to be. The border war and its failure to completely end set Eritrea on its current, securitized course. Its leaders became preoccupied with the potential for renewed war and oriented the entire country toward being under a state of siege (Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2014). The evacuation of Assab, which led to mass conscription, was a threshold, an entry point into the limitless liminality of National Service. Teachers who returned to Assab after summer 2000 were changed and living in a changed country.

In the years since the conclusion of my fieldwork, departures such as ours, and other far more harrowing escapes, have become all too common in Eritrea. As this book goes to press, the United Nations has noted a vast

increase in the already enormous numbers of Eritreans fleeing the country (Al Jazeera 2014; Gedab News 2014c; UN News Centre 2014). When I first went to Eritrea in 1995, leaving the country was unheard of for most. "Why would anyone want to leave the country?" one teacher asked, incredulous. "There is nothing sweeter than living in one's own country." That particular teacher is now in the United States. Of the teachers who taught in the Junior and Senior Secondary Schools in Assab during the years of my fieldwork, I know of only one who remains in Assab and three, when I last checked, who remain in Eritrea. Of the educational administrators, civil servants, and teachers in other schools whom I know and am friends with, countless more have left. They have spread across the world now, living throughout western Europe, the United States, and East Africa. I know Eritreans in Australia, New Zealand, Mozambique, Angola, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa. Some left legally, with a much coveted exit visa, by plane. Others were not so fortunate and made the treacherous journey by land or sea to Yemen, Sudan, or Ethiopia. Some managed to make their way to South America and then traveled across the southern border to claim asylum in the United States. Others made their way north by land across Sudan, Egypt, and Libya, risking being kidnapped, tortured, and held for ransom in the Sinai Desert or dying at sea while crossing the Mediterranean. I know that at least one of the teachers who appears in this book has died making this journey.

For Eritreans, a life outside the country is much coveted, but leaving involves intensive sacrifices. For years after my husband and I left, we constantly reminded ourselves how lucky we were. Life in Eritrea and leaving Eritrea was so difficult that freedom felt like a dream for a very long time. Over time our life there came to seem like the dream. Then the longing and the loss began to set in. Most who flee are not able to return. Some find that it is impossible to make enough money in their destination country to afford a trip back home. Some fear political repercussions upon return or worry they will not be given permission to leave again. Some take a principled stance in protest of the government's policies and refuse to comply with government requirements that would make their return safe and sanctioned (which I discuss below). In the ten years we have been gone, we have not believed that returning would be safe. During that time, both of my husband's brothers have gotten married, as have countless cousins and friends. Children have been born, including my husband's niece and nephew. We have had two children who have never met their uncles, aunts, or cousins. My father-in-law and mother-in-law have both passed away without our seeing them again. Our children will never know their grandparents.

When we left Eritrea, we did not realize we were saying good-bye forever. We did not realize we were severing our lives. These losses born from escape have become integral to the experience of being Eritrean. We mourn long-distance by Skype, Facebook, and phone with relatives and friends who are scattered around the world.

Many ethnographies end with an epilogue. The anthropologist revisits the village, chats with interlocutors, notes how the children have grown, and discusses how much has changed or not changed to bring the findings up to date. Instead, I end with departure, loss, and erasure—the literal hollowing out of the nation. The "village" of teachers and students that I studied no longer exists. The vast majority of the teachers who so generously shared with me their lives, their criticisms and insights into their country, town, school, and profession, are gone. Perhaps out of fear, perhaps frustrated with the inability to grow up, perhaps angry at a state that insists on militarizing them, they have left and now reside abroad, where they can recalibrate their lives and their relationship with the nation. They are no longer positioned to do the work of the state or to reproduce the nation by socializing a new generation of young people. What could be more emblematic of the impotence of the state than a generation of teachers—the ones charged with reproducing the nation—who have fled?

In many ways, I neither chose to do fieldwork in Eritrea nor chose when to leave. Going to Eritrea, in my case, and leaving—for thousands of Eritreans and for my husband and me—was framed by the strictures of the coercive state and, more specifically, by the prisonlike nature of Eritrea. My husband was not allowed to leave, and so I went to Eritrea instead; he could not get out, but I could get in. Two years later, the imperative to leave and the timing of our departure were also a by-product of the intense, prison-like nature of the Eritrean enclosure. Being enclosed and imprisoned means that when you have the chance to leave, you must take it. You do not wait and hope for another chance, because that chance might not come. The experience of being imprisoned drives Eritreans to escape into what is often exile, a condition from which they cannot return. Our leaving, like the departures of so many Eritreans, is an effect, a by-product, of the dynamics of encampment.

Encampment in Eritrea and Elsewhere

Throughout this book, I have suggested that Eritrea, with its prohibitions on leaving, its tight controls, and its biopolitical management, can be better understood through the logics of encampment. Enclosures—camps—are a

means of creating spaces that can be controlled, regulated, and managed. Governance through camps is the modus operandi of the Eritrean state. Not only is the whole country enclosed and regulated like a camp; a plethora of actual camps, such as military camps and work camps for students, also punctuate the national space and are visible throughout the country. The country is a series of literal camps within a larger figurative camp. Camps, both literal and figurative, are political spaces preoccupied with containing elements regarded as threatening and dangerous by keeping them in or out while also utilizing extremes of coercion and control and devolving sovereignty to state actors. Here I have also argued that schools are camps in their own right.

Processes of encampment, enclosure, and mass imprisonment are far from unique to Eritrea. It has been noted that nation-states in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries face "waning sovereignty," arguably giving rise to this preoccupation and near obsession with enclosure (Brown 2010). A large number of nations are building walls, barriers, and security fences along their borders, while other nations are building security barriers to protect communities within nations (for a discussion of both of these phenomena, see Brown 2010). Some of these forms of securitized enclosure—security barriers between national territories, gated communities, security gates around property—are intended to keep those who are unwanted *out* and, thereby, protect those who are *in*. In this sense, the enclosure is like a "gated community" (Brown 2010: 19). What is inside the walls is protected from the dangers outside. When communities or nations build security barriers around themselves, they simultaneously respond to perceived threats and produce a sense of identification with what is inside the enclosure.

Camps are intensely concerned with security and risk management in their myriad forms. Securitization leads to the utilization of the extremes of coercion, sometimes to keep people out, as in the case of walling off national borders with security barriers, and sometimes to keep dangerous elements in to protect society from their influence, such as in the case of prisons and detention centers. Eritrea is perhaps somewhat unique in that it has created a nationwide camp not to keep people out but to seal the nation and keep nationals *in*. Additionally, as I discuss below, this camp regulates the terms under which nationals who are able to get out may return. As with other countries that are anxious about waning sovereignty and concerned about security, enclosing the population within the national territory in Eritrea is a response to a sense of siege and security threats (Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2014). The most pressing threat, of course, is the lingering border conflict,

which produces the ongoing state of siege in Eritrea and, for some, justifies the mass militarization of the population. However, the logics of encampment in Eritrea are not just about protecting the nation from security threats but also about making Eritrean subjects who ascribe to the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice's (PFDJ's) version of what it means to be Eritrean. The instinct to govern through enclosing, while rooted in the country's military ethos, is about the party's revolutionary project and its desire to produce a nation oriented around these revolutionary notions of progress, unity, and *wholeness* that would fuse together disparate ethnic, religious, and regional identifications. In this regard, Eritrea is, perhaps, similar to Cold War–era, revolutionary dictatorships, which sealed borders and prevented people from leaving to protect "fragile" societies, promulgate the ideologies of socialism, and reinvent "new" societies (Brown 2010: 40; see also Hinton 2005). Total social change was the ultimate goal of these powerfully moral Cold War–era projects, and encampment was the key strategy to bring about this goal. Thus, in seeking to protect its national community from polluting influences, Eritrea is a complex "gated community" seeking to protect itself from external threats and take care of its population.

In contrast to the gated community, other forms of enclosure, such as prisons, concentration camps, and detention centers, are intended to guard sovereignty by keeping those deemed to be dangerous or polluting away from those to be protected. Imprisonment, detention, and mass incarceration are arguably a product of the same concern about weakened sovereignty and the subsequent securitization that emerges from perceptions that the government cannot keep us safe without removing those deemed to be dangerous. While the impetus to secure borders and communities looks to keep those deemed dangerous and unwanted *out,* prisons enclose those deemed a threat within a tightly controlled environment. They keep the dangerous elements *in.* The rationale for concentration camps, detention centers, and prisons is still to ward off security threats, but these camps do so by containing elements deemed to be threatening. They serve to imprison and punish those regarded as not fit to belong to the larger, protected whole. Because Eritrea protects itself by coercing and imprisoning its own nationals, it combines the two forms of encampment—the gated community that protects and purifies those inside and the prison that punishes those inside and deems them dangerous.

One of the core objectives of this book is to explore what happens to national identifications under these extremes of encampment. The large swathe of the population whose relationship with the state is mediated by

the biopolitical metrics of imprisonment and punishment fundamentally recalibrates its relationship with the nation. Arjun Appadurai (1996: 39) has noted that the hyphen that binds nation to state in most countries, if not all, is now more an "index of disjuncture" than an "icon of conjuncture." He suggests that nations and states "have become one and another's projects" (1996: 39). Even in a country like Eritrea, which initially appeared to be extremely adept at hyphenating its nation to its state, we can observe how the state has struggled and ultimately cannibalized its nation, its nationals, and its national project (Appadurai 1996: 39). At independence in Eritrea, the liberating and ruling party instituted an intensive, revolutionary nation-making project. As I showed in Chapter 1, the party developed and disseminated an ideology based on the legacy of The Struggle, values of equality, the commonalities of all Eritrean peoples, and, above all, the willingness to sacrifice and die for the country. It also set in place a variety of technologies designed to produce this type of subject. However, because those technologies were coercive, particularly after the failure to demobilize when the border war ended, they unraveled the party's version of nationalism, leaving Eritrean nationalism intact but fragmented. The party's unitary and unified vision for the country coexists with multiple notions of what it means to be Eritrean. This turned the meaning of being Eritrean into a question, a debate, no longer defined by party hegemony based on the tropes of revolution and sacrifice.

The party and the government it had put in place now struggled to reproduce the values of the struggle for independence. In the absence of effervescent buy-in from Eritreans, the government wound up forcing people into National Service, leading Eritreans to imagine the party's nation-making project as emblematic of the punishing state. They thought of themselves as punished subjects, forced to serve rather than valiantly sacrificing for the good of the nation. Attempts by the leadership to stay true to its nation-building agenda, which tried to maintain the hyphen between nation and state, produced a vicious cycle of coercion and evasion. Once committed to forcing citizens to comply with its nation-building agenda (and to National Service in particular), the leadership had no choice but to continue to coerce. Meanwhile, the more coercive the state became, the more Eritreans evaded forms of coercion. This in turn led to more coercion and more evasion, ultimately leading to large numbers of people fleeing the country.

The vicious cycle of coercion and evasion is not simply a battle between a monolithic state with the will and capacity to *force* and a population intent on escape and evasion. Rather, it is also enacted between middle actors,

such as teachers and citizens. This vicious cycle plays out not between The State and The People, writ large, but through everyday encounters between people who have multiple commitments as people and as state employees. Thus, this cycle occurs within the state apparatus itself, leading to multiple contradictions, inconsistencies, and inefficiencies that reveal the impotence of the state. In other words, as state employees struggle to *be* the state, they embody the cycle of coercion and evasion.

Under a regime of encampment, state sovereignty devolves into a plethora of individual state actors. If the camp is the embodiment of the state of exception, which normalizes the use of force and abandons the rule of law, then there is little to stop state employees from utilizing coercion or violence with impunity (Agamben 1998, 2005). This is certainly the case in Eritrea and elsewhere; it is evident in the behavior of bureaucrats, who may deny people documentation that will give them the freedom to leave the country, change jobs, pursue higher education, or even take annual leave. Many in Eritrea, including my husband and me, experienced this when trying to acquire exit visas; we became aware of how many people have the power to deny, contain, and constrain. Impunity is also apparent in the many accounts of punishment, torture, and detention within military units as well as among the police, who commonly use force and generally make decisions about the use of violence outside any guidance of law.[2] Impunity is present in schools, where teachers seal off school compounds, have students arrested, sort students, and use violence liberally as a punishment. Under a state of exception, particular places—schools, military units, and even ministry offices—become their own sovereign spaces where power is diffused to those who act with impunity, making decisions about the use of force on behalf of the state, but not according to any coherent state mandate or policy.

State employees, including bureaucrats, military commanders, police, and teachers, may act coercively and even violently. Though they act without the constraint of law, there is usually a complex logic to their use of violence and force, which may constrain violence or unleash it. Morality, beliefs, prejudices, and attitudes frame their decisions about the use of force and coercion, while debates about all of these complicate their decisions. Uncertainty about the future and a sense of moral crisis heighten the stakes of these debates, reframing these decisions about coercion and violence. Additionally, state actors' own imaginaries of the state—in this case, imaginaries of the state as failing to maintain order—amplify their sense of responsibility for the morality of the nation. Thus, state actors may act with impunity under a devolved state of exception, but they do so in response to

a complex configuration of factors, including their own contested morality, the insecurity brought on by an uncertain future, and their own imaginaries of what the state is doing to rectify this insecurity.

To further complicate our understanding of the state, these same state actors, who produce coercive state effects within the sovereign space of their own encampment, are also subject to regimes of encampment and coercion within the larger nationwide camp. Middle actors respond to being evaded with coercion and respond to being coerced with evasion, thus embodying the vicious cycle of coercion and evasion. Due to the limitless liminality of National Service, teachers believed they could not help students "grow up." Indeed, they could not grow up themselves. As a result, they gave up, slacked off, and joined the students in a kind of foot-dragging resistance that made the schools ineffective. Teachers showed up late and generally "did not act like teachers." They mocked the national narrative and created opportunities, willingly or unwillingly, in which students could do so as well. Many sought ways to escape the teaching profession and, ultimately left the country, seeing few other options. At the same time, the ensuing disorder that teachers helped create gave rise to their resurging sense of moral crisis and an effort to retake control that was almost vigilante-like in its determination to do better than the government at governing students.

Coercion and evasion inevitably produce each other, particularly within the enclosed conditions of encampment. This was certainly apparent in schools, but also in Eritrea as a whole. Imprisoning the nation produces desires and, indeed, a sense of the necessity to escape, which in turn produces the necessity of more coercive measures to prevent people from escaping. Containing people within enclosed military units, where violence is rampant, produces the need to evade National Service but also creates the state's need to enact more coercive means to conscript. *Gifa* was one such method; utilizing schools as a technology of conscription was another. Student attempts to use schooling to evade National Service led teachers to become more coercive by tightening the school enclosures and shoring up school walls, which, in turn, led students to slack off more in schools and led teachers to believe that they were justified in using even more force. Although the examples I provide are mostly from schools in Eritrea, the mutuality of coercion and evasion certainly has played out more broadly in Eritrea and also plays out elsewhere, particularly in light of the rising preoccupation with walled sovereignty and the logics of governance that accompany an increased preoccupation with encampment worldwide.

Ultimately, the cycle of coercion and evasion reveals the state as impotent. Teachers were impotent, failing to either make schools into controlled

spaces or to provide students with an alternative to the broader imprisonment, punishment, and coercion of life as a subject of the Eritrean regime. More broadly, the government was impotent in several ways. It came to rely on coercion and violence to enact its nation-making project—specifically, National Service. Meanwhile, it lacked the capacity to regulate and control the use of force by its own employees. Thus, this use of force did not accomplish any desired ideological or imaginative effects. Instead, it made state subjects feel coerced and evasive. These coerced subjects came to imagine the state negatively, delegitimizing and mistrusting the government's national project but not abandoning the nation or their sense of belonging to it.

Eritrea, with its hearkening back to an earlier era of Cold War authoritarianism, is a notably difficult case to compare. It might, at first glance, look like an artifact of an earlier political era in which it was not unheard of for countries to seal their borders, lock in their citizens, and exert extreme controls over their people. But I suggest that it is also a harbinger of things yet to come, an extreme form of encampment that punishes the punishers, coerces those who coerce, imprisons its citizens, and thereby cannibalizes the nation and renders the state impotent. Eritrea illuminates rising, and often hidden, forms of authoritarianism worldwide. This apparently odd case of Eritrea can shed light on state struggles elsewhere.

Much of the literature on authoritarianism, most of which comes out of political science, has attempted to differentiate authoritarian from democratic regimes. Despite a growing literature on the hybrid regimes in the post–Cold War era, which makes the important point that there is a complex politics within authoritarian regimes, most of the work in this area still distinguishes between distinct regime types (see, for example, Brownlee 2007; Gandhi 2008; Levitsky and Way 2010; Svolik 2012). It also tends to focus on political elites rather than on everyday life, meaning that we know very little about microlevel politics under conditions of authoritarianism. Anthropology would seem to be the field that might illuminate these dynamics; however, there has been little to no work in anthropology explicitly on authoritarianism. Several studies are incisive in this regard, but at present there is no readily identifiable anthropological literature on authoritarianism (see, for example, Mbembe 2001; Skidmore 2004; Wedeen 1999). This is a significant omission in the field given that forms of authoritarian governance are proliferating despite the widespread transition to formal democracy in many countries over the last two decades. Indeed, we might argue that so-called democracy and authoritarianism seem to be moving toward each other, with what are labeled authoritarian regimes holding elec-

tions and what are categorized as democracies utilizing increasingly authoritarian tactics to manage their populations.

This is particularly apparent at the level of lived experiences of people who live under all regime types. This makes it all the more necessary for anthropology, and ethnography more generally, to examine the phenomenon of authoritarianism. From the vantage point of lived, everyday authoritarianism, I have focused on the effects of three facets of this experience: coercion, and particularly the use of force; encampment, including imprisonment; and punishment, particularly as it frames a sense of subjectivity around being punished. As I have noted above, these facets of everyday authoritarianism are common in Eritrea and elsewhere. Indeed, a focus on these three elements makes Eritrea look much less like a unique case.

As I have written this book, I cannot help but be aware of how these three facets of authoritarianism play out in other, very different contexts where extremes of imprisonment are present, including neighborhoods fifteen minutes from where I live in Philadelphia. In the urban United States, a hugely disproportionate number of men of color come in contact with the carceral state through the police, the legal system, or prisons. The urban poor in the United States increasingly encounter the state predominantly through the auspices of being a suspect or a criminal—in short, being a punished subject. As this happens, not unlike in Eritrea, whole populations come to see the state as punishing and equate their status as citizens with being punished subjects (Lerman and Weaver 2014; Rios 2011). Ethnographies in these contexts suggest that as a guilty-until-proven-innocent mentality takes hold in these communities, subjects come to understand that there is no reliable rule of law, only a series of policing and legal practices that strip them of their humanity, constrain their everyday lives, and limit the way they think about their future (Goffman 2014; Rios 2011). A series of encounters with the force of law strip punished subjects of their humanity, rendering them "bare life" and repeatedly subjecting them to the state of exception.

Eritreans have responded to the inevitability of being punished by the state with evasiveness. This also resonates with accounts from the urban United States, where young men will go so far as to avoid signing up for government benefits that they are entitled to, avoid going to hospitals when injured or to see the birth of their children, and avoid attending public services and public places out of the knowledge that they may be punished or imprisoned if they do so (Goffman 2014; Rios 2011). This is not so different from Eritreans' learning to avoid public streets, the workplace and, at times, weddings and other events to avoid *gifa*. Ongoing attempts to avoid being

punished frame life in the urban American police state similar to the way they do in the prison state of Eritrea. As the vicious cycle of coercion and evasion plays out, Eritreans and members of urban, poor, American communities master intricate strategies to live life "on the run" (Goffman 2014).

While there is an expanding understanding of what it is like to be a punished subject, little work helps us understand the symbolic and actual violence used by middle actors within these contexts. While my work has focused on teachers, I suggest that this complex configuration of coercion and evasion, morality and power, frames decisions to use force and coercion among other state actors in Eritrea and elsewhere. In the United States, public institutions, particularly schools, not only are aligned with the carceral state and thereby positioned to punish citizens but are punished by the state as well. American schools increasingly have metal detectors, random police sweeps, no-tolerance policies, and other measures that make schools ever more like the larger carceral system (Kupchik 2010; Lyons and Drew 2006). At the same time, American public schools are mandated to educate students but must do so amid intensive regulatory scrutiny and face increasing sanctions (punishments) if they do not perform well (Kupchik 2010; Lyons and Drew 2006). Similarly stringent accountability measures regulate teachers' work. Although there is no study that looks at American teachers as state actors in light of the overall climate of punishment, an examination of teachers—middle actors who are both punishers and punished—in this context would be fruitful. We know little about how teachers respond to the mandate to punish when they themselves are punished; however, lessons from teachers in Eritrea might shed light on this paradox. It would seem logical that the same vicious cycle of coercion and evasion, tinged with morality, prejudices, and imaginaries of the state, would apply under conditions in the United States and elsewhere that teachers face the strictures of encampment. Understanding teachers, whose job it is to socialize citizens, under these types of conditions is important, because it allows us to understand nationalism at a historical juncture when identifications with nations are increasingly fragmented.

Imprisoned, punished subjects do not identify with national values or notions of citizenship in conventional or official ways. A growing literature on the punished and punishing culture of the carceral state in the United States (Goffman 2014; Kupchik 2010; Lerman and Weaver 2014; Lyons and Drew 2006; Rios 2011) and elsewhere in the democratic world (Waquant 2009) shows that citizens in these communities have a fundamentally different relationship with the state. Again, there are important resonances between the way this plays out in Eritrea and in other punishing contexts.

As in Eritrea, populations susceptible to mass incarceration and state punishment in the United States recalibrate their understanding of citizenship and reimagine the nation. These populations in the United States, whom I would consider to be punished subjects, feel alienated from any sense of democratic citizenship or civic duty, arguably the cornerstones of American nationalism (Lerman and Weaver 2014). There are parallels between America's punished subjects abandoning notions of democratic citizenship and Eritreans abandoning the ideals of party-sponsored nationalism in the face of mass punishment and coercion. In both cases, a large proportion of the population effectively opts out of any attempt to be good nationals, as per official definitions, and instead embraces and legitimates various forms of evasiveness and political subjectivity that are counter to those subject positions carved out by official state discourse.

Alchemical Nationalism

Escape and encampment demarcate the experience of being Eritrean and ascribe meaning to it; they are the two modalities through which citizens understand their relationship with the regime and vice versa. Eritreans can remain imprisoned and coerced subjects of the state, or they can flee from state repression. However, a third modality enables the state to recalibrate its relationship with citizens and citizens to reimagine the meaning of the nation and therefore recalibrate their relationship with the state. I call this third modality "alchemical nationalism." If alchemy is the magic of taking something base, bare, and without value and turning it into something valuable and precious, then efforts of both the regime and opposition groups to transform unfortunate circumstances into something meaningful and sacred can be thought of as alchemical. Through bureaucratic procedures, the regime turns those who flee the country, and are therefore regarded as traitors and de facto criminals, into good citizens. Meanwhile, opposition groups discursively transform Eritreans' experiences of suffering and bare life into meaningful narratives of opposition to the regime.

Over the past ten years, the number fleeing the Eritrean regime has exploded, leading diasporic citizenship to take two significantly different forms. Tricia Redeker Hepner (2009a) introduces this dynamic through her discussion of "generation asylum" and "generation nationalism." Generation nationalism references the earlier generation of patriotic, government-supporting diasporic citizens, while generation asylum references the more recent explosion of Eritreans fleeing the current regime.

The government, however, has more recently begun to recalibrate its

relationship with generation asylum, seeking out ways to alchemically transform generation asylum into citizens who perform as loyal citizens. Shortly after we left Eritrea, we learned that a teacher whom we knew well had managed to leave the country around the same time we did. (In keeping with the secrecy that surrounds departures in Eritrea, to this day, I have no idea how that family managed to secure exit visas.) We have visited them periodically over the years and were quite surprised to learn that they planned a visit to Eritrea. Around the same time, after years of witnessing Eritreans' struggles to flee the country and their anguish at being unable to return because the government regarded leaving as a crime, I suddenly became aware of many Eritreans, including those who had fled their National Service or left without permission, returning to the country to visit. I also started to hear more stories about those who fled, particularly those who arrived in Sudan, making the embassy one of their first stops so that they could receive documentation and identity papers. At some point in the last few years, the government began allowing Eritreans who left illegally to acquire consular services, including an ID card that would, in theory, allow them to travel back to Eritrea, provided they would sign a *te'asa,* a formal letter of apology that stated: "I regret having committed an offence by failing to fulfill my national obligation and I am willing to accept the appropriate measures when decided" (Hepner 2009a: 200). Signing the *te'asa* along with paying a mandatory 2 percent income tax and other additional fees effectively altered the relationship between Eritreans and the government (Hepner 2009a; Hepner and Tecle 2013). The *te'asa* is emblematic of the process of alchemical transformation of citizenship status and the reframing of the relationship between citizens, the state, and the nation. With a signature on a letter that the government has formulated (and the payment of fees and taxes), these Eritreans are instantly altered from criminals—who if caught while trying to flee Eritrea would have been imprisoned, quite likely tortured, and possibly killed—to legal, diasporic citizens with the right to return home and leave again freely. Through the use of the *te'asa,* the government coercively recalibrates notions of citizenship on a case-by-case basis, yet it still imprisons the broader population of Eritreans within the country.

As the diaspora is populated with larger and larger numbers of people who have fled the regime, opposition groups in the diaspora are involved in a national alchemy of their own. This becomes most clear in their appropriation and inversion of the language and symbolism of The Struggle to cast those who flee as the "sacrificial citizens" who are valiantly opposing the government (Bernal 2014). In October 2013, a boat that was carrying several hundred Eritreans capsized near the island of Lampedusa, off the

coast of Italy. These events pulled at the heartstrings of those around the world who are concerned for humanitarian issues, highlighting the plight of refugees and asylum seekers and Italy's lack of preparedness to cope with the routine influx of immigrants. However, the way these events played out in Eritrean politics was quite different. While the world expressed concern about this grave humanitarian problem, the Eritrean government tried to distance itself from these events, initially pretending that these were not Eritreans who had died (Awate Team 2013). After some criticism for failing to mention the crash, on October 4, three days after these events, an announcement was made on Eritrean TV, referring to "illegal African immigrants" from "horn of Africa nationality" who had died, without specifying where they were from (Awate Team 2013). The dead, officially for the Eritrean government, were alchemically transformed to country-less African immigrants. Later, the Eritrean government acknowledged that the losses were mainly Eritrean, offered condolences to the families of those who died, and offered to repatriate the bodies of the deceased (Clottey 2013).

Meanwhile, Eritrean diaspora opposition groups were nationalizing these subjects and depicting them with the most sacred language of the nation. For those opposed to the government, these were martyrs, equated with those who had fought and died for the country. Opposition websites posted pictures of long rows of coffins, some of them child-sized. The websites juxtaposed these images with pictures of mourning Eritreans, critiques of government policies that drive people out of Eritrea, and declarations of anger at how the government was dealing with the boat crash. For these opposition groups, those who died in Lampedusa were martyrs who died fleeing, and therefore opposing, the policies of an oppressive regime. Furthermore, for Eritreans in Eritrea and, particularly, in the diaspora, the tragedy in Lampedusa was deeply personal—many people knew or imagined they could have known people on that boat. Opposition groups yoked this affective climate of loss to a critique of the government. This was certainly not the first time that diaspora opposition groups appropriated the language of martyrdom. As Victoria Bernal (2014: 120) describes, in 2005, the opposition website Awate posted the "Martyrs Album," a "virtual war memorial" to commemorate the lives of those who had died in the border war. This Martyrs Album, according to Bernal, was subversive not only because it enabled an opposition website to usurp the role of the state by publishing the names of the war dead but also because Awate claimed the power to "sacrilize" the dead, categorizing those who died in the border war as sacred "martyrs" along with those who died in the war for independence (2014: 121). Opposition groups that have martyred those who died making the

dangerous escape from Eritrea take this one step further by labeling flight from the regime as the ultimate sacrifice.

Both the state and the people recalibrate nationalisms. Spaces of encampment produce and protect notions of national purity and pure belonging; they differentiate good citizens from bad and sort those who "really belong" from those who do not. The state may imprison or dispose of those who are deemed to be bad citizens. Indeed, the state in Eritrea has done so to a large number of people. But nationalism under conditions of encampment and exile also becomes alchemical. A symbol, image, person, or process that does not have value in one context can be transformed into someone or something that does. The state turns criminalized escapees into valued diasporic citizens. Opposition groups weave horrific tales of escape and suffering into valorous, brave acts of martyrdom for the nation. The government is intent on alchemically transforming citizenship status to bind these newly escaped diasporic citizens to the state. Meanwhile, opposition groups are intent on appropriating the sacred symbols of the nation and wresting the nation away from the ruling regime. While the country is enclosed and encamped—a space of coercion, evasion, and impotence—the places to which Eritreans are exiled become the spaces in which we can observe a multiplicity of actors and organizations, including the government, struggling over the meaning of the nation and the capacity to act as the state. In contrast to the enclosed space of the territorial nation, where the state cannibalizes its nation, weakening the hyphen between nation and state, outside the national territory the nation and the state "become each other's project" (Appadurai 1996: 39), remaking the relationship between nation and state in new ways. Governing institutions redefine citizenship. People wrest the nation away from the state. And nationalism is constantly reimagined and remade by state, nonstate, and middle actors.