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The Struggling State

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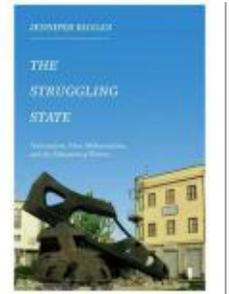
Published by Temple University Press

Riggan, Jennifer.

The Struggling State.

Temple University Press, 2016.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/64136.



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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. This is a point that has been made by a number of scholars, including Arjun Appadurai (1996), Akhil Gupta (2012), Michael Herzfeld (1997), and Lisa Wedeen (2008).

2. This definition of the state is common in much of the anthropology of the state, but I am specifically influenced by Herzfeld's (1997) and Gupta's (2012) work in this regard. See also Jean-François Bayart's work in the conclusion of *The Politics of the Belly: The State in Africa* (2009).

3. The concept of collective effervescence comes from Emile Durkheim (1965) and is borrowed by Tricia Redeker Hepner (2009b) to describe the passionate sentiments of support and joy for independence around which Eritrean nationalism coalesced during these years.

4. David O'Kane (2012) also uses the theme of struggle to illuminate the challenges of the regime to acquire legitimacy among its people. He identifies three struggles: a military struggle (the border war), a developmental struggle, and a struggle to instill national identities. I emphasize the regime's struggle to produce national identities, but I do so in a way that neither reifies nation or state nor equates the state with the regime, but rather illuminates the struggles of people to constitute nation and state and to fuse the two.

5. Achille Mbembe's (2001) and Wedeen's (1999) work draws on these frameworks but also attends to state violence specifically. Work on sovereignty that draws on Giorgio Agamben's notion of devolved sovereignty also addresses the productive and unstructured nature of state violence (see, for example, Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2005). Finally, work on vigilantism has also used these frameworks to show how extra-state violence functions as the state (Buur 2003; Goldstein 2003; Lyons 2008; Smith 2004).

6. Imaginaries that emerged from state coercion reflect the maddening nature of the state. On the one hand, a sense that the country is under a state of siege and that therefore the government is legitimately taking exceptional measures to protect people may legitimate state coercion. Indeed, Eritrea galvanized its people, both during the war and after it ended, with this sense of being under siege and has often been described as "a siege state," or a

“garrison state” (International Crisis Group 2010; Müller 2012a, 2012b; Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2014). On the other hand, when the state of emergency extends beyond the point at which people legitimately sense that there is a threat, people interpret the emergency powers of coercion ascribed to state actors as the state turning against its people. However, in people’s imagination of the state, there is no clear delineation between when the state legitimately derives powers from being truly “under siege” and when it has illegitimately turned against its people. This uncertainty and the unevenness of imaginaries of the state that this uncertainty produces constitute the maddening condition.

7. Wedeen makes a similar point: that these types of perspectives that focus on discipline are important to look at even in authoritarian, coercive regimes. In her work on Syria, overall she is interested in looking at how the state enacts symbolic power as well as disciplinary power and how the two become fused, leading subjects into a situation where they have to behave “as if” they support the regime. I think the symbolic power in Eritrea was somewhat different. Because liberation was so recent and there still was a powerfully lingering sense of effervescent revolutionary nationalism, Eritrean nationalism was more conflicted than performative. This is why I think Begoña Aretxaga’s framing of the “maddening state” works better to understand Eritrea than Wedeen’s notion of performing “as if” one is compliant with authoritarianism.

8. For example, “the state” that is held accountable for human rights violations in instances of arbitrary detention, imprisonment, or torture is assumed to have malicious intent; it is imagined as an all-powerful state that decides to behave maliciously. However, what are often thought of as state violations of rights and liberties are the result of actions by individuals who may or may not have been incentivized or forced to engage in those actions by other state actors.

9. In addition to Eritrean teachers, there were nine Indian teachers over the course of the two years I was in Assab, although only four stayed for the full two years. A complete examination of the role of these teachers and their role as “foreign” state actors is far beyond the scope of this book. Indian teachers were remarkably similar to Eritrean teachers in terms of pedagogy as well as in their understanding of their role as nation-builders. Thus, I have included the Indian teachers when their outlook and understanding of their role as teachers and “nation-builders” mirrored that of Eritrean teachers.

10. Historically, in eighteenth-century Europe, arguably the era in which the modern nation-state dawned, schools and the military worked together to create national identities, a sense of territoriality, and the mandate to protect that territory (Weber 1976). But while historical work tends to assert, quite rightly, that schools and the military have worked together to forge national attachments, the vast majority of more contemporary studies treat them separately, which does not allow for an exploration of the complex convergence and divergence of the two. There are some notable exceptions to the separation of studies of education and studies of militarization. Work on the relationship between militarization and schooling in Turkey (Altınay 2005; Kaplan 2006) makes similar observations. Additionally, there is historical work on this topic, most notably Eugene Weber’s *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), which treats schools and the military as key. But there is still a need for this relationship to be explored more fully.

11. This is similar to the bureaucratic pilgrimages that Benedict Anderson (1991) describes as being essential to forging national identifications in eighteenth-century America; the life trajectories of educated citizens and soldiers serve as a sort of pilgrimage that nationalizes their everyday experience in local settings, such as schools or military training.

12. Militarism references not only a government’s orientation toward defense and war

readiness but also the infusion of military symbols and practices into citizens' daily lives combined with a variety of symbolic and ritualized practices that valorize the nation's military past and present (Bickford 2011; O'Kane and Hepner 2009; see also Enloe 1988 and Lutz 2002). I understand militarization to be, as Andrew Bickford (2011: 24) notes, "an intentional process; something the state must set out to accomplish." Militarism becomes a way of life promoted by the state, in service to the state, and, indeed, enabling citizens to imagine the state. Militarism becomes a way of understanding the past, present, and future of the nation. Additionally, in militarized societies, experiences and encounters with military personnel and institutions mediate social experiences.

13. Exceptions to this include ethnographic studies conducted in Eritrea, which focus on various facets of everyday life in post-liberation Eritrea (see, for example, Bozzini 2011, 2013; Mahrt 2009; O'Kane 2012; Poole 2009, 2013; Treiber 2009, 2010; Tronvoll 1999; Woldemikael 2009, 2013); however, with the exception of Tronvoll 1999, no other full-length ethnographic monograph has been published until this book.

14. Eritrea has also provided fertile ground for scholars of transnationalism (Al-Ali, Black, and Koser 2001; Bernal 2004, 2005, 2014; Hepner 2009b). The ruling party's extensive organizational structure, which incorporates its diaspora into the national polity, has enabled Eritrean nationalism to remain strong among its citizens around the world (Hepner 2009b). The government is one of few to effectively levy a mandatory tax (2 percent) on members of the diaspora, which is an important source of revenue for the government. Scholars historically have used Eritrea as a case in point to show that the nation-state was not, in fact, weakening or disappearing as a result of globalization, as many predicted it would, but that nations like Eritrea could learn to operate transnationally and actually strengthen the nation-state (Bernal 2004).

CHAPTER 1

1. There is increasing and very interesting scholarship on the forms of nationalist consciousness that emerged from the colonial era in Eritrea. Because my focus here is on Eritrean government-sponsored nationalism and the genesis of the ruling party itself, there is no space to delve into this very interesting form of Eritrean nationalism, but for more information, see Makki 2011a, 2011b and Taddia 1994.

2. Earlier thinking on identity in Africa suggested that these were diverse and varied populations that were not easily turned into national populations. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992) asserts that these were states seeking nations. Similarly, this is a central piece of Basil Davidson's (1993) argument that the nation has been a "curse" and a "burden" for Africa. Complicating these earlier arguments, more recent work suggests that in an effort to lay legitimate claim to the state, the nation is co-opted by particular groups who seek to define national belonging more narrowly. Whereas earlier literature suggests that this is a process of rejecting the idea of the nation, more recent literature argues that because of the processes of democratization and the changing political field in Africa, nationalism is now an exclusionary process. This point is made in work on autochthony (Geschiera 2009; Geschiera and Ceuppens 2005; Geschiera and Jackson 2006; Jackson 2006, 2007). The principle of nationalism has taken hold, but it has become an exclusionary principle that allows groups to lay particular claims to the state rather than a unifying one that allows the government to spread its influence over "the people" (Young 2007).

3. Family members may have feared that a loved one they had not heard from had died in the war, but absent an official announcement, they could still hold out hope. Because

many soldiers were given little or no leave to visit family, many wrote home infrequently, and letters were easily lost, there was room for hope that family members with whom they had not had contact were still alive and serving in the military.

CHAPTER 2

1. At the same time that the G-15 was arrested, several Eritrean U.S. Embassy employees were also arrested.

2. Officially, Eritreans are considered of military age until they reach forty-five, but there are accounts of people being conscripted up to age fifty.

3. It is important to remind the reader that my definition of “the state” assumes that we understand that “the state” is not a material thing or a totality. Throughout this chapter, it is necessary for me to use language that may appear to be reifying the state, but all references of the state are to how the state is imagined and conceptualized.

4. Michel Foucault shows that the modern military was a disciplinary institution extraordinarily adept at producing the modern, disciplined state subject. Indeed, Foucault (1995: 136) singles out the soldier in his discussion of seventeenth-century technologies of power that “discovered the body as an object and target of power” that could be “manipulated, shaped, trained.” Soldier bodies are intensely disciplined. The experience of being in the military requires extensive temporal, spatial, and bodily control. Military training thus produces “isolation effects,” which lead individuals to think of themselves as disciplined subjects (Mitchell 1991, 2006).

5. Foucault’s (1995: 1) depiction of the seventeenth-century soldier emphasizes the “recognizability” of external attributes of the corps of soldiers. Their posture, coordinated movements, uniforms, and uniformity produce a collective, singular, uniform entity—the military. Extending Foucault’s argument, Timothy Mitchell (2006) argues that military discipline creates not only a disciplined state subject/soldier but also the very concept of “the military” as a whole.

6. Although initially there was widespread support for these various forms of service and Eritreans reflected a sense of pride in seeing televised images of National Service cadres, even in those early years, prior to the border war, there were complaints about the overly coercive and punitive nature of National Service, which belied docility while producing obedience. But despite these early complaints about National Service, it was largely an acceptable practice as long as the government honored its part of the agreement. Until 2001, few questioned National Service and the moral authority of the government to conscript. Indeed, when the war broke out, many, including those who had been critical of the institution, were thankful that the country had a ready fighting force to defend the country.

7. Katherine Verdery (1996) notes that the etatization of time could occur both when people have to engage in daily activities, such as waiting in food lines, and more coercively, when people are compelled to participate in lengthy parades and state performances.

8. Lisa Wedeen (1999) makes a very similar point. As I noted in the introduction, she refers to subjects of authoritarian leaders performing “as if” they supported the regime but transgressing in subtle ways.

9. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there were currently 252,000 Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers as of 2011, a number that steadily increased from 124,121 in 2003 (UNHCR 2000, 2002, 2005, 2011). The number continues to rise. As of December 2014, UNHCR estimates that there are 363,077 Eritrean refugees and 53,662 asylum seekers (UNHCR 2015). In the first ten months of

2014, 36,678 Eritreans requested asylum in Europe, compared to 12,960 in the previous year (UNHCR 2014).

10. In January 2013, a group of soldiers briefly occupied the Ministry of Information and read a statement on Eritrean television, demanding the implementation of the constitution and the release of political prisoners. There has been no further open opposition or protest since this event, which has come to be known as “Forto 2013,” although many opposition groups in the diaspora protested at Eritrean embassies around the world. Forto 2013 was the first open protest since students protested the arrest of their student union leader in 2001.

CHAPTER 3

1. Standards-based curricula have become prominent in the United States and are usually about integrating state curriculum with state standards and state tests. The Texas curriculum was notable for its early efforts to match statewide standards to statewide examinations, thereby holding schools and students to these standards.

2. This is a commonly understood assertion in a variety of literatures in the field of education. That schools reproduce class structures, particularly in the industrialized world, has been well asserted statistically and ethnographically (Althusser 1971; Anyon 1981; Bowles and Gintis 1976). Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron (1990) have taken up this argument and thoroughly theorized it, showing the ways in which schooling cultivates particular tastes, habitus, and therefore cultural capital. This assertion about the reproductive qualities of education is also at the core of work on social reproduction (Levinson and Holland 1996). Building on this, one of the core tenets of theories of cultural production is that schools reproduce broader social locations and positions, but in contrast to social reproduction theories, cultural production theories allow more agency and more understanding of the shifting, mutable nature of these structures. The vast majority of these studies explore the industrialized north, and, in general, much more work needs to be done in places where schools, and class structures themselves, function somewhat differently.

3. A robust literature on cultural production and social reproduction has illustrated the ways in which the subjectivity of an educated person is produced. This particular subjectivity maps onto racial, ethnic, or class privilege, thereby reinforcing broader societal inequalities, but it can also alter social structures and identities in meaningful ways. For an overview of this literature, see Levinson, Foley, and Holland 1996. For a discussion about how this literature applies to national identities, see, for example, Benei 2008, Hall 2002, and Levinson 2001.

4. The old system included clear written guidelines for what constituted failing a grade. In contrast, the new system never made clear to teachers what constituted “failure” for the year. Previously, under the old system, what constituted “failure” for the year was quite complex but was written in policy. For example, under the old system, in the Senior Secondary School, students “failed” their grade if they failed several different combinations of classes: (1) if they failed English or math and one other subject or (2) if they failed any other combination of three subjects out of the remaining five to seven subjects offered in Senior Secondary Schools (biology, chemistry, physics, history, geography, and sports were always offered, and sometimes Arabic and civics). The new system had no such clear policy regarding what constituted failure. One of the problems when the “new curriculum” was implemented was that the standard, academic courses were weighted differently; for example, students no longer took all three natural sciences every semester, as they had previ-

ously. Other “enrichment” courses were added, including “Family and Consumer Science,” “IT,” and “Health Science.” No policy ever clearly stated which courses would be included when calculating whether students would fail for the year.

5. These comments, made the same year that the new policies were implemented, might suggest that Eritrea’s choice of reforms were informed by (or resulted from) direct pressure from foreign donors. However, while it has been noted in many other countries that developing nations may have to succumb to pressures from international donors to fund their education systems (Berman 1992), Eritrea has long shown itself to be highly resistant to any type of coercive relationship with international donors and has been willing to reject aid to reject that which does not allow the government significant autonomy over its own policies. The director general of General Education described relationships with donors in the following way: “We share with our partners as long as they believe that we have the ownership and we have the program. They focus on what we are interested in and what we want to focus on.” Another interviewed curriculum writer went into more detail about what he thought the process of international influence might be, concluding that it was ultimately a national process: “I am quite sure there must be some kind of influence [from donors]. They have some ideas. But the good thing about our educational transformation is it has been initiated exclusively internally.”

CHAPTER 4

1. Ethnographies that show how schooling produces identities, including national identities, have focused a great deal on the use of school-based rituals to instill a sense of the meaning of being an educated person (Levinson, Foley, and Holland 1996; McLaren 1986; Quantz 2011).

2. Victor Turner (1969) discusses millenarian movements and hippies as examples of groups in a stage of extended liminality. Liisa Malkki’s (1995) work suggests that certain groups of people, such as refugees, are liminally located between categories produced by the nation-state system or “national order of things.”

3. In addition to the two roughly defined categories of Eritrean teachers, there were also Indian teachers, but for reasons outlined in the Introduction (because they were cultural outsiders), they do not figure into my discussion in this particular chapter.

4. Teachers who had already fully completed military training and National Service were called to the front lines during the third offensive and then were allowed to return to their teaching posts when the fighting stopped. University students and teachers who had not yet received training were called to training and after that began their National Service.

5. Indeed, historically the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front’s (EPLF’s) egalitarian ideology attempted to break down “traditional” hierarchies and empower youth. The People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), and its predecessor during the war for liberation, the EPLF, specifically targeted youth as a vulnerable and disenfranchised category of the population and has had a long history of organizing youth and breaking down earlier alignments of power (Hepner 2009b; Pool 2001).

6. According to Peter McLaren (1986: 82), the macrorituals refer to the “overall passage of students through the school system,” while the microrituals are the smaller, everyday rituals.

7. Control, as teachers described it, referred to managing the students and holding them accountable for their behavior by taking attendance, administering tests, and imposing consequences for lateness.

8. In Eritrean schools, students remain in their classroom throughout the school day, while teachers rotate from room to room; thus, the room belongs to the students.

9. Teacher lateness was not only a product of wanting to extend summer vacations and avoid returning to work. Some teachers worked during the summer, and their summer work encroached on the school year. Others experienced problems with finding transportation to Assab. New National Service teachers fresh from the university, who, depending on the year, composed a good percentage of school staff, had always been assigned to their posts belatedly and generally arrived once the semester was well underway.

10. It was common for teachers to leave the class a few minutes early if they had completed their lessons or to stay a few minutes late if their lessons ran over. However, it is possible that Aron felt self-conscious about leaving the class early because I was present. This was a problem, particularly in some of my observations of younger teachers. Despite my efforts to assure them that I wanted to see what they did normally in their classes, I often had the sense that, in contrast to the older teachers, they believed they had to perform in a particular way for me.

11. Perhaps surprisingly, students did not seem to make much of my presence in the room. In some classes when I first observed, when the teacher left the room, some students would glance at me and tell the others to be quiet, gesturing at me. But as soon as I indicated to them that I was not a teacher and they should carry on, they did so with little hesitation. In other classes, the students figured out on their own that I was not in a teacher role and paid no attention to me. This speaks to the fact that how the teacher behaved, in a particular ritualized manner, cued to the students how they were supposed to act. I was doing nothing that indicated to students that I was an authority figure. I sat in the back or the middle of the room, quietly taking notes as they were. I typically did not leave when the teacher left. I did nothing to command or require their obedience and docility. In some classes, the students tried to draw me into their conversations, sometimes even when the teacher was teaching. But mostly, they ignored me.

CHAPTER 5

1. Notions of sovereignty discussed by Giorgio Agamben (1998) and introduced by Carl Schmitt ([1922] 2005) are deeply entwined with notions of containment or “enclosure” (Brown 2010), which for Agamben is epitomized by the concentration camp. Law blurs with what is outside the law but enforced by state actors. State actors who are charged with upholding or following laws and policies find themselves positioned, and often expected, to behave in ways that are technically illegal but are considered necessary in times of crisis or emergency. In the state of exception, the force of law acts with violence on citizens, especially those categorized as dangerous or impure, stripping them of the rights that would be guaranteed to them by law. Those who encounter the full force of the law without the rights guaranteed by that law exist in a condition that Agamben refers to as “bare life,” not necessarily denied rights by the law but existing outside the law itself and effectively invisible to the law.

2. The lack of rights applies to a greater extent to those evading military service, who may be arrested at any moment, detained indefinitely, gravely mistreated, and perhaps killed with impunity. It applies to a lesser extent to civil servants, who also have minimal rights, but a few more than conscripts and many more than those evading service. In Chapter 2, I noted the absolute level of bodily control that conscripts experience. Additionally, no one has the right to own property or leave the country until National Service has been

completed. Furthermore, no written policies allocate when, how often, or under which conditions soldiers in National Service are awarded leave or under which conditions they may return home. Reports from those who have fled National Service suggest that considerations such as when a soldier may visit his or her family are made on a highly personal basis by commanding officers and that they may be denied for equally personal reasons.

3. Caroline Humphrey (2007) notes that Agamben's notion of sovereignty is tremendously useful for anthropologists to work with, as it allows for an exploration of very specific forms of state regulation and control of populations outside the traditional centralized notion of the state. However, she cautions that while we need to consider seriously the ways in which sovereignty devolves from the state, we need not treat Agamben as too prescriptive.

4. My thinking about morality and violence is illuminated by recent work on the anthropology of vigilantism, which shows that much vigilante violence is an attempt to rectify perceived or real weaknesses of the state. Like vigilantes, teachers behaved in ways that they saw as holding the state accountable to its moral obligations (Goldstein 2003). This work on vigilantism draws on a reinterpretation of Agamben's (1998) notion (which in itself is adopted from Schmitt [1922] 2005) to show the ways in which sovereignty becomes devolved and decentralized (see also Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2005).

5. Not surprisingly, teachers described these memories of well-ordered schools when I asked them directly what they thought was wrong with schools at the time of my fieldwork. But during life history interviews, when asked to recount their own education, they also spontaneously drew comparisons between well-ordered schools and respectful students of the past and the disorder of the present. Only a couple of teachers who grew up in Eritrea during the war noted that their schools were not as disciplined. One of these two teachers attributed this to their being taught by Ethiopian teachers who did not care about Eritreans. Another noted that there were many fights between Eritrean and Ethiopian students in the school. In both cases, the ongoing conditions and Ethiopian rule were implicated in the lack of order in schools. But, in general, most teachers noted that until the border war, schools in Assab were more disciplined.

6. When I spoke with teachers and directors in the highlands, they were experiencing similar or more serious behavior problems with their students, so the perception that students in Assab behaved worse than students in the highlands was more an expression of teacher frustration than a reality related to Assab.

7. It should be noted that because my research focused on teachers, my own knowledge of Afar culture is also very cursory and superficial. For this reason, I do not comment on these cultural differences in depth. The point here is that what were likely differences in cultural habits and practices were often coded by teachers as evidence of Afar students' being more "backward" and less "modern."

8. In practice, because of the dearth of Junior Secondary Schools throughout the country, relatively few students actually attended school up to grade 8, though according to educational policy, anyone could attend. Furthermore, the government was rapidly expanding access to grade 8 education by building more schools.

9. Parallels with the measures teachers took and the work of vigilantes can be seen here. If vigilantism is an attempt to retain order, justice, and morality when the state is not capable of doing so (Buur 2003; Goldstein 2003; Lyons 2008; Smith 2004), vigilante violence comes from a crisis of state legitimacy, such as existed in Eritrea, and challenges the state's capacity to maintain control and enforce justice but simultaneously reinforces these same ideals of justice and an ordered society (Buur 2003; Goldstein 2003). Its purpose is not to "overturn the state" but to "recall it to its legal obligations, its social contract with its citizens" (Goldstein 2003: 25). In times of moral anxiety, vigilante justice can be seen as an

attempt to restore a sense of morality: “It is through the constant enactment and embodiment of violence that the moral community is performed” (Buur 2003: 25).

10. Even adult married couples typically did not tend to overtly express romance, emotion, or affection for each other in public. There were very certain bars where more liberal men and women could go on a date; usually they were dimly lit with secluded areas where one would not be seen. In more public areas, women typically sat with their backs to the room to avoid being seen.

11. Generally students were not given ID cards. An exception was made for grade 8 and Senior Secondary School students, many of whom looked old enough to be of military age and were therefore at risk of being detained and forced into military training by the authorities.

CONCLUSION

1. I have detailed this process in Riggan 2014.

2. Although a systematic examination of the police was well beyond the scope of my research, anecdotally, I know of enough examples of police deciding how long to detain people and using violence liberally as an interrogation technique or punishment to make the claim that police officers in Eritrea, even more so than teachers, were generally at liberty to decide on the exception.

