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*On the cover: "Object of Interest."* Common sense about auto design implodes when a child encounters tail fins in the public space of the sidewalk or the street. The production of the street as a public space in the age of automobility has also been about the production of human subjects who must negotiate lethal machines traversing local places at high speed. Bystanders have had to develop complex knowledges about speed, driver behavior, and regulations; these knowledges are stabilized with massive infrastructures. In this issue, Sarah S. Lochlann Jain explores the subject construction of the nonhuman actors (automobiles) that constitute the space of the street. (Photograph by Sarah S. Lochlann Jain.)

# Eritrea Goes Global: Reflections on Nationalism in a Transnational Era

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University of California, Irvine

The May 1998 outbreak of war with Ethiopia over a disputed border generated an immediate outpouring of nationalist sentiment and money from Eritreans around the globe. In June 1998, for example, Eritreans met in Copenhagen and pledged \$1,000 per household; in Riyadh they pledged one month's salary each; in Edmonton, Canada \$26,000 was raised on the spot at a single meeting. Jubilant reports of these and other meetings circulated via the Internet on the U.S.-based Eritrean website, [www.dehai.org](http://www.dehai.org). A message reporting on a meeting held in St. Louis on June 14 where \$55,000 was pledged in two hours stated, "St. Louis resident Eritreans made history and a lesson to share with other brothers and sisters. This is something that all Eritreans need to emulate." The author signed off, saying "Proud to be Eritrean!!!" and "Awet n hizbi Eritrea. Zikri nswat Ahwatman Ahatnan" (transliterated Tigrinya phrases that translate as "Victory to the Eritrean people" and "Remember our martyred brothers and sisters"). In response to these efforts, the Eritrean government promptly set up a national defense bank account and the donations flowed in. It is worth noting, moreover, that these donations were not earmarked as humanitarian aid to alleviate the suffering caused by war but were aimed at bolstering the Eritrean state's capacity to wage war. Tekie Beyene, governor of the Bank of Eritrea, described the contributions from the diaspora as "beyond anybody's imagination" (Voice of America, June 24, 1998). As these activities suggest, nationalism remains a burning passion for Eritreans and one that is not dimmed by their transnational mobility or participation in global circuits.

While globalization is thought to render borders meaningless, transnationalism to render nationhood passé, and the Internet to have ushered in a new era of openness and connectivity, the activities of the Eritrean diaspora and the Eritrean state point to the ways that nations not only continue to matter, but how nations can be constructed and strengthened through transnational flows and the technologies of globalization. For Eritreans, nationalism and transnationalism do not oppose each other but intertwine in complex ways in the globalized spaces of diaspora, in cyberspace, and in new definitions of citizenship and state-citizen relations advanced by the Eritrean state.

The Eritrean experience runs counter to common assumptions about the decline of nationalism and the decreasing importance of nation-states. Hannerz (1996), for example, argues that the rise of transnational connections is causing the nation to decline in importance. Appadurai contends that we are at the dawn of a "postnational era," in which "the nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is on its last legs" (1999:19) and that "globalization [is] a definite marker of a new crisis for the sovereignty of nation-states" (2000:4).

This article explores the relation between nationalism and transnationalism in constructions of Eritrean nationhood. It seeks to reveal how and why nationalism and the nation-state remain significant for Eritreans not only despite global linkages but because of them. Situating this study of nationalism in the realm of the transnational has required me to shift frequently between a consideration of the ways in which Eritreans located in Eritrea, particularly members of the nationalist movement and the emergent Eritrean state, use and even construct transnational relations to achieve nationalist ends and a consideration of the ways in which Eritreans in diaspora construct nationalism and participate in Eritrean affairs from their transnational locations.

### Transnationalism, Globalization, and Nationalism

The concept of nation draws together various ideas including identity, community, sovereignty, and territory. As Verdery (1996:226-227) has pointed out, nation "names the relations between states and their subjects and between states and other states." As a symbolic community, nation also refers to a collective identity of its members. As Verdery (1996:226) observes, "Nation is therefore an aspect of the political and symbolic/ideological order and also of the world of social interaction and feeling." She defines nationalism as "the political utilization of the symbol nation through discourse and political activity, as well as the sentiment that draws people into responding to this symbol's use" (Verdery 1996:227). In all of its meanings, nation is about boundaries, about inclusions and exclusions, about members and outsiders, about where one sovereignty ends and another begins.

Two influential formulations of transnationalism are those advanced by Appadurai (1999) and by Basch (1994). Appadurai sees transnationalism largely in terms of capital, ideas, and images flowing across national boundaries. Transnationalism, in this approach, is an abstract process of circulation that tells little about the actual lives and experiences of people. Such an approach dominates much of the literature on globalization that focuses on flows of capital, technology, and communications networks. In contrast, Basch (1994) defines transnationalism as a social field created by people who live their lives by participating in more than one nation. This approach has the advantage of making people central and drawing attention to the agency of ordinary individuals in these global processes. But its emphasis on migration and on the activities of migrants in sustaining transnational social fields does not completely capture the sense in which we all live in a transnational era now whether we choose to or not, whether we migrate or remain where we are. The circulation of ideas,

capital, and people shapes the character of life even for those who are relatively immobile.

*Transnationalism*, as I use the term, is not simply another way of talking about diaspora, or one's possession of deep ties to more than one nation, or one's membership in a family that spans more than one nation (though it includes all those things). Transnationalism refers to the fact of living a life that is not in any real sense circumscribed by a nation. As Ong (1999:4) observes, "*Trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something." Transnationalism means our frames of reference for our own lives are not constructed on a national basis but in terms of standards, experiences, and concepts that include a larger world. Thus, I see transnationalism in such things as the consumption of foreign media and goods, in dependence on remittances from abroad, in the experience, desire, or expectation of international migration as part of one's life course, as well as in the reliance of local civil society initiatives on foreign donors and international aid. I see transnationalism in the fact that ideas about citizenship, rights, and entitlements, as well as visions of the good life more generally are not constructed wholly in local terms but rather constructed on a broader scale with reference to international standards, concepts, and comparisons, such that any local discussion of such things automatically implies this larger context.

In a literal sense, the term "trans/nationalism" as a description of our contemporary era draws attention to border crossings through evoking national borders. Globalization, on the other hand, suggests borderlessness, a unifying process in which distance and location no longer matter because everything and everyone on our planet are so tightly linked. Globalization was first used to refer to the worldwide integration of finance capital into a single system, but it was soon taken up by scholars in various disciplines as a shorthand reference to the ways that new technologies of information, communication, production, and transportation were transforming not only economic life but all spheres of life through what Harvey (1989) describes as the compression of time and space.

Nations, as systems linking identity, economy, and political order to specific geographical territories, seem to stand in logical opposition to transnationalism and globalization. It is thus not surprising that much scholarly attention has focused on the ways in which transnationalism and globalization undermine the nation and may be bringing about the demise of the nation-state. Yet already the early predictions of the end of nationalism seem simplistic and not particularly useful as guides to understanding the diverse kinds of cultural and economic transformations associated with transnationalism and globalization. Eritrean nationalism is useful as a guide to rethinking these complex relationships precisely because it appears to draw strength from the very processes of globalization and transnationalism that are often thought to undermine nation-states.

### Methods and Background

Research on Eritrea presents a number of challenges. During three decades of war little research of any kind was conducted by scholars and very little official data were recorded by governmental or international agencies. There are as yet no systematic, comprehensive accounts of the nationalist struggle, the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) as a movement, or life in Eritrea during the independence struggle. Similarly, little data or research are available on the Eritrean diaspora. The decades of nationalist mobilization and war, moreover, have politicized knowledge about Eritrea. Scholars who focus on Eritrea usually have done so either because they are Eritrean or because they were inspired by the dedication and self-sacrifice of EPLF fighters. Thus, whether produced by Eritreans or outsiders, scholarship on Eritrea generally has been written from a position closer to advocacy than to critical analysis. Ethiopianist scholars and Eritreanist scholars, moreover, have fought their own battles on intellectual terrain. Unfortunately, in the absence of opportunities to conduct primary research, these scholarly arguments have largely been conducted in terms of legalistic intellectual arguments that have added little empirical knowledge.

The study of nationalism, transnationalism, the Internet, and diasporas raises additional methodological challenges in terms of how best to locate and demarcate one's object of study. I have worked to piece together a broad picture of the development of Eritrean nationalism as well as to focus in on particular vignettes, conversations, and Internet postings that shed light on the relationships between nationalism and transnationalism in the Eritrean experience and to present this while developing an analytical framework for understanding the Eritrean experience in relation to scholarship on nationalism and transnationalism more generally.

My analysis of Eritrean nationalism derives from a diverse array of sources. I have been fortunate to have visited Eritrea three times: first, in 1981 under Ethiopian rule, followed by two research trips after independence, one in the winter of 1995–96 and another in the summer of 2001. I have conducted archival research using EPLF publications, published accounts of firsthand observers of the nationalist struggle, and the reports of international agencies. I have also been a participant observer of life in the Eritrean diaspora. I first became interested in Eritrea through meeting Eritreans in Europe in the mid-1970s. When I returned to the United States for graduate school I got to know Eritreans in the Chicago area and have circulated on the periphery of the Eritrean diaspora for over twenty years. Although I am most familiar with the experiences of Eritreans in the United States, I have visited Eritrean homes in Canada, Germany, England, Italy, the Sudan, Tanzania, and Ethiopia. I have also met with Eritreans who live in Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and the Netherlands when they were visiting the United States or Eritrea. I have interviewed Eritreans from various walks of life both in Eritrea and in diaspora as well as Eritreans who resettled in Eritrea after many years abroad. I have followed postings and discussions in Eritrean cyberspace, particularly on Dehai.

The future of Eritrea continues to unfold in fascinating ways. However, I have limited this article to an analysis of Eritrean nationalism up to the end of the 1998–2000 border war with Ethiopia, with particular attention to the 1990s when Eritrea achieved independence and national policies and practices began to be established by the new state.

The following section considers Eritrea's struggle for independence that gave rise to the particular forms of nationalism and transnationalism in which Eritreans are active. The article then focuses on the Eritrean diaspora, exploring their involvement in the nationalist struggle and the ways in which the Eritrean nation is built transnationally. Why was nationhood such a compelling goal for Eritreans and what is the significance of nationhood in the context of globalization and transnationalism? The section entitled "Nationalism in a Transnational Era" takes up these questions, arguing that Eritreans benefit from nationhood not because the nation is a world unto itself but because the nation is a key actor in the global arena. In the subsequent section, I explore the ways in which Eritreans located in Eritrea and in diaspora have appealed to international authorities and global audiences for support of their nationalist causes. Finally, I look at the ways in which the Eritrean state has taken legal measures to enfranchise the Eritrean diaspora and has created an institutional basis for nationhood that extends beyond national borders.

### Eritreans' Struggle for Nationhood

Eritrea achieved nationhood in the era of globalization, and its nationalist struggle was rooted in unprecedented ways: in international ideologies and discourses of nationhood, rights, and social justice, as well as in the transnational social fields created by Eritreans in diaspora and by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front.

Eritrea came into being as a political entity when Italy carved out a colonial territory along the western shores of the Red Sea. As Trevaskis (1960:10–11) puts it, "Italy created Eritrea by an act of surgery: by severing its different peoples from those with whom their past had been linked and by grafting the amputated remnants to each other under the title of Eritrean." The Italians ruled Eritrea from 1886 until 1941. In 1942, Eritrea passed from the Italians into the hands of the British who administered it as a trusteeship until 1952. Eritrea was then federated to Ethiopia under an arrangement that left considerable local autonomy. In 1962, Ethiopia violated the terms of federation and annexed Eritrea, which then remained officially a province of Ethiopia until, after three decades of war, Eritrea formally achieved independence and nationhood in 1993. The despotic rulers of Ethiopia, first Haile Selassie and, following his overthrow in 1974, the Dergue (the central committee of the military government) led by Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam pursued policies that made it appear that Eritrea could not thrive in unity with Ethiopia. For Eritreans, nationhood came to mean self-determination as opposed to domination by Ethiopia. Eritrea's first major independence movement, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), began the armed struggle in 1961. The Eritrean People's Liberation

Front (EPLF), which ultimately succeeded in winning independence for Eritrea, first emerged as a splinter group that broke away from the ELF in 1971. While the ELF had the goal of independence from Ethiopia, the EPLF's vision was revolutionary; it sought to transform Eritrea from within as well as to free it from Ethiopian rule. Through the early 1970s, the ELF and the EPLF fought their own civil war from which the EPLF emerged as the primary liberation movement in Eritrea (Pateman 1990). From 1974 until the definitive military victory over the Dergue's forces in 1991, the EPLF led Eritrea's struggle for nationhood.

Eritreans' experience of the Italian colonial period laid the groundwork for forging a national identity separate from that of Ethiopia, despite much common cultural and religious heritage. Eritreans are neither homogeneous nor seamlessly united as a nation. In fact, the EPLF's construction of Eritrean nationhood sought to contain and control potential lines of internal conflict by formalizing Eritrean cultural diversity into nine officially recognized ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> Eritrea is also divided almost evenly between Muslims and Christians, although Christians have historically dominated its political economy and continue to do so. The EPLF's emphasis on linguistic and cultural diversity served to divert attention from the potentially more volatile Muslim-Christian split. The EPLF and, subsequently, the government of Eritrea thus have sought to depoliticize diversity by incorporating it into the fabric of Eritrean national identity, defining Eritrea as a nation comprised of nine ethnic groups. In effect, Eritrea is a nation because Eritreans say they are and because they were able to take over the territory called Eritrea through military force and have, subsequently, gained international recognition.

In their nationalist struggle, Eritreans drew on transnational literatures, ideologies, and experiences of socialism and revolution. Nationalist rebels in Eritrea were deeply influenced by Marxist scholarship and by revolutionary struggles elsewhere. The ELF modeled its internal organization after that of Algeria's FLN (Markakis 1988). The EPLF translated key works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Mao into Tigrinya (Eritrea's major language), and EPLF communiqués and publications draw heavily from such sources. Some of the top cadres of EPLF, including its leader and Eritrea's current president, Isaias Afewerki, received training in China. Mao's book of sayings was popular among Eritrean student radicals and EPLF's use of slogans to sum up key policies was apparently modeled on Maoist practice (Markakis 1990). When I asked Saba, a woman ex-fighter about her experience as an EPLF guerilla in the field, she told me to read *Wild Swans* (Chang 1991), an account of women in the Cultural Revolution of China, saying "it was just like that." Saba is one of the Eritreans who left the United States to return to Eritrea and join the ranks of EPLF fighters in the field. Chang's book resonated with her own experience of being reprimanded for "bourgeois attitudes" and of having to serve under illiterate peasants.

During the war, tens of thousands of Eritreans joined the forces of the EPLF as fighters. Many others lived as civilians in "liberated areas" of Eritrea

under EPLF control. Other civilians, like those in the capital city Asmara, continued to live directly under Ethiopian rule. The struggle against the Ethiopian forces was so protracted and so bitter that by the early 1980s when I first visited Eritrea, the Ethiopians had clearly become an occupying army in the eyes of most Eritreans. Indeed at the time of my visit, Ethiopia was preparing an offensive against the rebels, and the streets of Asmara were filled with vehicles moving troops. Sandbag bunkers and checkpoints outside of important buildings made palpable the sense of Asmara as an occupied city and the feeling of being under siege. Over the course of the long war many Eritreans migrated out of the country as refugees, were displaced within the country by the war, or left their homes in Ethiopia proper and within Eritrea to join the liberation struggle.

Thirty years of armed struggle ended in 1991 with the EPLF's military victory. Official independence was declared in 1993 after an internationally supervised national referendum, in which Eritreans voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence. Today the EPLF calls itself the PFDJ (People's Front for Democracy and Justice) and is in effect the ruling party of a one-party state.<sup>2</sup> Once independence was achieved, the fact that Eritrea's President, Isaias Afewerki, and his ruling party had been the victors who defeated the Ethiopian forces militarily lent the regime considerable legitimacy. Isaias Afewerki came to power, moreover, not simply as another African military leader but as the head of a popular mass movement. By the end of the war, the ranks of EPLF fighters numbered roughly 95,000 (Iyob 1997). It is estimated that more than 65,000 EPLF fighters died in the war (Woldegabriel 1993).

The history of nationalist mobilization by the EPLF and the protracted struggle against Ethiopian domination both gave rise to, and was made possible by, powerful nationalist sentiments among Eritreans. The struggle for independence did not simply liberate Eritrea from Ethiopian rule; it was also a process that created Eritrean nationhood from the ground up. Even as the EPLF claimed *de jure* nationhood based on Eritrea's colonial boundaries, the Front was engaged in constructing *de facto* nationhood through grassroots mobilization and political education. In the areas under its control, the EPLF operated like a proto-state, providing public services such as health care and carrying out a program of land reform among other things. Thus, well before the EPLF had established sovereignty over all of the territory of Eritrea militarily, thus legitimating its claim to nationhood by defeating the Ethiopian army, it had already constructed a proto-nation within Eritrea, with the Front acting not simply as an army or a guerilla movement but as an emergent national government performing administrative and public service functions.

The independence movement and the incipient nation developed by the EPLF were sustained in part by transnational linkages to the Eritrean diaspora. Thus, in some sense, Eritrean nationhood itself was built out of Eritreans' connections to one another (across borders) rather than on their connections to Eritrean soil (or to resources and livelihoods located within Eritrea). The Eritrean diaspora was an outgrowth of the nationalist struggle and at the same time a contributing factor to the survival of Eritrean nationalism.

### The Eritrean Diaspora: Nationalizing the Transnational

While Anderson (1983) developed the concept of an "imagined community" as a way of talking about nationhood, it is immediately clear that this notion also lends itself to conceptualizing transnational, de-territorialized communities and identities. If nations do not naturally grow out of the soil but are products of cultural imagination, there is no reason why imaginations cannot jump oceans, political borders, and other barriers in creating community. The technological advances of globalization, rather than eroding Eritreans' ties to their place of origin, make it all the more feasible for them to participate in Eritrean nationhood across political boundaries and geographical barriers.

UNICEF (1994) estimates that one million Eritreans fled their country, which amounted to nearly one out of every three Eritreans at the time of independence. As with most things concerning Eritrea, data on the diaspora are hard to come by. Prior to Eritrea's official independence in 1993, for example, the United States recorded information on Eritrean refugees under the Ethiopian category, so there is no official record of Eritreans in the United States as a group over the course of the independence struggle. The number of "Ethiopians" living in the United States was estimated at between 50,000 and 75,000 in 1991 (Woldemikael 1996). The Sudan was the country most accessible to Eritreans, since the two countries share a border. There, too, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) figures do not distinguish Eritreans from Ethiopians. In 1984 there were 465,000 "Ethiopian" refugees in Sudan (Kibreab 1984:72), the majority of whom were Eritreans. The Sudan also served as a way station, since many Eritreans who fled to the Sudan were eventually able to gain admittance to the countries of North America and Europe as refugees, political asylees, or immigrants. Some Eritreans, particularly Muslims, were able to find employment in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. After Sudan, the next greatest concentration of Eritreans outside of Eritrea is in the United States.

The earliest group of Eritreans to come to the United States did not come as refugees but as students who came to study and ended up stranded in exile in the United States. After the Dergue came to power in 1974, Mengistu took Haile Selassie's battle against Eritrean nationalism to new extremes, regarding anyone of Eritrean descent as suspect. The Eritrean students generally came from among the more well-to-do urban segments of the Eritrean population. The selection practices used by the United States to screen refugees also gave preference to those with education and skills and therefore the Eritreans who came to the United States as refugees also tend to be more educated than the average Eritrean. Both the students and the refugees were predominantly male, since Eritrean women had less access to education. It would be a distortion, however, to describe the majority of the Eritrean diaspora in the United States as coming from elite backgrounds. They more commonly come from what could be seen as African middle-class or petit-bourgeois backgrounds. In terms of their class positions in the United States, the majority are far from privileged. Very few Eritreans hold professional jobs. Eritreans are concentrated in

the service sector and are often underemployed (Woldemikael 1996). They typically work as parking lot attendants, taxi drivers, and hotel staff.

Even though Eritreans are relatively few in number, they have clustered in several urban areas, most notably Washington, D.C. By means of residential clustering, long-distance telephone contact, and later through the Internet, Eritreans have been able to maintain close social links to other Eritreans. Political organizations, meetings, and rallies, as well as social ceremonial occasions such as weddings, have served to bring larger numbers of Eritreans together periodically and have fostered communal networks.

Eritreans in diaspora, while physically removed from the battlefield, played vital roles in the liberation struggle. Eritreans around the world (particularly Eritreans in North America, Europe, and the Gulf states) contributed to the nationalist struggle through the resources they collected and donated and through the public relations campaigns they waged (Clapham 2000; Cliffe 1988; Woldemikael 1991). Eritreans in diaspora organized themselves politically wherever they were, sent their own money to the Front, organized fundraising campaigns, and sought to educate the world about the Eritrean cause. Social networks and nationalist organizations linked Eritreans to each other and to the EPLF. Exiled Eritreans, moreover, were expected to pay a yearly tax of 2 percent of their gross income to the Front.<sup>3</sup> During the war, Eritreans held annual festivals in Bologna, Italy, which brought together EPLF representatives and exiles from around the world. The EPLF was extremely successful in mobilizing the diaspora and harnessing their skills and resources for the nationalist cause. While solidly based within Eritrea, the EPLF extended far beyond Eritrea's borders and maintained a transnational network of communication with Eritreans in many countries. For Eritreans living abroad, their connections to the nationalist movement served as an organizing force in the experience of diaspora and facilitated their contact with other Eritreans, helping to create a sense of community and purpose.

Perhaps the significance of the nation becomes more clear in its absence: the experiences of the many Eritreans who lived as refugees, exiles, and undocumented immigrants during the three decades of war provide a sobering picture of the vulnerability of those who occupy interstitial positions in the nation-state system. The conditions experienced by Eritreans in diaspora are diverse. Among the most miserable were those trapped in refugee camps in the Sudan (Kibreab 1984, 1997), some of whom I met while conducting fieldwork in Sudan in the early 1980s. Those living without proper documents in the West suffered in less extreme ways. Even Eritreans fortunate enough to be accepted legally as refugees in Canada and wealthy northern European states with generous social welfare programs suffered. For example, I think of the family I visited in Germany in 1982 whose lack of material want only seemed to highlight the intangible losses of community, belonging, and culture that they deeply felt. The isolation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement experienced by Eritrean refugees suggest the dystopic underside of transnationalism, one in which mobility means displacement and alienation, when the nation is

not so much a "cage" to be broken out of, to use Nairn's (1996) metaphor, but a space of belonging and entitlement. Some of the experiences of Eritreans in diaspora have thus fostered Eritrean nationalist sentiment because of the racism and exclusionary practices Eritreans encountered and continue to encounter in other countries. In fact, many of the most ardent Eritrean nationalists grew up in Ethiopia proper. National identity and nationalist sentiments in the case of Eritreans must clearly be seen in processual and relational terms. Conditions of exile fostered Eritreans' identification with other Eritreans and with their nation even as they adopted other legal nationalities, made new lives for themselves, and sometimes intermarried with non-Eritreans. Exile also served to make the cultural divisions among Eritreans pale beside all they have in common with each other in contrast to the host societies in which they live. Thus, it seems at times that Eritrean identity makes all Eritreans kin, so that nationalism is as much a social identity as a political one.

For many of the Eritreans in diaspora to whom I have spoken, the Eritrean nationalist cause and Eritrea's survival as a nation have deep personal and emotional meaning. Their connection to Eritrea goes beyond any pragmatic concerns such as personal intentions to return to Eritrea permanently or the well-being of their kin who remain in Eritrea. Their passion for Eritrean nationalism and Eritrean politics is evidenced by, among other things, the time and resources they devoted to the nationalist struggle and, more recently, to the 1998–2000 war. The importance of Eritrean identity in their lives is shown in the efforts Eritreans make to sustain social and political networks across vast distances and to build some sense of community with other Eritreans wherever they find themselves.

The first major Eritrean website, Dehai ([www.dehai.org](http://www.dehai.org)), was initiated by Eritreans in the Washington, D.C., area in 1992 and remained for many years the predominant Internet link for Eritreans in diaspora around the world. Eritreans within Eritrea, however, could not get online until 2000. Dehai is subtitled "Eritrea Online" and has two main components: news that consists of postings of published news related to Eritrea from diverse sources and a message board devoted to political discussion. Both of these are also archived. Postings on the message board include simple statements of opinion, complex political analyses, debates, witty repartee, and poetry, as well as announcements of Eritrea-related activities or holidays. Although many messages are ardent, sincere statements, there is also a liberal use of irony, satire, and hyperbole to ridicule the views of opponents in debates. This, aside from its informative nature, is what makes Dehai entertaining for readers. For active posters, discussions and debates offer a chance to display their wit, expert wordplay, political astuteness, historical knowledge, mastery of folklore and proverbs, and more. As is general with such discussion sites, the number of passive readers is believed to be far greater than the number of posters. According to some of its founders, Dehai averaged 37 postings per day from its inception in 1992 to 2001 (Bushra 2001). The Dehai charter posted in 1995 states: "The main objective is to provide a forum for interested Eritreans and

non-Eritreans to engage in solving Eritrea's problems by sharing information, discussing issues, publicizing and participating in existing projects and proposing ideas for future projects."

It is telling that Eritreans in diaspora established the Dehai website and subsequently other websites and discussion lists to discuss and disseminate news about Eritrean politics rather than to share information and ideas about the many issues that confront them in their daily lives in North America and Europe. Through their activities on behalf of Eritrea and their use of cyberspace, Eritreans in diaspora nationalize the transnational, creating national spaces and pursuing nationalist goals within and across transnational space.

### The Significance of Nationalism in a Transnational Era

If nations are declining in significance as globalization erodes their sovereignty and transnationalism transcends their borders, then how do we explain why Eritreans are willing to give so much and even to die for this idea of nation? In our post-Marxist era we cannot simply resort to labels of "false consciousness." We therefore have to take nationalism seriously and account for the fact that nationhood still holds a great appeal for many people. A conversation I had over 20 years ago with some Eritreans has stayed in my mind. At the time I was a student in Europe and had been struck by the ardent nationalism expressed by various Eritreans I encountered there. The Eritreans I met were eager to enlighten anyone who would listen about the Eritrean struggle for independence. Often they had flyers and posters celebrating and explaining their cause. One day I finally said to a group of Eritreans who, as I now remember it, were passing out leaflets in Copenhagen, "I don't get it. Why do you want a nation so badly?" One quickly replied, "You don't understand why we want a nation so badly, because you already have one."

Now Eritreans have a nation. It would be a cruel irony if, just as they finally realized their goal, nationhood as a global political currency were devalued. But has it been? The fragmentation of larger political units such as the Soviet Union (and in the Eritrean context, Ethiopia) may not signal the demise of the nation but, on the contrary, indicate that nations are so key to jockeying for position in the global arena that everyone wants to have one of their own. Eritreans attacked Ethiopia's nationhood, but they did so even as they reaffirmed nationhood as the most desirable form of political organization. And while critics tried to point out the absurdity of Eritrean nationhood (due to its lack of linguistic, cultural, or religious homogeneity, and a very small territory), they stopped short of recognizing the absurdity (or at least arbitrariness) of all nations. African nations are perhaps exceptionally arbitrary since they were carved out by European powers without reference to local linguistic or ethnic boundaries. Within that context, Eritrea's internal diversity is nothing out of the ordinary. Africa, moreover, abounds with stateless ethnicities, and there is no widespread assumption on that continent that every "people" should have its own nation-state. In fact, I would argue that Eritreans' claim to nationhood stands apart from some of the other movements also seeking to break away

from Ethiopia precisely because Eritreans did not simply mobilize around an ethnicity as did the Oromo, for example, but mobilized around the cause of an Eritrean nation that does not define itself on the basis of ethnic homogeneity.

Nationhood is valued by Eritreans, not because a nation constitutes a community unto itself but, on the contrary, precisely because the nation is a key actor in the global arena (cf. Brenner 1997). In this respect, nations may be even more important for poor countries, such as Eritrea, than for countries whose nationals are part of the global capitalist elite. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, has stated:

With its transition from de facto to legally recognized independence, Eritrea has gained formal access to direct international lending by the World Bank and other intergovernmental institutions, *as only States are eligible for such assistance*. . . . The international community has provided essential political and material backing for Eritrea's emergence from war. . . . It should sustain this effort with similar commitment as Eritrean nation-building enters a new and decisive phase. [Boutros-Ghali 1996:37; emphasis added]

The nation-state system is such that even the government of a small, poor, and fairly powerless nation can use its status as a sovereign power to advantage. Eritrea has refused to be a passive "beneficiary" of Western largesse and has shown a willingness to forgo aid if it comes at the expense of local sovereignty. After independence, the government of Eritrea quickly earned a reputation in international circles for being an absolutely tough negotiator that is willing to forgo any aid or project over which it does not exercise control. For example, as one UN worker based in Eritrea told me, agencies arrive in Eritrea with "terms of reference" that are general guidelines they are accustomed to applying unilaterally. "The Eritreans categorically reject those; they come to meetings prepared with their own terms of reference."

Dr. Isak Woldab, president of Asmara University, echoed sentiments expressed by other Eritreans with whom I talked when he told me, "We don't want a donor-recipient relationship. People are not used to this from a Third World country. But we want to make our own decisions and administer things ourselves. So, anything we do must be done on an equal footing" (interview, January 14, 1996). Of course, Eritrea is not truly on equal footing—its per capita income is half the average of sub-Saharan Africa, for example. The only leg Eritrea has to stand on to claim equal footing at all is that it is a nation.

No one who visited Eritrea under Ethiopian rule and again after independence could doubt that, overall, Eritreans will benefit from having a nation of their own. By 1996 (three years after independence), when I traveled to independent Eritrea for the first time, there were already many new schools, new health clinics, and more running water throughout the country. And, whatever their feelings, none of the Eritreans I have met want fewer schools.

The nation of Eritrea allows Eritreans to negotiate some aspects of their position in the world. As a nation, Eritrea certainly participates in a global political economy dominated by more powerful nations and therefore operates

under great constraints. Nonetheless, the fact that Eritreans as a nation can make their own development plans and negotiate their own deals with the World Bank and with foreign investors and donors appears to be greatly advantageous when compared to their historical experience as a region of Ethiopia. Roberts (1998) has written about "the New Global Manager" being promoted as the model for leadership in U.S. corporations and business schools. The hallmarks of the global manager—flexibility and a global perspective—suggest another way of thinking about the nation-state and transnationalism. The Eritrean state itself acts like a global manager. Rather than linking itself as a satellite or client to any one economic or political patron, as many postcolonial states did in the early days of neocolonialism, the Eritrean state has a flexible global vision. Its managers attempt to promote Eritrea's interests by skillfully maneuvering everything: from Korean investment to Finnish aid to Kuwaiti loans. At a 1998 "Meeting of Eritrea's Development Partners" that included the World Bank, the IMF, the International Finance Corporation, the European Union, and UN agencies, President Isaias Afewerki stated:

We are limiting the role of government to creating a conducive environment for development. . . . It will undertake critical investments in strategic sectors of the economy only when private investors are either unwilling or unable. . . . I would like to emphasize here that our policy is to treat foreign investors exactly in the same manner as we treat domestic investors. [1998:21]

The president's statement highlights the model of the nation with open borders in which the government's role is to facilitate transnational economic flows. Eritrea's leaders have not fully embraced neoliberal logics of development, however. In real terms, the Eritrean state lacks sufficient resources to function as a developmentalist state, so it must court investors and exercise its economic leadership through skillful management of these external relations.

The notion of Eritrea and the World Bank as "partners" is not mere rhetoric from the Eritrean perspective, moreover, but consistent with Eritreans' refusal to accept external domination despite the small size of their economy, territory, and population. As one report on Eritrea's foreign investment climate notes, "A primary tenet of the government is that Eritrea is for Eritreans. Projects will be examined to ensure that the plans include training Eritrean staff to replace expatriate workers and that the projects will not negatively effect the environment or local conditions" (www.countrywatch.com, 2000). While courting foreign investment, President Isaias has been an outspoken critic of aid as "disabling, dehumanizing, and very restrictive" and of donors who he says seek to "substitute themselves for the government" (Euromoney 1998).

Eritreans developed self-reliance as a strategy and a virtue when the EPLF had to survive largely without foreign support. But that stance, like that of the Eritrean state today, was made possible in part due to the resources channeled into Eritrea by Eritreans in diaspora. Even as the Eritrean state seeks to avoid dependence upon foreign powers, its ability to do so is sustained to a considerable extent by transnational flows of resources from Eritreans abroad.



### Oliver Stone's Next Movie?: Eritrea and the Global Audience

Anderson's (1983) analysis of the role of print capitalism (particularly newspapers and novels) in constructing national communities suggests that nations are, among other things, stories we tell ourselves. But he dealt largely with the imagining of the national community as an internal cultural process rather than as a political struggle involving contestants and participants in diverse transnational locations. By contrast, in the case of Eritrea, nationhood developed through a long 30-year war of independence in contest with Ethiopian claims to the same territory. Eritreans had to articulate a story of Eritrean nationhood not only to themselves but to a global audience. The United States, the Soviet Union (which backed Ethiopia), and international bodies such as the UN and the OAU (Organization of African Unity) were crucial participants and observers of Eritreans' struggle for independence (Habte Selassie 1989; United Nations 1996). Eritreans developed their claims to nationhood in an international context, moreover, that (until the break-up of the Soviet Union) regarded existing national boundaries as sacrosanct. The OAU tended to dismiss the Eritrean movement as secessionist because the OAU honored colonial boundaries at the time of independence as the basis of African nations (Mbembe 2000; Pool 1983). The narratives Eritreans construct about Eritrea as a nation are thus more complicated and problematic than Anderson's notion of imagined community and are much more clearly addressed to international audiences as well as to fellow Eritreans.

The EPLF recognized early on that to succeed fully they had to construct a narrative of Eritrean nationalism that appealed to global audiences. The account of how Eritreans achieved national sovereignty over the course of 30 years is thus not simply one of war. It is also an account of how the EPLF successfully waged a war of words on the international scene, learning how to express their claims to nationhood in ways that would be recognized as legitimate by the UN, the World Court, and the OAU (Habte Selassie 1989; Iyob 1995). Parallel to their military struggle, Eritreans conducted information campaigns asserting the legitimacy of the Eritrean cause to various audiences, from the men or women in the streets of North America and Europe to governments, international organizations, and scholarly circles.

There is a revealing parody in a zine produced by an Eritrean in diaspora in the United States with the title, "Oliver Stone's Next Movie" (Eritrean Export 1993). The premise of the piece is the author pitching the story of Eritrea's struggle for independence to Oliver Stone as a movie project. At one point in the text, Stone asks "Is it imperialist whites against native blacks?" [No.] "Muslims against Christians?" [No.] "So, what's the hook, babe?": The author attempts to interest Stone by describing the incredible military odds the Eritreans were up against, the unique role that women played in combat, and so on. But, Stone's response is: "Boring, boring, boring! Darling, I think we are wasting each other's time. . . . How could this possibly interest my audience? . . . A bunch of black Africans kill another bunch of black Africans. . . . Can we possibly tie this with white people, somehow?"

The parody points up the fact that Eritreans know they have to play to a global audience that is dominated by Western concerns and categories. Part of being an Eritrean is having to explain yourself and doing so in terms of categories imposed by others. The parody works as a piece of humor in the diaspora not least because it echoes the questions Eritreans are so often asked. Ultimately, the parody pokes fun at the painful indifference of the West to Eritrean experience and suffering or, for that matter, to Eritrean existence at all.

The 1998 outbreak of war with Ethiopia once again moved Eritreans to mobilize transnationally and to appeal to global audiences. Ethiopia and Eritrea both waged public relations campaigns in the international media that served as a second battle front as each one accused the other of being the aggressor and of lying about victories and losses. Dehai devoted considerable space to the conflict, including a link titled simply "Ethiopian lies." One message posted on Dehai expressed typical sentiments of outrage at Ethiopia and described the special role of Eritreans in diaspora:

Today Eritreans in the diaspora have recommitted ourselves to shoulder the responsibility of defending the motherland by assuming ambassadorial responsibilities which include exposing TPLF crimes over Eritreans residing in Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup> If there is anything that the successive Ethiopian governments have mastered, it is deceiving the world community through absolute lies! . . . Ethiopia keeps on spending an astronomical amount of money to disseminate false information. [Dehai, posted August 4, 1998]

On June 16, 2000, Eritreans organized a demonstration in front of UN headquarters in New York to protest the UN's "silence and inaction" on behalf of Eritrea (Dehai, posted June 14, 2000). One Dehai participant went so far as to argue that Eritreans should "sue the UN . . . in a court of law for gross negligence and breach of contract" for failing to intervene on Eritrea's behalf. The writer went on to speculate as to whether a U.S. court could hear the case, since UN headquarters are located in the United States, or if the case would have to go to "the International Court of Justice" and whether Eritreans in North America could bring the case to court if the Eritrean government did not do so (Dehai, posted June 9, 2000). The author's mixture of savvy and naïveté seems to capture something of how Eritreans continue to explore new means of using international institutions and reaching global audiences on behalf of their nationalist goals. Eritreans, it would seem, have reversed the 1980s saying, "think globally, act locally." As Eritrean nationalists, they think in terms of national interests but act globally in terms of the strategies and discourses they employ to achieve nationalist ends. Moreover, whereas in the original phrase, locality referred to a concrete place while globality was an abstract imaginary, in the 21st century we now experience the global on a daily basis, while local loyalties and identities are often both imagined and deterritorialized.

### The Transnationalization of the Nation: New Forms of Citizenship across Borders

Like the EPLF before it, the Eritrean state is active in promoting transnationalist networks and maintaining links to Eritreans in diaspora. The transnationalization of Eritrean nationhood therefore cannot simply be equated with the existence of an Eritrean diaspora that dreams of "home." It must also be seen as stemming from the character of the EPLF/PFDJ as a nationalist organization that developed a global reach and a global strategy for promoting Eritrea's national interests.

The Eritrean state has, for example, created new legal frameworks and institutional practices to incorporate members of the diaspora into the Eritrean nation. One of the first decrees of the provisional Government of Eritrea after independence was a law defining citizenship that stated that "any person born to a father or a mother of Eritrean origin in Eritrea or abroad is an Eritrean national by birth" (Referendum Commissioner of Eritrea 1993). The Eritrean state thus constructed a new definition of citizenship to encompass a wide range of people of Eritrean descent who reside outside of Eritrea and hold other national identities. The new citizenship law, moreover, did not seek to compel Eritreans settled overseas to choose between Eritrean citizenship and their current legal national identities. Eritreans in diaspora were entitled to national I.D. cards issued by the Eritrean government without having to renounce any other passports they held. The problem of dual citizenship was thus neatly finessed since the Eritrean I.D. card recognizes the individual as an Eritrean citizen for national purposes but has no effect on their other status. For Eritreans in diaspora, this means that in Eritrean matters they are recognized as Eritreans but for other purposes they can continue to enjoy the benefits of U.S., Canadian, or whatever citizenship they hold.

Since independence, the Eritrean government has also recruited numerous Eritreans from the diaspora to fill key government positions. Eritreans from the diaspora thus make up part of the Eritrean state machinery. Perhaps even more noteworthy is that Eritreans in Southern California (where I live) and throughout the diaspora participate officially in national politics. For example, in the 1993, polls were set up in Los Angeles so that Eritreans here could vote in the national referendum on independence. In fact, Eritreans cast their referendum votes in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa as well as in Australia, New Zealand, India, and Russia (United Nations 1996). The Eritrean government routinely sends representatives abroad to brief Eritreans overseas on what the government is doing and to cultivate their continued political and financial support. In 1994 and 1995, the Constitution Commission of Eritrea, which is the official body charged with drafting Eritrea's new constitution, held civic education seminars not only in each of Eritrea's 9 provinces<sup>5</sup> but in 11 U.S. cities, 14 European cities, and 4 Middle Eastern cities, as well as in Kenya and the Sudan (Constitution Committee of Eritrea 1995). In May 1997, following the ratification of the constitution, a Transitional National Assembly was formed to serve as the legislative body until countrywide elections to the

National Assembly could be held. The Transitional National Assembly included 15 representatives of Eritreans living abroad (CIA 2002).

It is estimated that Eritreans in diaspora remit between US\$250 and US\$350 million each year (Nelsson 2000), while Eritrea's GDP is pegged at about US\$650 million (World Bank 1999). (By comparison, diasporic Jews remit around US\$400 million each year to Israel [letter to author, May 20, 1998]). When one considers the poor economic position of most Eritreans and their relatively small numbers, these figures are impressive. No one knows the full extent of transnational transfers from the diaspora to Eritrea. As became clear from U.S. investigations into resource transfers by Islamic organizations in the aftermath of September 11, there are various means of channeling funds across international borders outside of any regulatory institutions. Through personal networks and the telephone, large sums can be transferred quite easily, quickly, and inexpensively.<sup>6</sup> Such transactions could be seen as undermining the Eritrean state since they bypass state authority and possible taxation. But ultimately the resource transfers to Eritrea help sustain the local economy. Thus far, the government of Eritrea has therefore made little attempt to control these flows.

The nation of Eritrea has thus developed novel institutional practices and new legal frameworks to encompass diasporas, developments that at some level can be seen as constructing a "detrterritorialized nationality" or transnational nation. Eritrea's definition of citizenship is based on descent rather than residence or place of birth, and it is not exclusive. It therefore enfranchises as citizens people who reside in other nations, including those who hold citizenship in other nations and including people of Eritrean descent who have never lived in independent Eritrea and may never do so. The Eritrean nation is thus in various ways organizing itself around transnational linkages, resource flows, and globalizing technologies rather than being broken up by them.

### Conclusion

The relationship between nations and transnationalism has been recently addressed by a number of scholars who are moving beyond the simple question of whether transnationalism means a decline of the nation to theorizing the complex relationship between transnational phenomena and nationhood. Glick-Schiller argues that transnational migration does not reflect the decline of the nation-state. "On the contrary, transmigrants helped construct nation-states in many regions of the world in the past and are active participants in the constitution of transnational nation-states" (1999a:99). Glick-Schiller's use of the term transnational nation-states draws attention to the ways that nations and nationalism can operate across borders. She gives the example of Haiti, where official discourse seeks to construct Haitians who have emigrated as part of an overseas *département* of Haiti proper (Glick-Schiller 1999b). Fandy's (1999) study of Saudi opposition in exile and cyberspace is an example of how citizens who live outside their national territory continue to participate in significant ways in national economies and politics. This Saudi example points

up the fact that diasporas can also contest national governments, but they generally do so as nationalists seeking to dismantle particular regimes, not the nation itself. Although war may have served to unite Eritreans in diaspora in the effort to assure Eritrea's emergence and survival as a nation, diasporas may be rent by profound political divisions. It is not the homogeneity of their political views, however, that constitute some diasporas as national or nationalist and as significant transnational actors in national politics. Even politically divided diasporas are engaged in national politics to the extent that they are entangled with one another in debates and conflict over diverging visions regarding the future of their common nation.

On the other side of things, states also seek to control and discipline nationalists beyond their geographical borders. The old model of a nation was that of a territory inhabited by citizens and administered by a national government that provided services to those citizens—each layer fitting neatly over the next. Globalization and transnationalism have uprooted these relations, creating looser arrangements of relationships in process (Ong 1999).

Sassen has helpfully pointed out that the global and the national are not discrete, mutually exclusive conditions, but rather they “overlap and interact in ways that distinguish our contemporary moment” (2000:215). While Sassen argues that assumptions of “the nation-state as a container, representing a unified spatiotemporality” were never quite accurate, she suggests that a process of “incipient and partial denationalization of domains” is underway (2000: 215–216). Sassen is particularly concerned here with the insertion of global projects into national space, whereas I am equally concerned with the projection of nationalism across transnational space. Thus, while Sassen sees a process of “denationalization” of national space, I see a simultaneous process of nationalizing transnational spaces in that transnational movements of people, resources, and communications are being used to further various nationalist projects.

Several interrelated themes emerge from this analysis of Eritrean nationalism. One theme is the transnational terrain of nationhood or the ways in which nationhood is constructed and sustained by Eritreans' relations to one another across borders. A second theme is the nationalization of the transnational or the ways in which certain transnational phenomena can serve to reinforce the national. Here, the activities of the Eritrean diaspora and their use of cyberspace for nationalist purposes stand out, as well as the ways the national-list movement within Eritrea and subsequently the Eritrean state organized transnational networks of Eritreans. A third theme is the transnationalization of the nation-state or the ways in which new legal frameworks, institutional practices, and state–citizen relations are emerging in response to transnational relations and global processes.

The Eritrean experience suggests that as transnationalism and globalization reconfigure state–society relations, the nation becomes at once larger, including many citizens who reside outside its borders as active participants in national political and economic life, and smaller, in the sense that the national

government is less determinant of the conditions in which its citizens live, whether inside or outside its borders, because transnational capital, media, culture, consumer goods, and ideologies operate in ways that cannot be controlled by any one nation or stopped at the border. In this sense, the nation has become more diffuse, more flexible, more porous. It has changed form but it has not necessarily been diminished. The national government's key role now may be that of managing transnational capital and international relations.

The case of Eritrea is more than simply how the global story plays out in a remote location. It can help us think about processes of globalization and the relation between nations and transnationalism in a productive way. As the example of Dehai illustrates, even the transnational and deterritorialized space of cyberspace is, among other things, a ground on which can be projected national imaginaries. Globalization and transnationalism have not replaced nationalism but have opened up new spaces in which nationalisms can be expressed, contested, and transformed. Constructions of globalization, transnationalism, and the wired world that emphasize their unboundedness and their unifying and universalizing effects are overlooking the very powerful ways in which people reinscribe difference and belonging, imagine boundaries, and construct territorial loyalties and identities, even as they engage in global processes and inhabit transnational spaces.

Perhaps this article has focused on what can be seen as a surprising set of circumstances that have allowed Eritrean nationalism to feed off of transnationalism and these historical circumstances will change. That should serve, nonetheless, to bring home the lesson that even huge global processes such as globalization and transnationalism do not stand outside of history and create the world we inhabit but are themselves socially produced and must be localized and historicized to be understood.

Therefore, rather than seeking to generalize about globalization and transnationalism as global phenomena, we need to study various transnational experiences and communities in order to elucidate what the new potentialities of space–time compression actually mean for different populations in various contexts. We also need to attend to the shifting terrains of nations and nationalism within processes of globalization. We need to approach nations and nationalism as something much more fluid, contextual, and relational, recognizing the porosity of borders and the shifting goals and capacities of states. It seems that transnationalism and globalization have not rendered nations and nationalism obsolete, but perhaps they have rendered some of our ways of thinking about nations obsolete.

## Notes

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1. The EPLF's adoption of the Soviet practice of using "nationality" to refer to cultural diversity within the nation can be a source of confusion for some observers. These lines of division among Eritreans would be more commonly understood as ethnicities in contemporary terms, while Nadel (1943) in his work for the British colonial administration in Eritrea called them "tribes."

2. The PFDJ explicitly calls itself a Front and not a party. In that sense, and perhaps only in that sense, it can be asserted that Eritrea is not a one-party state.

3. Specific information on compliance is scant. There is no doubt, however, that large numbers of Eritreans abroad gave money to the EPLF.

4. TPLF stands for the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, which was the Ethiopian movement allied with the EPLF. The TPLF toppled the dictatorship of Mengistu in Ethiopia and took power there following the definitive military defeat of Ethiopian forces in Eritrea by the EPLF. The writer who posted this is probably well aware that the ruling party in Ethiopia now calls itself the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front.

5. The internal regional administrative divisions have since been changed.

6. One method used by Eritreans to transfer funds from the United States is simple. I give money or a check to your relative here and your relative in Eritrea (most likely a merchant or someone else with cash on hand) gives funds to my relative there. The hard currency in the United States might then be used to purchase goods overseas for the merchant's business in Eritrea.

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**A B S T R A C T** Many scholars have seen globalization and transnationalism as ushering in a postnational era. The new nation of Eritrea serves as an example suggesting that transnationalism does not only operate in opposition to nationalism but can also work to reinforce it. Eritreans in diaspora helped to liberate Eritrea from Ethiopia, and continue to participate in the economics and politics of Eritrea. Official constructions of Eritrean citizenship and the national community take this into account in surprising ways. Theories of globalization, transnationalism, and the wired world that emphasize their unboundedness and their unifying and universalizing effects overlook the ways in which people reimagine community and nation and reassert local loyalties and identities even as they engage in global processes and inhabit transnational spaces. [transnationalism, globalization, nationalism, diaspora, cyberspace, Africa]