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### 'Africa: Past, Present and Future'

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#### Panel II D: Creation of Eritrea: Past and Present

#### Nation and Location: Eritrean Returnees' Voices

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#### **Summary**

In sub-Saharan Africa forced migration is increasing year by year; repatriation invariably fails as a complete solution to displacement. Post-return negotiation of integration has been shown to be a contested process at both national and local level. Therefore, it is apposite that closer consideration be focused on whether and/or how refugees and returnees inform both actual national policy and practice on the ground and also the debate on territoriality, belonging and the nation. In this paper discussion centres on the role/s of returnees in the shaping of the Eritrean nation and national identity.

This paper sketches certain aspects of academic discussions on identity, belonging, location, space and place and the influence or otherwise of history and memory on national identity, especially as expressed through the metaphors of landscape – landscapes of loss and landscapes of renewal. The role of the State in fashioning identity is considered.

#### **Background: the current situation in Eritrea**

The origins of the second war to affect Eritrea within a decade – its liberation from Ethiopia came in May 1991 – are too complex to be discussed in this paper. Indeed the paper describes events before May 2000. In order to provide a certain degree of context to the issues raised here, it is appropriate first of all to give a very brief synopsis of recent developments. The points debated below continue to be valid. However, it is too early to consider in any detail the ways in which both the cumulative repercussions of the current conflict and the effects of the last four months' dislocation of people's lives will shape future debate on the creation and sustaining of the Eritrean nation and national identity.

In September 2000 an uneasy cease-fire prevails in the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Fighting has not completely stopped since the signing in

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Algiers on 18th June, with skirmishes reported in the vicinity of the port of Assab close to the Djibouti border. However, the overall situation seems to be that both sides are marking time, awaiting further activity from the United Nations towards its deployment of a 4,000-strong 'peace-keeping mission'.

The intention is that the disputed border will thereafter speedily be delineated and demarcated in a manner acceptable to both nations.<sup>2</sup> Given the nature of the conflict thus far, there may be little cause for optimism. It is impossible at the moment to do anything other than speculate on the medium and long-term effects of conflict, extreme food shortages, displacement and flight on a country already previously stretched to its limits.

It is estimated that perhaps 1,000,000 people are currently internally displaced in Eritrea. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) suggests that upwards of 500,000 people have been displaced internally from the lowland province of Gash Barka alone. The resident population before the onset of the war in May 1998 was close to 2,500,000. UNHCR provides the most reliable figures on the numbers of Eritreans who have become refugees in the Sudan in the last six months and on those who have already repatriated under its protection.<sup>3</sup>

The scale of events in 2000 can be partly gauged by the fact that in May 2000, before the onset of the most recent fighting, there were an estimated 250,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in Eritrea, some 65,000 deportees from Ethiopia and an estimated 250,000 under arms. In addition the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC) estimated that there were then perhaps 400,000 drought and otherwise war-affected people, although definitions had not been entirely fixed. This latter group is not covered by UNHCR estimates; many must nonetheless be considered as in need of assistance. It is self-evident that as the conflict has continued there has been very considerable physical and socio-economic disruption, with both immediate and longer-term repercussions. The displacement corridor along the border is sometimes 15 km wide.

### ***Forced migration, nation and location***

It is only relatively recently that consistent attention has been given within anthropology to the linking of refugees and returnees into the wider debate on issues of belonging, place and space and the very processes of nation building and nationalism.<sup>4</sup> Anthropologists are also addressing perceptions of

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<sup>2</sup> The BBC World Service Online reported on 9th September that both Eritrea and Ethiopia have urged the UN to implement the force deployment as soon as possible.

<sup>3</sup> The UNHCR Refugee News Net web page provides a daily/weekly update on refugee movements. The UNCHR Horn of Africa Update (10th August) indicates that perhaps 90,000 people sought refugee in the camps of eastern Sudan from May 2000 onwards; as of 9th August ca. 21,000 had been repatriated.

<sup>4</sup> There is a growing body of literature on these general subjects. For the purpose of this paper, a number of texts including the following have been consulted. Amselle 1998; Barth 2000; Basso 1996; Bender 1994; Brah 1996; Casey 1996; Clifford 1997; Cohen 2000; Fullerton-Joireman 1996; Geertz 1996; Giddens 1991; Garcetti & Gruber 2000; Kapferer 1988; Küchler 1994; Lovell 1998; Mayer 2000; Parkin 1998; Shapiro 1997; Tronvoll 1998b; Werbner 1998.

belonging, location, place and space and how these can be addressed in the light of increasing population movements and globalisation.<sup>5</sup>

The perceptions and interpretations of people living in the Eritrean town of **Hagas**, both local and recently settled, either as internal migrants or as returnees, are discussed throughout this paper. People's views on the Eritrean nation, their place in it and their notions of identity and how it may be expressed, are described.

To position Hagas in context: it is a small and fast-growing town at the foot of the central plateau escarpment; it straddles the main road to the Sudanese border. While in 1967, the year of the first great refugee exodus from the Eritrean lowlands to the Sudan, it is reported that there were 14 houses in Hagas, the population in December 1999 was 10,206 individuals. Of these some 2,500 were returnees from the earlier conflict, which ended in May 1991.<sup>6</sup>

Before May of this year there were few IDPs in Anseba Zoba, in which Hagas is situated: this is unlikely to have remained the case. Use of land and access to it will inevitably have been considerably altered by internal displacement.

### ***Repatriation, identity and the notion of 'home'***

A recent paper by Kibreab discusses the 'tendency [within] post-modernist literature' to describe the ways in which identity has become 'deterritorialised'; Kibreab counter-argues that "place ... remains a major repository of rights and membership" (1999a: 385).<sup>7</sup> Three responses to his thesis are included in the same issue of the JRS, each written by a specialist in refugee and migration studies.<sup>8</sup>

As Kibreab's paper and the three responses represent one of the few recent contributions to the wide-ranging debate on identity to include the parameters of displacement and return by refugees, they will be used as a partial entrance point into a more focused discussion of Eritrean returnees' perceptions and responses. Kibreab, himself originally a refugee from Eritrea, has worked as a socio-economist with refugees for 15 years or more, predominantly in the Horn of Africa.

Kibreab writes: "With regard to refugee voices, the Eritrean refugees who returned from Sudan, including those who were born there and who had never been to Eritrea before, unequivocally state that they are at home and are enjoying for the first time full citizens' rights" (1999b: 423).

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Chatterjee 1993; Cohen 2000; Grosz-Ngaté & Kokole 1997; Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Kandiyoti 1991; Kapferer 1988; Lovell 1998; Mayer 2000; Radcliffe & Westwood 1996; Shapiro 1997; Werbner 1998.

<sup>6</sup> 1999 statistical information provided by the Hagas sub-zoba administrator.

<sup>7</sup> *The Journal of Refugee Studies* (12: 4). December 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Warner; Stepputat; Turton: all 1999.

Debate on this statement can be initiated on several fronts: it is only appropriate that a female returnee in Hagas, a head of household and mother of four children, be given first response. Discussion during fieldwork for this paper revealed that she sees the connections between land and identity as central to the development of a sense of belonging in free Eritrea: the absence of any such connection would raise questions about the nature of individuals' self-identification. Others in Hagas expressed similar sentiments, locals as well as returnees.

*“Had we known what the situation would be like in Eritrea, we [wife and husband] would have decided to stay in the Sudan. There is great uncertainty here, especially over land: I have heard about the government’s ruling [i.e. the Land Proclamation] but it is not being put in place. So many people who are not local to this place feel insecure: are we as Eritrean as those who have land? If land is more available to others than to us, why is this? And now that my husband is dead I recognise the strength of tradition about women. In many ways we knew where we stood in the Sudan: everything was made clear to us as refugees, both that we could do and that which was forbidden. Here we are supposed to be at home and yet many matters remain uncertain. In addition our children were born over there: in some ways they would like to return. And I do not want my sons to die fighting”.*

There is continuing need for close consideration of the once seemingly uncontroversial perception of ‘home’ in terms of returnees’ identities. Returnees may well have returned ‘home’, but what exactly does this constitute?

Surely not each and every returnee will envisage and experience home in an identical manner. In addition, as is discussed immediately below, the Eritrean State is itself engaged in profound attention to identity in ways that challenge and render mutable ideas of location and home; in this context and at a policy level ontological bases of identity have become partially disarticulated from such rooted markers.

### ***Social engineering and identity: the Eritrean situation***

The government of Eritrea has been engaged in a wide-ranging programme of social change and the development of a civil society based very firmly on the ideals and activities of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (the EPLF) during the liberation war. Its originally counter-hegemonic approaches have been translated through victory and the emergence of the central figures in the EPLF as the President and ministers of Eritrea into the framework for government policy and practice, which introduce social engineering on a fundamental scale.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For discussion from a number of positions of the various initiatives implemented by the GoE see e.g. Fullerton-Joireman 1996; Garcetti & Gruber 2000; Gruber 1999; Kibreab 1996; Makki 1996; Mengisteab 1998; Tronvoll 1998a & b.

The instruments that have direct impact on people's rights to land, and thereby inform people's ability to consider locality and belonging are the Land Proclamation (1994 and 1997a & b) and the Establishment of Regional Administrations (1996). Until 1998 well over 80% of the resident Eritrean population lived in the rural areas and either worked the land as settled farmers or engaged in agro-pastoralism. Internal displacement will have mightily disrupted farming and pastoral activities, but people's fundamental links to the land appear to remain strong and location-specific.

The Land Proclamation and its two addenda introduce fundamental changes to land tenure. The Proclamation derives from the agrarian and land reforms instituted in the liberated areas during the war by the EPLF, now reconstituted as the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (the PFDJ), the sole party of government. In 1994 all land became the property of the state; usufruct rights are to be granted to all Eritreans, male and female, aged 18 and over. This is a genuinely revolutionary move, in that customary laws of tenure, access and entitlement are abolished.

Kibreab has earlier written of his reservations concerning GoE alterations to land tenure systems. "The land policy of the...Eritrean state is ... strongly permeated by 'modernist' thinking, in which the communal and family land tenure systems are considered as impediments to economic development ... Development is conceptualised as a modernising process, which aims to transform traditional practices and institutions instead of building on them" (1996: 165).

The Proclamation removes the opportunity of ownership of land by individuals, households or villages, while allowing for a degree of inheritance. Its potential effect on people's lives, returnees and others, is extraordinarily complex; implications and effects may take years to emerge. Given the noticeable confusion about returnees' rights to what many of them still consider is 'their' land, there will surely be additional tension on this point.<sup>10</sup>

Tronvoll has written of the ways in which identity and belonging are linked to specific plots of land and/or land within a self-defined community and the relationship built up over time by households and communities. In the highland Tigrinya village of Mai Weini the land tenure system is described as meret shehena, the 'land of brothers' (1998a). Women's entitlement, while in existence in varying degrees under the old dispensations, is less clear-cut.

Customary laws among many ethnic groups in Eritrea do not allow women either to inherit land or to undertake many agricultural tasks; Muslim Sharia law also applies in many locations. Research in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia, where land reform similar in scope to the Land Proclamation was instituted, indicates that women's access to land will be dependent on complex and often local factors beyond the immediate remit of State authorities. People's notions of belonging and entitlement, especially perhaps where women are concerned, are not always as cut and dried as imposed

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<sup>10</sup> See Gruber 1999 for more detailed discussion.

central policy directives infer – or hope will be the case.<sup>11</sup>

With specific reference to land and perceptions of belonging and identity: where returnees, ex-fighters and internal migrants arrive in a new location (such, indeed, as Hagas) to claim land as is allowed under the Land Proclamation, perceptions often grow and/or sharpen of a hierarchy of entitlement. Views emerge of preferential belonging, of a locality once seemingly immutably linked to identity now virtually being created anew out of land defined as empty. While a number of returnees and locals spoke of how people with prior connection to the locality must be able to (re) claim ‘their’ land, this will not always be easy, and has already been proved to be contentious.<sup>12</sup>

Those in favour of restoration to land described how by virtue of belonging to the area and by identification not only by themselves but, crucially also by others, of their links to the locality, returnees are entitled to land. So too are their sons, which may not always be allowed once/if the Land Proclamation is effected. It has to be mentioned here that ‘returnees’ were perceived primarily as male heads of households: opinion was far less clear-cut where women, especially those in FHH, were concerned. One male returnee described how a woman’s identity is subsumed within that of her husband; thus his land is her land – but only insofar as they remain married. A female member of the Hagas town council confirmed that many problems arise when women attempt independent use of land; she was pessimistic as to the Land Proclamation ever settling such matters, or improving current situations.

The Establishment of Regional Administrations has been instituted, in contrast to the continuing uncertainty surrounding the Land Proclamation. This government instrument re-configured the map of Eritrea by replacing the ten ‘original’ provinces with six regions. The implicit intention has been to dilute local identity and to reduce specific attachment to place in the interest of a broader, national agenda of identity. While history and contemporary activities indicate that people’s singular connection to a specific place may be more attenuated than at first appears, there is little doubt that certain identifications perceived as age- old and immutable have been challenged by the re-ordering of the regions.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hendrie (1996).

<sup>12</sup> Thus the case of Hidko close to Hagas, where returnees (some with generally accepted prior claims) were given land, only to have it repossessed by the sub-zoba administrator a year later. Accounts differ significantly as to whose claims should have been given priority and the rights and wrongs of ‘expropriation’.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. many farmers who initially define themselves as ‘people of the highlands’ in fact spend a part of each year in the lower so-called Green Belt, using the originally Italian land use system of *polleta*. In addition, Tronvoll (1998b) writes that apparently certain of the highland and lowland regional designations predate the arrival of the Italians in the 1890s. Myths of origin and stories of founding fathers residing in particular locations continue to have significance.

Allegiance to land and to locality is to be re-organised: the over-arching symbol of national identity and self-identity as expressed through the nation is to become paramount.<sup>14</sup>

### ***The State and the shaping of people's identities***

Increasing consideration is being given by anthropologists to the ways in which the political projects of modern states play a part in the shaping of social beings.<sup>15</sup> For example, how do people balance or juggle the disparate calls on their loyalties and perceptions of the State and other forms of identity/identification, including locality and local allegiance? How far might social relations and expectations be mediated through the dictates of the State? The relationship between citizenship of a nation-state vis-à-vis membership of smaller entities in the context of return movements should similarly receive thought.

“Citizenship ought to be theorised as one of the multiple subject positions occupied by people as members of diversely spatialised, partially overlapping on non-overlapping collectivities” (Gupta 1992: 73).

“It is important to recognise ... that the normalising power of the State, its control over identity and the interpretation of space, has always had competitors. Insofar as it has maintained control over its space and the identities of its citizens, it has done so through the continuous reproduction of its political identity” (Shapiro 1997: 20).

The potential and actual tensions involved in such reproduction should be further explored in Eritrea, where homogenising State tendencies run counter to several more localised and discursive negotiations of identity.

### ***Gendered space and female identity***

Notions of ‘gendered space’ and locality linked to gender have a lengthy pedigree. Attention has expanded more recently into issues of gender, migration and nationalism. As Brah notes:

“Feminist politics have constituted an important site where issues of home, location, displacement and dislocation have long been a subject of contention and debate. Out of these debates emerges the notion of a ‘politics of location’ as *locationality in contradiction* ... a positionality of dispersal” (1996: 204: emphasis in the original).

Women’s spatial and social mapping of their locality and their world will often be contingent upon their relative absence of control over public space. Access to, and use of, land may be and remain problematic for many women. It is also possible that due to such separation some women come closer to de-territorialisation within their own country than do men. Identity may become dependent on other criteria, or become informed by less rooted notions.

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<sup>14</sup> Tronvoll quotes the Eritrean President’s statement, which unequivocally sets out government perceptions (1998b: 463).

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Smith 1999.

There are indications of such perceptions among a number of returnee women in Hagas. The creation by them of the ‘second and third nationalities’ descriptor to define categories of returnees in contrast to the ‘first nationality’ of those who fought for liberation suggests an awareness of additional factors to delimit and strengthen other routes to identity.<sup>16</sup> These would include the role of landscape and memory and the use of history by national entities.

Female perceptions of being the internal *Other* are described by Mayer.

“[N]ationalism, gender and sexuality ... play an important role in constructing one another – by invoking and helping us to construct the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ distinction and exclusion of the Other. ... Despite its rhetoric of equality for all who partake in the ‘national project’, *nation* remains ... emphatically, historically and globally – the property of men” (2000: 1-2: emphasis in the original).

Further work is intended in Hagas on this and related issues. The role of women in creating the State of Eritrea and its national identity is one that continues to be fiercely contested at local level. This is not so much through any denial of female fighters’ involvement and frequent sacrifice but more through widespread individual and communal distrust of female ex-fighters’ position in contemporary Eritrea. While ex-fighters as a whole are sometimes undeniably privileged in respect to allocation of land, tensions revolve more often around perceptions of female ex-fighters’ position in defining people as Eritrean and more precisely their frequently perceived ability to challenge ‘immutable’ gender structures. Many female ex-fighters’ senses of identity and views on gender equity jar against acceptable norms: in the light of continuing uncertainty over State-level re-alignment of national markers of identity, it is sometimes less challenging to confront such women’s behaviour and perceptions than it is to confront higher-level activities. There are indications in Hagas that female ex-fighters represent a ‘safety valve’ for expression of confusion and frustration over changes often perceived as frightening in their scope.

### ***Returnees and identity: returnee identities***

Refugees have multifarious strategies for dealing with forced migration; their views will also vary on both the possibility and the reality of return. Similarly, strategies post-return will differ according to individual and households’ circumstances. It may well be that some returnees adhere most closely to their diasporic identity and filter their experiences of Eritrea and ‘being Eritrean’ through that prism.

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<sup>16</sup> The GoE describes the citizens of Eritrea as belonging to the ‘nine nationalities’. These are classified as the resident ethnic groups; it should be noted that certain self-identified ethnic groups such as the Beni Amer (discussed by Nadel during the British Military Administration of Eritrea in the 1940s) are not on the list of nine.

For further discussion of the ‘third nationality’, see *The Third Nationality’: Female returnees to Eritrea. Issues of gender, return and the creation of the nation* (Gruber 1999).



Refslund-Sørensen has written of the ways in which the growing social heterogeneity of a community in Sri Lanka increasingly settled by internal migrants in itself shaped the construction of social and personal identity. One focus of her attention is how settlers view displacement; many narratives stress not suffering but an experience that serves as a frame of reference for the (re) interpretation and the (re) organisation of history, society and identity, often in a positive sense.<sup>17</sup> The settlers described by Refslund-Sørensen came from various locations and had different histories and backgrounds; many had suffered quite considerable upheaval. This allowed for, even at times required, a certain 'building forward': people shared little "common content" and had minimal joint foundations on which to rebuild.<sup>18</sup>

There is resonance here with Eritrean returnees: their lives have been disconnected from their pasts to a certain extent; their individual and eventual shared concept of identity and locality may well differ from that of the homogenising tendency. Such concepts may of course also differ markedly among returnees themselves, whose histories and memories will not all be identical; the same has been seen to be true of Hagas returnees' interpretations of belonging and national identity.

### ***Identity and movement***

Consideration is increasingly given within anthropology to the ways in which displacement and movement may in themselves constitute aspects of identity: narrow definitions of nation and location may be matched by wider, more expansive notions of how migration can be the defining event in shaping identity.

Such issues are central to examination of Eritrean returnees' understanding and analysis of movement vis-à-vis emplacement: how these two seemingly opposed conditions of life may in fact be elements on a continuum. Returnees in Hagas were not all at their journeys' end: many spoke of how the future might bring further migration. Identity would in certain such situations become malleable through necessity.

Turton writes that "Mursi identity is both 'rooted' in a particular territory and a relatively recent product of a long-term process of migration ... the Mursi did not make a journey: 'a journey made them' " (1999: 419 & 421: emphasis in the original). Cohen mentions "McCrone's remarkable observation that 'identities should be seen as a concern with 'routes' rather than 'roots', as maps for the future rather than trails from the past".<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 1997: especially p144.

<sup>18</sup> See Cohen 2000, p146 et seq.: especially his discussion of 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Cohen (2000: 167), citing McCrone (1998: 34). See also Clifford (1997).

### ***The essentialisation of identity***

Battaglia has recently written on ‘an ethics of the open subject’.

“A central problematic – some would say ‘the’ central problematic – of any post-essentialist theory and practice concerns how subjects are positioned within culturally patterned and socially constructed differentials of power. This problematic asserts an unwavering value for acknowledging the social, historical and cultural locatedness of persons” (1999: 116).

Battaglia’s definition of the ‘open subject’ resists any notion of a ‘core’ self, immutable and authentic.

If the ‘open subject’ can be taken as refusing to limit identity/identities to the boundaries of the body politic, then it can be argued that the GoE adheres quite vigorously to an essentialist, ‘closed subject’ definition. In the few short years between liberation and the onset of conflict in May 1998, there were indications that the creation of what it means to be ‘Eritrean’ would not be straightforward; dissonant voices were emerging. There is an absence of sufficient acknowledgement within Eritrea of the small-scale, the local, the discourses between different experiences and the ways in which belonging, memory and history may play their parts in forging the national identity.

The Eritrean national project might benefit from greater flexibility in terms of recognising the potential ‘provisionality’ of national identity and how local identities may be at odds with the over-arching construct. Here issues of gender and nation/nationalism are very much to the fore; so too are those of returnees’ place within the polity.<sup>20</sup>

Identity and the authentication of this can veer perilously close to exclusion if posited in all too essentialist fashion. Authenticity per se if defined primarily through imposition rather than negotiation and inclusion is predominantly essentialist – nuances of difference can be viewed as subversive and counter to the nation-state marking of territorial integrity and identity as defined through the categorisation of ‘alterity’. In this context there are suggestions of a certain growth of hierarchical perceptions among some residents of Hagas: returnees on occasion appear to be apportioned the role of the internal *Other*; women returnees perhaps even more so. They are placed in a certain contrapuntal position compared to the roster of ‘true’ Eritrean-ness.

### ***Memory, landscape and the creation of national identity***

Eritrea has been shaped by war. For the past 35 years perceptual categories have been strongly bellicose; people’s connections to the landscape and their own locality have been filtered through military activity. The terrain of Eritrea is permeated by landscapes of heroism and loss, as epitomised by the trench systems that thread through much of the higher ground and the martyrs’ cemeteries. Fighting for land and the defence of borders has literally shaped the dominant narrative of national identity. Such sacred topographies have

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<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Grosz-Ngaté & Kokole 1997; Gruber 1999; Mayer 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997.

particular meaning in Eritrea: these are taken to inform much of what it means to be an Eritrean. And yet many Eritreans will have no or little share in these metaphors of identity: they will have been absent, unborn or unable to participate in the crucible of national creation.

Thus when the 'body national' is identified with the 'body politic' through the embodying of sacrifice in the martyrs' memorials, their stamp is placed upon the land and the landscape. Holy places and 'a land fit for heroes' exemplify the foundations of an Eritrean identity, inherently exclusive of many yet supposed to signify common ground.<sup>21</sup>

There are many communities of memory and landscapes of loss. The same location can articulate different histories, memories and meanings: a question to be asked is whose then achieve pre-eminence, and why?

"Locality and belonging may be moulded and defined as much by actual territorial emplacement as by memories of belonging to particular landscapes whose physical reality is enacted only through acts of collective remembering" (Lovell 1998: 1-2).

The collection edited by Werbner (1998) has much to offer in terms of consideration of the shaping and refracting of memory in Eritrea. Eritrea was a de facto colony of Ethiopia between 1952 and 1993 when independence (as separate from liberation) was achieved. Its prior existences as an Italian colony (1890-1941) and as subject to British Military Administration (1941-1952) also enable much discussion of the "... historical approach to memory [that] takes it as problematic that intractable traces of the past are felt on people's bodies, known in their landscapes ... and perceived as the tough moral fabric of their social relations" (ibid. 1998: 2-3). It is in the re-figuring or even sometimes usurpation of memory that contestation of identity comes to the fore. In Eritrea that debate has barely started in a public arena. If memory is to be part of the inscribing of national identity, then the voices of dissonant and/or minority histories must be heard. Among these voices will be those of returnees.

### **Conclusions**

This paper posits that notions of belonging and the meaning of such (self) identification encompass a multitude of positions that influence post-return life and integration in Eritrea. Relations of relative power, issues of gender and ethnicity, access or otherwise to resources, histories and the creation and/or imposition of collective memory, are among potential key factors influencing post-return integration. The journey does not end when people return 'home': rather than then becoming clean slates they remain palimpsests of the entirety of their experiences. This complexity of reality and response requires greater space within the present hierarchy of identity creation within Eritrea.

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<sup>21</sup> Kapferer's 1988 discussions of the Anzac memorial and the surrounding ethos of Australian identity evoke many echoes in the Eritrean context. From another perspective Geertz's consideration of Negara foregrounds how personal ties of lordship and submission formed the central plank of identity and belonging rather than land: analogies might be drawn here with events in Eritrea.

Balibar has written of 'fictive ethnicity' (1991); the Eritrean national project could be described as encompassing not only that narrative but also a collective mythology that enables the development of the 'mythic nation'.

The ontological identification by the Eritrean State of national identity is constituted through the last and the current conflict: these are the boundary markers that define difference. It is ironic and sad that while Eritrea is experiencing internal moves towards less bounded structures of territory and location, with the attendant emergence of alternate, subaltern, perceptions, its external impetus is towards the most clear-cut definition of Otherness based on boundaries and territoriality. The deterritorialisation of Eritrean land brought about by the Ethiopian invasion of May 2000 may well be matched in individual Eritreans' perceptions by yet further allegiance to locality as a conduit of self-identification. The same connection may not be observed at the State level of representation of identity.

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<sup>22</sup> Not all documents in the bibliography are directly cited in this paper; however, all have informed its writing.

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