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##### MLA Citation

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**REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM MIXED ERITREAN-ETHIOPIAN FAMILIES IN  
CAIRO**

**‘The son of a snake is a snake’**

**June 2006**

**by  
Louise Thomas**

**An FMRS Report**

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## INTRODUCTION

People from mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families have been caught on the ‘front line’ of hostile relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, especially since the outbreak of the 1998-2000 war between the two countries. This report, based on interviews conducted with refugees from mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families in Egypt, seeks to explain the uniquely difficult situation still faced by this group. It contends that because of their family relations with both Eritrea and Ethiopia, people from mixed families find themselves in limbo legally, socially and psychologically, and should therefore be of concern to UNHCR’s international protection regime.

This report has three aims. The first is to explore the legal questions surrounding the situation of people from mixed families, looking both at the nationality status of individuals (including whether or not they should be considered stateless) and at how UNHCR’s protection regime is dealing with claims for refugee status by people from mixed families. Secondly, the report highlights the structural vulnerabilities that people from mixed families have suffered, and continue to suffer, in their countries of origin as a result of their exclusion from citizenship rights and social support networks. Thus, the report aims to promote better understanding of the situation of people from mixed parentage because it is clear that the situations experienced by the participants in this research are likely to be shared by other people from mixed families. The third aim is to bring to light the continued exclusion and harassment of people from mixed families in Cairo, highlighting the extreme vulnerability of asylum seekers of mixed parentage who remain in Cairo illegally and without social support networks.

### **Summary of the main findings of the report:**

#### **Nationality, statelessness and international protection**

- Reliable country of origin information on the situation of people from mixed families is severely lacking, especially on the question of nationality and legal status
- Ethiopians of Eritrean origin living in Ethiopia lost their effective nationality during the 1998-2000 war, even if they were not deported
- People of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian origin in Cairo have not been able to gain or to regain Ethiopian nationality through the Ethiopian embassy since the end of the war
- Some Eritreans of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage also lost their nationality as a result of the war
- People of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian origin in Cairo have not been able to gain Eritrean nationality since the end of the war
- People of mixed parentage in Cairo should therefore be considered to be *de facto* stateless and treated accordingly *vis-à-vis* nationality requirements for claiming refugee status

#### **Persecution and harassment in Eritrea and Ethiopia**

- The problems faced by participants in this research in their countries of origin are structural and likely to apply to any person from a mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian family
- People in mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian marriages in Cairo share many of the same problems as those who are of mixed parentage
- The problems faced by people from mixed families in Cairo did not begin with the outbreak of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998 and did not end with the cessation of hostilities in 2000
- Having a mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian family background can be an exacerbating factor in other forms of political persecution
- The problems of family division caused by the 1998-2000 deportations are particularly severe and intractable for mixed families
- Women from mixed families are particularly vulnerable to abuse and harassment

## **Harassment and exclusion by the refugee communities in Cairo**

- Prejudices among the Eritrean and Ethiopian refugee communities in Cairo lead to harassment of people from mixed families
- People from mixed families in Cairo are often excluded from the essential support networks usually provided by refugee communities
- Isolation and identity crises among people from mixed families in Cairo can lead to extreme psychological stress and psychological problems.

## **SECTION 1: METHODOLOGY, TERMINOLOGY, AND PROFILE OF POPULATION SAMPLE**

### **1.1 Methodology**

This report is based on research conducted in Cairo between October 2005 and April 2006. Formal interviews with and informal interaction among Eritreans and Ethiopians from mixed families form the basis of the findings. Wherever possible, several interviews and meetings were conducted with each individual, both in order to build trust and more closely to observe the attitudes and responses of the participants.

Participants were contacted by visiting churches and NGOs, by using contacts in the communities, and through word of mouth. Eritreans and Ethiopians from mixed families are a particularly difficult group to identify. Firstly, because they are predominantly without legal status in Egypt and so try not to draw attention to themselves for fear of arrest and deportation by the Egyptian authorities.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, Ethiopians and Eritreans in Cairo are dispersed in small groups or alone throughout the city (Cooper 1993 and Brown et. al 2003). Thirdly, people from mixed families do not form a distinct ‘community’, and many of the participants have no contact with other people from mixed families. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, many people from mixed families keep their family background secret from other members of the Ethiopian and Eritrean community for fear of rejection or worse.<sup>2</sup> These problems also make it impossible to ascertain the number of people of mixed parentage in Cairo. In total, I spoke with twenty-five people at least once and was able to gather information on two minors whom I did not interview directly. A further six people from mixed families in Cairo were unable or unwilling to speak with me. This report makes no claim to statistical significance, but even if the total of thirty-three cases that were identified in Cairo were the only ones at this time, they form a significant group whose situation deserves to be understood.

The vast majority of interviews were conducted in Amharic or Tigrinya with the use of interpreters although some participants spoke English well enough to conduct the interviews in English. Using interpreters sometimes posed difficulties, especially when trying to gauge attitudes towards difficult concepts such as race, ethnicity, and nationality. To overcome this, I learned the major Amharic and Tigrinya words used to describe people and nationalities, as well as a number of common insults so as to circumvent the translation problems that these colloquialisms could have caused.

The credibility of refugee testimonies is often called into question by people charged with determining whether or not they should be granted refugee status and international protection. In order to prevent participants from treating this research as an opportunity to gain refugee status, I explained to every participant that everything they told me would be entirely confidential and treated as anonymous. I made sure that they understood that their application to UNHCR would not be affected by what they told me because I would not be using their names in my report. More importantly, as mentioned above, Ethiopians and Eritreans from mixed families often have little contact with one another or with the wider communities. Even where there is contact, people rarely talk about their cases or discuss their situations. Therefore, when several people testify to the same patterns of persecution, abuse or harassment, these are unlikely to have been discussed between individuals, nor do people from mixed families have access to information networks

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<sup>1</sup> Almost all of the participants in the research were living in Egypt illegally and so I tried, wherever possible, to conduct interviews and meetings in places which were either close to their homes or places where they would be travelling to anyway, such as NGOs and churches, in order to prevent putting them in any unnecessary danger. See Brown et. al. (2003).

<sup>2</sup> There was a further ethical problem in that many of the people I spoke with kept their identities secret from other members of the community for fear of rejection. Because of the sensitivity of the subject, participants would make contact privately if they wished to be interviewed and interviews were conducted without the knowledge of other members of the communities. See paragraph 7.2 for more information on secrecy among the group.

about application procedures and so are also likely to lack access to the accumulated knowledge of refugees about supposed ‘strategies’ for gaining refugee status. Having questioned many of the participants a number of times, going over certain points and checking the information against available country of origin information, I have confidence that their testimonies are genuine.

## **1.2 Terms and definitions**

### ***1.2.1 Eritrean and Ethiopian***

The term Eritrean can be used to denote someone who is ‘ethnically’ Eritrean, or someone who is a national of Eritrea. While Eritrea was still a part of Ethiopia before 1991, ‘Eritrean’ was used to denote someone who was from the region of Ethiopia known as Eritrea. Because in Ethiopia nationality is traditionally inherited from the father, someone whose father was born in the region known as Eritrea could often also be regarded as Eritrean, even though they may have been born and brought up in another area of Ethiopia and consider themselves to be Ethiopian. Since Eritrea became an independent state in 1993 ‘Eritrean’ could also denote someone who held Eritrean nationality whether they lived in Eritrea or Ethiopia. However, in Ethiopia, even those people of Eritrean origin who were not Eritrean citizens can be known as Eritreans, especially if they or their father was born in Eritrea. Ethnic federalism in Ethiopia divides all public life, from youth groups to political parties, on an ethnic or ‘national’ basis. Eritreans formed one of these officially sponsored ‘nationalities’, whether they were formerly Eritrean citizens or had remained as Ethiopian citizens.

The question of whether ‘Eritrean’ should properly be referred to as an ethnicity or as a nationality is also complicated. Eritrea is made up of nine different ethnicities, and the dominant Tigrinya group in Eritrea, in fact, share many ‘ethnic’ characteristics with the Tigrayans of northern Ethiopia. Eritrea is a nation state containing these ethnic groups and so Eritrean should properly be called a nationality rather than an ethnicity. However, within Ethiopia, the term *gossa* is used to refer to the different ethnic ‘nationalities’ which make up Ethiopia; what western discourse might see as ‘ethnic’ groups. Ethiopians interviewed in Cairo told me that they see ‘Eritrean’ as a *gossa* in the same way as ‘Amhara’ or ‘Oromo’. When questioned whether they saw Eritreans as biologically different from Ethiopians, they affirmed that they did. This reinforces the evidence collected from testimonies, which reveals that parentage and blood relations have determined judgements of who is and who is not Eritrean far more than has formal possession of the nationality of either Eritrea or Ethiopia. It is therefore important to remember that, because at least some Ethiopians seem to believe that Eritreans form a separate ethnic group, it cannot be ruled out that Eritreans and people from mixed families have suffered persecution on the grounds of imputed ethnicity.

Because of this ambiguity, and in order to avoid complicity in the process of imposing unwanted identities upon people from mixed families, I will refer to people who held Ethiopian citizenship but who have some family connection to Eritrea as ‘people with Eritrean origins’. This will include people whose parents were both from Eritrea as well as those who have mixed parentage and lived in Ethiopia. People who held Eritrean citizenship I will refer to as ‘Eritreans’. People with Ethiopian parentage, either from both or one parent, but who lived in Eritrea, I will refer to as ‘people of Ethiopian origins’. People whose parents were both from Ethiopia and who held Ethiopian citizenship I will refer to as ‘Ethiopians’.

### ***1.2.2 Mixed parentage, mixed marriages, mixed families***

The term ‘mixed families’, which I have used to describe the participants in my research, refers to people who either: have one Eritrean and one Ethiopian parent; have parents who may have had one Ethiopian and one Eritrean parent; or have some Eritrean origins and are married to someone with some Ethiopian origins or *vice versa*. Some of the analysis in my report will apply only to people who are the children of mixed marriages, or whose parents are the children of mixed marriages. I will refer to this group collectively as people of ‘mixed parentage’ meaning people who are, through their parentage, seen as partly Eritrean and partly Ethiopian. Most of the respondents are children of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian marriages. However, several are Eritreans or Ethiopians who were in a mixed marriage, most of whom have children who are therefore half Ethiopian and half Eritrean. I will refer to this group collectively as people who are in ‘mixed marriages’. Some of the respondents were both the child of a mixed marriage and themselves in a mixed marriage. Although they and their spouse might hold the same nationality, a person with mixed parentage

could be seen by some to be Eritrean or Ethiopian because of their parentage. They will therefore fall both into the category of people of mixed parentage and people in mixed marriages.

### **1.3 Profile of population interviewed in Cairo**

#### **1.3.1 Age**

The youngest person from a mixed family about whom I have information is eight years old and the eldest is around seventy years old. One mixed couple in Cairo were also expecting their first child in April 2006. Both the youngest and the eldest individuals are of mixed parentage, which shows that mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian marriages have been taking place for nearly one hundred years. However, 24 of the 27 participants are between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, and so were born between the years of 1961 and 1988 when Eritrea and Ethiopia were still one country.

#### **1.3.2 Education and socio-economic background**

All but one of the 27 individuals for whom I have data were from major urban centres.<sup>3</sup> Of the 25 adults that I interviewed, 19 had completed high school. None had attended university, but several had intended to before political or economic problems had got in the way. Three had family members who had attended university. It is clear that the population in Cairo is of a much high educational level than the Ethiopian average. All of the participants were employed in white-collar jobs, had just left high school when they left the country, or were housewives.<sup>4</sup>

#### **1.3.3 Ethnicity**

Most of those interviewed seem to have been from families where Eritreans married Amharas or Oromo.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that in the rural border regions between Eritrea and Tigray province in Ethiopia mixed marriages occur predominantly between Eritreans and Tigrays. The high incidence of marriage between Eritreans and Amharas or Oromo is probably best explained by the fact that most Eritreans who live in Ethiopia live in and around Addis Ababa, which is the home of many Oromo and Amhara people, and most of the participants in this research are from Addis Ababa.<sup>6</sup>

#### **1.3.4 Country of origin and nationality**

Nearly every person interviewed told of a different situation regarding their birthplace, nationality and place of residence. Sometimes the nationality held by a person did not correspond to their birthplace, or the place of habitual residence. Many had moved from Eritrea to Ethiopia or back again at some point or another, either voluntarily or through deportation.<sup>7</sup> Suffice it to say here that the broad range of situations, movements, and experiences of people from mixed families makes it even more necessary for each case to be examined carefully on its own merits.

#### **1.3.5 Gender and marriage**

The dominant pattern of marriage among the families of participants seemed to have been that interviewees' fathers had been born in Eritrea and then moved to Addis Ababa to find work while Eritrea was a part of Ethiopia.<sup>8</sup> They then married Ethiopian women and settled in Addis Ababa. Of the six people in mixed

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<sup>3</sup> All but three were from either Addis Ababa or Asmara; one was from Keren in Eritrea and one from Gondar in Ethiopia. The only person of rural origin was from Adi Etay in Eritrea.

<sup>4</sup> Five had administrative jobs before coming to Cairo, five had owned their own businesses, two worked in factories, three were skilled electricians or mechanics, one was a waitress, and seven had no job either because they were women who worked at home, or because they had only just finished high school when they left their country of origin. I was not able to get information on the previous occupations for the remaining four.

<sup>5</sup> Participants who were of mixed parentage described their Eritrean parent's ethnicity merely as Eritrean and their Ethiopian parent's ethnicity as follows: Tigray 3, Amhara 10, Oromo 6. Information on ethnicity was unavailable for three participants. Participants who are in mixed marriages, described the non-Eritrean partner as follows: Oromo 3, Amhara 1, don't know 1.

<sup>6</sup> The connection between the Oromo and Eritreans in terms of persecution is explained in Section 6.

<sup>7</sup> The nationality question will be addressed in more detail in Section 4.

<sup>8</sup> Of the 27 people for whom I have information, 23 people were of mixed parentage and six were in mixed marriages, two people falling into both categories. Of the 23 people of mixed parentage, most (17) had an Eritrean father and an Ethiopian mother.



marriages, all were women. Their husbands had either died, been deported to Eritrea without their wives, or are missing, and one woman had left an abusive husband.<sup>9</sup>

## **SECTION 2: BACKGROUND**

There follows a brief background to the current situation in Eritrea and Ethiopia, concentrating on the elements that are relevant to the situation of people from mixed marriages.

Although now separate countries, modern Eritrea and Ethiopia have a long shared history and were, in fact, two parts of the same country for much of the twentieth century. If we are to understand why and how two countries could be close enough for so many people to intermarry, but become embroiled in a conflict which both exacerbated and relied on mutual resentments and ended up dividing those who had formed familial ties, we need to look at the patterns of unity and disunity that characterised the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia throughout the twentieth century.

### **2.1 Unity and disunity: Eritrea and Ethiopia before 1991**

Eritrea was created after the Battle of Adwa in 1896, when Italy's ambitions in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) were defeated and they were forced to settle for the land that they had already captured. Eritrea developed separately from Abyssinia for the next 39 years, benefiting from colonial development while the empire remained independent but autocratic. The difference between the development of Eritrea and the relative backwardness of Abyssinia caused resentment and division between the peoples of the two countries. The separation between Eritrea and Abyssinia was exacerbated in 1935 when Mussolini's Italy used Eritrean soldiers to invade and this time successfully to conquer Emperor Haile Selassie's Abyssinia.

Having thus grown apart for almost half a century, Eritrea and Ethiopia were thrown together again after Mussolini merged Ethiopia with Italian Somalia and Eritrea to form Italian East Africa. Italy was defeated in World War II and Ethiopia was handed back to Haile Selassie, Eritrea remaining under a British Military Administration until the decision was made to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1950. By 1962, the federation had been abrogated and Eritrea was formally integrated with Ethiopia, relegating Eritrea to a province of Ethiopia. Eritreans were from that time declared to be Ethiopians: Article 9 of the Imperial Order declared that 'All inhabitants of the territory of Eritrea except persons possessing foreign nationality are hereby declared to be subjects of our Empire and Ethiopian nationals.'<sup>10</sup>

Following the annexation of Eritrea with Ethiopia, Eritrean separatists launched a war of independence that was to last thirty years. Although based on the premise that Eritrea was entitled to independent nationhood as a result of the colonial experience, some believe that Eritrean national identity was forged primarily through the struggle against Ethiopian rule between 1962 and 1991 (Pool 2001). The dominant resistance group, the EPLF, made the process of winning the war also one of winning the support of the masses and at the same time forging a national identity that rose above ethnic, religious and gender divides (ibid).

The unpopularity of the socialist regime which ousted Haile Selassie in 1974 fuelled support for the Eritrean resistance movement, and gave rise to the TPLF, an Ethiopian resistance movement rooted in the province of Tigray. The TPLF and EPLF eventually became allies in the battle against the regime. However, the TPLF and EPLF were not natural allies in the struggle: to a large extent their association was one of convenience, especially given their differing visions for their respective countries. Ethnic connections and shared language between the Tigrayans and Eritreans were not a determining factor in their alliance. Eritreans and Ethiopians were thrown together due to political expediency rather than through an inevitable unity based on their ethnic or historical connections.

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<sup>9</sup> See Section 6 for more information on the specific vulnerabilities of women from mixed families.

<sup>10</sup> In Human Rights Watch *Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue*, (2003a) p. 13: 'The emperor promulgated Imperial Order 12/1952 'to provide for the federal incorporation and inclusion of the territory of Eritrea' within the Ethiopian empire.'

## 2.2 Cooperation and exclusion: Eritrea and Ethiopia 1991 – 1998

In May 1991, the EPLF entered Asmara and the TPLF (by now reconstituted as the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)) entered Addis Ababa seven days later. According to the agreement made between the TPLF and EPLF, Eritrea assumed *de facto* independence in 1991, pending the results of a national referendum to be held in 1993. Almost immediately after taking over, the EPLF expelled 130,000 Ethiopians connected to the military or previous government administration (AI 1999b). This expulsion included any Eritrean women who were married to Ethiopian officers or officials and the children of these marriages.

In April 1992 the EPLF issued a nationality proclamation. According to David Pool (2001) the proclamation:

was liberal in its definition of citizenship and had provisions for those born to a mother or father of Eritrean origin, for those of Eritrean birth but with foreign nationality, and for those married to Eritreans...The extension of citizenship to those born outside of Eritrea recognised the citizenship of the large refugee population and the naturalisation provisions granted the right to citizenship of the many Ethiopians of Tigray province with long residence in Eritrea. Unlike the referendum proclamation, that dealing with nationality brought considerable debate and opposition to some of its provision. It was an indication of the unchanged attitudes of sectors of the population untouched by the organisational outreach of the EPLF. In public meetings in Asmara views were expressed objecting to the equality of rights for children born to mothers of Eritrean origin and to foreigners, by implication Ethiopians, married to Eritrean women. These meetings on nationality provided an index of an anti-Ethiopian chauvinism, perhaps encouraged by the mass expulsion of Ethiopians remaining in Eritrea...(Pool 2001)

The referendum on Eritrean independence was held in April 1993. Eligible to vote were the whole population of Eritrea, and people with Eritrean origins living in Ethiopia and in the rest of the world. Around a third of Eritrea's population lived outside the country by 1993, driven out by the thirty years of war and the brutal Ethiopian regime. Of those registered to vote, 98.5% did so, and more than 99.8% of those who voted, voted for independence. The United Nations sent a mission to Eritrea to observe the elections and found them to have been 'free and fair at every stage' (USCI 2002). Elsewhere, however, serious questions have been raised over the conduct of the referendum, both inside and outside of Eritrea (Tronvoll, 1996). Ethiopia also had a sizeable minority of people of Eritrean origin who were eligible to vote in the referendum but considered themselves to be Ethiopian and did not register or take up Eritrean citizenship.

Between 1993 and 1997, there were good relations between the two countries. People moved freely across the borders and the citizens of each country worked in the other and were treated the same as nationals. Human Rights Watch notes that 'Article 2.3 of the [1993 agreement exempting citizens of the other country from visa requirements] declared that 'until such time that the citizens of one of the sides residing in the other's territory are fully identified and until the issue of citizenship is settled in both countries, the traditional right of citizens of one side to live in the other's territory shall be respected.'"<sup>11</sup> Public opinion in Ethiopia was turning against those people of Eritrean origin whose loyalties were in question because they had not formally chosen Ethiopian or Eritrean citizenship. This resentment was compounded by the prominent positions in business and government held by many people of Eritrean origin. The two countries recognized that the issue of the nationality of people of Eritrean origin living in Ethiopia had yet to be fully resolved, and Human Rights Watch noted that 'in August 1996, the Ethiopian and Eritrean government agreed to settle the issue by asking those involved to choose their nationality. The two sides agreed that 'On the question of nationality...Eritreans who have so far been enjoying Ethiopian citizenship should be made to choose and abide by their choice.' It was clear that participation in the referendum alone could not and was not construed as their having done so' (HRW 2003a).

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<sup>11</sup> 'Agreement on Security and Related Matters between the ministries of internal affairs of the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea,' signed in Addis Ababa on May 13, 1994 by Kuma Demeska, minister of internal affairs of Ethiopia and Naizghi Keflu, vice minister of internal affairs of Eritrea, art. 2.1.' in Human Rights Watch *Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue*, (2003a).

The number of people of Eritrean origin living in Ethiopia, and Ethiopians living in Eritrea at the outbreak of war is unknown and widely diverging estimates have been made. Refugees International has estimated that there were 200,000 Ethiopians of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia in 1998 and 40,000 Eritrean nationals (RI 2004). Amnesty International estimates that there were around 120,000 adults of Eritrean origin living in Ethiopia in 1993 (AI, 1999b). Amnesty International and Refugees International both estimate that there were around 100,000 Ethiopian nationals living in Eritrea in 1998, but there are no estimates of how many Eritrean nationals had Ethiopian ancestry at that time (AI 1999b, RI 2004). Rates of intermarriage were high as research conducted on those later deported during the 1998-2000 war revealed (Legesse 1999).

### **2.3 Defining boundaries: Eritrea and Ethiopia 1998 – 2000**

The causes of the war that broke out in May 1998 are opaque and complicated, rooted in economic and political tensions stretching back to before the independence of Eritrea. However, immediate tensions were raised by the introduction of the Eritrean currency in 1997 and a dispute over the border between the two countries. The important features of the war for people from mixed families were the deportations carried out by both countries, the consequent division of families, the denationalisation of people of Eritrean origin by Ethiopia, and the polarisation of society along national lines.

The deportations of people of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia began on 12 June 1998.<sup>12</sup> Important to note is that most of the deportees considered themselves to be Ethiopian and felt little or no connection with Eritrea: 'Most of those Amnesty International spoke to either had Ethiopian passports, or had been born or spent their entire working lives there, and considered themselves Ethiopians' (AI 1999a). As is widely documented, the pattern of who got deported varied widely and was generally arbitrary and inconsistent. Sometimes only people with two Eritrean parents were deported; at other times people with mixed parentage were also deported. Sometimes it was only people with Eritrean fathers, in other cases, it was people with Eritrean mothers as well. Children were deported in some circumstances, and but also frequently left behind. The register of voters in the 1993 referendum on Eritrean independence was a major source of information for the Ethiopian authorities but several of the participants in my research had family members who had not voted or had voted against Eritrean independence and were deported nevertheless (HRW 2003a).

The Ethiopian government denied that it was deporting its own citizens, claiming that the expelled individuals had forfeited their Ethiopian citizenship by voting in the Eritrean referendum in 1993. In an interview with Radio Ethiopia on July 9, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said the deportees were 'foreigners,' adding that '... any foreign national, whether Eritrean or Japanese etc. ... lives in Ethiopia because of the goodwill of the Ethiopian government. If we say 'Go, because we don't like the color of your eyes,' they have to leave' (HRW 1999a). Many of those who left had Ethiopian passports and other identity documents, which were either taken from them by the authorities or were stamped 'expelled, never to return' (HRW 2003a). As we have seen, no indication was given at the time of the referendum that participating would mean forfeiting Ethiopian citizenship. Not all of the participants in the referendum had formally taken up Eritrean citizenship. Therefore, many of those deported to Eritrea were not already citizens of Eritrea and on arrival they had to prove their eligibility for citizenship. The Representative of the Eritrean Permanent Mission in Geneva acknowledged that not all deportees from Ethiopia of Eritrean origin were Eritrean citizens.<sup>13</sup> Refugees International (2004) reports that 1000-2000 people deported from Ethiopia were unable to establish their connections with Eritrea and were issued with yellow temporary residence permits which have to be renewed. Refugees International (ibid) also states that a few individuals were not welcomed back and attempts were made to expel them again. Those unable to verify their eligibility were left stateless.

Another major effect of the deportations was that thousands of families were separated. Amnesty International reported that 'In some cases mothers were taken away without being allowed to arrange for the care of their children and families were deliberately and systematically split up and expelled in different

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<sup>12</sup> Details on the pattern and process of the deportations can be found elsewhere (See AI 1999b, HRW 2003a, Legesse 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Passade Cissé, Bernadette. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Regional Office for the United States of America and the Caribbean (Washington, DC). 'Re: The Status of Ethiopian Deportees in Eritrea.' Letter to INS Resource Information Center (17 July 2000).

batches, months apart. This created special hardships and considerable anxieties about when parents and children and their elderly dependants might be reunited' (AI 1999b). The BBC reported on the detrimental economic effects of the separation on the families left behind: 'first they deport the husband, then they starve the wife' (BBC, 1999). In many cases where both partners in a marriage were of Eritrean origin, the husband was deported first and the wife later. However, in cases where only one partner was of Eritrean origin, the families were permanently divided with the Ethiopian spouse being unable to go to Eritrea (AI 1999b).

Many people of Eritrean origin remained in Ethiopia during and after the deportations, either because the authorities had not deported them or because they managed to escape their scheduled deportation. This applied to many people from mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families who were either considered not to be 'Eritrean enough' for deportation or heard that their Eritrean family members were being deported and managed to hide with their Ethiopian families. The US State Department explained that 'in August 1999 all Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin who had voted in the 1993 referendum on Eritrean independence were required to register with SIRAA and complete residence application forms. After registration they received identity cards and residence permits valid for 6 months. These residence permits did not give access to hospitals or other government services' (DRL 2002a). Human Rights Watch notes the difficulties for people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia during the 1998-2000 war: 'Daily life became more precarious for people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia after the alien registration order went into effect. First, the registration gave the Ethiopian government an easily accessible record of the identities, addresses, and property of this population. Second, the alien identity card had to be renewed every six months, so that people of Eritrean origin remained uncertain of their ability to permanently reside in Ethiopia. Third, discrimination by local authorities and private individuals against people of Eritrean origin became more pervasive. Denied employment and business licenses, many were left without any means of support. Because of an intense climate of hostility towards people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia, it was also dangerous even for their friends and neighbors to be seen to be assisting expellees or their families' (HRW 2003a). In 2000, Amnesty International reported that 'more than 1,200 other Eritreans were still detained without charge or trial after mass round-ups in 1998 and 1999' (AI 2001b).

Eritrea did not begin deportations until later in the war, and did not deport its own nationals *en masse* like Ethiopia. Amnesty reports that 'there were allegations that the Eritrean authorities arbitrarily detained, ill-treated and forcibly deported tens of thousands of Ethiopian citizens. The allegations could not be substantiated, but at least 22,000 Ethiopians returned to Ethiopia, most after losing their jobs or becoming destitute as a result of the hostilities. However, there appeared to have been some cases of arbitrary detention and ill-treatment during the first few weeks of the conflict, and some leaders of the Ethiopian community in Assab were reportedly still held without charge or trial at the end of the year' (AI 1999c). Later in the war, the Eritrean authorities began to intern and deport Ethiopian nationals living in Eritrea (AI 1999c). Furthermore, there were reports that the police and civilians attacked Ethiopian civilians. The US Department of State reported in 2001 that 'In 2000 the Government shut down all businesses in Asmara that belonged to Ethiopians with only a few days' notice; approximately 300 businesses owned by Ethiopians were shut down. The Government gave Ethiopians occupying government-owned housing a 1-month notice to vacate. The Government reportedly also froze some bank accounts and seized some assets belonging to Ethiopians. Some Ethiopians had difficulty renewing business licenses, driving licenses, resident permits, or leases. A significant but unknown number of Ethiopians were fired or lost their jobs because of their nationality' (DRL 2001a).

The division of families, like in Ethiopia, affected mixed families in Eritrea in a profound and permanent way. The BBC reported on one woman who was an Ethiopian living in Eritrea and was deported during the war. She had to leave behind her young son because his father was Eritrean. 'We have found many cases on both sides of the border of people who were forced to leave their spouses or children behind, because they have the nationality of the other side', United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Human Rights officer Elio Tamburi said. Dr Kinfu Abraham, President of the Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development (EIIPD), believes normal ties have to be re-established before both Ethiopians and Eritreans can see their loved ones again. 'If eventually people are cleared of security and they don't have suspicious backgrounds maybe they will be allowed to come back, but this could take a very long time...'' (BBC 2002a).

Country expert Patrick Gilkes commented on the ‘nationalist fervour whipped up by bitter propaganda on both sides’ that existed in Eritrea and Ethiopia during the war (BBC 2000). The *Economist* refers to the ‘poisonous propaganda campaigns’ (Economist 1999) conducted in both countries. As a result, society in Eritrea and in Ethiopia became polarised during the war, leaving people in either country who had family or other connections to the enemy country vulnerable to exclusion and abuse. People of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia were harassed and excluded even by their neighbours who often denounced them to the authorities for deportation. Ethiopians and people of Ethiopian origin in Eritrea often lost their jobs and there were several reports of physical attacks by mobs of Eritreans (AI 1999b).

In December 2000, a peace accord signed at Algiers stopped the fighting. A UN-sponsored peace agreement made provisions for the delineation of the border and a temporary peacekeeping force to patrol a 20 kilometre wide zone along the length of the border region. The peace agreement failed to make provision for allowing those deported from Ethiopia to return home, or for resolving the nationality problems caused by the war.

#### **2.4 ‘No Peace, no War’: Eritrea and Ethiopia since 2000**

Since the signing of the peace agreement, Eritrea and Ethiopia have been described as being in a state of ‘no peace, no war’ (Legwaila 2005). The Ethiopian embassy in Asmara was closed in 2002. In 2004, Amnesty reported that Eritrea continued to host Ethiopian armed opposition groups (AI 2002a). In 2006 the border remains closed to the movement of people and to trade, damaging the economies of both Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Meles Zenawi, prime minister of Ethiopia, has come under internal political pressure for having been too soft on the Eritreans living in Ethiopia during the war. Many Ethiopians suspect him of having pro-Eritrean sympathies and he remains politically insecure. In Eritrea, the regime has stifled criticism of the government’s conduct of the war by banning the free press and arresting outspoken critics of the government. Democratic reforms have also been postponed again. Amnesty International reported in 2005 that ‘scores of people suspected of opposing the government or supporting armed opposition groups were detained in secret and held without charge or trial. They included forcibly returned asylum seekers and former refugees now holding foreign citizenship who were detained after returning voluntarily to the country’ (AI 2005a). Amnesty also reported that some people with suspected connections with Ethiopia remain detained in Eritrea in 2003: ‘there are some long-term prisoners of conscience, including...Ethiopian nationals and allegedly pro-Ethiopian Eritreans arrested during or after the Ethiopian war (1998-2000)’ (AI 2004a).

Mass deportations stopped after the signing of the peace agreement but there were several reports of further ‘involuntary repatriations’ of people of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia in 2001 (HRW 2002a). At the end of 2001, approximately 200 civilian residents of Eritrean origin remained detained in internment camps in Ethiopia (DRL 2001b). The ICRC supervised the voluntary repatriation of thousands of people from both sides throughout 2001 and 2002. However, the nationality status of people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia remains uncertain. The British Embassy in Addis Ababa noted on 15 January 2004 that, ‘a stamp declaring that [people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia] are Eritrean is still displayed [on their residence permits]. It appears also that the Authority has no clearly defined administrative or legal framework to handle the issue’ (IND 2004a). The Ethiopian government introduced new nationality legislation in 2004, of which Amnesty International says, ‘In early 2004 the Ethiopian government issued new regulations for the tens of thousands of Eritreans still remaining in Ethiopia. These regulations would allow them Ethiopian citizenship if they were not Eritrean citizens, or would grant them permanent non-citizen residence status in Ethiopia as well as travel documents and business permits’ (AI 2004a).

However, the ability of people deported from Ethiopia to return since the end of the war remains in doubt.<sup>14</sup> The 2004 directive allowed for the reacquisition of citizenship by Eritreans who had lived in Ethiopia

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<sup>14</sup> In 2002, the BBC reported on ‘Zalambessa Three’ – two sisters and a brother who were deported from Ethiopia during the war and tried to return home to Addis Ababa in May 2002. When they arrived at the Ethiopian border they were told they could not return

uninterrupted, which seems to preclude those who were deported during the war. Amnesty International cautions that the directive applies to all those who lost their nationality 'except for those who were outside Ethiopia for over a year. The latter would be treated as non-citizens for the purpose of government employment but otherwise with the same access to education and health facilities as Ethiopian citizens' (AI 2004a). This left stateless anyone of Eritrean origin who had resided outside of Ethiopia for any length of time, including those deported during the war who had not been able to take up Eritrean citizenship or those who have fled persecution. A further article in the directive clarifies that any person who voted in the referendum is considered to be an Eritrean until they apply for Ethiopian nationality. Those who had not voted in the referendum were still considered to be Ethiopian nationals. This left anyone who had voted in the referendum but had not formally taken up Eritrean nationality stateless until they applied for Ethiopian nationality' (WIC 2004).

There are indications that people of Eritrean origin still living in Ethiopia have remained vulnerable to discrimination and abuse since the end of formal hostilities. In a report dated 5 September 2001, the United Nations Secretary-General expressed concerns about the treatment of Eritreans in Ethiopia. In particular it was noted that those interviewed had reported long-term detention without due process, often in poor conditions. There were also allegations of ill treatment, discrimination in access to social services and harassment by civilians and officials. The Secretary-General called on Ethiopia and Eritrea to reconsider their positions with regard to the treatment of each other's nationals. He further urged them to comply strictly with international human rights and humanitarian law standards and their commitments under the peace agreement (SC 2001). The 2003 DRL Report on Human Rights Practices in Ethiopia stated that, 'Most Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin were registered with the Government and held identity cards and 6-month residence permits to gain access to hospitals and other public services. However, there were anecdotal reports that indigent Eritreans were denied the right to seek free medical services by government officials at the *kebele* level' (DRL 2003a).

Similarly, peace did not bring with it an end to the problems of Ethiopians and people of Ethiopian origin in Eritrea. In May 2002, the ICRC repatriated 122 Ethiopian civilians who had been detained in Massawa. The Government had previously denied holding them (DRL 2003b). In 2003 the BBC reported that Eritrea had banned Amharic songs from the radio and from bars and restaurants (BBC 2003a). The US State Department reported in 2004 that 'Ethiopian nationals reportedly were singled out for arrest because they were unable to pay the necessary fees to renew their residency permits every 6 months. Although numbers of detainees fluctuated from month to month, the ICRC visited approximately 300 Ethiopians who were detained at various times during the year' (DRL 2004a). In 2004, the ICRC reported that it was voluntarily repatriating Ethiopians from Eritrea, no longer for war-related issues, but because the social and economic environment in Eritrea was too hard for many Ethiopians (IRIN 2004). The BBC reported in August 2002 on an Ethiopian man who had to leave Eritrea due to threats and harassment by the Eritrean police. His Eritrean wife is still in Eritrea, unable to go to Ethiopia (BBC 2002b).

## **2.5 Prospects for peace: Eritrea and Ethiopia in the future**

'The situation in the border areas remains tense and potentially volatile.' This statement is made every week by UNMEE in its press briefings (UNMEE 2006). The 2006 Report of the Secretary General on Eritrea and Ethiopia said that since 2005 'there has been a serious deterioration of the security and political situation in the UNMEE Mission area' (SC 2006). The Economist reported in April 2005 and again in October 2005 that the signs for future peace in Eritrea and Ethiopia were not promising (Economist 2005a, 2005b). Eritrea has placed various restrictions on the movement of UN troops in the border region, seriously hampering their ability to carry out their mandate.

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home and had to remain in a camp. Then Ethiopian policemen took them back to the Eritrean border in June where they were interrogated by Eritrean officials, who tore up one of their Ethiopian passports. They were then deported back to Ethiopia and lived in the 'no mans land' between the two countries for several months. In September 2002 they were being returned to Addis Ababa where they had to apply for Ethiopian citizenship, but only after pleas to the Ethiopian government by UN Peacekeepers (BBC 2002c)

This hardly bodes well for the future security of people from mixed families. A senior Human Rights Watch researcher said that the peace process did not fundamentally change the situation of people of Eritrean descent in Ethiopia: they remain vulnerable (UNHCR 2001a). The Secretary General of the UN reported on 30 August 2005 that: ‘UNMEE monitored the repatriation of 298 persons of Ethiopian origin and 163 persons of Eritrean origin, under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross. I received with concern reports from both countries of discrimination on the grounds of nationality, and of difficulties in accessing public social services, against each other’s nationals. I appeal to the parties to ensure that repatriations remain voluntary...’ (SC 2005). The 2006 Report of the Secretary General on Ethiopia and Eritrea sets out a number of recommendations for changing the UNMEE mandate, largely in order to avoid the restrictions placed on it by Eritrea over the years. This does not bode well for UNMEE’s effectiveness. The report also says, ‘Tension remains high and any miscalculation by the parties could result in a rapid escalation of the situation, with unpredictable consequences’ (SC 2006). With tensions between the two countries so high, it is likely that the position of people from mixed families who have been caught on the ‘front line’ of hostilities, will remain precarious for the foreseeable future.

### **SECTION 3: REVIEW OF EXISTING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION AND LITERATURE**

Much has been written about the rights and wrongs of the deportations carried out by Eritrea and Ethiopia during the 1998-2000 war. There is, however, a severe lack of country of origin information on the current treatment of Eritreans in Ethiopia and Ethiopians in Eritrea, and particularly on the nationality issues surrounding the situation since the cessation of hostilities. Even less is written specifically on the problems faced by those of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage as they are not normally considered separately from those ‘full’ Eritreans or Ethiopians who are in the same situation at a particular time. Case law on asylum appeals brought by people from mixed families shows that the lack of country of origin information on a particular problem often leads to a refusal to grant asylum. Refusals are not always based on positive information which states that there is no problem for a certain group, but often simply on a lack of information on the topic at all.<sup>15</sup> The lack of reliable and clear information on the situation of people from mixed families is clearly demonstrated by the number of requests for information sent to UNHCR on the topic of mixed parentage in general and nationality issues in particular.

#### **3.1 The difficulties of obtaining country of origin information**

Reliable country of origin information on Eritrea and Ethiopia is not always easy to obtain. Both countries, but especially Eritrea, are led by former guerrilla movements that had long experience of conducting public relations exercises with the west and so are adept at communicating what they wish to be believed. Eritrea has become increasingly paranoid and reclusive since the war with Ethiopia, and this coupled with the Eritrean regime’s philosophy of self-reliance, rooted in the experience of thirty years of fighting for independence, means that even foreign aid is at times being rejected as ‘interference’. Western members of the UNMEE peacekeeping force were banned from Eritrean territory in 2006 (IRIN 2006). Against this background, it is hardly surprising that international human rights groups are not exactly welcomed in Eritrea. As Amnesty International reported in 2003 that ‘International human rights NGOs (including Amnesty International) are barred from the country, few foreign journalists are allowed in (with the exception of the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC). Travel inside the country by diplomats, international organizations and foreign journalists is restricted’ (AI 2004a). In 2003, Amnesty International delegates were refused visas to visit Eritrea (AI 2003a). Amnesty goes on to elaborate on the human rights situation in Eritrea: ‘The government rejects external criticism as interference in its internal affairs. It limits access to the country and attempts to conceal a persistent pattern of serious violations of internationally recognized human rights’ (AI 2004a). The BBC was expelled from Eritrea October 2004 (BBC 2004a).

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<sup>15</sup> For example, the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal in the UK stated in one case, ‘We draw the inference from the lack of such documentary evidence that the recent increase in tension between the two countries has not given rise to such problems for persons of Eritrean origin living in Ethiopia’ (IAT 2004).

### **3.2 Major problems with the country of origin information**

That there are serious gaps in the country of origin information regarding Eritrea and Ethiopia can be explained in part by the difficulties of access outlined above. However, much of the problem lies with a lack of attention paid to the specific situation of people of mixed parentage, and with the methodology used in obtaining some of the information that does exist. There are three major gaps in the country of origin information routinely checked by UNHCR and other asylum-granting bodies: information is lacking on the treatment of Eritreans of Ethiopian origin in Eritrea; on the specific situation of persons of mixed parentage in both countries; and on the actual nationality status of people with mixed parentage together with the possibility of them gaining another nationality. Further, there is a great deal of reliance by tribunals on the 2003 report conducted by the UK Home Office, whose methodology is seriously questionable.

#### ***3.2.1 Lack of information on treatment of people of Ethiopian origin in Eritrea***

Because of the mass deportations of people of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia, the treatment of Eritreans in Ethiopia has received a lot of attention. In contrast, Eritrea was not reported to have expelled its own nationals, and the continuing problems experienced by Ethiopians and Eritreans of Ethiopian origin in Eritrea have not received the same level of attention. Therefore, the situation faced by Eritreans of Ethiopian origin, including those from mixed families, does not seem to be seen as an issue. Even where the treatment of Ethiopians in Eritrea is mentioned, distinctions are rarely made between Ethiopian nationals living in Eritrea and Eritrean nationals of Ethiopian origin. By contrast reports on the situation of Eritreans in Ethiopia the importance of making a distinction between Eritrean nationals and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin is generally recognised. This lack of distinction means that very little notice is taken of the specific problem faced by people from mixed families: that they cannot escape or be ‘repatriated’ from Eritrea to Ethiopia because they would be likely to face the same problems from the other side.<sup>16</sup>

#### ***3.2.2 Lack of specific information on people of mixed parentage***

Most of the information provided on people of mixed parentage refers to the division of families, especially in cases where an Eritrean spouse had been deported and the Ethiopian spouse had been left behind.<sup>17</sup> What hasn't received much attention is what happens to the children of such a marriage when they find that they do not enjoy full rights as citizens in Ethiopia but are not welcome in Eritrea either. A request for information put to UNHCR on whether an Eritrean passport-holder with an Ethiopian father was in danger of expulsion from Eritrea received the response that although there is information on the expulsion of Ethiopians by Eritrea, there is no evidence to suggest that Eritrean nationals were expelled (UNHCR 2001a). A further request for information received the response: ‘Current information on the treatment of individuals of mixed Ethiopian and Eritrean ethnicity...could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate’ (UNHCR 2004). That there is, in fact, some information on the treatment of people of mixed parentage, published in 2003, is explained below, but there is not enough of it, nor is it sufficiently apparent for the UNHCR to have found it in a routine search in 2004.

#### ***3.2.3 Lack of information on nationality issues***

One of the most important questions in an asylum claim brought by a person of mixed parentage is that of what nationality they hold (if any) and what nationality they are able to obtain. A 2003 Home Office report based on a visit to Eritrea covers the issue of people of mixed parentage from Ethiopia gaining Eritrean nationality in some depth, although there are serious problems with the methodology used (see below). Elsewhere, however, little information can be found on the ability of people with mixed parentage to gain Eritrean nationality. Case law shows that information on the policy of the Eritrean government regarding nationality is obtained from the Eritrean embassies, and the word of the officials taken at face value in light

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<sup>16</sup>For example, Amnesty International investigated allegations of mistreatment of Ethiopians in Eritrea at beginning of the war. They report that people were arrested and tortured for supporting the Ethiopian war effort but then released and returned to Ethiopia. There is no mention of whether or not these individuals were Ethiopian nationals or Eritrean nationals of Ethiopian origin. Going to Ethiopia would not have been an option for an Eritrean of with Ethiopian origins for Ethiopia was at that time deporting Ethiopian nationals who had some Eritrean origins. See AI 1999b, pp 23-24.

<sup>17</sup> See Klein 1999, Pitcher-Wilson 2001, SC 2001



of the fact that there is no evidence available to the contrary.<sup>18</sup> There is no objective information on whether it is in fact possible for a person with Ethiopian parentage to gain an Eritrean passport from an embassy in a third country.

Regarding Ethiopian nationality, it is reported in several places that the Ethiopian government in 2004 introduced a new law, which in theory enables people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia to regain their Ethiopian nationality. The USDOS report on Ethiopia 2004 merely states that Eritreans living in Ethiopia had their status regularised, not questioning whether this would actually benefit many people, nor mentioning the fact that it did not apply to those outside of Ethiopia (DRL 2004b). Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International were more cautious, preferring to wait and see how many people the new directive would in fact benefit (IRIN 2004). However, there is no information in the commonly consulted sources on whether this directive has been carried out, on who may have benefited, whether it applies to people of mixed parentage, or whether people of Eritrean origin outside Ethiopia have succeeded in obtaining nationality and returning.

#### ***3.3.4 Home Office Report of a Fact-finding Mission (2003)***

The 2003 Home Office report of a fact-finding mission to Eritrea (conducted in 2002) is heavily relied upon, especially in asylum cases brought in the UK. However, there are serious problems both with the methodology used and with the contradictions between its findings and those of other sources. The Home Office report states the claims of an Eritrean minister interviewed by the research team as fact, and the report also uses the minister's contribution word-for-word, presenting it as the opinion of the Home Office (IND 2003). The report is then referred to in all subsequent Home Office assessments of Eritrea, and by other authorities, and its findings are not questioned. Given the Eritrean regime's poor human rights record, its contravention of human rights standards to which it is party, and its reputation for repression, it is disturbing that the statements of its officials regarding the implementation of its laws should be taken at face value. The statement of the Eritrean minister interviewed by the Home Office research team implies that Eritrea would welcome any and all persons who can demonstrate a family connection with Eritrea within the rules set out in the 1992 Nationality Declaration. He also implies that anyone who is unable to provide the three witnesses required to prove Eritrean nationality is most likely an impostor (*ibid*). Both of these assertions, if taken at face value, have enormous potential to materially damage an individuals' claim for asylum, especially when that claim hinges on the possibility of an individual gaining Eritrean nationality. Asylum cases in the UK have been refused on exactly these grounds, with the tribunal citing the Home Office report as evidence discrediting the claimant (IAT 2005).

Furthermore, the report claims that Ethiopians living in Eritrea were able to gain employment and avoid harassment in 2002. 'Overall they [the Ethiopians] now appear to be better respected after the fervour of the border war... The attitude towards Ethiopians had changed, not as a result of any Government led initiative but as a result of a shift in the attitude of the public and police towards them. The inability to earn a living had been a leading cause for those that chose to be repatriated. Without the possibility of work they have little option but to leave. Since the end of the war not only have societal attitudes changed, but with so much of the potential workforce in the military it is possibly a lot easier to gain employment now if you are registered as a resident foreigner' (IND 2003). This opinion is flatly contradicted both by the ICRC who reported in 2004 that discrimination in access to employment continued to lead to 'voluntary' repatriations of Ethiopians to Ethiopia (IRIN 2004) and by the report of the Secretary General in 2005 who 'received with concern reports from both countries of discrimination on the grounds of nationality, and of difficulties in accessing public social services, against each other's nationals' (SC 2005).

#### ***3.3.5 Summary of existing Country of Origin Information***

Despite all of the problems outlined above, some published information does exist which highlights the situation of Ethiopians and people of Ethiopian origin in Eritrea, as well as those of mixed parentage. It is

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<sup>18</sup> For example, see IAT (2003) wherein the adjudicator states that 'the latest position as being that as set out in a letter from the Embassy of the State of Eritrea in London dated 29 August 2002.' No attempt is made to assess whether or not the statements of the Eritrean embassy in London are in fact in line with practice.

worth providing some of it here in full because it is so frequently overlooked in assessments of Eritrea and Ethiopia as places to which people from mixed families can safely return.

Regarding the treatment of Ethiopians and people of Ethiopian origin in Eritrea, Amnesty International's report on the first year of the war mentions that 'Amnesty International has received reports that there are several Ethiopian civilians secretly detained in Eritrea because of their Ethiopian nationality...Eritreans of part-Ethiopian origin or married to Ethiopians were also often suspected of Ethiopian sympathies and some are believed to be arbitrarily detained without charge or trial. One such case is Saba Berhe, owner of a restaurant in Asmara (later confiscated by the authorities), who is of mixed Ethiopian/Eritrean origin. She was arrested during the war when pregnant and is reportedly detained in Mai Haber prison with her infant daughter' (AI 2004a). Amnesty International also provided statements from individuals persecuted in Eritrea: 'In July 2003 we were taken to Dahlak Kebir island, 130 in a truck, lying on top of one another, then on to a boat to the island. Torture continued there for some prisoners – 'helicopter' and 'Jesus Christ'. We did hard labour – building houses, carrying goods off boats, cleaning soldiers' quarters, from about 8am to 2pm each day. I was accused of spying for Ethiopia [because of being of part-Ethiopian origin] and was tortured by 'ferro' method for a week.'<sup>19</sup>

Amnesty International also reported in 2003 that 'in addition, two categories of Eritreans affected by the war and continued tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia would be at risk of human rights violations if forced to return to Eritrea: those who wished to remain in or return to Ethiopia as Ethiopian citizens (after living there for all or most of their lives and having no ties to Eritrea) but were *en masse* denied this by Ethiopia and stripped of their Ethiopian citizenship; those of mixed Ethiopian-Eritrean families (of which there are many): families were broken up by the expulsions from Ethiopia during the war, where the Ethiopian spouse/parent stayed in Ethiopia in fear of the risks of moving to Eritrea, or where marriage to an Ethiopian or someone of part-Ethiopian descent might lead to their being refused entry to Eritrea, discriminated against in Eritrea or suspected of having Ethiopian government links; some had no ties with Eritrea and did not wish to become Eritrean citizens' (AI 2004a).

UNMEE reported in 2004 that in the past year 'discrimination against Ethiopian civilians in Asmara appeared to increase, possibly as a result of the stalled peace process. More than a hundred Ethiopian civilians were arrested in January during national service round-ups. Many were kept in detention despite having valid resident cards. In the case of those held at the Maitemenai detention centre, several reported that they were threatened with deportation if they did not pay up to Nfa 5000 for their release' (UNMEE 2004). And the US Department of State reported that 'in 2004 at least one Eritrean of Ethiopian origin was stripped of citizenship and expelled to Ethiopia,' (DRL 2004a) and further that 'Ethiopian nationals reportedly were singled out for arrest because they were unable to pay the necessary fees to renew their residency permits every 6 months. Although numbers of detainees fluctuated from month to month, the ICRC visited approximately 300 Ethiopians who were detained at various times during the year' (ibid).

Finally, it should also be borne in mind that the UN remains concerned about Eritrea and Ethiopia's treatment of each other's nationals. In his 2006 Report on Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Secretary General says 'Reports indicate that persons of Ethiopian origin continue to face discriminatory practices in Eritrea, including the demand for payment or high 'repatriation clearance fees'. At the same time, cases of temporary detentions in Ethiopia of persons of Eritrean origin pending their repatriation are also reported' (SC 2006).

## **SECTION 4: EXCLUSION FROM NATIONALITY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section will examine how people of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage<sup>20</sup> in Cairo have been excluded from their right to a nationality and left vulnerable to statelessness both during and since the 1998-2000 war.

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<sup>19</sup> Former detainee on Dahlak Kebir Island, quoted in AI 2004a.

<sup>20</sup> Other sections of this report apply to both people of mixed parentage and those who are in mixed marriages. Sections 4 and 5, however, apply only to people of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage because they are the group who are likely to experience problems with their nationality status in both Eritrea and Ethiopia

Participants in this research with one Ethiopian and one Eritrean parent have often found themselves unable to avail themselves of the protection of either Eritrea or Ethiopia. While many of those people of Eritrean origin deported from Ethiopia during the war were subsequently able to obtain Eritrean citizenship, some, including participants in this research, were either not allowed to enter Eritrea, or, having been stripped of their Ethiopian nationality but escaping deportation, have been unable to gain Eritrean citizenship and have thereby been rendered *de facto* stateless. As explained in Section 3, country of origin information on the nationality status of people of mixed parentage is severely lacking. This report hopes to provoke further investigation into the current nationality situation of people from mixed families by outlining the experiences of participants in Cairo.

Eritrean and Ethiopian law both provide for automatic conferment of nationality on the basis of *jus sanguinis*, or nationality by descent from either or both parents. Therefore, under law, people of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage can be nationals of both Eritrea and Ethiopia through their parents. However, Ethiopia does not provide for the possession of dual nationality and so an individual can only be Eritrean or Ethiopian, not both. An Ethiopian official has confirmed that if a person born to Ethiopian parents acquires another nationality at birth, then they would be considered an Ethiopian subject. But in order to be considered an Ethiopian citizen, they would have to renounce their other nationality and be formerly naturalised in Ethiopia (UNHCR 2003). The official Eritrean system of providing three witnesses to testify to an individual's Eritrean roots is well documented (IND 2003). Acquisition of citizenship is not, therefore, automatic but relies on administrative procedures and checks by officials. Testimonies of the participants in this research have revealed that the *jus sanguinis* principle, rather than allowing people of mixed parentage the option of either Eritrean or Ethiopian citizenship, seems to have made it possible for Ethiopia to claim that these individuals are Eritrean and Eritrea to claim that they are Ethiopian, thereby leaving them *de facto* stateless despite being entitled to either of two citizenships under the operation of the law of those countries.

#### **4.2 Loss of nationality in Ethiopia.**

That by deporting individuals of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000 the Ethiopian government illegally deprived many of these individuals of their only nationality is well established and need not be discussed at length here. Less obvious is that those who escaped threatened deportation, or were simply overlooked during the deportation process, were also deprived of their rights as nationals. The government issued a press release on 9 July 1999 stating, 'the individuals that have been expelled by the Ethiopian government over the course of the past year are citizens of Eritrea. None of them are citizens of Ethiopia. They are Eritrean citizens because they registered to vote in Eritrea's 1993 referendum on independence' (HRW 2003a). This implies that others who had voted in the referendum but had not yet been deported were also considered by the government of Ethiopia to be nationals of Eritrea. Having set out through the 9 July 1999 statement that henceforth all people who had voted in the Eritrean referendum were to be considered Eritrean nationals, the government of Ethiopia made a further statement on 14 August 1999, ordering all 'Eritreans' in Ethiopia to register for a temporary residence permit with the Security, Immigration and Refugee Affairs authority, thereby classifying them as aliens. Human Rights Watch believes that this may have been done to back up the claim that the expellees were non-citizens and to extend this claim to all people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia (ibid). This applied to Eritrean nationals, people with two Eritrean parents, and people of mixed parentage who had, until that point, considered themselves to be Ethiopians, and effectively revoked the nationality of all Ethiopian nationals of Eritrean origin, whether deported or not.

Most of the participants in this research who were of mixed parentage and were living in Ethiopia at the time of the deportations managed to escape deportation in one way or another. However, all claimed that they and their families were nevertheless stripped of their nationality. DG reported that his Eritrean father was rounded up in 1998 along with many other Eritreans. He was taken to the local *kebele* office where he was told that he was not Ethiopian, then had his Ethiopian ID taken away from him before he was released. MM was arrested in December 1998 and threatened with deportation. His Ethiopian half sister managed to secure his release from prison but his Ethiopian ID was taken from him. Thereafter he was afraid to go to public places like hospitals because he had no ID and could have been arrested by security at any time. One of his friends was caught with no ID card and has not been heard from since. YE fled from Ethiopia in 2000 after his father and brother were arrested for deportation to Eritrea. He met with an Ethiopian embassy official in

Khartoum to ask whether he could obtain a passport with his Ethiopian ID. The official told him ‘I will tell you the truth. It is easy to renew a passport, but it is difficult to get new ones, even for people who are not half Eritrean. They have to do checks in the *kebele* where you live. We don’t have a place for you right now. I don’t know about in the future.’

#### **4.2.1 Can people with Eritrean parentage regain or obtain an effective Ethiopian nationality?**

Ascertaining whether people with mixed parentage are now able to regain their Ethiopian nationality, or to obtain it for the first time is extremely important in light of the centrality of this question to many asylum cases.<sup>21</sup> As we have seen, country of origin information on this point is severely lacking. It is often assumed that the halt in deportations of people with Eritrean origins from Ethiopia means that such people are now able to regain their rights as Ethiopian citizens, especially since the 2004 nationality proclamation. However, this assumption is based on a lack of information about how people of Eritrean origin who were not deported from Ethiopia were also deprived of their citizenship. Further, participants in this research have indicated that concrete difficulties in obtaining the nationality of Ethiopia remain, both for those who were previously nationals of Ethiopia, and for those who were previously Eritrean and have applied for Ethiopian nationality for the first time.

MM, who had his Ethiopian ID card taken away from him when arrested during the war, left Ethiopia in 2003 at which point it was still impossible for him to regain his Ethiopian citizenship. YMK is an Ethiopian of mixed parentage who came to Egypt as a refugee in 1993 for political reasons unrelated to her parentage. In 1993 she was able to renew her passport at the Ethiopian embassy in Cairo. She went back to renew her passport after the war began and was refused. The embassy handed back the other passports which had been renewed, but kept hers. She would now need to apply for a new passport, which would require checks to be made with her local *kebele* who refused to give her Ethiopian ID in 2002. Her siblings in Ethiopia are still in hiding, without a nationality and without rights. None of them have been able to legally obtain an ID card or a passport since the end of the war. YE has an expired Ethiopian ID card which cannot be renewed, or used to obtain a passport at the embassy in Cairo without checks being made at the *kebele* level. He believes that the fact that he obtained an Eritrean ID card when he was younger will prevent him from obtaining any Ethiopian ID now. As he puts it, ‘I have no permission to be in Ethiopia. If I were to return I would have to live a clandestine existence, without formal identification or proof of citizenship. I would have no rights. I would still be stateless.’ Since the end of the war, none of the participants from Ethiopia have reported that they or any of their family had managed to legally obtain either an ID card or a passport, the primary proofs of nationality in Ethiopia.

If people with mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage who were born in Ethiopia remain unable to regain their citizenship then those with Ethiopian parentage who were born in Eritrea find it even more difficult. ADS, a mixed-parentage Ethiopian passport-holder from Eritrea, was deported from Eritrea in 2000 because she had obtained an Ethiopian passport. She went to the Ethiopian embassy upon arrival in Cairo and told them that she was from Eritrea but had an Ethiopian passport. She was told that she might as well throw her Ethiopian passport in the Nile. They called her *ketkem wich nesh* in Amharic means ‘worthless’ or ‘of no use’. They told her that she had no place because she was of mixed parentage. HOS is from Eritrea and has an Ethiopian mother. He has been in Cairo, fleeing the Eritrean government which he opposes, since 1993. In 1995 he was able to obtain an Ethiopian passport from the embassy in Cairo on the grounds that his mother was Ethiopian. In 2004, he tried to renew his Ethiopian passport but was refused. They told him that he was from Eritrea and so was not entitled to an Ethiopian passport. S was born in Asmara to an Eritrean father and an Ethiopian mother and moved to Addis Ababa as a very young child. She held Ethiopian citizenship until 1998. After coming to Cairo in 1999 she applied for a passport at the Ethiopian embassy because hers had expired. They saw that her birthplace was Asmara and told her that she did not deserve an Ethiopian passport and even formally cancelled her old one which had expired anyway. It is important to note that several of the participants were refused passports by the Ethiopian embassy on account of their Eritrean origins after the war and deportations ended and in some cases as late as 2004.

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<sup>21</sup> See Section 5 of this report

### 4.3 Loss of nationality in Eritrea

Because Eritrea did not deport Eritrean nationals with Ethiopian parentage *en masse* during the war, little country of origin information is available on whether any Eritreans with Ethiopian parentage were caught up in the deportations, or lost their rights as Eritrean nationals.<sup>22</sup> Only three of the participants in this research were residents of Eritrea at the time of the war and it is therefore difficult to draw any firm conclusions as to the treatment of Eritreans of mixed parentage as regards their nationality status. However, one of the three reported having her nationality denied by the Eritrean authorities. TT was born in Eritrea to an Ethiopian mother and an Eritrean father. She was arrested by the Eritrean authorities during the war and placed in a prison camp with Ethiopians. She tried to tell the authorities that she was Eritrean but they would not listen and she had no ID to prove her nationality. They told her that she was not Eritrean any more.

#### 4.3.1 Can people with Ethiopian parentage regain or obtain Eritrean nationality?

Eritrean officials have claimed that according to Eritrean law, a person who has one parent who is Eritrean is an Eritrean citizen by birth, regardless of whether or not they have any ID.<sup>23</sup> An Eritrean official told UNHCR that any person born to an Eritrean parent is an Eritrean citizen by birth regardless of their birthplace, residence, and whether they have voted in the referendum or paid taxes to the Eritrean government (UNHCR 2001c). However, the process of ‘proving’ Eritrean nationality can be difficult, and if proof is impossible to find or officials use the process of proving citizenship to exclude people, then the individual concerned, although an Eritrean national by birth, can hardly be said to enjoy the rights and protection of Eritrean nationality. A BDRL has official said ‘it is difficult for deportees to meet the stringent Eritrean nationality requirements’ (UNHCR 1999). The testimonies of participants in this research would also seem to refute the claims of the Eritrean government, as none of the participants with mixed parentage have succeeded in obtaining Eritrean nationality or protection.

Several of the participants or their families report not being accepted as citizens by Eritrea despite their theoretical entitlement to citizenship. GGH is an Ethiopian with an Eritrean grandfather. The Ethiopian family of GGH were arrested and deported from Ethiopia to Eritrea in 1998. At the Eritrean border they were turned back to Ethiopia because they had no Eritrean ID. When they arrived back in Ethiopia they were arrested and imprisoned for six months. The whole family is now hiding in Ethiopia, without nationality status. HTT, whose father was Ethiopian and whose mother was of mixed parentage, was arrested in 1999 and deported to the Eritrean border. The Eritrean government refused to accept her and she returned to Ethiopia only to be detained a second time, beaten and interrogated before fleeing to Cairo. Another participant was forced to sign away her rights to future Eritrean citizenship during the war. ADS is from Eritrea and obtained an Ethiopian passport before the war began because she believed that she would never be accepted as an Eritrean by other Eritreans on account of her Ethiopian father. Despite never having been to Ethiopia she was arrested in 2000 and tortured by the Eritrean authorities, before being forced to leave the country and sign a document declaring that she never intended to return. When she applied for an Eritrean passport at the embassy in Cairo, she was told that the paper she had signed prevented them from issuing one to her. Despite never having been to Ethiopia, having lived her whole life in Eritrea, and being entitled to Eritrean citizenship under Eritrean law, she is now prevented from returning in the foreseeable future.

The attitude of the Eritrean embassy in Cairo seems to be at best obstructive to people of mixed parentage who apply for Eritrean passports or recognition, often refusing assistance outright or knowingly imposing impossible conditions. RAT, an Ethiopian with a father who is of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage, visited the Eritrean embassy in Cairo in 2004 trying to obtain some form of identification. The embassy told her that she needed to obtain a letter from her father who had been deported to Eritrea stating that she was his daughter. She has no contact with her father and does not know whether he is dead or alive and so cannot fulfil this condition. She was not given the option of providing three witnesses and remains, therefore, without a means of obtaining Eritrean nationality. S was born in Asmara to an Eritrean father and an

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<sup>22</sup> Although it was reported in 2004 that at least one Eritrean national of Ethiopian parentage had their nationality revoked and was deported in that year (DRL 2004a).

<sup>23</sup> Eritrean nationality is currently defined by the Eritrean nationality proclamation of 1992. Subsection 2.(1) of the Eritrean nationality proclamation indicates that a person is an Eritrean national by birth, on account of their having one parent who is Eritrean. Subsection 2.(4) indicates that proof of such citizenship can be obtained in the form of a certificate of nationality. (UNHCR 1993)

Ethiopian mother. She held Ethiopian citizenship until 1998. She approached the Eritrean embassy in Cairo in 1999 to try to obtain an Eritrean passport. They asked her if she had an Eritrean ID card and if she had participated in the referendum. She told them that she had neither and they refused her the passport.

#### **4.4 Particular difficulties of statelessness outside of the country of origin**

The lack of an effective nationality causes a particular problem for those individuals who are outside of their country of origin. As many of the examples from the previous paragraphs show, participants have had difficulties obtaining or renewing passports from either the Eritrean or Ethiopian embassies in Cairo. Refugees International has reported that this is a problem not only in Egypt but elsewhere in the world: 'Outside of Ethiopia and Eritrea, still further challenges arise when individuals try to secure travel documents. Increasingly, they are subjected to an assessment of their political views by the issuing embassy and face difficulty securing passports, leaving them stranded in all parts of the world' (RI 2004).

Aside from their knowledge of the outright refusal of the embassies to offer protection or issue documents, people from mixed families who are outside of their country of origin might have other reasons to be reluctant to approach the embassies to claim protection. Several of the applicants reported that they were afraid to approach the embassies because they had escaped from the authorities in their country of origin and feared repercussions in Cairo. HOS has been informed that the Eritrean embassy in Cairo knows that he tried and failed to get an Ethiopian passport and are looking for him. Often participants reported that they were afraid to approach the embassy of their country of origin, be it Eritrea or Ethiopia, and did not think that they would be able to obtain a passport from the embassy of the other country because they were not from that country.

Participants in my research reported not feeling secure in returning to their country of origin even where they no longer fear the persecution from which they fled. Statements from Ethiopian embassy officials confirm that return to Ethiopia would be problematic without documentation: 'If the person does not have any documentation at all, he must ask the Ethiopian Embassy or Consulate Office where he resides. The Embassy or the Consulate will examine his background history, education, work exposure, languages and colour, and other matters relevant to the study; and finally decides' (UNHCR 2001b). As one participant in this research said 'I have no permission to be in [Ethiopia]. If I were to return I would have to live a clandestine existence, without formal identification or proof of citizenship. I would have no rights. I would still be stateless.'

A final tragic consequence of being without citizenship while outside one's country of origin is highlighted in the testimony of one of the participants. S, an Ethiopian woman of mixed parentage, reported that a friend of hers who was also of mixed parentage was killed in Egypt, reportedly by her Egyptian employer. S went with some others to the Ethiopian embassy to report the death, arrange for the body to be flown back to Ethiopia and for the death to be investigated. The embassy told them that the affair had nothing to do with them because the individual concerned was an Eritrean. S and the others went to the Eritrean embassy and were told that it had nothing to do with them because the girl who died was an Ethiopian. To S's knowledge, the body remains in the morgue in Cairo. Following this S reported feeling very vulnerable in Cairo. She said 'even if I die, no one will take care of me'.

#### **4.5 Conclusion: Are people of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage stateless?**

Paul Weis has described the stateless person as a kind of anomaly, flotsam, a *res nullius* (Weis 1956). One of the participants was told by the Ethiopian embassy that she was *ketkem wich nesh*, an Amharic phrase meaning something of no use, or superfluous. Another participant was told that there was 'no place' for him in Ethiopia or in Eritrea. Conceptually, people of mixed parentage seem to be seen exactly how Weis described the stateless person: as flotsam, as people with no place in the world.

As explained in the introduction to this section, the nationality laws of both Eritrea and Ethiopia provide nationality by descent for anyone who has one parent who is a national. The evidence presented in this section shows that people who are of mixed parentage have often found it impossible to gain recognition of either nationality on account of their parentage or administrative obstacles which may or may not be

intended to block an individual's application for recognition of nationality on account of their mixed parentage.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, this report contends that the participants are at least *de facto* if not *de jure* stateless.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of the duty of the international community to be concerned about the situation of people from mixed families, the question of whether they are *de jure* or *de facto* stateless is somewhat redundant. Carole Batchelor has said that it is in the wider sense that the term statelessness informs the mandate of the UNHCR. A resolution attached to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness recommends that persons who are *de facto* stateless should as far as possible be treated as *de jure* stateless, to enable them to acquire an effective nationality. And Carole Batchelor also contends that 'The technical distinctions between *de jure* and *de facto* stateless persons should not be significant if the principles and intent of international law are fully recognised' (Batchelor 1998).

This report contends that the participants in this research who are of mixed parentage are all at least *de facto* stateless, and that they should be considered to be *de jure* stateless for the purposes of ensuring that they gain the appropriate protection and assistance in gaining a nationality, in accordance with the principles of international law. This report also contends that the situation of all people of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage be considered sympathetically with regard to the possibility of their being stateless.

## SECTION 5: INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

### 5.1 Introduction

UNHCR is the organisation mandated not only to protect refugees but also to reduce statelessness. Human Rights Watch has stated that it believes 'that most, while not all, of those people forcibly expelled from Ethiopia are of concern to UNHCR under its mandate both to provide international protection to refugees and to address matters pertaining to statelessness.'<sup>26</sup> As explained in the previous section, those who escaped deportation from Ethiopia, as well as a number of people of Ethiopian origin in Eritrea, also became stateless as a result of the 1998-2000 conflict. Having become refugees, often on account of their statelessness, participants in this research should also be considered as persons of concern to UNHCR. However, only one of the 27 participants had been granted refugee status. It is apparent that the ambiguities and lack of clear information surrounding the nationality status of people of mixed parentage may be preventing them from claiming asylum even where their genuine fear of persecution in the country of origin has been acknowledged.

### 5.2 Determination of nationality status

RAT, an Ethiopian with a father who was half Eritrean, reported that her UNHCR interview was dominated by questions about why she couldn't just go to Eritrea. 'I came away from my interview with the impression that there was a critical misconception of people in my situation... I had the impression that [the interviewer] thought it was possible for me to return to Ethiopia or go to Eritrea.' Other participants said that they were asked 'Why can't you just go to Eritrea?' (if they had come from Ethiopia) or 'Why can't you just go to Ethiopia?' (if they had come from Eritrea). Participants reported that it didn't seem to be enough that they had been persecuted in their country of origin and former nationality, and that they were also expected to prove fear of persecution in the country that one of their parents had come from. Inability to do so seems to have led to a refusal of refugee status.

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<sup>24</sup> Carole Batchelor believes that if a person is unable to obtain an effective nationality due to administrative obstacles, then they may fairly be considered *de facto* stateless (Batchelor 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Determining whether people of mixed parentage are also *de jure* stateless is difficult. A *de jure* stateless person is defined as someone who is without a nationality under the operation of law. If the government of Ethiopia's interpretation of its own constitution as permitting the revocation of nationality upon the voluntary acquisition of another nationality (something that was not explicitly stated in law until the 2003 Nationality Proclamation), and that it's interpretation of participation in the Eritrean referendum as being this voluntary acquisition of another nationality, can be taken as 'the operation of law' then people whose Ethiopian nationality was revoked and who are unable to obtain Eritrean nationality can be considered *de jure* stateless.

<sup>26</sup> At the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of UNHCR's ExCom Standing Committee in February 2000, the Africa Bureau stated in its presentation on UNHCR operations in Africa that the ongoing border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea had 'put hundreds of individuals in a *de facto* stateless situation,' an indication that UNHCR believed that some, if not all, of the deportees were persons of concern to the organization under its mandate for statelessness' (HRW 2003a).

The 1951 Refugee Convention clearly states that a refugee must be able demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution in his or her country of nationality. In the case of dual or multiple nationalities, a refugee must demonstrate a well-founded fear in all of his or her countries of nationality before international protection can be granted. Because people of mixed parentage are eligible for the nationalities of Ethiopia and Eritrea under the laws of those countries, they are often treated by asylum-granting authorities effectively as persons of dual nationality (IAT 2005).

However, what is frequently overlooked is that, as explained in the previous section, an individual cannot be a national both of Eritrea and of Ethiopia. If they previously held or currently hold the nationality of one of the countries, then in order to be recognised as a citizen of the other, they would have to meet certain criteria and apply. Section 4 outlined how the participants in this research have been unable to renew or obtain passports at the embassies in Cairo. Section 3 has already shown that there is a lack of reliable and up-to-date country of origin information on the practical possibilities of people of mixed parentage successfully applying for Ethiopian or Eritrean nationality. Therefore, we should not assume that an asylum seeker from one of the countries could alternatively gain the nationality of the other, merely because the laws of those countries and the statements of officials say that they can.<sup>27</sup>

It does make sense that an asylum seeker should explore all options available in the country of asylum for obtaining national protection before claiming international protection. Nevertheless, this process should not place an undue burden on the asylum seeker. An case brought before the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal in the UK recently established the principle that if a claimant is eligible for the nationality of Eritrea or Ethiopia but does not yet hold that nationality, they are obliged to try and fail to obtain the second nationality before they are eligible for refugee status (IAT 2005). However, even where one applicant tried and failed to obtain recognition as a national at the Eritrean embassy in London, the tribunal found that the applicant had not exercised due diligence in providing the proofs necessary for her application to succeed, and her claim for international protection was refused on these grounds. Both Carole Batchelor<sup>28</sup> and UNHCR's guidelines<sup>29</sup> acknowledge that proving statelessness is problematic because a country that does not recognise an individual as a national might feel no compulsion to testify to that effect. Further, the embassy of a country will not wish to provide documentary evidence that it is excluding an individual who has a theoretical right to the nationality of that country. It is therefore very difficult for an individual of mixed parentage to prove that they are unable to gain the nationality of either Eritrea or Ethiopia, leaving them vulnerable to unfair rejections of their asylum claims.

It is worth noting that most of the participants in this research felt a strong affinity for their country of origin and had strong feelings against being forced to go to the other country. For those of Ethiopian origin, especially, going to Eritrea would often entail being forcibly recruited into the Eritrean army and in the event of hostilities breaking out again would mean fighting those they consider to be their own compatriots. Several female participants also expressed fear of recruitment into the army because of the sexual abuse which is reported to occur.

Finally, those responsible for determining nationality status in asylum-granting authorities should be aware of the ambiguities and difficulties of the nationality situation in Eritrea and Ethiopia. Confusion can occur over the nationality of an asylum seeker because of their own contradictory statements. One of the participants who was of mixed parentage showed me a testimony that had been prepared in English by a member of her community. At the top of the first page her nationality was stated as 'Eritrean' although in the

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<sup>27</sup> It is generally acknowledged that, because of the deportation and denationalisation of persons of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia during the 1998-2000 war, a person of mixed parentage from Eritrea will not be expected to apply for Ethiopian nationality. However, statements from Eritrean officials and the 2003 Home Office report on Eritrea both claim that a person of mixed parentage would be welcomed in Eritrea and that the process for proving their connection with the country would be easy for anyone who really is Eritrean (IND 2003).

<sup>28</sup> 'While a State may claim an individual has the option to obtain nationality, administrative procedures may be adopted which foreclose attainment of citizenship for certain sectors of the population. Hence, these individuals should not be left to languish under the burden of proving a negative.' (Batchelor 1995)

<sup>29</sup> The UNHCR Handbook on Statelessness for Parliamentarians also notes that there are difficulties with proving statelessness because it is by definition a negative (UNHCR 2005, p. 17).



testimony itself she claimed that she had been born in Ethiopia, had never held an Eritrean ID card nor been to Eritrea, had not voted in the referendum and considered herself to be an Ethiopian. When questioned why her testimony stated that her nationality was Eritrean she said that it was because her father was an Eritrean. Care must be taken when interviewing an asylum seeker of mixed parentage to identify exactly what they mean when asked for their nationality, and contradictions and ambiguities should be interpreted sympathetically, allowing the applicant the benefit of the doubt where contradictions occur.

## **SECTION 6: PERSECUTION, DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION OF PEOPLE FROM MIXED FAMILIES IN ERITREA AND ETHIOPIA**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This section outlines the major elements of persecution, discrimination or exclusion experienced by the participants or their families in their countries of origin. Several of the participants came to Egypt primarily fleeing persecution that was unrelated to their being from a mixed family. Persecution due to actual or imputed political activity unrelated to the nationality question has sometimes been exacerbated by the problems faced by people from mixed families and Paragraph 6.6 examines how being from a mixed family has become interrelated with other political persecution. Most of the participants, however, are in Egypt because they are afraid of persecution, discrimination or harassment directly related to their being from mixed families. Several other important themes including the particular vulnerability of women and the division of families are examined separately in further depth in Paragraphs 6.7 and 6.8 respectively.

The findings are divided chronologically in order to demonstrate clearly how the difficulties faced by people from mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families did not begin with the outbreak of war in 1998 and did not end with the peace agreement of 2000. Understanding the longer-term picture is important for understanding both the depth of hostility between some people in the two countries, and for determining whether or not people from mixed families can be expected to pursue a meaningful future in Eritrea or Ethiopia. This report hopes to show that many participants have experienced problems not accounted for in the commonly consulted sources of country of origin information. By presenting these experiences together, this report hopes to give credence to individual accounts and to provoke further investigation into the current situation of people from mixed families in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The majority of participants were primarily from Ethiopia and so there is more information for the treatment of people from mixed families in Ethiopia than in Eritrea. However, this should not be taken as meaning that Eritrea is 'safer' for people from mixed families, because there is not enough information to determine this one way or the other. Eritrea has much tighter controls on people leaving the country, and has a far smaller population than Ethiopia, so the number of refugees from Eritrea found to participate in the research was always likely to be smaller than those from Ethiopia.

The experiences of the participants vary widely, and not all of the information gathered is presented exhaustively here. However, all of the major themes that emerged from the research and examples from the most illustrative testimonies are included in the following. This section aims to present how, when taken as a whole, the testimonies reveal that all people from mixed families in Ethiopia and Eritrea are structurally vulnerable to persecution, discrimination and harassment of different kinds.

### **6.2 Language and insults**

In the course of the research, respondents have used a number of terms to describe some of the complexities of Eritrean and Ethiopian families and identities. I checked usage of the terms with other Ethiopians and Eritreans to determine the context in which these terms were used. Some of the terms are derogatory, or have become derogatory since the war. The following are a selection of important terms which are widely used in the Eritrean and Ethiopian communities in Cairo as well as in Eritrea and Ethiopia and which have come up in the testimonies taken from the participants:

*Shabia*: An Arabic word meaning 'popular', initially used to describe the EPLF rebel fighters. Before 1991 the term was used by Eritreans and Ethiopians alike and was not necessarily derogatory, although it could be used as an insult. Since 1991, *Shabia* has been used primarily as the name of the EPLF-led government of

Eritrea, but especially since 1998 it has also been an insulting way to describe an Eritrean or a person of Eritrean descent. Many people who held Ethiopian citizenship but had Eritrean origins were called *Shabia* during the war as a way of marking them as different to ‘full’ Ethiopians, possibly while acknowledging that they were not technically Eritrean citizens. Participants who have experienced extensive harassment in Ethiopia on account of their Eritrean origins hate the term and some visibly wince when it is used.

*Woyane*: The name for the TPLF rebel group which became the EPRDF-led coalition that currently governs Ethiopia. Like *Shabia* it can be a neutral term but also has derogatory connotations when used by Eritreans to describe Ethiopians.

*Amiche*: The name of an Italian company which sells spare parts for vehicles to Ethiopia. Since 1991 it has been used in Eritrea to refer to any person who lives in Ethiopia and is of either full or part Eritrean origin. The idea behind the use of the term was explained to me as ‘made in Italy, assembled in Addis Ababa’, referring to Eritrea’s historical connection with Italy. This term seems to cause amusement among the respondents when mentioned, but it has derogatory connotations. President Isais Afwerki of Eritrea is reported to have used the term in public speeches, referring to those Eritreans and people of Eritrean origin who were deported from Ethiopia during the 1998-2000 war.

*Wedé adgi*: Meaning ‘son of a donkey’ this term is used by Eritreans to describe a person of the Ethiopian Amhara ethnicity. Because of the historical dominance of the Amhara group over Ethiopia, the term is often used to refer to any Ethiopian person and has been used as an insult directed at people with Ethiopian origins in Eritrea and Eritreans married to Ethiopians.

*The son of a snake is a snake*: This phrase is commonly used in reference to people in Ethiopia with Eritrean parentage. The use of this phrase demonstrates the extent to which familial relations are seen to determine an individual’s character and loyalties in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

There are undoubtedly other terms of description and abuse used in Eritrea and Ethiopia with reference to people from mixed families. I have included only those which have emerged during the course of the research. More research into other linguistic terms used to categorize and possibly to exclude individuals and groups in Eritrea and Ethiopia would shed further light on popular perceptions of people from mixed families. Suffice to say that the fact that terms such as *Amiche* and ‘the son of a snake is a snake’ have developed specifically to describe people from mixed families indicates the depth and potential longevity of popular prejudices.

### **6.3 Social and family exclusion prior to 1998**

This research has revealed long-standing prejudice and hostility between Ethiopians and Eritreans that predates the 1991 independence of Eritrea and the 1998-2000 war between the countries. Many participants reported that, contrary to the usual assumption that relations between Eritreans and Ethiopians were good between 1991 and 1998, hostility between Eritreans and Ethiopians existed before 1991 and increased thereafter, especially after the 1993 referendum on Eritrean independence. This section will seek to outline the long-term problems between Eritreans and Ethiopians as experienced by people from mixed families, thereby demonstrating that some of the problems they currently face did not begin with the war in 1998 and are unlikely to have ended with the 2000 ceasefire.

Many participants reported prejudice and hostility within their families as a result of their parents entering into mixed marriages, even before 1991, when Eritrea and Ethiopia were still officially one country. Hostility was experienced both from both sides of the family in some cases, and in others only from the Ethiopian or Eritrean side. Only two participants said that there were no problems within the family because of the mixed marriage of their parents. ADS reported that when her Eritrean mother married her Ethiopian father, her mother’s father disowned his daughter. He did not recognise ADS and her sisters, his grandchildren, as members of his family. When ADS’s mother fell ill following the death of her husband, her mother’s father came to the house and began taking furniture away, showing no concern for the health of his daughter. ADS asked her grandfather for help when she began to experience problems with the Eritrean government on account of her mixed parentage. He refused to help her. BY’s Eritrean father’s family were not happy about

his marriage to BY's mother who was Ethiopian. When BY's father's brothers came to visit from Eritrea they would not come to the house, but would meet with her father separately. They did not consider BY and her siblings to be part of their family because their mother was an Ethiopian. HOS's father was an Eritrean and his mother was an Ethiopian. His father had been married before to an Eritrean woman with whom he had two sons. HOS's two half-brothers who were full Eritreans refused to meet HOS and his other siblings because their mother was Ethiopian.

Several of the participants who were themselves in mixed marriages experienced hostility from the family of their spouse, or from their own family, as a result of their entering into a mixed marriage. TAM was a teenager in Eritrea when she was forced to marry an Ethiopian army general stationed near to her town in 1986. Her husband was fighting the EPLF rebel forces and so regarded TAM as an enemy because she was Eritrean. When the EPLF took Asmara in 1991 her husband fled to Sudan and she was deported to Ethiopia by the new administration along with the other Eritrean women who had been forcibly married to Ethiopian soldiers. She went to live with her husband's family in Addis Ababa who also treated her as an enemy and accused her of killing her husband's brothers who had died in the war with the EPLF. MH is an Eritrean woman who married an Oromo Ethiopian man. Her mother-in-law was against the marriage because MH was an Eritrean. Soon after they married, MH's mother-in-law deliberately put a treatment on MH's hair, which severely burned her scalp and has left her with permanent scars. MH also believes that her mother-in-law tried to poison her on a number of occasions. M is an Oromo Ethiopian who married an Eritrean man after arriving in Cairo. Her family refused to bless the marriage and she now has no contact with her parents in Ethiopia because of this.

Other participants reported that there were problems between their parents because of their mixed marriage. MM reported that his parent's marriage had broken up over the nationality question. His father was an Eritrean nationalist and his mother's parents considered him to be a racist because he was Eritrean. MM's parents argued a lot after Eritrea became independent because his father supported Eritrea and his mother supported Ethiopia. They separated in 1992. As a child, MM felt the stigma of being Eritrean even from his Ethiopian mother and half sister. If he made a mistake, it was attributed to his being Eritrean like his father. When he fought with his sister, she would call him *Shabia*. AS reported that her parents used to argue a lot about nationality. AS's mother was half Eritrean and wanted to vote in the 1993 referendum on Eritrean independence. AS's father was an Ethiopian and did not want her to vote. When AS, herself born and bred in Addis Ababa, married an Eritrean man in 1996, her parents were very unhappy because they saw her as making the same mistake as they had made.

An increase in hostility between Eritreans and Ethiopians after the 1993 referendum was referred to by a number of participants. DD reported that tensions between regimes began to filter down to youth groups in Addis Ababa after 1995. The Tigrayan and Eritrean youth groups (DD was a member of the latter) would insult each other and disrupt each other's meetings. The Eritrean youths were called *Shabia* and told that they did not belong in Addis Ababa. HTT's mother was of mixed parentage and believed in the unity of Eritrea and Ethiopia. Her mother's brothers were Eritrean nationalists, however, and between 1991 and 1993 tried to convince HTT's mother to vote in the referendum, which she refused to do. Although HTT's mother refused to vote in the referendum her neighbours saw the visits that had taken place and did not believe her. They began to call HTT and her family *Shabia* and threw stones at them in the streets. People who worked at the church with HTT's mother began to discriminate against her. HTT said 'The people who had loved and respected her now called her *Shabia*.'

Some participants experienced harassment from non-family members before 1998. MH, an Ethiopian citizen born in Eritrea, had held an Ethiopian government job in Addis Ababa before 1993. After 1993 she was fired from her job and her family were forced to move into the servants' quarters of the government villa they lived in. They rented the rest of the villa to an Ethiopian man who then tried to have them evicted saying that they had no right to live in a government house because MH was Eritrean. The man threatened to kill the family and tried to shoot them on a number of occasions. The police did not do anything. Between 1993 and 1998 they struggled with this situation until finally the man locked them out of their home and they lost all of their papers and possessions.

Political involvement in Ethiopian or Eritrean organisations was also complicated by mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian marriages. KAG is an Oromo woman who was an active member of the OLF and whose father was imprisoned and tortured to death by the Ethiopian authorities for his involvement with the OLF. The OLF disapproved strongly of KAG's marriage to an Eritrean man and for this reason she felt she was not trusted by the organisation; even after the Eritrean government began supporting the activities of the OLF after 1998. Similarly, her husband's position within the Eritrean Development Association (EDA) was compromised because of his marriage to an Oromo woman. This caused KAG and her husband a lot of pain: 'Both of us risked our lives working for illegal organisations whose aims we believed in, but because of our marriage neither of us was trusted or appreciated within those organisations.'

Families not wishing their children to inter-marry with other ethnicities or nationalities, and ethnically-based political groups disapproving of marrying outside of the ethnic group could tell us more about the desire of groups to remain homogenous than about prejudice against Eritreans or Ethiopians. However, the problems that families had with their relatives entering into mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian marriages seemed not to be to do with marrying out of their own ethnicity, but rather a specific objection to marrying into or out of the Eritrean 'ethnicity.' When participants were asked whether they thought the Ethiopian families would have had the same objections to their relatives marrying someone from a different Ethiopian ethnic group other than Eritrean, the answer was universally 'no'. KAG, an Oromo woman married to an Eritrean man responded 'my family did not approve of my marriage because my husband was an Eritrean. Although Oromos do not usually marry non-Oromos, they would have been happier if I had married an Ethiopian of a different ethnicity rather than an Eritrean'.

## **6.4 Persecution in Eritrea and Ethiopia 1998-2000**

### ***6.4.1 Persecution in Ethiopia 1998-2000***

#### ***6.4.1.1 Government persecution in Ethiopia 1998-2000***

The major form of government persecution experienced by people from mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families in Ethiopia during the 1998-2000 war was internment and subsequent deportation to Eritrea. Although only two of the participants had been deported, many had been threatened with deportation, arrested, or otherwise persecuted and had managed either to escape deportation or go into hiding in Ethiopia and then escape the country later. M was deported from Ethiopia to Eritrea during the conflict and was recruited into the Eritrean army. He managed to escape with great difficulty to Sudan, and then to Cairo. AS's Eritrean husband was reportedly killed attempting the same journey. That those individuals who make it to Cairo are those who managed to escape being deported to Eritrea is not surprising, given the reported difficulties of leaving Eritrea (AI 2004a). HTT was deported to the Eritrean border but the Eritrean authorities refused to accept her and she was turned back.

Accounts of the deportation of people of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000 are widely documented and need not be repeated in detail here (AI 1999b, HRW 2003a). However, the effect of the threat of deportation on those who were not deported has not been documented. Of the participants of mixed parentage who avoided deportation, some hid as soon as they heard that they were to be deported and others were arrested but later released. MM was arrested in 1998 for interrogation and deportation because his father was an Eritrean. His Ethiopian half-sister was able to secure his release after he had been imprisoned and tortured for several months. DD was imprisoned but managed to escape with the help of a friend. MH and her children changed lodgings five times in five years in order to avoid detection by the authorities. RAT left home the night her father told her that they were all to be deported. She lived in hiding before she was caught and arrested, finally managing to escape from prison. YE heard that his father and brother were arrested and deported while he was away from home and managed to escape to Sudan. Most of the participants have family members still living in hiding from the authorities in Ethiopia.

That the Ethiopian government confiscated and sold property belonging to Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin when they were deported is widely reported (AI 1999b, HRW 2003a). Several respondents reported that the property of their deported relatives had been taken from them. AS, an Ethiopian woman whose Eritrean husband was deported to Eritrea in 1998, was taken into custody for one week. When

released she found that papers certifying that her husband had transferred all his property to her before his deportation had been taken from her home. The authorities told her that she would have to get her husband to send replacement papers from Eritrea but they knew that she had no contact with her husband and did not know if he was dead or alive. The government confiscated her house and she was forced to move in with relatives. YE's Eritrean father's haulage company was confiscated by the Ethiopian government when YE's father and brother were deported. Some participants were able to sell their property through their Ethiopian relatives and so get a reasonable price for it (people of Eritrean origin often found it impossible to sell their property during and since the war because the Ethiopian buyers would take advantage of their desperation to offer very small amounts of money). MM, whose father was Eritrean, was able to sell his property through his Ethiopian half sister.

Most of the above discrimination related to the threat of deportation applied to people with mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage. However, Ethiopians married to Eritreans have also been targeted by the government of Ethiopia. AS is an Ethiopian woman who was married to an Eritrean man. Her husband was deported to Eritrea in 1998 and she was arrested after the police found a letter in their home in which she criticised the government for deporting her husband. The security services 'tortured and degraded' her, asking about her and her husband's activities against the government. They released her after one week but continued to harass her, coming to her house and threatening her until she left Ethiopia. KAG, an Ethiopian woman, was harassed by the security forces for several years after her Eritrean husband was deported, and raped in her own home under the threat that her children would be deported. After the deportation from Ethiopia of MB's Eritrean mother, the security forces harassed MB's father and imprisoned him for interrogation about his wife's activities four times in three months. Later that year MB's father died due to problems with his blood pressure which MB believes was caused by the stress of his mother's deportation and the harassment by the security forces.

The arbitrary nature of the deportations and related problems means that not every person from a mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian family was necessarily affected by it. However, the very arbitrariness of the government's policy also meant that there were no limits on who could be affected: people who had not voted in the referendum, people who were not even eligible to vote in the referendum, Ethiopian spouses of Eritreans and even people who helped their friends and relatives in need could all be targeted for arrest or expulsion. YMK's cousin was refused a passport after she tried to help YMK and her mixed parentage siblings to get ID cards. Anyone with a connection to Eritrea could be suspected of divided loyalties or active support for the enemy, regardless of their beliefs or actions. Furthermore, those with Eritrean parentage were stripped of their nationality, leaving them in a very insecure position. The entire group was therefore vulnerable to abuse, and knowledge of the insecurity of their situation could be exploited.

#### **6.4.1.2 Social harassment in Ethiopia 1998-2000**

Less well documented than the persecution of people from mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families by the government of Ethiopia, is the social harassment and exclusion they suffered. Government propaganda used to generate support for an unpopular war did its job, building on pre-existing stereotypes and tensions about the position of Eritreans within Ethiopia. All but one of the participants from Ethiopia reported an increase in harassment from the Ethiopian public after 1998; harassment which sometimes including close friends and neighbours.

MB found that after the war began, his Ethiopian friends did not call him any more and many would say bad things about Eritrea to try to provoke him. His Eritrean friends were all deported and he found himself alone. HMK heard from his siblings in Ethiopia that when his Eritrean father was deported in 1998, an Ethiopian neighbour called to the family standing outside the house 'the son of a snake is a snake', meaning that they were all also implicated in their father's status as an 'enemy'. This was someone who they had welcomed in the community when she came to Addis Ababa from a rural region. MM reported his increasing isolation in Ethiopia after the war began: 'none of my Ethiopian friends have remained my friends. They would accuse me of supporting Eritrea during the war. Any discussion about Ethiopia or about politics would stop when I arrived. Most of my friends were not open to me and would not help me. Some of them were scared of the consequences of associating with me. They were scared of becoming isolated within the community. People would say 'Why are you hanging around with that racist?'".

Even the Ethiopian spouses of Eritreans deported during the war suffered social isolation and harassment. AS, whose Eritrean husband was deported, found herself isolated from her community in Addis Ababa. She was labelled an Eritrean because her husband was an Eritrean and her young child had an Eritrean father. This isolation only began after the war. People would tell her that she carried the child of the enemy. KAG, an Ethiopian woman married to an Eritrean man, reported that after her husband's deportation in 1999, people who had previously been her friends turned away from her and would not help her. People avoided her and became distant. Because of her isolation in the community, she was left more vulnerable to the subsequent harassment that she experienced from the security forces.

Like the government persecution in Ethiopia, social exclusion seems to have affected all those with a family connection with Eritrea, regardless of their personal identity or political beliefs. During the war, Ethiopian society would appear to have excluded anyone whose loyalties could potentially be called into question and so people with mixed families were left even more vulnerable and isolated. Such isolation often left them exposed to the harassment that many experienced at the hands of the authorities.

#### ***6.4.2 Persecution in Eritrea 1998-2000***

##### ***6.4.2.1 Government persecution in Eritrea 1998-2000***

Below are brief outlines of the experiences of three participants who were born and raised in Eritrea but were discriminated against for their family connections to Ethiopia. One of the participants was technically an Ethiopian national, despite never having been to Ethiopia. The others, however, were Eritrean citizens.

ADS was born and bred in Eritrea to an Eritrean mother and an Ethiopian father. She was too young to vote in the 1993 referendum and did not obtain an Eritrean ID card when she turned eighteen because she had no need for one. In 1997 she decided to get a passport in case worsening relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia descended into war. She would have been eligible for an Eritrean passport at that time but was afraid that she would not be accepted as an Eritrean by society because her father was an Ethiopian. She thought that then she would belong nowhere. So she decided to get an Ethiopian passport instead, believing that then she would at least be an Ethiopian and if she was abused for that then so be it. She would know who she was. ADS never intended to travel to Ethiopia with her passport. She wanted to continue living in Eritrea as an Ethiopian, paying the residence fee and getting on with her life. However, because of her visits to the Ethiopian embassy to obtain the passport, the Eritrean authorities arrested and tortured her, accusing her of being a spy. ADS had her hands immersed in boiling water and had hot water thrown on her, leaving permanent scars on her chest and arms. Upon her release the authorities harassed her until finally she was ordered to leave the country in 2000.

TT was born in Eritrea to an Eritrean father and an Ethiopian mother. She lived as a refugee in Sudan from 1991 to 1997, having been abducted by the EPLF as a teenager and raped by one of the soldiers. The Sudanese authorities returned her to Eritrea in 1997 where the Eritrean government provided her and her child with food aid. When the Eritrean authorities discovered that her mother was Ethiopian, they stopped the food aid for herself and her child. Because she had no ID, she was put into a prison camp with Ethiopians during the war. They told her that she was not Eritrean anymore. When the Ethiopian army advanced into the area of the prison camp, TT escaped back to Sudan.

TAG is an Eritrean who was forced to marry an Ethiopian army officer in 1986. She has two children by him and she escaped back to Eritrea with her children in 1997. She went to the Ethiopian embassy in Asmara to try to find out what options her children had regarding their nationality. The Eritrean authorities arrested her in 1999 because they suspected her of being a spy, based on her trips to the Ethiopian embassy. They wanted to know why she had gone to Ethiopia for so many years – the truth was that the Eritrean authorities had deported all wives of Derge officials and army personnel in 1991 when the EPLF took over Eritrea. TAG was kept in prison for two months without charge.

These three testimonies indicate that people in Eritrea who have family connections to Ethiopia were vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and persecution during the war solely on the grounds of their family situation.

They were liable to be suspected of collaboration with Ethiopia and of spying. TT was treated like an Ethiopian enemy national during the war, despite not being able to speak Amharic and never having been to Ethiopia. In Eritrea, as in Ethiopia, people from mixed families were persecuted, harassed and discriminated against on the grounds of a perceived nationality or ethnicity.

#### **6.4.2.2 Social harassment in Eritrea 1998-2000**

As in Ethiopia, people from mixed families in Eritrea experienced harassment and abuse at the hands of ordinary Eritreans. The Eritrean government's own justification for rounding up and detaining Ethiopians in Eritrea was that it was for the Ethiopians' own protection. However, the harassment was not limited to Ethiopian nationals, but was also experienced by Eritreans with Ethiopian family members.

ADS reported that after the war began, she was accosted in the street by an ordinary Eritrean man who asked to see her ID. She showed him her Ethiopian ID and the man made her stand in the hot sun for several hours. She said that there was no way she could prevent him because Ethiopians had no rights in Eritrea. She was finally released when a passer-by helped her. On other occasions even children would stop her and ask for her ID and then hit her with sticks and stones when she showed her Ethiopian ID. Her boyfriend told her after the war began that her family were killing his family. She heard that people had been telling her friends not to come to her house because she would poison them. TAG is an Eritrean woman with an Ethiopian husband and two children of mixed parentage. When Ethiopia occupied part of Eritrea during the war, her children were savagely beaten by unknown people in Asmara.

#### **6.5 Persecution in Eritrea and Ethiopia since the end of the war**

The situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia is currently one of 'no peace, no war' and at the time of writing there is little evidence to suggest that much progress is being made towards a normalisation of relations between the two countries. The testimonies of refugees who have been in Ethiopia or Eritrea since the cessation of hostilities in 2000, and of those who have family members remaining in either country, indicate that the situation there for people of mixed parentage remains precarious, and has in some ways got worse since the end of the war. Government persecution does seem to have lessened, and deportations have largely ceased. However, while relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia remain so hostile, people from mixed families, especially those who evaded deportation during the war, and those returning from abroad, are still likely to be suspected of spying for the 'enemy' government. Importantly, many participants reported an increase in social hostility after the end of the war, and particularly after the names and numbers of soldiers killed in the war became known. As one participant explains, 'People's attitudes will not change in less than a century. Propaganda was necessary at the beginning of the war in order to gain people's support. Now hatred has been instilled on both sides and this will not go away, even with a change in government. It has gone too deep.'

##### **6.5.1 Persecution in Ethiopia since the end of the war**

###### **6.5.1.1 Government persecution in Ethiopia since the end of the war**

Five of the participants have been arrested in Ethiopia since the end of the war in 2000 on account of their family connections with Eritrea. Brief summaries of their experiences are below.

Having escaped deportation to Eritrea in 1998 MM, an Ethiopian with an Eritrean father, was arrested again in 2003 and beaten and threatened with death unless he admitted to being an Eritrean spy. 'They put a pistol to my head and told me that they would not beat me like before, but that they would shoot me this time. The face of the man was very cruel and I could tell that he was not afraid to do it. I was sure that he was going to die this time. Then they beat me with the butt of the gun, kept me for five hours and then released me.'

The Ethiopian authorities had attempted to deport HTT to Eritrea in 1999 but she had been turned back at the border by the Eritrean authorities and imprisoned again in Ethiopia before being released after severe torture. In 2003 she was at the home of a friend when another friend told her that the police were looking for her. She went into hiding and escaped to Sudan. After arriving in Cairo in 2005 she learned that her brother had been arrested and taken to prison accused of being a member of the Eritrean Development Association, and that the authorities were arresting other people with Eritrean connections in her community.

KAG, an Ethiopian woman, was harassed and raped by security officials between 2001 and 2004, and finally arrested because she was married to an Eritrean man who had been deported. She was accused of collaborating with her husband and supporting the EPLF. The specific implications of the vulnerability of this participant to sexual abuse is explained further in Paragraph 6.7.

SZT is an Ethiopian whose Eritrean father was deported during the war. She was arrested in 2003 along with five other Eritreans. She was kept in a cell for five days. The others arrested with her were taken for questioning but she was not. Her mother paid for her to be released from prison.

In 2002 YMK was arrested in Egypt where she had been living since 1993, and was deported to Ethiopia. Her Eritrean father had been deported from Ethiopia to Eritrea in August 1998 and later died as a result of the harsh journey. Her brothers and sisters were living in hiding in Ethiopia, afraid of deportation or arrest. Upon arrival in Ethiopia in 2002, security officials at the airport searched her luggage and discovered a letter from her Eritrean father. She was arrested and detained and beaten for five days, accused of being a spy for Eritrea. She was eventually released on conditions and her passport was confiscated. She tried to apply for a *kebele* ID card but the officials at the *kebele* told her that ‘the son of a snake is a snake’ and refused her a card. After several months during which she lived in hiding with the rest of her family she was arrested again, and this time detained and beaten for seven days. When she was released, her family helped her to obtain documents to escape to Egypt again.

These testimonies indicate that the Ethiopian authorities have continued persecuting people from mixed families since the end of the war in 2000. In fact, 11 of the 20 participants from Ethiopia left Ethiopia since the end of the war for reasons directly or indirectly related to their being from mixed families. While Eritrea and Ethiopia remain effectively enemies, people in Ethiopia with family connections with Eritrea will remain vulnerable to suspicion of collaboration and disloyalty.

#### ***6.5.1.2 Social harassment in Ethiopia since the end of the war***

Participants present in Ethiopia after the end of the war have reported that social harassment and exclusion did not end with the war, and in fact got worse. As the full extent of the damage caused by the war and the names of casualties were published, people from mixed families became increasingly isolated and vulnerable.

MB, an Ethiopian with an Eritrean mother, reported that his situation in Ethiopia became worse after the war ended. Relations between Ethiopians, and particularly Tigrayans, and Eritreans deteriorated. He said that Tigrayans had taken over many of the businesses of deported Eritreans and he found it very difficult to continue his coffee trading business because the Tigrayans were trying to drive him out. S, an Ethiopian of mixed parentage who lived in Addis Ababa, reported that the situation for her and her family got worse after the war ended. Business became very difficult and people began to avoid the shop that she ran. YMK was deported from Egypt to Ethiopia in 2002. Having been arrested by the authorities on arrival because of her mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage she went into hiding with her mother’s Ethiopian family. People in the community avoided her.

The social exclusion and harassment experienced by some of the participants in Ethiopia during and since the war has sometimes exacerbated the problems they have had with the authorities. KAG, who was harassed and raped by security officials between 2001 and 2004, was unable to turn to anyone for help because the community had turned against her due to her marriage to an Eritrean man. The combination of social exclusion and government harassment left her unable to cope in Ethiopia.

#### ***6.5.2 Persecution in Eritrea since the end of the war***

##### ***6.5.2.1 Government persecution in Eritrea since the end of the war***

Only one of the participants from Eritrea has been in the country since the end of the war. However, this participant was targeted by the authorities in 2003 because of her family connections with Ethiopia. TAG, who had been forced to marry an Ethiopian in 1986, was arrested in Eritrea in 2003 and accused of playing



Ethiopian music in her snack bar after Amharic songs had been banned. She had not been playing it because she knew that it was illegal but the authorities knew that her husband was an Ethiopian and she believes that this is why they arrested her. She was detained for eight months and only released once her family paid a very large amount of money to bail her out.

#### **6.5.2.2 Social harassment in Eritrea since the end of the war**

TAG also experienced social harassment in Eritrea since the end of the war. ‘My children faced major problems because of their Ethiopian father. People would call them *wede adgi* which means ‘child of a donkey’. This is a common term of abuse which Eritreans use to describe Amhara people. People would say this to me as well. People on the street would insult us and people in my children’s school would as well. People would whisper and point at us. When my son played football the other children would try to exclude him.’

### **6.6 Mixed families and other political persecution in Ethiopia and Eritrea**

Although many of the participants left their countries of origin because of persecution directly related to their being from mixed families, some of them were persecuted because of other actual or imputed political activity. Frequently their family situation has exacerbated the other problems they faced. This has been especially true for people in mixed Eritrean-Oromo families. A number of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families studied in the research are of mixed Eritrean-Oromo composition. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is now a major armed opposition group in Ethiopia and persecution of Oromo people by the Ethiopian government has increased as a result. When the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia began, the Eritrean government began supporting the OLF which operates out of Eritrea. Participants with both Oromo and Eritrean connections are not only doubly vulnerable to suspicion from the Ethiopian authorities but often suspected of providing a connection between the OLF in Ethiopia and EPLF in Eritrea through their deported Eritrean relatives.

KAG is an Oromo woman married to an Eritrean man. When war broke out in 1998, her husband lost his job because he was an Eritrean. KAG also lost her job with the local road authority because the government replaced her with a member of the official Oromo party. After KAG’s husband was deported, the Ethiopian authorities accused her of collaborating with the OLF and the EPLF. She was harassed and abused from 2001 and finally arrested in 2004. The authorities accused her of sending money to her husband in Eritrea, and she feels she was effectively punished for her husband having been forcibly deported. MH is an Eritrean woman who was married to an Ethiopian Oromo man. When MH and her husband were forced to rent their home in Addis Ababa because MH had lost her job, their tenant tried to have the property confiscated from them, claiming that an Eritrean and an Oromo had no right to a government house in Ethiopia. MH’s husband was unable to use his status as an undisputed Ethiopian to protect the family because he was Oromo. MB is an Ethiopian with an Oromo father and an Eritrean mother. He was arrested in 2004 on suspicion of being involved in an OLF bomb attack on Addis Ababa University. The policemen in the station where he was kept for twenty days told him ‘you are the enemy two-fold; you should have been deported to Eritrea with your mother. There is no worse enemy of the EPRDF and Ethiopia than you’.

The authorities in Eritrea and Ethiopia have also exploited the vulnerability of people from mixed families in order to gain information about other political activities. BY’s mother was a member of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) in Ethiopia and BY believes that her mother was killed because of her political activity. BY reported the death to the Ethiopian Human Rights Council in 2005 and was subsequently arrested. The security forces used the threat of deportation to Eritrea to find out what BY knew about her mother’s activities. HOS is from Eritrea and is of mixed parentage. He was a member of the ELF, opposed to the EPLF, and left Eritrea because of this in 1993. After he fled, the authorities, who were trying to find out the whereabouts of HOS, harassed his Ethiopian mother and his mixed parentage sister. After the war began they were threatened that if HOS did not return they would have no rights in Eritrea. HOS has heard that they may now be in Sudan, having been deported from Eritrea.

Of the four participants who came to Cairo as refugees before the 1998-2000 war, three came in 1993, and one in 1989. Their refugee claims at that time were entirely unrelated to their being from mixed families (all four are of mixed parentage). None of the four have been granted refugee status based on their original claims. However, all four have heard that since 1998 their family members have been deported, arrested or

disappeared because of their being from mixed families. They are therefore unable to return to their countries of origin for fear that the same will happen to them. Consequently, they should be recognised as refugees *sur place*. One, YMK, was deported to Ethiopia from Egypt in 2002 where she was promptly arrested and tortured because of her connections with Eritrea. Eventually she escaped back into Egypt.

### **6.7 Division of families**

The division of families has been highlighted elsewhere as one of the major problems associated with the deportations of Eritreans and Ethiopians during the war. This is especially true of mixed families because some family members are unable to live in Eritrea and some are unable to live in Ethiopia. Most individuals from mixed families interviewed in Cairo had little or no contact with their families, either because family members had been deported and lost contact, or because they are afraid that making contact will endanger those still in Ethiopia or Eritrea.

AS's Eritrean husband was deported to Eritrea from Ethiopia, leaving AS and her child behind. AS travelled to Sudan where she believed she might find news of her husband and found that he had been killed trying to escape across the border from Eritrea to Sudan. Her family in Ethiopia told her that it was too dangerous for her to return home, so she went to Egypt looking for a solution. She has not seen her daughter for five years. BY's father was Eritrean and was deported in 1999 along with her two elder brothers. Her mother was killed in Ethiopia in 2005 and she returned from Beirut where she had been working to arrange for the care of her younger brother. She was arrested in Ethiopia and fled to Egypt. She has no idea where her father and elder brothers are in Eritrea and has only periodic contact with her younger brother in Ethiopia. KAG has had no contact with her Eritrean husband since his deportation in 1999. She does not know if he is alive or dead. After he was deported, she was unable to cope with looking after her two young children and was forced to leave her youngest child with friends in Ethiopia when she fled to Egypt with her elder child. Her child is now asking where his father and brother are and KAG says that this is the hardest thing she has to deal with. S had an Eritrean father who was deported to Eritrea in 1998. She later found out that he had died in prison in Eritrea because when he was young he had been a supporter of the ELF, a group opposed to the ruling EPLF government. Her brother and sister were deported in 2000. Her brother is in prison in Eritrea and her sister committed suicide after the deportation. Her mother is in Ethiopia and S managed to escape to Egypt.

### **6.8 Vulnerability of women**

The testimonies of several of the female participants have indicated that women were left particularly vulnerable in Ethiopia and Eritrea because they were from mixed families. The majority of the participants were from families in which an Eritrean man had married an Ethiopian woman and lived in Ethiopia. When the Eritrean men were deported from Ethiopia, the women were left open to sexual abuse and often without a means of earning income.

Property was often in the name of the Eritrean husband or father being deported and so the Ethiopian or mixed parentage women left behind were left homeless. AS, an Ethiopian woman whose Eritrean husband was deported to Eritrea in 1998, was taken into custody for one week, and when released found that the papers which certified that her husband had transferred all his property to her before his deportation had been taken from her home. The authorities told her that she would have to get her husband to send replacement papers from Eritrea but they knew that she had no contact with her husband and did not know if he was dead or alive. The government confiscated her house and she was forced to move in with relatives.

The threat of deportation of women or of their children has been used as a tool in Ethiopia for exploitation of Ethiopian women who were married to Eritrean men. KAG is an Ethiopian Oromo woman, married to an Eritrean man who was deported from Ethiopia in 1999. After his deportation the security forces began to harass KAG, on account of her marriage to an Eritrean and her suspected involvement with the OLF. Security men began to visit her home and her place of work, telling her that she had to marry one of them in order to demonstrate her loyalty to Ethiopia. One in particular would harass her and tell her that she had to marry him in order to obtain protection: otherwise her businesses would be confiscated and her children deported to Eritrea. KAG began to pay him protection money but still refused to marry him. Between 2002 and 2004 the security official entered her home on several occasions and raped her with her children in the house. Having refused to marry the man one last time, KAG was arrested and tortured in 2004. 'The man

used the threat of deportation on me and my children to try to get me to do what he wanted. We were in a very vulnerable position because their father is Eritrean. My children could have been taken away from me at any time. My marriage to an Eritrean had also left me very isolated in the community.’ DB, an Eritrean woman living in Addis Ababa whose husband died in 1995 is another example. Her boss, a government official, wanted to marry her after her husband died but she refused because she was a Protestant and he was an Orthodox Christian. When the war began in 1998, her boss reported her to the security forces and accused her of being an Eritrean spy. She was fired from her job in 1999 and in December 2001 she was detained by the police and held for eleven months, tortured and humiliated. Her boss would visit her in prison and told her that he would get her released if she agreed to marry him but still she refused. She was released in January 2003 and fled to Cairo.

The testimonies gathered in this research would seem to indicate a structural vulnerability of women from mixed families. A woman’s perceived loyalties seem to be determined by those of her male relatives. Women are traditionally supposed to take on the ‘tribe’ of their husbands in Ethiopia. KAG, TAG and AS have all been harassed because of their being in a mixed marriage. Their loyalties have been called into question and sometimes they have been grouped with the ‘enemy’ because of their marriage. KAG, an Ethiopian woman married to an Eritrean man, said that her Ethiopian neighbours called her the enemy because she was carrying the child of the enemy. The security officer who abused her after her husband was deported to Eritrea told her that she had to prove her loyalty to Ethiopia by marrying one of the security men. This case clearly shows that in the minds of at least some Ethiopians, marriage for a woman can be seen as a declaration of loyalty, either to an enemy group, or a reaffirmation of loyalty to the group of their father.

#### **6.10 Conclusion: Vulnerability and lack of rights**

The experiences of the participants in their countries of origin have revealed two core factors which appear to underlie the harassment of people from mixed families during and since the 1998-2000 war. The first is the tendency to regard a blood or marital relationship with a group reason enough to blame that person for the actions of that group, or the government of the group. This leaves all people with any family connection with Eritrea or Ethiopia open to harassment for the actions of Eritrea or Ethiopia and susceptible to suspicion of collaboration with the ‘enemy’. For example, TAG was a fifteen-year-old Eritrean girl when she was forced to marry her Ethiopian husband. Because she was Eritrean, her husband and his family accused her of killing her husband’s brothers in the war against the EPLF. Although a small child when they were killed, she was blamed by her husband’s family for the actions of the EPLF guerrilla force. And when she returned to Eritrea in 1997 she was called *wede adgi* (son of a donkey), an insulting term used to denote people of the Ethiopian Amhara ethnicity. The fact that she had married her husband under pain of death while still a child did not seem to matter. Some people in Eritrea took the marriage in itself to be proof of disloyalty to Eritrea and loyalty to Ethiopia. The phrase ‘the son of a snake is a snake’ has been used against more than one of the participants to refer to their mixed parentage, and indicates clearly how much of a person’s character and loyalty is determined by their familial relationships.

The second core factor underlying the persecution of people from mixed families is the way in which the citizenship rights of people from mixed families have been stripped away since 1998 by claims that they are, in fact, enemy nationals. The ambiguity surrounding who was Eritrean and who was Ethiopian has enabled Eritrean and Ethiopian governments, officials and general publics, to deny the rights of those they perceived as having questionable loyalties to the national cause after 1998. Several of the participants talked about their vulnerability to government and social abuse because of their lack of status as citizens. SZT experienced harassment from her Ethiopian neighbours in Addis Ababa after her Eritrean father was deported in 1998. She said she was too scared to tell the police because she thought that she would also be deported. ‘I was powerless to try to stop this sort of discrimination’.

### **SECTION 7: THE SITUATION IN CAIRO: EXCLUSION IN EXILE**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The vulnerabilities of people from mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families in their countries of origin are mirrored by different but parallel vulnerabilities as refugees in Cairo. Reflecting the animosity between Eritreans and Ethiopians that has been generated since 1998, the Eritrean and Ethiopian communities in Cairo practice

‘general mutual avoidance’ as one Ethiopian refugee put it. Isolated incidents of verbal clashes between Eritreans and Ethiopians were reported, but for the most part there seemed to be a low-level suspicion and tension, resulting in separate Eritrean and Ethiopian church congregations and meeting places. Participants reported that Eritreans and Ethiopians in Cairo are very secretive. They are concerned that spies from the embassies will collect information on them and that if they are deported from Egypt to Eritrea or Ethiopia then they will be punished for things they have said and done in Cairo. People from mixed families have to survive in this atmosphere of general distrust that exists between Ethiopians and Eritreans and also within the two groups.

This report is not concerned with outlining the general insecurities or vulnerabilities of Eritreans and Ethiopians in Cairo. Brown et. al. (2003) have already shown how Eritreans and Ethiopians form an extremely vulnerable refugee group in Cairo. The purpose of this section is to reveal the ways in which people from mixed families form an especially vulnerable group within (or without) the wider Eritrean and Ethiopian communities. The experiences of participants in Cairo vary because of the scattered and disparate residences of Ethiopians and Eritreans: as reported by Dereck Cooper (1993) and Brown et al. (2003), there is no single Eritrean or Ethiopian community in Cairo. Nevertheless, the problems outlined below were experienced almost universally by people from mixed families in Cairo and anecdotal evidence suggests that the situation of refugees and asylum seekers from mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families may be even worse in Uganda and Kenya. One of the participants who worked in Lebanon between 1999 and 2005 reported that relations between Eritreans and Ethiopians are worse in Beirut than in Cairo.

## **7.2 Secrecy**

Several of the participants said that they don’t tell other Eritreans and Ethiopians about their family background for fear of exclusion from the Eritrean or Ethiopian communities. AS is afraid to tell other Ethiopians in Cairo that she was married to an Eritrean and has a child who is half Eritrean. She is afraid of what people will think of her so she does not say anything. BY is of mixed parentage and lives with Ethiopians in Cairo who do not know that her father is Eritrean. She said ‘to be accepted by Eritreans or Ethiopians you have to be full-blooded. The political rift permeates every aspect of life’. HTT does not tell anyone about her mixed parentage. Her daughter belongs to a choir at an Ethiopian church and HTT believes that she would be excluded if the church knew that she had mixed parentage.

That this fear of exclusion is justified is demonstrated by the fact that the only participants who reported no problems between themselves and other Ethiopians or Eritreans were those who kept their identity a secret. KAG does not hide the fact that she is an Ethiopian woman married to an Eritrean man because she wants to find any information she can about her husband who was deported to Eritrea in 1999 and who she has not heard from since. She is therefore forced to endure isolation from the Ethiopian community. For some participants, keeping their identity secret from others itself promotes isolation. They reported that relationships they have formed in Cairo are necessarily shallow and they prefer to keep to themselves to avoid their secret being revealed.

## **7.3 Harassment and exclusion**

Mutual avoidance between Eritreans and Ethiopians has left many people from mixed families unable to participate in either community. Those who do reveal their identity are unable to belong fully to either the Eritrean group or the Ethiopian group, with each group claiming that a person of mixed parentage belongs to the other. HOS finds that other Ethiopians and Eritreans in Cairo tell him that they don’t know who he is because of his mixed parentage. ‘Eritreans tell me that I am Ethiopian and Ethiopians tell me that I am Eritrean’.

Some people from mixed families experience insults and insinuation during their interactions with other Eritreans and Ethiopians. KAG, an Ethiopian woman married to an Eritrean man reported: ‘Other Eritreans will insult Ethiopians deliberately within my hearing. One Eritrean refugee told me that Eritreans only like to marry other Eritreans, so am I sure that I can trust my husband now that he is in Eritrea? They said this deliberately to hurt me.’

Such attitudes mean that people from mixed families are often left without a community and unable to participate in religious activities. TG is an Ethiopian of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage who tried to join a choir at an Ethiopian church in Cairo. She was told that she could not because her mother is Eritrean. TG began attending an Eritrean church with her mother although the service is in Tigrinya and she does not understand it well. She also feels discrimination from the congregation on account of her Ethiopian parentage.

Several participants reported the pain of being excluded from political activities on account of their mixed parentage. HMK is a refugee from Ethiopia and was heavily involved in Ethiopian politics before leaving. He remains politically active in Cairo and has organised several demonstrations opposing the Ethiopian government. However, his participation has to remain undercover because should he openly march or demonstrate he believes he will be accused of being a spy or a traitor because of his Eritrean father. 'People always assume that I have mixed loyalties or am spreading lies.' He says that people of mixed parentage 'cannot participate in the politics of either country. They have lost their social value'. YMK says that other Ethiopian refugees in Cairo claim that they do not know her even though they do. People are afraid to associate with her because they know that she has mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage. She thinks that they are afraid of being accused of disloyalty by the rest of the community. 'My relationships with other people are very limited because of lack of trust. I am very isolated. I go to a church with an Ethiopian congregation but I sit by myself. Otherwise people will say bad things to me. I am unable to participate in any political activities or conversations.'

Such exclusion and low-level harassment can lead to extreme isolation for people from mixed families in Cairo. They are often cut off from the social contacts that other Ethiopians and Eritreans enjoy and this leaves them outside the informal information network which is crucial to urban refugees for obtaining news of jobs and other services for refugees. KAG is an Ethiopian woman married to an Eritrean man who was deported from Ethiopia in 1999. She reports: 'I am isolated in Cairo and do not have any friends here. There is no one that I trust. Some Ethiopians get angry with me for marrying an Eritrean. Some Eritreans hate all Ethiopians and so they will not speak to me at all.' During the research period KAG had lost her job and did not know who to ask about finding another one because she had no friends in the refugee community. SZT said that Eritreans and Ethiopians avoid her because of her mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage. 'When someone receives news from Ethiopia or Eritrea that someone has died it is the custom to go to their house pay condolences. It is a social duty. When I went to the house of someone whose relative had died in Ethiopia, people pointed at me and called me *Shabia*. So I don't go to these things anymore'. HOS is excluded from information about jobs and celebrations in the Eritrean and Ethiopian communities because of his mixed parentage.

#### **7.4 Marriage problems**

The prospects for people from mixed families in Cairo building a family life are also compromised by the prejudices in the communities. HMK says that marriage prospects for people of mixed parentage are slim. Even if a suitable marriage prospect were not prejudiced against a person with mixed parentage, no family will want their son or daughter to marry this person because the couple would never be able to go back to Ethiopia or to Eritrea together. Children of such a marriage would also have problems.

However, two of the individuals interviewed for this report did choose to get married, despite the fact that one of them was from a mixed family. MT is an Oromo Ethiopian who married a man with mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian parentage and Eritrean nationality after meeting him in Cairo in 2003. She explains her choice to marry him thus: 'it did not matter to me what nationality he was. We are Protestants and it is normal in our religion to marry the person who you love. I knew that there would be some challenges but I was prepared to make the necessary sacrifices. I love him, and that is all.' Since the marriage, MT has had no contact with her family in Ethiopia who do not approve of her marrying an Eritrean man. MT has been offered resettlement through UNHCR but turned it down because her husband, being of a different nationality, would not be resettled with her. MT is expecting her first child soon. She hopes that the child can have a different nationality altogether – not Ethiopian and not Eritrean. Only then, she says, will the child be able to visit its family in Ethiopia and in Eritrea.

## 7.5 Conclusion

The problems experienced by people from mixed families in Cairo are important not only because they leave individuals even more isolated and vulnerable than other Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees in Cairo, but also because they are indicative of the likely treatment of people from mixed families in Eritrea or Ethiopia if they were returned to either country. The social harassment and isolation outlined in Section 6 of this report is mirrored in the refugee communities, and it is unlikely to be less in the countries of origin than here in Cairo. MM, an Ethiopian of mixed parentage, says that he experiences the same problems in Cairo as he did in Ethiopia. Both the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities consider him to side with the other. MM says 'I do not believe that I would be accepted in Eritrea, especially given the behaviour of Eritreans towards me here in Cairo.'

However, this is not to say that there is no difference between harassment at home and harassment as a refugee. MM says that harassment and exclusion is easier to deal with in Cairo than it was in Ethiopia. 'At least here they have no power over me. Here we are all refugees and so we are all on the same level. I am more free to speak my mind.' In Eritrea and Ethiopia where people from mixed families generally have fewer rights than other Ethiopians and Eritreans and live in a country where they are treated as second-class citizens, they are more vulnerable. While they are relying on their communities as illegal residents in Egypt, they are still vulnerable. With the security of rights, and nationality in another country, people of mixed parentage could potentially pursue their lives and happiness despite community attitudes.

## SECTION 8: IDENTITY AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES

### 8.1 Identity and politics among people from mixed families

The war left no room for ambiguities in a person's loyalties or identity. Either you were Eritrean or you were Ethiopian, and if you weren't for your country of origin, then you were against it. Being neutral during the war was interpreted as being a supporter of the enemy. In the current nationalistic political atmosphere of Ethiopia and Eritrea, people from mixed families have struggled to reconcile their family situation with their political beliefs. DD had an Eritrean father and an Ethiopian mother and grew up in Addis Ababa. He felt himself to be Ethiopian but joined the Eritrean youth group because of his father's pressure. This put him in conflict with the Tigrayan Ethiopian youth group. He said 'being a member of the group was a dilemma for me. I was Ethiopian but acting with the Eritreans against the Tigrays who were Ethiopian.'

Some participants and their families were passionate believers in the unity of Eritrea and Ethiopia, especially those who came of age before 1991. HOS has an Eritrean father and an Ethiopian mother. All his family believed in Eritrean-Ethiopian unity and called themselves *habesha* (a term used to describe Ethiopians and Eritreans together) rather than Eritrean or Ethiopian. 'When people ask me where I am from, I tell them that I am *habesha*'. GGH has one Eritrean grandparent and considers himself to be Ethiopian. 'I feel that I am Ethiopian. However, my family and I are all told that we are Eritrean by the Ethiopian authorities...I supported Ethiopia during the war, even though I do not support the Ethiopian government. I do not believe that Eritrea is a country, so how could I be Eritrean?' HMK's father voted in the Eritrean referendum, but against Eritrean independence. HMK left Ethiopia before Eritrean independence and still thinks of them as one country. HTT's mother was of mixed parentage and her father was Ethiopian. Her family considered themselves Ethiopian. Her mother, especially, worked for the Orthodox Church and was very devout, believing in the unity of Ethiopia and Eritrea for the sake of the church. YMK has an Eritrean father and an Ethiopian mother. She says 'I feel that I am Ethiopian. However, I have a conflict inside because I feel that I am forced to choose. If I choose my father then what about my mother? This conflict is tearing me inside...I would prefer that the two countries were united.' Rejecting the separation of the two countries could be a means by which people from mixed families can circumvent the contradictory imperatives of loyalty to country and loyalty to family.

Indeed, in some cases, family appears to be the most important determinant of people's identities and political beliefs. Many of the participants interpreted their identity as a choice and the difficulties they have in making this choice stem from the division of their families between the two countries. For example, MH, an Ethiopian of Eritrean origin with mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian children, says 'my father and brothers and sisters are in Eritrea. If I became Ethiopian I would have to abandon them. If I became Eritrean then my

children would be left behind'. Although MH considers it impossible for her to go to Eritrea or Ethiopia now, she still considers that to choose either identity even in her own mind would be to abandon part of her family. HMK feels he is Ethiopian but does not want to forget his Eritrean father. Therefore, he has not contributed anything to either cause, something that Eritreans and Ethiopians living in the diaspora are expected to do. When invited to a musical concert being given in Cairo to raise funds for the Ethiopian war effort, he did not go. He said that he felt that he would be betraying his family.

## **8.2 Identity crises and psychological problems among refugees from mixed families**

Many of the participants were suffering from crises of identity because of the external pressures that the war caused them. Participants reported that their identity had changed since the beginning of the war as a result of these external pressures. RAT's father was born in Asmara to an Eritrean mother and an Ethiopian father when Eritrea was still a part of Ethiopia. Her father moved to Addis Ababa when he was eighteen. RAT and all her family had always considered themselves Ethiopian and none of them had voted in the 1993 referendum. RAT said, 'the authorities imposed an Eritrean identity on my father and then they did the same to me. They denied me my Ethiopian identity.' MB, an Ethiopian with an Eritrean mother, said that he had never really thought about his Eritrean connections before the war: 'it was only when the war began that I became aware that I was partly Eritrean – I was forced to realise it because people treated me differently from other Ethiopians...I feel like I have lost my Ethiopian identity but have not gained an Eritrean identity...I believe that in order to belong to a community one has to have a stake in that community. People like myself are not allowed a stake in our own communities'. DD, having been arrested and tortured by the Ethiopian police, lost his Ethiopian identity: 'they called me *Shabia* and *Tegentaye* [traitor]. These are insulting and patronising terms but I accepted the implication that I was Eritrean. Their treatment of me destroyed my Ethiopian identity...I am stateless, that is how I feel. I don't have a country to go back to from Egypt.' MH was born and raised in Eritrea when it was a part of Ethiopia. 'My friends and I had heard about the guerrillas who were fighting for Eritrea to be a separate country. But I only knew that I was Ethiopian.' Now, having experienced severe harassment and persecution in Ethiopia she says 'I hate to be Ethiopian and I hate to be Eritrean. I feel Ethiopian but I cannot get the Eritrean out of me'. She was scrubbing at her arm while saying this, as if trying to remove the Eritrean part of her that had caused her so much trouble. MM says 'I no longer feel that I am Ethiopian because of the harassment that I experienced at the hands of the authorities and the people. I was treated as an outsider in my own country and so I no longer accept it as my country...because they all tell me that I am Eritrean I have started to believe it. I am the only son of my [Eritrean] father and I am loyal to him.'

When asked how they identified themselves, most answered that they did not know. HOS said 'it is very difficult to interpret my situation. Eritrea persecuted me and my family and now Ethiopia will not accept me either'. RAT says that she is in 'limbo status' now. 'I have no official identity or place in the world. I find it very difficult to think about my nationality and the problems that I have. I try not to think about it'. SZT says 'I feel caught between everything. I cannot identify with Eritrea or Ethiopia'. MM said 'Now, however, I accept neither Eritrea nor Ethiopia. I would accept Egyptian citizenship if it were offered to me even though I do not like living in Egypt. I am stateless and so I do not know who I am anymore.'

The uncertainty of some participants' situations has caused severe mental stress, and some participants require counselling. MM is an example: 'the uncertainty of my situation cripples my mind. If I am deported from Egypt I do not know which country I will be deported to. This is a huge problem and is affecting me greatly. I would prefer to stay in prison in Egypt then to return to Ethiopia or go to Eritrea.' S feels very insecure in Egypt due to her lack of nationality. A friend of hers was killed in Egypt and because she was of mixed parentage neither the Ethiopian nor the Eritrean embassy would claim the body or push for prosecution. 'After this I felt very scared because nobody will look after me and even if I am killed nobody will do anything.'

Such problems with identity, especially with reference to family, indicate a self-imposed psychological isolation on the part of many of the participants. Unable to reconcile being loyal to both of their parents in an atmosphere of nationalistic polarisation, and often unable to identify either with the country that has persecuted them or with the country they have been taught to hate, some participants have psychologically isolated themselves from the Eritrean and Ethiopian communities. They have become 'stateless' in their own

minds, a situation which could have repercussions for their successful future integration into Eritrean and Ethiopian communities either in those countries or abroad.

## SECTION 9: CONCLUSION

The participants in this research have been systematically and arbitrarily excluded from their nationality status, their societies, their families and their communities in Cairo. The vulnerable state this places them in has been compounded by the serious trouble they encounter when trying to claim refugee status. It has also led to psychological stress among the affected individuals. The frightening predicaments faced by the participants in this research are neither incidental nor isolated, although their individual experiences may have been. The polarisation of Ethiopian and Eritrean society, the process of exclusion and deportation practiced by their governments, and the cultural determination of loyalty and character through blood and marital relations, are all structures which have trapped people from mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian families. The evidence presented in this report calls for attention to be paid to the gaps in country of origin information which plague people of mixed parentage who are striving to secure their rights as refugees. And it shows that unless the plight of people from mixed families is properly understood, and dealt with sympathetically, then these people will remain stateless in Cairo and isolated from their Eritrean and Ethiopia refugee communities. They will also be at risk of *refoulement* to one of the two countries that are claiming there is no place there for them.

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