Eastern Africa Series

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The Eritrean National Service (ENS) lies at the core of the postindependence state, not only supplying its military, but affecting every aspect of the country's economy, its social services, its public sector and its politics. Over half the workforce are forcibly enrolled into it, driving the country's youth to escape by seeking employment and asylum elsewhere. Yet how did the ENS, which began during the 1961-91 liberation struggle as part of the idea of 'the common good' - degenerate into forced labour and a modern form of slavery? And why, when Eritrea no longer faces existential threat, does the government continue to demand such service from its citizens?

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Cover photograph: Eritrean soldiers on the way to the front lines during the Eritrea/Ethiopia war, Igila, Eritrea, June 2000 (© Steve Forrest/Workers' Photos)



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