Postliberation Eritrea

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Dedication

For my brother,

Mehreteab Woldemikael Mehari,

Asmara, 1957- Taba Wedi Fenkil, 1982

Contents

Globalization, Imitation Behavior, and Refugees from Eritrea

ASEFAW BARIAGABER

Abstract

Social scientists and economists have argued that human beings imitate the behavior of others to maximize benefits and minimize costs; however, not much has been written on imitation behavior among refugees. I appeal to globalization and increased access to modern means of communication to argue that imitation does occur among them. I provide empirical support for refugee-imitation behavior through focus-group interviews with a recent group of Eritrean refugees in the United States. I conclude that imitation is an important variable in explaining current and recent refugee movements from Eritrea and other countries in Africa. The explanatory power of the variable will increase with further expansion of modern means of communication.

In a seminal work entitled "The Refugee in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement," Kunz states that the movement of refugees across international borders resembles "the movement of the billiard ball, devoid of inner directions [and whose] path is governed by kinetic factors of inertia, friction[,] and the vectors of outside forces applied on them"; he adds that an "inner self-propelling force. . . is singularly absent from the movement of refugees" (1973, 131). The extant literature, therefore, treats refugees as irrational actors when faced with events that impel their flight. This contention runs in stark contrast to the rational and purposeful

movement of migrants, who are assumed to plan well ahead of time when and where to resettle.[1] Later works have partially challenged Kunz's contention and have argued that, given the limited amount of information available, prospective refugees make considered decisions to flee (Bariagaber 1995; Hansen 1981); however, the assumption that refugees have no inner self-propelling forces governing their flight still dominates the literature, and our knowledge of refugee behavior has remained limited because of the inability to apply migration models and theories.

With the recent rapid rise in modern means of communication–the internet, electronic messaging systems (e-mail), smart phones with various applications (apps), and the global reach of television broadcasting, such as CNN and Al Jazeera–prospective refugees have become more independent and autonomous because of their increased access to information, not only when deciding whether or not to flee, but also how to flee, which route to take, and where to settle. It is plausible to suggest that refugee movements nowadays increasingly resemble deliberative and purposeful migrant movements. This article will answer the following questions: What distinguishes current and recent refugees in Africa from refugees during the Cold War? Do prospective refugees imitate the behavior of those who have already become refugees? And if so, what factors facilitate this behavior? How, if any, have recent advances in modern communication affected their flight?

I hypothesize that the more the diffusion of information, the more individuals in closed societies tend to consider exile an option. The higher rate of the diffusion of information at present has made it easier for prospective refuges to seek information from those who have successfully become refugees and to learn what to do to attain the same status when conditions deteriorate in their places of original residence. Increased information empowers individuals by lowering their threshold of tolerance for hardships. Therefore, prospective refugees are expected to make purposeful and strategic decisions about flight much like prospective migrants. I provide

empirical support for this contention through an interview with a group of five Eritrean refugees who fled the country after the signing of the peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea on December 12, 2000 and who have been granted refugee status in the United States.

Variables that impel flight in the extant literature remain as plausible as ever (Bariagaber 2006; US Department of State 2016). These include religious persecution, a suppressive political environment, arbitrary imprisonment based on political opinion, and so forth. Indeed, at present, many Eritreans are fleeing from rural areas to seek exile in neighboring countries and stay put until the opportunity to repatriate presents itself, and many of them, like their countrymen who fled to exile decades ago, are unlikely to use modern means of communication. This study, however, adds an explanatory variable that has recently become important because of globalization. Increased access to information brought about by the diffusion of communication technology, especially for those living in urban and semi-urban areas of Eritrea, has eased flight, and this has added to our knowledge of the dynamics by which refugees flee.

The rest of the article is divided into four parts. The first part reviews the literature on imitation behavior and introduces imitation as a possible explanatory variable in the present outflow of Eritrean refugees. The second part talks about the magnitude and factors associated with current refugee formations in Eritrea. The third part identifies the factors associated with the flight of refugees during the War of Independence and the 1998–2000 Border War with Ethiopia and discusses how these factors differ from the factors commonly associated with the flight of the current group of refugees. The fourth part examines the effects of globalization on refugee movements and presents empirical findings based on interviews with Eritrean refugees who have been granted asylum in the United States. The article ends with a discussion of the academic and policy implications of the study.

Human Imitation Behavior and Refugee Movements Out of Eritrea

Many refugees are leaving Eritrea because of a host of factors (US Department of State 2016). Whatever the specific reason(s) for the flight, the outflow of refugees–the dependent variable–is a given. The independent variable is human imitation behavior, defined as behavior adopted after observing the behaviors and decisions of others. Imitation behavior is rather common, and very few acts are original because humans notice the past successes of others and factor them into their decision-making process (Ross 1908). As Birkhchandani et al. (1998, 152) have noted: imitation is "an involuntary adaptation that has promoted survival over thousands of generations by allowing individuals to take advantage of the hard-won information of others." This is more so for individuals in the same or similar situations, who face the same decisions based on similar information, and who expect similar economic payoffs after potentially executing the decisions (Birkhchandani et al., 1998). Therefore, convergence of behavior is to be expected because it makes economic sense: imitation minimizes costs, maximizes benefits, and reduces anxiety because of added predictability of the possible outcomes.

Social psychologists have also appealed to imitation behavior in their studies of personality traits. Indeed, the development of one's personality does not occur in social isolation, and a given behavior occurs after an individual develops a drive or an urge to do something that potentially provides a reward; thus, in social situations that evoke action, individuals must notice and want something, do something, and get something (Apple 1951). Given this, it is not hard to imagine many prospective Eritrean refugees–and prospective refugees elsewhere–imitating the behavior of other refugees when they seek exile.

Studies of refugees, however, have barely touched upon imitation behavior in refugee formations. The few studies that do only talk

about refugees in exile and how settled refugees, including their children, try to cope in their new surroundings (Cohon 1981). Other studies link benefit-seeking and patterns of migration to explain the flow of refugees to countries with successful assimilation of previous migrants (Boyd and Richerson 2009). In other words, imitative behavior is associated not only with outcome predictability but with benefit maximization.

Whether or not refugees imitate when they flee has been, however, conspicuously absent from refugee studies, probably because of problems associated with obtaining credible data. First, not many refugees will claim that they fled their countries of origin to seek exile only because they saw others fleeing; to make such a claim may take away a measure of respect they would otherwise have among their compatriots. Second, they are seen as illegitimate refugees if they took flight because they saw others fleeing; as a result, they would not enjoy the legal protection accorded to refugees under the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Third, implementing strict procedures to identifying deserving refugees from among a mass of fleeing individuals poses a moral, ethical, and religious dilemma for international organizations and their personnel; it means withholding relief aid and legal protection in the country of exile from supposedly undeserving individuals who cross international borders and arrive at refugee camps in the same need of assistance as the deserving refugees. All these factors have made credible data hard to come by, either from prospective refugees or from relevant international organizations; however, at present, additional information makes it possible to determine whether imitation behavior among Eritrean refugees (and refugees from the developing world) is an important variable in the formation of modern-day refugee situations, even if some of the factors mentioned above still persist.

Therefore, when looking at the present emergency-like conditions in Eritrea, it is easy to notice that the policies of the

government have been especially felt by the young and the single—a group that forms a large majority of those who seek exile. The policies include national service required of all (regardless of whether or not one is a conscientious objector), the closure of independent media, the outlawing of political activities not condoned by the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), and so on (US Department of State 2016). Those fleeing the country in opposition to these policies defy the traditional picture of a refugee: hungry, poor, sick, helpless, hopeless, resigned, and so forth (Kibreab 2005). They see no end to the desperate political, economic, and security situations in which they find themselves, especially because the national service, initially adopted to last only two years, has become unending due to repeated extensions. In the present era of globalization, where numerous sources of information are available, they are likelier to have strong misgivings about the direction the country is taking and to show impatience with it. As a result, they have developed a strong desire to pull themselves out of the situation in which they find themselves. The intense desire to break loose from highly restrictive government policies has propelled this group of individuals to look for ways to actualize their desires.

Given the present situation, where the Eritrean government is in a much stronger position vis-à-vis the opposition, to challenge with arms, as during the pre-independence struggle against the Ethiopian government, may not be a feasible way out, and the desire to extricate oneself from an undesirable situation can be satisfied only by seeking refuge elsewhere; however, there is no such reward in exile in Sudan or Ethiopia because of possible governmental restrictions and the lack of economic opportunity. Therefore, most of the young and the well-educated seek temporary refuge in either of these countries to pave the way for migration to a third country, where the payoffs are greater than the risks. Their goal and desire is to settle in prosperous countries in order to satisfy their wants. Thanks to modern communication, including regular visits to the country by the Eritrean diaspora, electronic messaging systems,

and smart phones, they are aware that their relatives outside Eritrea have satisfied their economic, security, and political wants by settling in Europe, North America, Australia, and the Middle East. Such individuals are more prone to imitation, compared to refugees before independence. They find themselves in conditions that evoke a strong desire to want a big payoff. The present situation in Eritrea, where they see no future, evokes such a desire to want something and do something by way of settlement in more prosperous countries. What is crucially needed is information on how to go about doing it, and the expansion of the means of communication has provided the opportunity and the means.

The Current Refugee Flight from Eritrea

At present, there is increasing concern and apprehension about the outflow of Eritrean refugees. The United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), a US-based organization that advocates the protection of the rights of refugees and other stateless persons,[2] classifies Eritrea as one of the world's principal sources of refugees consecutively for the seven years before December 31, 2007, and a major source of refugees in 2008 and 2009.[3] The result of an intractable thirty-year-old conflict that began in 1961 and ended in 1991, the Eritrean refugee situation has been one of the most acute in the world, and tens of thousands of Eritreans have been given asylum in the United States and other countries.

Equally important is that Eritrea has been relatively peaceful since 2001; however, it remains one of the top refugee-generating countries in the world, not only because many of the long-time refugees have never returned home, but also because new refugees have continued to join their ranks since 2001. The number of "Eritrean asylum seekers entering Sudan has grown quite dramatically, from around 1,000 in 2003 to almost 33,000 in 2008,

with a somewhat smaller figure (between 22,000 and 25,000) in 2009 and 2010" (Ambroso, Crisp, and Albert 2011). With regard to those who fled to Ethiopia in 2007, "between 300 and 600. . . Eritreans entered [Ethiopia] per month" in small groups of individuals or family members (USCRI 2008, 78). The flight continues up to the present. UNHCR (2014) reports that more than "10,700 Eritreans have sought refuge in Sudan [in 2014], an average of more than 1,000 arrivals per month"; and an estimated twice that number who fled to Ethiopia.[4] There were a total of about 383,900 Eritrean refugees in mid-2015, of which about 139,300 have sought exile in Ethiopia (UNHCR, 2015), and tens of thousands more in Sudan. Most of the refugees these countries as the first stop on their journeys for final settlement elsewhere.

With regard to their modes of flight, most have left, and are still leaving, in small groups and at greater risk to their lives because flight is seen as "voting with one's feet," an act not condoned by any government, including the Eritrean government, which authorizes the immediate killing of those caught while fleeing (US Department of State 2013). If refugees successfully cross the border into their first country of asylum, they are not received with open arms. Beyond that, their chances of third-country settlement are bleak because of the anti-refugee environment prevalent in the more developed countries. Despite this, however, many Eritreans have fled, not because of existing violence and threats to their lives, as during the War of Independence (1961–1991) and the Eritrean-Ethiopian Border War (1998–2000), but because of a combination of persistent political and economic factors.

The present flight dynamics of Eritrean refugees are very much unlike the flight dynamics during the years of struggle for independence, when continuous violence resulted in massive disruption of the means of livelihood, accompanied by the imminent threat of death. It was a time when exile was approvingly seen by Eritreans because it helped discredit the government of Ethiopia. Hence, fleeing was a sudden action, sometimes undertaken in waves of large numbers of people. About 26,000 Eritrean refugees fled

to Sudan in 1967 in because of the large-scale Ethiopian army offensives and the burning of many villages in the lowlands of Eritrea (Kibreab 1987). The lack of a permanent presence of government and opposition forces in the contested territories made flight less risky. The chances that one would be apprehended then were lower than now, when the chances of being intercepted by government forces are not insignificant. Moreover, there was a more welcoming environment in Sudan and a more sympathetic international community for possible third-country settlement.

Given the absence of violence-related factors after the cessation of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia since 2001, an imperative question is why Eritreans are fleeing at present, despite a much more restrictive anti-refugee and xenophobic international environment. Based on the opportunities that globalization and the recent diffusion of modern means of communication have presented and a focus-group interview conducted with a select group of Eritrean refugees in the United States, this article advances the proposition that individuals in countries with closed political systems who contemplate exile make good use of modern means of communication.

Eritrean Refugee Formation

From the early 1960s to the early 1990s, Eritrea suffered the longest continuous war in Africa. As a consequence, it generated more than 500,000 refugees who fled to Sudan and an additional 100,000 to 150,000 refugees and migrants scattered in the Middle East, Europe, North America, Australia, and Ethiopia (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 1998). All told, about one in four Eritreans left the country because of war-related factors (Bariagaber 2000). On a per capita basis, therefore, Eritrea has been one of the foremost refugee-generating countries, not only in Africa, but in the world. Refugees have included men and women, young and old, married and single,

and the educated and the less educated. Violence affected almost everybody, and the composition of the refugee population matched the general composition of the Eritrean population.

In 1991, Eritreans succeeded in establishing a sovereign state through sheer perseverance and patriotism. There was hope that such attributes would be an asset in establishing a peaceful and democratic Eritrea, ready to meet the challenges of state-building and nation-building, including the complete repatriation of the estimated half a million refugees in Sudan and the return of most of those residing in other countries; however, this hope has yet to be realized. In early 2005, nearly fifteen years after independence, an estimated 191,000 Eritrean refugees remained in Sudan, roughly 38 per cent of those who had sought refuge in the country (USCRI 2005), and in 2009, nearly twenty years after independence, an estimated 113,000 Eritrean refugees were still in Sudan; this apparent reduction in Eritrean refugee numbers was primarily due to "onward movements, both to urban areas of Sudan but also to other countries and continents, including Egypt, Israel, Europe and beyond" (Ambroso, Crisp, and Albert 2011). This does not mean that the percentage of those who did repatriate—either using their own means, or through assistance from governmental and nongovernmental agencies—is not significant, but tens of thousands failed to repatriate. Similarly, the anticipated return of many Eritreans from countries other than Sudan did not materialize.

Eritrea and Ethiopia successfully established amicable relationships during 1991–1998, though conflicts over the exact border and economic disagreements began to emerge. They culminated in the 1998–2000 Ethiopian Eritrean Border War, when between 80,000 and 100,000 soldiers on both sides are believed to have died (Negash and Tronvoll 2000; Prunier 1998). The war created about 85,000 Eritrean refugees in Sudan, made hundreds of thousands of Eritreans internally displaced, and resulted in the deportation of about 70,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean ancestry from Ethiopia (Bariagaber 2000). Almost all these refugees returned home following the 2000 Algiers peace agreement

between the countries; likewise, almost all the internally displaced persons have returned to their villages. Nevertheless, Eritrea still finds itself in a state of pre-war-like preparedness because of the government's suspicion that Ethiopia is "intent on reversing Eritrean independence altogether, or pushing for an outlet to the sea, or at the very least, [bent on overthrowing] the existing government in favor of a new, [more] compliant government" (Bariagaber 2006, 9). Indeed, a few in the Ethiopian opposition have yet to accept the separate and sovereign existence of Eritrea, and demarcation of the border would make it harder to accomplish their envisioned union of Eritrea and Ethiopia in the future (Mengisteab and Yohannes 2005).

Given this history, the Eritrean government appears determined to accomplish a single goal: to demarcate the entire border and establish Eritrean sovereignty over all areas that the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission ruled to be Eritrean.[5] Unless this is accomplished, the Eritrean government sees little reason to implement the 1997 Constitution, which would open up the political system. It has been unable to focus and give sufficient attention to the pressing economic, political, and other issues Eritrea faces. "Therefore, Eritrea finds itself under emergency conditions, accompanied by higher expenditure on defense, an open-ended national conscription program, the banning of independent newspapers, expulsions of various NGOs, various measures against [the now-defunct United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea], and of course, the imprisonment of dissident members of PFDJ" (Bariagaber 2006, 10). Members of religious groups who have been unable to reconcile the demands of the state with their religious beliefs have been put in jail. The above factors together have contributed to fresh refugee outflows from Eritrea. Also, unable to voice their opinions at home because of the government's heavy-handed response to any opposition, some have fled Eritrea and have established staging grounds for opposition activities in exile, including armed opposition movements and civic organizations that advocate human and refugee rights, democracy, and so forth.

Unlike the pre-independence-era refugees, who came from all sectors of the Eritrean social landscape, the new refugees are mostly young, single, and relatively educated. Most of those who fled to Sudan have settled in Khartoum and are now known as the Kosovo group because they are "well-dressed, well-fed, and disinterested in spending a single day in Sudan," and do not "fit [the] stereotypical image of a refugee" (Kibreab 2005, 136–137). Unlike the earlier refugees, whose movements may be termed acute because of the wave-like influxes of large refugee populations, the movement of the new refugees may be termed anticipatory because of the deliberative nature of their trek to exile. The factors that have pushed out more recent refugees have been weaker than those that pushed out the earlier refugees.[6] Their flight was undertaken as individuals, families, or small groups. They have characteristics that resemble those of a typical European refugee who fled after the end of the Second World War because of fear of persecution based on political, religious, and other affiliations.

For more than fifty years, conflict and displacement have remained unchanging attributes of the Eritrean political and social landscape. If it was possible to establish that a small percentage of pre-independence-era Eritrean refugees had sought exile because of mass behavior (or imitative behavior),[7] as Bulcha (1988) and Bariagaber (2001) have established, then it makes more sense to propose now that imitative behavior has become an important factor in the movement of Eritrean refugees. This is mainly due to the emergence of a new variable: the diffusion of modern means of communication, such as the internet, e-mail, the smart phone and accompanying applications, and so forth, brought about by rapid globalization.

Globalization, Communications Technology, and Prospective Refugees

Migration has been part of human history since time immemorial. Although there have been ups and downs in the rate of migration, sometimes depending on the social, economic, political conditions and at other times on natural disasters, population mobility as part and parcel of human history is incontestable. It appears that over the last few decades the rate of migration has increased as a result of many factors, including political upheaval in many countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the changeability of the international political economy, and the conditions of globalization. It is now easier than ever to make economic and other financial transactions across national borders, to traffic human beings without the knowledge of national authorities, to smuggle illicit materials undetected, to broadcast and disseminate information without the approval of the powers that be, and to enter countries illegally and seek employment, despite strict laws that prohibit this.

More importantly, because of the diffusion of modern means of communication, the public can now easily follow, send, and receive news and other materials critical of government officials and move from place to place despite strict government controls. Also, "flows of capital, goods[,] and services" are nowadays "increasingly. . . organized through transnational networks," and not through state actors (Castlles 2002, 1146). The world is increasingly changing from a "space of places," a feature that made the nation-state relevant, to a "space of flows," a feature that is increasingly making the nation-state irrelevant (Castells [1996] 2000, 440–448). As a result, the movement of people across national borders, whether legal or illegal, has increased significantly over the last decade and has become an inseparable aspect of contemporary international affairs. In short, globalization has eroded state power and has empowered individuals to a degree never seen before.

At higher levels, globalization has facilitated the uses of social-

networking technology in the pursuit of group goals. Perhaps the most talked about are the uses of social media, including Twitter and Facebook, in mobilization and democratization endeavors following the 2009 presidential elections in Iran and the more recent popular revolutions in the Arab world, including Tunisia and Egypt. Protests against what the opposition saw as rigged elections in Iran were largely initiated, facilitated, maintained, and fed to the outside world by such social-networking outlets. Although the protesters did not succeed in their demand to annul the election outcomes, their persistence shook the foundations of the Islamic Republic. More recently, the effective uses of Twitter, Facebook, electronic messaging, and smart phones during the Tunisian and Egyptian protests is believed to have played a critical role in bringing about the downfall of long-entrenched regimes, not only because such media outlets provided credible news where the government-controlled media failed, but more importantly, because they provided like-minded individuals and groups with the means to cooperate, coordinate, and communicate various courses of action (Olsson 2008). In other words, access to social media has made the public more autonomous and less dependent on the nation-state and its functionaries.

At lower levels, the internet has particularly advanced individual autonomy vis-à-vis governments because of the secure and confidential transmission of information that governments may find objectionable. In particular, e-mails and smart phones have been instrumental in providing an easier and secure means of communication in situations and places where information flows are highly restricted and controlled, or where access is minimal. One such situation is when one contemplates and agonizes over the decision to leave one's country to seek exile. Granted that exile is tantamount to a no-confidence vote in a government, the need for private and secure communication in internet-sparse regions of the world is imperative. E-mails and mobile phones provide that means, especially since many governments in the developing world may not have the technical know-how and the resources to monitor

and access information being transmitted. It is therefore reasonable to expect many modern-day refugees and migrants to use modern means of communication, especially instant messaging, such as the Yahoo! Messenger, and various applications in smart phones in their quest to optimize successful departure from the home country and arrival at their proposed destinations.

Prospective refugees in Africa use Yahoo! Messenger as their main means of communication for many reasons. It was one of the earliest instant-messaging systems, although others have now become common; is the fastest program to use for e-mailing on the slow dial-up connection computers found in most African countries;[8] is easy to use with a low amount of internet connectivity; has a fast loading time and hence useful in Africa, where connectivity is low; was free (unlike AOL, which was not free in its early phase, or MSN, which had limited content); is available on mobile phones, and mobile phone use in Africa is cheap and more widespread than the use of regular telephone and internet connections; and is ready for use, without a password, anywhere in the world after an acquaintance, usually in a foreign country, has set it up. Given that there is the need and the opportunity to make such use and the certain payoffs to be had, the proposition that individuals in less developed countries would be more inclined to use Yahoo! Messenger and the likes in their private communications is rather solid.

Eritreans find themselves in a closed society, where information is hard to get. There was no mobile telephone usage in Eritrea before 2003 and, by 2010, this increased to only 3.53 percent of the population who used mobile phones—the lowest rate in the Horn of Africa.[9] Also, Eritrea was the last country in Africa to establish local access to the internet—in 2000. In 2015, while the internet usage rate for Africa was 28.6 percent (that is, its penetration as a percent of the total population of Africa), Eritrea's usage rate was 1 percent, one of the lowest in Africa.[10] Thus, existing mobile telephones and internet connectivity rates and the characteristics mentioned in the previous paragraph are expected to make Eritreans, at least those

in the urban and semi-urban areas with better access, want to use them in their quest to leave the country and seek exile (Economic Commission for Africa, n.d.). Why would they not, given that Eritrea's internet connectivity has been much lower, even by African standards, until recently? How could they not if they have to travel to the "United States by way of Sudan, Kenya, Gambia and Cape Verde, then Brazil, Venezuela, Columbia, Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico" (Vedantam 2011)?

Nonetheless, to provide empirical support to the contention that current Eritrean refugees use modern means of communication in their effort to seek exile, I conducted a focus-group interview with five Eritreans in an American city on April 12, 2009.[11] All five had fled Eritrea after 2000, were male Tigrigna-speaking Eritreans eighteen years old or older, and had finished secondary school. Four had a bachelor's degree and had been accepted for graduate study in the United States while they had still been in Asmara, Eritrea's capital. They all had fled to Sudan, their first country of exile, and had come to the United States directly from Sudan.

The last two interviewee attributes—their higher educational levels and direct flight to the US from the first country of exile—may not strictly reflect the general composition of recent Eritrean refugees. The first attribute may suggest a higher, more frequent use of modern communications technology because they are well educated, while the second attribute may suggest a lower, less frequent use of modern means of communication because their direct flight from Sudan to the United States minimized the time (hence lowering the chances of their use of modern means of communication) to arrive at their destinations. In fact, the second contention appears to be more plausible because of the need to use, and the ease with which one can get, telephone and internet services in transit countries.[12] Given this, I make a generous assumption: that the opposing effects of the first and the second factors on the uses of modern means of communication will even out; that is, the information the interviewees provided is expected

to be close to what is actually happening by way of usage of the internet and smart phones.

Finally, all have been granted asylum under the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and relevant US laws. The reasons for their flight–as to whether or not they sought asylum because of fear persecution on account of their political orientation, religious persuasion, belonging to a particular group, and so forth–are thus not examined because they have been declared legitimate refugees. What is examined, however, is the means of communication they used to reach their destinations. There was no set of structured questions the interviewees had to answer, except to share their general experiences with a focus on the contacts they had made when the decision to leave was being contemplated and made, and the means by which those contacts were made. Apart from statements that the interviewees made in passing, no specific questions as to whether or not they agreed with government policies were asked.

With respect to their choice of Sudan and not Ethiopia on their way exile, all indicated that they had received information on the heavy Eritrean troop presence along the border with Ethiopia, and there was more freedom for refugees to move inside Sudan as compared to Ethiopia, where refugees were kept in strictly controlled camps;[13] there was a long history of Eritrean refugee presence in Sudan and an established route to get there; and information on all aspects of refugee issues in Sudan was readily available.[14] All five agreed with the statement one of them made: "You have to find a reliable guide or smuggler before setting [out] on the trip."[15] Hence, the choice of Sudan as the first country of asylum was based on safety considerations, as well as on imitative behavior of refugees who had left for Sudan during the War of Independence. In short, the refugees who fled to Sudan did their homework before embarking on what could have been a dangerous journey.

With regard to their use of modern means of communications, all but one indicated that they used Yahoo! Messenger while in Eritrea and/or Sudan to communicate with people in Sudan and/

or the United States. It was important to do this because they had to make arrangements for their documents to be sent to them after their arrival in Sudan. Only one interviewee said he had kept his documents with him at all times during the trek to Sudan.[16] Asked about why they used Yahoo! Messenger as the main means of communication, one interviewee said many prospective refugees do not know how to navigate regular e-mail, but "Yahoo! Messenger was fast" and was easy to use.[17] Also, the cost of internet use in Sudan was "cheap."[18] All but one said that they had used a telephone in Asmara and/or Sudan (not necessarily a mobile phone) to contact relatives in the United States. Although they did not indicate that they had contacted a recent refugee before they left, one interviewee said that he had received detailed information through e-mail from one of the interviewees who had arrived in Sudan earlier.[19] Finally, two of the five had relatives in the city in which they presently reside, and had made several telephone and e-mail contacts before coming to the United States.

The focus-group interview made it clear that safe arrival in the first country and mobility within that country was critically important for any refugee who planned to seek asylum in another country. If there were restrictions in mobility, as has been the case for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia a couple of years back, then the chances of successful transfer to the desired country became lower. That is probably the reason why many refugees avoid immobility and cross one international border after another until they reach their final destinations.

Concluding Remarks

The arguments on the effects of globalization in facilitating imitative behavior advanced earlier and the empirical support obtained from the focus-group interview strongly indicate that prospective refugees from Eritrea have used modern means of communication

in the process of seeking exile, from the time they contemplated and made the decision to leave to the time they arrived at their final destinations. There are at least two reasons as to why refugees use modern means of communications. First, technology eases learning through the experience of others–that is, through imitation–because it provides added predictability of outcomes, maximizes the benefits to be had, and minimizes the costs to be incurred. Second, the availability of information provides prospective refugees with the knowledge to weigh and sort things out and to make considered decisions. Knowledge, in turn, reduces the fear of the unknown, builds confidence, and provides a sense of empowerment sufficient to challenge state authorities. Hence, the threshold of tolerance to put up with "life without a future," as Interviewee #5 stated,[20] had become low enough for prospective refugees to be able to muster enough courage to take control of their lives and to decide to leave. Had this not been the case, it would have been difficult to imagine why current and recent Eritrean refugees (and refugees from neighboring countries) continue to leave despite the reported hardships on the way–including the rape of women, as in Libya; death in the deserts, as in the Sahara and Sinai; the risks of being taken hostages, as in the Sinai; and drowning in dangerous waters, as in the Mediterranean Sea. It would have been hard to contemplate how current and recent Eritrean refugees would traverse many thousands of miles through a dozen or so countries in three continents to reach the United States.

As hard as it might have been, pre-independence Eritrean refugees did not go through such travails to reach their destinations. It would have been rather rare for them to plan to traverse countries in Africa, followed by countries in Latin America and Central America, to reach the United States. Perhaps this was because they were fleeing violence and imminent threats to their lives. The push factors were so overwhelming that quick exit and safe arrival at their first countries of exile were critically important. In addition, they did not have as much information as the recent and

current refugees have to weigh the pros and cons of exile other than the immediate safety to be had in the first, neighboring country of exile.

At present, globalization has provided prospective refugees with much better access to information when compared to the access refugees had a few decades ago. Also, there is no war-related violence to flee from. Therefore, recent and present-day Eritrean refugees, in contrast to earlier refugees, have not been in a hurry to leave: they have had enough time and information at their disposal to think through the potential risks in transit and the pros and cons of exile. Consequently, in terms of the kinetics of their movements, they look more like migrants. The first implication is thus academic: the conceptual distinction between a refugee and a migrant has become increasingly blurred, and scholars of refugee studies may now appropriately apply the more elaborate migration models to advance the study of contemporary refugee movements.

The second implication is related to policy. Pre-independence Eritrean refugees (and refugees from neighboring countries) fled because of violence and imminent threats to their lives. Nowadays, however, people are fleeing because they see no political and/or economic future if they stay home, much as many Central and Eastern European refugees did when they left their home countries for the West in the aftermath of the Second World War. They now have enough time at their disposal and more opportunity to access and process information because the push factors are not as overwhelming as they were decades ago. It appears that the days when Africans will seek exile only because of violence and imminent threats to their lives are gone. Gone also are the days when they would seek asylum in the next-door neighboring country, because now they are more informed of the legal and other rights accorded to asylum seekers in more prosperous countries. Therefore, the combined effects of the expansion of modern means of communication and closed political systems in many countries are expected to generate refugees, even in the presence of nominal peace, in the years to come. Of course, the more closed the

political system is, the higher the number of refugees will be. This is a challenge that policymakers have to face. After all, because of globalization, we now find ourselves in a "space of flows" (Castells [1996] 2000). This is as true of Eritrea as it is of some countries in Africa.

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Notes

1. Per the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing Specific Aspects of the Problem of Refugees, a refugee is "an individual who flees from his/her state of nationality because of political, racial, ethnic, or other kinds of persecution or to avoid warfare or other forms of political violence." A refugee is reluctant to uproot oneself and would rather return upon cessation of the conflict or other factors that impelled his/her refugeehood. In contrast, a migrant is an individual who voluntarily leaves his/her state of nationality and is optimistic

about life in the new environment and has no intention of returning.

2. The United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants is a century-old, highly respected organization. I have used refugee statistics provided by it because they are the most accurate estimates available.

3. See annual publications of the USCRI, entitled *World Refugee Survey*. Each includes a section on the world's principal sources of refugees or major sources of refugees, and it lists the top ten countries with such characteristics. The 2009 issue is the latest that is available online.

4. The UNHCR estimated that about 2000 Eritreans crossed into Ethiopia each month during the first nine months of 2014, and about 5000 in October 2014. These puts the total to 23,000 in the first 10 months of 2014.

5. The Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission was created to demarcate the border as provided in the 2000 Algiers Agreement between the countries. A full text of the agreement is available at http://untreaty.un.org/cod/riaa/cases/vol_XXV/83-195.pdf.

6. These are borrowed from Kunz's (1973) typology of the kinetics of flight.

7. Bariagaber (2001) has documented that about 4 percent of a sample of 104 Eritreans who repatriated during 1992–1993 had left simply because they saw others leaving.

8. Obtained from a conversation my graduate assistant had with a former Peace Corps volunteer, whereby the Peace Corp volunteers in Kenya a few years back had been instructed to create a Yahoo account before arriving in the country to begin their assignment. They were told Yahoo was the easiest electronic-messaging system in the country. I assume this is true of other African countries.

9. See *Index Mundi* at http://www.indexmundi.com/eritrea/cellular-subscribers.html.

10. See *The Internet Coaching Library* at http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm. Accessed on May 30, 2016.

11. Because of institutional review board requirements of confidentiality and anonymity and my assurance that this will be the case, the city and the names of the interviewees are not disclosed. In another city where a focus-group interview was scheduled, only one interviewee showed up at the appointed place on time (a second came when I was about to leave); therefore, only the information from the focus-group interview in the first city is included in the discussion.

12. For example, a friend of mine in the United States tells me that he received an unexpected telephone call in November 2009 from a relative in Libya who asked him for money to pay human traffickers for a clandestine entree into southern Europe. I myself received a telephone call sometime in June 2011 from a female relative of mine in Sudan (who has a mobile phone) to help her find ways to come to the

United States as a refugee.

13. The Ethiopian government has since relaxed its control and has adopted a policy whereby Eritrean refugees can now live outside of the camps. See http://www.refworld.org/country,,,,ERI,,4c64f132c,0.html.

14. All five interviewees. 2009. Interview by author, 12 April.

15. Interviewee #1. 2009. Interview by author, 12 April.

16. Interviewee #1. 2009. Interview by author, 12 April.

17. Interviewee #1. 2009. Interview by author, 12 April.

18. Interviewee #3. 2009. Interview by author, 12 April.

19. Interviewee #2. 2009. Interview by author, 12 April.

20. Interviewee #5. 2009. Interview by author, 12 April.

Introduction: Postliberation Eritrea

TEKLE MARIAM WOLDEMIKAEL

Abstract

After thirty years of armed conflict with Ethiopia (1961–1991), a national liberation movement, the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), took power in 1991, making Eritrea an independent country from Ethiopia. In 1993, Eritrea conducted a successful referendum, gaining independent state status. It received recognition as a new African Renaissance state, and was on the forefront of African renewal and rebirth, which included the nations of South Africa, Namibia, Uganda, and Ethiopia as well. This occurred after many gloomy years of pessimism about progress, stability, and democracy in Africa. In the 1990s, a series of African nationalist liberation movements gained power that stimulated international and local observers' imagination for the dawning of an African Renaissance. There was hope that the Pan-Africanist dream of African unity would bring a new level of continental cooperation, economic growth, and political stability. This task rested on the shoulders of a new generation of African leaders. Today in Eritrea, thousands of Eritrean refugees, mostly young, are fleeing the country to seek refuge in camps in Ethiopia and Sudan. They eventually hope to find asylum in Europe and in the Middle East.

On the journey hundreds of Eritrean youth have drowned in the Mediterranean and Red Seas, have been victims of human trafficking, and have been abducted for ransom in the Sinai Desert. Many are starved and killed, and their body parts sold for organ transplant. This is not a story the world expected to hear when Eritrea gained its independence in 1993. In twenty five years, Eritrea fell from the

high status of an African Renaissance state to the low position of
an African pariah state, shunned by international organizations and
communities, sanctioned by the United Nations and distrusted by
neighboring countries. Why and how did this new nation fall into
social, political, and economic crisis? This book tries to answer these
questions through careful analysis and rigorous logic. The writers
are Africanists whose disciplinary training is in the social sciences
including anthropology, sociology, political science, and international
and cultural studies. They have conducted extensive research on
Eritrean politics, culture, and society. They shed light on the current
crisis of state and nation formation in Eritrea and by extension, they
hope to bring greater understanding about why the idea of African
Renaissance is being replaced by continuing pessimism about the
future of Africa.

Twenty-six years ago, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), armed with Kalashnikov rifles and tanks, entered Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, announcing that it was liberating Eritrea from Ethiopian rule. The thirty-years' war between the Eritrean nationalist front and the Ethiopian government has been termed the long struggle (*gedli*) (Cliff and Davidson 1988). Right after winning the war, in 1991, the EPLF was on the world stage, struggling to establish a new political order in Eritrea, replacing the Ethiopian regime that had ruled from 1952 to 1991. This had included a ten-year federation (1952–1961) and thirty years of direct rule (1962–1991).

Eritrea is the name given in 1889 by the former Italian colonial administration to a strip of land on the Red Sea coast of North East Africa. In 1992, the EPLF leader Isaias Afwerki declared that the Eritrean People's Liberation Front would be the provisional government of Eritrea, thus assuming the role of running the state institutions left by the collapse of the Ethiopian administration. Soon after conducting an internationally supervised referendum on April 23–25, 1993, the provisional government of Eritrea declared itself an independent state. As a new African state, Eritrea received

immediate membership in the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations as well as recognition from the major world powers and the neighboring African countries. This support gave the new state legitimate power along with authority over its territory and citizens. The referendum gave the new Eritrean state an international mandate to rule the Eritrean population and the land. The referendum was the crowning achievement of the EPLF, which had just won the longest armed conflict in Africa's history. In 1994, the EPLF conducted its first postliberation congress and reconstituted itself as the only party of the new state, calling itself the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ).

The authors in this special issue treat the PFDJ's construction of dominance and the rupture of the national consensus that had been established by a referendum and a declaration of independence in 1993. The essays deal with the fragments of culturally constructed social divisions, such as young people, refugees, and diasporas, and their relationship to the nation and the state. The Eritrean state can be characterized as a state of exception (Agamben 1998, 2005), a state in which the leader of the nation, Isaias Afwerki, used the crisis following the Border War with Ethiopia (1998–2000) as a cover to exert absolute control over the society and state and consolidate his power over the nation. The papers focus on the structures of domination and subordination that have emerged in postliberation, postindependence Eritrea. They contend with the cultural politics of Eritrea and show how certain people's exclusion is unsustainable in the long term. (Cultural politics can be defined as "the domain in which meanings are constructed and negotiated, where relations of dominance and subordination are defined and contested." [Jackson 1991, 200]). They pay special attention to the younger generations of Eritreans who are fully affected by the domination of, and exclusion and disconnection from, the dominant culture. The articles collectively bring into question the popular wisdom that Eritrea's political instability would end once the political issues of the war between the liberation movements and the Ethiopian government ended. This demonstrated that gaining sovereignty or autonomy

was insufficient to resolve the political, economic, and social crisis in Eritrea.

This introductory essay is divided into five parts including (a) a brief exploration of the rise and fall of Eritrea from the group of African Renaissance states; (b) how it became a state of exception ruled by an arbitrary and absolutist state; (c) how the absolutist state created a bifurcated social hierarchy in which the population was divided into "citizens" and "subjects" with differentiated gradation of citizenship in relation to the state (Mamdani 1996; Ong 1999); and (d) how this "graduated citizenship" has created a "Refugee-Diaspora Nexus" that could explain the current refugee crisis in Eritrea. This introductory essay ends with a brief description of the articles in this volume. Collectively, the articles provide a deeper examination of the refugee-state-diaspora nexus through theoretically informed case studies and essays on Eritrean refugees and diasporas including: (1) Assefaw Bariagaber's exploration of how globalization has facilitated the flow of refugees from Eritrea; (2) Victoria Bernal's discussion on how the information revolution has provided spaces for political engagement for Eritrean diasporas; (3) David Bozzini's discourse on political jokes among Eritrean youth conscripted for national service as a form of resistance to the power structure in Eritrea and also its limitation; (4) Amanda Poole's examination of how the Eritrean state functions as a gatekeeper state that financially supports itself through receiving ransoms from families of refugees and managing remittances and diasporas, which becomes a basis for its claims of self-sufficiency and autonomy from outsiders; (5) Jennifer Riggan's essay on how debates on national duty in Eritrean classrooms link directly to the deeper and practical meaning of citizenship of the refugee-diaspora nexus through how the students imagine emigration as a form of fulfilling national duty; (6) Gaim Kibreab's research, using Albert Hirschman's theory of exit, voice, and loyalty, about Eritrean youth who were required to participate in the Eritrean National Service (ENS), which turned into endless national serve after the Border War in 1998-2000, causing them to exit their home country en-masse; (7) Dan Connell's study

of the movement of Eritreans from their home country to the many places of refuge around the world and how their voyage from place to place was conducted at great personal risks and potential harms; (8) Georgia Cole's inquiry into how the international community contributed to Eritrea's state crisis (a state of exception) through the failure of the United Nations Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the Government of Eritrea, and the Sudanese government to find a mutually satisfying solution to the return of Eritrean refugees from Sudan to Eritrea in the early 1990s; (9) Magnus Treiber's exploration of how Eritrean refugees in Switzerland have figured in the Switzerland's election in 2015, by analyzing the missed opportunity for politicians, social workers, and refugees to dialogue with one another in a productive and mutually beneficial manner to mitigate the refugee crisis in Switzerland; (10) Milena Belloni's fieldwork on the influence of transactional communications, ties, and kinship obligations between Eritrean refugees and how communities in Eritrea fostered the social-psychological feelings of being "stuck" in places they consider as less desirable such as Italy, Ethiopia, Libya and others; and finally, (11) Michael Woldemariam's synthesizing essay explores the significant role played by international events in the making of Eritrea an African "pariah" state. The following section will examine how the new Eritrea state was elevated into one of the emerging African "renaissance" states for a short period of time in the early 1990's. It further explores how that hope was frustrated in short period of time after Eritrea's independence. After Eritrea conducted a border war with Ethiopia in 1998–2000, the lack of a successful resolution of the border conflict has made Eritrea a state that views itself as in siege, insecure in its relationship with its bigger neighbor, Ethiopia (Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2014).

A Brief Description of the Rise and Fall of an African Renaissance State

In the early 1990s, Eritrea, along with South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, was put on pedestal in the Western mass media and powerful global political circles as one of the emerging African states that was expected to play a leading role in the recovery of Africa from decades of corruption, poverty, inequality, and violence. They were dubbed Renaissance African States that were expected to charge forward in African economic, cultural, and scientific growth. Unfortunately, by 2001, Eritrea was demoted from this chosen group and is one of Africa's most oppressive countries, and generates some of the largest numbers of refugees leaving the country for safety and security.

The expectation that the flow of refugees from Eritrea to the neighboring and Western countries would stop after the end of the thirty-year war between Eritrean nationalist movements and the Ethiopian government has proven elusive. On May 24, 1993, Eritrea declared its official separation from Ethiopia and became the newest independent state in Africa and the first successful case of an African country's breaking away from another African state. Foreign journalists and Eritrean scholars wrote that Eritrea was different from the rest of Africa; they believed that the newly independent Eritrea could become a showcase for African development and recovery. The new sovereign nation-state of Eritrea was expected to generate economic opportunities and provide a stable political culture for its people. The enthusiastic reception Eritrea received was partly due to the perceived malaise that postcolonial African countries had entered after their successful decolonization. Many writers and analysts were seeking a success story from sub-Saharan Africa, something that could set an example for African recovery and development; they believed that Eritrea could play this role because they were impressed by the Eritreans' show of a new identity of self-sufficiency, confidence,

and unity. In the early 1990s, Isaias Afwerki, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia were dubbed the new generation of African leaders, leaders of this African renaissance (Oloka-Onyango 2004). This honeymoon did not last long. Postwar Eritrea brought neither peace nor prosperity to the population under its control, nor did it resolve the crisis of citizenship and identity affecting its population. This is not surprising, considering that Eritrea had long been in a state of crisis, first as colony of Italy, then under Ethiopian rule, and then subsequently during thirty years of nationalist war that destroyed the social and economic infrastructure of the society. The structural challenges of nation building and constructing the new Eritrean state were nearly insurmountable. Eritrea, a nationalist movement turned into a state, had neither the economic and political resources nor the organizational capacity to tackle the challenges effectively.

After the Border War with Ethiopia in 1998–2000, which cost about 70,000 lives on both sides, with Eritrea admitting a loss of 19,000 soldiers, over half a million people were displaced within the country. This unresolved border war immersed Eritrea in a quagmire of consequences, leading to an economic and political crisis of citizenship and, subsequently, a new surge of refugees from Eritrea into neighboring countries. The no-war, no-peace stalemate between Eritrea and Ethiopia placed both countries in an ongoing economic and political crisis, with Eritrea suffering more. In addition, a shortage of rainfall had put Eritreans on the verge of a major famine. Even though Eritrea emerged with great fanfare and the blessing of the United Nations in 1993, by 2009 Eritrea reached a new low. Its international reputation had plummeted following the United Nation's accusation that Eritrea was supporting the Somali insurgents known as Al Shabab, who sought to overthrow the emerging government in Somalia. On December 23, 2009, the Security Council imposed arms-and-travel sanctions against Eritrea (United Nations 2009). Additional sanctions were imposed on Eritrea on December 5, 2011 for not heeding UN sanctions and

continuing to provide support to armed groups seeking to destabilize Somalia and other parts of the Horn of Africa (Reuters 2011). As a result, by 2013, the economic and political crisis in Eritrea had reached an alarming intensity. Many years after its official independence, the state continued to experience persistent shortages of electricity, water, bread, and fuel.

The Eritrean state made policy choices that stifled economic growth and political stability and made the nation uninhabitable for its growing youthful population. The government attempted to transform traditional Eritrean society into its own image of a modern society. This top-down method of transformation tended to create a new class structure of hierarchy of statuses: an oligarchy, with the top leaders occupying the most privileged and highest status and the lowest status occupied by people who left the country to avoid forced conscription and forced labor (Djilas 1957). The PFDJ saw itself as a vanguard party, seeking to bring quick economic progress and prosperity and establish a classless society where everyone could be part of a popular state. It sought the nationalization of the country's labor and natural resources, bringing them under the firm control of the state.

The ensuing policy, designed to expand the sovereignty of the state over the population, is the immediate cause of the current economic, political, and citizenship crisis as well as the refugee crisis it has spawned. The more Eritrea pursues a stringent policy to protect its national sovereignty and control the economic and political sphere, the more it generates continuous economic failure, political instability, and social upheaval, including new refugees, who join the Eritrean diaspora communities around the world. All the articles in this present volume examine, directly or indirectly, the disastrous consequences of this misguided policy. To understand it and how it came about, it is imperative to contextualize this moment in a larger historical context and explain how the new ruling class, the PFDJ oligarchy, is partly, but not entirely, responsible for the outflow of young people as refugees. The refugee crisis in Eritrea can be explained using a perspective

that sees Eritrea as a state of exception (Agamben 1998, 2005; Schmitt [1922] 1985), a product of long-term violence, war, and colonization. It is a crisis that has deep roots in Eritrea's political history, involving colonial violence, liberation, and civil and border wars, and it is therefore not amenable to shortcuts and an easy solution.

Eritrea as a State of Exception

The idea of a state of exception comes from Schmitt and Agamben. Schmitt argued that a state of exception occurs when a sovereign exceeds the rule of law for the public good in a state of emergency (1985). Developing Schmitt's ideas, Agamben (1998, 2005) explored the increase of power of the government in response to crisis as a state of exception, in which a leader, under the guise of a threat to his or her sovereignty, suspends the constitution (hence violating the rule of law) and treats the population under his or her control as subjects, stripping them of their human and political citizenship and individual rights. Agamben believes the role of politics is to create justice and produce a good life for citizens. Therefore, the question for him is whether a sovereign creates justice for a few or for many. In a democratic and open system, the wider and more inclusive the citizenship rights are, the bigger the circle of people who have an expansive understanding of citizenship. In contrast, in a state of exception, citizenship is narrowly defined and includes only a fortunate few. This does not mean that a state of exception does not have rules or laws, but that laws are made only to serve the interests of the sovereign. Citizenship is narrowly constructed, benefiting and providing a good life for a few members of the ruling elite. The suspension of the constitution gives the sovereign absolute power to keep the population at the level of bare existence, merely bodies that have no rights and protections. In the words of Agamben, a person who is reduced to bare life is a *Homo sacer*, a man who can be

killed but not sacrificed: his killing will not be considered as dying, but as sacrificing, for the state or nation (1998, 2005).

The state of emergency in Eritrea began when Italy, a European power, intervened in Eritrea. It has lasted a long time, starting with the colonization of Eritrea, which reduced the people's political, economic, and cultural ties with neighboring areas and divided ethnicities, histories, kin groups, authority structures, and regional economies. Although the Italian presence in Eritrea was short-lived and the area settled by Italians was a small part of the country (mostly urban), the new configuration produced a fundamentaly transformative, long-term effect on Eritrean society. Colonialism casts a shadow on the people, from which they have not been able to escape. The newly configured area called Eritrea was a conglomerate of different ethnicities, histories, religions, and cultures that did not consider themselves part of a single national entity. Eritrea was tied to Italy, a nation in Europe, a continent that had a global reach. Eritrea was one of the colonies that was hierarchically integrated into a colonial and world capitalist system (Wallerstein 1976). Whether people who call themselves Eritreans were aware of it or not, they were being realigned, and their society was being reconfigured into a different constellation, a hierarchically organized global system of nation-states. They were in a peripheral region of the world, a source of cheap labor and raw materials for the benefit of the industrial north, mostly Europe, North America, and Japan. Local populations were thrown into a crisis of historical continuity, belonging, identity, and citizenship.

In addition to the long-term history, we need to analyze the microhistory and recent events in Eritrea, where these factors are significant in the continuing crisis of identity and citizenship. After the end of the nationalist war, Eritrea continued to be a state of exception. It never demilitarized its soldiers, nor did it lift the state of emergency for the entire population. In the 1990s, it retained a bitter memory of its nationalist war. According to Haben, its government introduced a special court in 1996 "allowing the office of the President to go after the alleged corrupt officials of the

Red Sea Trading Co. with zero tolerance or least leniency. In other words, the President can do what he wish [sic] with zero accountability" (Haben 2010). The formation of the special court predates the Eritrean Constitution, ratified in 1997. Immediately, however, the government suspended the implementation of it. Engaged in a border war with Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000, the state expanded the state of emergency—its state of exception—to the whole society indefinitely. Like other states of exception, it established a new regime of truth, its own version of reality, by which it justified imposing arbitrary rule and made its leader, President Isaias Afwerki, an absolutist head of state, unaccountable to any government body.

The state of exception in Eritrea became more entrenched after the Border War with Ethiopia (2008–2010), which produced a leader and a state obsessed with national security and sovereignty. The war started out as a border skirmish in May 1998, but it quickly escalated into full-blown trench warfare, similar to that of the Great War. The war greatly damaged both countries, with both sides losing more than 70,000 soldiers. It left 1.4 million people displaced, and both sides still disagree over the demarcation lines of their shared border (Reuters 2008). Ten-plus years of neither war nor peace have further weakened Eritrea's sovereignty. Eritreans are now more determined to defend national security and sovereignty at any cost. After the war, the Eritrean leader and his supporters became obsessed with national security. The more Eritrea pursues a stringent policy to protect its national sovereignty, the more refugees it generates—mostly young people who join the ranks of global refugee communities around the world. Thus, the policy of expanding the control of the state over the population to maintain its security and sovereignty had the unintended consequence of making Eritrea one of the countries that has produced the largest number of refugees in the last ten years (ICER 2011). These are the new homeless, who have to live by their wits to survive. They enter refugee camps to gain access to refugee rights and seek asylum in safe havens in the West. They do not necessarily leave the country

voluntarily. The state's denial of their citizenship rights and its treatment of them as bare lives is the main impetus for their exodus.

The first victims of the state of exception were migrants from Tigray, a province bordering Ethiopia, and other Ethiopians who had lived in Eritrea as an integral part of the society until they felt vulnerable and at risk after the nationalist front took control of Asmara in 1991, which made them leave Eritrea soon after. Religious minorities and leaders, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, and various Christian groups and Muslim clerics who had been imprisoned for being unpatriotic followed them. Many of the persecuted groups left the country and became exiles or refugees. After the 1998–2000 war, two more groups followed: people displaced by the war who left their homes and took refuge in Ethiopia and Sudan and young people pressed into national service. An incredible number of young people have fled from all corners of Eritrea to escape national service. This demonstrates that citizens in an oppressive, absolutist, closed state—a state of exception—will either protest the status quo when permitted or exit to another state (Hirschman 1970). To become an exile or a refugee suggests a lack of confidence in the government. The national liberation war was noisy and violent, but a stealth revolution (*selahta maabel*) is silently being waged in Eritrea: young people leaving the country will prevent the state from reproducing itself in the future.

Subjects and Citizens in Postliberation Eritrea

In the last twenty years of independence under the leadership of President Afwerki, the Eritrean state has created a differentiated, hierarchical, unequal system of citizenship. This hierarchy ranges from what may be called super citizenship for the top echelons of the government and party members, to local persons' status

as subjects, with few rights and little chance of upward mobility. This system of citizenship mirrors what Mamdani observed in other postcolonial African states: that many countries, after achieving independence, reproduced a two-tier system—citizens and subjects—similar to colonial social hierarchies. The citizens were the European colonizers and settlers who had established themselves as the dominant racial group, assuming rights and privileges of modern citizenship, and the subjects were the colonized indigenous populations, seen as uncivilized and racially inferior, ruled through customary laws that ostensibly preserved their tribal cultures, authorities, and communities. The postcolonial African states continued the practice of bifurcated domination by privileging the educated elites and administrators over urban and rural dwellers. As with the so-called civilizing mission of the colonial elites, the African political elites claimed they were liberating and developing their societies, transforming them through revolution or social reform (Mamdani 1996). The bifurcated social hierarchical approach serves as an analytical tool, but the reality of social hierarchies can be more complex, as they do not always fit into two neatly contrasting types. Mamdani's insight is relevant in the Eritrean case because it lets us explore the emergence of differentiated social hierarchies among its population, especially between state and society. His framework needs to be revised to include the effects of globalization, plus the information revolution regarding the power of the African states over their citizens.

Giddens, drawing from Marshall's (1950) classification of citizenship into civil, political, and social rights, argues that these three rights are arenas of contestation or conflict, and each is linked to a distinctive type of surveillance, which, he argues, is necessary to the power of the superordinate groups and acts as an axis for the operation of the dialectic of control (1987, 205). Globalization encourages the development of new sets of rationalities and techniques of governmental practices (Perry and Mauer 2003). According to Ong, while European states have confronted these contestations sequentially over decades, postcolonial Asian and

African states have had to deal with them simultaneously, mostly in an era of globalization. Newly industrializing regimes, eager to meet capitalist requirements, have evolved into what she calls a system of graduated sovereignty, by which she means that citizens in zones differently articulated within global production and financial circuits are subject to different kinds of surveillance and in practice enjoy different sets of civil, political, and economic rights (Ong 1999, 41). Ong's concept of flexible citizenship complicates Mamdani's classification of subject and citizen, which primarily focuses on classes and power structures. Ong argues that in an era of globalization, Southeast Asian governments have sought to accommodate corporate strategies of location by becoming flexible in managing their sovereignty. Flexible citizenship, as a product of graduated sovereignty, allows the differentiation of populations into graduated scales of citizenship, or graduated citizenship. Ong uses the concept of flexible citizenship to "describe the practices of refugees and business migrants who work in one location while their families are lodged in 'safe havens' elsewhere" (Ong 1999, 214).

Eritrea, dealing with globalization, has adopted a strategy similar to what Ong has called graduated sovereignty and citizenship. Citizenship is expressed through an individual "sacrificing for the nation" (Bernal 2014, 7). Those who died in the Nationalist War or the Border War with Ethiopia are considered martyrs. When a former guerrilla fighter dies, for any reason, including natural causes, he or she is automatically called a martyr and buried in the local martyrs' cemetery. This is because the EPLF and the PFDJ have elevated the martyr as a symbol of Eritrean culture: "The martyr. . . is not only a central figure in the Eritrean national imaginary, but represents the essence of the social contract between Eritreans and the state in which the citizen's role is to serve the nation and sacrifice themselves [sic] for the survival and well-being of the nation" (Bernal 2014, 33). Therefore, in Eritrea, a new hierarchy of citizenship, based on sacrifice to the nation, has evolved. This differentiates the people into graduated scales of citizenship, ranging from full citizenship–granting civil, political, and economic

rights to members of the party—to treating local people as subjects and forgetting and abandoning the refugees. The practice of assigning citizenship unevenly has grave consequences.

There are in Eritrea two broad ideal and typical strata, with intersecting and crisscrossing boundaries. This includes citizens, the former guerrilla fighters, often called *tegadelti* in Tigrinya, and subjects, known as *hafash* in Tigrinya, meaning 'masses'. The masses include all those who were not members of EPLF and are not members of the new party, PFDJ (i.e., civilians in Eritrea and in the diaspora). The government sometimes uses the term *gebar*, meaning 'taxpayers', to refer to them. The government-run media translate the terms *gebar* and *hafash* as 'nationals'. These analytical categories are imprecise, but they do fit effectively with reality. The *tegadelti*, estimated to be 95,000 ex-combatants, are the power elites. They are mostly former members of the EPLF and current members of the PFDJ. Their superiority is based upon their belief that they deserve more than the rest of the population because of their participation in the armed struggle (Article 19 2013). They receive a higher salary, better housing, and special treatment for services and goods in all government institutions. Although they represent only a small fraction of the population, they dominate government positions, including at least 50 percent of national assembly seats, constitutionally reserved for them; in addition, they control the executive branch, specifically the ministerial cabinet (Article 19 June 3, 2013). Among the *tegadelti* is a hierarchy, in which higher government and military officials (*laalewot halefti*, 'higher authority') occupy the highest position; these personnel include government bureaucrats, military officers, and party officials and intellectuals. The membership of the oligarchy is not publicly acknowledged, but we get a glimpse of it when there is a breach within the ruling class. A breach happened in 2001, when fifteen top officials of the government questioned President Isaias's leadership, particularly his handling of the 1998–2000 border conflict with Ethiopia. The state-controlled media accused them of disloyalty, treason against the state authority (meaning Isaias Afwerki), and

conspiracy to surrender to Ethiopia. Eleven of them were arrested without charge, and they remain in prison; the other four are out of the country, living in exile. Additionally, we can infer who might be in the inner circle. On September 21, 2013, government media showed pictures of 150 administrators, regional PFDJ, heads of regional administration, and subzonal administrators participating in a PFDJ-organized retreat (*Eritrea Profile* 2013a), and on October 2, 2013, these media showed videos of twenty ministers at a cabinet meeting (*Eritrea Profile* 2013b). These meetings are often convened at the president's whim. For the cabinet meetings, the videos were released for propaganda and served no other purpose. Under the powerful elites are disparate groups of *tegadelti* who have higher status because they are considered to have sacrificed their youth for the nation and are thus valued more than the *hafash*. They occupy differentiated, hierarchical positions in a complex of patron–client relationships. Although the entire edifice makes the government look like a bureaucracy that functions as an efficient, modern, rational legal system, in fact it is not. As with many African patronage systems of governance (Berman 1998), all Eritrean government services, from top to bottom, are done within the patron–client relations of loyalty, friendship, acquaintance, and future favors for service rendered.

The subjects are placed in two groups: diasporas and locals. Diasporas live abroad and are assigned a higher status than locals. They are expected to fulfill their obligations to the regime, such as paying a two-percent diaspora tax and/or giving money for government-sponsored funding initiatives, such as martyrs' trust funds and war-disabled patriots' funds. Locals call diasporas belles, referring to a sweet cactus fruit widely sold in the streets of Asmara and other towns during the summer. Because diasporas flock into Eritrea during the summer at the same time belles are harvested, locals apply the term to them and call their arrival belles-times.

Locals are urban and rural people of diverse classes and statuses. They lack power and are marginalized by the elites and political leaders. Refugees (*segre-dob*, 'those who crossed the border'), who

fled their country to avoid national service and conscription or were displaced by war, have the lowest status. National service began in 1994, drafting teenagers over the age of sixteen and adults under the age of forty. It initially entailed six months of training and one year of service; however, it soon developed into two years or more in military service. Since the Border War with Ethiopia, it has turned into unending military service. Even boys and girls are mandated to enter military-training camps for at least one year when they reach the age of sixteen. If they have finished tenth grade, they are required to finish their eleventh grade in a military camp called Sawa, where they receive military training in addition to their formal, nonmilitary education. The prospect for gainful employment and upward mobility for all people in Eritrea is almost nonexistent. Eritrea's employment sector is heavily monitored and managed while being policed by the state.

Since 2002 the military national service has been tied to a development program campaign called Warsai-Yikealo in which the youth are required to perform their national service for an indefinite time period. Some writers have characterized the Warsai-Yikealo campaign as forced labor (Kibreab 2009). This glaring difference of life chances, rights, and privileges among preferred citizens, diasporic citizens, and locals has triggered an insatiable desire for most working-age young people to seek better opportunities and rights in exile. They are leaving in droves, through every country that borders Eritrea. They are abandoned by the Eritrean state; they are, to use Hannah Arendt's words about refugees, stateless people (Arendt 1943).

A new generation of Eritreans, mostly young, has started to oppose the regime indirectly inside Eritrea, and openly abroad. Diasporas who openly support opposition groups or groups who criticize the government face the possibility of arrest by the government. Diasporas who make negative statements about the Eritrean regime jeopardize their preferred citizenship and may be classed as an enemy of the state, subject to arrest and torture upon arrival on Eritrean soil.

The Refugee–Diaspora Nexus

Rapid globalization in recent years has made it possible, either by choice or pressure, for immigrants to maintain strong ties to their countries of origin, even when they are integrated into the countries that received them (Levitt 2001). In response to globalization, countries are distinguishing residence from national membership and extending their boundaries to those living outside of them. They have created mechanisms to facilitate immigrant participation in the national development process over the long term and from afar (Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003). Intensified globalization has enabled the new Eritrean state to enhance its power and its relationship with Eritreans abroad.

Eritrean diasporas valorize the Eritrean nation-state and give the sovereign the power to decide and have flexible sovereignty over them. They support the state, mitigating the sense of alienation in their host countries. They hope for preferred citizenship in Eritrea—their only chance in the world to be preferred citizens, where they will be more equal than others. With the added resources they have in exile and things being so affordable in Eritrea, they are more than happy to do what the sovereign asks of them. The Eritrean state and the diaspora have become a mutual admiration and support unit. The state does not have much responsibility to meet the basic needs of the diasporas: they are citizens of other nations, and their needs are taken care of by their adopted new countries, mostly democratic nations in Europe, North America, and Australia. In relation to the Eritrean state, they are required to pay taxes and contribute to war efforts; in return, they are given some scarce resources in Eritrea, such as free land, where they can build houses. Their houses in Eritrea may serve as resting places for summer vacations or places of residence when they retire. Diasporas are the strongest supporters of events that celebrate holidays and parties initiated by the government. They dance the night away and spend a lot of money at these parties.

Although they could have asked for more representation in Eritrean politics, they cannot afford to antagonize the state and thereby cut their connection to home. They need a place they can call home so intensely that they are willing to accept the state of exception, where normal rules are suspended indefinitely and the regime routinely makes arbitrary decisions. Such mutual benefit works at the expense of the captive citizens inside Eritrea and the refugees in refugee camps. Diasporas, government officials, members of the single party, and former guerrillas are treated as sovereign subjects, with rights that the local subjects do not receive. Eritreans, especially young people, dream that–through a process of transformation by leaving the country as refugees and then returning as diasporas, with a higher status and resources to spend lavishly–they will become part of the sovereign subject.

A paradox of Eritrea's refugee crisis is that today's refugees are tomorrow's diasporas–a phenomenon that I call a refugee–diaspora nexus. Refugees have to find a suitable home within centers of global powers, the global north, and then they can become new diasporas and attain preferred citizenship with significant rights in Eritrea. Refugee status seems a rite of passage, rife with danger and risks, where only a few become successful diasporas. If everything works out, a refugee becomes a diaspora who will be resettled in a third country, hopefully Europe, the United States, Canada, or Australia; he or she will then be able to come back home to visit–proud, rich, and supportive of the status quo. In the context of the refugee–diaspora nexus, however, many Eritreans cannot move freely in and out of the global north: they are neither refugees, slated for resettlement in a third country, nor in a party-sanctioned diaspora, and they therefore do not have privileged citizenship status in Eritrea. Many are in legal limbo, have not reached their destination or goals, and are still waiting to be resettled in a third country.

The Papers in this Volume

Each of the papers in this volume takes as its starting point the state of exception in Eritrea itself which has produced various forms of bifurcated and/or graduated citizenship.

Assefaw Bariagaber in his article uses social-psychological concepts of imitative behavior as an explanation for the outflow of young people from Eritrea. According to him, emigration from Eritrea is an externally induced imitative behavior, effected as a result of the diffusion of social media, such as the Internet, movies, and mobile phones among Eritrean young people, who have used technology-based social networks to flee to neighboring countries and eventually to industrialized Western countries. He contends that learning from others enables young people to escape, take chances, and face dangers, including rape, death in the Sahara and Libyan deserts, being taken hostage in the Sinai Desert, and drowning in the Mediterranean and Red Seas. He argues for looking at Eritrea in the context of emigration from Africa in response to the pull of the information revolution and globalization.

Victoria Bernal explores how the information revolution has influenced Eritrean politics and public life through the participation of Eritrean diasporas in social media by creating their own websites to discuss and participate in Eritrean politics. She shows how these websites serve as a public sphere, countering a lack of a free press and free space for civil society in Eritrea. She argues that online websites are now an integral part of Eritrean national politics, safe for civil society and dissent because of their location outside Eritrea. She contends that their significance has increased since 2001, when the state increased its repression of public discourse inside Eritrea. She focuses on the political activities that take place on three sites–Dehai, Asmarino, and Awate–and examines the decentering effect of these media in challenging the top-down method of governance in Eritrea, where the mass media are under the strict control of the state.

David Bozzini conducted two years of fieldwork, from 2005 to 2007, in Eritrea and studied people enrolled in national service there, exploring their political imagination, jokes about bureaucracy, superiors, positions relative to the state system, and citizenship. He states that the blocked social and economic mobility for conscripts in Eritrea leads them to resignation and a deep desire to seek exile. He suggests that jokes and other subversive discourse against state power and ideology may inadvertently promote some of the dynamics of the power system that they contest, and he thus highlights the limits of resistance and subversive discourse.

Amanda Poole argues that we should look at Eritrea's state–society relations as a manifestation of a larger African issue, involving the state–society relations of a gatekeeper state. She suggests that the flight of citizens from Eritrea and their continuing connection through remittances and ransoms can be understood if we conceptualize the Eritrean state as a gatekeeper state, one that has acquired the capacity to manage massive emigration and use remittances, taxes, and national service to further its nation-building project. Remittances and ransoms have made it possible for the Eritrean state to claim self-sufficiency and autonomy from outside forces, such as nongovernmental organizations, and other dependency from foreign aid. Since the 1998 border conflict, young men and women in national service have been transformed into sources of unlimited and cheap forced labor (Kibreab 2009).

Jennifer Riggan directly addresses the question of graduated citizenship and the effects of the bifurcation of citizen and subject under the Eritrean state of exception. She takes up the question of how valorization of diaspora communities in Eritrea itself produces an imagined future in which leaving the country becomes central for high-school students. This is an unintended consequence of a governmental policy that ascribes greater citizenship to diasporas, rather than people in Eritrea, especially young people. This graduated citizenship has reshaped the way young people redefine emigration as a way of fulfilling their national duty, after they become diasporas and contribute remittances and diaspora taxes.

Riggan observes a classroom debate among high-school students in an English class, where students consider leaving their country a patriotic act. She shows that they are reworking the state-sponsored idea of citizenship into a citizenship that justifies leaving the country within the logic of global market forces, going against locally defined duty and sacrifice, and thus protecting the national sovereignty and power of the Eritrean state.

Gaim Kibreab's chapter is on how the Eritrean National Service (ENS), which was originally a project of for the construction of nation identity and culture, transformed into an endless national service after the 1998–2000 Border War. He applies Albert Hirschman's theory of how individuals respond to intolerable conditions by following one of three options, including staying at home and remaining loyal in spite of the difficult challenges, or staying in their country while resisting and voicing their objection, or exiting the country through migration to safer places for a better life. Kibreab questions the use of the three concepts developed by Albert Hirschman—exit, voice, and loyalty—as sequential and mutually exclusive concepts. Instead, he suggests that they should be conceived as crisscrossing and interrelated outcomes.

Dan Connell conducted interviews of Eritrean refugees in nineteen countries around the world, including countries in Africa and the Americas. He explores the dangerous routes the refugees take, facing kidnapping, torture, being ransomed for money, and sometimes execution in the Sinai and Sahara deserts, or drowning in the Mediterranean and Red Seas. He seeks an approach that would diminish such risks by engaging and empowering the refugees themselves.

Georgia Cole studied how the international community's dealings with the Eritrean government between the period of Eritrea's liberation and the Border War with Ethiopia influenced the Eritrea government's line of action and policy toward Eritrean refugees in the Sudan. Using illustrations related to the multinational effort to repatriate Eritrean refugees in the early 1990s, she postulated that the international community, especially the United Nations (UN),

the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and other states, behaved in ways that fostered alienation of the Eritrean state from the international community.

Magnus Treiber informs us that Eritrean refugees to Switzerland have had influence on the political debates and anti-immigration campaigns in the country's 2015 election. This was because the Eritrean refugees were the largest asylum-seekers in Switzerland 2015. This led the Swiss politicians to frequently question the legitimacy of Eritreans' claims for asylum. He analyzes the difficulties faced by professional social workers in assisting the refugees because of their mutual misunderstanding and miscommunications, which resulted in hurting the cause of asylum seekers in the country.

Using ethnographic research materials conducted in several countries extending from Eritrea to Italy, Milena Belloni explores the lives of Eritrean asylum seekers in Italy. She asks the question, once they reach Italy, why do the refugees desire to move on to other places and not want to stay and seek asylum. She found the Eritreans feel "stuck" in Italy even when they could be gainfully employed and she explains the source of their disappointment to be the pressure they experience from their families to reach the more wealthy northern European countries, which have greater economic and social safety support system for refugees and asylum seekers.

Lastly, Michael Woldemariam's chapter focuses on why the state of Eritrea has faced international sanctions and isolation and why it was labeled as a "pariah" state, especially by the United Nations and related agencies since 2009. He contends three major international political events, including the Ethiopian-Eritrean Border War, the 9-11 terrorist attacks on the US, and the growth of Al Shabaab in 2007–2008 in Somalia, produced a set of interlocking forces that have led to Eritrea's international isolation.

Taken together, all of these papers address the challenges of Eritrea's strategy of nation-state formation in an era marked by global flows. The government's attempts to act as a gatekeeper

between Eritrea and the rest of the world by attempting to regulate flows of people, money, and ideas about nationalism produces graduated categories of national citizen and subject each endowed with very different rights and duties. However, Eritreans themselves are aware of these categories, and, in response, they apprehend and produce alternative forms of belonging to the nation be it through the Internet, other forms of media, Eritrean classrooms, or political humor that circulates more broadly.

Acknowledgements

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Civil Society and Cyberspace: Reflections on Dehai, Asmarino, and Awate

VICTORIA BERNAL

Abstract

Websites created and sustained by Eritreans in the diaspora over the past two decades stand as one of the most significant initiatives undertaken independently of the state. In fact, due to the Eritrean state's pervasive domination of public life and orchestration of political expression and practice, the online public sphere created by the diaspora has no offline counterpart of free press or civil society within Eritrea. This essay argues that diaspora websites are an integral part of Eritrea's national politics. Websites are used by Eritreans as an ambiguous and elastic space that can serve at times to extend the nation and state sovereignty across borders, and at other times can be used as an extraterritorial space that is safe for civil society and dissent because of its location outside Eritrea and beyond the reach of the state. This shows, among other things, that the internet is not singular or universal in its effects on politics, but can produce quite opposite results based upon the distinctive ways people engage with it. Websites like Dehai, Asmarino, and Awate are public spaces where a range of political activities can take place. Websites bring publics and counterpublics into being, mobilize opinions and actions, and allow for collective debates and collaboration. Cyberspatial activities extend beyond the realm of the virtual, yielding material consequences even as they transform people's understanding of the nation and their places in it.

The Internet brings people into contact in a public agora, to voice their concerns and share their hopes. This is why people's control of this public agora is perhaps the most fundamental political issue raised by the development of the Internet. (Castells 2001, 164)

Websites created and sustained by Eritreans in the diaspora stand out as one of the most significant political initiatives taken by Eritreans independently of the state. The Eritrean diaspora has long been engaged in Eritrean politics and its members are recognized as Eritreans by the state that seeks to retain their loyalty and maintain the flow of remittances to Eritrea (Bernal 2004; Hepner 2009; Conrad 2005; Fessehatzion 2005). The diaspora contributed to Eritrea in an unexpected way, however, by establishing cyberspace as a site for Eritrean politics. Beginning in the early 1990s, Eritreans living in the US created a transnational public sphere in cyberspace for debating, chronicling, analyzing, and influencing Eritrean politics. Due to the Eritrean state's comprehensive orchestration of political expression and practice within Eritrea, the public sphere created online by the diaspora has no offline counterpart in Eritrea (Woldemikael 2008; Amnesty International 2004; Connell 1997). In creating Eritrean space online and an open forum for political participation, the diaspora achieved something not simply for themselves, but for the nation.

This essay contributes to an emerging body of literature on politics and new media as well as to the understanding of Eritrean politics since independence. I argue that websites can be seen as constituting a unique political space that can be both inside and outside of the nation at the same time. Diaspora websites are an integral part of Eritrea's national politics and therefore the understanding of Eritrea is incomplete without the inclusion of Eritrean activities in cyberspace. This study reveals that websites are used by Eritreans as an ambiguous and elastic space that can serve at times to extend the nation and state sovereignty across borders, and at other times can be used as an extraterritorial space

that is safe for civil society and dissent because of its location outside Eritrea and beyond the reach of the state. The use of websites as a space for Eritrean civil society has been particularly important since 2001 when the present era of government repression in Eritrea began with the imprisonment of journalists and high officials who had publicly expressed criticism of President Isaias Afewerki.

The online activities of Eritreans in the diaspora show that the internet offers much more politically than simply making information more accessible, providing a new means of fact-checking, and facilitating the creation of an informed citizenry that is so important to democracy. Websites like those established by Eritreans are public spaces where a range of political activities can take place. Dehai, Asmarino and Awate are products of Eritrean culture and history as much as they are products of digital technologies. The Eritrean diaspora has, moreover, engaged with these technologies in distinctive and evolving ways that relate to the changing conditions in Eritrea, including projects of nation-building, supporting the government's war effort, and mobilizing for political change in Eritrea. Cyberspatial activities extend beyond the realm of the virtual, mobilizing public opinion and actions, and putting pressure on national authorities. This essay, based upon a long-term research project, analyzes Eritrean activities online focusing on three major websites, starting with the earliest, Dehai, and continuing up to the present with Asmarino and Awate.

An emerging body of scholarship is providing a range of insights about how the internet might be transformative of politics in ways that go beyond simple issues of providing information or greater transparency (Dean 2009; Bernal in press; Boler 2008; Sreberny and Khiabany 2010). Some research suggests that with the rise of new media "government is simply one of many competing sites, albeit a powerful one, in which values and ideals are adapted, debated, reshaped, or nourished" (Norton 2003, 23). In the Eritrean case this de-centering effect of new media is particularly meaningful because of the top-down method of governing by the Eritrean state.

The regime of President Isaias Afewerki and the ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice controls media within Eritrea and mobilizes citizens in national projects but allows no space for independent organizing or expression by citizens on their own behalf (Hepner and O'Kane 2009; Kibreab 2009). As one scholar observes, "The Eritrean postliberation state is widely recognized to be strong, controlling, and mobilized" (Dorman 2005). Other observers, such as Human Rights Watch, put things in starker terms:

> The Isaias government has granted no independent civil society institution authority to operate. All labor organizations and youth and women groups are appendages of the ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). All news media are owned and closely supervised by the government, relentlessly used as instruments of propaganda. (HRW 2011, 1).

This political context makes diaspora websites particularly important. In fact, the regime has forced civil society into the diaspora and into the alternative public spaces created online. Through debates and dialogue among diverse interlocutors and through the vicarious participation of "lurkers" who are known to include members of the government, the websites have played a role in defining Eritrean identity, mobilizing support and opposition to the government, and constructing Eritrea as a nation (Bernal 2010, 2006, 2005).

In a seminal article, Becher and Wehner (2001, 69) discuss the internet in relation to civil society in terms that are well-suited to the analysis of Eritrean websites.

> By virtue of its interactive communication structure, the Internet may support the domain of public communication, which has been described as "civil society" in the context of theoretical discussion about modern democracy. The term "civil society" refers to a network of preinstitutional civil activities and assemblies as well as social movements and

pressure groups. . . These movements form an alternative public sphere, which influences both political decisions and the public opinion established by mass media system [sic]. In this way civil society generates partial forms of public opinion which are relatively open, close to the needs of citizens and which are characterized by rather elaborate levels of discussion.

The way Becher and Wehner define civil society is worth noting because they see it as including an array of phenomena that are deeply entwined with the public sphere.

In the Middle East, Eikelman and Anderson (2003, 5) found that the accessibility of new media widens the base of producers/ senders and "create(s) public space." The notion of public space has serious implications because it allows us to see that websites, for example, allow for more than simply greater access to information or cheaper communication; they serve as spaces that bring people together. The public space offered by websites is all the more important under conditions like those in Eritrea where public space is under government control and surveillance (Bozzini 2011).

In the context of Eritrea's authoritarian regime, what ordinary Eritreans in the diaspora have created through the establishment of a range of websites constitutes an increasingly vital dimension of Eritrean national politics. The websites serve as Eritrean public space not controlled by the government. No space for civil society to develop can be found within Eritrea's borders, but it has been created online. Whereas small groups created the various websites, their success as an online public sphere rests on the content that is contributed by a larger pool of posters, some of whom are loyal and prolific and others whose contributions are intermittent or fleeting, and an even larger pool of readers who constitute the public or publics that posts address.

Dehai and the Eritrean Internet in 1990s

Dehai was the first computer-mediated network of Eritreans and is now the longest-running Eritrean website. It has been part of Eritrean politics since 1992, the year before Eritrea was officially recognized as a nation. Dehai was established by a group of Eritreans in the diaspora in the US and by design it was devoted to Eritrean politics and nation-building. Eritrean activity on the internet thus has unfolded in tandem with Eritrea's postliberation development as a nation. Through participating in Dehai, Eritreans in the diaspora saw themselves as serving a larger national purpose and contributing ideas and expertise to the new nation. The Dehai charter, first posted on the website in 1995, defines the purpose of the site as follows: "The main objective is to provide a forum for interested Eritreans and non-Eritreans to engage in solving Eritrea's problems by sharing information, discussing issues, publicizing and participating in existing projects and proposing ideas for future projects" (Dehai 1995). A poster gives a sense of what this meant in practice when he writes:

> I recently joined Dehai believing I could freely, honestly, openly and responsibly discuss with my fellow Eritreans about issues that affect all of us. . . I specifically said 'don't email my private account' And the reason is obvious. I wanted everybody to participate in the discussion. (Dehai post December 14, 1996)

Another post states:

> Eritrea belongs to all Eritreans. We believe (we claim to) in diversity. Any Eritrean has got the right to air his opinion the way he sees fit without denying the right of others to air their opinion. (Dehai post June 9, 1997; parentheses original).

The website was not simply a forum for discussion, but a launching pad for action. One example is an annual fund-raising campaign for Eritrean war orphans run by Dehai. A 1996 post calling for contributions begins by praising the ties that bind Eritreans as "one people" and goes on to say:

> This is why I believe that whatever we set our minds to do, we can do it with tremendous success. . .The same goes for this annual fundraising. . . Our hearts hum the same song when it comes to the love and passion, the desire and wishes that we nurture for Eritrea. (Dehai post December 16, 1996, ellipses added)

From the outset, the online public sphere was never primarily about the diaspora or longings for home, but was rooted in a commitment to the Eritrean nation and a sense of responsibility for, as well as a stake in, its welfare.

A distinctive characteristic of the engagement of Eritreans in the diaspora with their homeland is their intense focus on politics. Other transnational populations may send remittances and remain deeply connected to their homeland but are less directly engaged in with national concerns and a relationship with the state (Miller and Slater 2000; Abusharaf 2002; Panagakos and Horst 2006). It goes without saying that Eritreans' transnational activities are not limited to the internet. In fact, Dehai built on what I have come to think of as a "world wide web of Eritrean nationalism" that preceded and extends beyond the internet (Al-Ali, Black, and Koser 2001; Hepner 2008; Bernal 2004; Fessehatzion 2005). However, most of the transnational linkages connecting Eritreans were organized by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) before independence from Ethiopia, and after independence by the state and the ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). In contrast, the development of Eritrean internet connections has been pioneered by ordinary Eritreans themselves acting on their own behalf. In fact, the PDFJ and Eritrea's Ministry of Information did not establish their own websites until years after diaspora

websites clearly had established the internet as a significant domain of Eritrean political activity. Dehai established Eritrean online culture, eventually spawning successful competitors, including Asmarino and Awate that drew posters and readers away from Dehai.

In the early 1990s when Dehai began, Eritreans were coming together in the heady days of nationalist victory to contribute to nation-building (Woldemikael 1991; Iyob 1995; Kibreab 2008). The earliest published mention of Dehai appears to be a 1996 essay that captures some of the exuberant optimism of that time:

> Finally, in 1993, the sun burst forth with a new Eritrea—a country which now has safe streets, no guns, and competent leaders who work for virtually no pay because there is little money for salaries. As Eritreans around the world discovered each other on the Net, they became a Greek chorus for the unfolding drama of their nation's birth. (Rude 1996, 19)

This representation is a bit misleading in its suggestion that Eritreans in the diaspora were mere bystanders, however, since the diaspora had been deeply engaged in supporting the fight for independence. All too soon, as we now know, Eritrea would become more like a Greek tragedy with the national pater familias (President Isaias) sacrificing his children (citizens). But, it seemed at the time that the wars against enemies internal and external were over, and the questions facing Eritreans were peacetime questions about development and institution-building. The information technologies revolution combined synergistically with the dream-come-true of national independence and the zeal of the diaspora. Ordinary citizens within Eritrea did not have access to the internet until cybercafes opened there in 2000, but people in government offices did. One effect of this is that posters had the sense of communicating not only to each other but to Eritrea's leadership. Eritreans not only believed that Dehai was read by members of the government, but that, as several people have told me, they

saw changes in government policy or practice in response to views expressed on Dehai. Throughout the 1990s Dehai worked in many ways as a transnational extension of the nation.

In the first decade of independence disappointments about progress toward democracy, moreover, could be dismissed as merely a question of time, rather than viewed as failures or betrayals on the part of President Isaias and the ruling PFDJ party. Until the new war with Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000 devastated and nearly defeated Eritrea, Eritreans understood their nation to be in a period of transition toward a promising future that remained open-ended. A four and a half page post responding to criticism of the government reflects this perspective:

> For those who are so determined to prove that the Eritrean Government's policies are loaded with injustices, unfair and undemocratic principles, I have some questions to ask. 1) Is your expectation of post-independence Eritrea to have a fully swinging democratic principles? For example, did you expect on May 24, 1991 [the day victorious EPLF troops marched into the capital city, now celebrated as Eritrean Independence Day] multi-party systems should have been installed? Free elections should have followed the next year? 2) Are you upset that there aren't jobs and jobs advertised where everyone is gainfully employed? . . . 4) Are you upset that there are not numerous newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations to allow people to say anything and everything they wish? . . . May 24, 1991 announced the end of our armed struggle and the dawn of freedom to Eritrea, but by all means, it didn't announce the end of our evolution as a nation and people. . . Other nations, such as the U.S. have evolved over many hundred years. . . (Dehai post October 8, 1998, ellipses added)

Even though its aim was to help Eritrea, Dehai was controversial and essentially unprecedented in Eritrean politics because in principle anyone could post their ideas and opinions. In practice, self-

censorship and harsh critiques created informal boundaries of what could openly be expressed. Nonetheless the degree of openness that Dehai offered was unusual. A post from 1998 on Dehai addresses the question of civil society and the role of Dehai in these terms:

> The main purpose of any group or civil discussion among citizens is simply to suggest the right doing and criticize the wrong doing, if there is any, so that things can be corrected and implemented the right way. Discussion and criticism is the main weapon of any civilized society to defeat ignorance. The "Dehai" internet communication is one of the examples that I am trying to explain. (October 22, 1998, Dehai post)

Dehai made possible a more participatory and less top-down engagement with nationalist projects. It was also unique that on Dehai, Eritreans of different generations, ethnicities, and religions could be interlocutors. Such a forum had no offline counterpart. One poster says:

> I would like to take this opportunity to compliment DEHAI for such a forum. Who would have thought that an online discussion between Eritreans and their political entities could be possible, and opposition political organizations banned by the current regime at that. (Dehai post February 8, 1997)

Through the 1990s, Dehai was the preeminent website for Eritreans around the globe. The website had an appeal for many Eritreans in the diaspora for multiple reasons. Dehai served as an Eritrean space where Eritrean concerns and current events were the focus, it connected Eritreans to each other collectively across borders and distances, and it allowed people to explore ideas and hopes for the kind of nation Eritrea could be, and to contribute to nation-building through sharing their ideas. At the end of the nineties, Eritreans in

the diaspora rallied online and in other locales to insure Eritrea's survival in the face of a new war with Ethiopia.

The potential for the virtual public sphere to have material effects for life on the ground in Eritrea was demonstrated dramatically when a border war with Ethiopia broke out in May 1998. Immediately, Dehai was largely given over to various war-related communications, and the website served, not simply as a source of breaking news, but as a site where activities could be publicized and actions mobilized. Posters in various locations shared the details of their fundraising and public relations efforts on behalf of Eritrea and urged other Eritreans everywhere to contribute to the war effort (Bernal 2004). Posters signed off with phrases like, "Lasting glory to our Martyrs," "Victory to our Defense Forces," "Demise to the Woyanes [derogatory term for Ethiopians]," "Proud to be Eritrean," "Victory to the people of Eritrea," and "Remember our Martyred Brothers and Sisters," sometimes writing these slogans in transliterated Tigrinya. War-time posts expressed intense nationalism and posters asserted the obligation of Eritreans wherever they were to come to the aid of their country. Dehai was instrumental in promoting a range of activities to support Eritrea's war effort, most notably fund-raising. In fact, Eritreans around the world sent hundreds of millions of dollars to the Eritrean government to help the country fight Ethiopia during the 1998–2000 border conflict.

The way in which Dehai mobilized and publicized activities in support of the war and served as a collective rallying point for dispersed Eritreans demonstrated the instrumentality of the internet to effect material outcomes. The most important of these was the financial support channeled from the diaspora for Eritrea's war effort, but there were also public relations and citizen diplomacy efforts to get Eritrea's side of the war story told, as well as demonstrations in Washington and UN headquarters among other places to call for international intervention on Eritrea's behalf. Dehai's founders stated that during the war, "our main aim was to saturate the web with Eritrean information because the lie machine

in Addis was operating nonstop, so we thought it was our national duty" (Asmerom et al 2001). Dehai's home page was redesigned to give prominence to the border conflict and to include a link entitled "Ethiopian lies" that focused on Ethiopia's representations in the media. To this day, Dehai's home page features a link titled "Demarcation Watch" that is continually updated with developments and negotiations over the designation of an official border between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Dehai reached its peak during the Border War. A new political era dawned in the aftermath of the war, however. Dissent which had remained muted during the crisis, broke out once the crisis had passed. As dissent and government repression within Eritrea intensified in the aftermath of the war, in cyberspace, where there was no central authority to clamp down on people, the common public sphere that Dehai had represented fragmented. An array of alternative websites emerged where dissent began to be made public. By that time the role of cyberspace as a significant sphere of Eritrean politics had been well established. After the war, rival websites, including Asmarino and Awate, rose to become particularly successful counterparts and competitors of Dehai. These websites responded to the lack of independent media within Eritrea, and the self-censorship that often characterized Dehai, offering an openness of expression not possible in any Eritrea-based medium. Particularly on the new websites, the internet began to serve less as an extension of national politics as defined by the leadership in Eritrea, and started to develop more into an alternative public sphere representing civil society perspectives, sometimes in opposition to the state. In 2000, moreover, a much wider range of Eritreans living in Eritrea first gained access to the internet in cybercafes and therefore could also join the ranks of readers and writers in Eritrean cyberspace.

Youth appeared to be the primary users of the few public and private cybercafes operating in Eritrea from my observations in 2001 shortly after they began operating. With greater access to the internet and the development of software for writing Ge'ez

script (the script used for Tigrinya, Eritrea's dominant language), as well as the expansion of English-language skills in Eritrea as a result of making English the language of instruction for secondary education, the possibility of posting from Eritrea has become ever more feasible.

   At present, there are some citizen posters from inside Eritrea. However, the diaspora still produces most of the online content, with the government and Eritreans within Eritrea acting as important audiences. As the regime of President Isaias Afewerki and his ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) has grown more repressive and militarized, the online public sphere, like the diaspora's relationship to Eritrea, has shifted. Dehai has remained largely a pro-government website and the ruling party even displays a link to Dehai on its home page as I write this in 2013. Among other things, this suggests that the government sees the diaspora websites as part of Eritrea's political field. Since 2001, websites like Asmarino and Awate have become a counterpoint to state authority and the national media it controls so tightly.

Dissent and the Rise of Asmarino and Awate

At the end of the Border War, political rifts emerged within the ruling circles of Eritrea. The war and the government's handling of it strained people's loyalties. The government's response to criticism was to crack down on any suspected critics. The diaspora was able to express themselves more freely and thus make the cracks in the façade of Eritrean unity more visible. What appeared to many observers to be a carelessness regarding the lives of its citizens in waging the Border War, contributed to the tidal shift in which Eritreans in the diaspora and their websites, particularly Asmarino and Awate, took on a new role as a counterpoint to the Eritrean

state. Online, Eritreans could articulate independent views and openly question the legitimacy of Isais Afewerki and the PFDJ. Over the past decade expressions of dissent have multiplied and the websites have taken on the role of a civil society outside Eritrea's borders, in sharp contrast to the absence of freedom of expression and civil society within Eritrea's borders.

Like Dehai, the new websites were created by Eritreans living in the US. The founder of Asmarino, Tesfaledet, explains that he founded the website in 1997 after visiting independent Eritrea for the first time, 22 years after leaving home as refugee. Tesfaledet was working in the field of technology and was excited by the possibilities that new developments in information technology might hold for Eritrea. As he says, "my heart was still there." In 1997, he traveled to Eritrea and met with government officials hoping to help Eritrea take advantage of digital communications. But authorities were resistant to his ideas. Failing to make headway in Eritrea, Tesfaledet established Asmarino.com on his own back in the US. At the time, he saw it as a way to help Eritrea (personal communication 2008). In the context of growing political discontent among Eritreans everywhere following the Border War, Asmarino began to attract posters and readers, taking some of the attention and talent away from Dehai where the atmosphere was less tolerant of dissent.

At this turning point in Eritrean politics, Awate.com was established and quickly became a significant website where information and analyses critical of the regime were posted. Awate's motto on its home page is: "Inform. Inspire. Embolden." The link "About us" on the website describes Awate's purpose as follows: "to serve as an anti-dote to the stifling propaganda of the Eritrean State media and its tentacles in Europe and North America." There it is stated that:

> The purpose of the State media and its tentacles is to promote the sole ruling party in Eritrea, the People's Front for Democracy & Justice (PFDJ) by exaggerating its meager

"accomplishments" and by hiding its catastrophic mistakes and crimes against the people of Eritrea. In contrast, the mission of awate.com is to provide Eritreans and friends of Eritrea with information that is hidden by the Eritrean regime and its surrogates; to provide a platform for information dissemination and opinion sharing; to discuss issues truthfully no matter whose ox is being gored; to inspire Eritreans, to embolden them into taking action, and finally to lay the groundwork for reconciliation whose pillars are the truth.

A 2004 post on Dehai criticizes Awate and Asmarino for having posted the names of those killed in the Border War (information which the government had withheld from the public), calling Awate and Asmarino "lowlife websites" and "the #1 enemy websites of the Eritrean people" (Dehai post December 17, 2004). This shows, among other things, the way struggles are waged on and among the websites over the boundaries of national authority and public discourse.

A long post on Asmarino presenting a detailed, critical analysis of the government's self-reliance policies included this observation:

[the government] confuses self reliance for a state's monopoly of various aspects of the nation's economy; not only does it try to free itself from foreign dependence but also, oddly enough, from internal dependence (that is, from dependence on its own population)–from its merchants, farmers, businessmen, fishermen, etc. (Asmarino August 29, 2005; parentheses original; material in brackets added)

This generated both praise and critiques, including a poster who disagreed with the analysis, asserting among other things that, "Eritrea is a country with potential to be more than she is now, although she is better than all the countries in our region" (Asmarino post August 30, 2008). Another poster responded along lines suggesting, as Eritrea's leaders often claim, that any critique

benefits Eritrea's enemies and threatens Eritrea's existence, saying "PIA [President Isaias Afewerki] will pass like any leader and the current GoE [Government of Eritrea] will change as well like any government. In the meantime, we will side with the GoE, not with our bloody and deadly enemies…NO NO NO!" (Asmarino post August 30, 2008; material in brackets added).

A post on Awate from a citizen writing from inside Eritrea decries various conditions in Eritrea that are so far from what liberation was expected to achieve, and adds: "Forgotten is the principle of Justice, equality, progress, peace and democracy. If you have written Democracy and justice on all the sign posts of PFDJ offices in all Asmara and the towns of Eritrea it is enough" (Awate post November 9, 2006). There is some subtle humor intended since the D and J in PFDJ stand for 'Democracy' and 'Justice.' A ten-page single-spaced post presents a scathing critique of the Eritrean government and conditions in Eritrea before making this recommendation near the end:

> The forces of positive change opposing the regime in Eritrea should focus on articulating a convincing political agenda, organizing and leading the people whom they represent in peaceful disobedience, creating a culture of resistance and preparing opportunities for peace by opening a negotiated exit option for Mr. Isaias Afeworki for exile and exemption from local justice thereby paving the ground for democratic elelctions and majority rule that will safeguard individual rights as well as the interests of minority national groups. (Awate post January 6, 2009)

Many posts are several pages long and some posters even write long essays in installments. These excerpts from websites can only convey some of the form and content that are both vast and varied.

Paradoxically, the repression of dissent within Eritrea heightens the importance of the online public sphere, since it provides one of the only conduits through which Eritreans and the Eritrean leadership can gain insights from the critical opinions and analyses

expressed by Eritreans themselves. Critics of the PFDJ and President Isaias remain obsessively committed to nationalist politics as they continue to post their views and seek to sway public opinion among Eritreans. Since there is no independent media or citizen's public sphere within Eritrea, the websites created by Eritreans in the diaspora serve as a crucial public space where independent perspectives can be developed and circulated.

In late January 2013 rumors of an attempted coup in Eritrea circulated widely. The traffic to Awate.com as a result was so great the website could not handle it and was out of service for several days. Meanwhile a visit to the official website of Eritrea's Ministry of Information, Shabait, found no mention of any kind about the political events. Instead beneath its motto, "Serving the Truth," was the headline: "Preparation underway in the Eastern Escarpment in the Central Region to plant temperate fruits" (*Shabait* January 27, 2013). The diaspora websites serve the nation as an alternative public sphere and a space for civil society.

Conclusion

Eritreans in the diaspora have created in cyberspace a public sphere of citizenship and belonging more successful in achieving democratic form than any within Eritrea. In this way, the websites do not merely meet the diaspora's needs for connection to Eritrea and to other Eritreans, but provide something for all Eritreans (whether in the diaspora or "at home") that their government has refused to provide—an open public sphere and a space for citizens to engage autonomously in politics. Posters who write from within Eritrea's borders are still a small minority compared to those in the diaspora who contribute most of the content, but readers in Eritrea, particularly urban and educated populations, circulate content to wider audiences in various ways including word of mouth. Dehai,

Asmarino, Awate, and similar websites make new forms of political participation and expression possible.

Websites bring publics and counterpublics into being, mobilize opinions and actions, and allow for collective debates and collaboration. The websites are unique in that they allow Eritrean professionals and high school graduates, Muslims and Christians, women, and people of different generations, classes, and ethnicities to engage one another and be part of the same discursive community through shared reading and writing online. Even those who may feel too intimidated or not entitled to post have access to a wide range of others' views which they would not otherwise have.

Online, Eritreans can practice the kinds of public debate and non-violent political conflict they would like to see take place in Eritrea's public sphere but does not happen there due to government control. The repression in Eritrea under the Isaias regime, thus, has not only caused Eritreans to flee their country as an earlier generation once did in flight from Ethiopian oppression and war, but has forced civil society into the diaspora and into the alternative public spaces created online. Eritreans in the diaspora locate themselves within the broader context of Eritrean nationhood, rather than outside of it, and Eritreans in the diaspora continue to figure in the national imaginary of Eritrea on the part of Eritrea's leaders.

Online activities extend beyond the realm of the virtual, blurring the boundaries between the diaspora and the nation, and exerting influence on political understandings and actions. Dehai, Awate and Asmarino have had material consequences—fundraising for development, aid, and war, and mobilizing political activities, and demonstrations. The way in which they foster new political analyses and subjectivities is no less vital. It seems that politics, like so many other domains of human life, is fundamentally about stories. Narratives make actions and policies meaningful and serve to legitimate political positions and goals or conversely to construct them as dangerous and wrong. Websites offer a site where such stories are not simply told, but constructed, contested, and

collectively revised through the give and take of multiple interlocutors.

The websites, moreover, allow for communication from Eritreans to their leaders (who are known to read posts and even, it is rumored, to sometimes participate under assumed names or via individuals acting as their spokespeople). In some sense, however, this aspect of political communication from "the common man" to state authorities is the obvious one that scholars identify as political and on which much attention is focused. However, studies of the public sphere make clear that ordinary people discussing, producing analyses, and debating among themselves is itself a vital political activity (Habermas 1992; Fraser 1992; Warner 2005). Eritreans in the diaspora have created public, communal spaces in cyberspace so that instead of each individual relating to the state and grappling with Eritrea's turbulent history and present privately or among a small local group of compatriots, these events and activities are valorized, discussed, and critiqued and thus made meaningful as social rather than individual experiences. Given the imprisonment of journalists within Eritrea, the shutting down of the short-lived independent press in September 2001, and the growing record of jailing anyone suspected of dissent, and practices of surveillance (Tronvoll 2009; Bozzini 2011), the analysis and criticism voiced by the diaspora in cyberspace is essentially without any counterpart in Eritrean political culture.

Eritrean nation-building remains an unfinished project as national independence in itself did not result in democracy. The Eritrean Constitution has yet to be implemented, opposition parties are not allowed to form, and there are no legitimate channels of dissent or independent civil society organizations within the country. Eritreans' concern for the nation is also related to the fact that the nation and national institutions are still forming. It remains fragile, vulnerable. The nation could fragment along religious lines, for example, and it could be invaded by Ethiopia or attacked by other neighbors. The regime of President Isaias could fall to a military coup as apparently was attempted in January 2013. Eritrea's

stability and nationhood cannot be taken for granted. Its viability as a nation, economically and politically, remains in question in practice if not in principle.

Many questions remain unresolved because Eritrea is still a young state whose future continues to unfold in surprising ways, and whose present and future remain shrouded due to the lack of transparency about everything that happened in the nationalist struggle under the EPLF's leadership as well as about government decision-making and the operation of the regime since independence. As a result, people continue to be drawn to the websites in search of answers, explanations, partial truths, information, opinions, and analyses, and even new questions about the future and the past of Eritrea and Eritreans. Eritrean diaspora websites are sites of creativity that continue to generate novel ideas and activities. The websites reveal the creative strategies of the less powerful to construct new spaces and strategies of political participation and to expand the boundaries of what can be publicly expressed.

Eritrea's future is unpredictable but holds possibilities in new generations, new waves of the diaspora, and also new websites. In all of these lie the potential for new stories and perspective to emerge and new national narratives to be constructed. Future waves of Eritrean migrants and generations of Eritreans, in Eritrea and in the diaspora, will likely participate in and transform Eritrean cyberspace. Technological advances will also bring different possibilities for what can take place in online spaces. One day websites may be established by Eritreans in Eritrea that rival or complement those established by the diaspora. The challenges facing Eritreans at present are significant and, as the example of Egypt demonstrates so sadly, democracy does not arise simply, even once a dictator has been deposed. What can websites offer in the face of histories of war and the on-going potential for violent conflict? Perhaps something very valuable—the possibility to fight with words rather than guns, and not so much lasting peace, as perhaps what is even more important for democracy and

development, the possibility of on-going dialogues among those with diverse and conflicting perspectives.

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The Catch-22 of Resistance: Jokes and the Political Imagination of Eritrean Conscripts

DAVID M. BOZZINI

Abstract

Because of authoritarianism, almost no collective protests or acts of resistance have emerged since 2001 in Eritrea. Dissidence manifests itself only through indiscipline, obstruction, desertion, and exile. Expressions of discontent and condemnation are carefully concealed in private spheres. This article presents and analyzes how Eritrean conscripts perceive and criticize the political arena and state power in their country by analyzing a corpus of discourse and jokes they share among each other about the state, the government, and its policies. In accounting for this form of resistance, this article documents how these views and their humor, in challenging the legitimacy and the hegemony of the political elites, often contribute to the reification and accentuation of certain characteristics of state power.

The Eritrean Postrevolutionary State and National Service[1]

God surveys the world one day, seeing the mountains, valleys, seas,

and all there is. Suddenly, God stops and exclaims: "Why is Eritrea so green? I specifically made that country dry and yellow!" The angel Gabriel leans over and whispers: "My Lord, those are army uniforms."

Recounted in an article by the journalist Jack Kimball (2008), this joke refers to the ongoing militarization of Eritrea. It is one among many jokes that conscripts share in murmuring to people they trust. On the brink of collapsing after the war against Ethiopia (1998–2000), the Eritrean political leadership managed to reorganize itself through violence and repression. In 2001, freedom of the press was suspended, journalists were arrested, university students who raised concerns were sent to desert camps for several months, and the PFDJ[2] was purged of the contenders of President Isaias Afwerki. Undeclared martial law was enforced, and thenceforth arbitrariness, despotic modalities of governance, and erratic and unstable rules defined the postrevolutionary Eritrean state (Bozzini 2011a).

Demobilization of the soldiers who participated in the war was delayed: of the 350,000 soldiers counted in 2001 (World Bank 2002), only 104,400 were demobilized in 2006.[3] Tens of thousands of new recruits continued to be conscripted each year to national service (in Tigrinya, *hagärawi ợagälglot*).[4] Mandatory for both male and female citizens aged 18, such mobilization, although legally limited to 18 months, has become permanent. Nowadays, national service represents the central pillar of the national developmental campaign known as Wofri Warsai-Yikealo,[5] which aims to reconstruct a country devastated by the recent war (Rena 2008). In reality, it aims above all to implement a planned economy through forced labor (Gaim 2009) and to facilitate the authoritarian control of most social activities. This militarization of Eritrean society reflects the party's and government's obsession with security policies, founded in the three decades of struggle for independence and justified by the absence of a border demarcation with Ethiopia (Bundegaard 2004; Dorman 2005; Pool 2001; Reid 2005; Iyob 1995).

By forcing conscripts to serve permanently in its civilian and

military institutions, the state considerably limits the lives of young adults in Eritrea.[6] Boarding schools prepare them for the service (Debessay 2003; Riggan 2009), and conscription organizes the masses: a forced one when citizens abide by the rules, or a prosecuted one if they do not; however, the modes of surveillance and control by the state never cease to change and induce a multiplicity of uncertainties for the young Eritreans who have to live with national service (Bozzini 2011a, 2011b). Ranked at the bottom of public service, conscripts find themselves in a situation of dependence and vulnerability, which offers them limited perspectives for the future: "Eritrea set up one of the most massive youth mobilization efforts ever seen in Africa. . . In the eye of the governing circles, the young generation has no agency and no autonomy but must continue to follow the precepts of nation-building as defined by the leaders" (Abbink 2005, 28).

Since the end of the conflict and the repressive measures of 2001, overt criticism and complaints about politics and state agents have been considered risky practices, and over the last decade, almost no collective contestations, such as protests or strikes, have occurred in Eritrea,[7] but as the joke given above indicates, conscripts subvert the official policies and narratives. If most of them are willing to serve the country for a time, it is obvious that nobody agrees to serve indefinitely without having future career prospects (Bozzini 2011a; Gaim 2013). It is therefore no surprise that such a situation has led to a massive exodus of conscripts.[8] This illustrates two important dynamics. First, it shows that many Eritreans of an age to be conscripted do not conform to the nationalist and official rationale for extraordinary mobilization (the current stalemate of the border demarcation with Ethiopia). Second, it indicates that desertion and clandestinity in Eritrea are not a sustainable option for many of them, especially for male conscripts.[9] If desertion is without doubt the most remarkable act of resistance[10] to the state leadership and its militaristic ideology, this article aims at analyzing subtler forms of dissidence that occur, almost beyond sight, inside Eritrea. The performances of resistance and protest by conscripts

in reaction to government policies and party propaganda are quite limited and carefully concealed from the public arena.[11] Nonetheless, they are widespread and performed on a daily basis by conscripts, accounting thus for their relative agency and autonomy. In this respect, acts of resistance have to be understood in the sense that James Scott gives to them: an infrapolitics composed of daily insubordinations performed behind the scene. This kind of insubordination is the most common and widespread form of resistance since it requires no coordination, and it limits the risk of sanctions by avoiding direct confrontation (Scott 1990).

Several scholars have analyzed such forms of resistance and protests in Eritrea, ranging from disapproval about indefinite national service (Bozzini 2011a; Müller 2012a; Treiber 2009) and several other policies (Müller 2008; O'Kane 2012; Riggan 2009, 2013a, 2013b; Woldemikael 2009; Reid 2009; Poole 2013) to protest behaviors such as falsifications, draft dodging, conscientious objection, and illegal departure from Eritrea (Bozzini 2011b; Hirt and Saleh Mohammad 2013; Treiber 2004).[12] In the same vein, this article draws on the undeniable but relative agency and autonomy that conscripts have in relation to the state and the party's ideology. It explores, in particular, the ways in which conscripts subvert and question the social order defined by the political elites. Previous studies have already pointed at forms of ambiguity fraught in similar performances;[13] however this article aims at highlighting that resistance and discontent sometimes strengthen the power they criticize.

Outline for a Catch-22

Drawing especially on conscripts' talk about and representation of the state and its leaders, this article investigates conscripts' political imagination in the sense that "allows us to write about the ways political life is being thought, without presupposing that all such

representations are attached to the hidden motives or economic interests of powerful groups. . . The political imagination does not only interact with ideologies, it subsumes them, i.e. it creates a greater arena within which ideologies exist" (Humphrey 2002, 259). Political imagination involves the production of narratives of history, the interpretations of national crises, and the invention of new forms of citizenship (Bernal 2005, 161–163). Speaking of imagination in this sense does not mean that conscripts' representations of politics and state power are inaccurate: political imagination is not necessarily a fantasy, but something constituted and justified by practical experiences.

Conscripts' political imagination consists of portraits, opinions, explanations, theories, and jokes concerning the functioning of the bureaucracy, their superiors, and their position relative to a system that they define, despise, criticize, and sometimes justify. Two remarks are necessary with regard to the sorts of discourse selected here. First, though rumors and gossip are integral to political imagination, I do not include them in the corpus analyzed in this article. The specificities of their subversive dynamics (prediction and disclosure) and their involuntary effects (uncertainties produced by circulating several contradictory versions and ostracism) would have extended the discussion far beyond the limits imposed for an article.[14] Second, I include political jokes in the corpus despite the distinctiveness attributable to their fictive dimension. On the one hand, discussion on the role of humor has a long tradition in scholarship on authoritarian and totalitarian regimes (Fitzpatrick 1999; Krikmann and Laineste 2009; Thurston 1991). Beyond the contested functionalist perspective, which recognizes humor as a safety valve useful to individuals experiencing great pressure (Draitser 1989), jokes have served as an indicator proving that people cannot be considered simply as helpless victims of an authoritarian regime (Scott 1985; Thurston 1991; Visani 2004), but indeed have the agency to distance themselves from the dominant representations and to act according to their own will, at least to a certain extent.[15] On the other hand,

scholars have underlined the importance of analyzing humor because it often "expands the range of what can be publicly expressed" and reveals and represents "an underlying reality not normally perceived or publicly acknowledged" (Bernal 2013, 304; Boyer and Yurchak 2010). If, generally speaking, the tendency in the literature is to emphasize the potentially transformative power of humor, this article underlines that political jokes, as well as other kinds of subversive talk, have a catch: howsoever subversive, they might inadvertently promote some of the dynamics and elements that they are contesting. This dilemma is found in an intrinsic political paradox in these performances of resistance, and it is similar in form to what the aviator Yossarian faces in Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* ([1961] 1999), which has inspired the title of this article.[16] I show therefore, that conscripts' representations contesting the state's power and leadership sometimes contribute to what they fundamentally challenge.

In this perspective, conscripts' subversive talk contributes in different ways to the accentuation, essentialization, and externalization of state power, and performs conscripts' subaltern relationship regarding this power. Resistance thus clearly differentiates conscripts from the state, but this distinction is far from being obvious, since conscripts are actually the main workforce of state institutions. In other words, subversive talk contributes to the shaping of the state as a powerful and abstract entity, set apart from society (Mitchell 1991). Drawing on Foucault's analysis of the micropower of disciplines (Foucault 1979), Mitchell argues that this abstracting effect is the result of processes such as "spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance" (1991, 95). These are essentially institutional processes promoted by leaders and experts such as military commanders and executive officers. The ethnographic material presented in this article shows, however, that radically different kinds of performances, which I call micropolitics of indiscipline, account also for the same effect. Representations and performances of people as ordinary as those presented in this

article not only are the consequences of ideologies and policies on the ground, but play "a central role in the formation of the state, and more generally in the production of politics" (Bayart 2005, quoted in Cinnamon 2012, 190). In this perspective, expression of resistance and protest are sometimes more than nuanced and ambiguous (O'Kane 2012; Treiber 2009), and involuntary support of the power of political elites goes beyond self-censorship (Scott 1990), forced compliance, political passiveness, and financial flows (Müller 2012b; Reid 2009). The state is a complex, heterogeneous actant (in the sense of actor–network theory), constituted by both phenomenological and institutional realities (Abrams 1988; Aretxaga 2000; Navaro-Yashin 2005, 2007), which are the result of a complex, changing, and performing network of representations, affects, and processes that sometimes go far beyond the formal limits of state institutions as usually defined. The state, understood as a network composed of a multitude of heterogeneous elements, is always determined by events, measures, and representations that are temporarily the object of an anthropological analysis.

This article is based on two years of fieldwork in Eritrea (2005–2007), where I interviewed and lived with people enrolled in national service and working in civil institutions such as schools, ministries, and other state offices.[17] The ethnographic material presented here is based on inquiries conducted in 2006 with male Tigrinya conscripts of high-school or college education and of Christian background, aged from twenty-one to forty years old. Most of them were urbanites, but a few were raised in rural areas of the highlands (*kābäsa*) until they joined the national service after military training. Therefore, this study does not account for perspectives from freedom fighters, higher state officers, civilians of an older generation, Tigrinya women, exiles, and individuals from other ethnic groups. Similar views were shared by Tigrinya, including some who had been deported from Ethiopia in 1999–2000, and Djeberti individuals whom I met during my stay in Eritrea and by several deserters of different backgrounds whom I met in Europe. Jokes and excerpts of dissent-enacting discourse were

mainly collected informally in Asmara among small groups of friends, at home, strolling, sitting in cafés, or during celebrations such as weddings and saints' commemorations (*ngdät*). Restricted access to state offices and the utmost precaution of my respondents, in relation to their practices of resistance and their strategies of circumvention at work, have determined another limitation of this study. Such practices are thus less analyzed than the subversive talk and political jokes that they shared with me.[18] Discussions were held in English and sometimes in Tigrinya. For obvious reasons and to respect the will of my research participants, names and personal details, such as place of assignment, have been altered or omitted.

The Limits of Open Defiance and Criticism

Acts of defiance have been rare in Eritrea since 2001.[19] Nevertheless, conscripts dare sometimes to resist their chiefs or their assignment in national service. Such acts occur mostly in the form of indiscipline or obstruction at the individual level and are either veiled or trivial. For instance, conscripts assigned to teach in schools delay their return to work after weekends or summer or national holidays, knowing that usually their superiors are unable to take significant retaliation against them (Riggan 2013b). At most, their pay can be suspended for some months, but for many, the amount it represents is negligible compared to the benefit of additional days spent with relatives at home.[20] Conscripts deliberately omit to pass on information, they hide and distort their knowledge when others claim technical difficulties, or they deliberately fail to find an answer to the lack of equipment in order to limit their commitment at work. Common forms of sabotage occur when, for example, trainees in information technology or in engineering intentionally fail to use equipment with the required care; some refuse to do so when they believe that their expertise

and work are crucial for the population, as with regard to prospecting for water and drilling wells.

Everyday forms of insubordination are rarely straightforward and almost never collective. They often take shape silently and behind the scenes to limit the risk of sanctions; however, miscalculations happen, and their consequences change the life course of those who, like Kiflom, are unmasked. Kiflom was assigned as a technician to a ministry in Asmara. He was in charge of setting up a complex database. While the technical challenge was of some interest for him, he was reluctant to work for the institution to which he was assigned. For many months, he delayed the development of this database. Invited to present the progress of his assignment, he announced that he could not realize the project as it had been specified. The office manager threatened him, but he answered that the project must be reevaluated because it was infeasible for technical reasons. The next day, the manager summoned him again, but this time he showed him an arrest warrant. Scared by the intimidation, Kiflom decided to conceal his fear under a smile, took the warrant, and surrendered at the nearest police station. He explained his conduct to me in two different ways: first, he assumed that the arrest would be of short duration since his boss was in need of his skills; second, he declared that if he had displayed his fear, that would only have produced the effect his superior wanted: "To act like a chicken would have only increased his power. I should only smile in front of his stupidity." He spent two weeks in prison, during which he decided that there were no viable alternatives for him to stay in Eritrea. A few months after his release, he was in Khartoum, Sudan. The importance of the discretionary powers of conscripts' superiors and the absence of any genuine means of recourse define conscripts' high dependency on the managers of the institutions to which they are assigned (see also Riggan 2013b).

Such acts of resistance are limited and performed so as to be rarely detectable, but it is more usual to hear criticism and subversive discourse about the state, its policies, and its leadership; however, such eruption of resentment remains carefully confined to

narrow spaces, such as small groups of friends or relatives. Every breach of this rule quickly makes its way around the city. Once at home, after a day working in the ministry where he was assigned, Gyorgis recounted a joke related to the unusual practice of raising critiques in public:

> A well-known fool enters a bar of Asmara. Some customers sitting at a table recognize him and invite him over: "Hey Mister *Kusto* [So-and-So], come sit with us and have a chat." The fool stops and declines the invitation solemnly: "No, thank you. I know you well. Before, the Amhara [Ethiopian ethnic group, but here in extenso, the former rulers before independence] were shooting people before they could open their mouths. Now the Tigrinya [the current government, impersonated by its president of Tigrinya origins] let you talk first. . . but afterward they shoot you as well." For some time, nobody dares speak in the bar, and the fool sits alone at a free table.

According to Gyorgis, only mentally disturbed individuals can so openly and strongly denounce the current political situation. The Derg of Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, ruled with cruel and blind violence over the Eritrean people, but the story accounts for more treacherous violence exercised by the current government.[21] The joke, coupled with Gyorgis's assessment, represents a microtheory about the limits of freedom of speech in contemporary Eritrea: condemnatory opinions on governance and government obviously exist, but their utterance always must be carefully concealed. James Scott offers two concepts that help shed light on the discursive duplicity performed by most Eritreans. There exists both a discourse façade, which can be disclosed at any time in public spaces, and conversations that surface only under certain limited conditions—what Scott calls public and hidden transcripts (Scott 1990). Absence of freedom of speech has become central in arguing for a distinction between the era before 2001 and the present. Filipos, assigned since 1996 to various offices in Asmara as a

conscript, critically recounted from his own experience with officials: "Before [2001], we knew more or less what to abide by [concerning the law and the bureaucracy], but now even the question 'why?' has disappeared from the Tigrinya language. It has become risky to ask questions to an official."

The Totalitarian State: An Epic Theory of Political Power

Critiques, railleries, and jokes justify limitations on conscripts' ability to challenge their rulers, affirming their helplessness. As in many other countries, the top level of the state is central in the political imagination.[22] In the view of most Eritreans, President Isaias Afwerki and his close consultants sit above the government agencies, and since the events of 2001, the President's Office has been considered dissociated from the rest of the state and the party apparatus. The common picture of the state displays an autocracy in which no devolution of power exists. Officials and conscripts assume that even ministers need to call the office of the president before making significant decisions or when they have to deal with a workload out of their routine. Accordingly, many people also declare—sometimes joking, sometimes in a depressed mood—that "only one head thinks" in Eritrea, referring to the president. These views illustrate a widespread perception of an extreme centralization and personification of state power.

Mandatory and indefinite national service in state institutions, repressive policies such as military raids and pervasive controls, and an uneven bureaucracy and unexpected state measures particularly shape conscripts' representations of state power and dynamics. State arbitrariness is interpreted in many different ways, but stress produces in conscripts the experience of insecurity and uncertainty. It is widely believed, for instance, that the government

disseminates false rumors to destabilize the population and that other hidden agendas to promote terror are at play. Conscripts' attempts to understand uneven and arbitrary measures accordingly prioritize state officials' agency and rational causality—the leadership's carefully and well-designed evil plan—over blatant institutional shortcomings and systemic bureaucratic dysfunction. Associated with the perception of the personification of state power, the inconstancy of rules, the arbitrary volte-faces, and bureaucratic blockages are often explained as a deliberate and Machiavellian presidential agenda or as the result of the well-known lunatic temperament of Isaias Afwerki. The malicious influence of the president is depicted in jokes that portray him as an evildoer or the enemy of the nation. These are two characteristic examples that I collected while talking with friends who had completed their university degree and were recently assigned in national service in Asmara. The discussion took place only among us on a saint's-day celebration (*ngdät*, generally commemorated in a distinctive neighborhood or a village) in a calm corner of the compound (*kanshelo*, from Italian *cancello* 'gate') of a relative of one of them. The first one is based on the internationally famous clock-in-heaven joke; the other was elaborated from the rumor that Isaias Afwerki had to undergo a critical medical intervention shortly after independence:

> It's a very hot day in paradise. In one of the offices of the divine administration, an official is doing the inventory of a collection of clocks. Every clock represents a president in power on earth. Every time one of them commits a crime, the hand of the clock advances by a minute. This is how God keeps track of presidential misdeeds. All the clocks are there except for Isaias's. The official searches and then panics because he can't find it anywhere. Finally, he decides to report the disappearance to God personally. Surprised by the well-working air conditioning in God's office, our official reconsiders his actions and excuses himself for having

bothered God for nothing. Isaias's clock was in fact standing on the divine desk, with its minute hand nicely ventilating the office.

In 1993, only shortly after independence, President Isaias flies to Israel to undergo medical treatment. The doctors heal him, but unfortunately, they transfuse him with Israeli blood. This explains why, after returning to Eritrea, he turned violently against the population: for him, the Eritreans have become Palestinians living in the occupied territories.

Here, jokes reverberate in fiction the fearfulness of a political situation that is rarely explicit otherwise. Despite facing severe insecurity, conscripts do not express their own unease; they prefer to talk about others' fears. Dread of the president is neither restricted to fantasy nor experienced by conscripts only. Salomon, at that time a secretary in a ministry, remembered his official visit to Sawa military camp on a graduation day:

Last weekend, I got close to the big boss [Isaias] and saw for myself how everyone reacts to him and how he behaves. It was funny: some generals were shaking while greeting him. He behaves like a demigod.

In jokes, fear is nevertheless not sticking only to the power of the president but can be a more diffuse feeling, related to state governance as a whole and its repressive character in particular. Several jokes cover this topic, which underlines the authoritarianism of the regime; some portray repression and mock torture, as the following example, famous among conscripts, suggests:

The roundups have managed to conscript all Eritrean youth, and so the police have started rounding up the carnivores. One day, a monkey arrives in Wadi Sherifa in Sudan [location of the UNHCR screening center]. The other refugee animals

are surprised and ask the monkey why he's decided to flee Eritrea, and the monkey replies: "Why should I rot in jail and be tortured until they find out that monkeys like me are not carnivores?"

The jokes and opinions presented in this section expose and subvert the current political situation in different ways: while official propaganda ceaselessly recounts unity in harmony, trust in the leadership, and significant national development, another political imagination underlines an autocracy by referring to the patent concentration and perversion of state power in the president's hands. At least partially, jokes and sometimes other narratives account for the dread that conscripts and bureaucrats experience–and at last, the conscripts most vulnerable to military raids (*giffa*) and arbitrary incarceration underline the absurdity and arbitrariness of state repression.

   All these subversive statements justify practices of concealment by articulating legitimate reasons for contestation while observing a life-saving silence. In doing so, they reinforce and make visible the existence of a necessary double game, manifested in the distinction between a public and a hidden discourse–a duplicity that can be overcome only by exile. Critiques constitute an emic representation of a totalitarian state, a representation that shares key attributes with the classical and debatable definition of the concept: the state, both arbitrarily and extremely centralized, enforces repressive measures that generate terror and exert total control over the population (Arendt 1968; Ian Kershaw in Traverso 2001). If these jokes and other hidden transcripts undoubtedly create a space for political critique, it seems unlikely that such space constitutes a real challenge to the leaders, considering that such political imagination underlines many reasons for not opposing the political order. From this perspective, it is clear that a political leadership that lost its legitimacy and the genuine public support it had enjoyed at the time of independence can be seen as successful in having induced such representations of the state to the population. Such a catch-22

represents a good example of the manifestation of a structural constraint that does "not operate independently of the motives and reasons that agents have for what they do" (Giddens 1986, 181). Occurrences of such self-restraint are located not only in the discursive realm of funny stories and hidden transcripts: beliefs, rumors, prefigurations, and anticipations, as well as other strategies of risk avoidance, constantly delineate the boundaries of bureaucratic maneuvers, claims, and encounters that one dares not cross (Bozzini 2014).

Along these lines, a magistrate in a regional court explained to me why he hoped never to experience the most perilous situation he could imagine in his profession: to lead a judicial investigation into the police regarding an unlawful arrest. Despite the fact that, as he himself acknowledged, most incarcerations infringe the penal and procedural laws promulgated by the state, he noticed that nobody had filed such a lawsuit in his court so far. Here is his explanation:

> People have their ideas about who's working in court. For them, I'm part of the system. They don't believe that the courts have a certain degree of independence. They think it would be meaningless and even dangerous for them to bring sensitive affairs before the court. In doing so, the people help us; they protect us from the government. The people are stopped before they get everybody in trouble.

The self-restraint of potential plaintiffs represents a blessing for the magistrates: it is because people believe that they are somehow "part of the system" that they are not obliged to face a dilemma that might expose them; however, this perspective suggests that being part of the system does not necessarily mean that all potential plaintiffs assume that magistrates are genuinely and blindly perpetuating injustice. Political imagination about state dynamics might be much more sophisticated: potential plaintiffs might be wise not to file certain lawsuits by simply acknowledging that the magistrates would be most likely obliged to dismiss some claims and

to act contrary to the rule of law in order to save their job, their freedom, and maybe even their life.

Staging Conscripts' Own Domination

Taking into consideration conscripts' own reasons for self-censorship, this section shows how they discursively perform their subalternity and subsequently attribute power to other specific state agents, externalizing thus the structural constraints that they experience and perform themselves. In positioning themselves in such a power relationship, they contribute to defining the contour of an apparent absolute state domination. They assert and perform their subalternity in representing themselves as helpless and passive. The position of subordination in which they perceive themselves is depicted in two kinds of discourse closely related to each other: the first acknowledges the hardship and privation they experience, while the second emphasizes their status in state institutions and their relationship with other state agents.

Conscripts declare that national service obliges them to interrupt their studies, to postpone starting a family, to survive with almost no income, and to be helpless in supporting their relatives–in particular, their family elders. Prolonged national service and its privations can be frustrating, and the absence of attractive prospects ruins conscripts' morale. Gyorgis, in his village to attend a relative's wedding, compared the happiness of his childhood with his current situation:

> When I was a boy and still lived in the village, there were a lot of games [sʾwäta] and sports [sport] that we organized within the family or among neighbors. The most propitious period was the one between the end of harvest and the beginning of Christmas [lädät]. In this period, the village was full of people. It was the time when the truck drivers came back to

spend a couple of weeks with their families. In my region, we played *qarsa*, *şädäd*, or *gäbäta*, but now, because of the situation and the service, the people are tired: they have neither energy nor the right spirit to have fun when they come back home. They are dry [*neqisom ʾyom*].

Similarly, Haile, recently assigned to work in a ministry in Asmara, commented about the fate of his generation:

During a honeymoon, relatives and friends came to visit the young couple, and together they played *goytay ʾmbäytäy* [my king, my queen], but now this doesn't happen anymore. Those who excelled at this game are either martyred or are in national service and are tired. They don't have the capacity to have fun. Even honeymoons are becoming rare: if you get married, you return straightaway to the service.

There is no doubt that national service and the war against Ethiopia have created a situation that has deeply affected individuals and social relationships, but these opinions have two important implications. First, in making a strong distinction between traditions and state interventions, Haile and Gyorgis separate the social into two opposed spheres: evil politics on one side and virtuous but fragile popular culture on the other. In doing so, they both accuse exclusively the state leadership of having spoiled positive cultural values and practices and imply that communities have been largely unable to attenuate the consequences of the state policies.[23] The nostalgia felt by Haile and Gyorgis points at a second important belief: longing for a social life that existed before the outbreak of the war. This exemplifies the pessimism conveyed by conscripts. Often, the current state of affairs appears irreparable to them. In addition, the idea of an inevitable deterioration of one's capacity caused by prolonged national service is conveyed in a joke that portrays conscripts as sportive cats:

The Eritrean cats win all the medals at the feline Olympics.

> Everyone is astonished, and the journalists hurry to meet the glorious feline athletes to learn the Eritrean secret. One of the Eritrean cats unveils the mystery: "In our country, the national service has given us the appearance of cats, but in reality, we are all leopards. This is why we won all the medals."

Apart being obviously less sturdy than leopards, cats (*dmu*) are generally despised in Eritrea, where "Cat face" (*dmu gäs̀*) is a common insult in Tigrinya. On the contrary, leopards (*näbri*) and lions (*ạmbäsa*) usually refer to brave and courageous individuals. This joke alludes to the several national service sportsmen and football teams that have defected and claimed political asylum after international competitions. If such a transformation due to national service occurs metaphorically, the joke also conveys the idea that it is nevertheless reversible when one finds an opportunity to travel abroad.[24] The idea of such a transformation not only mocks the leadership and unveils a widespread foot-dragging strategy, but reveals how conscripts consider the inexorability of their situation. Their political imagination is a good example of what Scott (1990, 72–76) has defined as a thin version of false consciousness: in attributing an excessive power of domination to the political regime, they cannot help but acknowledge the reasons of their own resignation in front of it; however, what is particularly striking in Eritrea is that their justifications of their own subordination occur often when they decide to resist the dominant ideology. The most obvious instance of such dynamics is found in the way they distance themselves from the official idea that they are performing noble sacrifices for the nation: since most of them feel entrapped and exploited, they disregard their official status as *warsay* (descendants of freedom fighters), which refers to the national symbolic genealogy promoted by the political elites, and instead call themselves *agälglot*, meaning straightforwardly "service" in Tigrinya. They concomitantly perform a noticeable act of resistance against the dominant national ideology in refusing categorically to consider

themselves successors of the freedom fighters (*tägadälti*, sing. masc.: *tägadälay*) and assume and underline their servitude and powerlessness.

Conscripts' justification of their passivity to challenge the political order is supported by a second kind of discourse, one that stresses their lack of alternatives and their subordination in the state institution where they are assigned. Conscripts like Haile and Gyorgis are well aware that they are benefiting from a privileged assignation, compared to soldiers or those who are forced to build roads and irrigation schemes, but nevertheless, undertaking national service in a ministerial office is often accompanied by a psychological paralysis produced by inactivity and long waiting periods. As a consequence, many conscripts declare that they would prefer "to serve the country" or simply have something to do, instead of waiting without earning anything. Their boredom and passivity are not so much the result of their demotivation and resistance, enacted by delaying their tasks: more than anything, it is the structural level of bureaucratic dysfunction and the behavior of their bosses that are the cause of their lethargy and dissatisfaction.

On the one hand, conscripts' activities appear to be limited by bosses who are indeed often reluctant to take initiatives, not only because they lack motivation, but also because their wrongdoings can be severely punished without any legal proceedings; they prefer to wait for clear orders from the upper hierarchy, as Efrem,[25] who managed a department, observed in 2006, when his ministry was suddenly in full reorganization: "Taking a decision is an ordeal in the ministry: before, one could make plans, decide to do something; now, it is better to wait if you do not want to get into trouble." On the other hand, conscripts assigned to state civil institutions often declare that they are not integrated in their office. For instance, Kiros, who was teaching in a primary school in the outskirts of Asmara, complained that teachers like him were ignored by their superiors and the local representative of the Minister of Education: "There should be more democracy in the state. We are not listened to; there is a lack of openness: we take part in the meetings, but

our opinions are not taken into account." Similarly, Henok, a former university student assigned to work in a court, told me about his profound disappointment in working with former freedom fighters: "What annoys me is the arbitrariness and authoritarianism. Even in my position I am not listened to. If I propose something, my superiors—who are all *tägadälti*—often say to me: 'Where were you during the war?' The problem is that there is no room here for young people like us."

Thus, conscripts do not forget to remind themselves that they cannot do anything, that they are obliged to stay quiet, that they are in *their* hands (*ab ạsärom*)—and they conclude readily that those who have power over them can do whatever they want anyway.[26] Their subalternity, depicted by resignation, helplessness, and silence, is again explained and justified by Janus-faced discourse: by their incapacity to react and their continual underlining of the omnipotence the former freedom fighters employ in state institutions. Patience is therefore considered a lifesaving virtue, which conscripts often feel obliged to adopt. To wait and see if things take a turn for the better is in this sense opposed to stressful plans for deserting. Conscripts focus thus on the necessity of waiting and finding arrangements to make ends meet. To conform to what is expected of them is the less risky option, but certainly not the most engaging. In the same vein, Hirt and Abdulkader (2013) have referred to the concept of anomie in relation to certain dynamics inherent to national service while Reid (2009) has emphasized the importance silence has in the current political situation in particular.

"We and the Idiots"

The distinction between powerholders and subjected individuals decisively affects the way in which the state and its power are isolated and represented by conscripts. The representations that

they have of state power and of the domination exerted over them cover a much larger social space than the top leadership. They are drawn from their daily experiences and interactions with freedom fighters (*tägadälti*). This section explores and analyzes the representations that contribute to drawing a simple dichotomy between conscripts on the one hand and freedom fighters—who incarnate the *they* that conscripts unceasingly mention—on the other. The *tägadälti*, officials from whom conscripts take their orders and who are working alongside the top state leadership, are indeed often the targets of rude denigration.

According to conscripts, the staff of every state institution always has two groups: "In my department, the fighters fall asleep during technical meetings, while we fall asleep during the political forums," declared Filemon, who was assigned as a technician in a ministry after having completed his degree at Asmara University. The distribution of interests determines status in a binary mode. Filemon continued with the following statement about the fighters: "They don't do anything other than read the newspaper and discuss among themselves the brilliant rightness of what they've read." The ideological indoctrination usually attributed to them borders sometimes on a moronic state. The words used are strong and charged with meaning. A way to describe the fighters consists in saying that they have been needled (*täkätilu*)—lobotomized—by the ideology of the party. Despite internal tensions and rivalries among state institutions (including tensions based on ethnic origins), conscripts place the fighters in a homogeneous category, which shapes discourse that usually attributes a multitude of deficiencies to the fighters. There is no easier way to illustrate this than to relate some jokes that depict conscripts' scorn, which is otherwise difficult to express. I met Filemon one evening in a noisy bar of Asmara. Particularly angry with his bosses, he recounted two well-known jokes that portray the fighters as idiotic:

> This is the story of a *tägadälay* who wanted to phone one of his comrades but who wrongly dialed a number that doesn't

exist. So he is connected to the recorded voice at the Eritel company that announces that he dialed a number that does not exist. [The Tigrinyan phrase literally reads: "The number you dialed is not available *for service.*"[27]] Surprised and annoyed, the fighter retorts: "Hey moron, I'm not an *ạgälglot* [service]: I'm a *tägadälay*, so connect me to my friend right now!"

One day, General Wuchu [Gerezghir Andemariam] sees his son coming back from school early. He asks for an explanation, and the child answers: "My teacher [inevitably an *ạgälglot*] shouted at me and expelled me from the classroom, telling me to look for him somewhere else. This is the reason why I went back home." On hearing this, the general, becoming purple with rage, grabbed his son and started beating him: "Next time," he shouts, "you better look into the other classrooms, to find out where this *ạgälglot* hides!"

In a fashion similar to Cameroonian caricatures of the autocrat famously deciphered by Mbembe, these jokes cast severe discredit on freedom fighters in Eritrea and, in their attempt to weaken *tägadälti*, they reinstate and confirm the existence of an absolutely furious and arbitrary power exerted by a wider leadership than previously accounted in this article, which stimulates both "fascination and dread" (2001, 165) of state power; however, despite the fact that excess and ridicule are at the core of caricatures, Eritrean and Cameroonian humor and popular fascination for state power remain quite different: instead of emphasizing the autocrats' desire for majesty, exuberance, and greed, conscripts prefer to stress the stupidity and brutality of the Eritrean heroes and political elites.

Another aspect of these jokes resides in their power to create an alterity for conscripts. The attribution of stupidity is concomitantly opposed to conscripts' identity, founded on secondary education, from which the *ạgälglot*, especially those in civilian service, have

benefited, contrary to most of the freedom fighters. Their superiors' lack of education explains two things: it illustrates the indoctrination of the *tägadälti* and their hopeless loyalty toward the government, and it explains most of the bureaucratic shortcomings. Moreover, the jokes that portray idiotic fighters, as well as other hidden transcripts, organize a clear identity boundary (Lamont and Molnár 2002) on two levels: on a semantic level, they promote the definition of a grouped and homogeneous alterity (the *tägadälti*), while on the level of enunciation, they define a collectivity of peers, the conscripts who share this discourse. Conscripts knew perfectly well with whom they can criticize and mock the government without taking risks. Therefore, such exchanges not only construct a clearcut *tägadälti–ągälglot* dichotomy, but establish, sanction, and strengthen the existence of small groups of peers who trust each other and can entertain relations of solidarity, such as small loans, tips, and so forth. The process of differentiation is accomplished mainly inside the state, and it indicates thus how omnipresent and pivotal the state has become for the representations of conscripts' identity in Eritrea. It is extremely rare to hear a conscript openly defining himself by reference to his ethnicity, place of origin, or religion.

Last, the subversive dimension of such dynamics deserves to be underlined in its relationship to the official nationalist ideology. Enacting semantically and socially such distance between the *ągälglot* and the *tägadälti* considerably degrades the national symbolic genealogy promoted by the political elites to harmonize the relationship between the generations and between civilians and freedom fighters. While in Cameroon certain popular practices aiming similarly at widening the gap between the populace and ruling elites can be considered a popular reinforcement of a dynamic originated by political elites (to create segregated spaces along class lines), in Eritrea the "logic of unfamiliarity" (Ndijo 2005), discernible in conscripts' critiques of the national symbolic genealogy, perform a much more radical modality of counterpower in opposing frontally the elites' political ideology. Such

manifestations, offered daily at work and among friends, emphasize conscripts' lack of public power and responsibilities (Reid 2009); however, the material presented here shows that what has damaged "the bonds between generations" (Ndijo 2005, 213) is much more than conscripts' status. Conscripts in Eritrea, despite the difficulty of challenging the current regime, ceaselessly perform conversations that dismember the official national ideology and contradict the image of a disciplined population standing harmoniously behind its leaders. Repressive measures, the absence of accountability, and the production of insecurity account for the self-sabotage of the government's legitimacy and the popular support of its policies significantly more than any lack of communication and delegation.

The Blurring of Categories

The last section accounts for nuances in conscripts' conversations about two of their critiques, one covering nuances in the distinction between *tägadälti* and *ǝgälglot* and the other covering the limits of the conscripts' critique of the official state ideology. Conscripts, like many older citizens, are considerably affected by party members' lack of openness; however, when responding to the question of devolution, they sometimes justify the behavior of the *tägadälti*. Filipos is critical of officials, but he underlines the reason for which things do not work as he had hoped: "The former combatants need to open up more to democracy, but we also need to give them time. They have enforced orders by pointing a gun at people's heads for decades. Routines need time to change."

Conscripts—critical but complacent, depressed but deferential—can thus to be caught between inconsistent forms of justification. They acknowledge that significant shortcomings in state dynamics should be addressed and that the implementation of reforms are not timely: "Everything on its own time," "Let's not

be too impatient," or "Let's wait and see," are sincere expressions they sometimes use to justify their inability to raise political issues or claim individual benefits or services. In other words, patience plays a major role in minimizing their criticism, which is thus never univocal and absolute.[28]

Conscripts understand sometimes that they are not the only ones to complain about the government. Their opponents, the fighters themselves, also raise meaningful complaints, as in a conversation Haile had with the *tägadälay* chief of human resources in his office:

> When he told me that I needed to hurry up and find some money for paying the rent in Asmara, I told him that I wanted to do my service because I wanted to be useful to my country. I play the card of the nationalist, you see, but he replies to me: "OK, but we don't have any room for you; you know, things are dying here." I was quite astonished to hear such words from him.

The *tägadälti* are not always as loyal and uncritical as conscripts want to believe. Additionally, many research participants shared views at odds with what has been recounted so far: conscripts believe that several fighters are caught like them in the claws of the government. To be sure, public and hidden transcripts are not illocutory dynamics peculiar to conscripts.[29] The identity categories described above—*agälglot* and *tägadälti*—do not last long when confronted by the everyday experiences of those who use them. This indicates that the social ruptures apparent in discourse are not necessarily determining and qualifying relationships on the ground. In the end, tacit agreements and negotiations occur between conscripts and their superiors, as the following case shows:

> Filipos was assigned to carry out a new project in his ministry, but he was not concerned at all about a precise business plan and a final deadline. "When it's done, it's done" he told me and added that his bosses cannot give him more precise orders "because [they] know our situation [as

ạgälglot]. Nobody tells you how to do things." If orders were stricter and more defined, he explains, he would then claim the equipment necessary to carry out the project in a professional way: "There is limited equipment, so they let me do as I want, and, on the other hand, I don't ask anything: this is the deal." While leeway with conscripts is particularly limited, they nevertheless make provisional arrangements and engage in negotiation that eventually improves their daily lives.

Nuances apply to freedom fighters and *ạgälglot* alike. Conscripts, as fighters, are not a homogeneous group, politically speaking: not every conscript is firmly opposed to the government. Indeed, fractures among the *ạgälglot* are sometimes blatant. Several knew and despised those they called the opportunists of their generation, those who supported the government, like Gebremariam, who similarly classed his fellow citizens of the same age who discretely participated in the mass organizations such as NUEYS or NUEW.[30] He strongly suspected that conscripts who had attended a compulsory party-cadre training course in Nakfa in September 2006 had been brainwashed:

> They want to centralize education at May Nehfi and at Nakfa, where they teach their ideology and Chinese communism to educate the new Şa*ə*bya. A friend of mine—I have a hard time believing that we were friends—he joined first the NUEYS, and he was eventually sent to Nakfa. Now he is a small Şa*ə*bya, who tried to brainwash me recently. Why do I have to listen to what he says? Me, I don't want to brainwash myself. My brain is dirty, but these people—they want to take advantage of the system; they want to divide the society.

The blurring of categories and the innumerable nuances not only question hasty categorization, which tries to make political opinions (opposition or loyal) correspond to social categories (*ạgälglot* or

tägadälti), but promote the idea of a regime without a defined face, an uncertain sociopolitical context, in which mistrust and suspicion are pervasive and therefore in which everyone has to be careful at every instant.

Conscripts also have nuanced views on the official ideology. At least, they do not reject it entirely. Tensions between the sincere understanding of party doctrine and the denunciation of what people perceive as unreasonable policies can be embraced in a single topic. The national symbol of Eritrea is a pair of plastic sandals (*shida*). Used by the combatants during the War of Independence, they represent not only the Eritrean people's march toward self-determination, but also the amazing resilience of the guerrilla movement,[31] which, suffering from limited financial resources, decided to produce and recycle the sandals used by the freedom fighters. Such a policy of import substitution has latterly become the symbol of the creativity, the resilience, and above all the self-sufficiency of the Eritrean nation. Today, these sandals, still produced in large numbers, are at the heart of two confronting forms of political obstinacy: they are a symbol, congruent with certain policies of the leadership, that represents the historical and national pride of relying only on oneself, but the perennial and often forced use of these sandals, because of the expensiveness of imported shoes, symbolizes the stubborn form of a communist political program imposed by the party, one that conscripts often denigrate.

Another way to illustrate the limits on conscripts' criticism of the official national ideology is to consider topics that are not defaced by their jokes.[32] For instance, joking about identity and religious groups is apparently a more disgraceful and subversive experience than ridiculing the state and its agents. Very few jokes of these kinds circulate. The few I collected are related to Muslims, the Kunama ethnic group, and peasants (*hagäräsäb*).[33] Ethnic and religious jokes are recounted with noticeable embarrassment, often followed by a comment about the importance of national unity. Official narratives promote representation of the unity of the Eritrean nationalities

and the idea of a national culture that refers to the values personified by the EPLF fighters before independence (Bozzini 2011a).[34] Taboos relating to social, geographical, and confessional identities are difficult for a foreign ethnographer to overcome. Similarly, nobody shared jokes about the achievement of the liberation struggle. The official version of pre-independence history remains mostly unchallenged,[35] but the views of conscripts and the population at large in Eritrea—and to a greater extent, in the diaspora (Hepner 2009) and in cyberspace (Bernal 2005, 2014)—differ from the official historiography on some specific periods (Mekonnen 2013). Such limitation on the targets of humor indicates that, besides the overt resistance toward national genealogy (conscripts' refusal to consider themselves *warsay*), other pivotal topics about national ideology are rarely questioned or challenged by the young generations. Tensions between sticking to the party line and denouncing officials' stupidity or criticizing absurd policies thus reveals an ambiguity that apparently navigates between criticism and approval of the current regime.

Conclusion

In Eritrea, resistance that challenges the political elites, but is concomitantly (and unintentionally) complicit with the leadership in the sense that it reinforces its power, does not build on logics of imitation and conviviality, as Mbembe describes them in his studies of Western Africa: mimesis, imitation, and the popular takeover (and internalization) of the official episteme (2001) are not at the core of the catch-22 underlined in this article. Indeed, the *agälglot* sharply distance themselves from the national order and the official episteme imposed by the political elite. A vast majority of them are willing neither to join the party nor to defend at all cost the values associated with the freedom fighters. Their service is no longer simply a program of national reconstruction that necessitates noble

sacrifices. Conscripts, rather, view it as a structure of domination. Perceived as such, it becomes a central feature of state totalitarianism. At the same time, however, indiscipline and subversive talk contribute to compensating, at least in part, the shortcomings of a government that has lost its legitimacy, because such performances outline the state as a powerful entity. I have emphasized that jokes and other representations shared by conscripts contribute to defining the limits of their insubordination. Their way of opposing official nationalism, ridiculing their superiors, and rebelling (at least verbally) against state institutions and the party's ideological justifications cannot be articulated without acknowledging that their words and silences may reinforce what they challenge. This catch-22 is not only intrinsic to the performance of insubordination and subversion analyzed in this article: such performances must be accounted for as a pivotal phenomenon in the formation and transformation of power relationships.

The state is not only a predator, or a sphere in which to make a career: the state, the office of the president, the *tägadälti*, and other objects of theories and categories held by my respondents serve as key conceptual resources for them not only to identify their positions and their scope for action, but to organize their experiences and their explanations of events and frustrations and to frame historical periods. This conceptual framework defines the way in which they understand power in general and the particular power relationships that they experience. Static state power and the ways in which they depict their helplessness are pivotal while they refuse to acknowledge themselves and their deeds as being part of the Eritrean state apparatus. They push away or externalize and essentialize the state and its power, at the same time refusing to admit that they are involved in dealing with it. Accordingly, they maintain a particular image of the state, epitomizing it as an erratic totalitarian block. This not only constitutes a pivotal interpretative key, but represents an indisputable reality that they continuously fear. The ways of drawing boundaries set up dichotomies

theoretically presentable as a crucial state effect (Mitchell 1991), which partly–and contextually–veil a much more complicated social reality, constituted of a multitude of intermediary and contradictory positions, cleavages, and tensions, all of which coexist within the state institutions and the social categories outlined by conscripts.

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Notes

1. I thank Ellen Hertz, who mailed me a copy of Heller's book *Catch-22* while I was in Eritrea, and James Scott, Jon Abbink, Julia Eckert, Tekle Woldemikael, Jennifer Speirs, Alessandro Facchini, Roberta Deambrosi, Anne Lavanchy, the anonymous reviewers, and the editors of Africa Today for their insightful comments on previous versions of this article. All errors are the author's. I am immensely indebted to my friends in Eritrea for their trust and patience.

2. Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (Tigrinya: *Häzbawi Gnbar Dimokrasin Fthin*, HGDF). Since independence, Eritrea has been ruled by the Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF), a party that emerged from a former guerrilla movement and in 1993 formed a provisional government.

3. http://www.er.undp.org/recovery/docs/pj-demob-06-fs.pdf.

4. Legally, national service amounts to six months' military training, followed by a year of service in military or civil institutions (Government of Eritrea 1995). Tens of thousands are recruited each year, but some—especially, married women, women with a child, and disabled individuals—are partially or completely exempted. After training, conscripts are sent into the army or to party-controlled companies; others are dispatched as teachers, nurses, or office workers in all kinds of state institutions (Bozzini 2011a, Gaim 2009, O'Kane and Hepner 2009, Tronvoll 2004).

5. Literally, the campaign (or collective works) of the heirs (*warsay*) of the braves (*ykäɑlo*, from the triliteral root *yk̟ǝl* 'can'). The braves are freedom fighters, of whom conscripts are heirs, according the official credo.

6. I use the term conscript for both the soldiers and those assigned to civilian institutions of the state or the party. Individuals assigned to civilian service or pursuing their education can be mobilized as soldiers in case of conflict.

7. A notable action against the regime took place in January 2013 when soldiers occupied the Ministry of Information to disrupt TV broadcast for few minutes asking for reforms and release of prisoners before being arrested (Connell 2013).

8. UNHCR statistics show that a massive exodus to Sudan and Ethiopia started in 2004, amounting to 8893 Eritreans registered in camps in both countries during that year. Exile has intensified since 2007, with

more than 17,000 new registrants in refugee camps set up near the Eritrean border and more than 20,000 in 2009 (UNHCR 2009; statistical yearbooks from 2003 to 2009, available at http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c4d6.html). In 2011, the organization in Kassala estimated that an average 3,000 Eritreans arrived in Sudan each month (personal communication with a UNHCR officer).

9. Police tolerance and the economic need of a workforce in the manufacturing and service sectors have allowed many draft-evading women to stay and work clandestinely in Eritrea; however, they have limited rights and may be easily threatened, accounting for the organization of docile laborers and for the reproduction, in part, of gender inequality (Bozzini 2011a).

10. The concept of resistance must be understood in its broad sense, including desertion and all kind of mundane acts (Scott 1990) that intentionally challenge the political order (van Walraven and Abbink 2003).

11. In Eritrea, the limits of the performance of protest contribute to the shaping of what is considered a public space.

12. See Dorman (2005) and Hepner (2009) for analyses of the overt forms of protest that took place in Eritrea in 2001.

13. Several studies of the diaspora have equally highlighted the limits and ambiguities of resistance and protest (Bernal 2005, 2006, 2014; Conrad 2005; Glatthard 2012; Hepner 2008, 2009, 2013; Koser 2002). Although critiques of the Eritrean regime and other ideas circulate between the diaspora and Eritrea (Bernal 2006, 2014), this article is limited to the analysis of ethnographic materials collected in Eritrea and consequently does not provide a comparison between the performances in different sites and political contexts.

14. A detailed analysis of the effects of rumors in the context of national service in Eritrea is presented in Bozzini (2011a).

15. Scholarship on humor and jokes is much broader, but many scholars who have been interested in humor claim that social science in general has never regarded jokes as relevant material for analysis. See for instance Carty and Musharbash (2008), Mulkay (1988), Obadare (2009), Powell and Paton (1988), and even Freud (1992); however, Bergson cited not less than nineteen substantial studies published decades before his own famous book, *Le rire* (1900).

16. In the novel, the procedure of demobilization is the catch: the only way to be sent back home is to be declared mentally insane and therefore unfit to fly dangerous missions during World War II in Italy, but the soldiers, by requesting such medical evaluation, demonstrate their sanity instead. As Doctor Daneeka declares to Yossarian: "Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy" (Heller 1999, 52). Heller's conundrum is a paradox that can formally read: {A → (B∧C), B → ¬C} ∴ ¬A or {A ↔ B, A ↔ C, B ↔ ¬C} ∴ A ↔ ¬A. See more details in Goldstein (2004).

17. This research was conducted for my doctoral dissertation in anthropology (University of Neuchâtel) and was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (http://p3.snf.ch/person-515450).

18. Some illegal practices, such as falsification and other acts of indiscipline, are, however, described in detail in my dissertation. Collecting subversive discourse became possible after several months. The ethics of methodology, promotion of confidence, and guarantee of confidentiality are discussed in detail in my dissertation (Bozzini 2011a, 36–47).

19. Beside the military action that took place in January 2013 (see note 7), a group of people have been posting and tagging anti-government messages in the street of Asmara in 2012 and 2013.

20. Conscripts receive 450 nakfa per month—less than 30 US dollars and insufficient to cover basic needs.

21. Condemning comparisons of the current leadership with the Derg is not uncommon in Eritrea. I heard such critiques back in 2003, while I was visiting remote villages in the Anseba region. Later, in 2005–2006, several conscripts and older citizens shared with me similar views and justified them quite seriously, arguing that during the Ethiopian occupation, some services to the population were more efficient and controls were much more easily overcome.

22. Two words are used to refer to ideas of the state, nation, and government in Tigrinya: *hagär* and *mängsti*. The first refers to the notions of country and nation (*Hagär Ertra* is the Eritrean nation, and *wädi hagr* signifies 'fellow citizen'). The second word encompasses notions of state and government: dictionaries translate *mängsti* as 'state', 'government', or 'kingdom' (Eritrean People's Liberation Front 1986). *Mängsti* is the term generally used to speak of the political leadership or the state. Therefore, a distinction between concepts of the state as an institution and the government as the collectivity that rules it is not explicitly made. Given the current one-party state system, *mängsti* refers also to the party otherwise described as HGDF, EPLF or *Şaəbya* (meaning 'popular' in Arabic, an epithet of the EPLF).

23. Scholars have also embraced this view when they have confronted pre-existing traditional forms of democracy, or at least collective deliberation exemplified by the Baito institution and allegedly ruined by the EPLF authoritarianism; for instance (Ogbazghi 2015). Inability to protect village institutions from centralized authoritarian rule must be nuanced as the case about land regulations brought by O'Kane (2012) shows.

24. Eritreans in national service are not allowed to go abroad, except in extremely rare cases.

25. Efrem was one of the few state officials I interviewed at length during my fieldwork in Eritrea. His status was peculiar because he had been employed in the same ministry before independence; it was different from that of conscript and former freedom fighters, who constitute the large majority of state agents.

26. This representation exemplifies the condition of the Agambian bare life scholars have pointed at regarding the life of Eritrean conscripts and the distinction between (super)citizens and subjects (Woldemikael 2013).

27. *Zädewlkumulu qtsri nagälgolot aytäwahaber* in Tigrinya.

28. Patience is one of the national values promoted by elites since EPLF's foundation.

29. Vigorous condemnation of some policies is evident in loyalists who identify with the current government; however, such critiques are likelier to be found in the diaspora than in Eritrea. The analysis of such dynamics is part of a larger project on the Eritrean transnational state governance and the recent emergence of dissident movements. An abstract is available at http://p3.snf.ch/person-515450.

30. Acronyms for the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students and the National Union of Eritrean Women, respectively.

31. Sandals and boots have important political symbolic meaning for several Marxist or Maoist insurrectional movements, as, for instance, in the Philippines (Margold 1999).

32. Forty jokes constitute the corpus I analyzed (Bozzini 2009); however, this study is limited only to Tigrinya speakers. Non-Tigrinya speakers share several jokes and critical issues about the Tigrinya, who are considered to be closer to the ruling class than other ethnic groups. This corpus is mainly composed of political jokes, most of them about President Isaias Afwerki, the army, and the military leaders, or about politics and state repression. A few are related to religion and economics, and very few are about ethnic groups.

33. This represents significant variance from the corpus collected by Ebenezer Obadare (2009) in postmilitary Nigeria, a study that claims that Nigerian jokes address both the state and civil society and thus account for a certain sense of popular self-derision and cynicism—a trait that appears limited in a military regime like Eritea.

34. On the historical trajectories of EPLF ideologies, see, for instance Gaim (2008), Hepner (2009), Iyob (1995), Makki (1996), Markakis (1995), and Pool (2001).

35. Regarding historical analysis, Reid (2014) also points to other directions that have crucial importance for future Eritrean scholarships.

Ransoms, Remittances, and Refugees: The Gatekeeper State in Eritrea

AMANDA POOLE

Abstract

This paper draws from ethnographic research in Eritrea to explore new configurations of power and belonging in the Eritrean gatekeeper state. The gatekeeper state is a theory describing state–society relations in Africa in which the patrimonial state sits astride narrow channels of wealth creation, relying on a control of the circulation of citizens, funds, and resources within and across national borders. The escape—illegal emigration—of citizens from Eritrea and the remittances sent home to families in rural areas have potentially been a source of challenge to state authority, but this paper argues that the Eritrean state has developed new gatekeeping strategies that operate in and through porous borders, transnational kinship networks, and the aspirations of citizens to escape civil service.

I introduce the contemporary gatekeeper state with a story about Amanuel, a friend who was arrested, like many other young Eritreans, trying to cross the border into Sudan. The last record I have found referring to him in field notes from my ethnographic research on resettlement in the western lowlands in 2004–2005 dated to months before I learned that he was missing. My notes, in fact, had him celebrating good news: attending the new postsecondary school of Mainefhi, he was thrilled to learn that he was one of few students in his class who would be posted to the capital city, Asmara, for the period of military service to be

performed during the semester break. Mainefhi was being kick-started by the government as an alternative to the long-standing University of Asmara. Located outside the capital city, it was a militarized school, filled with students who had passed qualifying exams taken during the requisite twelfth grade spent in Sawa, the military training camp in the far western lowlands. Mainefhi students were not permitted to come and go freely, nor could family members visit, and rumors abounded that students were being jailed who failed to attend classes or were captured trying to flee the school compound and were enduring "physical education" classes that involved long hours spent digging trenches—a course ironically dubbed digology (Reid 2009). For Amanuel, semester break in Asmara meant cafes and theaters, a network of friends and family, and perhaps a release from the restrictions of the academy.

Weeks later, I visited the capital city from my field site in the western lowlands, only to hear that Amanuel had been captured trying to flee the country, attempting the long, dangerous journey across the Sudanese border. He had not informed his family or friends that he was planning on leaving, and the only information they received about his welfare was a brief note smuggled out through a guard from the prison where he was being detained indefinitely. In the months following his capture, his roommates would get calls from time to time, from friends or acquaintances, asking after him. These roommates never revealed any knowledge of his whereabouts, or even that he was missing. The people calling could be anyone, they assured me, government agents, trying to figure out what we know—even people whom they remembered as Amanuel's friends. It was safer to be silent. Indeed, those suspected of assisting emigrants were often taken for interrogation, imprisoned, or pressed into military service. The families of young people who fled the country were sometimes imprisoned themselves, or forced to pay steep fines as a ransom for the seepage of human capital from a country of just over five million, in which at least 200,000 people are in active military service and all able-bodied adults are required to work in unsalaried national service—an

eighteen-month period that in practice extends indefinitely (Human Rights Watch 2009; International Institute for Strategic Studies 2010).

Eritrea is currently one of the world's top refugee-producing nations (Human Rights Watch 2009). In 2010, around 3,000 Eritreans a month were fleeing their country across the Ethiopian and Sudanese borders (UNHCR 2011). This wave of migration has increased steadily over the past decade, despite the dangerous conditions facing asylum seekers—including a shoot-to-kill policy for those caught trying to escape, and more recently, the danger posed by human-trafficking networks targeting Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers (Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea 2012; UNHCR 2013).

This emigration is a reversal of the previous trend of return migration by Eritreans after independence—the intended focal point of my research on the role of the environment in refugee resettlement in the western lowlands, where as many as 200,000 Eritreans were being repatriated under state-led resettlement projects. While my research did focus on the ways in which returnees and stayees negotiated belonging and claims to resources in the resettlement community of Hagaz, I came to investigate the growing wave of migration back across the Sudanese border, which was notably linked to the inabilities of many people to participate in the promises of nation-building in ways they had envisioned on returning to their country. These frustrations were largely due to the worsening economic and political conditions since the border conflict began in 1998, including the transformation of national service into an indefinite period of forced labor (Kibreab 2009).

This emigration reflects the broader and long-standing trend of economic migration from the global south, but it opens a number of questions about the nature of state power in Eritrea and the webs of compliance and survivalism that bind escaping nationals to the state. Certainly, these young Eritreans are looking for economic opportunities in the context of great scarcity; they are seeking ways to support their families—a nearly impossible endeavor when forced

conscription and national service removes them from urban and rural livelihoods, either as wage laborers or subsistence farmers and agropastoralists (Poole 2009). People who have been involved in the lives and frustrated aspirations of Eritrean citizens since they gained their independence from Ethiopia in the early 1990s after thirty years of warfare are prompted to ask an additional set of questions. What do we make of migration from a nation-state that has been able to claim power and legitimacy via the legacy of powerful nationalism? As Kibreab notes, flight "is contrary to expectation in view of the fact that the EPLF [Eritrean People's Liberation Front] came to power on the back of a popular struggle promising to relegate to the dustbin of history the factors that previously forced Eritreans to flee their country in search of international protection" (2009, 54). In the seemingly persistent silence that many have observed among the Eritrean population, is flight the only means of dissent? Is dissent the best way to understand emigration? Does individual flight suggest that strident Eritrean nationalism is soluble after all—that collectivist national projects in countries like Eritrea, occupying a marginal position in the global economy, have begun to dissolve into individual strategies of survival?

The escape of citizens from Eritrea and the remittances sent home to families through informal mechanisms have potentially been a source of challenge to state authority; however, adapting Cooper's (2002) theory of the gatekeeper state to the Eritrean context allows us to appreciate the persistence of nationalism in the multiple paths and projects of flight across national borders. Moreover, the state in Eritrea, rather than being dismantled by the flight of its citizens, has been sustained via new strategies of gatekeeping. Along these lines, the government of Eritrea has assumed the capacity, if not to manage this migration itself, to capture the material and symbolic capital of these projects of movement, both successful and unsuccessful.

The Gatekeeper State in Africa

Theories of the African state and nationalism often seem to miss the mark when extended to the Eritrean context, where nationalism has been a defining, and seemingly enduring, feature of political life. Describing the moment of independence for African nations in the mid-twentieth century, Cooper comments on the birth of a national imagination, shaped in both discourse and practice: "The very process of claim-making had helped to define a national imaginary" (2002, 198). Cooper points to the loss of this imaginary in the following decades, with the eventual slimming of political and economic spaces available to African societies. Ferguson also problematizes nationalist identifications in describing the attenuation of nationalist projects in Africa in the context of an emerging neoliberal world order. During the era of decolonization, he argues, "the political form of the independent nation-state. . . obscured the continuing transnational relations that help to produce 'African poverty'" (2006, 17). When African elites, however, attempted to redefine national identity during the era hailed as the African Renaissance, these efforts were undermined by a global political economic context that selected for individuated lines of flight over collectivist projects. These observations are a critical starting point for understanding the shifting role and meaning of nationalism in African communities; however, the Eritrean context suggests that nationalist identifications, though socially constructed, may not dissolve so easily with the loss of modernist dreams, with transnational flows, and even with individuated lines of flight. Those who have left Eritrea, for instance, have pursued individual strategies to access resources at the same time that they have remained embedded in nationalist projects and have sustained state-led development efforts during a time when such a thing seemed anachronistic (Bernal 2004; Hepner 2009b). Many scholars have noted the key role of the Eritrean diaspora in negotiating the parameters of citizenship and governance after independence

(Bernal 2005; Iyob 2000; Nadje, Black, and Koser 2001; Hepner 2009b).

The persistence and power of Eritrean nationalism pushes us to rethink the presumed unbundling of the hyphen linking nation to state. Unlike the 1960s, when most African states gained national independence, Eritrea emerged in the early 1990s onto a world stage in which donors preferred to work through nongovernmental organizations, the doyens of civil society, at the expense of what were considered inefficient and corrupt state bureaucracies. These transnational linkages were often understood to problematize the nation-state as a container of institutions and identities: "If the nation-state formed the basis for the projects of colonialism and nationalism, then the 'unbundled' space that is being created by new forms of governmentality. . . [characterize] 'the postcolonial condition'" (Gupta 1998, 329). In contrast to this, the Eritrean state has maintained tight control over civil society and the actions of foreign-aid and development organizations. The predominant narrative accompanying state-led development initiatives has revolved around self-sufficiency, in part drawn from a sense of isolationism during the struggle, in which global superpowers supported Ethiopia. This discourse focuses on the primacy of national identity over other forms of identification, the value of sacrifice for the good of the nation, and the central role of the developmentalist state. Isaias Awferki, president since independence, has publicly crafted a critique of foreign aid, forced privatization, and external models of democratization, arguing that foreign aid is typified by "structural flaws, crippling preconditions, and self-perpetuating tendencies" (Afwerki 1997).

Nationalist discourse in the state-run media focuses on self-sufficiency, but the sweeping projects of state-led development in Eritrea, in which a massive number of in-country citizens are mobilized in national service, persists because of remittances and taxes procured from the global diaspora, comprising as many as one-fourth to one-third of all Eritrean citizens (Hepner and O'Kane 2009). Additionally, even though an isolationist stance and focus

on self-sufficiency have been possible only through remittances, these ideals are used to justify authoritarian state actions that have slimmed the space available for civil-society organizations to create webbing between local and transnational organizations.[1] The government of Eritrea has expelled or placed untenable restrictions on nongovernmental organizations since 2005 "to diminish the leverage of outside powers over both its repressive policies at home and its capricious behavior in the region" (Connell 2011, 424).

Fredrick Cooper's (2002) theory of the gatekeeper state offers a useful framework for understanding the ways in which contemporary Eritrean politics cannot be dismissed as exceptional, but may help to illuminate processes of power and shifting state–society relationships in Africa. Rejecting the priority often given to the moment of independence and the schism between colonial governments and liberated African states, Cooper points to what he envisions as a more fundamental frame of reference: the growth of the developmentalist state after World War II and its moment of crisis with global economic depression in the 1970s. Consequently, he develops a model of the gatekeeper state to describe the marked continuities in state–society relations throughout the late colonial and postcolonial periods. Postcolonial African states inherited not only bureaucratic infrastructures and territorial borders from colonial predecessors, but also the imperative of development spearheaded by the state, and alongside this imperative, a system of governing in which the state had weak penetration throughout communities within national borders. In addition to dependence on empowering traditional authorities through a system of indirect rule, the "coercive power" of colonial states "was more effective at staging raids and terrorizing resistors than at routinizing authority throughout a territory" (Cooper 2002, 157). With the transition to independent governance, those who rose to power within African states consolidated power through similar channels, coming to occupy a space between global markets and the formal means of revenue at their disposal:

> What they could do was to sit astride the interface between a territory and the rest of the world, collecting and distributing resources that derived from the gate itself: customs revenue and foreign aid; permits to do business in the territory; entry and exit visas; and permission to move currency in and out. (2002, 157)

While it might be argued that any state performs these sorts of gatekeeping functions, the African gatekeeper state is particular in part because the means of amassing wealth is narrowed to involvement within (or control of) the state, resulting in a winner-takes-all scenario, which precludes incentives for political power sharing. While the gatekeeper state may be depicted as sitting astride society, however, state and society are deeply intertwined through social networks that take on a distinct vertical character.[2]

   Stressing networks between people across state spheres is one way that Cooper's analysis departs from other understandings of state–society relations in Africa, most notably Mamdani's emphasis on the dualisms between citizen and subject, and urban and rural, that he depicts as legacies from the colonial era. For Mamdani, the problems of governance in Africa–the artifacts of decentralized despotism and bifurcated rule over African rural and urban areas–emerge from colonialism. He details the ways in which indirect rule "containerized" rural populations along ethnic lines and distilled diverse sociopolitical networks into a single model of customary authority, which was "monarchical, patriarchal, and authoritarian" (Mamdani 1996, 39). In urban areas, direct rule involved a racialized system of access to civil freedoms granted to citizens in civil society, leading to a bifurcated system of ethnicized subject and racialized citizen that has yet to be displaced by postcolonial attempts that have been limited to dismantling one side of the coin while upholding the other, often leading to centralized despotism over rural and urban areas. Mamdani offers an interesting critique of unilinear and structural models of African underdevelopment put forth by dependency theorists in their

efforts to explain the "African predicament." Nevertheless, the question that arises about Mamdani's argument is the extent to which it solidifies social dichotomies that may long have been more fluid than rigid in lived realities outside the scope of his analysis and prescription, particularly in the context of a transnational population that has taken shape since colonialism.

Instead, Cooper explores the relations that become apparent "when one is not limited to seeing society divided into categories–elite versus popular classes or ethnic, racial, or gender divisions–but rather stresses relationships, and in particular vertical relationships" (2002, 188). This focus on relations and networks, rather than oppositions, is closely linked to a notion of agency that reaches beyond the limits of strict social categories that would determine the position and function of groups within a larger system, instead attending to the power of political imagination to shape futures. Again, redolent of a contradiction to Mamdani's categorizations that often appear to be inherited intact from the colonial experience, Cooper writes:

> Africans faced the constraints and the humiliations of a colonial state, but they are, above all, human beings trying to survive, form relationships, find opportunities, and make sense of the world. They cannot be reduced to stick figures in a drama with two actors, colonizer and colonized, or a story with one plot line–the struggle for the nation. What is striking about the year after the war [WWII] was how much seemed possible. (2002, 38)

These multiple possibilities hinge on the developments within a political imagination, formed in the dynamic interplay between individuals and state policies. Dramatized by the era of decolonization, colonial policies and the response of individuals shifted the ways in which people imagined and articulated political futures. Cooper describes how within French and British colonial policies following World War II, "the desire to expand empire resources while legitimizing colonial rule . . . became the basis for

a profound engagement of African and European actors, which in turn changed the meanings of 'development,' 'citizenship,' and 'self-government'" (2002, 39). While subject to reimaginings, political structures and identities were also channeled, as the gatekeeper state drew from certain networks while curtailing others from forming outside state spheres. The notion of blockages is significant here, for while change may "lurch in different directions" (2002, 15) within a political space of "interconnection, relatedness, and mutual influence" (2002, 13), some spaces are closed off—sometimes violently—to other political imaginings.

Cooper suggests that networks existing both within and beneath the surface of state channels offer the possibility of radical social change: "Gatekeeper states in fact have something to fear from networks or collectivities able to pose a challenge or from African cultivators who use social connections to make the state irrelevant" (2002, 202). In Eritrea, the escape—illegal emigration—of citizens and the remittances sent home to families in rural areas have potentially been a source of challenge to state authority.

Ransoms and Remittances: Gatekeeping in Eritrea

The contemporary government in Eritrea embodies many of the characteristics of the gatekeeper state while extending them in new directions—across national borders and through networks both material and symbolic. The flight of individuals from Eritrea often does not signal a definitive end-point to their entanglement with the Eritrean state, and the financial and political pressures exerted by the Eritrean state on exiles have a long and dynamic history. The struggle for independence led to the emergence of a widespread and populous diaspora, which often remained deeply involved in funding the war, along with debating the meaning and nature of

citizenship and nationhood at the time of independence.[3] Many Eritreans living in this global diaspora voted for independence in the 1993 referendum and participated in drafting the Constitution, which, though it has not been fully implemented, stipulates the enfranchisement of overseas citizens (Iyob 2000). If the Eritrean gatekeeper state involves the gatekeeping of social, symbolic, and financial flows from a transnational citizenry, it has emerged out of a long history of various periods of emigration that "predate the articulation of a distinctly 'Eritrean' identity, and in fact, helped establish that identity vis-à-vis the outside" (Hepner and Conrad 2005, xi).

Eritrean government officials since independence, through political offices in major settlement countries, the operation of party-led organizations, and regular visits to the diaspora, have maintained financial and political support from a transnational constituency (Newland and Patrick 2004), and occasionally, as was recently the case with Eritrean students studying in South Africa, they have operated to quell dissent (Hepner 2009a). In this case, the Eritrean embassy in South Africa worked to dismantle a student movement by making threatening phone calls, pulling tuition and other vital resources, and revoking passports (Hepner 2009a).

Beyond quelling active dissent, the ruling party has been remarkably successful at attaining "hegemony over nationalist identity and trans/national praxis" (Hepner 2005, 79). Scholars have provided windows into the deterritorialized authority of the Eritrean state, exploring the origins of this transnational field in the 1970s and applying this analysis to a nascent civil society group in California that was stifled by the Eritrean state in the 1990s. Agents of the Eritrean regime have used multiple ways—including overt pressure and covert tactics, such as spreading rumors—to undermine an autonomous organization formed to connect Christian and Muslim Eritreans living in Southern California (Woldemikael 2005). Consequently, the PFDJ government, partly through party-aligned organizations, visits to the diaspora, government-sponsored news, and surveillance of diaspora

activities, has subsumed and channeled diaspora engagement in the Eritrean political economy (Hepner 2005). Although new human-rights groups bear some potential to break up the "monopolistic domination of diaspora communities by the state" (Schmitz-Pranghe 2010, 24), they operate within a framework that has been shaped by dominant political actors who have so far fractured dissent and channeled modes of transnational engagement in the country.

Diaspora Eritreans are absolutely central to the survival of the Eritrean state, as they have been one of the main sources of revenue for the government. Collecting data on the volume and nature of remittances to Eritrea is problematic. Financial data for Eritrea is somewhat opaque, given the lack of published budgets from the government, a scarcity of international economic reporting on Eritrea (Styan 2007), and a far from complete portrait of the size and shifting profile of the Eritrean global diaspora (Fessehatzion 2005). Despite these uncertainties, most scholars highlight the exceptional role of remittances in Eritrea in terms of the scale of remittances, their centrality to the Eritrean economy, and the level of government control over them. In 2007, in light of low exports and decreasing foreign aid, Eritrean foreign reserves were only enough to cover about two weeks of imports, making the country highly dependent on the diaspora as a source of foreign exchange (Styan 2007). Remittances made up nearly one third of the GDP, according to the World Bank in 2002, reaching US 1.37 billion in 2007, and according to these estimates, Eritrea ranked fifth in Africa in remittances received per capita, and first in proportion of remittances in relation to GDP (Schmitz-Pranghe 2010). In 2002, $10 came in as remittances for every dollar generated from foreign direct investment, and $40 came in as remittances for every dollar earned from exports (Fessehatzion 2005). Alongside the scale of remittances within the Eritrean economy, "the government's ability to control and channel what are–in almost all other cases in the world–*private* transfers is worthy of attention" (Styan 2007). These remittances are collected directly, in the form of a 2 percent income

tax requested of diaspora Eritreans, and indirectly, through taxes collected from rural households that depend upon remittances from family members residing abroad.

The tax on Eritreans living abroad is technically voluntary. The government has a limited capacity to exact compliance with it or to enforce disclosure of income; however, refusal to pay this tax can have consequences for individuals abroad and their families in Eritrea. Some Eritreans living abroad have not had their passports renewed, or have been unable to purchase property in Eritrea for failing to pay the tax; others report that family members back in Eritrea have been punished through detention, fines, the denial of business licenses, or the confiscation of property (Human Rights Watch 2009). Many Eritreans have been able to visit their home country without having paid the tax, but they have been forced to pay back taxes in the case of requests for government services or to purchase land (Styan 2007). Studies suggest that remittances sent home tend to decrease over time, but data reported by the government of Eritrea show a steady increase in remittances from the 2 percent tax between 1997 and 2003—from $1.2 to $10.4 million dollars (Fessehatzion 2005). These data suggest that declining political legitimacy on behalf of the ruling regime is not necessarily the determining factor in soliciting remittances (as people may be compelled to pay to access state services), or that the number of remittance senders has been steadily increasing.[4]

If the aspiration of many young people fleeing the country involves finding a livelihood stable enough to send remittances back to their families, the Eritrean state has, since increasing restrictions around foreign exchange in 2005, been able to channel, monitor, and tax many of these other remittances. In March 2005, the government promulgated Legal Notice 101/2005, currency regulations restricting all domestic transactions to nakfa and specifying the potential of two years in prison and a fine of two million nakfa (more than $130,000 at the official exchange rate) for transactions involving foreign currency done without permission, including the deceitful import or export of foreign currency (Harris

2005). This measure was enacted to address a severe shortage of foreign exchange. Although the currency shortage was due to the border conflict, the collapse of trade relations with neighboring countries, and a fixed exchange rate (Harris 2005), government officials reported that the measures had been adopted to address the shortage of hard currency because of fuel subsidies needed to assist the rural poor. Fear of punishment led to the near disappearance of a black market for currency exchange at that time. It became increasingly impossible to locate foreign currency, or to exchange it for nakfa, outside the state banks and Himbol Financial Exchange, a party-controlled company. People who had relied on money sent by family members living abroad reported that they now had to receive all funds through Himbol, where it was taxed and subject to a fixed exchange rate below the informal market value. Anecdotal reports suggest that, though the black market has persisted, there have been waves of restricted access. Even with the muted black market, however, informal remittances that have occurred may generate state revenue as the source of taxes for households within the country that depend upon family remittances to meet basic needs.

The government also exerted tight control over other valuables entering the country. The new decree held that all foreign currency was to be declared on entry into the country and accounted for on exit. Postal packages were frequently searched, and taxes were levied on goods. Laptops entering Eritrea were often confiscated for a period of time until proper government approval for their location and use could be provided. In addition, exit visas, including those issued to foreigners, were granted only on proof that the technology had not been sold or left behind.

The government of Eritrea issued Proclamation No. 173/2013 in February 2013, replacing the 2005 legal notice. The main difference appears to be that foreign currency needs to be declared at customs only when it exceeds ten thousand US dollars. The Ministry of Information describes the impetus behind this proclamation as a renewed focus on private industry and private–public partnership

for economic growth, explaining the necessity of previous restrictions by referring to the state of siege that has typified governance since the border conflict broke out in 1998:

> It is to be noted that Eritrea has over the past 12 years been compelled to prevail over an exigent stage challenged by all acts of conspiracy ranging from flagrant invasion to a number of covert and blatant political and economic ploys, whose ultimate goal is reversing national sovereignty. Whereas the existing assets need to be employed in the most pressing priorities, such [a] state of affairs requires special handling. Instituted in relation to the scenarios Eritrea underwent, previous regulations that have been in operation are now repealed and replaced by the latest notice. (*Shabait* 2013b)

Another Ministry of Information article notes that Eritreans traveling to and from the country believe that this policy will enhance investment and "encourage mobility of nationals to and fro [sic] the Homeland" (*Shabait* 2013a); however, the new legal notice maintains the restrictions on the use of foreign currency inside the country and maintains state-run or state-approved financial organizations as the sole source of remittance processing.[5]

   Beyond financial flows from a well-established diaspora, gatekeeping extends through the social and family networks of those who currently attempt, successfully or unsuccessfully, to flee. Recent escapees are treated as criminals if involuntarily repatriated to the country, facing imprisonment and sometimes torture. Their families are subject to recrimination. Recall the fear on behalf of Amanuel's friends and family that state secret service would intuit prior knowledge of his attempt to flee. In this case, they were not detained or punished; however, there are many accounts of family members facing stiff fines and imprisonment as a sort of ransom for the young men and women who succeed in leaving the country, or go missing from military and national service positions. A fee of 50,000 nakfa (USD 3,300) was sometimes levied on families whose

daughters or sons escape the country (Styan 2007). At one point in 2005, the public school in the small town of Segenetti faced a delayed start to the school year because it was filled with at least fifty people—including elders and children—imprisoned there as punishment because family members had gone missing from national-service positions. Concern for family members living inside the country may dampen active political dissent by Eritreans in the diaspora, and this brings us beyond financial gatekeeping to the role of the state in channeling the traffic of political actions and the meanings of national identity.

Perhaps the key difference between Cooper's classic description of the African gatekeeper state and the current government in Eritrea is a refashioning of the vertical relationships that join citizen to state. Instead of political patronage, Eritrean state–society relations are linked in intricate vertical networks, characterized by the incorporation of individuals into state service through mass conscription and a social political fabric in rural and urban areas threaded through with political fear and silencing. The opacity of governance, as detailed by Riggan (this volume), along with the lack of a free press and the severity of punishments, contributes to this culture of fear.[6]

That I am mostly forced to reconstruct Amanuel's story of imprisonment from memories of fieldwork conducted in Eritrea is an important piece of the story. The absence of this event from my field notes recalls a time when I was enmeshed in the political paranoia that threaded its way through many forms of communication in Eritrea—not just the wild interpretation of rumors and events missing from the only available state-run press in the country, but also through more intimate spheres: e-mails, phone conversations, casual social encounters, and public gestures, the significance of who you are spotted walking with—let alone field notes that, despite passwords and pseudonyms, felt dangerous and exposed. Eritrean social life was characterized by a pervasive sense that everything done publicly, and perhaps privately, was under observation, subject to suspicious scrutiny, capricious

interpretation, and punishment. And nearly everything, beneath the surface, seemed to hold within itself a double meaning, an insidious portent that seemed to mirror the tension that had existed in the stalled state of exceptionality since the border conflict broke out between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998. Was the university being dismantled before our eyes as a kind of punitive action against the elite urban intelligentsia, or was it being reconfigured in a visionary effort to decentralize higher education and disseminate resources to rural areas? Was it even really happening at all? Weeks before the new term was to start, when would faculty learn if any students would be admitted that year? How many young men and women were rounded up by soldiers in the capital city the day before in a seemingly random and widespread sweep of public places? By what criteria were some held and some released, and what would become of them? These whispered and wild speculations were punctuated by the constant throb of fighter jets flown over the city. Did they indicate that war with Ethiopia would soon break out again? What else could these unpredictable but persistent maneuvers mean during a time when fuel scarcity in the country was so dire that petrol was unavailable even with a coveted ration coupon, stranding people for days as they waited for public buses to refuel and resume service?

These kinds of rumors, coupled with the unknowns surrounding the fate of those who attempted to flee, the fear of surveillance, and the concern that anyone could be penalized on the basis of a rumor spread about their disapproval of the government or intent to leave, provided some measure of gatekeeping on interpersonal relations, channeling dissent into flight. The effect of this situation, as much crafted by tax codes and conscription practices as a transformation of the public sphere into one of fear, has been to minimize the potential for collective dissent in the country, siphoning off a large population of youth who do have severely limited economic opportunities in Eritrea, given the stalled political and economic standoff with Ethiopia, and at the same time profiting from projects of emigration via the capacity to demand, channel, and tax

remittances, and maintain tighter political control over families that remain in the country: "Used in particular by the young and educated. . . exit robs the country of those that might be able to inspire change from within. Moreover, by removing themselves as potential 'troublemakers,' and sending remittances back home, these new refugees unintentionally reduce the pressure on the regime to instigate reforms" (Conrad 2005, 255).

The slimmed spaces for public opposition, coupled with a network of vertical relationships between people variously positioned within and around the state sphere, suggest that the gatekeeper state not only challenges periodicizations between colonial and postcolonial, but simplifies divisions between state and society. Political power in Eritrea has a capillary nature, in which intentionality may be less orchestrated by government officials than it is inferred by people who collude in the restraints placed upon them by political fear (Bozzini 2011). The experience of Amanuel's friends, and of many other people I interviewed whose friends and family had escaped the country illegally or evaded national service, certainly support this observation. Through the operation of rumors, silence, evasion, and absence, the gatekeeper state is produced within the micro-politics of daily life. Rather than a monolithic, rational actor, the state emerges from the work of a series of actors, some of whom can capitalize on resources because of the selective permeability of national borders.[7]

Conclusion

Remittances compose "part of the complex web of relationships that connect diasporas with their places of origin" (Fessehatzion 2005, 165). The vertical relationships that comprise the Eritrean gatekeeper state as it channels not only remittances but political structures and identities extends beyond and through permeable borders, throughout transnational communities. As described

above, the transnational Eritrean sphere has been constitutive of Eritrean identity, but in ways that have been channeled by the EPLF state:

> Diaspora engagement in Eritrea, if allowed at all, takes place in close co-operation with the government. . . the influence of the diaspora organizations supportive of the government and the "silent majority". . . is largely limited to financial contributions to the state, which are likely to have a stabilizing effect on the current system and individual "indirect" activities, such as sending remittances and financing the escape of young relatives. (Schmitz-Pranghe 2010, 30)

We must be cautious about reading only resistance and individualism in flight, as Reid does in a recent article on political silence in Eritrea when he addresses emigration: "One of the more worrying developments has been a disengagement of people from the state and what the state purports to represent. Individualism is increasingly replacing the wider sense of 'national community,' which was discernible (if at times a little contrived) prior to and during the 1998–2000 war. People now care for little beyond their own circumstances and those of their immediate families" (Reid 2009, 211). Cooper's concept of the gatekeeper state pushes us to think beyond a simple division between individualism and nationalism, dissent and compliance, resistance and oppression: instead, we need to appreciate people's "complex coping strategies" and "multi-sided engagement with forces inside and outside the community" (Cooper 1994, 1533), along with overlapping and perhaps conflicting commitments. Instead of interpreting dissent and individualism, it is perhaps more useful to think through the ways in which individual strategies of survival are harnessed by new forms of gatekeeping for collective purposes. Eritrea pushes us to consider the capacity of the gatekeeper state to evolve new strategies of gatekeeping around sociopolitical and financial networks that may otherwise bypass the nation-state. In doing so,

the gatekeeper state has adapted to a historical moment supposedly typified by the attenuation of collectivist national projects.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. At the same time, as I have argued in contrast to Wrong's (2006) centralized model of Eritrean national history, the building blocks of nationalism—memories of the struggle, nostalgia for lush landscapes damaged by colonial conflict, and shared sacrifice and martyrdom—are not completely enveloped by the state. Instead, ethnography reveals how people outside centers of power use history to imagine different futures and reconstitute themselves as historical actors.

2. The verticality of state–society relations represents an apparent contradiction to the kinds of horizontal linkages theorized within Anderson's description of imagined communities in the Western nation-state.

3. Hepner (2009b) adopts an ethnographic focus on Eritrean post-independence diaspora communities to explore "how often violent efforts to construct national identity and control territory unfolded through space and time, drawing diverse and dispersed populations into a contentious but compelling political process."

4. Fessehatzion (2005) examines the reported numbers of Eritreans living

in the Middle East, Europe, and North America against remittance data, finding it likely that many do not pay the 2 percent tax, or undervalue their salaries when they do so.

5. Revised penalties cited in Proclamation 173/2013 for illegal remits in nakfa for foreign currency received abroad, or illegal payments or exchanges of foreign currency in Eritrea, involve imprisonment up to three years, or a fine of not more than 50,000 nakfa.

6. In addition to the fact that the 1997 Constitution has not been implemented and there is no free press, there is no public record of the decision-making processes for proclamations issued by the executive branch, nor is there a public comment period. Riggan (this volume) explores the value of ethnographic research in understanding state power when it operates in opaque ways. See Tessema (2010) for an interesting discussion of the role that perceived lack of good governance plays in the brain drain from Eritrea.

7. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore fully the recent emergence of human-trafficking networks targeting Eritreans as a pressing human-rights issue. It is worth noting, however, a recent UN report that alleges the collusion of Eritrean military and political officials in the lucrative cross-border smuggling of arms and people out of Eritrea (Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea 2012). Whether or not this is the case, the testimonies of Eritrean emigrants in this document point to a social model of the Eritrean state as performing a gatekeeping function through the selective porosity of borders.

Imagining Emigration: Debating National Duty in Eritrean Classrooms

JENNIFER RIGGAN

Abstract

Emigration is effectively illegal in Eritrea; however, Eritrea cultivates a loyal, active diaspora. Graduated emigration policies create a territorially bound population to provide cheap labor to the state and a diaspora that contributes financial resources to the government. The celebration of diasporic nationalism has successfully produced a longing to return among the diaspora, but it has inadvertently produced a longing to leave among Eritreans trapped in Eritrea. These contradictions are explored by examining classroom debates about emigration. Emigration debates allow teachers and students to articulate conflicting beliefs about national duty, personal aspirations, and the state. These debates enable teachers and students to construct emigration as part of their national duty, but they expose a critique of state policies that mandates different kinds of sacrifices for Eritreans in Eritrea and in the diaspora.

When the teacher announced that the class would be doing a debate, smiles broke out on students' faces. They had prepared for this. The debate question was: "Is it better to emigrate from your country or stay in your country?" The debate began slowly. One boy began by saying that he wanted to live in his country because "life without country is too difficult" and that "the word *migration* means spoiling culture and religion." A few students nodded and quietly

called out, "Yes!" Other students shook their heads and excitedly waved their hands. They were called on and, with great passion, they stood and announced that they wanted to go abroad to have a "new life" and to "get a good job." One young man stood slowly and, with gravity, walked to the front of the class. Enunciating his words, he waved a hand for emphasis, "When your country has harsh conditions and when leaders are oppressing their people, what does it mean to have a country? If you live in the US for three to five years you become a citizen and then you can do what you want." In response, half the class cheered and clapped loudly. The teacher stood and tapped his wooden eraser on the blackboard to silence the class. The clapping subsided, but the students could tell from his smile that they were not expected to behave with the usual order and discipline in this particular class. As the debate continued throughout the fifty-minute period, students on both sides spoke energetically, and the atmosphere in the classroom became increasingly raucous. Students heckled each other. They stood up and walked around the classroom. They spoke in increasingly loud voices, interrupting and mocking, a deviation from the ordered silence that pervaded most classes. (Field notes, 2003)

In a country where much of the population lives under the strict discipline of a highly militarized state and the public critique of governmental policies is typically regarded as dangerous, what was the meaning of this debate and the behavior that accompanied it? What does this debate tell us about the ways Eritreans understand their duties as citizens in a country where, twenty years after independence, many have lost faith in the state? This debate occurred in an eleventh-grade English class in Eritrea in the fall of 2003. Although debates were a common occurrence, typically accompanied by this type of environment, it is significant that a

question about leaving the country gave rise to a subtle, but critical, reworking of the meaning of national duty.

Governance practices related to emigration and the management of the Eritrean diaspora expose a deep contradiction. Emigration is effectively illegal in Eritrea, exit visas are required to leave the country, and completion of national military service is a prerequisite for receiving an exit visa or a passport (Government of Eritrea 1995, 82, article 7). According to the National Service Proclamation, national service is legally an eighteen-month commitment, consisting of six months of military training and one year of voluntary service (Government of Eritrea 1995, 82); however, since the Border War with Ethiopia (1998–2000), very few have been released from national service, and most who are recruited into national service believe they will be serving indefinitely (Bozzini 2011; Kibreab 2009a; O'Kane & Hepner 2009; Reid 2009). Conditions in national service have been described as forced labor, as conscripts are required to work for almost no pay, sometimes in government-owned businesses (Kibreab 2009b). During this time, recruits receive for pay what the government calls pocket money (Government of Eritrea 1995, 82, article 22).[1] As of the time of my fieldwork, exit visas were almost unheard of, even among those who had been released from or were exempt from national service. As a result of restrictions on exit visas and harsh, prolonged conditions of military service, tens of thousands of Eritreans have fled the country illegally. UNHCR estimates that there are currently 252,000 Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers, a number that has steadily increased from 124,121 in 2003 (UNHCR 2000, 2002, 2005, 2011). The border is heavily policed, and those who attempt to leave run the risk of imprisonment, torture, being shot at the border, or being kidnapped by traffickers (Human Rights Watch 2009).

In contrast, Eritrea has a large, celebrated diaspora, whose members are allowed to move freely in and out, provided they regularly pay a two-percent tax to the Eritrean government (Bernal 2004, 2005; Hepner 2009). In addition to being able to come and go as they please, they may acquire land—another citizenship right

denied Eritreans in Eritrea (Kibreab 2009a). Eritrea thus enacts a policy of graduated citizenship, whereby certain segments of the population—Eritreans in Eritrea—must complete national service before being granted full citizenship rights but have little hope of being released from national service, while other segments of the population—most notably for this paper, Eritreans in the diaspora—are exempt from national service and enjoy the full benefit of citizenship (Bozzini 2011).

The paradox produced by these policies provides the context for this article. The same policies that cultivated and nurtured citizenship among many members of the diaspora produced the seeds of discontent and critique among Eritreans in Eritrea. Students, their teachers, and Eritreans whom I interviewed and talked with in the course of my fieldwork were aware of these policies. Territorially bound Eritreans, because they interacted with family and friends from the diaspora, knew that returning members of the diaspora were not required to complete national service and were free of many of the restrictive policies that applied to Eritreans in Eritrea. Members of the diaspora who visited often came with lavish gifts and disposable income; they were permitted to travel around the country and enjoy themselves in ways that most Eritreans could not. This presented a stark contrast to limitations on the movements of Eritreans in Eritrea, as well as their economic circumstances. Furthermore, Eritreans in Eritrea were aware that the accomplishments and monetary contributions of the diaspora were being publicly celebrated, while theirs were obligatory and coerced. Eritreans who attempt to escape or avoid national service may be imprisoned or fined (Government of Eritrea 1995, 82).

Despite vast differences in the treatment of different categories of Eritreans, evidence from my research suggests that Eritreans in Eritrea did not eschew the national rhetoric of sacrifice and duty to the nation. Instead, they utilized the experiences of the diaspora to redefine this notion of duty. In this article, I argue that policies of graduated citizenship produced desires to migrate, not only to escape repressive conditions, but to serve the nation and,

indeed, to be Eritrean in a different way. I explore the ways in which an imagined future that revolved around leaving the country and cast leaving the country as a form of national duty was shaped by paradoxical government policies, which ascribe different citizenship rights to different kinds of Eritrean citizens. I show how this contradiction was exposed in classroom debates, in which students attempted to rework national narratives of duty and sacrifice so as to constitute leaving the country not as an *antinational* act (despite that fact that it was illegal for service-age youth to leave), but as an *alternatively* national act. Youth attempted to rework dominant, state-produced notions of sacrifice and duty to the nation by drawing on state-produced narratives of nationalism that cast members of the diaspora as model citizens.

My argument is laid out as follows. I begin with a brief discussion of my research methods and the challenges of doing research in Eritrea. I then explain Eritrea's policies of graduated citizenship by showing how Eritrea's need to capture a transnational revenue stream from its diaspora required one set of governance practices while disciplining a fighting force to defend and develop the country required another. From there, I move on to show that these graduated policies have produced the contradiction that is illustrated in the debate quoted above. I illustrate the way ideas about the diaspora have functioned symbolically to shape the imagined futures of many Eritrean youth, including those who were debating the meaning of citizenship in their classrooms. Then I return to an analysis of classroom debates to show how the tensions between doing one's duty to the nation and leaving the country were debated in an attempt to carve out a new sense of national identity that held on to meaningful notions of loyalty, duty, and sacrifice but attempted to embed emigration as a viable act of national duty.

The Exceptional State of Eritrea: Challenges

and Opportunities for Ethnographic Research

Eritrea is a country in which governance is aptly characterized by Agamben's notion of a "state of exception," which often derives from the perception or reality of being constantly under siege and results in conditions where "there is a force of law without the rule of law" (2005, 39). Indeed, Eritrea has been described as "a siege state," a place where exceptional measures are taken to reorganize society around the need to defend against perceived external threats to the nation (International Crisis Group 2010; Müller 2012).

As the state of siege is extended, there are ever expanding gray areas where written law becomes secondary to governing practice. Under conditions of "war and mobilization," the National Service Proclamation states that "anyone in active national service is under the obligation of remaining even beyond the prescribed period" (Government of Eritrea 1995, 82, article 21). In 2002, the government introduced the Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign, which, under the auspices of galvanizing national-service conscripts to work on development projects, enabled the government to avoid mass demobilization after the Border War concluded and effectively extend national service.[2] Given that there has been no significant fighting with Ethiopia since 2000, the ongoing mobilization of such a large proportion of the population is generally seen as illegitimate and outside the scope of Eritrean law; therefore, Eritreans, scholars of Eritrea, and human-rights organizations commonly assert that national service is indefinite or permanent.

Meanwhile, other policies and governance practices, such as those that determine who can travel, quit their job, and get an exit visa, are unavailable in written form. While it is noted in the National Service Proclamation that anyone who attempts to escape national service will have "his rights to license, visa, land tenure[,] and the right to work suspended" as a punishment, many never experience these rights in the first place (Government of Eritrea 1995, 82, article

37). At the time of my fieldwork, I found that many civil servants were unclear as to whether or not they had been demobilized and were, therefore, eligible to enjoy these citizenship rights. Regardless of whether or not national service had been completed, extensive documentation and permission from a large number of bureaucratic functionaries were needed to start a business, quit a government job, acquire an exit visa, and even travel to another part of the country. Furthermore, no written policy explained this process. Acquiring documentation and permission often proved to be close to impossible and thus was experienced as a legal prohibition. Eritreans themselves often commented to me that laws and policies were "written in pencil," yet Eritreans experienced the material, and often detrimental, effects of governing officials' capacity to carry out these constantly mutating laws and policies. In this context, where the force of law is more salient than the written law, ethnographic methods, which have a unique capacity to apprehend everyday experiences, become a particularly important means of gathering information.

The lack of written law and policy has some historical precedent in Eritrea. A practice of not writing down many laws and policies emerged from Eritrea's history as an insurgency (Connell 2011). It therefore comes as little surprise that a climate of silence and secrecy pervades Eritrean political culture. Government officials often do not have full information. When information is obscured, fact and interpretation often blend seamlessly into each other, making partial information, rumors, and gossip particularly salient to understanding often veiled political commentary. This is often the case in authoritarian regimes, where it is particularly important to attend carefully to everyday experiences as well as rumors, jokes, and other forms of political commentary that fall outside the gaze of the government, including classroom debates (Wedeen 1999).

Data for this paper are taken from a larger study of nationalism, state formation, and teachers, made during periods of ethnographic fieldwork in Eritrea's South Red Sea zone between 2000 and 2005. The study, grounded in the field of political anthropology, seeks to

understand, first, how Eritreans encounter and experience the state through schools, and second, how this encounter reshapes national identities. This paper specifically looks at debates in classrooms in two secondary schools set in the context of broader political and policy shifts taking place at that time. Findings come out of an analysis of field notes on classroom observations recorded over the course of two years and are supplemented by data from interviews with teachers and participant-observation during the same period.

   Research on teachers and students illuminates the paradoxes of Eritrean nationalism because teachers and students imagined themselves as being the kind of citizen who should have the right to travel and advance beyond the status of other Eritrean citizens. As with many other places, the processes of cultural production inherent in becoming educated endowed Eritreans with a sense of themselves as a distinct type of citizen (Levinson, Foley, and Holland 1996). My own work has detailed the ways in which educated people in Eritrea imagined their role in the nation in ways that marked them as distinct from the population at large (Riggan 2009).

Developing a Nation in a Transnational Era: Eritrea's Version of Graduated Sovereignty

Eritrea faces particular sovereignty challenges and opportunities as a developmental nation coming into an era marked by global flows (O'Kane and Hepner 2009, xxii). In response to the porousness of the global era, Eritrea has simultaneously enacted two strategies of governance: on the one hand, the government has embraced transnational flows and attempted to capture capital from the transnational field by cultivating and nurturing the loyalties of Eritreans around the world to make them willing financial contributors; on the other hand, it has contained the territorial nation by prohibiting Eritreans living inside Eritrea from leaving,

strictly regulating life for Eritreans within Eritrea, and protecting against foreign influence. One set of governance practices extended sovereignty transnationally by governing and extracting resources from the diaspora; the other set shored up territorial sovereignty by protecting and containing the physical nation.

Mahmood Mamdani's concept of the bifurcated state may partially illuminate the contradictions of state policy in the Eritrean context (1996). According to Mamdani, different forms of rule within a single state lead to a distinction between a rights-bearing citizen and a state subject, each of which is governed according to different legal and political formulations.[3] Another useful framing comes from Frederick Cooper's notion of the gatekeeper state, whereby the state situates itself economically and politically so as to coopt resources (2002). Amanda Poole's contribution to this volume utilizes this framework to depict Eritrean state strategies of resource accumulation (Poole, this volume). Instead, however, of drawing on Mamdani's notion of bifurcated political and legal frameworks that differentiate between citizen and subject or Cooper's concept of gatekeeping, I find that Aihwa Ong's term graduated sovereignty provides a useful heuristic with which to examine both the transnational economic logic that has produced the need for bifurcated policies on the part of the state and their subsequent effect on national imaginaries among Eritreans in Eritrea (Ong 1999, 2007).

Like Mamdani's account of bifurcation, Ong's concept of graduated sovereignty references differential modes of governing different populations, but Ong's conceptualization is perhaps more akin to Cooper's, in that she emphasizes the calibration of sovereignty itself to enable the state to mobilize economic forces and extend itself beyond the confines of the territorial nation. Ong notes: "Through the differential deployment of state and non-state power, populations in different zones are variously subjected to political control and to social regulation by state and non-state actors" (1999, 217). In some of these zones, the state regulates and disciplines its subjects to better provide a docile labor force; in

other zones, the state allows much greater freedom of movement, information, and expression so as to access global capital. Ong differentiates between "developmentalism. . . which takes the national economy as the target of state action" and "post-developmentalism," a "more dispersed strategy," which "induces the coordination of political policies with the corporate interests, so that development decisions favor the fragmentation of national space into various noncontiguous zones, and promote the differential regulation of populations who can be connected or disconnected from global circuits of capital" (2007, 77). As I explain in more detail below, Eritrea appears to be a developmental state, focused on the national economy and population, but enacting distinctly post-developmental strategies by using its own deterritorialized citizens to guard against foreign involvement.

In 1991, when Eritrea became independent from Ethiopia, the country was noted for the nationalism that effervesced out of its populist, thirty-year armed struggle for liberation (Hepner 2009; Iyob 1995). Eritrea immediately engaged in a cultural project aimed at producing social cohesion and loyalty to the nation, although it quickly became apparent that this was a top-down nation-building project, which tolerated little to no debate over state policies (Connell 1997; Makki 1996). At the core of this project was the ideal of economic self-reliance, which eschewed foreign involvement of all kinds and led to a completely government-controlled economy (Hepner 2009; Kibreab 2009a). On several occasions, the government has forced NGOs out of the country, most recently in 2005, arguing that NGOs inhibit self-reliance and instead promote dependency (Kibreab 2009a). Agriculture, service, and construction industries are all government controlled. In the agricultural sector, which traditionally encompasses 80 percent of the population but only one-fifth of GDP, farmers are required to inform local government before they harvest and then sell the majority of their crops to the government at a set price (Ogbazghi 2011). Additionally, the government prohibits trade outside of government channels, leading to the emergence of a black market for grain, bread, and

other staples—which, in turn, is policed by the government (Kibreab 2009a; Ogbazghi 2011). Meanwhile, the ruling party is required to have a majority stake in any private industries, and the party profits from these industries while national service provides them with a cheap source of labor in the form of conscripts (Kibreab 2009b). The vast majority of the population between the ages of eighteen and forty is in national service, most serving in military units. Exact numbers are hard to come by, but some estimates suggest as many as 350,000 are in active service (Hirt and Mohammad 2013). A large proportion of the civil service, including teachers, was comprised of national service labor at the time of my fieldwork, and, given that private sector employment is minimal, the government employs the vast majority of educated people. Those in national service and those in the civil service face similar restrictions. My fieldwork revealed that civil servants, like those in national service, often could not choose their job or where they work, quit their job, acquire an exit visa, or have access to their university diploma.

Indicators suggest that the economic picture for Eritrea is increasingly bleak. Since the Border War ended in 2000, inflation, slow growth, increased deficit, and national expenditures vastly outpacing revenues all reflect a troubled economy (Kibreab 2009a).[4] While gold mining has sped up growth in recent years, major economic challenges remain (World Bank 2011).[5]

In theory, Eritrea's program of national service proposes to utilize its labor pool for self-reliant development projects, one of the main goals of national service (Government of Eritrea 1995, 82), but the reality is that maintaining such a large number of people on active military duty and in the civil service has been expensive, and the state has not been able to translate this captive labor pool into economic value (International Crisis Group 2010). In 2000, Eritrea allocated more than 30 percent of its GDP to the military (UNDP 2013), and some estimates suggest that Eritrea may have allocated close to 20 percent of its GDP to the military in 2005 (Bozzini 2011). Thus, those in national service are expected to serve in the name of national development, and they are threatened with punishments if

they abandon national service, but the cost of maintaining this labor pool may have actually impeded growth (Kibreab 2009a).

In the face of economic challenges, remittances and revenue from the government's 2-percent tax on the Eritrean diaspora have become increasingly important resources (International Crisis Group 2010). In fact, not only was the Eritrean diaspora essential for supporting both Eritrea's war for independence and the Border War, but since independence the government has become increasingly dependent on the diaspora as a source of capital (Al-Ali, Black, and Koser 2001; Bernal 2004, 2005; Hepner 2008, 2009; Makki 1996). Members of the diaspora have been strongly encouraged to send voluntary contributions in times of hardship (Hepner 2009). Although little specific information is available about remittances, it is estimated that an average of US $226 million per year were remitted to Eritrea, and that as of 2005 approximately one-third of Eritrea's GDP came from remittances (Tessema 2009). The effect of remittances from the diaspora is probably even higher, because many send money through illegal, black-market channels, rather than through government banks.

In contrast to discipline of the territorially bound population, policies toward the diaspora cultivate a relationship between diasporic citizens and the homeland with the goal of securing a constant source of revenue, as well as political support for the ruling regime. In exchange for paying taxes and demonstrating political compliance to the government, members of the diaspora have more robust citizenship rights, including the ability to move freely in and out of the country. They can participate in other pleasant events that seem intent on nurturing attachments to the nation, such as the annual summer Expo in Asmara and tours of the military training center at Sawa for young people. Additionally, they can acquire land and build homes in and around Asmara. Thus, treatment of citizens in the diaspora cultivates their loyalties and linkages to the homeland in pleasant and pleasurable ways while reminding them of their duty to sacrifice for the nation—and doing

all of this in a way that enables the government to extract much-needed resources from this population.

As with Ong's conceptualization of graduated sovereignty, laws, regulations, and forms of discipline in Eritrea are calibrated to extend sovereignty across a transnational field and shore up sovereignty within the territorial nation. Eritrea's policies cultivate and nurture relationships with its diaspora to capture capital from parts of the world where capital is readily available. Meanwhile, Eritrea takes advantage of political conditions within Eritrea to coerce and discipline its territorial population into providing free labor to the government. Arguably, these strategies are not quite working, particularly when viewed from the perspective of territorially bound Eritreans, who feel the pain of shortages and inflation caused by economic struggles: they have seen no rewards from their own labor or the system of economic self-reliance and, thus, are often left only with the experience of personal sacrifice. Meanwhile, they are aware of a diasporic population that enjoys a very different kind of relationship with the state.

Diaspora as a National Symbol; Emigration as a National Desire

Substantially different kinds of policies need to be enacted to cultivate supportive, financially nurturing nationalism from members of the diaspora and ensure a compliant labor force among Eritreans in Eritrea. According to Ong's conceptualization, the distinction between cultivation and care on the one hand and discipline and regulation on the other is key. Policies of cultivation and care not only garner economic support (as the government intends them to), but symbolically shape the way Eritreans in Eritrea imagine their future. This is perhaps an unanticipated side effect of these policies. At the time of my fieldwork, Eritreans living in

Eritrea were keenly aware that the diaspora and its contributions to the nation were celebrated while they themselves increasingly felt exploited.

Literature on transnationalism has suggested that increased global linkages not only connect a nation with its diasporic community and vice versa, but that these connections fundamentally alter the nature of the nation from a territorially bounded entity to one that operates across spaces (Bernal 2004, 2005; Hepner 2009). In this process, new ways of imagining emerge that enable people to think of themselves as members of a deterritorialized community (Appadurai 1996). Those who leave home are imaginatively and materially linked to home in a variety of ways, and the presence of that imagined home shapes their desires to return. At the same time, the desires of those who cannot leave are shaped by their imagination of the lives of those who have left, thus framing their desire to leave (Dick 2010). The diaspora and those at home thus figure prominently in each other's imagined sense of the nation and national belonging.

The diaspora materially supports the nation and plays a symbolic role in the production of Eritrean nationalism, particularly among those residing in Eritrea. The destiny of Eritrea as a diasporic state has been built around the desire for a viable, independent, internationally recognized, sovereign state to which those dispersed by conflict could safely return (Iyob 2000). Extending this discussion, I suggest that national identities in Eritrea have been built around this nationalism of longing and the romance of return to the nation.

Imaginaries of returning to the homeland have played a powerful role in framing the national identities of Eritreans in the diaspora, but imaginaries of leaving home have framed national identities of Eritreans in Eritrea. The same graduated policies that have cultivated relationships between the state and the diasporic citizen and encouraged flows between Eritrea and countries in which the diaspora reside have inadvertently made Eritreans in Eritrea both aware and resentful of the highly regulated, constrained, and

disciplinary relationship that they have with the state. At a time when a state's capacity to serve as an "ideological container" (Trouillot 2001) for the nation is often compromised, the Eritrean state has provided an extraordinarily strong ideological container, particularly for its diaspora (Bernal 2004). Ironically, for the same reasons it has provided a strong container for diasporic identities, it has perhaps not provided as strong an ideological container in Eritrea for those living under the disciplinary mechanisms of the state. Gaim Kibreab has explored the relationship between refugees' longing for home and their pragmatic evaluation of where they will have full citizenship rights and the best ability to survive (2003). Eritrean refugees' decisions to repatriate or remain in exile following independence weigh these factors against each other, and ultimately, their sense of their citizenship rights and belief that they will be looked after by the state play a key role in determining whether they will return (Kibreab 2000, 2003). Conversely, Eritreans in Eritrea evaluate the status of their citizenship rights and weigh rights against notions of home and loyalty to country in their debate over whether or not to leave the country.

Eritreans in Eritrea see themselves as being denied the citizenship rights that they have worked hard for and had initially been promised by the government. During the course of my fieldwork, Eritreans commented daily on their frustration with the endlessness of national service, the inability to quit a job or find alternative employment, the overall quality of governance in Eritrea, and the control that governing officials had over everyday lives. Less frequent, but still pervasive, were complaints about the government's failure to hold elections or implement the Constitution. A sense of malaise had taken place, evident in the increasing sense of hopelessness that I noted and that has been noted in other ethnographic work from the same period (Poole 2009; Treiber 2009). More recent research suggests that this sense of hopelessness has worsened since then (Hirt and Mohammad 2013; Reid 2009).

In contrast, members of the diaspora—nicknamed belles, after the

cactus fruit that ripens only in summer—came, went, and traveled freely throughout the country. Eritreans in Eritrea often joked about the way belles talked—loudly—in upscale cafes that most Eritreans could scarcely afford, and they complained about the traffic caused by belles' elaborate weddings in the summers in Asmara. The freedoms that members of the diaspora had and wealth differentials between the diaspora and Eritreans in Eritrea were obvious, and both were blamed on government policies that kept Eritreans in national service indefinitely. "Teachers never grow up," several research subjects complained to me, describing the economically backward state they felt permanently relegated to. In this government-controlled economy, where the vast majority of employees were in either national service or the civil service, economic difficulties were blamed directly on the government and conflated with government repression.

Additionally, the desires for return and a sense of duty among Eritreans in the diaspora were used by the government as a public spectacle to idealize national loyalty among the diaspora. During the Border War, the monetary contributions of members of the diaspora were regularly reported on Eritrean television, portraying members of the diaspora as ideal citizens willing to make sacrifices for their country. Although willingness to sacrifice for the nation is a cornerstone of Eritrean nationalism, diasporic sacrifices were publicly depicted as being more significant. The diaspora was celebrated in the Eritrean media. Scenes on Eritrean television from the annual festivals in Asmara and around the world idealized the patriotism of the diaspora by publicly displaying the heightened emotional euphoria experienced through celebrating the nation. Accomplishments of famous Eritreans in the diaspora, particularly musicians and athletes, were celebrated. They came to serve as a symbol of a transnational nationalism, but for Eritreans in Eritrea, these national heroes and heroines were a symbol of a lifestyle that could not be attained and a set of choices that could not be made without leaving the country.

The impossibility of leaving the country and these symbolic and

actual encounters with the diaspora fueled the desire to leave. Emigration from Eritrea has been steadily on the rise since 2003, with increasing numbers of Eritrean refugees located mainly in Sudan and Ethiopia. At present, there are an estimated quarter of a million Eritrean refugees—a strikingly high number for a country of 5.3 million and a number that has doubled since 2003 (UNHCR 2003, 2011). The increase in asylum applications speaks to Eritreans' ongoing flight from political conditions. Between 1996, four years after independence, and 2000, at the end of the Border War, asylum applications rose from 610 to 2,675 (UNHCR 2002). Asylum applications between 2003 and 2005 rose from 7,650 to 15,910, and 25,543 new Eritreans applied for asylum in 2011 (UNHCR 2005, 2011). More anecdotally, but equally poignantly, when I first lived in Eritrea in 1995, many Eritrean friends could not fathom wanting to leave their country: a phrase that has stuck in my head since that time is "nothing is sweeter than your country." When I returned to Eritrea in 2003, many of the people who had been talking about the sweetness of living in one's country were asking me for help with applications for visas to the United States or asking if I could sponsor them to immigrate.

The romance of return and the longing for the homeland shaped the imaginaries of Eritreans in Eritrea in a somewhat paradoxical way. Romanticizing the return (and the returnees) produced a desire to leave so that one might be able to return and enjoy a different sense of national duty, one with more freedom and less hardship, one in which sacrifice was constituted by monetary contributions rather than labor. Thus, longing for the nation took the form of longing to leave and to replace one's military duty to the nation with the less disciplinary and more joyful participation in the transnational citizenry, and yet, as I illustrate below, these longings were in constant tension with notions of duty that revolved around staying home to defend and build the country.

Debating the Nation

Classroom debates on the question "Is it good or bad to leave one's country?" illustrate the ways in which students dynamically engaged with the double standard produced through these different definitions of citizenship. The ability of the diaspora to move relatively freely in, out of, and within the country, the perception that members of the diaspora could pursue education and work of their choice abroad, and the sense that the diaspora had the chance to enjoy the country (rather than just suffer and sacrifice for it) led to a rethinking of the meaning of duty to the nation among Eritreans living under the disciplinary control of the state.

In 2003, debates were arguably one of the few formats in which the process of redefining citizenship duties could have occurred. That year was a pivotal moment for Eritrean students and teachers. Educational policy was changed, effectively to merge the completion of high school with the beginning of military training. This policy, combined with the government's failure to demobilize those who had been in national or military service for five years or more, was leading students to believe that the state was radically altering their life trajectory. As part of a comprehensive reform of its education system, promotion policies were rewritten to enable all students to complete high school. A parallel policy implemented the same year required students to complete their final year of high school at a boarding school located in the country's military-training facility and to complete military training before beginning grade twelve (Riggan 2009). All of this led to deep uncertainty on the part of teachers and students, whose understanding of their role as educated citizens appeared to be opposed to state definitions of military citizenship. Educational processes often enable educated people to imagine themselves as endowed with privilege and occupying an exceptional place in society, as has been well documented (Coe 2005; Levinson 2001; Luykx 1999; Stambach 2000). In contrast, policies introduced in 2003 were intent on

integrating educated citizens into the broader mass of militarized citizens, creating a disconnect that I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Riggan 2009).

Debates opened up spaces in which students could rethink the role of the educated person in the nation. Debates were one of several techniques recommended to teachers, particularly in English and history.[6] Amid a generalized sense that one could not critique the government in a public forum, classroom debates unwittingly opened up spaces for dialogue. The carnivalesque environment freed students to take a political stance that they might not otherwise have felt free taking. Bakhtin and others have noted that the carnival locates its participants in a space where norms, rules, and authority are overturned (Bakhtin 1984; Mbembe 2001; Woldemikael 2009). Under the guise of practicing a foreign language, students engaging in the debate could create and act out highly politicized roles, and in doing so, they could discuss perspectives normally impossible to discuss in such an open forum. Typical norms of classroom behavior altered to produce a more chaotic environment, but this inversion of norms emboldened students to say things that may not have been safe to say in other contexts. The debate created a playful public sphere, which departed from both the government-dominated public voice in Eritrea and the diasporic public spheres in which modalities of being Eritrean tend to become polarized, as one is cast either with the government or against it (Bernal 2005). As students rationalized their claims that leaving the country was good or bad, they engaged with government-sponsored nationalist rhetoric of service, sacrifice, and self-sufficiency but reinterpreted it.

Debate topics helped shape the dialogue. Teachers had a great deal of freedom to choose debate topics, and they often chose topics that would lend themselves to political commentary. Debates covered a range of subjects, from abstractions like "Which is better: money or knowledge?" and "Which is better: social science or natural science?" to specific material like "Was the Italian colonial period beneficial or detrimental to Eritrea?" What is interesting

about debates was the way they created opportunities for students to comment on the political conditions of the country, particularly on issues of importance to them, such as national service, the university, the border situation, and the war. For example, in a debate on whether social science or natural science is better, students evoked the Border War as evidence that politicians (social scientists) were responsible for getting Eritrea into the war and that scientists who made the weapons would make it possible to win it. Although teachers generally picked fairly abstract topics, which were then politicized by students, the topics sometimes seemed to have an intentionally political side. One teacher asked students to stand up in front of the class and imagine that they were running for president of Eritrea. Debates on all topics tended to wind their way back in some form to national politics and issues students wrestled with, such as how to improve their own lives and still help their country. While politicized topics, however, lent themselves to debate and critique, they did not force students to be critical. Students could, and did, willingly "toe the party line." Thus, what I point out in the analysis that follows is not so much an example of overt resistance, but of an attempt to wrestle with contradictions created by the relationships among graduated citizenship, a sense of national duty, and national service.

The debates from an eleventh-grade English class on the question of whether it is better to stay in your country or emigrate were particularly representative of the lines of thought that redefined notions of duty to the nation. For grade-eleven students, about to enter grade twelve and an indefinite period of national service, the question of emigration was a highly personal one. The debate allowed them to express divergent views about their country, its government, and the position of Eritrea and Eritreans in the world.

The debate began by defining two sets of ideas. Several students made comments that suggested that "life without country is too difficult" and "the word *migration* means spoiling the culture and religion"; these phrases show how leaving can be cast as a betrayal to oneself, one's country, and one's culture. In contrast, several

students articulated the viewpoint that one does not "have a country" when there are "harsh conditions" and "leaders are oppressing their people." Here, the country is cast as unworthy of its citizens unless it takes care of them. These two ideas—that migration was a betrayal to one's country, and that migration was the only choice, given the political conditions—loosely framed the poles of the debate. Leaving the country was tantamount to killing the culture, but staying was impossible because people had no choices.

What was most interesting about the debate was students' attempt to find a middle ground between those poles, an attempt that the following sequence emphasizes:

> A student said he wanted to live in both his own country and abroad—to go abroad to get better education and then to come home to develop his country.
>
> The next student opposed this idea, rather anxiously, saying that tomorrow Eritrea could be like European countries and, "If many of the young people leave, who is going to develop the country?"
>
> Then another student said, "You can't develop your country by staying because you will be ignorant if you stay here. There is no education here." (Fieldnotes 2003)

The first student who speaks, struggles to define national duty amid an awareness of limited possibilities, particularly for educated people, and to suggest that leaving could help develop the country. This attempt to redefine national duty is immediately opposed by a student who evokes the specter of everyone's leaving and emptying out the country, and then by another student, who evokes a contrary specter by asserting that development cannot happen in a country where there is no education.

What emerges next in the debate reflects a complex politics of the belly, where the ability of Eritrea to take care of its people is debated:

A girl raised the problem of economic conditions in America by asking, "If you leave, who will feed you? It's better to stay home than to be hungry."

One of the boys who had been very outspoken throughout the debate addressed the critique that if you leave, you won't help the country: "When we go abroad, we're going to get something. Lack of food is the first problem that makes people go away. If you go there, people will help you; here, no one helps you." He went on to say that he might be a "sweeper" in another country, but he could "get dollars," and he would eventually improve his skills and his job. He concluded, "There, you can earn a little money and have a peaceful mind."

Another boy rebutted him, saying, "In America, they will feed you but won't give you skills to develop your country: they will only take your labor." (Fieldnotes 2003)

The question "Who will feed you?" illuminates concerns about being cared for and raises the question of where one will be better cared for. The implicit question here is whether Eritrea cares for its people. Only one student depicts Eritrea as capable of serving as a caretaker of its people by saying, "If you leave, who will feed you?" Other students agreed with one student's assertion that "lack of food is the first problem that makes people go away"; the inability of Eritrea to be a caretaker actually fueled expressions of the desire to leave.

Depictions of country as caretaker or negligent caretaker frame discussions of whether leaving is a sacrifice or a selfish act. As is apparent above, while only one student thought one would eat better in Eritrea, a range of opinions addressed what the implications of eating better would be for a decision to emigrate. Discussions of a full belly reveal many students' awareness of hardships they would face if they did leave the country. The comment "It's better to stay home than go hungry" reflected an awareness of difficult economic conditions for people who had left

the country and suggested that one would be better cared for at home. In contrast, another student believed he would be a "sweeper" (relegated to low-wage labor) if he left, but thought that was still the better option. Students were aware of economic hardships they would face if they left. Leaving, as much as staying, is thus depicted as a form of sacrifice.

In contrast, as the debate goes on, the desire for a full belly is critiqued as an attempt to put one's desire for material comfort and individual well-being over the good of the country:

> A boy who had been quiet until now stood and disagreed, saying that people abroad received better education. To this, the boy who had just spoken replied that you could get personal tools from education, but this wouldn't help you develop your country.
>
> Another student added, "If people in this country think only of their stomach, there will be no development. If everyone leaves, what will the next generations do? I think it is better to live here." (Fieldnotes 2003)

The statement "If people in this country think only of their stomach, there will be no development"—which follows a critique that education abroad would afford personal tools but not help develop the country—suggests that one's material needs should come second to the needs of the nation: one should sacrifice for the nation by staying home and sticking it out, even if the country cannot take care of its people. Leaving is seen as self-serving, in contrast to staying to work for the nation.

Throughout the debate, the value of knowledge is pitted against the full belly. Education figures prominently in the way students imagine their role in building the nation, so the location of knowledge to develop the nation becomes an important question in the debate. While the full stomach is depicted as selfish, gaining knowledge is depicted as important for the nation, but questions are raised about where knowledge comes from and whose knowledge can develop the nation:

"It's not about stomach: it's about knowledge," one student said emphatically.

   Then a student asked a question: "Are people in developed countries going to other countries to learn? No! They get their knowledge from their own country, and then come to exploit developing countries." (Fieldnotes 2003)

On the one hand, students constructed an education–emigration continuum by arguing that the nation could be developed only if educated people were willing to leave, experience political freedom, and get a better education; emigrating was thus depicted as something good for the country, something that entailed great sacrifice. On the other hand, the site of knowledge for developing the country was debated, and questions were raised as to whether outside knowledge would help the country. Repeatedly, both in this class and in others, those arguing in favor of leaving suggested that they had to leave to get a good education—which, by implication, was not available in Eritrea. No one refuted the assertion that education in Eritrea was poor, but many argued against the idea that knowledge from another country could successfully develop Eritrea.

   Overall, a striking thing about this debate is that students were discussing what was good for the country as much as, or even more than, what was good for them personally. Those who wished to leave overwhelmingly sought to contextualize a desire to leave as something that would help the country or was inevitable because the country had failed them. The attempt to situate the longing to leave within the discourse of helping the nation resonates with patterns that I found throughout the course of my fieldwork. Even in turbulent times, when teachers, students, and others were deeply unhappy about government policies and practices, the vast majority continued to be deeply nationalistic; they continued to adhere to the core tenet of Eritrean nationalism: that everyone must serve and sacrifice for the nation. Thus, in the course of this debate, students were interrogating and critiquing policies of the state while casting

themselves as loyal citizens. In doing so, they argued that leaving the country could help the country.

In contrast, other students expressed concern that knowledge gained abroad would not be the right kind of knowledge to develop the country and that the best thing to do for one's country was to stay. This casts those who stay in Eritrea as the true keepers of national development and thereby casts the work and sacrifices of Eritreans in Eritrea as more legitimate than that of others. The question of if or how one could contribute to the nation by leaving the country was raised in a debate in another class and is reflected most clearly below:

> To support the argument that one can leave the country and still support the nation, a boy pointed out that people who go abroad have sent a lot of money to help the war.
>
> A girl then stood and responded passionately, saying "Giving money and lives is not the same. Giving money is easy. Easy."
>
> Another boy stood up and continued to make the same point, saying, "You can't compare money with defending your country."
>
> These points effectively silenced the class and ended the debate. (Fieldnotes 2003)

These statements seem to borrow from nationalist themes emanating from the history of the struggle for independence and suggest that being truly national is being willing to sacrifice everything for the nation. These points about the sacrifices of Eritreans in Eritrea in contrast to those of Eritreans in the diaspora articulate with government definitions of sacrifice-based nationalism, but they point to an awareness of deep inequities between the classes of citizens. It was thus an attempt to elevate the sacrifices of those who stay home over those of the diaspora, but also a commentary on unequal expectations: the diaspora is encouraged to send money, which the government badly needs,

while those in Eritrea are expected to devote their lives to serving the country.

Overall, what I hope to have illustrated above is the way in which schoolroom debates reflect an imaginary of the role of the diaspora in building–and sacrificing for–Eritrea. Clearly, some students are trying to carve out a role in building the nation for those who try to leave, while others continually assert that it is those who stay who are truly loyal, the ones who really care about the future development of the nation. In doing this, the inequities between different classes of citizens are exposed as the nature of different forms of sacrifice is debated. Ultimately, while students disagree about whether leaving the country can be construed as one's national duty, they converge on an awareness of these inequities.

Conclusion

Above, I have attempted to explore the effects of Eritrea's version of graduated sovereignty on students' definition of national duty. Graduated policies have created different categories of citizens: diasporic citizens, whose loyalties are cultivated so they will continue to make financial contributions to the nation, and territorially bound citizens, required to engage in national military service. For diasporic citizens, payment of taxes to the government and political compliance continues to be a prerequisite for full citizenship rights, and if these conditions are met, they can move freely in and out of the country, own property, and enjoy certain freedoms and privileges as Eritrean citizens. In contrast, territorially bound citizens are theoretically supposed to have full citizenship rights once national service is complete, but in reality, national service continues to be endless for many, and even when it ends, many struggle to have the same rights as members of the diaspora.

Eritreans are keenly aware of these graduated policies, and, as I

have argued here, the treatment of people in the diaspora makes territorially bound Eritreans long to leave, desiring not just to escape from a repressive state and the economic hardships it imposes on its population, but to be Eritrean in a different way, to be a citizen of a different kind. People in the diaspora and government efforts to cultivate diasporic nationalism inadvertently model this other way of being Eritrean to territorially bound Eritreans.

My analysis of classroom debates on this topic have shown the ways in which these contradictions played out among Eritrean students, who, by virtue of their age and life stage, were poised to join national service, but, being educated people, thought of themselves as having the rights to travel and learn from and about the world. All these youth cared about the future development of the country, but many tried to cast their devotion in terms of loyally leaving the country so as to help it. Others clung to more traditional notions of sacrifice and duty and cast themselves as the truly sacrificing Eritreans.

Graduated sovereignty attempts to disperse sovereignty across a transnational space, governing populations differently so as to take advantage of different economic configurations, but Eritrea, with its insistence on self-reliance and containment, is inventing its own version of graduated sovereignty, one that produces side effects that may be problematic for the state. As I note above, economic reliance on the diaspora is insufficient to fund the labor pool in national service. More importantly for the arguments presented in this article, when a state simultaneously extends sovereignty over a transnational populace and creates different categories of citizenship within that populace, each endowed with different rights and duties, that state loses control over the ways in which the nation is imagined. This makes graduated citizenship precarious in Eritrea and elsewhere. New ways of thinking about, imagining, and debating the nation are opened up, even as the state seeks to bind territorial and diasporic Eritreans to state-produced notions of duty, sacrifice, and self-reliance.

Acknowledgment

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Notes

1. Pocket money can be anywhere between 145 nakfa and 400 nakfa. It depends on whether conscripts while in service are in the military living with their unit or living on their own. At the current government exchange rate of 1 US dollar to 14.5 nakfa, this is the equivalent of 10 to 25 dollars per month. The government exchange rates, however, are notoriously inflated. Black-market exchange rates more accurately reflect the value of the currency and at the time of writing are between 45 and 46 nakfa to the dollar.

2. A full discussion of the Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign is beyond the scope of this article. For a further discussion of it and its relationship with national service, see Bozzini 2011 and Kibreab 2009b.

3. Mamdani's bifurcated state emerges from a historical understanding of parallel forms of governance produced simultaneously as elements of direct and indirect rule evolved side by side within the same state and were then appropriated by nationalist movements that reproduced the same parallel forms. Although the distinction in Eritrea between diasporic citizens, governed by one set of regulations, and territorial subjects, governed by another, appears to resonate with Mamdani's notion of bifurcation, the historical trajectory in Eritrea has been quite different, given that the composition of the Eritrean diaspora does not

neatly map on to any colonial-era category, and the ruling and liberating party has spread the centralized state throughout the country, leaving little space for bifurcation in Mamdani's sense.

4. Inflation in Eritrea was 29.5 percent in 2009, 11.6% percent in 2010, and 13.3 percent in 2011. Additionally, "Large fiscal and trade deficits are managed through price, exchange rate[,] and interest rate controls, which have led to a shortage of foreign exchange and a fall in private sector activity" (World Bank 2011).

5. Eritrea was one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa in 2011, mainly because of mining. Growth in GDP increased from 2.2 percent in 2010 to 14 percent in 2011 (World Bank 2011).

6. Despite the fact that the new reforms encouraged debates, debates were not a new activity. A long tradition of debates dated back to the 1960s and 1970. Debates were held within classes and as schoolwide competitions. Within classes, the form that debates took involved the whole class. Sometimes these debates were structured competitively, with two teams facing off against each other; at other times, the entire class was asked to prepare comments on a topic and the teacher would call on individuals or groups to present their opinion. The debate I discuss here follows the latter format.

The Nexuses between Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in the Light of the Indefinite Eritrean National Service

GAIM KIBREAB

Abstract

For a country and society that was "rising from the ashes" of a devastating thirty-year War of Independence which on the one hand, destroyed the pre-existing rudimentary social and physical infrastructure, and on the other, brought the disparate ethno-linguistic and religious groups closer to each other than ever before to face a mightier common enemy, it was appropriate on the part of the otherwise myopic incumbents to try to (re)-build the post-independence state drawing on the experiences and values produced during the liberation struggle. The Eritrean National Service (ENS) was originally conceived as a legitimate mega project of social engineering for nation-building and common national identity construction. Initially, the majority of citizens received it enthusiastically, but after the 1998–2000 Border War, it has become open-ended. Over time, it has become a cancerous growth that has been eating into the Eritrean polity reflected in the severe haemorrhage of the country's single most important resource—labor. This in the context of bad governance and poor economic and human rights performance engendered what Albert Hirschman in a different but similar context refers to as "objectionable state of affairs" that prompt a variety of responses. The disaffected may stay put to exercise

voice and fight for political, social, and economic change; emigrate abroad in search of protection and a better life, which Hirschman refers to as the exit option; and abstain from taking any deliberate action hoping that things would get better in spite of the decline. He refers to the latter response as loyalty. The major part of the chapter is a critique of the Hirschmanian framework. The findings show that in spite of its versatility and sophistication, the dichotomisation of the three conceptual building blocks of the Hirschmanian framework—exit, voice, and loyalty—seem to limit its explanatory power when applied to the recent Eritrean exodus. When interrogated on the basis of the Eritrean data, not only are the lines between exit, voice, and loyalty fluid, blurry, and continuously shifting, but also their effects are mutually reinforcing rather than counteracting each other. The data gathered for this essay show that it is more fruitful to conceptualise the relationships between exit, voice, and loyalty in terms of nexuses rather than dichotomies.

Introduction

> Eritrea is seeing its future walk away.
> —Stevis and Parkinson (2015)

For a country and society that was "rising from the ashes" of a devastating thirty-year War of Independence, which on the one hand, destroyed the pre-existing rudimentary social and physical infrastructure, and on the other, brought the disparate ethno-linguistic and religious groups closer than ever before to face a mightier common enemy, it was appropriate on the part of the otherwise myopic incumbents to try and (re)-build the postindependence state, drawing on some of the positive experiences and values produced during the liberation struggle. However, although it may sound politically incorrect to point this out, buried in these endlessly glorified experiences and core values

is the culture of intolerance, hostility to democratic dialogue, and propensity to quash dissent extra-judicially. Not only has this been the single most important Achilles heel of the postindependence situation, but also of the national service. The Eritrean National Service (ENS) was originally conceived as a legitimate mega project of social engineering for nation-building and common national identity construction. Initially, the majority of citizens received it enthusiastically, but after the 1998–2000 border-war, and the introduction of the *wofri* Warsai-Yikealo in May 2002, it became open-ended and its popularity diminished gradually and its damaging consequences became the major drivers of forced migration and destitution. Over time, it has generated into forced labor resulting in severe hemorrhage of the country's single most important resource–labor.

   After providing a succinct background to the Eritrean National Service, the chapter discusses briefly its deterioration into forced labor and the degree of militarization permeating the social and political landscape of the country. It presents briefly the competing theories on migration, namely: push-pull; new economics of labor migration; network theory; and the exit, voice, and loyalty framework. More importantly, it reconceptualizes the three building blocks of the Hirschmanian framework in terms of nexuses rather than dichotomies.

Background to the National Service

Soon after it took over power in May 1991, the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) was struck by the perceived differences in the level of commitment to the project of nation building between the youth who grew up in the areas controlled by the EPLF (the Eritrean People's Liberation Front) and the Derg. The PGE and the EPLF feared that the core values that determined the successful outcome of the liberation struggle might be lost once

the shooting stopped, unless a mechanism that warrants continuity in the context of change was devised. The idea of national service was conceived as a mechanism of preserving and transmitting the treasured national core values developed during the liberation struggle to the present and future generations. That was the reason the proclamation on the ENS was among the first decreed by the PGE. The preamble of the proclamation on Eritrean National Service states:

> The people of Eritrea fought a bitter war for thirty years and paid a heavy price to relieve the Country and the people from darkness of colonialism, an all-out destruction, pain and to attain freedom and sovereignty. This and future generations have a historical responsibility to fulfil the will of thousands of martyrs and ensure the continuity of the Country's freedom and sovereignty. To enable carry out this sacred duty, it is found to be essential to promulgate and establish National Service.

Accordingly, all Eritreans–women and men–between 18 and 40 years old are required to perform 18 months of national service.[1] However, according to Proclamation 11/1991, only a limited number of citizens, particularly the unemployed youth were targeted. Proc. No. 11/1991 was repealed and replaced by Proclamation No. 82/1995, which eliminated most of the exceptions and exemptions save the veterans of the liberation struggle, the physically unfit and mentally infirm persons. Persons with physical disability are exempted from military training, but not from national service.

   Military training was introduced for the first time in May 1994. Initially, the ENS consisted of six months military training at the Sawa Military Camp in western Eritrea and 12 months participation in nation building. During the first six months, conscripts receive military training. They also receive political socialization and indoctrination as opposed to political education. The aim of the former is to socialize the conscripts into the values of the liberation struggle, such as patriotism, sacrificial nationalism (on the latter,

see Hogan 2009, 2014; Bernal 2014) and subordination of self-interest to national interest and obedience to authority. As the former Minister of Defence, Sebhat Ephrem, said, "*It is through the national service that we intend to transfer the noble values developed during the armed struggle–steadfastness and dedication–to coming generations*" (1995) (emphasis added). Its architects believed that the ENS would foster common national Eritrean identity and powerful commitment to the project of national unity and nation building (Isaias Afwerki 2004; Sebhat Ephrem 2008).

Militarization of Education and the ENS

When war broke out in May 1998 between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the four demobilized cohorts were remobilized and those who joined after May 1998 stayed on the grounds that war may break out (Isaias Afwerki 2004; Sebhat Ephrem 2008). In May 2002, the government also introduced the Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign (WYDC), which officially rendered the ENS indefinite (HRW 2009; Kibreab 2009b; USDS 2010; Connell 2015). A study conducted by the author among deserters living in UK, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, South Africa, and Kenya found that on average, they served 6 years instead of 18 months before they fled. Many of those who remained have been in the ENS for over 20 years. Many of them have family members who have been stuck in the ENS for more than 20 years. As a result, Eritrea is among the most militarized countries in the world (Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2014; Hirt and Mohammad 2013). Even the educational system is militarized (Dorman 2004; Muller 2008; Andebrehan Welde Giorgis 2014). After the ENS became open-ended, it grew unpopular and many began to flee. To pre-empt this, in 2003 the government decided to increase the duration of secondary education by one year and to relocate the final year (year 12) students to the Sawa military camp where students combine military training with final year education in which the former is prioritized (Fisher 2004). The authorities thought that relocating

the students in the final year to the Sawa military camp would enable them to control their freedom of movement and monitor their activities. Berhe, a former student at Sawa told the author,

> The Warsai School is not like any other school. It is mainly a military training camp. When I went to Sawa in 2006 after completing 11th grade, I thought I was going to study and prepare myself to go to college. To my dismay, on top of the three months military training, we were required to undertake military training every morning. We could also be called at any time to undertake other tasks unrelated to our studies. We were escorted by soldiers wherever we were. There was really no time to study.[2]

Abdelkadir, another former student at Sawa said, "We were not students at Sawa. We were soldiers under the control of the Ministry of Defence."[3] Some of those in Year 12 are under 18 years. It was because of this, UNICEF expressed concern that the ENS may constitute a violation of the rights of the child (in Fisher 2004).

The degree of militarization in the country has intensified since the government introduced the people's militia in March 2012 in which citizens between 50 and 70 are forced to undertake militia duties several times a week without remuneration. Such duties include working as armed guards and unpaid labor on public work projects (Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2014; Kibreab 2014; UNCOI 2015).

Deterioration of the ENS into Forced Labor

After the 1998–2000 Border War between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the introduction of the WYDC in May 2002, the ENS has become open-ended (HRW 2009). As a result, the grand social engineering scheme that was introduced as a legitimate overarching program of nation building, post-conflict (re)-construction, and common Eritrean national identity construction has deteriorated into forced labor (Kibreab 2009b; UNCOI 2015; ILO 2010). Those who fail to

comply are subjected to degrading treatment (see UNCOI 2015; AI 2004; HRW 2009; Kibreab 2013). The ENS has been characterized as forced labor by numerous analysts (Kibreab 2009b; Tsurkov 2014; Andebrahan Weldegiorgis 2014; Woldemikael 2014; Connell 2014) and human rights organizations (HRW 2009, 2013; UNCOI 2015). The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for example, stated, "We will continue to press for an end to obligatory and indefinite national service and to compulsory and onerous civilian militia duties (such as guarding, patrolling and dam-building), *all of which could amount to forced labor*" (2015) (emphasis added). The ILO has also considered the question of whether the ENS constitutes forced labor and concluded that in its current form, it does (ILO 2014).

The UNCOI characterizes the ENS as forced labor and a modern form of slavery. It stated: "The Commission finds that by conscripting them [citizens] into an indefinite period of national service, the Government reduces its citizens to mere duty-bearers, negating their role as right-holders who enjoy individual rights and freedoms recognized under international human right law. *The Government of Eritrea refuses to treat its citizens as human beings with rights, dignity and a free will.*" (2015)[4] (emphasis added). The Commission further observes, ". . .the indefinite duration of national service; its terrible conditions and treatment including arbitrary detention, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, forced labor. . . make national service an institution where slavery-like practices occur" (*ibid.*).

Theoretical Perspectives

Although it is unrealistic to provide a full account of the relevant theories that may explain the recent migration of Eritrean conscripts, draft evaders, and young children; in the following only a brief reference is made to the most relevant ones. A survey of the extant literature on migration shows that there are a number

of theories that could be used to explain the recent flight of large number of Eritreans. These include firstly, the push-pull theory in which migration is conceived in terms of push factors in a place or country of origin, such as poverty, unemployment, high population growth, political repression, etc. and pull factors in the place or country of destination, such as higher income, greater employment and education opportunities, greater political freedom and welfare, etc. (King 2012; Massey et al. 1993). Secondly, the new economics of labor migration in which the decision to migrate is not made by individual actors only, but rather by families or households who expect to maximize income and reduce risks (King 2012; Massey et al. 1993). Thirdly, network theory represented in sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants and non-migrants in countries of origin and destination based on kinship, friendship and commonplace of origin. These ties ". . .increase the likelihood of international movement because they lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to migration. Network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to foreign employment. . ." (Massey et al. 1993, 448). Although all these theories are evidently relevant for the explanation of the recent exodus from Eritrea, given the limited scope of the paper, it is impossible to deal with their aspects comprehensively. Instead, the focus will be on the Hirschmanian theory of exit, voice, and loyalty, which to some extent incorporates some elements of the aforementioned theories.

Albert Hirschman's ground-breaking theory of exit, voice, and loyalty (EVL) has inspired a flood of theoretical and empirical studies (70). The central thrust of his theory is that when participants are faced with actual or perceived deteriorating conditions, they respond either by exiting to escape a disagreeable condition or exercising voice to improve the situation. A third least understood concept in the Hirschmanian framework is loyalty, which some analysts perceive as a third behavioral response to dissatisfaction and others view it as "an affective moderating

variable that influences the choice between exit and voice" (Graham and Keeley 1992, 191).

Although the other theories presented earlier can be used to explain the migration of Eritreans, I have chosen Hirschman's framework as enriched by some of its critics and analysts for its versatility. Among the theories mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the EVL framework is the only one that incorporates some powerful elements that provide an opportunity to examine the ambivalent and multi-layered responses of Eritreans to the deteriorating conditions in the context of the country's culture of resistance. In view of the limited space, an elaborate exposition of why the EVL framework is preferred to the other theories is not feasible.

Hirschman defines voice as ". . .the act of complaining or of organizing to complain or to protest, with the intent of achieving directly a recuperation [recovery] of the quality that has been impaired." Once the organization is made aware of its failings reflected in terms of citizens voting with their feet, it may introduce changes in order to eliminate or minimize the cause of deterioration. However, this is only plausible in countries where governments or organizations are responsive to public dissatisfaction. Hirschman states, "In all these respects, voice is just the opposite of exit. It is a far more 'messy' concept because it can be graduated, all the way from faint grumbling to violent protest; it implies articulation of one's critical opinions. . . it is direct and straightforward rather than roundabout. Voice is political par excellence" (1970, 16).

The corollary is that disaffected citizens can exercise voice at different levels from mere complaint to make the state aware of its deteriorating performance to open protest aimed at bringing pressure to bear on the incumbents. Hirschman argues, "To resort to voice, rather than exit, is for the. . . member to make an attempt at changing the practices, policies. . . of the organization to which one belongs" (1970, 30). Nevertheless, the Eritrean case demonstrates that this strategy is not pursued at any cost. Rational actors weigh

the costs and benefits to be had from their actions or inactions. If the costs of complaints and protests are risky, the alternative options are either silence in oppression or "voting with one's feet." The latter option is not necessarily resorted to escape from politics, but rather to engage in politics safely. In the context of the current state of affairs in the country, political activity in safety and dignity is only possible abroad.

In the Hirschmanian framework, voice refers to ". . . *any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs. . . through various actions and protests*" (*ibid.*) (emphasis added). He notes that the process of deterioration in the performance of a state is likely to trigger "certain counter forces" (1970, 15). This counter force informs the incumbents of their failings either through voice or exit. Although Hirschman later modified his theory on the relationship between exit and voice, he argues, "Easy availability of exit was shown to be inimical to voice, for in comparison with exit, voice is costly in terms of effort and time." Moreover, to be effective, voice often requires group action and is thus subject to all the well-known difficulties of organization, representation, and free riding (1998, 12).

In his original theory, Hirschman conceptualized exit as the antithesis of voice by arguing, "The presence of the exit alternative can. . . *atrophy the development of the art of voice*" (1970, 43) (emphasis in original). However, exit does not necessarily mean the end of voice. As we shall see later, it can also be a harbinger of voice. In the rapidly globalizing world, exit facilitates the exercise of voice amongst transnational communities. This is more so in fear and risk-ridden societies such as Eritrea where the exercise of voice may result in life-threatening consequences. Bert Hoffmann (2008, 4) for example, states, "The changing nature of migration in the 1980s and 1990s gave rise to the emergence of the transnationalism paradigm in migration studies." Hepner's (2001, 2008), Bernal's (2014) and Conrad's (2010) studies clearly show that among Eritrean refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants, exit instead of atrophying voice has been the single most important instrument for the

development and consolidation of vibrant Eritrean diaspora organizations and websites which are key to the exercise of voice and for coordinating protest (Bernal 2014). This has been true both among the older generation of diaspora Eritreans who fled during the independence war and those who fled the postindependence state (see Hepner 2009).

The third construct in Hirschman's innovative work, loyalty, is ambiguous as well as less developed in his framework. He argues that loyal participants "suffer in silence, confident that things will soon get better" (1970, 38). A loyalist is a person who does not exit regardless of the degree of dissatisfaction. To Hirschman, loyalty is that unexplainable "special attachment" or feeling that supresses the propensity to quit in favor of the alternative that provides similar or better benefit. Some analysts argue that loyalty seems to be an irrational decision because it is contrary to expectation to remain within an entity that is in the spiral of decline.

Hirschman conceives loyalty as a behavior, which motivates an individual to support a deteriorating organization or state. He states, "the likelihood of voice increases with the degree of loyalty" (1970, 77). Brian Barry (1974, 98) states that loyalty does not normally mean a disinclination to "leave a collectivity, but rather a positive commitment to further its welfare by working for it, fighting for it and—where one thinks it has gone astray—seeking to change it." This view implies that voice "is built into the concept of loyalty" (*ibid.*). Birch on the other hand, argues that loyalty "belongs to a family of concepts which. . . includes allegiance and fidelity" (1975, 74). The corollary is that loyalty rather than increasing voice, diminishes it.

There are analysts who perceive loyalty as a "passive constructive behavior," such as "being quietly supportive and being patient" (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, and Mainous 1988). Leck and Saunders state that loyalty is "an act of waiting patiently for conditions to improve" (1992, 220). A loyal participant in an organization, firm, or state is one who is reluctant to exit in response to a decline of performance. There is an agreement among some analysts that loyalty connotes some form of positive affective attachment that

binds an individual to a state, organization, or firm (Graham and Keeley 1992). It is assumed that the degree of attachment is so powerful that it outweighs the propensity to resort to the exit option. Others perceive it as an attitude, rather than as a behavior, that moderates or conditions the use of exit or voice (Withey and Cooper 1989; Leck and Saunders 1992).

Hirschman argues that a loyalist is someone who doesn't exit in response to dissatisfaction (1970, 38). In the Hirschmanian conception, a loyalist is an optimist who hopes that "someone will act or something will happen to improve matters" (1970, 78–79). Loyal customers or citizens try to right the wrongs of the state by exercising voice with the aim of effecting change through protest where there is freedom of expression or where citizens are willing to face the consequences. The higher the degree of loyalty, the greater the propensity to stay put to exercise voice. However, this is only possible in democratic societies.

Although the concept of loyalty was not adequately expounded in Hirschman's framework, its ambiguity and messiness is more apparent when used as a tool of analysis to explain Eritreans' response to dissatisfaction. As seen earlier, although the exact number of those who flee from the dissatisfying conditions in Eritrea is unknown, as seen before, hundreds of thousands of deserters, draft evaders, and young people approaching the age of conscription have been voting with their feet to escape from repression, as well as to engage in politics in the context of safety.

A closer scrutiny shows that there is a gap in literature on motivation for migration. The literature seeks to portray asylum-seekers and migrants as the antithesis of political engagement. Eritrea provides us an opposite example in which strategy of flight is adopted to facilitate protest and political engagement. This is greatly facilitated by information and communication technology.

Other analysts have added a fourth response to dissatisfaction, namely neglect (Rusbult, Zombrodt and Gunn 1982). They describe neglect as ". . . refusing to discuss problems. . . just letting things fall apart" (*ibid.*, 1231). Withey and Cooper observe that "Neglect differs

from loyalty in that it is not directed at recovery of the relationship. Rather, the individual responding with neglect implicitly accepts that recovery is not going to happen" (1989, 522). This may explain the response of conscripts and others who have remained in the country instead of "voting with their feet" in spite of the deteriorating condition.

In view of the fact that flight from postindependence Eritrea is neither an escape from repressive politics nor a political act, but both, and that those actions are multi-faceted, it is necessary to reframe the acclaimed Hirschmanian framework of exit, voice, and loyalty in terms of nexuses rather than dichotomies to explain the Eritrean exodus. When interrogated on the basis of the Eritrean data, not only are the lines between exit, voice and loyalty fluid, blurry, and ever-changing, but their effects are also mutually reinforcing rather than counteracting each other. That is why it is suggested that it is more fruitful to conceptualize the relationships between three building blocks of the Hirschmanian framework in terms of nexuses rather than dichotomies.

In the following, a pithy description of the methods used to gather data for the chapter is presented.

A Note on Method and Data Sources

This chapter is written as part of another on-going major research project which examines, inter alia, the drivers of displacement, the transformative effects of the ENS, as well as its impact on the economy, nation-building, national identity construction, and national unity and defence capability. While researching the ENS in the past three years, I interviewed 190 respondents residing in different EU+ and two African countries and 38 key informants, 11 of whom were females, selected on the basis of chain referral or snowball sampling. Although the chapter draws on these data, the major part of the data are derived from in-depth interviews conducted with former conscripts in Geneva,[5] London, and

Stockholm, who fled from the ENS. Those from Geneva were interviewed in June 2015 whilst those in London between April 2014 and January 2016. The interviews in Stockholm were conducted in November 2015. The interviewees were identified through chain referral sampling. An elder who arrived recently for a visit was also interviewed in London.[6] All the names and their characteristics are altered to insure anonymity. Muslim, Christian, female, and male names indicate the religion and sex of the interviewees. Using data gathered from personal interviews and secondary sources and drawing some insights from the Hirschmanian framework of exit, voice, and loyalty, this chapter examines how the disaffected have been responding to the disagreeable circumstances in the country.

Conscripts' Responses to the Open-ended ENS: Discussion and Findings

The short description of the situation in Eritrea presented at the beginning of the chapter shows the inauspicious reality facing hundreds of thousands of conscripts and nationals approaching the age of conscription, including young children far below the age of national service (see Women's Refugee Commission 2013). As stated by Amnesty International (2015), "Eritreans, many of them children, are refugees fleeing a system that amounts to forced labor on a national scale." The conditions are by any reasonable standard objectionable. It is therefore interesting to examine how those who are affected have been responding to the situation. It is important to bear in mind that people—including those whose livelihoods have been ruined by the open-ended national service—do not respond in the same way. The responses cannot therefore be determined a priori. Responses to the objectionable circumstances, no matter how severe are likely to be varied and wide-ranging.

Even when Eritrea was faced with an existential threat during

the War of Independence (1961–1991), in which hundreds of villages were razed to the ground, thousands of innocent civilian lives were lost, large swathes of cropped land were burned down, and tens of thousands of livestock were massacred by the marauding Ethiopian military (see Kibreab 1987a, b), those affected did not respond in the same way. A study conducted by the author among Eritrean refugees in the five land settlements in Qala en Nahal and two wage-earning settlements in Kashm el Girba and Kilo 26, eastern Sudan, show that the people in the affected areas responded in at least six different ways to the imminent threat of violence (Kibreab 1987a, b).

Their responses included a "wait and see" stance and stayed put in spite of the imminent dangers; some moved behind the frontlines into the liberated areas; others relocated themselves to safer areas to become IDPs; many, especially the youth, joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) to fight; and some members of the vulnerable groups moved into the "strategic villages" established by the Ethiopian military intended to deprive the fronts of a mass base. Flight across the border was only one of these six options (Kibreab 1987a, b). The decision to flee or not is a complex process mediated by a multiplicity of inextricably and mutually reinforcing and/or counteracting factors. The implication of this finding on the present study is that in spite of the common hardship experienced by conscripts and other nationals in the onerous and the never-ending national service, their responses cannot be generalized.

The dichotomization of the three conceptual building blocks of the Hirschmanian framework—exit, voice, and loyalty—seems to limit its explanatory power when applied to the postindependence Eritrean reality. Not only are the lines between exit, voice, and loyalty continuously shifting, but also more importantly, their effects are also mutually reinforcing rather than counteracting each other. It is more fruitful therefore to conceptualize the relationships between exit, voice, and loyalty in terms of nexuses rather than dichotomies. Given the successful history of the liberation struggle in which the Eritrean people fought together, setting aside their

ethno-linguistic and religious differences to confront their giant southern neighbor, which enjoyed considerable military and financial assistance first from the United States of America and later from the Soviet Union and its allies, it is reasonable to expect those who are aggrieved by the current dissatisfying condition to stay put and fight for change and transformation. However, as the data presented below indicate, the tendency among Eritrean conscripts and draft evaders has been to exit from the dissatisfying conditions rather than exercising voice to change the situation. Therefore, the single most important question this chapter addresses is, why do Eritreans flee rather than staying to organize opposition to repression?

Given the Eritrean government's severe restrictions on freedom of movement and emigration, the overwhelming majority leave the country illegally and cross into Ethiopia and Sudan en route to the EU+ countries. The data elicited from the informants show that the large majority make up their mind before departing from Eritrea that their destinations are far beyond the first countries of first arrival, namely Ethiopia and Sudan.

In December 2015, there were 131,660 Eritrean asylum-seekers and refugees in Ethiopia (UNHCR 2015). The corresponding figure in Sudan was 125,530, of whom 89,800 were old caseload from the pre-independence period (UNHCR 2015). The large majority of Eritrean asylum-seekers and refugees in the two countries can be described as birds of passage. The data gathered from hundreds of conscripts and draft evaders who fled Eritrea since 2000 via the two countries, show that the overwhelming majority regard the two transit countries as stepping-stones for further emigration rather than destinations. The figures in the two countries do not therefore show the actual number of Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers living in the two countries. They only show the total number of Eritrean asylum-seekers who crossed into the two countries. Before the wall Israel erected on the Egyptian-Israeli border stemmed the flow of Eritrean asylum-seekers in 2013, many Eritreans tried without success to apply for asylum in Israel.

Those in Ethiopia cross into Sudan and join their brethren in the long and dangerous sojourn to the European shores via the Sahara Desert and Libya across the Mediterranean Sea where an unknown but considerable number face the risk of death. In Israel, there are a total of 46,437 African asylum seekers and 33,899 are from Eritrea (ARDC 2016). An unknown, but undoubtedly large number have left Israel to avoid the threat of deportation and state-sponsored xenophobia (Sheen 2015).

According to data obtained from the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in Velletta, the total number of Eritrean asylum-seekers in the 28 EU+ countries in 2012 was 11,990, and the corresponding figures for 2013 and 2014 were 20,310 and 46,735, respectively.[7] Between 2000 and 2014, a total of 133,385 Eritreans sought asylum in the EU+ countries. Eurostat data also show that between 2008 and 2014, a total of 7,840 underage Eritrean children arrived in the EU+ countries seeking asylum.[8] The increase in the number of minors between 2013 (1,005) and 2014 (4,485) was staggering, i.e. 346 per cent over a period of one year. The increase for the total number of Eritrean asylum-seekers between 2013 and 2014 was 130 per cent. During the first half of the 2015, the number of Eritreans reaching the EU in comparison to the other five major refugee-producing countries declined considerably.[9] Between 2015 Q1 and Q4, a total of 30,120 Eritreans sought asylum in the EU member states.[10] These figures do not include those who sought asylum in Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

These figures show that a considerable proportion of those who were dissatisfied with the deteriorating conditions have resorted to flight rather than staying put to exercise voice and to fight for change. However, as we shall see later, in the context of the repressive regime, protest can only be exercised from abroad. Therefore, as was mentioned earlier, it is wrong to perceive the flight of the tens of thousands as escape from politics, but rather as a means of engaging in politics from a place of safety. In spite of the fact that many have "voted with their feet" to exit from the objectionable conditions in the country, there are many others

who have remained. We don't know with certainty whether their decision to stay put is due to loyalty, fear of retaliation, neglect, or surrender. The data gathered from interviewees indicate that fear and subsistence insecurity are the major factors that limit some people's movement. On the basis of the data elicited from informants, an attempt is made to come to grips with these complex questions in what follows.

Why Flight instead of Voice and Protest?

When I asked the key informants, who fled from the ENS, why they resorted to flight instead of staying put to fight for change, all but one said that the whole country is in the grip of intense fear. In June 2015, I interviewed four Eritrean asylum-seekers in Geneva, who crossed the Mediterranean Sea in rickety boats, and asked them why they fled rather than remaining at home to protest. Although the interviews were conducted independently, the answers each of the interviewees gave were astonishingly similar. All said independent of each other that the exercise of voice is too dangerous where even family members are perceived to spy on each other. Abel said, "*Our society is in a state of paralysis due to fear.*"[11]

The generalized state of fear, the complete absence of any form of autonomous civil society and/or political organization, lack of freedom of speech and expression and movement, as well as the absence of rule of law and due process were said to be the key factors that have atrophied voice inside the country. This is confirmed by the UNCOI's report in which it is stated:

> . . .the Government has created and sustained repressive systems to control, silence and isolate individuals in the country, depriving them of their fundamental freedoms. It shows how information collected on people's activities, their supposed intentions and even conjectured thoughts is used to rule through fear in a country where individuals are

routinely arbitrarily arrested and detained, tortured, disappeared or extra-judicially executed. (2015, para. 25)

This does not mean, however, that those who are frightened and silenced within the country and resort to flight have given up on the exercise of voice. On the contrary, for those who want to engage in fighting against the system, relocation in democratic countries provides golden opportunities to exercise voice from safe locations.

Every interviewee but one said that the conditions in the country are so dangerous that any attempt at criticizing the incumbents would be suicidal. Kemal said:

> The people in power are inimical to all forms of autonomous political or civil society organizations. Fighting requires an organization. One cannot fight alone. There is no space for exercising voice or protest. Whoever tries to create a space for voice is dealt with mercilessly. Many citizens, including journalists, high and middle-ranking military officers, former ministers and many citizens have disappeared for no other reason, but for exercising voice. Whoever utters a critical voice disappears without trace. The conscripts are aware of this and hence they opt for flight rather than staying to fight.[12]

This has created a climate of fear which has stifled any attempt at protest or exercise of voice from within. Instead, those who are committed to change and transformations do so from a distance, i.e. in exile, which suggests, contrary to Hirschman's assertion, that exit, instead of atrophying voice, enhances it.

Haile added, under the existing circumstances, "any attempt made to criticize or to fight the government amounts to signing one's suicide note."[13] He further said, "In Eritrea, whoever utters a critical voice is detained and disappears. This discourages people from organizing themselves to fight for political change. The state of fear in the country is paramount. People are afraid of their own shadows." These accounts suggest that the environment is inimical

to voice. But as noted earlier, this does not mean exit is the end of voice. On the contrary, in the Eritrean reality, exit facilitates the exercise of voice. However, not all of those who resort to the exit option necessarily exercise voice or fight against the government from a distance. Therefore, it is wrong to assume that everyone who resorts to flight have lost their right to exercise voice or are necessarily ready and willing to oppose the government they fled from. The reality is messier than the neat theoretical postulation purported by the Hirschmanian framework. Hirschman states, "In all these respects, voice is just the opposite of exit" (1970, 16). In our case, there are situations in which the two are in tandem or exit is sine qua non for the exercise of voice.

There is evidence to show that the most vocal opponents of the "objectionable state of affairs" in the country are in the diaspora. They are interconnected through the Internet and other social media channels to communicate with each other and to organize protest. For example, on June, 26 2015, between 6,000–8,000 members of the Eritrean diaspora from all over Western Europe held a mammoth demonstration in front of UN Human Rights Council's headquarters in Geneva. Most of the demonstrators were exiters from the ENS. A corresponding rally also took place in New York on October, 29 2015 to express support for the UN Commission of Inquiry. The Eritrean government also has its own boisterous supporters among the Eritrean diaspora, including few exiters from the "objectionable state of affairs" precipitated, among other things, by the indefinite ENS. For example, on June 22, 2015, about 2,000 of them held a demonstration in Geneva in support of the Eritrean government and against the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry. On June, 21 2016, according to sources close to the government, about 7,000 diaspora Eritreans held a demonstration in front of the headquarters of the UN Human Rights Council's in Geneva.[14] On June 23, 2016, a huge demonstration attended by over 10,000 youth,[15] the overwhelming majority of whom were deserters and draft evaders, took place in front of the UN Human Rights

Council's headquarters in support of the UNCOI's report. According to an eyewitness interviewed by the author:

> The major difference between the two demonstrations was that the anti-government demonstration was organized and attended pre-dominantly by: young men and women who fled from Eritrea to desert from and/or to avoid the open-ended national service whilst the pro-government demonstration was organized and attended by old men and women who fled the country during the war of independence and their children born in the diaspora who are stuck in the "glorious" past.[16]

This shows that in the rapidly globalizing world, exit, instead of atrophying voice, may be instrumental in facilitating its expression.

One of the key research informants, Hagos,[17] offered a counter-narrative that lends support to Hirschman's theory that postulates that the presence of the exit option atrophies "the art of voice" (1970, 43). Hagos, a graduate from the University of Asmara with an MSc degree from the UK, deserted national service after 12 years. He said,

> People talk about the high-risk political activity or voice represents under the present situation in Eritrea, but this is a lame excuse. No revolution takes place under convivial [safe] environment. If conditions are favourable, there is no need to fight. Our people fought and won in spite of severe adversities.

He continued,

> The reason we are not fighting to remove the dictator is because it is easier to remove ourselves than getting in serious trouble trying to get rid of him. In comparison to the dangers and imminent risks of death or indefinite incarceration that can result from exercising voice and

protest; the dangers one faces in flight although potentially menacing [lethal], those who make it may lead a fulfilling life.

It is worth noting that not only do some of those who make it across the Mediterranean and farther north lead a fulfilled life, but also, they are able to send remittances to their desperate relatives at home, fuelling an irresistible drive among those who remain behind to follow suit in pursuit of the imagined nirvana, discounting or underestimating the intervening obstacles, including death, kidnapping, rape, and disappearances.

The corollary in Hagos' view is that had there been no opportunity for exit, the disaffected would have stayed put to fight rather than voting with their feet. He further said, "Flight is a make or break project, but the consequence of fighting or protesting in Eritrea at present amounts to slow and agonizing death." Probably, he is referring to the 11 members of the G15 and journalists who have been languishing incommunicado in the Eiraeiro dungeon since 2001. He further said, "The threat of death and injury did not deter our fathers and mothers from fighting for independence. The reason why we are not emulating their heroic experience is because the option of flight is less costly and more rewarding for those who make it." This, however, is a question of perception. If we were to ask the families who lost loved ones in the border crossing between Eritrea and Sudan/Ethiopia, the Sinai and the Sahara deserts, as well as the Mediterranean Sea, or whose loved ones have disappeared in between without trace, they are unlikely to think that flight is less costly than being locked up, tortured, or incommunicado detention. These are, however, afterthought reflections.

At present, the consequence of political activity as an expression of voice is severe in the country. This can be demonstrated, inter alia, by the experience of the eleven members of the G15 who disappeared when they were picked up from their homes in early morning raids in September 2001 at the behest of the personal ruler, Isaias Afwerki, for no other reason but for exercising voice in terms

of asking him to convene the long overdue regular sessions of the Central and National Councils. In an open letter sent to members of the ruling party which leaked to the private newspapers, the G15 described the crisis that had gripped the country as follows: "The problem is that the President is conducting himself in an illegal and unconstitutional manner, is refusing to consult, and the legislative and executive bodies have not performed their oversight functions properly" (G15, Open Letter). They have never been brought to court or been seen by their relatives or public since September 2001. This was mentioned as being a major disincentive and a cause of fear of government retaliatory action against the exercise of voice by most of the informants. Kahsai,[18] for example, said, "If the cruel man [president Isaias] has gleefully caused the disappearance of his closest friends and comrades in-arms, such as Haile Durué, Sherifo, and others, do you think he would hesitate to wipe out whoever criticizes his tyrannical rule?" Saleh[19] also said, "Isaias and his henchmen never forgive and forget and most Eritreans are aware of their depravity. Such knowledge is the single most important factor that has silenced their voice notwithstanding their *siqiat* (suffering)."

Disappearance has become a norm. Whoever is detained is neither charged nor released. This has wreaked havoc among the youth. Fear is the major disincentive to the exercise of voice. The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea for example, found that "Eritreans live in constant fear that their conduct is or may be monitored by security agents, and that information gathered may be used against them leading to arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, disappearance or death" (see also *Financial Times* 2009).[20]

Exit as an Instrument of Organizing Resistance and Protest

As we saw earlier, a large number of Eritreans who are within and approaching the age of conscription have been fleeing the country

from 2004 onwards. Many have also been deserting national service. Although there is little doubt about the severe hemorrhage the country has been suffering, it is important to guard against misconstruing this movement as evidence of disengagement from politics. On the contrary, given the stifling political environment in the country, flight from Eritrea and relocation to democratic countries provides excellent opportunities for engaging in politics. The severe state of fear pervading the social and political landscape in the country has eliminated any opportunity for organizing protest on home soil. Those who are determined to fight for progress have therefore been "voting with their feet" to engage in political activities for democratic change.

To the question "why don't you organize and protest instead of fleeing," Saleh said, "Can you clap with one hand? Voice and protest are collective action. No collective action is possible without organization and there is no room to organize"[21] in Eritrea. I met the interviewees at the demonstration in Geneva held in support of the UNCOI's report, which demonstrates that exit has enabled them to engage in visible collective political action and to exercise voice loudly unconstrained by fear, as was the case in Eritrea. Had they stayed put, they would have not been able to exercise voice and demonstrate for change without compromising their safety. Hirschman's claim that "voice is the opposite of exit" is not backed by the findings. Instead, they show that exit has been for the exercise of voice among the Eritrean diaspora, including those who fled to escape the open-ended national service.

Elias, 27 years old, was conscripted through the Warsai School at Sawa when he completed 11th grade in Asmara. After receiving initial military training, he later combined it with education. At the end of the academic year, he sat his matriculation and failed. He was assigned to the army where he also participated in construction of roads, bridges, houses belonging to the government, the ruling party, and high-ranking military officers without remuneration. He said that he was only allowed to visit his parents three times throughout the period he was in the army.[22] He said he knew in

great detail the potential dangers that lay ahead inside Eritrea, at the border, in eastern Sudan, in the Shagarab refugee camp, in the Sahara Desert, in Libya, and the Mediterranean Sea.

When asked, "If you were aware of all the dangers, how could you sleep walk into them?" He said, "I had no choice. I was literally a slave to my commanders in the national service. My life was in their hands and I had nowhere to turn to seek redress against these abuses. The cruelty I suffered eliminated my ability to feel fear. I have seen the worst in the ENS. Nothing, including death, can be worse than what I have been through." He said, "in national service, the pains and predicaments are excruciating and endless. The potential risks I expected to face in flight could be deadly, but they don't last forever. You either die or survive." The bitter experience of suffering and deprivation seem to have rendered him and others in his situation risk averse.

Asked if he knew about the rescue operation in the Mediterranean Sea, he said, "Yes, but so what? There were still many of my brothers and sisters that perished in the sea in spite of Mare Nostrum and after. My decision had nothing to do with the rescue operations in the Mediterranean." The question that arises in connection to his account is that, if the potential risks of death in flight did not deter him from fleeing, why was he unprepared to face the risks associated with exercising voice in Eritrea? He said, "*If I am detained in Eritrea, it may be the end of me, but if I flee, there may be an opportunity for me to join the change-seeking organisations abroad.*" This shows that he was already aware that under the existing circumstances, exit is sine qua non for exercising voice. Kahsai also said, "the only Eritreans organizing against the regime are in exile."[23] Hirschman's assertion, "Easy availability of exit was shown to be inimical to voice. . ." (1998, 12) is not backed by the findings of the study.

In his original theory, Hirschman conceptualized exit as the antithesis of voice by arguing, "The presence of the exit alternative can. . . *atrophy the development of the art of voice*" (1970, 43) (emphasis in original). The findings here demonstrate the converse.

When asked why he fled instead of exercising voice to fight for change in Eritrea, Araya said, "There was no room to organize. We did not trust each other." The reason for this is because of the overwhelming perception that "every other person in the country is a spy."[24] This does not need to be true. It is enough if people believe it to be so. Interestingly, he is currently one of the key leaders of a youth movement organized to bring about political change in Eritrea.

Government Supporters among Exiters

As noted earlier, whether to exit or remain to exercise voice is ambivalent and multi-layered, and exit is neither an act of surrender not disengagement from politics. On the contrary, in the Eritrean case, exit has been instrumental in the Eritrean diaspora's political engagement and protest. However, inasmuch as it is wrong to assume that all those who have been fleeing the country have given up on their right to exercise voice, it is equally important to underscore the fact that not all those who flee the country are necessarily ready and willing to fight against the Eritrean government. Their decision to flee the country may be a manifestation of their dissatisfaction with the status quo. But the concept of dissatisfaction is subjective and ambiguous and therefore not easily amenable to objective assessment. Thus, although the situation is dissatisfying, it is wrong to assume that all Eritreans perceive it as such. It is also equally wrong to assume that all those who stay put are necessarily satisfied with the situation. By the same token, it is awry to assume that all those who exit are necessarily dissatisfied with the political system.

In the diaspora, although the large majority of the most raucous supporters of the government and the PFDJ are Eritreans who fled during the War of Independence (1961–1991) and their children born in exile, there are some who fled from the ENS and draft evaders who support the government notwithstanding the fact that they

alleged that they fled from persecution when they filed their asylum-applications. They may have issues with the prevailing economic hardship and endless national service, but they do not blame this on the government. Instead, they externalize the causes by attributing them to the *tesabaêti hailitat* (Eritrea's external enemies). In their eyes, the government is perceived as the victim rather than the culprit. Some of those who remained at home characterize members of the diaspora as cheerleaders of the regime. This is not far from the truth. Bettina Conrad summarizes the gist of the conversations she had with interviewees when researching her luminous PhD thesis—"We are the Prisoners of our Dreams"—in Asmara 2001 as follows:

> The diaspora could use their money and influence to press for reforms, but they just clap their hands, no matter what lies the government tells them. They send their money and we have to bear the consequence (an allusion to the 1998–2000 Border War). So far away you don't feel the heat of the fire (2010, 160).

This is a clear indication of the fact that not all those who have stayed in spite of the disagreeable conditions are necessarily loyalists. In their view, the bulwark of loyalty is the diaspora. By the same token, it is equally awry to assume that those who are disloyal to the government, both among exiters and stayees, are disloyal to the state or to the country.[25]

Even some of the informants, including those who are deeply dissatisfied with the situation, are still reluctant to denounce the government because they feel it is unpatriotic to do so. In a long conversation with one of the key informants, Tsegai, it was easy to see that he was caught "on the horn of a dilemma." He referred to the government as "mergem" (S*ummum malum* or affliction) that has "wreaked havoc in the social fabric of our people."[26] In spite of the strong language, however, he was reluctant to take a stand against it. The reason he gave was: "It is the only government we have and it is risky to abandon it when there is nothing to replace

it with." Tsegai is clearly a deserter, but is he a loyalist? If he is, his loyalty is not to the government, which he characterizes as an affliction, but rather to the state.

There are many in the diaspora who are emotionally caught in between and this remains understudied. In light of the high price citizens paid in terms of loss of lives, property and forgone opportunities to have their own state, their attachment to the latter even when severely aggrieved by the incumbents, remains powerful. Willy-nilly, not only does this stance benefit the government, but it is also the result of its excessive obsession with securitization intended to instill anxiety and fear of the "Other." This has engendered constant fear, bordering on paranoia, among many of its diaspora supporters.

It is also wrong to assume that all those who exit from the apparent dissatisfying conditions are necessarily disloyal to the government. An unknown but undoubtedly a significant number of exiters who allegedly fled from persecutory treatment in the national service and at the hands of abusive commanders have turned around and supported the government. As Tanya Müller observes, ". . . choosing exit does not necessarily imply diminished loyalty or questioning the ideological legitimation of the state project" (2012, 794). However, her observation, "It [exit] is merely a sign that the political leadership has lost legitimacy. . ." is inaccurate. Most of the pro-government exiters currently residing in the EU+ countries and elsewhere do not think that the government has lost its legitimacy. As Birch argues, those who have exited, but are still loyal to the government are reluctant to criticize "the country of their birth. . . Residual feelings of loyalty frequently prevent them. . ." from doing so (1992, 75).

In view of the severe restrictions on research activities and dearth of published official and non-official materials concerning the reality on the ground, it is difficult to state with certainty whether loyalty has anything to do with the decision of those who have not exited. This is an empirical question, which cannot be established a priori unless examined in situ, which is not possible at present.

As mentioned earlier, their staying cannot be equated with loyalty. There is no evidence to show this to be the case. Rezene, an elderly man, who came to visit his relatives in London, told the author, "the people at home have lost faith in the government. Nobody trusts them anymore, but nobody seems to know what ought to be done to get rid of them. But one thing is certain, *hizbi ab anqeru betsihiwo alo* (people are fed up)."[27]

Other Counteracting Factors

As noted earlier, the decision of many of those who have stayed put in spite of the dissatisfying conditions may have nothing to do with loyalty. There are many possible explanations other than loyalty why citizens, including conscripts and those approaching the age of conscription, have stayed put. The "shoot to kill" policy at the Eritrea-Ethiopia and Eritrea-Sudan borders and the risk of being taken hostage by traffickers, who collaborate with smugglers, military officers in Eritrea and in the transit countries, are the major disincentives. For women, the risk of being raped throughout the displacement cycle is another disincentive. The exorbitant bribes paid to military officers in order to negotiate safe exit from Eritrea and safe entry into the transit countries, as well as the fees one needs to pay for smugglers, are exorbitant and often beyond the reach of many willing but unable exiters. Those who are able to afford such excessive fees are those who have rich families or relatives in the diaspora. Not all Eritreans are blessed with rich families and dense diaspora networks. The people are in a state of entrapment rather than exercising loyalty by staying put.

Withey and Cooper's study shows that loyalty, instead of being a manifestation of "supportive behaviour," was found to be "something that resembled entrapment" (1992, 237). One of the informants, Adem, when asked "if the conscripts who have stayed are so dissatisfied, why don't they protest or flee?"[28] said, "They are imprisoned." This metaphor could mean anything from being

trapped or gripped with fear, to having a family living from hand to mouth, or being a caretaker of elderly parents in a country where there are no social security or state and occupational pension schemes. It can also mean that people are despairing because they are deeply dissatisfied, but they don't know how to move forward. Beyene stated the reason many conscripts in the open-ended ENS have not exited is because their families' lives have been reduced to bare existence. He said, "If you have dependents and you live from hand-to-mouth, there is no room in your mind to think about anything else, but what you are going to put on the plate for dinner tonight."[29] This may be exacerbated by lack of social networks that provide information and financial support to facilitate exit. For example, Kahsai said that the only families that are doing well in Eritrea are the ones who have family members abroad, not the ones whose children are stuck in the national service. It seems the expected dividends of flight are the key incentives that motivate some Eritreans to resort to this rather than staying put to exercise voice.[30]

In view of the abject poverty and grinding deprivation permeating the economic landscape, the agential power needed to take an independent action, e.g. exiting, is diminished among those who live on a knife's edge. Loyalty is one of the wide arrays of motives that can explain the behavior of many who have remained. There are those who may allege that the default position of most people is to stay put rather than flee or emigrate, leaving possessions, families and belonging to spatially-grounded communities. Such analysts may therefore explain the "decision" of those who have remained in spite of the dissatisfying conditions by their attachment to their country or place of origin. When conditions are bad, Eritreans have always moved to create and recreate new homes wherever opportunities exist. The strength of such an explanation is therefore weak in the context of Eritrean history. As Birch in a different but similar context theorizes, non-exiters suffer in silence because of fear of "retaliation" (Birch 1975, 73).

The potency of this explanation is evidenced by the gruesome

retaliatory actions the government has been taking against those who dared to voice any form of criticism, as well as against those caught exiting. The latter is epitomized by the government's "shoot to kill" policy of illegal exiters. The majority of interviewees referred to the ruthlessness with which the government exercises upon those who do not toe the line. They gave, independent of each other, examples of the disabled veterans whose protest was suppressed violently (see Kibreab 2009a, 74–80). They also referred to the retaliatory action the government took against the members of the mechanized brigade when they demonstrated against the government's decision not to pay salaries to the former combatants for four years (see *ibid.*). All referred to the indefinite incommunicado detention of the 11 members of the G15, the journalists in the private and government-owned newspapers, as examples of retaliatory actions taken by the incumbents. Tsegai, for example said, "If the government is able to unleash so much violence with impunity against the disabled former combatants and founding members of the liberation struggle, what can stop it from taking any action against whoever exercises voice."[31]

When asked "If the conditions are so bad as you state they are, why aren't people taking action against the government?" Saleh,[32] Senait,[33] and Elias,[34] independent of each other, said that people have given up. They don't expect change can happen easily without bloodshed and they don't think a change that happens this way can result in meaningful and sustainable change. They are also discouraged by some of the diaspora Eritreans' betrayal. In their view, because the Eritreans in the diaspora don't have to suffer the consequences of the government's follies, they try to justify its endless blunders. The betrayal of the promises of the liberation struggle by the incumbents and the ruling party seems to influence the attitudes of a few exiters toward political engagement. When asked why instead of fleeing she did not stay to fight, Senait, a female with a postgraduate degree said,

> If the thirty-year war of liberation, which cost 65,000 lives,

displaced nearly one million and maimed nearly 100,000 citizens failed to bring about fundamental economic, political, social and cultural transformation, why would any sane Eritrean contemplate to fight? After seeing everything going wrong, every promise betrayed and every opportunity wantonly squandered, everyone I know became excessively pre-occupied with personal projects and goals.[35]

If the revolution made no difference in the lives of our people, she said, "only fools would think fighting against the regime would bring about positive change. It may be possible to overthrow the regime, but probably the one that replaces it may be as equally bad or even worse."[36] She further said, "Look at the state Somalia, Iraq, Syria, DRC and Yemen are in. I hate the Eritrea government from the bottom of my heart, but I don't want the country I love to fall apart. *Kab zey tifelto melak, tifelto seitan* (the better the devil you know)."[37] Such an attitude can easily lead to neglect and indifference. It was in this sense Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn (1982) added a fourth response—neglect—to the Hirschmanian framework of dissatisfaction. Withey and Cooper observe that "Neglect differs from loyalty in that it is not directed at recovery of the relationship. Rather, the individual responding with neglect implicitly accepts that recovery is not going to happen" (1989, 522). This is precisely what the interviewees said.

Concluding Remarks

It is an utmost irony that a country that fought a costly thirty-year war and incurred heavy losses of lives, property, and forgone opportunities, inter alia, to eliminate the root and proximate causes of population displacement and suffering, has become one of the top refugee-producing countries in the world in proportion to its population size. This development is contrary to general

expectation. Another scenario that has been unfolding, which on the surface appears to be contrary to expectation, is also the decision of tens of thousands of young men and women to flee the open-ended national service and its multi-faceted negative effects rather than remaining in the country to fight against repression. Given the heroic history of the people who successfully defeated sub-Saharan Africa's largest military (see Welch 1991) against all odds, it is reasonable to expect the youth to remain and fight against repression and the dissatisfying condition rather than "voting with their feet."

When those who have been fleeing the country were asked why they resorted to flight rather than staying put to exercise voice and fight for change, the overwhelming majority said that the whole country is in the grip of intense fear. The exercise of voice or protest under the circumstances is too dangerous. This does not mean however that in the Eritrean case flight is the antithesis of engagement in politics and protest. On the contrary, data gathered from deserters show that those who have been leaving the country are doing so on the one hand, to escape from repression, and on the other, to engage in politics and protest in conditions of safety. Some deserters interviewed in the study equated the exercise of voice and protest under the repressive regime in the country with the signing of one's suicide note.

For those who want to engage in fighting against the system, relocation in democratic countries has provided them with opportunities to exercise voice and to fight from safe locations. Therefore, it is wrong to assume that all those who resort to flight have lost their zest for fighting against repression. The most vocal opponents of the Eritrean government are exiters. This may suggest that in the rapidly globalizing world, exit instead of atrophying voice may be instrumental in facilitating its expression. That is the main reason that I have argued throughout the chapter that in light of the Eritrean data, it is more fruitful to theorize the relationships between the key building blocks of the Hirschmanian framework of exit, voice, and loyalty in terms of nexuses rather than dichotomies.

Another discernible pattern that emerges from the Eritrean case is that not all those who have fled the country are necessarily ready and willing to fight against the government. Although the large majority of the unreserved and loud cheerleaders of the government and the PFDJ, the ruling party, are among older diaspora Eritreans and their second-generation children, there are some exiters who joined their ranks. It is also equally important to underscore the fact that although the situation in the country is by any measurement dissatisfying, it is wrong to assume that all Eritreans perceive it as such. Not all those who have remained in the country are also necessarily loyalists. The reality is messier than the neat theoretical construct purported by the Hirschmanian framework. Hirschman's assertion that voice is the opposite of exit is contradicted by the Eritrean case. The findings in the latter show that the two can operate in tandem in the sense that exit is sine qua non for the exercise of voice.

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Notes

1. See Article 2 of the National Service Proclamation 11/1991; Article 8 of the National Service Proclamation 82, 1995.
2. London, August 30, 2014.
3. Stockholm, September 25, 2014.
4. See chapter VI, C, 2, Forced labour.
5. Geneva, June 26, 2015.
6. London, January 23, 2016.
7. See also http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/statistics-illustrated. The EASO statistics wrongly show that there were zero Eritrean asylum-seekers in Switzerland between 2000 and 2008. Between 2000 and 2008, a total of 6,731 Eritreans applied for asylum. See https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/de/home/publiservice/statistik/asylstatistik.html.
8. *ibid.*
9. Eurostat, Five main citizenships of first time asylum applicants, 3rd quarter 2015.png. Available http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Five_main_citizenships_of_first_time_asylum_applicants,_3rd_quarter_2015.png&oldid=270682.
10. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database.
11. Geneva, June 26, 2015.
12. London, April 20, 2014.
13. London, April 5, 2015.
14. See "Pictures and videos of Eritrean Demonstration in Geneva Against COI Report on Eritrea," June 21, 2016. Available at http://www.madote.com/2015/06/pictures-and-video-of-eritrean.html.
15. "Diaspora Eritreans protest regime human rights abuses." Thousands of diaspora Eritreans march in support of UN report that accuses government of crime against humanity. June 23, 2016. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/diaspora-eritreans-protest-regime-human-rights-abuses-160623210503792.html.
16. Kidane, Telephone interview, Geneva, June 23, 2016.

17. London, November 16, 2014.

18. Stockholm, September 25, 2014.

19. Geneva, June 24, 2015.

20. The government vehemently denied this. But this is common knowledge in the country, including to foreign visitors. For example, after experiencing the deafening silence on the streets of Asmara, Barney Jopson (2009), of the Financial Times, told president Isaias "that there was a climate of fear on the streets," he "responded with sarcasm. 'It's very important discovery on your part. You've been able to discover this in how many hours?' I said I'd been in the country for two days. 'It's very unique. You must have a very unique brain,' he said." Jopson said to him, "I don't think so." Isaias further said, "To be able to know and read everything in this country in a matter of hours, it's amazing. You must be a superhuman." See Interview with Eritrea's Isaias Afewerki, Financial Times, September 18, 2009. Available at https://www.ft.com/content/35b8905c-a44b-11de-92d4-00144feabdc0.

21. Geneva, June 24, 2015.

22. London, May 14, 2015 (telephone interview).

23. Stockholm, September 25, 2014.

24. London, January 9, 2016.

25. Although some were unable to distinguish between where the government ends and the state begins, most of the informants said their grievances against the government had no impact on their commitment to the state. In the Tigrinya language, the distinction between the concepts of state and government is not clear unless one consistently uses mengisti (government) and hager (country).

26. London, January 16, 2016.

27. London, January 4, 2016.

28. Geneva, September 24, 2015.

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Eritrean Refugees at Risk

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Abstract[1]

Thousands of Eritreans have fled a repressive dictatorship since 2001, making their small nation (population 3–4 million) one of the largest per capita producers of asylum seekers in the world. Some languish in desert camps. Others have been kidnapped, tortured, and ransomed—or killed—in the Sinai; left to die in the Sahara; or drowned in the Mediterranean. Still others have been attacked as foreigners in South Africa, threatened with mass detention in Israel, or refused entry under draconian "terrorism bars" in North America. But when one avenue closes, they seek others, often posing new dangers. This chapter draws on interviews in refugee camps and communities in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas to put a human face on this crisis, sketch out the risks refugees face on their perilous journeys, and discuss the basic elements of a strategy to mitigate such risks built on refugee engagement and empowerment.

Introduction

A woman I will call Abinet spent six years completing her national service in one of Eritrea's ministries, keeping to herself but always doing her job as directed. However, after authorities discovered she had joined the clandestine congregation of a banned Pentecostal church, she was arrested, interrogated, and threatened before being released and shadowed in a clumsy attempt to identify other congregants. Faced with this, she arranged to be smuggled out of

the country in 2013 and enrolled in a graduate program in human rights in Oslo, where I met her a year later.[2]

Abinet, who asked that her name be withheld to protect her family within Eritrea, was one of thousands of Eritrean asylum seekers who were finding their way to Europe in flight from a repressive dictatorship that had consolidated its control over the society after a border war with its neighbor, Ethiopia, in 2001. Thirteen years later Eritreans were second only to Syrians in the number of arrivals crossing the Mediterranean in leaky boats to reach Italy or tramping through the Balkans, though the country was only a fraction of Syria's size and there was no civil war there (Connell 2015c; Laub 2015; OHCHR 2015; Tronvoll 2014).

The small northeast African country, which has a population of 3–4 million and was once touted as part of an African "renaissance," was by then one of the largest per-capita producers of asylum seekers in the world (Laub 2015). Many languished in desert camps. Some had been kidnapped, tortured, and ransomed—or killed—in the Sinai by brutal human traffickers. Others had been left to die in the Sahara or drowned in the Mediterranean. Still others had been attacked as foreigners in South Africa, threatened with mass detention in Israel, or refused entry to the United States and Canada under post-9/11 "terrorism bars" based on their past association with an armed liberation movement—the one they were now fleeing (EASO 2015; HRW 2014a; ICG 2014; Jacobsen 2013; OHCHR 2015; RMMS 2014; Monitoring Group 2012).

The most horrifying of their misfortunes—the kidnapping, torture, and ransoming in Sinai—generated attention in the media and among human rights organizations, as did a tragic 2013 shipwreck off Lampedusa Island within sight of land that cost more than 500 lives (Jacobsen, Robinson and Lijnders 2013; HRW 2014b; Van Riesen, Estefanos and Rijken 2012, 2013; Van Riesen and Rijken 2015). But the public response, like that to famine or natural disaster, tended to be emotive and ephemeral, turning the refugees into objects of pity or charity with little grasp of who they were, why they took such risks, or what can be done to halt the hemorrhaging.

This was abetted by the Eritrea government, which masked the political origins of these flows by insisting they were "migrants," not refugees, and no different from those of other poor countries like their neighbor and archenemy, Ethiopia, or that half or more were actually Ethiopians masquerading as Eritreans (DIS 2014; Laub 2015). These are fictions and exaggerations convenient for destination countries struggling with rising ultra-nationalist movements and eager for a rationale for turning the Eritreans (and others) away. But this is not a human—or political—crisis amenable to simplistic solutions. Nor is it going away any time soon.

The reason most Eritreans cite for leaving their homeland has long been conscription for national service of an indefinite duration, with pay so low their parents have to subsidize them (Connell 2012; Kibreab 2013; HRW 2014a, 2009; UNCHR 2013). But I heard other compelling reasons from most of those I interviewed over two years in 19 countries in North America, Europe, Israel, Africa, and Central America—more than 450 in lengthy personal conversations. Many cited unrelenting abuse and humiliation, constant threat of imprisonment or torture for offending someone in authority, often without even realizing how they had done this, or for abetting someone else's escape or practicing a banned religious faith.

The EU and many of its member states have responded to this crisis by offering aid to Eritrea with the aim of reinvigorating its stagnant economy based on unofficial assurances that national service will be scaled back in the future and a faulty assumption that economics lies at the base of this exodus.[3] But they are missing an essential point: The crushing repression of Eritrea's citizens, especially its youth, is as much a driver of the outflow of people as the lack of economic prospects. Nor are they separate, as the economy is almost completely dominated by the state and ruling party. Money alone will not change this.

The Source

Eritrea's history has been marked by conflict and controversy from the time its borders were determined on the battlefield between Italian and Abyssinian forces in the 1890s. A decade of British rule was followed by federation to and then annexation by Ethiopia. Finally, in the 1990s, after a 30-year war that pitted the nationalists, themselves divided among competing factions, against successive US- and Soviet-backed Ethiopian regimes, Eritrea gained recognition as a state (Connell 1997; Iyob 1995).

Since then Eritrea has clashed with all of its neighbors, climaxing with an all-out border war with Ethiopia in 1998–2000 that triggered a rapid slide into repression and autocracy (Jacquin-Berdal and Plaut 2005). It has survived by conscripting its youth into both military service and forced labor on state-controlled projects and businesses, while relying on its diaspora for financial support, even as it produced a disproportionate share of the region's refugees. This paradox underlines the strength of Eritrean identity, even among those who flee (Kibreab 2010; Hepner and Tecle 2013; Hepner 2009).

Eritrea is dominated by a single strong personality, former rebel commander and now president, Isaias Afwerki. He has surrounded himself with weak institutions, and there is no viable successor in sight, though there are persistent rumors of a committee-in-waiting due to his failing health. The ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), a retooled version of the liberation army, functions as a mechanism for mobilizing and controlling the population (Connell 2011; Kibreab 2010). No other parties are permitted. Nor are non-governmental organizations—no independent trade unions, media, women's organizations, student unions, charities, cultural associations, nothing. A constitution ratified in 1997 has never been implemented (Habte-Selassie 2003). All but four religious denominations have been banned, and those

that are permitted have had their leaderships compromised (EASO 2015; ICG 2010; Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2014; UNHCHR 2015).

Refugees cite this lack of freedom–and fear of arrest should they question it–as one of the main reasons for their flight. But the camps in Ethiopia and Sudan, the first countries of refuge for the overwhelming majority of those fleeing, reflect a highly unusual demographic: Most such populations are comprised of women, children, and elderly men, but UNHCR officials in Ethiopia and Sudan say that among those registering in the camps there, close to half in recent years have been women and men under the age of 25. The common denominator among them is their refusal to accept the undefined, open-ended national service (HRW 2009).

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) had registered more than 380,000 Eritreans as refugees by 2015, and many more have passed through Ethiopia and Sudan without being counted (UNHCR 2010).[4] The UNHCR representative in Sudan in 2013, Kai Lielsen, told me he thought 70–80 percent of those who crossed into Sudan didn't register and didn't stay.[5] Thus, a conservative estimate would put the total at more than three-quarters of a million. For a country of only 3–4 million people, this is remarkable. And it is the combination of their vulnerability and their desperation that has made them easy marks for traffickers.

The Trafficking

For many years after the crackdown on dissent in Eritrea and the indefinite extension of national service, the main refugee route for those fleeing the country ran through the Sahara to Libya and thence to Europe. When that was blocked by a pact between Libya and Italy in 2006, it shifted east to Egypt and Israel. Smugglers from the Arab tribe of Rashaida in northeastern Sudan worked with Sinai Bedouin to facilitate the transit, charging ever-higher fees until

some realized they could make far more by ransoming those who are fleeing (HRW 2014b; Van Reisen, Estefanos, and Rijken 2013).

The smugglers-turned-traffickers eventually demanded as much as $40,000–50,000, forcing families to sell property, exhaust life savings, and tap relatives living abroad. In international law, smuggling rises to the level of trafficking not just when it becomes outrageously exploitative but rather when it involves force, coercion, or fraud for an "improper purpose," which is what happened in this case with a vengeance.[6] As the voluntary flow dried up, the smugglers in Sinai paid to have refugees kidnapped from UN-run camps after identifying those from urban, mostly Christian backgrounds (those most likely to have relatives in Europe and North America), effectively turning the trade into modern-day slavery (This American Life 2013).

I spoke with one survivor in Israel in 2013 whose story was typical. Philmon, a 28-year-old computer engineer, fled Eritrea in March 2012 after getting a tip he might be arrested for public statements critical of the country's national service. Several weeks later, he was kidnapped from Sudan's Shagarab camp, taken with a truckload of others to a Bedouin outpost in the Sinai, and ordered to call relatives to raise $3,500 for his release. "The beatings started the first day to make us pay faster," he told me.[7]

Philmon's sister, who lived in Eritrea, paid the ransom, but he was sold to another smuggler and ransomed again, this time for $30,000. "The first was like an appetizer. This was the main course," he said. Over the next month, he was repeatedly beaten, often while hung by his hands from the ceiling. Convinced he could never raise the full amount, he attempted suicide. "I dreamed of grabbing a pistol and taking as many of them as possible, saving one bullet for myself."

Early on they broke one of his wrists. Later, they dripped molten plastic on his hands and back, during many of his forced calls home to beg for money. After his family sold virtually everything they had to raise the $30,000, he was released. But his hands were so damaged he could no longer grip anything. He couldn't walk and had to be carried into Israel. Because he was a torture victim, he was

sent to a shelter in Tel Aviv for medical care. In this regard, he was one of the lucky ones.

For some 35,000 Eritreans who came to Israel after 2006, each day was suffused with uncertainty, as an anti-immigrant backlash developed (Hotline 2014, 2015). The government called them "infiltrators," not refugees, and threatened them with indefinite detention or, what many feared most, deportation to Eritrea. Philmon has since moved on to Europe for treatment of his injured hands where the reception was more welcoming, though there, too, a virulent anti-immigrant movement was growing.

Late in 2013, the Sinai operation began to contract due to a confluence of factors: increased refugee awareness of the risks, the effective sealing of Israel's border to keep them out, and Egyptian efforts to suppress a simmering Sinai insurgency among Bedouin Islamists. But this didn't stop the trafficking—it just rerouted it. What I found in eastern Sudan that summer was that Rashaida were paying bounties to corrupt officials and local residents to capture potential ransom victims along the Sudan-Eritrea border and even within Eritrea and Ethiopia and were holding them within well-defended Rashaida communities there. Such captives would not be counted by government or agency monitors and would not show up at all were it not for the testimony of escapees and relatives (Connell 2013b).

In the fall of that year, Lampedusa survivors also revealed that Libya was becoming a site for ransoming and kidnapping, illustrating that as one door closed for the traffickers, new opportunities arose across a region of weak states and post-Arab Uprising instability (Connell 2015c, 2015b, 2013a). What Sudan and Libya had in common was not the predators but the prey. And the practice was expanding as word spread of the profits to be had, much as with the drug trade elsewhere. And it will continue to expand as long as there's a large-scale migration of vulnerable people with access to funds and no coordinated international response to stop it (HRW 2014b; IOM 2014; Van Reisen and Rijken 2015).

Eritrean refugee flows run in all directions. They're facilitated by smugglers with regional and, in some cases, global reach. The gangs behind this engage in a range of criminal activities, within which human trafficking is just a lucrative new line of business. Some have ties to global cartels and syndicates. Some have political agendas and fund them through such enterprises. Most are heavily armed. Under such conditions, a narrowly conceived security response can quickly spin out of control and escalate into a major counterinsurgency, as in Sinai in Egypt. For weaker states across the Sahel, the risks of ill-thought-out action are infinitely greater. Meanwhile, Eritreans blocked from Israel and frightened by the risks of crossing the Sahara and the Mediterranean found other routes to freedom that carried new risks. One these ran through South and Central America to the back door of the United States.

The Road to the U.S.

It was not hard to find the Eritreans in the laconic, Pacific coast town of Tapachula, Mexico, a few miles from the Guatemala border. They gathered on the front steps of the Palafox Hotel with the only other Africans here—Somalis, Ethiopians, a handful of Ghanians, all of them migrants—or they crowded a bustling internet café across the street. One afternoon in the spring of 2015, I met two who had been released from a maximum-security detention center here the night before. They were surprisingly at ease, giddy at the thought they had passed the last major hurdle to reach the United States. All they had to do now was fly to northern Mexico and walk across a bridge. But it had been a long, arduous journey, and I could see they were still jumpy (Connell 2015a, 2014a).

Tesfay, a Catholic from the market town of Keren, a crossroads for Eritrea's diverse cultures and religious faiths, left his country in 2007 at the age of 20 after being caught in a *giffa* [round-up] and taken to the Sawa Military Training Center for induction into the

national service, fearing he would be in for an indefinite term at pay so low his parents would have to subsidize him for the foreseeable future. But there was nothing he could do. At the end of his training, he walked out of the camp and kept going until he reached Kassala, Sudan.[8]

After a year in Sudan, Tesfay became ever more frustrated at his lack of prospects and fearful of Eritrean security forces who frequently crossed the border in search of escapees, so he got on the phone to relatives and raised $3,500 to pay smugglers to take him to the Egyptian Sinai so he could cross into Israel. In September 2008, he reached Tel Aviv where he thought he would be safe.

But after six years of relative quiet, he was swept up in another *giffa*, this time by Israeli authorities who were rounding up Eritreans and sending them to the newly constructed Holot Detention Center in the Negev Desert. By then there were 35,000 in the country, along with 15,000 Sudanese, and anti-African sentiment was reaching a fever pitch, as demagogic politicians stoked the anger among ultra-nationalists who wanted the Africans out. One member of parliament from the right-wing Likud Party, Miri Regev, had termed the refugees "a cancer in our body."

At the end of 2012, the government had begun to implement measures to reverse the influx. The first step had been the completion of a high security border fence running from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea to prevent new arrivals. The second, a year later, was opening of the Holot detentions. Deportation or "voluntary" departure was to be the final one (Connell 2015b).

Holot was a desolate place with no facilities for its inmates apart from a cafeteria and beds, which I saw for myself on a visit in January 2015, though its gates were open during the days and evenings, so residents could go in and out and conduct interviews with a visiting researcher, so long as they got back for evening roll call. In this respect, Holot functioned as a kind of halfway house, designed to house refugees for limited periods while pressuring them to leave—but only under Israeli auspices.

When Tesfay joined a protest there in June 2014 and marched to

the Egyptian border with hundreds of other detainees to demand they be allowed to leave then and there, he was jailed at the maximum security Saharonim Prison across the road from Holot for three months. When he was released, he decided to give in to the pressure and go on Israel's terms. The choices he and others were offered were: self-deport directly to Eritrea or accept a deal Israel worked out with Rwanda and Uganda to go there. In either case, the refugees got a cash payment—$3,500—and temporary travel documents that would be taken from them upon their arrival.

Tesfay took Rwanda, and the money. As soon as he got to Kigali, however, he arranged to go to Uganda to meet his wife, who came from Sudan to escape what she had said was harassment and abuse because she was an Eritrean Christian. No place seemed safe, so they agreed that he would try to get to the United States and send for her.

Once he had arranged air tickets and forged travel documents with smugglers in Kamapala, he flew to Turkey, then to Brazil and finally to Ecuador, taking this roundabout route because the flights on Turkish Airlines were cheap. From Quito, he went by bus and foot across Columbia and up through Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala to the Mexican border, following a well-trod path used by hundreds of Eritrean refugees each year, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Tapachula.

Ghebre was from Adi Quala in south-central Eritrea, close to the Ethiopian border. He'd been sent to Sawa for military training in 2010, but on his first home leave twelve months later, he refused to go back. Three months after that, he was arrested and sent to the notorious Aderser Prison near Sawa, where he spent the next two years under what he described as unrelentingly harsh conditions. He escaped in 2013 by going to the hospital and slipping out with a guard he'd befriended.[9]

Ghebre and his friend went straight to Khartoum, where the former prison guard, also a national service conscript, arranged to be smuggled to Libya. Ghebre, who'd fallen ill, stayed behind. He

choked up as he told me he learned a few months later that his friend had died in the Mediterranean trying to get to Italy. Others he knew had been detained in Sudan and sent back to Eritrea, leaving him scared to stay and scared to go to Libya. He said he'd heard about the option of flying to South America to get to the United States and decided to try it. It took him several months to raise the money, but once he had it he flew to Brazil and followed the same route through Ecuador and Columbia as Tesfay had. They met in Panama and traveled the rest of the way together. By the time I encountered them, they were describing each other as "family."

Ghebre and Tesfay moved along this modern-day "underground railroad" with dozens of refugees and migrants from Somalia, Pakistan and India, as well as Eritrea, traveling in small groups that met up at major transit stops. All this was done under the direction of a network of smugglers—"agents," they called them—who got them through checkpoints and led them along little-used footpaths to bypass border posts. In Columbia, they boarded boats for an eight-hour, middle of the night ride on a small fishing boat to reach Panama, where they had plunged into the dense, largely uncharted wilds of the Darien Gap. Some of the time they walked, some they rode in long wooden canoes paddled by indigenous Panamanians whom the smugglers hired.

For two days, they were awakened before dawn to hike through undergrowth so tangled with vines and brambles they often could not see where they were putting their feet. The thick canopy overhead blocked the sun, but punishing temperatures and suffocating humidity left them drenched in sweat. Brief but intense bursts of rain offered some letup but left them dripping even more. No one wore long pants, they said, because it was too hard to walk once they were wet. Some threw away clothes, food, even water when they became too much to carry, forcing them to drink from rivers the color of cappuccino. But if they did so, they paid the price with crippling bouts of diarrhea. At least one in Ghebre's group gave up, he said.

Throughout the trek, they kept as quiet as they could to avoid

attracting the attention of Colombian drug runners that use the trails, or the heavily armed border police who hunt them. When they emerged, though, they stumbled onto a military camp and were immediately detained. They were also fed. It was a relief, he said. After four days he was loaded onto an army truck and taken to another camp, the second of four en route to Panama City. Each time he moved he was asked for a bribe. At the fourth one, he met Tesfay. In Panama City, they were questioned and photographed and then issued 10-day passes to get to Costa Rica. It took six days to get the money from relatives to pay for the trip. On day seven, a local "agent" put them on a bus.

For the next two weeks, they worried about being detained in one of the other countries they had to pass through or, worse, taken off a bus by one of the many drug-smuggling gangs that operate there. "I'm every day scared," said Ghebre. "I'm not ever relaxed." None of this was made easier by their lack of Spanish. "We had very little contact with the people," he added.

As it happened, the trip was uneventful—harrowing midnight treks along barely marked mountain paths, a pick-up truck jammed with migrants careening along back roads in Nicaragua, hour after hour on rickety hand-me-down school buses in Honduras and Guatemala, but no hostile confrontations.

Detention finally came in Tapachula, just as they had expected. Nearly all the migrants were aware of what awaited them at the Mexican border. Many Central American migrants, fearing they would be turned back, avoid it by slipping across to the north near Tenosique to catch a freight train known as "The Beast" to the US border. Most African and Asian migrants, coached by their smugglers, go to the authorities instead.

Mexico gives them two choices: Either petition for asylum and permanent resident status, which can take two to three months, or plead their case, ask for a travel permit and promise not to remain in Mexico.[10] If they take the second option and are granted safe passage, they get 30 days to get through and out of the country. Mexico detains more refugees and migrants than nearly any country

in the world, but it grants asylum to relatively small numbers (451 in 2014). In 2012, they held 90,000 (not all at once). In the first 11 months of 2014, the number jumped to 117,00, most from violence-plagued Honduras, El Salvador, or Guatemala. By way of contrast, the U.K. detained 25,000 over a similar period. The Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI in Tapachula is the largest detention site in Mexico, with a capacity of 960, but many people are held a week or less, giving it a revolving door feel, and very few ask for asylum. Most Eritreans view this as a minor irritant, after all they've been through.[11]

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has an office there, but staff said they could only guess at the number of Eritreans who come through based on detention statistics from the federal government, as almost none register as refugees. "They don't approach the UN," said Ana Silva Alfonso,[12] "They know the way, and they are very well organized."

I met Tesfay and Ghebre after they'd been inside for seven days. Neither was fazed. All they talked about was where to go next, California or Texas. They appeared to have no plan and no relatives to call upon there, but they'd been reading posts on Facebook. They inclined toward the Hidalgo Bridge at McAllen, Texas. Asked why the United States, Tesfay merely shrugged and said: "I like freedom."

What Needs to Happen

An effective approach to this crisis would start with education and empowerment of the target population and involve efforts to identify and protect refugees throughout their flight. A key step would be the early, uncoerced determination of status according to international standards and an expanded program of resettlement that gave the refugees a credible opportunity for relocation—including young single men who are often excluded or put to the bottom of the list. This could be coupled with an

expansion of incentives to deter onward migration, including education, training, employment, and, where appropriate, integration into host communities. Employment is a key, though, for training that leads nowhere only propels onward movement. But none of this could work without refugee engagement in the process itself.

Then, and only then, would a security operation targeted at the smuggling and trafficking have a chance for success. But it, too, would need to be multidimensional in substance and regional in scope with the key states sitting down with one another and cooperating in the implementation of a strategy to curb, if not end, illegal activity. Each country in this region has a tendency to act independently of the others, attacking aspects of the problem but not dealing with it in its totality. Sudan has arrested individuals implicated in trafficking, including one police officer, but has not cracked down on corrupt officials or gone into Rashaida communities to take down the ring leaders. Nor does it have an urban refugee program to recognize and accommodate the many Eritreans from urban backgrounds who do not adapt to rural camp life (Jacobsen, Robinson and Lijnders 2013). Ethiopia has instituted security measures within the refugee camps on its northern border and has an effective urban program based on what it calls an "out-of-camp" policy, but it is not working with Sudan on cross-border movement and it lacks funding to accommodate the large number of camp-based refugees who want to live in the cities. Egypt has launched military operations in the Sinai where the torture camps are situated, but the announced aim was to break up an Islamist insurgency–the government denies there is trafficking taking place.

An effective approach would begin with a conference of affected states, and it would have to be supported by donor states and appropriate agencies (Interpol among them), not only in terms of aid but also intelligence, logistics, coordination, and communication. The meeting that took place on November 28, 2014 in Khartoum–dubbed the "Khartoum Process"–was a good start in this

direction, but the proof of its value (or its absence) will be in the follow up, which has to date been less than encouraging.[13]

If the trafficking operations are truly to be rolled up, the marginalized populations from which they arise and on which they depend need to be offered sufficient incentives to withdraw support for the criminals. This means access to resources, economic alternatives to off-the-books trading, involvement in the local political process, education for their children, and more. These people need to be made stake holders in the states where they live, which is not the case today for the Sinai Bedouin or the Sudan-based Rashaida or most of the other groups involved in Trans-Sahel smuggling.

Meanwhile, to dry up this particular supply of prey, political change is needed at the source, in Eritrea. That means at a minimum opening up the political system and the economy, limiting (but not necessarily ending) national service, releasing political prisoners, implementing the long-stalled Constitution, and ending controls on travel so those who do want to go abroad as migrant workers can do so without illegally crossing borders and going through illicit smuggling networks.

The most important thing the United States and other interested countries could do to facilitate this process would be to work with Ethiopia to resolve once and for all the border dispute with Eritrea. The clash centers on a frontier town, Badme, which both states claim, but which a 2002 Border Commission ruled belonged to Eritrea.[14] Ethiopia has held out for negotiations that would address normalization of relations, among other concerns. For its part, the US has done little more than protest, while the Asmara regime has used the impasse as a rationale for continued repression and one-party rule.

Despite Eritrea's appalling human rights record and its belligerent behavior in the region, which have long left it isolated, there is an opportunity for engagement given that prominent regime officials indicated a willingness to revise the terms of national service in private sessions with European officials and in media interviews,

though no official policy change has been announced apart from a promise of salary increases. But if the EU and individual states jump too rashly and simply throw money at Eritrea, they risk entrenching the very practices that lie behind much of the exodus, while doing precious little to stem it.[15]

Although Eritrea's three branches of government–cabinet, national assembly, and high court–provide a facade of institutional governance, real power is exercised through informal networks that shift and change at the president's discretion. Every important decision is made in secret (Connell 2011; Kibreab 2013; ICG 2010; Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2014). Under these circumstances, taking private pledges of reform at face value is a risky proposition. At a minimum, a date for an end to the practice of requiring indefinite national service should be announced, along with a plan for a rolling demobilization of those who have already served longer than 18 months (Mehreteab 2004).[16]

Making this public would make it difficult–not impossible, but harder–for the government to renege on a promise it is quietly making to visiting delegations. Given President Afwerki's unbending resistance to such moves in the past, however, there is reason to be skeptical. In any case, such an announcement would at best only slow the migration rate of those now in military service and those about to be called up, but not halt it. More is needed to turn the tide.

When I've asked refugees, especially recent arrivals, what it would take to get them to go back, there are two things they mention right away: the release of political prisoners, including those jailed for their religious convictions, and the implementation of the Constitution, which was ratified in 1997 but has sat on a shelf in the president's office ever since. It is deeply flawed and needs revision, but it would be a start. Many also talk about the need for basic freedoms–of press, of speech, of movement, of religion–but the rule of law tops the list, as everyone wants to know what the rules are and that those in power have to play by them, too. Without this, few are likely to take promises of reform seriously. Those policymakers

in other countries inclined to re-engage with this regime and offer aid need to use this opportunity to demand hard evidence that change is coming and that it's more than cosmetic.

There are more steps needed to ensure that Eritrea is really on a path from dictatorship to some form of nascent democracy with increased transparency in state affairs, reform of the deeply flawed judicial and penal system, and the nurturing of a political culture in which stable political institutions can take root. Eritrea also needs a structured process of truth and reconciliation to give people back their history and start a process of healing on which this once promising new nation can build a future. And there has to be movement toward normalizing relations with its neighbors, especially Ethiopia.

One thing is certain: if the wrong steps are taken at the outset—or false hope is raised and no steps taken—what little hope that still flickers within the younger generation inside Eritrea will be further dimmed, more will flee, and it will be much, much harder to convince any of them to go back soon.

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Notes

1. This chapter is adapted from Dan Connell, Eritrean Refugees at Risk. *Foreign Policy in Focus* and *The Nation* (April, 11 2014); Crushing repression of Eritrea's citizens is driving them into migrant boats. *The Guardian* (April 20, 2015); and Eritrean Refugees' Trek Through the Americas. *Middle East Report*, no. 275 (Summer 2015).

2. Interview with the author, Oslo, October 24, 2014.

3. For a summary of the EU initiative for 2016–2020, see European

Commission, "Eritrea," https://www.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/countries/eritrea_en.

4. UNHCR, "2015 UNHCR subregional operations profile – East and Horn of Africa," http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4838e6.html.

5. Interview with the author, Khartoum, June 23, 2013.

6. See for example the discussion of trafficking by the United States National Institute of Justice, http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/human-trafficking/pages/welcome.aspx.

7. Interview with the author, Tel Aviv, January 1, 2013.

8. Interview with the author, Tapachula, Mexico, March 24, 2015.

9. Interview with the author, Tapachula, Mexico, March 24, 2015.

10. Mexico's refugee policy and statistics on refugees and asylum-seekers can be found at the website of the Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR), http://www.comar.gob.mx/es/COMAR/home.

11. For more on this, see the Global Detention Project, http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/americas/mexico.

12. Interview with the author, Tapachula, Mexico, March 25, 2015.

13. In November 2014, representatives of the European Union, the African Union and some 40 individual states, including all those in the Horn of Africa, agreed to work together on human trafficking between the Horn and Europe, though there were substantial disagreements over the causes of the outflows. For a brief summary of the outcome, see European Council on Refugees and Exiles, "Khartoum Process: EU and African Union launch initiative against smuggling of migrants" (December 5, 2014), http://ecre.org/component/content/article/70-weekly-bulletin-articles/911-khartoum-process-eu-and-african-union-launch-initiative-against-smuggling-of-migrants.html.

14. "Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission Decision Regarding Delimitation of the Border" (April 12, 2002), http://reliefweb.int/report/eritrea/eritrea-ethiopia-boundary-commission-decision-regarding-delimitation-border.

15. A Danish Immigration Service report issued in November 2014 and later cited by U.K. immigration authorities claimed that conditions in Eritrea had changed, that human rights reports were outdated, and that Eritrea's terms of national service were being eased (https://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/B28905F5-5C3F-409B-8A22-0DF0DACBDAEF/0/EritreareportEndeligversion.pdf). Speaking on a panel on the political situation in Eritrea sponsored by the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue in Vienna on April 8, 2015, Yemane Gebreab, a top presidential advisor and head of the political affairs department of the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), announced that the decision had been taken to scale back the terms of service to eighteen months (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLWqaPILqNo). However, this was never implemented.

16. The Eritrean government twice planned and organized a major phased

demobilization program, once in the mid-1990s after the independence war and again after the Border War in 2001, though the latter plan was not implemented. For details of the second program, which could serve as a template for a program now, see http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2001/04/1121249/ eritrea-demobilization-reintegration-program-project.

The International Community's Role in Eritrea's Postliberation Phase of Exception

GEORGIA COLE

Abstract

When Eritrea emerged from its decades long struggle with Ethiopia to attain de jure independence in 1991, there was widespread optimism about the country's future. Eritrea was applauded as "the one ray of hope in the Horn of Africa" (McSpadden 1999, 73). The international community—including states, international organizations, the media, and academics—for the most part celebrated the government's unorthodox approaches to the country's economic, political, and social development. By the late 1990s, however, the mood towards Eritrea had changed and previously excited onlookers made their disappointment clear. Numerous reasons have been proposed for why Eritrea failed to effectively develop during this period, not least the role of Ethiopia and the shortcomings of domestic governance. This chapter, however, seeks to expand existing literature on this theme by asking: in what ways did the international community's engagement with President Isaias's regime in the period between Eritrea's liberation and its descent in to war with Ethiopia influence the country's trajectory? Using examples related to the multilateral attempt to repatriate Eritrean refugees in the first half of the 1990s, this paper explores the ways in which the international community, most notably in this case the United Nations, the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees, and its donor states, behaved in ways that potentially isolated and hardened the new regime in Eritrea. It draws on three "unremarkable" features of these negotiations to highlight that identifying and understanding the more quotidian diplomatic experiences of newly independent states like Eritrea is critical if we are to understand how their governing psyches have evolved and become consolidated.

On May 24, 1991, within a week of the start of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front's final offensive against Ethiopian troops, Eritrean tanks rolled in to claim back their capital, Asmara. Thirty years of resistance and fighting, first against Ethiopia's imperial regime and then against the Derg, ended in a celebratory fervor that was shared by many across the globe. The victory of a grass-roots, leftist, revolutionary front over a repressive, well-funded colonial force resonated with a host of Western states and interested bystanders. They felt vindicated in their enthusiasm for a new generation of "Renaissance" African states (Woldemikeal 2013). Unlike their predecessors and other heads of state across the continent, leaders of states such as Eritrea, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Uganda were branded as paragons of a new style of less unequal, less corrupt, and less violent politics, even before some of their tenures as postliberation regimes had effectively commenced.

As this chapter will show, coverage of this period from the international community—including states, international organizations, the media, and academics—was widely supportive of the contention that Eritrea was "the one ray of hope in the Horn of Africa" (McSpadden 1999, 73). Discussions with academics and employees of international organizations who worked in the country at this time are, even today, still redolent of the optimism that informed their stances towards the new regime. Their enthusiasm is nonetheless tinged by the almost ubiquitous disappointment that these individuals came to feel towards Eritrea. This set in most notably when the country descended back into war with Ethiopia in 1998 and emerged on the other side to see

the PFDJ instigate a torrent of political arrests against opposition figures in September 2001. To use words taken from Dan Connell's denunciatory speech of 2003, within a decade of the country's Liberation there came to be a sense within many that "the Revolution was in jeopardy, that silence in the face of this was complicity, and that open criticism was the only option." The view thus prevailed amongst these once ardent supporters that despite the huge amount of international support that the new regime had garnered, the immense legitimacy it commanded as a result of its thirty-year popular struggle in the trenches, and the country's immense promise in the immediate postliberation era, the PFDJ's state-building project had almost irreversibly failed.

This chapter does not set out to challenge this view on the underperformance of the Eritrean government. The priorities and ideals promoted by the EPLF during the liberation struggle, from democratic accountability to civil rights, and from tertiary education to women's empowerment, have for the most part either been lost or distorted beyond recognition by President Isaias's regime. Multiple factors and actors are held responsible for this, largely depending on what opinions the person pointing the finger holds of the country. These explanations include, but are certainly not limited to: the leadership's relative inexperience with international diplomacy (McSpadden 1999; Mengisteab 2009); the legacy of the Eritrean People's Revolutionary Party in postliberation politics (Connell, 2001); the deepening militarization of society following the border conflict with Ethiopia, and its continuing lack of resolution; the autocratic style of governance that those in the highest echelons of the ruling party have tended to exhibit; and the economic impacts of sanctions against the country for its supposed support for Al Shabaab.

This piece also does not aim to discredit these analyses, or to suggest that it was anything but a complicated mix of all of these contributory forces that resulted in the government emerging as increasingly mistrusting, isolated, and vituperative. What this chapter will instead seek to challenge is whether the international

community's disappointment that this decline happened *despite* their support, and the promising foundations laid by the preliberation Front, fails to explore an important part of the story. This constitutes the possibility that the approaches adopted by the international community towards the EPLF/PFDJ in the pre-border war period served to legitimize a phase of exceptional behavior, which contributed to the consolidation of the ruling apparatus as we see it today. I have chosen to focus on the period between 1991 and 1998 intentionally, to side-step three areas of international engagement with Eritrea that have received far greater coverage in academic debates. First, the United Nations' failure to act when Ethiopia annexed Eritrea in 1962. Second, the degree of support provided by the international community to the EPLF during the Liberation war. And third, the role of the international community in the aftermath of the border conflict with Ethiopia (Bereketeab 2009). The Eritrean Government has long used the failure of the United Nations to enforce the findings of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission to justify the continuing degree of militarization and political control within the country, which continues to drive so many Eritreans across the border (Zondi et al. 2006). The border conflict is also often cited by commentators as *the* pivotal moment in Eritrea's political trajectory, serving to potentially obscure the changes afoot in the country long before its descent back into war.

I instead intend to draw attention to the possible role that the international community, from loyal journalists to international organizations, played in the consolidation of the newly independent state in the pre-1998 period. With reference to Eritrea, Mengisteab (2009, 47) stated that "a country is fully responsible for its foreign *policy*, but its foreign *relations*, good or bad, are also outcomes of the policies and actions of the other parties involved." This piece will argue, however, that policy of any kind must also be situated within the past experiences of states, their global and regional contexts, relationships that they have held with those "other parties," and the ideological convictions of those in power. Rather than start from

the premise that the PFDJ frustrated the efforts and expectations of its external patrons and observers, I therefore flip the equation to pose a new question: in what ways did international engagement with President Isaias's regime in the inter-war period influence the country's state-building endeavors?

The first section of this chapter explores the international optimism that surrounded Eritrea's prospects as a postliberation state, before detailing dominant explanations for why the country failed to convincingly fulfill these–and its own–expectations. Using examples related to the multilateral attempts to repatriate Eritrean refugees in the first half of the 1990s, the second section then explores the ways in which the international community, most notably in this case the United Nations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its donor states, behaved in ways that potentially isolated and hardened the new regime in Eritrea. I develop this example not to explain what happened to the Eritrean refugees in Sudan or during their repatriation to Eritrea, which is beyond the scope of this paper and has been discussed at length elsewhere (Kibreab 1996a, 1996b, 2000; Farwell 2001; Habte-Selassie 1992; Bascom 1994, 2005; McSpadden 1999; Bariagaber 1999). I instead use one component of these negotiations[1] to highlight a formative experience in the relationship between the international community and the Eritrean government. I suggest that this period requires greater discussion for two main reasons. First, because it illustrates the consolidation of many points of disagreement that continue to plague this relationship and second, because these "sticking points" themselves should be understood as having contributed to the trajectory of political developments within Eritrea.

Emphasis is placed on three areas of the international community's behavior, all relating to their expectations around the relief and development response of the Eritrean state. The first was the disjuncture between professed international support for the impoverished nation, and the financial and political assistance that materialized. Relatedly, the second was the contradiction inherent

in donors' respect for the strategies used by the liberating forces in sustaining Eritreans throughout the war, and yet their desire upon independence to impose models of development upon this regime that were at clear odds with the EPLF's foundational principles (Smith-Simonsen 2003). And the third was that donors failed to take account of the reasons why some Eritrean refugees showed a hesitation to return for reasons beyond material deprivation. Thus, they missed the opportunity to caution the Eritrean government on its human rights record accordingly. As the international community was prepared to intervene in other areas of the state's behavior, the defense of wishing not to appear as neo-imperialist holds limited justificatory clout. The chapter concludes by a brief discussion of what these observations might mean for historiographical analysis of the postliberation Eritrean State.

Euphoria Over Eritrea's Postindependence Period

Though many retrospective accounts of Eritrea's internal politics contend that the state was in terminal decline from independence onwards, this ignores the immense optimism that surrounded the country's future during the years directly following liberation (Hansson 2001). Commenting on this period, and expressing the general sense of awe that surrounded the country then, Mengisteab (2009, 48) states that,

> The regime's progressive rhetoric, along with the cooperation that the EPLF had cultivated with the population during the armed struggle, gave it a remarkably high level of popular support, arguably unprecedented in African politics. It also received praise from many outside observers.

The international community placed a set of huge expectations on the newly independent state, from rebuilding devastated rural infrastructures to securing peace in the wider Horn of Africa. As Ruth Iyob, writing just before the outbreak of hostilities with Ethiopia, stated, "Eritrea is beginning to emerge as the epitome of peace, stability, and the locus for challenges to the status quo in the Horn of Africa. . . touted by many outsiders as a driving force for the region's political and economic transformation" (1997, 656). The professed commitment of President Isaias and his team to peaceful relations with neighboring states left commentators sanguine about the contribution that the country might make, both to the re-establishment of amicable ties between Ethiopia and Sudan and to the revitalization of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development. This sense persisted even despite the country's confused and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to court states and international alliances that held clearly incompatible goals, not least Israel and Sudan (Mengisteab 2009).

Drawing on a narrative that painted the country's future as on the ascendance, the PFDJ's behavior, and restrictive interpretation of many "liberal democratic" concepts, was repeatedly given the benefit of the doubt by onlookers. The PFDJ's charter, produced after the EPLF's third congress in February 1994, was celebrated by observers as providing an alternative, inclusive, and democratic model of governance. It called for extensive public participation in the Constitution drafting process, human and political freedom for all citizens, and strong checks on excesses of power through the eventual establishment of three branches of the state (Doornbos et al. 1999). The Eritrean government was praised for aiming to provide a more inclusive forum for national reconstruction, and for promoting certain key tenets of governance: national harmony, economic and social development, social justice, cultural revival, and widespread political democracy (Ministry of Information 2009). Articles in the *Eritrea Profile* discussed the timeframe over which the Constitution should be produced, and expounded that the time

might be ripe for the replacement of customary law with a democratic constitution (1995c, 1995d).

It appeared to matter little to those expounding the virtues of these policies that the PFDJ's interpretation of these qualities was markedly different to conventional Western wisdoms. Democratic accountability was conceived of as broad public participation, not the existence of multiple political parties or electoral processes. The PFDJ also felt that this participation should be strictly controlled, to avoid it "degenerat[ing]. . . into endless public meetings, seminars, group meetings, workshops, when the same points are belabored over and over again" (Doornbos et al. 1999, 280). The authors of this view, including the renowned freedom fighter and author, Alemseged Tesfai, defended this stance by arguing that "the likelihood that multi-party politics would divide the country into regional and religious factions is a real possibility and danger. For what purposes would a nation sacrifice the unity and peace it enjoys to party politics it is not yet ready for and whose eventuality holds dubious benefits for its future?" (*ibid.*, 322). The party publicly debated the extent to which democracy was a prerequisite for economic growth, or whether greater power invested in President Isaias would yield more profitable results (*Eritrea Profile* 1995e).

Restrictions on oppositional politics were widely accepted by international onlookers as a necessary, and perhaps even an innovative and praiseworthy, route to ensuring that national unity was not jeopardized by opportunistic sections of society. A briefing produced in 1997 to shape US policy towards Eritrea, for example, advised that the Eritrean government would build its "system in stages, rooted within its own history and culture," and that "The U.S. should," as such, "back off from pressuring Eritrea to impose a pluralistic model drawn up in Washington" (Connell 1997, FPIF). The political system was thus praised not simply in spite of its unorthodox approaches to conventional development challenges, but also as a direct result of them. Iyob (1997, 671) commends this stance at the time, arguing that "international readiness to accept political and economic stability in Eritrea as a precursor to

democracy (however defined) has provided an 'oasis of civility' with which to dazzle foreign observers and analysts." Commentators at the time therefore overwhelmingly accepted this line of reasoning due to their general belief in the PFDJ's sincere commitment to the development of the country (*The Independent* 1996). Summarizing their views, McSpadden (1999, 73) stated that,

> The Government of Eritrea. . . has proven itself, according to UN personnel, Western government and NGO sources, to be honest and 'clean' in their governing. Confidence in the integrity of the leadership is widespread. This confidence is strengthened by the fact that since liberation, thousands of former fighters have, until recently, been working in the government without salary, including at the highest level. Most importantly, the country is at peace.

Early Counter-Narratives to Eritrea's "Success Story"

The concerns being raised by more critical voices appeared to neither hugely dampen the international community's expectant excitement nor to incentivize them to promote changes that were more than technocratic. Counter-narratives reasoned that changes within the country were occurring at the expense of personal freedoms, to an extent that was unjustifiable and potentially threatening to the country's long-term prospects for democratization (The Fund for Peace 1994). Though testament to the media's comparative openness in this period, a report by James C. McKinley Jr, republished in the *Eritrea Profile* in 1996, discussed the human flipside of the Eritrean government's revolutionary fervor: the round-ups of impoverished people from the streets; the shooting of disabled former fighters during a protest over the government's treatment of them since independence; and the disgruntlement of those populations being told to work for several years without any remuneration (*The New York Times* 1996). The

PFDJ did little at the time to conceal its heavy-handed response to dissent or nonconformity, convinced as it was by its alternative formulation of democracy. In 1994, the PFDJ openly and unashamedly declared its attitude towards the "unconstitutional obduracy" of Jehovah's Witnesses. This group's refusal both to fight during the liberation struggle and to vote during the referendum was interpreted as a betrayal of Eritrea, and illustrative of this community's relinquishment of their rights to citizenship. A Standing Directive issued by the PFDJ on the 25th October 1994 therefore stripped them of their citizenship, without any apology for the damage that this would do to their job security prospects and social security (*Eritrea Profile* 1995a). With this in the background, newspaper coverage nonetheless continued to promote headlines such as "Eritrea: African Success Story Being Written" (*The New York Times* 1996).

The facts, however, suggested that it was far from a "success story" that was being cultivated during this period. The country had managed to fall out with all of its neighbors over the course of the decade, including with Yemen in a dispute over the Hanish Islands. As mentioned above, blame for the Eritrean state's failure to mature as both it and the international community anticipated that it would has been retrospectively aimed in multiple directions. Looking more historically, increasing interest is now turning to how the regime's current behavior can be explained through analyzing the EPLF's structure and performance from the liberation struggle onwards. Reid (2009, 2) suggests that the current militarization of the Eritrean state and society can be seen as "informed by" the government's intrinsically militaristic attitude, which was fostered during their time fighting the Derg. The "stability, discipline and pragmatism" (Iyob 1997, 667) so celebrated by observers when that efficiency was directed at supposedly admirable causes, and so bemoaned when it has underpinned the stubborn pursuit of ill-advised policies, has thus been attributed to the characteristics necessitated by guerrilla warfare, and that have subsequently proven extremely difficult to shake off.

A critical component of this psychology has been the government's unwavering commitment to the principle of self-reliance. This has appeared to have come at the cost of development assistance that might have significantly improved the country's social and economic prospects (Smith-Simonsen 2003). Engagement with international non-governmental organizations has long been intermittent due to the unpredictable constraints that the Government has placed on their behavior. Even when organizations were permitted to operate during the 1990s, those loyal to the PFDJ have confessed that "whenever international policies and actors have found themselves contravening national policies, the government has not hesitated to cancel them or renegotiate their entire content and form" (Tesfai 1999, 353). In 1992, for example, the PGE reduced UNHCR's office in Eritrea to administrative staff because they felt that the organization was working at cross-purposes to their own goals.

Even though some of those loyal to the regime acknowledged that this strategy risked alienating international actors in ways that undermined the country's long-term interests, the PFDJ has fairly consistently promoted this approach (*ibid.*). During the process of expelling international organizations from Eritrea in 1998, for example, the president prophetically stated that, "We reject assistance. We are in no need of humanitarian or charity aid. . . And this is based on crucial questions and matters of destiny" (*Eritrea Profile* 1998). As Smith-Simonsen (2003, 340) suggests, however, this came to constitute "an eviction the Government soon came to regret." When the PFDJ sought to invite these organizations back to assist with the reconstruction efforts following the waves of displacement in 1999 and 2000, they hesitated. After their unceremonious dismissal from the country, they nurtured disappointment and distrust towards the PFDJ (*ibid.*). As Reid (2009, 7) suggests, Eritrea's "robust, aggressive style of diplomacy has won it few friends." Failures to significantly adapt this style of governance in the postliberation era are thus widely held responsible for the state's isolation.

There were certainly many opportunities for domestic reform that the PFDJ avoided in the 1990s, and that the international community–whether intentionally or not–appeared to overlook. Much like during the liberation struggle, economic activity continued to be dominated by companies owned by those close to the ruling elites. With the country's most profitable sectors almost exclusively controlled by this population, private enterprise and its associated dividends were stifled. The concentration of power and wealth within the president's narrow cadre resulted in the failure of autonomous and accountable institutions to develop, and a policy portfolio based on the ideas of just a few (Mengisteab 2009). The absence of alternative political parties and the right to promote alternative political views sent a clear message about the desired absence of democratic constraints on the government's decision-making. Without a sounding board for major policy decisions, however, the Eritrean government made several naive, albeit potentially unpredictable, decisions that had far-reaching consequences. The overarching belief that the contentious points of their relationship with Ethiopia could be addressed down the line, or would be unimportant given the rapport between the two countries' guerrilla movements at liberation, provides a clear example. Issues concerning trade, currencies and the shared border were left unaddressed, only to flare up as key points of irreconcilable difference once the two governments exhausted their "benefit of the doubt" towards each other (*ibid.*). Despite episodes of conflict with all of its neighbors, it was the descent into war with Ethiopia and its aftermath that have been held most responsible for the failure of Eritrea's political, economic, and societal strategies for building the nation.

It is in relation to this incident that the international community's reputation, from the perspective of the PFDJ and many un-aligned third parties, has come out most scathed. The episode following the Algiers Agreement and the findings of the Boundary Commission, when the United Nations failed to act decisively and arguably impartially on the outcomes of the latter's ruling, codified Eritrea's

distrust of multilateral institutions (Bereketeab 2009). As discussed above, this incident was nonetheless only one of several key moments in the Eritrean leadership's history when they have felt unfairly treated by the international community. Criticism of the United Nations has sprung hyperbolically from the Eritrean government and its supporters, predominantly around annexation, border demarcation, and the current sanctions regime. Whether or not this community has been justified in their sense of victimhood is not, however, the focus of this chapter. It instead highlights how less sensational discussions around the role that international actors may have played in shaping the Eritrean state in its formative years have, perhaps as a result of this focus on major events, been largely ignored. It responds to the contention that understanding the consolidation of the Eritrean state must involve recognizing the impacts of both remarkable and unremarkable encounters with the international community. The remainder of this chapter thus briefly explores one more subtle manifestation of contradictory, confusing, and potentially damaging behavior that was exhibited by international actors in the 1990s. Using the negotiations over the return of Eritrean refugees in the early-1990s, it outlines some of the ways in which one series of poorly handled negotiations fed into the often obstructive narratives that the Eritrean government has continually drawn upon in its international engagements.

Refugee Repatriation as an Example of Misaligned Expectations

Even before the country's liberation from Mengistu's Marxist-Leninist rule, the EPLF and then the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) established the repatriation of Eritrean refugees from Sudan as a clear priority (Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs 1991).[2] In the context of these events, and the "climate of brutal

repression that had triggered their exodus" coming to an end, the PGE stated that "these people can no longer contemplate life in exile. . . or sustain the deprivation of their basic rights to live in their homeland," "craving to return home but unable to do so for want of basic assistance" (PGE EPLF 1993). Refugees were thus assured by the PGE that they could and should return to Eritrea, without fearing any adverse measures upon return (ERREC/UNHCR 2000). The Eritrean Government stressed from the very start of this process that its success would be wholly contingent on the promotion of a "holistic" model of return, and that refugees could expect reintegration to occur hand in hand with repatriation. Herein lay the source of one tension, however, that would continue to undermine the relationship between the Eritrean government and other stakeholders in these negotiations throughout subsequent years.

After a series of over-ambitious first attempts had failed to attain material or political support for these proposals, the Eritrean government unveiled its redesigned flagship program for the successful repatriation of its refugees in June 1993. This was entitled the Program for Refugee Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Resettlement Areas in Eritrea, hereafter named PROFERI. It represented a scaled down version of a plan presented by the government only a few months earlier, which had aimed to support the repatriation and reintegration of all 500,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan. PROFERI instead proposed the adoption of a graduated approach for repatriating the 340,000 refugees who they claimed actively wished to return from Sudan, and who the Eritrean government felt were becoming increasingly vulnerable to physical violence and economic exploitation in the camps (CERA 1995, 12; PGE/UN 1993). The extent of unassisted return in the early 1990s, of approximately 150,000 individuals, corroborated what several Eritrean commentators at the time suggested was Eritrean refugees' overwhelming desire to return home (Kifleyesus 2010).

PROFERI was intended to last just three and a half years, commencing immediately after a pledging conference convened by

the Eritrean authorities in Geneva on the 6th of July, 1993. The program was designed as a key pillar of the Eritrean government's broader strategy for recovery and rehabilitation, which included the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants within a comprehensive development plan, the restructuring and streamlining of the civil services, and discussions over the constitution-making process (Doornbos et al. 1999). Investment in these strategies, which were supported on paper by a broad consortium of donors, was seen as time-critical. A "Joint Appeal by the Eritrean Government and United Nations Organisations" (1993, 29) stated that "if the framework and resources required to reintegrate these returnees, and to rehabilitate the areas to which they will return are not provided, this opportunity will be lost. This in turn could make the returnees a burden instead of an asset, with the added danger that they could even become a divisive factor for the new nation at a time when national unity and healing are essential."

The Mutual Failure to Procure Funds

The failure of the pledging conference to adequately support PROFERI has been widely documented (Bascom 2005; McSpadden 1999; Ericson et al. 2009). Explanations from parties sympathetic to Eritrea at the time focus on it being the result of the country's political marginalization, and the incompatible expectations of the UN organizations and the Eritrean government vis-à-vis repatriation since the country attained de facto independence.[3] As Sutton (1994) commented in Eritrea's national newspaper, the *Eritrea Profile*, though the Eritrean Government felt that PROFERI was a "blueprint for success. . . global politics intervened. Donors, preoccupied with demands from the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Russia, baulked at the $262 million price tag. They pledged just $22 million–and even this has yet to appear in the coffers" (*Eritrea Profile* 1994b). The divergence between multiple stakeholders'

widespread approval of the program and the contributions raised in the pledging conference was seen by one member of the Eritrean government, over a decade on, as an inexplicable "tragedy." Though the same representative's view that they "didn't get peanuts of support for their program and how they suffered"[4] ignores that pledging attempts almost never reach the desired amount, and that some funding, albeit minor, was provided for the program, these sentiments nonetheless reflected the PFDJ's obvious disappointment.

To them, the question of how a project could have been so widely supported and yet fail to catalyze the requisite financial support was never answered. In the absence of any explanation, and being not well acclimated to the realpolitik of these processes, individuals from the Government of Eritrea were quick to conflate the international community's apathy with "sabotage attempts" and a "big conspiracy against Eritrea not to stand on its feet."[5] As Teclemichael Wolde-Giorgis (1999, 95) stated when reflecting on these failures in the late 1990s,

> The external economic assistance that would have enabled implementation of the three-year PROFERI programme did not materialise. The lesson seems clear, the needs that arise from devastation caused by war are not sufficient to qualify for outside assistance. Aid is not given based on demonstrated necessity, or even the capacity of using it properly. It is usually guided by donor priorities, whatever they may be.

Beyond the disappointment was also most likely the sense of embarrassment that accompanies the wounding of national pride. Given international debates on repatriation, and the broad support enjoyed by the Eritrean government at the time, the country's provisional government had felt excessively confident that the international community would embrace the comprehensive program that they had designed. It had, after all, in their eyes been completed in partnership with committed and supportive UN

agencies. Further conviction was fed by the fact that the pledging conference in Geneva immediately followed the opening of the 1993 UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This forum had included deliberations on "Coordination and Humanitarian Assistance–Emergency Assistance and the Continuum to Rehabilitation and Development," which the Eritrean government felt was perfectly encapsulated in PROFERI's aims. Buoyed by their new-found confidence, the pledging conference was thus envisaged as an opportunity for Eritrea to make its first, high profile presentation to the international community after the country's independence (PGE-UN 1993). The paucity of pledges was therefore a bitter reminder that the words of external actors, however complimentary and encouraging they might be, were not necessarily to be trusted.

Though it was clear to the United Nations institutions involved in these interactions that they were dealing with a government new to the world of international diplomacy, they appeared to make limited attempts to guide the PFDJ's transition. Confusion and disappointment on the part of the Eritrean authorities over the failure of PROFERI was compounded by contradictory messaging. UNHCR was undertaking a precarious balancing act in its attempts to both placate the PFDJ and to adhere to its own mandate. The organization thus ended up simultaneously promoting multiple "lines" on whether or not to support more comprehensive return, rehabilitation, and reintegration projects within Eritrea. Speaking on behalf of UNHCR in July 1995, a senior protection officer was, for example, clear in stating that "I would like to stress. . . the point that when refugees return home, they cease to be protected by UNHCR" (*Eritrea Profile* 1995b). Other colleagues within UNHCR nonetheless issued statements that entirely contradicted this. The Head of UNHCR in Eritrea at the time did little to assuage the PFDJ's suspicions that the country's lack of funding was related less to mandates than it was to politics. In response to a question concerning whether or not he felt that the UNHCR office in Asmara

had "done enough" to support the repatriation and resettlement of Eritrean refugees, the Head of Office was reported as stating that,

> I say concerning this question that the UNHCR has not been able to do what we liked to do. Because we don't have enough funds from donor governments. Actually the scope of our activity is limited by the awareness and good will of donor governments. Fortunately for Eritrea, there is peace and stability now, but this has shown to be counterproductive when it comes to awareness and understanding of the needs of Eritrea. CNN today goes to Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Somalia and focus is no longer on Eritrea even though Eritrea deserves attention, because of its important role in creating regional peace and prosperity (*Eritrea Profile* 1995b).

The Promotion of External Models of Development

The second element that appeared to confuse the Eritrean Government, as alluded to above, was therefore the disjuncture between the donors' celebration of their founding ideologies, not least self-reliance and independent agenda-setting, and their respect for these strategies in practice. To the Eritrean government, refugees were not special citizens. They felt that those who had never left the country required and deserved the same treatment as those who had. It furthermore made no sense to the PFDJ, from either a diplomatic or a human rights perspective, to have refugees return and face greater hardships than in Sudan. Eritrea's economy was devastated, even if foreign governments felt optimistic about its recovery. Plunging areas of return into even greater difficulties–if repatriants exacerbated the existing strain on services and infrastructures–was not an option for the PFDJ. Their stance towards repatriation and reintegration was therefore unfaltering: return and reintegration should be driven by principles of equal opportunity for both returnees and stayees. They "could not see

any point in creating refugee enclaves within its borders, albeit of its own citizens, that would be a great problem to administer and sustain. . . the government's logic seems to be that if UNHCR (or any other) assistance is to be relevant and effective, it should be geared towards solving the problem, not transferring or compounding it" (Tesfai 1999, 334).

This was considered especially important to the Eritrean government because of the immense tasks that confronted them upon seizing power. Large proportions of the population were suffering from a food deficit, and had little or no access to services and employment opportunities. The British Military Administration had stripped away much of the infrastructure built by the Italians, and Ethiopian occupation and the 30-year War of Independence that followed caused both further destruction and retarded the economic and technological development of the country. Degradation of agricultural land combined with poor rainfall meant that eighty percent of crops failed in Eritrea in 1993, and 400,000 individuals were estimated to be suffering from food shortages (*Eritrea Profile* 1994a). The Government responded to these shortcomings by issuing Proclamation No. 11. This mandated that 100,000 EPLF fighters work voluntarily in national reconstruction programs, and that all Eritreans between the ages of 18 and 40 undertake a national service obligation (Selassie 1996). The initiative was informed by the PGE's general attitude in the postliberation period that "the period of sacrifice, the time when the national interest subordinates every other individual or group need, is not yet over" (Tesfai 1999, 283). While the government therefore argued that they did not want refugees back outside of controlled repatriation operations, to ensure that support mechanisms were not over-run, they simultaneously demanded that individuals return if they could contribute towards the project of national reconstruction.

Several observers supported this attitude. They argued that the Eritrean authorities should resist the temptations of a rushed repatriation exercise. The incentives to be resisted included the

Eritrean Government's own, to ensure that refugees were back in time to vote in the referendum in 1993 for example, and those of donor governments, who were reported to be looking for an excuse to scale down their activities in Sudan because of the country's worsening political situation and extractive tendencies (Selassie 1996). Others agreed with this approach, arguing that the conditions in Eritrea were unsuitable for return, and that the Government of Eritrea should feel entitled to defend a position whereby refugees were not unconditionally welcomed back. Kibreab stated that, in conditions whereby return would be a death sentence because of lack of resources, "a legal right to return may be rendered meaningless without concerted international humanitarian assistance" (1996b, 54). This hesitation sat uneasily with the approach being promoted by UNHCR at the time. This made clear that homecoming was not always "likely to be under ideal conditions. In many it will be dogged by political insecurity and economic uncertainty" (UN General Assembly 1995, 33). Domestic constraints, and the Eritrean government's attempt to exercise autonomy in determining patterns of repatriation, were thus dismissed by UNHCR as they continued to promote return without funding the complementary programs for rehabilitation and reintegration.

To the PFDJ, the continual rebuffing of their plans for repatriation—which continued with multiple, largely unsuccessful iterations throughout the decade—confirmed their belief that the international community had the resources, but not the will, to assist them. This fed into an ongoing psyche of inherent mistrust of outsiders, and "the powerful concept of 'historical betrayal' [that] permeates the nation's image of itself" (Reid 2005, 483). The perceived inconsistency in these organizations' rhetoric and behavior, whether real or not, left Eritrea with a sense of its political and strategy irrelevance to the major donor countries. As one UNHCR employee later stated, this was quite likely accurate given geopolitics at the time and America's apathy towards funding programs in the region.[6] Writing in 1997, Connell stated that US

policy towards the country was indeed sending "mixed signals." Funding to the new state was conditional from the start, and based on Eritrea's ascription to a series of Washington Consensus reforms that stood at fundamental odds with the political model that the EPLF had employed, with generally considered success, throughout its time in the trenches. The US was also accused of rhetorically supporting the Eritrean government while failing to provide corresponding levels of funding (Connell 1997). As such, Connell recommended that "the U.S. should support Eritrea's bottom-up economic and political development strategy without trying to control it" (*ibid.*). Policy makers appeared to have disregarded this recommendation when it came to respecting the PFDJ's attempt to carve an autonomous path to refugee return and national rehabilitation, while embracing it when it came to tacitly supporting the PFDJ's non-participatory consolidation of power.

The International Community's Failure to Recognize Why Some Refugees Hesitated to Return

Finally, return was being encouraged by UNHCR and donors with limited regard for the reasons as to why some Eritreans were reticent to do so; even the Eritrean government was not making a secret of the fact that areas of return had very limited capacity to receive refugees (Kibreab 2000). The absence of guaranteed livelihoods certainly constituted the primary reason underpinning refugees' reluctance to return.[7] There was nonetheless also a contingent of Eritrean refugees in Sudan who held political sympathies that were antithetical to the PFDJ's. A document released by WRITENET in 1996 summarized that "Although the regime [Eritrean refugees] fled is no longer in power in Ethiopia and Eritrea has been independent since April 1991, the present government does not belong to the same political shade of the independentist spectrum as the majority of the refugees. As a result, most of the refugees have not gone back" (WRITENET 1996). Though

this paper ignores that the majority of Eritreans did in fact return upon the country's independence, albeit through informal channels beyond the governments' and UNHCR's control, there was continuing uncertainty amongst some in Sudan as to how welcoming Eritrea would be to individuals upon return. The government authority coordinating refugee affairs stated that they welcomed all Eritreans regardless of their political "stand" (CERA 1992, 5), but statements by President Isaias suggested a less forgiving attitude towards individuals who had a previous affiliation with the competing guerrilla army, the Eritrean Liberation Front:

> The government's policy is based on the principle of forgiveness and the covering of past sins. A lot of people joined ELF in person or helped the Front from afar, and many others became members for a minimal contribution. The problem is that someone who joined the front in 1965 comes now, after twenty years of uncertain whereabouts, and asks for pay rise [sic] and other amenities. We know who is who, but we prefer to let sleeping dogs lie, otherwise it would be very easy for us to open the books and settle matters one by one (*Eritrea Profile* 1995f).

It was thus no secret that the PFDJ continued to harbor resentment towards individuals who had sided with other fronts during the conflict. The fact that reintegration would require a concerted effort on both societal and economic fronts was, however, notably absent from official documentation on this process. In much the same way as the international community wilfully sacrificed democratic ideals in the hope of furthering political and economic goals first, they also seemed willing to marginalize questions on the country's dubious human rights record until they had diminished the caseloads under their charge in eastern Sudan. The same behavior was repeated almost ten years later, when UNHCR promoted repatriation from Sudan despite being aware that the protection of returnees could not be guaranteed in the post G-15 climate.[8] This does not mean that the organization is

responsible for the PFDJ's discriminatory behavior or incendiary language. The fact that UNHCR turned a blind eye towards early manifestations of intolerance and exclusion, however, likely did little to encourage more inclusive models of state-building in the long run.

Though a significant number of Eritrean refugees did return through their own means in the 1990s, PROFERI and its subsequent incarnations never proved hugely successful. Alongside the reasons stated above, the relationship between the Eritrean government and both UNHCR and the Sudanese government deteriorated, and the behavior of the Commissioner for Refugees in Sudan continued to undermine the success of repatriation operations.[9] Berhane Woldegabriel (1996, 88) commented at the time that "the scheme is scarcely in operation, while overtly the three parties are conducting a face saving diplomatic manoeuvre so that the voluntary repatriation program could appear to be progressing." Alongside being immensely disappointing for those parties that had wished to alleviate refugees' long-term exile in deteriorating camps in Sudan, this string of failures and incompatible expectations—amidst ostensibly widespread support—disturbed the PFDJ. Though much blame can be directed at the PFDJ for their behavior during this period, the Eritrean government nonetheless felt angry at the disconnect between the UN's mandate for support, the organization's support for some reintegration programs but not theirs, and UNHCR's dismissal of their own intentions for community-wide rehabilitation projects. It has been stated elsewhere that disappointing introductions to multilateral diplomacy, such as that outlined above, have continued to undermine the PFDJ's relationship with the UN system more generally (Kifleyesus 2010).

Conclusion

In the majority of discussions exploring the many shortcomings of the Eritrean state after independence, the onus of responsibility has been primarily levelled in three main directions: from the Eritrean state and pro-PFDJ contingents towards Ethiopia and certain cases of inimical international action, from anti-PFDJ contingents and many within the international community towards the Eritrean government itself, and from both sides, towards the lasting effects of waves of colonial projects dating from the Italians, through the annexation of the country under the United Nation's watchful eye, to the thirty years of Ethiopian occupation. The purpose of this chapter is not to deny the critical importance of these factors in contributing to the current state of Eritrean governance, but to inject this discussion with a further, comparatively underexplored component. Rather than merely deploring the "downfall" of the Eritrean state, it suggests that the ways in which the behavior of the international community affected the country's trajectory in the inter-war period deserves greater attention. This includes casting a more critical eye on the implications of the types of support that Eritrea received in the first few years of its independence.

Detailing the negotiations between the Eritrean government and various UN institutions over the repatriation of Eritrean refugees from Sudan is intended to illustrate a few examples of the ways in which these multilateral relationships played a part in the hardening of the Eritrean state. First, some unorthodox initiatives peddled by the Eritrean state were supported by the international community. Their overarching rationales for how refugee return and community rehabilitation should be pursued were nonetheless rejected in international fora, both conceptually and financially. Beyond the embarrassment that this caused to those in power within Eritrea, poor explanations for this inconsistent international engagement confirmed long-held narratives of international betrayal, disrespect,

and apathy that for a brief moment after liberation had appeared slightly less unimpeachable.

Second, return movements were encouraged at a time when the willingness of the PFDJ to integrate dissenting voices was hardly guaranteed. Evidence available at the time concerning human rights abuses and "disquieting signs" (Connell 2003) within the country, such as the gunning down of disabled war veterans, went largely unchallenged. Support for the return of vast swathes of the population from exile—despite illustrations of repressive modes of social control—suggested that such behavior was tolerable if progress on other fronts could be discerned. Similar to accounts of how donors had behaved during the liberation struggle, there was a sense in the postindependence period that donors "were more inclined to turn a blind eye as long as the Eritrean case was regarded as being a just one, or of special interest" (Smith-Simonsen 2003, 345). The result, however, was that a transitional "phase of exception" was tacitly supported by the international donors, organizations, and commentators as government projects were interpreted within a grand narrative of teleological progress.

Third, and with reference to both the above points, many international actors were enthusiastic to celebrate Eritrea's independence as illustrative of the new African Renaissance. This led, however, to the creation of a set of expectations of the country's trajectory and behavior by external authorities that were almost certainly unattainable. Part of this was due to the fact that they relied on the construction of an era in Eritrea's history that many argue never happened. As Smith-Simonsen writes, "one cannot question the absence of something that never was. The liberation army was never truly self-reliant and Eritrea as an independent nation had little prospect of ever getting self-sustainable" (2003, 347). For each time the PFDJ peddled its "culture of self-reliance" (Tesfai 1999, 317) and stated that it was "in no need of humanitarian or charity aid," (*Eritrea Profile* 1998), there was a contradictory moment when the regime berated the international community for its failure to provide the funds they felt entitled to, such as in the

case of PROFERI. The contradictions inherent in the government's behavior have nonetheless seldom appeared to prevent President Isaias's regime from publicizing characteristics that it has shown little proof of possessing. More pertinent for this discussion, however, was that, in the early years of independence, these lofty aspirations appeared to have been legitimized by an international community that had temporarily bypassed its usual sceptical stance. The result was even greater confusion and animosity between the international community and the Eritrean government, as the former's encouragement of particular state behaviors was not met with corresponding financial and political commitments and was likely unattainable regardless.

Though less blatant than the strict imposition of external models through projects such as structural adjustment, the expectations placed on newly independent states come with their own colonial ideologies and implications. We increasingly hold international donors to account for how their funding has served to prop up, shape, and legitimate states with dubious governance records, such as Rwanda and Ethiopia (Uvin 2001; McDoom 2013; Human Rights Watch 2010). The more subtle ways that multilateral interactions and relationships have engendered similar processes in newly independent states like Eritrea potentially requires greater exploration too. The unique "socio-psychological make-up of the EPLF" is a phenomenon that has rightly deserved academic attention (Reid 2005, 470). Due to a history of disappointment with the international community's assistance, dating back to their supposed failure to provide support to the EPLF in the trenches, the PFDJ has cultivated a national psyche whereby "Sacrifice, struggle, hardship, are the key concepts of the government's ideological armoury" (*ibid.*, 480). As stated in the introduction, however, this "psyche," which informs both domestic policy and international relations, must be understood within the historical, geographical, political, and economic contexts that have influenced it. Such an endeavor does not mean to exculpate the PFDJ of responsibility for the current state of affairs in Eritrea, nor to pass judgement on

whether such disappointment is justified or not. It instead seeks to suggest that furthering our understanding of the Eritrean state will involve greater recognition of the more unremarkable international experiences through which its practices and performances have been, and continue to be, shaped.

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Notes

1. Another factor influencing these negotiations, for example, was the relationship between the Eritrean and Sudanese governments. In late 1994, and coinciding with when the PFDJ surrendered the Sudanese Embassy in Asmara to Sudanese opposition forces, diplomatic ties between the two countries were severed. The lack of dialogue between the two countries, as well as instability at their shared border and continual attempts to undermine each other's regimes, impeded repatriation operations throughout the 1990s.

2. The EPLF and PGE had both approached UNHCR for support in these early operations, but had been denied this assistance because of UNHCR's inability to work directly with what were at that point—pending the country's de jure Independence—still non-state actors. Upon achieving independence, the Eritrean government did not forget these early rebukes (McSpadden 1999).

3. The Eritrean authorities' main partner during the formulation of PROFERI was the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs following their dismissal of UNHCR's international staff the year before. UNHCR remained in the background throughout these initial discussions, until a full working relationship was re-established in 1994.

4. Interview with former member of the Commission for Eritrean Refugee

Affairs, Asmara, Eritrea. May, 2014.

5. Interview with former member of the Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs, Asmara, Eritrea. May, 2014.

6. Interview with a staff member at UNHCR, Geneva. September, 2014.

7. Refugees with ethnic ties across the border in Sudan, such as the Beni Amer, also did not cross back to Eritrea en masse in any organized repatriation operations.

8. Interview with a staff member at UNHCR, Geneva. November, 2014.

9. UNHCR's Chief of Mission for Eritrea in 1996 was quoted as saying that "We (UNHCR) created a monster in Sudan. . . we still support 2,000 jobs in the refugee business there, and there are vested interests in keeping the Eritrean refugees. If they repatriate, their refugee empire will collapse. We have to take a lot of responsibility for creating the situation in Sudan" (Street 1996). The Sudanese government therefore sought to discourage the repatriation of Eritreans to ensure that operations in the east of the country were not scaled down.

"Eritrea" in Switzerland's 2015 Election—A Missed Chance for Dialogue between Politics, Social Work, and Refugees

MAGNUS TREIBER

Abstract

The year 2015 has not only seen a considerable influx of refugees into Europe, but also a heated political debate on immigration and political asylum. Switzerland held national elections in October, and as refugees from Eritrea made up the largest group of the country's asylum-seekers, political debate and anti-immigration campaigns focused on Eritrea itself. Eritrean refugees' legitimacy as such was questioned and Swiss politicians started travelling to Asmara's isolated regime, where they were warmly received. Besides this rather ideological debate on refugees from Eritrea, Swiss professionals in the wider field of social work felt in need of more empiric knowledge on this widely unknown African country and its people, whom they considered strangely elusive and evasive—leading to misinterpretations and perplexity. Refugees from Eritrea, however, had their own reasons to avoid communication and assistance. Already in Eritrea, as much as on their long and precarious journeys to Europe, they had learned to mistrust formal institutions and to rely more on informal ways. Thus, Switzerland's much needed dialogue between politics, social work, and refugees did not take place.

Public debate in Switzerland's 2015 election mirrored the huge

refugee influx into Europe that has become a "crisis" for European countries. This is a crisis at both the state and society level, as well as national, inter- and supranational politics.[1] Since the early 1990s, refugees have become a hotly discussed issue in public debate and were singled out as a veritable "other." Most significantly, Germany and its eastern neighbors started quarrelling on a potential European distribution mechanism for hundreds of thousands of newly arriving refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, and elsewhere. Even national border control within the Schengen area–once celebrated as historical achievement of economic and symbolic importance–has been partially re-established,[2] this "refugee crisis" became the most pressing issue of domestic politics within European countries, dividing people into pragmatic pro-immigration alliances and increasingly radicalized anti-immigration movements. Yet, refugees[3] themselves rarely had a voice in recent debates. While there was much talk about refugees, there was little communication *with* refugees. This is especially true for Eritrean refugees, who are at the center of an ongoing debate in Switzerland. This article wants to show how, and why, politicians, social workers, and refugees missed a chance for dialogue and mutual exchange, which could have helped to ease misunderstanding and conflict.

Small, but prosperous, Switzerland is Italy's northern neighbor and still close to the Mediterranean. It has become a main destination for refugees who enter Europe through Lampedusa Island. Although Switzerland is not a member of the EU, it is cooperating with Brussels in various ways, including the Schengen and Dublin agreements.[4] Swiss migration policy has always been more or less restrictive, but in 2015, a year of national elections, Switzerland witnessed an exceptionally aggressive debate on migration. Moreover, since Eritrean refugees indeed made up the largest group of asylum seekers in Switzerland–6,923 in 2014 and 9,966 in 2015–Eritrea itself became a topic.[5] These debates centered on two contrasting questions: a) was Eritrea–this arcane place a literal hell on earth–providing legitimate reason to accept its high numbers of refugees? Or b) was it a poor, but beautiful, country

at the shores of the Red Sea, where the country's diaspora went for holidays, thus rendering its emigrating youths into economic migrants pursuing unrealistic dreams of happiness at the expense of the Swiss tax payer? Politicians from different parties explicitly took up the topic in their election campaigns and the tiny and largely unknown country at the shores of the Red Sea was prominently covered in Swiss media. In August 2015 Guido Graf, prominent member of the Christian-Democratic Party (CVP) and head of Luzern's regional health department, declared Eritrean refugees to be mere economic migrants and thus joined the Swiss People's Party's (SVP) open anti-immigration campaign that essentially focused on the legitimacy of Eritrean refugees.[6] Politicians from the liberal party FDP followed. Especially for the "national conservative" SVP, this strategy proved successful: in October's elections, they pulled in 30% of the votes.[7] Subsequently Eritrea remained an important topic, and party officials and journalists continued travelling to Asmara, but could not find much more than friendly officials and hospitable people. In February 2016 Susanne Hochuli, representative of the Green Party and member of Aargau's regional government, stated she did not see dictatorial control "à la North Korea," and called critical reports on Eritrea "Western lies" and a tall tale.[8] Together with other politicians from various parties, she had accepted an invitation of Eritrea's honorary consul in Switzerland, the Swiss gynecologist and Eritrea lobbyist, Toni Locher. Locher supported the Eritrean liberation struggle since the 1970s and the country's development attempts since independence. Unlike his American counterpart Dan Connell, a similarly involved journalist, he did not switch sides after 2001, when Eritrean president Isaias Afewerki staged a coup d'état from above and cracked down on journalists and critics from his own circle—the so-called "Group of 15" (G15) (Connell 2004; Tronvoll 2009; Hepner, O'Kane 2009). Following Eritrea's disastrous war with neighboring Ethiopia (1998–2000), this political catastrophe impeded any democratization efforts, eventually led towards broad impoverishment, and severely damaged public life and the

educational system. Locher, however, became the regime's official spokesperson in Switzerland.[9]

In the course of Switzerland's debates, the State Secretary for Migration (SEM) came under pressure and faced a dilemma on which policy to follow and recommend. On one hand, Simonetta Sommaruga, the minister of justice, refused further cooperation with dictatorial Eritrea, based on the SEM's own detailed, and well-researched COI-report on behalf of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in Malta.[10] On the other hand, SEM's vice-director openly favored Denmark's strongly favorable, but much criticized, Eritrea report[11] after returning from Asmara.[12] Already in November 2014, the State Secretary's director represented Switzerland at an EU-conference in Rome that initiated the "Khartoum-process": a deal with East African states—including Eritrea, Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, none of them known for their respect of human rights—to diminish irregular emigration from their territories. Here, the European Union and its associates had offered considerable funding to Eritrea—until then considered a pariah state at best—for "[a]ssisting in improving national capacity building in the field of migration management," to implement efficient border control, and "to effectively and consistently address trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants, including ensuring protection to refugees and asylum seekers and assistance to migrants in vulnerable situations" [sic].[13]

Switzerland has become active in a broader European effort to upgrade the isolated and already crumbling Eritrean regime through hastily renewed political and diplomatic contacts and financial rewards and gifts. Consequently, the EU's representative in Eritrea and the Eritrean Minister for National Development signed a 200 million euro deal in January 2016 to develop Eritrea's unreliable power supply, but also to keep the institutional remains of Eritrea's formal state running.[14] Furthermore, the EU offered to strengthen the country's control of its borders—a project coordinated by Germany's development agency, GIZ.[15]

During the last decade, Eritrean officials claimed they were facing

defamation by foreign powers who did not give the regime credit for improving the economy, for fighting price increases, administrative chaos, crime, and corruption. While this claim was unconvincing, the regime now scented the morning air and saw a chance for international recognition of its difficulties. In the light of Europe's "refugee crisis," Eritrea regained the almost-lost opportunities to explain its postrevolutionary challenges to the outside world. Switzerland offered exceptionally favorable circumstances to listen to the regime's position on the refugees. The general Swiss anti-immigration campaigns made lobbying for a Third World dictator politically acceptable again. In line with this anti-immigration sentiment, the State Secretary for Migration prepared substantial changes in foreign and migration policies itself. Officially, the authority still acknowledged the country's dictatorial character and granted protection to the bulk of arriving refugees from Eritrea. However, the number of full asylum grants in 2015 was reduced by half. More and more applicants received "preliminary protection" only.[16] Increase of refugees and subsequent–somehow abstract–debate on Eritrea and Eritreans in the election year fueled, sometimes even poisoned, public debate on immigration in Switzerland and shifted the country's political landscape to the right. Hence, the realpolitik to cut down refugee numbers clashed with self-ascribed values of human rights, democracy, and political asylum.

There were, however, people who had to address new-arriving refugees on a professional basis and who–despite the heated discussion and media coverage on Eritrea–did not yet feel well informed, such as social workers, language teachers, psychologists, and civil servants from welfare and communal authorities. They had their own encounters with Eritrea and Eritreans and developed a much less polemic, but serious and professional interest.

Professional Perspectives

After its independence, and then again after the Border War with Ethiopia, Eritrea was not much discussed in the Western world–at least not beyond small, but concerned, academic circles. About 25 years later, professionals and volunteers working with Eritrean refugees were eager to learn more about Eritrea because of personal experiences with their clients. During a series of workshops organized by Caritas Switzerland in autumn 2015, participants presented and jointly discussed a number of problems arising from work with Eritrean refugees. Here, I will sketch two apparently typical cases:

> Case no. 1:
> An Eritrean mother of four children from two different fathers is under pressure to run and organize her family. The two elder children have crossed the Sahara and the Mediterranean on their own in yearlong journeys. Now they feel subjected to their mother's strict rule. The social worker would like to support the adolescent children's interests in sports, music, and language learning, for which the mother lacks resources. However, the mother is unwilling to allow activities outside school and home. The father of the two teenagers is back in Eritrea, and the father of the two toddlers lives in a neighboring city, but apparently does not care. At the same time, the mother does not allow doubt that she is in charge of the family–and she is not ready to accept social work's professional help.

The assigned social worker wanted to know why this Eritrean mother was unable to accept help despite being clearly overburdened. She attached far-reaching questions: the social worker wonders if this is loose morality, and are the lack of durable partnership and family bonds a typical cultural trait among some

Eritrean refugees? Is there, the social worker asked prudently, a lack of values?

These kinds of questions come up among many social workers in Switzerland because they have witnessed remarkable social conflict among Eritrean refugees, and even the fragmentation of recently reunited families.

> Case No.2:
>
> A 22-year-old man visits a literacy class in Switzerland. In Eritrea, he went to school for only four years. After some time, he is more and more often absent, although his course is mandatory–an obligation tied to his welfare support. His excuses are numerous, but not convincing: he lost his phone or the teacher's phone number, he overslept or was sick. . . subsequently he is warned and then called for an interview. He is all well, he insisted, no problems at all. Neither the official social worker nor the translator has the impression that their client has developed a drug problem. He is sanctioned, meaning his welfare support is cut down, but the staff involved feels helpless and uncomfortable.

This second case represented a challenge to the caseworker who wanted to support this individual, but he could not understand the motivation of the Eritrean refugee's actions.

Above I sketched two cases of how Swiss social workers experienced Eritrean refugees. The overburdened mother's elder children had to grow up quickly while crossing the Sahara and the Mediterranean on their own. Now their mother–maybe in compensation for deficient parenthood, certainly for fear of an alien, threatening outer world–tries to over-control and isolate her children. While the assigned social worker doubts the mother's morals, the mother may perceive the social worker as a threat for her precarious family, under pressure. Likewise, the young man denies communication, professional offers, and assistance. We are unable to know why; maybe family members are still on their way and at risk of life (which causes stress), maybe first social

encounters in Switzerland turned out confusing, frustrating, or even shocking.[17] Here mediation and communication (including the reflection of power relations) have not yet taken place. The pragmatic professional interest to assist and support on the side of social work could not link up with the newcomers' fundamental, but frustrated, expectations. Their hopes for formal and incorruptible rules, for trustworthy social interaction, justice, and the rule of law in the Western world had easily crumbled after arrival. So, neither of the two sides understand, nor feel understood, and neither feel safe and settled in contact with each other. Differing views and perceptions of each other–which make both sides appear strange and unknown–may not even be at the core of the problem, they could be overcome. These perceptions, however, become closed references in the construction of knowledge on each other. Knowledge of course is not static, it is characterized by processes and therefore subject to change. Thus, mediation and instigation of mutual exchange between our Swiss social workers and their Eritrean clients would have to take into account extremely different conditions, histories, and cultures of learning themselves–for the sake of mutual understanding and respect in a commonly shared place. At least social workers tried to get into direct communication and understanding–but often failed. A remarkable number of their Eritrean clients refused open exchange due to their social experience of Eritrea's dictatorship and migration's pitiless learning processes, which do not prepare for trust in formal institutions and their protagonists. Swiss politicians from various parties, instead, showed their willingness to believe whatever fit into their political agenda and campaign strategies and provoked further retreat, mistrust, and fear.

In the heated political atmosphere of Switzerland's election campaigns, more migrant-friendly politicians, professionals, and activists did not only have serious problems defending the considerable numbers of Eritrean newcomers, but also arguing on behalf of these people, so often experienced as strangely reserved and mistrustful. Large numbers of Eritrean refugees–seemingly

masses (cf. Assad 1994)–became the main reference point for political discussion on migration in general. Combined with a feignedly cultural argument–"these are none of us"–political debate became a fundamental issue (cf. Brumann 1999).

Alfred Schütz's concept of knowledge helps to understand social work's dilemma. Knowledge, here, is the steady and dynamic product of one's own experience and socially mediated experiences of others–shared and rendered meaningful through communication (Schütz 1946; Berger, Luckmann 1969; Knoblauch 2010). Involved professionals obviously lacked sufficient opportunity to create satisfying and substantial knowledge on refugees and their country of origin. Political knowledge, constructed in Switzerland's debate on Eritrea, relied on views from outside and from above, based on figures and strategic interests, alien physiognomies, as well as everyday perceptions of culture and cultural boundaries (cf. Harrison 1999). It essentially aimed at maximum control and election results, not at mutual understanding and respect. Social work's professional perspective, in contrast, looks at individual and social practices–it is much more empiric and follows other interests: the "other" is one's client (Grießmeier 2015; Domes 2015). However, professional empathy by itself did not enable dialogue and understanding. Remarkably, many Eritrean refugees seemed to refuse communication, explicitly or implicitly. But why? Weren't the professional social workers and volunteers on their side and, so to speak, the good guys? To address this issue, we will leave Europe and look into the situation and process of migration from Eritrea itself, which will be discussed in the next section.

Migration's Informality

Eritreans who illegally crossed borders to Ethiopia or Sudan faced an ambivalent encounter with the outside world–represented by national and international refugee administration offices and

agencies. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) grants protection and assigns the status of an international refugee on broad rules following clear-cut guidelines. Eritrean refugees, who risked freedom, health, and perhaps life by leaving the country illegally, understood this institutional advocacy represented a strong moral legitimation and international acknowledgment of their plight.

However, the UNHCR's high moral stand was not followed in practice. No immediate visa to the Western world was issued; no compensation for life in Eritrea was given. Instead, Eritrean deserters became refugees. From active run-aways they became administrative cases in the extensive bureaucratic process of the organization, which is characterized by paternalism and lack of transparency. In practice, the refugees are rendered passive, practically excluded from social life and stowed away (Treiber 2013a; Müller 2015; Hepner 2009; cf. Inhetveen 2006).

The Western world suffers from what appears an inherent dilemma: the rule of law and human rights are propagated, but not universally granted. Currently, politicians and media in Europe speak of a "refugee crisis," a "wave" of refugees, a "catastrophe"–wordings that do not address what refugees might have gone through, but rather their massive influx into European territory. Europe's policy towards refugees and migrants is indeed two-faced. This contradiction inevitably shapes and conditions Eritrean refugees' individual situations, their personal migration projects and thus, their knowledge construction and practice during migration itself.

Feeling marginalized and excluded from more privileged forms of migration, Eritrean refugees often overdo their stories in interviews by the UNHCR or immigration authorities. Few of my informants felt self-confident enough to stick to their own experiences.[18] These five stories illustrate my point: Biniam insisted he belonged to an Orthodox youth group in Asmara that rebelled against the deposition of the patriarch Abune Antonios in 2007. The religious youth rebellion was silenced–but Biniam had never been part of it.

Zeberga narrated what a friend of his experienced during his stay in prison as his own story. Yohannes claimed to have co-organized the Asmara students' protests in 2001. In fact, he has seen neither Asmara University nor an Eritrean prison from inside. Kiflu claimed he feared persecution from Eritrean security agents in Khartoum, but he had no credible stories to support it, and Selamawit relied from the beginning on a faked marriage in Sweden in order to avoid formal procedures as a refugee at all (Treiber 2013b, 2016a).

Although applicants in the formal immigration processes had not been directly involved in the stories they told, the reported repression nevertheless happened to others. Obliged to sit and wait, being formally rendered inactive, it seemed worthwhile to attempt to push one's case and speed up one's process by implying a heightened risk (cf. Turner 2004a/b, Honwana 2012). From a privileged perspective, this was rather unnecessary; "I deserted Eritrea's national service" would have been a sufficient statement. Story fragments from various sources inside the refugee milieu, however, provided new–and more striking–individual narrations of life in Eritrea and respective reasons to flee. The best story is the most efficient one: the story that fits best into anticipated administrative categories and leads towards the visible success of formal onward migration and resettlement. Refugees find themselves thrown into rivalry and competition, whereas official categories and formal administrative procedures remain widely opaque and hard to apprehend. In such a situation, there is no base for strategic planning, which needs cool and analytical reflection. Here, people act under stress and duress. Their reference knowledge is not the UNHCR's resettlement handbook,[19] but the communication of rumors and experiences within the broader refugee milieu (cf. Horst 2006, 161–200; Özkan and Hüther 2012). However, can these be trusted, when refugees have become competitors for their own individual onward migration? Such knowledge is necessarily vague and unreliable, most often it cannot be properly evaluated. Prototypical elements of knowledge construction in the refugee camp refer back to Eritrea itself (Bozzini

2011). While mistrust inherently characterizes social bonds and relationships, conspiracy has become a valid social explanation of the world, a meta-theory that explicitly explains the lack of insight and uneven distribution of power and resources. Eritrean leaders blame the CIA and CNN for launching mass media campaigns aimed at encouraging Eritrean youth to migrate en masse. On the other hand, during my own fieldwork in Ethiopia and Sudan I have come to notice that some Eritrean refugees suspected the UNHCR to be a barely disguised CIA institution.

Practice under such circumstances is not restricted to cheating in a UNHCR interview. It includes concealment of information, mistrust towards co-migrants, refused solidarity within the social milieu, evasion from and avoidance of formal institutions and administrative rules and procedures, attempted manipulation of staff, and finally, the willingness to pay for forged documents and illegal cross-border transportation–or even to get personally involved in the overall illegal migration business (cf. Horst 2006, 161–200). In my previous work, I have labeled these illegal acts as "informal practice" of illegality among refugees in their transition from fleeing Eritrea to reaching a supposedly better world (Treiber 2016a). In this context, informality opens up ways into hard criminality and individual criminal careers, but certainly also towards broad social fragmentation. In migration from Eritrea, informality has developed into a cultural trait that links up with political history in Eritrea, but also with the hierarchical segregation of our world–and its inherent contradictions. Migration becomes a school that does not prepare for a life after arrival. What Eritreans experience and learn during migration beyond their home countries–in Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Libya, or Israel–leads to mutual misunderstanding and fragmentary, if not refused, communication in the new host countries, on both sides. How, for example, can social workers and civil servants expect trust and cooperation from clients and applicants–if the applicants lack a safe status (Griessmeier 2015; Özkan and Hüther 2012)? After all, Eritreans–as well as most other refugee groups–had enough time

and opportunity during their years-long, and always uncertain, migrations to mistrust all kinds of formal institutions.

Uneasy Communication

As the Swiss example has shown, migration's encounters may create mistrust and even fear on both sides. Feeling safe and secure depends on one's ability to read and interpret the surrounding social world—in personal experiences and social learning processes ("shared reasoning," Hervik 1994). This is certainly true for the relation between citizens and new-arriving refugees and migrants. After all, Switzerland's political debate on Eritrea emerged from domestic politics and its ongoing discourse on immigration. It resulted from recent refugee figures and the ranking of their countries of origin. Different numbers would have highlighted another country, maybe Syria or Afghanistan. On the other hand, migration from one of the poorest countries on Earth to one of the wealthiest is certainly not an accident, but shows the phenomenon's global dimension. For a long time, Eritrea was a forgotten place in the periphery, irrelevant to world politics. Now it has become one of the world's most prominent refugee-producing countries and made it back into European politics, media, and public opinion. The country, however, has never been simply an isolated island at the margins, but always also the product of an asymmetrically interconnected and brutally neoliberal world (Hepner and O'Kane 2009; Quehl 2013; Poole 2013; Woldemikael 2013)—which drastically renders refugees into desperate competitors and to appear as "severely damaged" social beings. The need for communication and mutual exchange across today's world will continue to be a pressing issue, even long after Switzerland's 2015 elections.

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"Why don't you move onwards?": The Influence of Transnational Ties and Kinship Obligations on Eritrean Refugees' Feeling of Being Stuck in Italy

MILENA BELLONI

Abstract

This chapter analyzes Eritrean refugees' secondary mobility from Italy. Although Eritreans have in the last decade been granted asylum in Italy, most of them intend to move onwards. This mobility orientation has mainly been explained as the result of limited integration opportunities. However, the social and cultural factors underpinning this desire have rarely been investigated. Drawing from ethnographic research with Eritrean refugees in Italy and in their home country, this chapter shows that my informants' migration-related decisions and perception of being "stuck" in Italy stemmed from a transnational flow of images, expectations, and aspirations linking Eritreans abroad and their kin back home. While being in contact with their co-nationals who have reached their final preferred destination, usually a northern European country, Eritrean refugees in Italy are linked to their families back home by a more or less implicit system of expectations. These include not only remittances, but also beliefs concerning the most suitable final destination for

migrants. Families, thus, I argue, play, even if from afar, a crucial role in Eritrean refugees' mobility patterns.

Introduction

Eritreans endure long and difficult journeys to reach Europe; however, the first European country they reach is rarely the one they desire to settle in. In particular, in the last 15 years with the rise of the Libyan corridor and the fall of others (Ciabarri 2014), Italy has increasingly become the first European country reached by Eritrean asylum seekers. In spite of the legal protection to which they usually have easy access in Italy, Eritreans rarely want to stay there for good. Most of them, if not apprehended by the authorities upon arrival, try to avoid the identification procedure and move onwards to other countries, preferably Scandinavian ones, such as Norway and Sweden. This is particularly evident in recent data: in 2015, over 39,000 Eritreans landed on Italian coastlines, but only about 730 sought asylum there.[1] The rest probably moved onwards to other countries, or at least attempted to do so.

Drawing from my ethnographic work with Eritrean refugees in Italy and in their home-country (Belloni 2015), this chapter analyzes the social and cultural factors underpinning secondary mobility within Europe. The literature on secondary movements has mainly highlighted that these internal European migrations are mainly the result of the gap between reception conditions and integration measures in different European countries (e.g. Brekke and Brochmann 2015). However less attention has been given to the role of values, beliefs, and expectations which underpin this flow. Here, I argue for the importance of analyzing the role of grassroots factors in understanding my informants' persistent desire to move onwards from Italy, in spite of policy obstacles, such as the Dublin Regulation, (see pg. 239, n7). In particular, this chapter describes how my informants' migration-related decisions and perception of

"stuckedness" in Italy stemmed from a transnational flow of images, expectations, and aspirations linking Eritreans abroad and their kin back home. Without neglecting the difficulties in integrating in Italy with limited institutional support, my point here is that my informants' motivation to move was also the result of a "cosmology of destinations" (Belloni 2015) which refugees in Italy share with their families back home. As a consequence of many decades of forced migration from the country, large strata of the Eritrean society[2] have developed a hierarchy of possible migratory destinations classified along different lines, such as the deemed availability of economic and educational opportunities and freedom (Belloni 2015). This cosmology prescribes the goals of the migration journey and associate positive value to specific destinations and to those who are able to reach there. These symbolic structures and implicit norms are somehow resilient to policy obstacles and push Eritreans onward even in presence of meaningful integration chances.

After revisiting the debate on refugees' decision-making, transnationalism and family moral economies, the context of Eritrean migration to Italy is outlined. While socioeconomic integration and contacts with Italian society are limited, the daily lives of the refugees I lived with in Rome, Milan, and Genoa (2012) are deeply embedded in a transnational field of relations. On the one hand, they are often in contact, by telephone, visits, and internet social networks, with those kin and friends who have reached their final preferred destination, usually a northern European country. Through them, Eritreans in Italy come to know about the opportunities available in those countries (mainly social assistance) and the perception of the differences between "here" and "there" continuously reproduces their mobility aspirations. On the other hand, Eritrean refugees in Italy are linked to their families back home by a more or less implicit system of expectations (2013). Italy is not perceived as a final destination not only by Eritrean refugees in Italy, but also by their families back home, who wish for their sons to settle down in other countries more northwards. Moreover, the

limited opportunities available for their socioeconomic integration in Italy do not allow many Eritrean refugees to support the families back home as wished.

The ethnographic material I analyze in this chapter is part of a larger research aimed at investigating the factors of Eritrean geographic mobility at each stage of the migration process (Belloni 2015). Here, I mainly focus on the fieldwork I conducted among Eritreans beneficiary of national or international protection in Rome, Genoa, and Milan between 2012 and 2013 and with their families in Asmara in 2013. My informants in Italy were mainly men in their twenties and thirties, who had come through Libya between 2007 and 2010. All of them had been fingerprinted and for that reason had felt they remained stuck in Italy. I followed my informants in their everyday social activities, shared their dwelling spaces, and collected their stories. I also lived with a group of Eritrean refugees in a squat, one of many informal housings which Eritreans have gained access in Rome (Belloni 2016b). In Eritrea, I lived with Gabriel's family (my informant in Milan). While sharing the everyday life of my host family and of its young members (mainly girls in their twenties), I also conducted periodic home-visits with the families of other informants whom I previously met in Italy. Hence, I explored the two sides of the story behind my informants' migration and the cultural and familial understanding of their children' trajectories.

Investigating Refugees' Secondary Mobility: a Multi-local Perspective on Transnational Moral Economies

The study of refugees' onward mobility in Europe has been widely investigated from different perspectives. In the last two decades, there have been a number of macro-level studies, which attempted

to assess the role of different cultural, socioeconomic, political, and linguistic factors in directing refugee flows to a specific country. While stating that refugees have limited possibilities of choice, most of these studies had a hard time identifying which factor weighs more in refugees' decision-making (Havinga and Bocker 1999). More insights have been gained from studies based on ethnographic and biographical approaches. These have analyzed how migrants and refugees decide to move onwards once they have already lived for a certain amount of time in one country (Andall 1999; Schuster 2005; Van Liempt 2011; Toma et. al. 2015; Lindley and Van Hear 2007). They tend to look at onward movements as adaptive strategies to cope with a number of economic, legal, and social restrictions in the first country of emigration. For instance, Van Liempt (2011) describes how Somalis who have lived in the Netherlands for several years decide to move to the UK as a response to perceived better job opportunities, family ties, and possibilities to practice Islam. While highlighting the wide range of factors impacting on situated decision-making process, these studies tend to emphasize the practical hardships experienced in the first migration country and the agency of migrants (Schuster, 2005) in pursuing onwards mobility.

Other studies have investigated onward mobility from a transnational perspective. Although the transnational perspective is relatively peripheral to refugee studies, it has become increasingly crucial to understand refugees' integration patterns, aspirations, and movements (Cheran 2006; Horst 2006a; Brees 2010; Al-Ali et al. 2001). For instance, Horst (2006) illustrates the importance of analyzing the flow of ideas, images, and money coming from developed countries to those Somali refugees living in Kenyan camps longing for onward mobility. Koser and Pinkerton (2002) evidence the role played by informal social networks in circulating information about possible destination countries and direct the choices of prospective asylum seekers. In the same vein, and specifically to the case of Eritreans from Italy to Scandinavia, Brekke and Brochmann (2015) argue that aspirations to move onwards

emerge from the perception of the inequalities between those who manage to get asylum in northern Europe and those who are stuck in Italy. These perceptions are partly the result of objective disparities and are partly produced by the transnational flow of information, images, and aspirations between Eritreans in different locations. In this sense, I find a transnational optic to be especially important to understand secondary mobility of refugees in Europe.

Analyzing the transnational dimension of Eritrean refugees' lives in Italy is important not only to understanding their attempts to move onwards, but also their perception of "being stuck." As it is described later, this feeling is connected to transnational web of expectations and aspirations that link them with families back home and co-nationals in other countries. However, the studies mentioned above on refugee transnationalism usually consider only the links between two sites, typically the destination and the home country (Al-Ali et al. 2001), or the home country and the expected areas of transit (Brees 2010), or the area of transit and the preferred destination (Horst 2006a). This bi-focal perspective does not enable to understand how refugees participate in different transnational flows which link them not only with those co-nationals who have reached their expected final destinations, but also with their families back home. As I mentioned elsewhere (Belloni 2016a), home-driven expectations are as crucial as the attractive images from Europe for understanding Eritreans' desire to migrate and to move onwards. Such a multi-local focus, as I argue in the next sections, is of paramount importance to grasp Eritrean refugees' motivations to continue their journeys from Italy.

Although the influence of families on migration decisions has been widely investigated in labor migration, it has rarely been considered as important factor in refugees' movements, even less so in secondary and tertiary mobility. Moreover, even in the labor migration literature it is unusual to find studies which document the direct influence of families on migratory decisions of individuals who are already abroad. However, a wealth of case studies is available on the moral economy of migrants' remittances, kin

obligations, and gifts exchange in transnational families (e.g. Philpot 1968; Parry and Bloch 1989; Carling 2008; Baldassar and Merla 2014; Tazanu 2015). Among these, the ones specifically focusing on refugees tend to highlight the burden of economic obligations towards those left behind even in the context of forced migration. Lindley (2010), for instance, reports Somali refugees in London receive calls of kin and friends requesting economic assistance. Similarly, Peter (2009) documents how Congolese in Johannesburg are haunted by fear of being ostracized by their home communities if they miss sending remittances home. These studies are relevant in the case of Eritrean refugees in Italy who often find it impossible to fulfill their family expectations and thus have to bear a high social price. Considering moral economies underpinning Eritrean migration is thus crucial to understand their determination to move onwards in spite of policy obstacles and their sense of feeling "stuck." Before moving onto the transnational moral dimension of my informants' everyday life in Italy, however, I will briefly outline the characteristics and the asylum context of Eritrean communities in Italy, below.

Eritreans in Italy: Limited Integration Measures and a Divided National Community

Since 2000, Eritreans have been among the national groups with a strongest record of immigration to Italy via the Mediterranean route. The presence of Eritreans in Italian asylum and migration statistics–their total number is about 13,500 (UNCHR 2015)–has been increasing since the beginning of the 2000s.[3] According to official figures,[4] Eritreans have one of the highest rates of recognition among the applicants in Italy (around 95–98%).[5]

According to the Dublin Regulation, asylum seekers have to

present their asylum applications in the first European country they reach. That country will be responsible for processing their application. This implies that asylum seekers should be identified—which mainly consists of registering the fingerprints of asylum seekers in the EURODAC database. This identification is particularly feared as it is the basis on which other European countries may reject individual asylum applications.[6] For instance, if an Eritrean who has been identified in Italy seeks asylum in another European country, (s)he is to be returned in Italy, excluding exceptional cases.[7]

Regardless of the efforts to homogenize the European asylum system through several directives on the grounds and procedures for legal protection, as well as on reception standards for asylum seekers and refugees, disparities and unbalances across Europe are still extremely, and unsurprisingly, evident. In particular, whereas asylum seekers and refugees in Italy receive little institutional support and face several economic challenges, in Northern European countries they enjoy several social benefits, such as pocket money, housing facilities, and other forms of assistance. This gap in assistance mirrors deep-rooted imbalances across welfare regimes (Brekke and Brochmann 2015).

The Italian reception system is widely stratified and varied. Several systems have been implemented to address asylum flows since 2000, with shifting balances in the role of local and central authorities, civil society, and private actors.[8] This has produced extremely diverse reception conditions according to the period, the region, and the actors involved. Although regional differences in the assistance of refugees are not negligible and services provided could significantly vary from case to case, in general terms the Italian reception system has been scarcely effective in accompanying asylum seekers and refugees through their local integration process (Hein 2001; Ambrosini and Marchett 2008).

Even ethnic networks have not been a factor enabling the integration of newcomers, as it could have been assumed by considering the literature on social networks (Boyd 1989; Koser and

Pinkerton 2002; Palloni 2011). Although they have migrated to Italy since the 60s (especially in big cities, like Rome, Naples, and Milan [Scalzo 1984; Capalbo 1982]), the community is deeply divided along generational and political lines. As observed by Anna Arnone (2008) in her study on old and new generations of Eritrean migrants in Milan, those who arrived before 1993 are usually supporters of the ex-EPLF and current PFDJ government. For this reason, they rely on government propaganda and see those Eritreans who fled after 1993 as deserters and traitors. This internal cleavage within the Eritrean diaspora has been equally documented in other settings in Italy (Belloni 2015) and in other national contexts, such as the US and Germany (Hepner 2009; Conrad 2006; Woldemikael 2005).

Due to limited institutional support and implicit conflict with older generations of migrants, many refugees had to discover their own way to find a shelter and survive in Italy (Puggioni 2005; Korac 2003). Their need for cheap housing has led to different practical arrangements in different contexts. In Genoa, my informants tended to share cheap flats in the area of Sampierdarena, an ex-working-class neighborhood at the periphery of the city, today mostly inhabited by immigrants (Gastaldi 2013); in Milan and Rome many started squatting abandoned buildings (Ministero degli Interni 2012; Manocchi 2012). The squats, where I conducted my research in Rome, were characterized by high-level socioeconomic deprivation, ethnic homogeneity, and limited contacts with local society (Belloni 2016b). The systematic separation of my informants' dwelling places from the Italian society is important to understanding how the orientation to move onward is constantly reproduced (Belloni 2016a). Within such contexts, a feeling of being stuck while longing to reach other destinations is continuously strengthened.

Stuck in Transit? Perceptions and Practices of (Im)Mobility

The expression "stuck" has often been used to define those asylum seekers and migrants who, while being settled in transit countries, would like–but cannot–seek asylum elsewhere (Brekke and Brochmann 2015; Schapendonk 2012; Mathews 2011; Zijlstra 2014; Papadopoulou 2003). For example, Schapendonk (2012) has studied the West Africans who remain in Northern African countries while attempting to cross to Europe; Zijlstra (2014) describes the case of Iranians trying to transit through Turkey to Europe. Brekke and Brochmann (2015), in turn, have investigated the conditions for which Eritreans in Italy would like to move onwards to Scandinavian countries. "To be stuck in transit" conveys the idea that a status which should be temporary becomes permanent due to structural constraints to mobility. It also entails that precariousness and uncertainty become normalized, at least for some categories of people (Grabska and Fanjoy 2015).

Although the studies on "being stuck" partly touch on migrants' immobility, it is important to keep the two concepts separated. In fact, as Schapendonk observes (2012, 579), the perception of being stuck does not always correspond to a physical impossibility of moving. In this instance, migrants-in-transit that get stuck in Morocco are very mobile in their daily practices. They move camping arrangements to sleep at night and to escape from local authorities, they regularly cross the Moroccan-Algerian border to work, and some of them even go back to their homes. The distinction between the feeling of being stuck and physical immobility is relevant also for Eritrean refugees in Italy.

Although the Eritreans whom I met during my fieldwork did feel stuck in transit, they were highly mobile. In spite of being fingerprinted in Italy, they had tried more than once to seek asylum in other European countries and had been returned; some of them had gone back to Africa to visit their families (in Eritrea, Ethiopia,

Sudan) or to get married with Eritrean refugees who were residing in Ethiopia, Sudan, Angola, etc.

The case of Eritrean refugees in Italy illustrates that "to be stuck in transit" is not necessarily a physical condition. Rather, it points to an emotional and social condition, or to an existential perception of unsettledness. As Hage (2009, 97) observes, "a viable life presupposes a form of imaginary mobility, a sense that one is going somewhere." When this sense of going somewhere is lost, individuals experience existential immobility–which he defines as "stuckedness." According to Hage, most voluntary migration stems from willingness to react to this immobility. This is also the case for many of my informants in Eritrea, as I have explored elsewhere (see Belloni 2015). While they thought that their life in Eritrea was going nowhere due to the hopeless–as they perceive them–economic and political conditions of the country, they believed that the only way to construct a future was by leaving the country. Their reactions to the feeling of existential immobility was projected on a geographic scale of imagined opportunities, desires, and norms–the cosmology of destinations. However, the flight from their country and the arrival in Europe was often not enough to defeat existential immobility.

In a certain sense, the feeling of being stuck experienced by refugees in Italy is the perpetuation of what I encountered among a number of those young Eritreans in their homeland, in Ethiopia, and in Sudan. All of them felt stuck not only for their forced immobility, but also (and mostly) for the condition of eternal adolescence that stemmed from it (Vigh 2006; Treiber 2009). In practice, they were unable to provide for their families, form a new family of their own, and achieve a recognized social status in their eyes and in those of their community. As my 26-year-old informant, Ogbazgi, once told me, on his way from Genoa to Switzerland (his final destination): "I have been working in Italy for 5 years and still I cannot support my brother who is getting married in Eritrea, nor send money to my family. This is not good, I am not a child anymore."

Ogbazgi's words meaningfully exemplify the feelings of many

Eritreans in Italy. In spite of his willingness to support his brother's marriage, the impossibility to do so after a 5-year-stay in Italy made Ogbazgi feel like a "too grown-up" child unable to meet his commitments as family breadwinner, even after having moved to Europe. The project to move onwards to Switzerland was then linked to his desire to improve his conditions so to be able to fulfill his family obligations and thus, hopefully, attain the status of respected man.

The comparison between my case study and the literature (Mathews 2011; Papadopolous 2003; Grabska and Fanjoy 2015) also suggests that the condition of feeling stuck is also a psychological status with specific features. As observed by Papadopoulou (2003, 351), the perception of being stuck in transit implies limited engagement in the country of residence, and a strong emotional orientation towards the wished country of destination. This author argues that to be stuck in transit is somehow an essentially transnational stage, because migrants maintain cross-border ties with both their aspired destination and the homeland, while having little or no engagement with the receiving society. Similarly, the Eritrean refugees I met were highly connected with other Eritreans in other countries and in the homeland, but did not show any intent to engage in the place where they lived. Not only were social and economic contacts with the Italian society limited, but also their intentions of actually trying to get a job, to learn Italian, and to get regular housing were weak. For instance, when I asked Kibreab, a 29-year-old Eritrean living in a shantytown of Rome, why he did not work harder on his Italian skills, he answered: ". . .my mind is not settled. I cannot focus on studying. We have too many problems and our families back home are waiting for our support." This was a common attitude among my informants in Italy. Although it is undeniable that the Italian context was challenging in many senses, one may wonder if their disenchanted attitudes did also contribute to their own marginality. The perception that it was possible to reach quite easily all the things they needed "somewhere close," seemed to direct all their efforts toward the next attempt to seek

asylum in another country, rather than in trying to find their way in Italy.

Senay, my host in a Roman squat, is the most exemplary case of the condition of being in transit. He arrived in Italy in 2008. He tried to obtain asylum in Sweden, but he failed. He was sent back in 2011, about one year before I met him. After that, he did not look for a job. His stay permit—3-year-long subsidiary protection—had expired in 2012, but he said he did not want to renew it, as he was going to leave soon. He was working hard to renew his room in Metropolis in order to sell it to someone else before leaving to Sweden. All his time in Italy was spent planning his next journey to Sweden. This partly depended on his personal aspirations, but there was more to it. As his experience suggests, deciding if Italy is a destination or a transit country is not simply an individual exercise. Rather, refugees are embedded in a web of aspirations, expectations, and values that connect them with their diasporic community. The next section describes in detail how these norms and representations are maintained among Eritrean refugees in Italy by mutual relations and contacts with their kin and friends abroad.

Flows of Information and Images From the First World...

The feeling of being left behind is amplified by the continuous transnational flow of information, images, and people that connect those still living in Italy with those who have made it to the North. Despite their strong ethnic segregation, the Eritrean refugees whom I met in Italy were deeply embedded in transnational relationships with their kin, friends, and acquaintances in other countries.

The transnational dimension of their daily lives is noticeable in their use of technology. As several studies have highlighted,

technology is crucial to the transnational and local lives of migrants and refugees, as manifest in their use of mobile phones and internet social networks (Panagakos and Horst 2006; Harney 2013; Madianou and Miller 2012). For example, Alazar used to receive many calls a day from his friends still in Sudan, from others who had reached Northern Europe, from family members who worked in Israel, and still others in the USA. Senay was more active on Facebook: he used to spend a long time looking at the pictures of his friends who lived in other countries and chatting with them. Such a widespread flow of information and images elicits a feeling of disparity between the unlucky ones in Italy and the lucky ones who live elsewhere. It also produces of a sense of longing for further migration.

Information and images from the first world reach Eritrean refugees in Italy not only through technology. As most of them have attempted to seek asylum more northwards, they have directly experienced the differences of being an asylum seeker in Italy and in a Scandinavian country, for instance. The case of Senay illustrates this experience well. Senay, had tried to seek asylum in Sweden and often remembered his days as an asylum seeker in Sweden as a beautiful period of his life. Once, while we were sitting in an internet café at the periphery of Rome, he started showing me his pictures when he was in Sweden: "You see Milena? I was fat at that time. It is because I was relaxed. I had such a great time there, I met my old friends from Asmara, and you see what a house we had?! Not like this squat where I live now." Material comforts, such as housing, good furniture, and modern appliances, symbolize a "good life" in the eyes of many Eritreans and represent that modernity they have been striving for since they left Eritrea (Belloni 2016a).

However, Dubliners—the ones returned to Italy under the Dublin Regulation—are not the only ones who come back to Italy. Whenever the Eritreans who have made it to the "first world" come back to Italy for holiday, they bring images and information which elicit the desire to leave among their "stuck" friends. This mechanism is similar to what has been described in areas of intense out-migration with the term of social remittances (Levitt 1998). Social, cultural,

and economic remittances and summer visits of emigrants produce feelings of disparity and enhance desires of emulation which reproduce migration. In the Eritrean migration system, this phenomenon can be observed not only in areas of origin but also in so-called transit areas, such as Italy.

...and Flows of Expectations from Eritrea

In the Eritrean context individuals and their families do not perceive emigration as only an individualistic search for better life prospects, but also as a strategy to ensure families' wellbeing through remittances. In fact, individual refugees' relationships with their families are embedded in a web of economic, moral, and cultural expectations concerning the destination of the migration journey, the kind of life they should have in that country, and the kind of support refugees will provide for those who stay back. Put otherwise, their cosmologies of destinations are shaped by kin-bound obligations, no less than by societally shared values and aspirations. Family expectations are high for those refugees that engage in onward mobility from the first country of asylum. They become even higher for those in Italy who are so close to reach the "first world," but have not been able to reach it yet, as the next ethnographic example illustrates.

Gabriel's family hosted me for two months while I lived in Asmara. Here, I aim to address the family's complicated relationship with him. Gabriel arrived in Italy in 2007, when he was 23. He stayed in a center for assistance of asylum seekers (CARA) in Crotone for a few months, the time necessary to be granted legal status. Then, as most other refugees in that period, he was sent out from the CARA and left on his own. He went to Rome, where he slept in a squat in Anagnina for a while, and then moved to Milan, where a friend of his had told him that there were more work opportunities. He remembered the period in Anagnina as a horrible nightmare.

"Everything was dirty and we were sleeping on the ground. I hate Rome." Even in Milan, he lived in a squat for a while in Porta Romana, until the squat was demolished. He had a small shop there—"I was doing good business there," Gabriel used to tell me during our long strolls in Milan's peripheries. After that he found a job in Rho Fiere, the industrial neighborhood in Milan and worked there for two years. However, when I met him in summer 2012, he had lost the job and he was in a legal dispute with his ex-employers, because, as he told me, "they owe me some money."

Gabriel loved Milan: the elegant shops of the center, from which he liked to buy expensive clothes and shoes, which made him feel like he had really reached the "first world." Moreover, although he was often complaining about his co-nationals in Milan, the Eritrean neighborhood around Porta Venezia, where he used to eat his lunch or drink beers, made him feel at home somehow. He kept on saying that he could have found a job whenever he wanted in Milan, because he knew people and he was a hard-working man. However, his job hunt was continuously delayed: he was undecided whether to stay in Italy or move onwards. "My family think Italy is not good for me"—Gabriel used to tell me—"they want me to go to Germany where we have some relatives. . . but I wanna decide my life by myself."

At first, I did not give much importance to Gabriel's statement about his family's pressure to move onwards, nor to the effect of this unsolved conflict between individual desires and family obligations on his ambiguity of purpose. However, as soon as I entered Gabriel's family's house in Asmara, I realized that I had been wrong. After having let me through the door and accommodated me in the living room, Ester came to sit in front of me, briefly introduced herself, and welcomed me in the family. Then, after only a few minutes of conversation, she asked me why Gabriel did not move to Germany or some Scandinavian countries. She was worried about him and thought the situation in Italy was not favorable for her nephew. I explained to her that Gabriel was not allowed to seek asylum in another European country and that it was probably better for him

to try his best to find a new job in Italy. However, she was not convinced. After a while, Yordanos, Ester's eldest daughter, came into the living room. She had always been very close to Gabriel and he had told her about the hardships he had gone through in Italy. "I know it is not easy"—she said—"but we see other people who have settled down in other countries in Europe. Now they are doing well. We wish the same can happen to him."

It was interesting to notice that Gabriel's relatives were aware that life for refugees in Italy was hard. They were not an exception. During my fieldwork in Eritrea, I was often asked: "How is the crisis going in Italy?" "Is it true that people cannot find work there?"; Aragay, one of my neighbors, told me, "everyone knows that our guys in Italy are living in a bad situation, work is hard to find and people sleep in the street." Those Eritreans who had managed to go through Italy and were residing in other countries usually provided this information. The Eritrean national television also used to broadcast news about refugees' hardships in Europe so as to discourage further irregular emigration from the country.

However, awareness that refugees were facing hardships in Italy was not enough to exonerate them from blame. As families believed that other countries in Europe could offer young Eritreans more opportunities, they often complained about the fact that their sons had not moved to those "good countries." Like Ester, Senay's mother, Fiori, criticized her son for not trying hard enough to leave Italy while his brother had managed to reach Sweden. This was a common attitude towards those Eritreans who lived in Italy. My informants' parents did not seem to know that their sons had already tried to move out of Italy. Senay, for example, had already attempted to seek asylum in Sweden, but he was sent back to Italy after a few months, when the Swedish authorities on the EURODAC found his fingerprints.

Although families had general ideas about different opportunities in different European countries, they seemed to ignore other important, but more specific aspects of migrants' lives abroad. In particular, they did not know about the Dublin Convention and the

problems that refugees had to face once forcedly returned from Norway, Sweden, or other European countries back to Italy. On the contrary, young Eritreans seemed more informed on these issues; for example, many of them knew about the importance of avoiding fingerprints in Italy in order to seek asylum in other Northern European countries. However, even among them misinformation was far from rare. Some, for example, thought that after five years in Italy the fingerprints would be deleted from the EURODAC and people could move onwards to other European countries. Interestingly, some Eritrean refugees I met in Italy also shared this belief.

Families' expectations about their children's onward mobility were not rooted only in the belief that Italy could not provide good conditions for settlement. They also mirrored the hope that migrant children would be able to support the family back home. Intergenerational solidarity represents a core moral value in Eritrea, as much as elsewhere; migrants are supposed to economically and practically support their old parents and their younger siblings. More specifically, among my informants, support was expected in two domains: economic remittances for everyday survival in Eritrea and assistance to other siblings who intend to migrate. As migration is widely considered "the best strategy" for individual social mobility and family survival, to support the emigration of relatives is perceived as the most important duty of those who have already reached developed countries. This is crucial not only to understanding family expectations and the pressure experienced by refugees abroad, but also to analyze the relational mechanisms which maintain the flow of refugees moving from Eritrea to Ethiopia, Sudan, Italy, and beyond.

The fact remains that most of my Eritrean informants in Italy were not able to meet their families' expectations, as they were also struggling to survive. This had significant implications for their family relationships and for the social status ascribed to them by their community of departure.

The Price of Disappointing Family Expectations

Although my informants were willing to send remittances home, sometimes they simply were not able to because they did not earn enough for their own living. If a refugee is in Africa, his/her inability to send remittances is well-understood and pitied, because Africa is generally recognized—within the cosmology of destinations—as a place where living is hard, salaries are low, and personal development is prevented. However, once a refugee makes it to the "first world," relatives' expectations become higher. Although Italy was known as a hard place to live, its being a European country was enough to make those emigrants who were struggling there a target of blame by their families and the community at large, as I show by analyzing Gabriel's case below.

Gabriel's sister, Lwam, and his family in Asmara were bitter about the fact that Gabriel had not sent money and presents home since his arrival in Europe. Although they knew life was hard in Italy, they still felt bad because he did not send anything through me. Lwam was often my interpreter during my home-visits to the families of my Eritrean informants in Italy, many of whom had not sent any "gifts" through me. These occasions reminded her of her own feelings of frustration for her brother's lack of remittances. "For people here"—Lwam commented to me, once we had come out from one of our visits—"if someone migrates and cannot survive with his own means, but still waits for money from relatives, it is like he is dead. It is already a shame to live with family here in Eritrea, but you can accept it. But if you go abroad and you have to ask [money] to others, that is not life, it is death."

Her words powerfully define the price that an emigrant can pay if he disappoints social expectations. The risk of "social death" (Vigh 2006; Peter 2010) feared by those Eritrean refugees whom I met in Ethiopians camps (Belloni 2016c) increases for those Eritrean refugees who reach Italy but are not able to send remittances back

home. Not only families but also the community at large would judge negatively refugees who do not help their families back home. That became clear to me when Lwam and I went to visit Tegesti, our neighbor, for a Sunday coffee. Her family had a kiosk of clothes at the market close to the *medeber* [caravanserai]. Her house was located just one street after the one where my hosts used to live.

While we sipped our coffees, Tegesti started speaking about her two sons who had escaped from the country a few years back and were then working in Angola abroad. They were apparently doing well in Angola, but had not started yet to send remittances to the family. One son had left Eritrea three years before and started working in Khartoum as electrician. He was making good money but all the money he earned was spent to bring the younger brother out of the country. After his brother joined him they decided to go to Angola and started working in a supermarket. Tegesti was then hoping that her sons would start sending some money. As she said: "We cannot survive here without their help! 100 euro a month is 5,000 *nakfa* [Eritrean local currency] here! Life becomes easier if you can have that kind of money every month." They asked me about Lwam's brother, Gabriel. I said to them that he was fine. Then she exclaimed, a bit jokingly and a bit seriously: "It is not enough if he's okay, because the family here is waiting for *nakfa*! *Nakfa*! *Nakfa*!" and then she rubbed her thumb and her index, "the money sign," while looking into my eyes to be sure I understood it well. Lwam laughed bitterly. She clearly felt embarrassed due to her brother's behavior and only Aragay's mediation could ease the situation. Aragay said that everyone knew how hard life was for refugees in Italy, and thus somehow justified Gabriel's incapability to support the family.

From this episode at Tegesti's, it is clear the high social cost which refugees may have to pay if they do not meet family expectations. In order to avoid paying this social price, Eritrean refugees keep trying to move onwards to other northern European countries, where they believe they will have enough money to help their families. Until they succeed, however, they have a hard time dealing with their families back home.

Conclusions

Why do Eritrean refugees want to move onwards from Italy in spite of their stable legal status? From where does their sense of "stuckedness" stem? While answering these specific questions concerning Eritrean refugees' orientation for onward mobility in Europe, this chapter has highlighted the role of transnational connections in understanding secondary movements in Europe and the feeling of being stuck in transit. Not only the social remittances coming from countries deemed to be more suitable destinations, but also the moral obligations towards kin in the home country and their expectations are crucial to understand why refugees and migrants may perceive themselves in transit and not at destination. Migration is, in fact, in Eritrea as in many other countries, perceived as a way to achieve self-realization, adulthood–declined along gender lines–and the improvement of one's own family socioeconomic condition. Whenever integration difficulties do not allow meeting these widespread social expectations concerning migrants and their pathways, the desire for further mobility emerges again. Thus, the condition of "stuckedness" experienced by my informants, I have argued, does not simply mirror a physical condition–as many refugees are not able to seek asylum elsewhere due to policy regulations–but rather a feeling of un-accomplishment with respect to commonly shared goals of migration.

The decision to move onwards thus is both a personal choice and the result of family pressure. By studying the transnational moral economies underpinning Eritrean forced migration, the chapter has pointed to the crucial role of families not only in the initial decision to move out from Eritrea, but also in refugees' onward mobility. In fact, within the current asylum context in Europe, Italy has progressively come to be seen by Eritrean refugees as well as by their families and communities back home as a transit country. Those who are voluntarily or involuntarily living there occupy a

somehow intermediate position in the widespread cosmology of destinations, and are often object of blame for their incapability to accomplish the ultimate goal of migration, i.e., reaching another European country more northwards and contributing to family wellbeing by remitting. Thus, the families and kin groups in Eritrea directly and indirectly influence the migration trajectories of Eritrea refugees in Italy, even though from afar.

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Notes

1. A similar trend can be noticed in 2014: out of 34,329 arrivals only about 450 sought asylum in Italy. Instead, the data of 2016 show a dramatic increase in the asylum requests among Eritreans. Among the 20,718 Eritreans arrived in Italy, about 7,500 applied for asylum. Nevertheless, the gap between arrivals and asylum requests is still significant (these are less than one third of the total number of arrivals). This increase may be due to the implementation of the European relocation system which allows some nationalities of asylum seekers to be relocated from Italy to another European country. For further information on the European relocation mechanism see http://eea.iom.int/index.php/what-we-do/eu-relocation.

2. The Eritrean population is highly diversified in terms of ethnic belonging, religious membership and geographic origin. Each group has had different exposure to international migration and has specific migration histories. Although many of my informants came from ethnic minorities, most of the findings I discuss here concern Tigrinya Eritreans, the most numerous ethnic group in the country.

3. However, there has been a dramatic decrease in Eritrean arrivals between 2009 and 2010 due to the effect of the bilateral agreement between Libya and Italy (Paoletti, 2011) and the push-back policy of the

Italian government at the time (Cuttitta, 2014).

4. These estimates are calculated on the basis of the data from the Italian Ministry of the Interior available at http://www.ismu.org/irregolari-e-sbarchi-presenze/.

5. The international acknowledgement that Eritrean applicants, if returned home, could face torture and persecution has led Italy, as well as most European countries, to grant legal protection (mostly in a "subsidiary" form) to the great majority of them.

6. EURODAC is a European software system which enables European states to share biometric data on asylum seekers and illegal migrants. The Dublin Regulation and EURODAC are expected to prevent abuses of the asylum system, such as the submission of several applications by one claimant in more than one European country.

7. See the text of Dublin III Regulation at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:180:0031:0059:EN:PDF.

8. In several occasions, the SPRAR (System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees) has been sided by other initiatives, such as Marconi system, the North African Emergency system, which have involved other private actors, such as hotel owners and other individuals involved in hospitality, in order to provide basic assistance to asylum seekers and refugees. Civil society associations and, especially, religious organizations, such as Caritas and the Jesuit Refugees Service have also played an important role in providing legal and practical help for refugees.

The Making of an African "Pariah": Eritrea in the International System

MICHAEL WOLDEMARIAM

Abstract

Beginning in 2009, the State of Eritrea found itself increasingly isolated in international fora. The most significant indicators of this trend were UN Security Council sanctions and investigations sponsored by the UN Human Rights Council that ostensibly targeted the Eritrean state for its external and internal policies. What explains Eritrea's slide into, for lack of a better term, "pariah" status? This article seeks to complicate, but not deny, approaches that situate pariah states as a product of their own ideological, institutional, and material characteristics. I argue that three major international political transformations produced a set of interlocking forces that propelled Eritrea's international isolation. These were the Eritrean–Ethiopian Border War, the 9-11 attacks, and the rapid growth of Al Shabaab in 2007–2008. In so doing, I suggest that while the state of Eritrea has been no victim of circumstance, its emergence as an international pariah would not have been possible without important structural shifts in the international politics of the Horn of Africa.

What lessons does the Eritrean case offer scholars of international relations? In a field dominated by the study of Great and Middle Powers, can a country of six million people, just 26 years old, teach us something new about the practice of international politics in the contemporary age? The answer to this question, this essay argues, is a resounding yes.[1] When Eritrea entered the

international system in 1993, it was embraced as a hopeful exemplar of what might be possible on the African continent. This was not only because of its remarkable history—and its long and unlikely road to independence—but because it had the opportunity many African states at the end of the Cold War did not; an ability to start from scratch, learn from Africa's "mistakes," and chart a new course towards rapid economic and political progress. Two decades later, of course, the standard narrative was much different. While Eritrea was once touted by the international community as a country pregnant with possibilities, it soon found itself on the margins of the international system, its government treated as "pariah" by many of the international institutions and gatekeepers of international political order that had earlier sang its praises.

This reversal of Eritrea's international fortunes, from poster child of promise, to international pariah, sits at the heart of this essay. International relations scholarship tends to treat the pariah state as a product of its own behavioral patterns, driven as it were, by its internal characteristics—its ideology, the nature of its ruling apparatus, or its material resources. I argue that such an approach is incomplete, and that Eritrea's rapidly shifting international fortunes had as much to do with changes in the international political environment as they did with the internal characteristics of its party-state. In the Eritrean case, these changes in the "international political environment" turned on three important transformations, the first and third that were regional, and the second that was more global in nature: the Eritrean-Ethiopian War, the September 11th attacks, and the emergence of a rejuvenated and more radicalized Somali Islamist movement in 2009. These three transformations pushed the United States—the world's preeminent global power—into increasing, if inadvertent, conflict with Eritrea's party-state that would result in the international isolation of the latter.

In this essay's view, it is here that the true significance of the Eritrean case rests. By examining how the shifting strategic considerations of global powers have shaped Eritrea's emergence as a pariah state, the Eritrean case forces us to consider the way

in which pariah states in international politics are forged, rather than born. This reality has significant implications for how the international system should engage with, and seek to transform, those states that sit at its political margins.

The next section lays out the conceptual basis of this essay, defining the concept of the pariah state and clarifying the theoretical approaches available in thinking about its emergence. The following section lays out what were the main features of Eritrea's pariah status. The third part of the essay describes why the US was central to forging the political process that led to Eritrea's international isolation. The fourth section describes how three international political shifts undermined the US-Eritrea relationship and led to Eritrea's international isolation. The final section offers some concluding reflections about the significance of the Eritrean case to the broader literature on pariah states.

Pariah States in International Relations

In exploring Eritrea's slide into pariah status, it is important to be concrete about what the term means. Although for some, the term "pariah" might possess normative overtones, evoking impressions of a state whose leadership is guided by sinister impulses, I strip the term of any value judgments. Instead, I view pariah status as an empirical condition, in which the balance of a state's conduct, either domestically or internationally, is considered by a consensus within the international community to be outside the bounds of normal, acceptable behavior. This consensus is not simply rhetorical, but concrete, and reflected institutionally within international forums, through formal legal efforts to punish the state or exclude it from normal international relations.[2]

It is also the case that pariah status is fundamentally about power: namely, who has it, and who doesn't. Consensus in the international system on who should and should not be the target of international

approbation, is often driven by Great Powers, who possess the means to establish global norms and expectations and insist when the international community recognize they have been violated. For this reason, pariahs tend be smaller states lacking Great Power backing.[3]

In the context of the post-Cold War unipolar moment, it's a simple fact that pariah states tend to be in direct political confrontation with the US. Indeed, smaller states generally don't violate the global norms the US seeks to uphold, nor are they ostracized for that behavior, if they have productive ties with Washington. One consequence of this reality is that the concept of the pariah state has functionally merged with what the US foreign policy establishment came to view as the "rogue" state—a label introduced by the Clinton administration, but later popularized by the Bush administration's effort to classify states that posed particularly alarming challenges to US strategic interests after 9-11.[4] This modified version of the pariah state, then, situates it as not simply isolated, but "revisionist," pursuing a foreign policy deliberately designed to counter US strategic imperatives at the regional and global levels.[5]

If contemporary pariahs are revisionist states, at least vis-à-vis the US, then explaining pariah status requires that we understand why. Why do these states commit themselves to countering US strategic imperatives when it often comes at the cost of international isolation? The literature on revisionist states, and particularly weak revisionist states, suggests that their behavior turns on the nature of the ruling regime: whether it is "revolutionary" and/or infused with an anti-American ideological current; whether it is subject to democratic constraints; and whether it has access to natural resources that it can parlay into a viable model of autarky.[6]

The Eritrean case suggests that this perspective is limited. This is not because the internal characteristics of the PFDJ's "party state" haven't played a role in its revisionism and international isolation. What published work exists on Eritrean foreign policy suggests that

the character of the PFDJ–its ideology, its centralization, and its personalism–has profoundly shaped the foreign policy behaviors that have contributed to the country's troubled international relations.[7] Nothing in this essay is meant to suggest otherwise. However, the international context in which this small African state operates has also been an important and absolutely necessary factor in structuring its emergence as a pariah state. More specifically, it's necessary to examine the shifting contours of the international political environment, and its impact on the strategic calculus of the United States–the world's preeminent global power–in the Horn of Africa.

The Trappings of an African Pariah State

The Eritrean government often rejects the premise that it is, or has ever been, internationally isolated.[8] It does so by highlighting what it says are productive relations with states of the Global South, and by attributing any tensions in its relations with other countries to the pernicious influence of the US and Ethiopia. As will become clear in this essay, the latter point is not without merit, insofar as Ethiopia, and to a greater extent the US, have been crucial to forging the diplomatic consensus needed to isolate Eritrea in the international system. In and of itself, however, these realities did not, and do not, make the fact of Eritrea's international isolation any less true. As has already been asserted, most pariah states are functionally rendered pariahs through the political will of Great Powers.[9]

On the former point, there is little doubt that Eritrea retains increasingly productive, generally rancor free relations with non-traditional powers like China, Turkey, and South Africa.[10] China accounts for nearly 20 percent of Eritrean exports and 33 percent of its imports.[11] The Chinese state-owned port construction company, CHEC, holds the contract for the Massawa New Port Project–the

largest infrastructure project in Eritrean history—that will produce port upgrades valued at USD 400 million. Chinese loans have been instrumental to improving Eritrean infrastructure in the areas of telecommunications, cement production, and health care. In 2007, the Chinese government lent Eritrea USD 60 million to finance Asmara's purchase of a 40 percent stake in Nevsun's Bisha mine—a mine that remains the single most productive economic asset in the country and is responsible for furnishing the Eritrean government with almost 1 billion in revenue since it was brought on line in 2011.[12]

Eritrea's relationships with Turkey and South Africa, while not as economically significant as its linkages with China, are also generally warm. Turkey played a critical role in meeting Asmara's desperate need for regular air links between Eritrea and the outside world, when Turkish Airlines introduced three flights per week between Istanbul and Asmara in May 2014. This resolved an acute aviation crisis brought on by Lufthansa's October 2013 decision to end flights servicing Asmara.[13] Eritrea's relations with South Africa, for its part, involved some cooperation in the mining sector, and very close and collegial diplomatic linkages between the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice and the African National Congress.[14]

These ties sit alongside an evolving relationship with the Arab world. Eritrea had for some time close relations with Qaddafi's Libya, as well as a diplomatic partnership with Qatar. The GCC's (minus Oman) intervention in Yemen contributed to a deepening security partnership between Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, through which Asmara has likely traded access to Eritrean territory and airspace for economic assistance.[15]

Even relations with the EU have expanded in recent years, propelled by European concerns over Eritrean migration. Despite significant controversy, by 2015, it was clear the EU would pursue an aid package to Eritrea under its 11th European Development Fund, to the tune of $229 million over six years.[16] Individual European states are now engaging Eritrea more intensely, with the objective

of establishing a workable framework for reducing the flow of refugees and streamlining refoulement.

Valuable though these relationships may be, they have not been converted into political capital Eritrea could employ in defending its interests where it has mattered most: in international fora where Eritrea has been repeatedly censured, sanctioned, and rebuked by the international community. Although there are some recent signs that this situation may be changing, as Eritrea broadens its diplomatic dealings and leverages them more adeptly at places like the UN, it is in exactly such settings that Eritrea's international isolation has been thrown into sharpest relief.

Eritrea is the target of two UN Security Council resolutions, the first that imposed sanctions, and the second that expanded them. The stated cause of these sanctions was Eritrea's alleged involvement in Somalia via its support of the Islamist militant group, Al Shabaab—an express violation of the UN imposed Somalia arms embargo—and the Eritrean government's failure to amicably resolve its border dispute with Djibouti. Although the latest evidence suggests that Eritrea's involvement in Somalia is now inconsequential, its dispute with Djibouti remains unresolved, despite both countries' accession to a Qatari mediated peace process. The main issue, according to Djibouti, appears to be Eritrea's failure to account for Djiboutian prisoners of war.

The legal basis of the Eritrea sanctions regime is UNSC 1907, which was adopted on December 23, 2009 and received near unanimous support, with 13 Security Council members voting in favor of the resolution. The two exceptions were Libya and China, the former voting against, and the latter abstaining. The most significant aspect of the sanctions regime was an arms embargo that prohibited Eritrea's import and export of weapons and associated material. Although Eritrea maintains a capacity to import and export arms through black market trade, many UN member states actively enforce the arms embargo.[17] The other aspects of the sanctions regime were asset freezes and travel bans on Eritrean government officials involved in channeling Eritrean support to

armed groups in Somalia, pending the identification of these officials by a relevant UN committee. However, at the present time, no names have forthcoming, rendering this dimension of the sanctions resolution inconsequential.

Almost two years later, the UNSC expanded the Eritrea sanctions regime through the passage of UNSC 2023, which was adopted on December 5, 2011. Again, 13 Security Council members voted in favor of the resolution, with two countries, Russia and China, abstaining. Essentially, the resolution called on UN member states to more concretely regulate the two key sources of revenue of the Eritrean government: its burgeoning mining sector and its controversial two percent "diaspora tax."[18] More specifically, it asked UN member states to ensure that revenues from these two sources were not used for illicit purposes, with illicit being effectively defined as anything that violated the arms embargo. In the case of the diaspora tax, UN member states were also called upon to ensure that the Eritrean government did not employ "extortion, threats of violence, fraud and other illicit means to collect taxes outside of Eritrea from its nationals or other individuals of Eritrean descent."[19]

Like UNSC 1907, 2023 was meant to be binding on member states. However, neither the resolution nor follow-up deliberations provided guidance about how to implement its provisions, beyond indicating that states should take "appropriate measures" in guaranteeing that the State of Eritrea's operation of its mining sector and diaspora tax was in accord with the sanctions regime. The vague language of "appropriate measures" quickly became a significant problem for the Eritrean government, because it established an international legal basis for states to take their own initiative in defining what measures were required. For example, the UK and Canada, countries that are home to large Eritrean diasporas, mandated that the Eritrean government end collection of the diaspora tax within their borders. In the case of Canada, the Eritrean government's failure to comply led Foreign Affairs Minister Jon Baird to expel the Eritrean Consul General in 2013.[20] Other countries, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, have considered

similar action, although the Swedish Parliament declined to pursue further measures in early 2014. The mining sector has generally been the focus of less public scrutiny, although Canada has held a series of parliamentary hearings on the issue in which officers from Canadian mining firm, Nevsun, have been asked to testify.

The critical piece of the Eritrea sanctions regime is the Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG), a group of experts tasked with assessing Eritrea's compliance with the sanctions, and progress on the issues (Somalia and Djibouti) that provoked them. Its recommendations to the UNSC are critical to building the consensus necessary to maintaining the sanctions regime. Most of the SEMG's annual reports have been highly critical of Eritrea, citing both its non-compliance with the sanctions regime and its continuing failure to modify the behaviors that provided the rationale for the sanctions. That said, more recent reports, such as those issued in 2015 and 2016, have found no evidence of Eritrean involvement in Somalia. Still, SEMG reports continue to recommend a continuation of the sanctions. While the UNSC must undertake a special vote to rescind the sanctions, the SEMG must be renewed annually. Generally speaking, the annual renewals have received overwhelming support at the UNSC, and in 2014, only Russia and Jordan failed to endorse the renewal by abstaining.

The severity of the Eritrea sanctions regime underscored just how thoroughly Eritrea had been isolated politically. While a number of states, including South Africa, Russia, and China, have made periodic efforts during deliberations of the UNSC to water down the sanctions, the fact remains that it is one of the most punitive UNSC sanctions regimes currently on the books. North Korea is the only other UNSC sanctions regime that currently involves an arms embargo imposed on a UN member state. Meanwhile, other African states such as Sudan and Zimbabwe have been repeatedly shielded from arms embargoes by the support of China and Russia.

As Eritrea has run into serious trouble at the UNSC, there have been parallel developments at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, for altogether different reasons. In response

to worsening human rights conditions in the country, the Council adopted a resolution creating a special rapporteur for Eritrea at its 20th session in 2012. This was the first non-cooperative country mandate passed by consensus in the history of the UN Human Rights Council. After a series of explosive reports from Special Rapporteur Sheila Keetharuth, the Council approved the creation of a three-person Commission of Inquiry (COI) to further assess human rights conditions in the country. At its establishment, it was only the third such commission created in Council history, next to those established to investigate the situations in North Korea and Syria. In 2015, the COI released its findings, which were just as alarming as those of the Special Rapporteur. Over Eritrean protest, the Council decided to extend the mandate of both the Special Rapporteur and the COI, while expanding the COI's mandate by tasking it with investigating whether the Eritrean government was guilty of crimes against humanity.

At the regional level, Eritrea found itself equally isolated. In mid 2009, it was the African Union (AU) that requested the UNSC place sanctions on Eritrea, a request that created initial momentum for the UNSC 1907. The AU request was unprecedented as it was the first time it had formally made the case for this sort of punitive action at the UNSC against an African member state.[21] Moreover, all sanctions resolutions tabled at the UNSC were tabled by African states. Meanwhile, IGAD, the Horn of Africa's regional organization, made a similar request to the UNSC, a move that actually paved the way for the AU's critical endorsement. At the current time, IGAD member states have blocked Eritrea from readmission to the organization, which it withdrew from in 2007 over protest of Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia.

The United States as a Critical Actor

Eritrea's slide into pariah status was largely a function of the marked

deterioration in its relationship with the US between 2001–2009. In the post-Cold War, unipolar moment, US diplomatic maneuvering–or at the very least acquiescence–has been the single most decisive factor in the UNSC's deployment of punitive measures against member states.[22] This is a basic reality recognized by many scholars of the UNSC. There are two obvious reasons for US predominance on matters of UNSC sanctions, beyond the obvious fact that it has leverage as a Great Power to forge needed consensus. First, two veto wielding members of the UNSC–France and UK–are junior alliance partners of the US, and as such, their behavior at the UNSC is often aligned with the US. Meanwhile, as a general principle, Russia and China tend to spurn the deployment of punitive country-specific actions at the UNSC, and therefore almost never take a leading role in orchestrating sanctions regimes. These trends are reflected across other UN institutions such as the UN Human Rights Council.

Beyond this, there is plenty of specific evidence that the US was the *decisive* force in Eritrea's international isolation. First, key players like France, Germany, and the EU, had initial doubts about the appropriateness of deploying sanctions against Eritrea, but it was the active lobbying of Washington that changed their positions.[23] Moreover, it was the US that encouraged the AU and AU member states to officially request the UNSC place sanctions on Asmara, because it understood that this would constitute an African stamp of approval that Russia, China, and other UNSC members would be reluctant to ignore via an exercise of their veto power. The US also sponsored the resolution at the UN Human Rights Council that introduced the Special Rapporteur. There is also some evidence that during discussions about the second sanctions resolution in December of 2011, Washington sought to prevent President Isaias Afwerki from attending the proceedings in a bid to ensure the resolution's passage.[24] Heads of state and foreign ministers from neighboring countries that were in favor of the resolution–namely Ethiopia and Djibouti–were able to make their case via teleconference. More recently, the US endorsed all subsequent

Eritrea focused resolutions at the UNSC and UNHRC that ensured the maintenance of the sanctions regime and investigative mechanisms at the UNHRC. The US has made it clear that it will not countenance a removal of these measures until Eritrea demonstrates what it considers to be behavioral change, and it is a broadly recognized fact that Washington will veto any UNSC resolution designed to undo the sanctions. Finally, it is worth pointing out that the United States was the only country to show initiative on UNSC 1907's effort to sanction Eritrean persons involved in channeling military support to Somalia's Islamists. In 2010, President Obama issued Executive Order 13536, which imposed an asset freeze on Yemane Gebreab, head of political affairs for the PFDJ and key lieutenant of President Isaias.

It is tempting to believe that Ethiopia's regional predominance, as the Horn's preeminent military power, emerging economic juggernaut, and diplomatic hub, account for Eritrea's international isolation. On one level, this line of argument is strong. There can be little doubt that Ethiopian diplomatic influence played a role in IGAD and the AU's UNSC sanctions requests, and that Ethiopia wields substantial influence on and through Washington on matters pertaining to the Horn of Africa. But alone, this is an inadequate explanation for Asmara's international isolation, since Ethiopia had steadily sought to isolate Eritrea diplomatically since its early rupture in relations in 1998. Yet it was only when US-Eritrea relations had reached their nadir, for reasons that were mostly unrelated to Ethiopian exhortations on Washington, that Eritrea's diplomatic isolation became a reality with passage of UNSC 1907.[25]

The Unlikely Beginnings of an African Pariah State

Like many pariah states in the international system, the Eritrean

state has a fairly well-developed narrative of victimhood that situates the US as its *bête noir*.[26] In this narrative, which is rooted in some deep historical realities but a fair bit of exaggeration, the US is a belligerent state whose influence has been behind a litany of historical injustices against the Eritrean people. These include a sustained effort to deny Eritrea its right to self-determination during the long War of Independence, plots to undermine the Eritrean government during the Eritrean-Ethiopian Border War (1998–2000), the continued occupation of Eritrean territory by Ethiopia, and even the current exodus of Eritrean youth. Eritrea's international isolation, in this perspective, was but a capstone in a long historical project of subversion orchestrated by successive administrations in Washington. Undergirding this entire narrative is the claim that the US is fundamentally opposed to Eritrea's existence as an independent state.

From Asmara's perspective, the rationale behind "Unprovoked US Hostilities Against Eritrea,"–the title of a key polemic produced by the PFDJ in 2012–have been myopic geopolitical imperatives that have driven the US to provide unqualified support to Ethiopia as its "regional enforcer." This historic bias has been compounded by the danger of Eritrea's "power of example," as a defiant, self-reliant African nation that has rejected the US' imperialistic impulses.[27]

All of this might suggest that PFDJ-led Eritrea has always been a revisionist state ideologically anchored in anti-Americanism and deeply committed to opposing American hegemony both regionally and globally. Eritrea's international isolation, then, might be considered a reflection of this inbuilt ideological orientation, and the rejection of global norms that it entails.

Yet this view gets the causal dynamic wrong. As will become clear, the current ideological orientation of PFDJ-led Eritrea is less the cause of its international isolation and more its consequence. When one carefully examines the PFDJ's early postindependence foreign policy, it is clear that it initially contained little revisionist content. In fact, Eritrean foreign policy represented an almost overt endorsement of US priorities and strategic imperatives both at the

global and regional level for much of the 1990s. A quick review of the early bilateral relationship illustrates this point well.

A striking aspect of the EPLF's (the PFDJ's predecessor organization) long history as an armed national liberation movement is that despite Washington's long-standing opposition to Eritrean independence—manifested through its political support of Ethiopian claims to the territory—the EPLF exhibited relatively little anti-Americanism. To be sure, the US was not always a willing ally of Ethiopia when it came to the Eritrea question, as it regarded Ethiopia's centralizing overreach as a key driver of the conflict, and at times sought to limit its support for Ethiopian military objectives in the unruly province. Yet practically speaking, no one, least of all the EPLF, had any real doubts about where the US stood on the Eritrea question.

Although it is true that the EPLF was imbued with a thinly formulated conception of Marxism, there was little in its rhetoric that could be interpreted as anti-US vitriol.[28] In part, this was because the security partnership between the US and Ethiopia had abruptly ended by 1977, and by the late 1980s, the EPLF had largely shorn its Marxist garb. But even before the rupture of the mid-1970s, when Washington was footing virtually the entire bill for the Imperial Ethiopian Government's 40,000 man army, the EPLF steered clear of conveying an image of open hostility toward the US. While the US privately feared Eritrean insurgent attacks on their signals installation at the Kagnew facility in Asmara, these fears were never realized, despite the obvious capacity of the EPLF and its nationalist rivals to launch such an assault. In fact, the EPLF never raised Kagnew base as a political issue worthy of dispute, an omission that is a telling indication of its ideological disposition towards Washington. The EPLF did occasionally detain, almost inadvertently, US citizens that it came across in the field, but they were generally quickly released with little fan-fare. Meanwhile, the EPLF maintained a consistent official presence in Washington through which it sought to engage US officials and persuade them of the legitimacy of the Eritrean nationalist position.[29]

In the waning days of the war against the Derg, as Soviet support for Mengistu ground to a halt and the regime began to teeter under the pressure of the rebellions in the north, Washington decided to formally engage the EPLF. This engagement came through the person of Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Herman Cohen, who sought to mediate four-way negotiations between the EPLF, the TPLF, the OLF, and the Derg. For the US, the prime objective of this mediation was to avoid further bloodshed by negotiating a mutually acceptable transitional settlement amongst the parties. In the end, Cohen's efforts were overtaken by the military gains of the EPLF and its allies, who defeated the Derg and took control of the Ethiopian state.

The EPLF's military victory presented the US with a fait accompli on the issue of Eritrean self-determination. After a referendum in 1993, the US became one of the first countries in the world to recognize an independent Eritrea, and quickly deployed an embassy and ambassador to Asmara to deepen diplomatic relations.

In 1994, USAID established a formal presence in the country, although it had begun funding projects two years earlier. By the late 1990s, a robust bilateral aid relationship between the two countries had emerged, with one USAID memorandum noting that that the agency enjoyed "a high degree of confidence and collegiality with the government of Eritrea."[30] As the fledgling aid relationship suggests, US perceptions of the government in Asmara were generally positive, although US diplomats recognized the prickly and somewhat mercurial nature of the Eritrean leadership. There were two specific areas where US officials had concerns. The first were the PFDJ's policies towards international NGOs, which were quite obviously designed to assert full control of, and eventually remove, the international NGO presence in Eritrea. These policies culminated in a January 1998 order that all international NGOs in the country close their operations. The order was never implemented, but since many of these NGOs functioned as USAID implementing partners, it did for some time raise the prospect of future operational barriers to USAID programming. The second issue was

Eritrea's slow, halting pace of democratization, as the country had no organized opposition and no clear schedule for multiparty elections.

Yet in Washington's view, none of these issues were important enough to merit downgrading of bilateral relations. In 1997, First Lady Hillary Clinton visited Eritrea, and later that year President Clinton dubbed President Isaias and several other African heads of state "a new breed" of African leaders that were committed and capable agents of the African continent's political and economic transformation. Shared security interests were no doubt central to propelling Washington's interest in consolidating its relationship with Eritrea, as neighboring Sudan's export of militant Islamism quickly put it at loggerheads with both countries. The US designated Sudan a state sponsor of terrorism in 1993, closed its embassy in Khartoum in 1996, and imposed comprehensive bilateral sanctions in 1997. For its part, Eritrea broke diplomatic relations with Khartoum in 1994, citing its sponsorship of militant groups that were infiltrating across the border into western Eritrea. This confluence of interests prompted the Clinton administration to channel military assistance to Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda, which were deemed "frontline states" in the effort to contain the Sudanese government's aggressive Islamist foreign policy.

Seen from the long view, the cozy relationship between Washington and Asmara during much of the 1990s illustrates the dramatic nature of the rupture in bilateral relations that was to come. As mentioned earlier, that reversal largely hinged on three international political developments, two occurring at the regional level and one that was of more global political significance.

The Eritrean-Ethiopian Border War

May 1998 marked the beginning of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Border War, a conflict that was ostensibly triggered by a dispute over the

small border village of Badme, but would fundamentally transform the region's post-Cold War political order. Although generally not recognized at the time, the war would have two far-reaching effects on US-Eritrea relations.

First, the war triggered an intense security rivalry between two US allies and forced Washington into the uncomfortable position of seeking to mediate between them. While the US sought to navigate a position of neutrality, and preserve its relationship with both countries, this was no easy task, as Asmara and Addis routinely accused the US of playing favorites. It was Eritrea, however, that was probably more dissatisfied with US mediation, since a US-Rwanda peace proposal tabled in the summer of 1998 seemed to echo Ethiopia's negotiating position on the border dispute that triggered the war. The proposal called on the Eritrean government to vacate the disputed territories that it had seized on May 12, 1998 during the initial round of fighting. Eritrea rejected this early proposal, arguing it ignored Ethiopia's earlier efforts in territorial aggrandizement. As a result, Eritrea's leadership seemed to permanently sour on the mediation efforts of US Assistant Secretary of State Susan Rice—a fact that would color Asmara's later perception of the Obama administration during Rice's tenure as UN Ambassador and National Security adviser.

Washington obviously felt differently about its role during the conflict. From its perspective, the US-Rwanda proposal—which to the displeasure of Asmara would be the basis of all subsequent mediation efforts—was not an expression of pro-Ethiopian bias, but strategically the best way to resolve the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict. By asking Eritrea to withdraw from the territory it had seized in the early days of the dispute, it sought to reinforce the principle that states should not resort to force as a means of resolving competing territorial claims. Moreover, it believed that due to domestic political pressures, the Ethiopian government had much less negotiating room than Asmara. This was an argument that was based on the assumption that the EPRDF was a fragile minority government ruling over a largely hostile population.[31] In any case,

these rationales likely fell on deaf ears within the Eritrean government, which saw US support for the proposal as a reversion to its historic favoritism of Ethiopia.

The second major impact of the war was in its outcome. Although not generally appreciated, Ethiopia's gains in the third and final phase of the war (May–June 2000) re-ordered the regional balance of power in some fundamental ways. While Ethiopia had always been a much larger country than Eritrea, and thus possessed a greater latent capacity to project power, the historical political seniority of the EPLF over the TPLF, and perceived domestic political fragility of the TPLF-led EPRDF government, had led Washington and much of the international community to the view that Eritrea was the pre-imminent–or at least a coequal–power in the region. Indeed, when the war began the US was doubtful of Ethiopia's ability to penetrate the network of Eritrean defenses that protected the disputed territories.[32] The unforeseen Ethiopian successes of May–June 2000, when Ethiopia barreled across western Eritrea, seized most of the disputed territories, and occupied perhaps as much as 1/4th of Eritrea's landmass, no doubt prompted the US to revisit its perspective on the regional power hierarchy. This new reality was further cemented by the June 2000 ceasefire agreement in which Eritrea was compelled to accept a 25-mile buffer zone entirely within its own territory and Ethiopia's full control of much of the disputed territories.

The September 11th Effect

Standing alone, the regional shifts initiated by the Eritrean-Ethiopian Border War did not fundamentally alter the relationship between Washington and Asmara. In part, this is because the US had, over the course of the war, operated as a fairly neutral player in the context of Eritrea's conflict with Ethiopia, despite whatever grievances Asmara may have had. The most compelling evidence of

this neutrality was Washington's mediation during the latter stages of the Border War, where it applied serious diplomatic pressure on Ethiopia to accept the December 2000 Algiers Agreement that committed it to final and binding arbitration of its border dispute with Eritrea.[33] US pressure was significant, since on its own, Eritrea lacked the leverage to achieve a settlement that would force Ethiopia to relinquish territory via arbitration that it had earned through military force.

The other key issue was that the US, beyond its Sudan containment strategy, was not heavily invested in the Horn at a strategic level. This detachment enabled Washington to avoid further entanglements that could jeopardize its neutrality in the context of the Eritrean-Ethiopian security rivalry.

Yet the September 11th terrorist attacks disrupted this equilibrium decisively. As the apparatus of the American state mobilized for the Global War on Terror, Africa emerged as an area of strategic relevance to US policymakers. In this "second front" in the War on Terror, the US would require strategic alliances with key African states in stabilizing the continent and ensuring it did not become a fertile breeding ground for the Al-Qaeda franchise. In the Horn, this new strategic interest was most prominently illustrated by the 2002 creation of the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa, through which the US sought to institutionalize its strategic footprint in the region.

Ethiopia's renewed regional preeminence in the years after 9-11, seemingly clarified by the outcome of the Border War in 2000, made it a natural partner for the US. An early endorsement of this idea was the White House's 2002 National Security Strategy, which listed Ethiopia as one of four continental "anchors" that required the US' "focused attention."[34] As a result, the US increased development and security related assistance to Addis, and in return, received enhanced intelligence cooperation from Ethiopia's security establishment.

Somalia was one particular arena where the US sought to leverage its counter-terrorism partnership with Ethiopia. The US was

particularly concerned about the presence of known Al-Qaeda operatives in Mogadishu, a number of which were directly implicated in the 1998 Nairobi and Dar es Salaam embassy bombings. As early as 2002, Washington began to direct resources towards warlords in south central Somalia in an effort to capture these Al-Qaeda targets. Ethiopia, for its part, had waged its own battles against Islamist militants in Somalia in the mid-1990s, and had the necessary intelligence infrastructure to support the US effort.

In 2005, the rise of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in Somalia created a more clear-cut convergence of interest between Washington and Addis. For somewhat different reasons, American and Ethiopian policy-makers were wary of the emergence of a consolidated Somali state under the leadership of an assertive Islamist regime. The two governments forged tighter operational linkages in their counter-terrorism efforts, a fact which became a subject of public scrutiny in the aftermath of Ethiopia's December 2006 offensive that destroyed the ICU.[35] Using the cover of the Ethiopian intervention, the US launched a number of special operation strikes against Al-Qaeda affiliated targets embedded within the ICU, while assisting Ethiopian forces with intelligence, a naval blockade of ICU positions, and any diplomatic blowback that the African state may have received for its Somalia intervention.[36]

Yet Washington did not view its post-9-11 relationship with Ethiopia and Eritrea in zero-sum, or mutually exclusive terms. In fact, it openly gestured towards a deepening of its security relationship with Asmara in the years after 9-11. Between September 11, 2001 and December 2002, CENTCOM commander General Tommy Franks visited Eritrea four times. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited in December 2002 (just before a visit to Ethiopia), where he extolled the virtues of enhanced security cooperation between Washington and Asmara by arguing that Eritrea "has considerably more experience than we do over a sustained period of time" in battling the scourge of terrorism.[37] The Eritrean government was eager to foster such a relationship,

and through the American law firm Greenberg Traurig, lobbied Washington to place a US base in Eritrean territory. In 2003, Asmara sought to curry more favor with the US by enthusiastically joining its "coalition of the willing" in Iraq.[38]

These efforts, however, would not bear fruit. By 2004, it was clear the US had decided against establishing a military base in Eritrea, preferring instead to locate its installation in neighboring Djibouti. No doubt, an American base in Eritrea would have antagonized Washington's Ethiopian partners. Yet from Asmara's perspective, the US decision was hardly a cause for a serious rift, since the US had not established a military base in Ethiopia and had continued to provide both economic and security assistance to Eritrea at significant levels.[39]

Of more consequence to Eritrean policy makers was the status of its as yet unresolved border dispute with Ethiopia, and more specifically, the American role in hastening its conclusion. The Algiers Agreement, which was preceded by the already mentioned June 2000 ceasefire agreement, formally ended the Eritrean-Ethiopian Border War. The agreement's key mechanism for resolving the border dispute that had ostensibly triggered the war was the Eritrean-Ethiopian Boundary Commission (EEBC). Interpreting evidence supplied by the parties through relevant legal principles, the commission would arbitrate between competing territorial claims and determine where the actual boundary lay. The decision of the EEBC was to be final and binding. As is well known, things would not prove to be so simple, eventually creating a context in which Washington and Asmara would move into full-fledged diplomatic collision.

When the EEBC released its decision on April 13, 2002, Ethiopia hailed it as a vindication of its territorial claims. In effect, however, both sides failed to realize their territorial claims in full. When Addis more closely reviewed the decision, and discovered that the key flashpoint town of Badme had been awarded to Eritrea, it rejected the decision and blocked any effort at demarcation. Instead, it called for an "alternative mechanism" to the EEBC. To Addis, non-

demarcation was of little consequence, since it occupied much of the disputed territory. Eritrea, which recognized that the territorial status quo was not desirable, obviously attached much greater urgency to the issue of demarcation.

By November 2004, Ethiopian authorities had softened their position. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi issued a five-point peace proposal in which Ethiopia accepted the EEBC decision "in principle," but sought "dialogue" on implementation and a broader normalization of relations. Ethiopia later dropped the "in principle" caveat. Effectively, Ethiopia was now demanding a quid pro quo from Eritrea for demarcating the border and relinquishing Badme—most likely small modifications to the border decision and explicit guarantees on normalization—rather than rejecting the EEBC decision outright. Eritrea correctly insisted that since the decision was meant to be final and binding, the demand for further dialogue—and a quid pro quo for demarcation and Ethiopian withdrawal from Badme—had no legal basis. All that was left was for Ethiopia to vacate what had been deemed Eritrean territory. It is this basic disagreement that has left border demarcation and the broader Algiers peace settlement in a permanent state of limbo.

How the US responded to this impasse was to have a decisive impact on US-Eritrean relations. Asmara's view was that the US was one of the most significant "guarantors" of the Algiers agreement (along with the UN, AU, Algeria, and the EU), and was thus obligated to apply pressure on Ethiopia to end its non-compliance, even deploying punitive measures if necessary. This would include a reduction in the sizeable bilateral assistance that the US provided Ethiopia, and with US support, the invocation of the UN Security Council's Chapter 7 provisions against Ethiopia for its non-adherence to the EEBC decision.

Indeed, a robust response from the US and the other "guarantors" was not simply an Eritrean hope; rather, it was the Eritrean expectation. In April 2004, Director of the President's Office Yemane Gebremeskel argued that the impasse over the border would not

continue indefinitely, as international pressure would soon force Ethiopia to comply with the boundary ruling: "I don't think Ethiopia can defy international law for long," Yemane said, "It is too dependent on international assistance. . . I don't consider it [the current impasse] a stalemate and I don't think it's unlimited."[40]

Predictably, the US balked at the idea that it should bear the burden of pressing Ethiopia to comply with the EEBC decision. Given Ethiopian public opinion, Washington believed the EPRDF would resist external pressure on the border issue. Moreover, such pressure was likely to undercut the American efforts in democracy promotion in Ethiopia, and could erode the very stability of the Ethiopian state. This latter concern was linked to a more urgent worry: that a casualty of US pressure on Ethiopia would be the highly valuable US-Ethiopia counter-terrorism alliance, which was a virtual necessity for the US in Somalia. On this point, Washington was fairly honest that broader counter-terrorism concerns required they tread carefully in handling Ethiopia's non-compliance with the EEBC decision.[41]

Washington was also not of the opinion that the Algiers Agreement positioned the US as an actual "guarantor" of the treaty, and thus obligated to sanction non-compliant parties. Importantly, the Agreement itself refers to the fact that it has been "witnessed by" US and other international parties.[42] This is a crucial distinction since it can be argued under conventional understandings of international law that "witnesses" to an agreement cannot be equated with "guarantors," the latter of which might carry attendant enforcement obligations.[43] International and bi-lateral treaties are often self-enforcing, and it is not unusual that the burden of implementation rests with the concerned parties themselves.[44]

Asmara was likely not persuaded by this legalese for a number of reasons, but had Washington's perceived slights regarding the EEBC decision been contained to the level of inaction, it's possible that a full rupture in US-Eritrea relations could have been avoided. Yet the US would appear to go one step further, taking purposive action that seemingly enabled Ethiopia to erode the final and binding

provisions of the Algiers Agreement. Although the US remained steadfast in its official commitment to the Algiers Agreement, even the most charitable reading of Washington's behavior suggests that it was operating in direct contravention of the spirit, if not the letter, of the accord. This behavior would provoke the Eritreans, and create toxic relationship between Washington and Asmara that would have far reaching implications for Eritrea's status in the international system.

The crux of the issue was the Bush administration's quiet endorsement of the seemingly benign, but legally incorrect, notion of "dialogue." This endorsement logically followed from its unwillingness to pressure the Ethiopian government to implement the EEBC decision. Washington did not want to see the stalemate persist, as it worried about the resumption of hostilities between the two countries, and the cost and continued viability of the UNMEE mission—a UN mandated peacekeeping force that patrolled the border areas. Indeed, by December 2005, the Eritrean government had placed such severe operational restrictions on UNMEE that the international community feared the mission would unravel, undermining the credibility of UN peacekeeping operations and removing an essential barrier to a resumption of hostilities along the Eritrean-Ethiopian frontier.

Yet absent American pressure on Ethiopia, the only logical way to jump start the border demarcation process was for the US to encourage "dialogue" in the form of a third-party facilitation effort that could work alongside and support the EEBC. Early on, Washington's tendency to favor "dialogue" was exhibited by its support of UNSG Special Representative for Eritrea-Ethiopia, Lloyd Axworthy, who was appointed by the UN Secretary General in January 2004. Asmara refused to engage Axworthy, arguing that the Algiers Agreement did not provide the scope for this sort of mediation in resolving the border impasse. No doubt, Asmara recognized that the assignment of a special envoy was an implicit recognition of the Ethiopian position that further "dialogue" was necessary to implement the EEBC decision. Again, in the Eritrean

view, the EEBC decision was final and binding, and all that remained was for Ethiopia to implement the agreement without preconditions.

Eritrean resistance to Axworthy's mission doomed it from the very beginning. Keen to avoid a deterioration of the situation along the border, Washington supported another effort designed to generate dialogue between the parties, this time with more direct American fingerprints. In January 2006, US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Jendayi Frazer visited the region in an effort to jump-start the stalled boundary demarcation process. Her mission was encouraged by UN officials, who on the back of Axworthy's failed mission, believed that only the US could get traction on boundary demarcation.[45] Frazer's plan was to visit both Ethiopia and Eritrea, and travel to the disputed Badme region from both sides of the frontier. The Eritrean government provided a visa to Frazer, but refused to allow her to visit the disputed border area, since again, doing so would be a tacit endorsement of the notion that further dialogue was necessary to the implementation of the EEBC decision. In the end, Frazer decided against visiting Eritrea, and entered Badme from the Ethiopian side. Not surprisingly, this upset the Eritrean government, who would publically accuse Frazer of visiting "a sovereign Eritrean territory under Ethiopian occupation without Eritrea's permission."[46]

Despite obvious Eritrean resistance, Washington again forged ahead to bridge the divide between the two countries. Frazer's effort led to the convening of the Witnesses of the Algiers Agreement in February 2006, and its issuance of an important statement that was backed by the UN Security Council. After insisting on the final and binding nature of the EEBC decision and requesting the EEBC call a meeting of the two sides, the statement of the Witnesses invited the EEBC to "consider the need for technical discussions with the support of neutral facilitator to assist the process of demarcation."[47] The US tapped General Carlton Fulford, former deputy commander of US European Command, to operate as the neutral facilitator.[48]

By this time, it appears the US had removed the Eritrea-Ethiopia file from the UN Security Council (UNSC), preferring instead to go all in on its own mediation effort. This decision appeared to be another sore point for Eritrea, which again, had always envisioned the UNSC as a central mechanism to resolve non-compliance with the Algiers Agreement, and now had doubts about Washington's neutrality. In any case, Asmara was not pleased by Washington's behavior at the UNSC, which they believed had the effect of diluting UNSC statements on the border issue so as to avoid placing any clear burden of responsibility on Ethiopia.

Like the Axworthy mission, Eritrean resistance undermined Fulford's effort, forcing the EEBC to decline him as a neutral facilitator. In any event, while the EEBC was able to bring both sides together in March 2006 under the watchful eye of the US, a second meeting scheduled for June was cancelled when Eritrea refused to attend. The insistence on "technical discussions," which Frazer argued was designed to address areas where physical and human realities made demarcation difficult, was viewed by the Asmara as thinly veiled attempt to adjust the EEBC boundary line. Feeling that the EEBC was now succumbing to American influence, Eritrea largely ended its cooperation with the EEBC by the end of the year. Ethiopia, which had always detested the EEBC, was happy to follow suit. In a matter of months, Washington's attempt to jump start the stalled demarcation process had fallen apart.[49]

At senior levels of the US government, Frazer's failed mediation effort in the first half of 2006 seems to have generated a hardening of attitudes against the Eritrean position vis-à-vis the border impasse. The sentiment seems to have been that the Ethiopians had shown greater flexibility in attempting to resolve the stalemate, while Eritrea had proven obstinate.[50] Perhaps as a result, senior State Department officials would later more transparently favor the Ethiopian position, even asserting–in contrast to official US policy–the need for alternatives to the EEBC decision that would better satisfy Ethiopia.[51] By this time, however, the US-Eritrean relationship had fully gone off the rails, further tilting Washington's

triangular relationship with Eritrea and Ethiopia more robustly towards the latter.

Seen from the long view, it is clear that the attacks of September 11th initiated a real, if inadvertent shift in American policy in the Horn. The strategic imperatives raised by the War on Terror pushed the US away from the neutrality that had characterized its earlier approach to the Eritrean-Ethiopian security rivalry. This fact was most clearly evidenced by its approach to the stalled EEBC demarcation process. In response, Eritrea chose a strategy of resistance and confrontation, that however legitimate, would in large part determine its emergence as a pariah state.

The Rise of Al-Shabaab

Eritrea's response to US policy was carefully calibrated but increasingly sharp, and designed to elicit a reorientation in Washington's approach to the border issue. In effect, Eritrea sought to impose costs on the US for what it viewed as its pro-Ethiopia bias. On July 26, 2005—months before Frazer's ill-fated mediation effort—Eritrea requested that USAID close its operations in the country, a demand that Washington reluctantly, but dutifully met by the end of the year.[52] At the time, state owned media made clear what the closure of USAID was about, declaring: "The non-resolution of the Eritrea-Ethiopia border issue is negatively affecting the necessary cooperation and work coordination between Eritrea and the United States."[53]

State owned and state affiliated media began to ramp up its anti-US rhetoric, although, with some exceptions, the tone of this rhetoric was nowhere near as vitriolic as it appears today.[54] Yet the most telling sign of the shifting Eritrean posture were comments made by President Isaias Afwerki himself. In a statement published on November 21, 2005, Isaias directly criticized US policy in the Horn, and suggested that Washington's "resort to giving orders

through proxy" was a dangerous mistake. Here, Isaias was quite obviously referring to the view that the flourishing security partnership between Washington and Ethiopia that that had empowered Addis to throw its political and military weight throughout the Horn of Africa region.[55] The President went a step further in May 2006, when he used his widely distributed Independence Day remarks to excoriate the US for its role in the border impasse, arguing that Washington was "vouching for and encouraging the TPLF's defiance of international law. . ."[56]

As Asmara raised the temperature of its rhetoric, it unleashed a series of measures against the US embassy in Eritrea that seriously undercut its ability to function. The Eritrean government tampered with diplomatic pouches, imposed onerous travel restrictions on the US diplomats, arbitrarily arrested the Embassy's Eritrean personnel, and in one extraordinary incident, even physically intimidated a US diplomat in a bid to shut down a public event hosted by Embassy personnel. Operationally, the US mission was so beleaguered that it was forced to take the major step of suspending all public services in February 2007, including the provision of visas.

The Bush Administration initially demonstrated some restraint in its response to Eritrea's new strategy of resistance, and sought to work within regular diplomatic channels to resolve what was fast evolving into a full-blown diplomatic rupture. As early as 2006, officials from the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs sought to enlist the support of Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice in opening up a direct line of communication to President Isaias, in the hope that high level contact could improve relations. Yet according to Jenadyi Frazer, on two occasions, Rice's call was not received and not returned.[57] With few other options, Washington took what it regarded as reciprocal action in August 2007, closing down the Eritrean consulate in Oakland and imposing travel restrictions on Eritrean diplomats in the US.

While Eritrea's behavior towards the US mission was certainly a cause for concern in Washington, it remained more of nuisance rather than real source of anxiety. Yet when Asmara began to pursue

regional initiatives that contradicted the core US interest of counter-terrorism, Washington's perspective shifted. The main issue was Eritrea's political and material support of militant Islamists in Somalia, a policy that was in large part designed to open up a second front against Ethiopia, but also to impose direct costs on the US for its perceived favoritism of Ethiopia. In Washington's estimation, Eritrea seemed to pursue a similar tack in Darfur, where counter-terrorism concerns were not really in play, but Eritrea seemed to interfere with the Darfur peace negotiations in ways that may have been at cross-purposes with UN-AU mediation initiatives supported by the US.[58]

Much has been said about Eritrean involvement in Somalia. Asmara's support of militant Islamist factions opposing the internationally backed Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, including the ICU and its successor Al-Shabaab, is not really in doubt. It should be said, however, that Eritrea was hardly unique in its interference in Somalia or its support of the Islamists. The fact that the US was to back the effort to sanction Eritrea, and effectively "single out" Asmara for its Somalia policy, is an indication of how poor bilateral relations had become by this juncture.[59]

Washington had been aware of Eritrea's involvement in Somalia since 2006, and throughout 2007 and 2008, privately and publically warned Eritrea that its backing of Somalia's militant Islamists would have consequences. In August 2007, Jendayi Frazer acknowledged that the US was now considering designating Eritrea a "state sponsor of terrorism" for its behavior in Somalia, a legal step that would automatically trigger a number of sanctions against the Eritrean government.[60]

Still, as Frazer noted at the time of relations with Eritrea, the US was "not trying to move toward a fundamental break in our relationship."[61] Indeed, it never followed through on the threat to place Eritrea on the terrorism list, and for a time, seemed comfortable with lodging threats that Asmara did not appear to take seriously.

Of course, the sanctions regime that the US sponsored in

December 2009 most definitely constituted a fundamental break. What caused Washington's shift from threats to action? The main issue was the radicalization and resurgence of militant Islamist forces in south-central Somalia in 2008–2009. By 2008, a new Islamist standard bearer, Al-Shabaab, had emerged as the dominant opposition to the TFG. In terms of its ideology and tactics, the group was much more radical than its predecessor the ICU, and more transparently linked to Al-Qaeda central. Meanwhile, Ethiopia's Somalia intervention had not gone as planned, inciting strong feelings of Somali nationalism that were leveraged by the Islamist opposition to rebuild the political movement that had been thrown into disarray when Ethiopia had defeated the ICU in January 2007. Badly bruised, the Ethiopian military gradually became less assertive in Somalia, eventually withdrawing and leaving the TFG and a small contingent of AU troops in Mogadishu to face the wrath of the Islamists. Al-Shabaab and other allied Islamist factions capitalized on Ethiopia's withdrawal, occupying the critical port of Kismayo in August 2008, and launching big offensives against TFG and AMISOM positions in Mogadishu in early 2009. From the perspective of US counter-terrorism concerns, Washington was now faced with a situation far worse than what existed in 2006, when the ICU's takeover Mogadishu precipitated Ethiopia's ill-fated military campaign.

The worsening situation in Somalia dovetailed with more alarming concerns about homeland security. By the end of 2008, it became clear that Al-Shabaab had opened up a recruiting pipeline to Somali communities in Minnesota and other parts of the US, creating the specter of attacks in the US either directed, or inspired by, Al-Shabaab. This appears to have been the red line that spurred the US to more concerted action on Somalia and Eritrea. On March 18, 2008, the State Department designated Al-Shabaab a Foreign Terrorist Organization under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, effectively making the provision of support to Al-Shabaab a criminal offence.[62] Just eight days before this occurred, Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice advised the US Mission to the

UN to begin exploring the possibility of targeted UNSC sanctions against Eritrea.[63] US diplomatic pressure on Eritrea became more strident at all levels. US Ambassador to Eritrea Ronald McMullen even warned PFDJ officials that Eritrean support for a reinvigorated Al-Shabaab could have consequences that went beyond sanctions. Ominously invoking the memory of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, he asked Eritrean officials, "Based on recent history, how do you think we would react to a major al-Shabaab terrorist attack against the US?"[64]

As the US began to cobble together the international support needed for UNSC sanctions regime, President Isaias and his administration largely remained impervious to American threats, oscillating between denying involvement in Somalia, and asserting the legitimacy of opposition to the TFG and Eritrea's right to support it. It is difficult to know what accounted for the inflexibility of Eritrea's approach in the face of what would prove to be credible American warnings.

It should be noted that there was a significant exception to the recalcitrant tone emanating from Asmara throughout 2008–2009. The November election of Barack Obama created a window of opportunity for improved US-Eritrea relations, at least in the view of Eritrean officials. In February 2009, just weeks after Obama's inauguration, the US Embassy in Asmara noted that, "Senior Eritrean officials have signaled their interest in re-engaging the United States in areas of mutual interest."[65] This effort included a letter of congratulations from President Isaias to Obama that sounded a conciliatory note. Yet the new Obama State Department seemed fairly committed to the idea that Eritrea must cease and desist from its involvement in Somalia before any rapprochement between the two states could occur. Whatever the reality of the situation may have been, Washington did not detect much substantive change in Eritrean policy towards Somalia throughout 2009. When President Isaias refused phone calls from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and the Eritrean government failed to facilitate a visit from Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Johnnie Carson

in June 2009 (a claim the Eritrean government denies), the Obama administration's pursuit of an Eritrea sanctions regime became the path of least resistance.[66] With the decision now made, US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice—the *bête noir* of Eritrea's ruling PFDJ—successfully helped engineer an effort at the UN in December 2009 that led to the imposition of UNSC 1907 on the State of Eritrea.

UNSC 1907, of course, marked Eritrea's emergence as pariah state in the international system. As should be clear, it would not have been possible without the radicalization and resurgence of Somalia's Islamist movement under the banner of Al-Shabaab.

Eritrea and the Pariah State in Comparative Perspective

Eritrea's emergence as a "pariah" state was the symptom of the dramatic unraveling of its relationship with the world's preeminent power, the United States. As this essay has shown, the UNSC sanctions regime that was the core component of Eritrea's international isolation would not have been possible without Washington's sustained diplomatic effort.

Three transformations produced the combined effect of shifting the international political context shaping US-Eritrea relations, driving the US into real, but inadvertent political conflict with Eritrea's PFDJ-led party state. The 1998 Eritrean-Ethiopian War triggered a sustained, but imbalanced security rivalry that tested the capacity of Washington to steer a neutral course between the two countries. The attacks of September 11th deepened the strategic stakes for the US in the Horn of Africa, and provided the impetus for a more robust counter-terrorism partnership with Ethiopia, which Washington, rightly or wrongly, believed was the preeminent power in the region. The counter-terrorism imperative meant that the US gradually lost its ability to remain a neutral

party in the Eritrean-Ethiopian dispute, causing Eritrea to pursue a strategy of resistance that manifested itself in the steady erosion of US-Eritrea ties and Eritrean involvement in Somalia. The rise of Al-Shabaab in 2008–2009, which signaled the resurgence and radicalization of Somalia's Islamist movement, is what pushed the US to take the aggressive step of responding to Eritrea's policy of resistance by pushing an Eritrean sanctions regime at the UNSC.

The Eritrean case teaches us much about international politics in the contemporary age. Eritrea's international isolation—what I have referred to as its pariah status—was not solely determined by the internal characteristics of the PFDJ's party-state, but major transformations in the international political environment. This suggests that international relations scholarship should be more attuned to the systemic features of global politics that structures the relationship between states that sit at the political margins, and the Great Powers that are the gatekeepers of international political order. PFDJ-led Eritrea was by no means a victim of circumstance; but its international isolation was the product of an increasingly challenging international context shaped by the imperatives of Global War on Terror. This implies that a "reintegration" of Eritrea into the international system, which may already be underway, will require not simply behavioral change on the part of the PFDJ party-state, but a greater sensitivity in Washington about how it can create an external context that makes this possible.

Notes

1. There is a literature on "small states" in international politics, but its focus is on the conduct of small states themselves, rather than what such cases teach us about the critical questions of war and peace that animate the field of international relations. See Ingebritsen, Christine, ed. 2006. *Small States in the International Relations*. Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press.

2. Historically speaking, pariah states have violated norms in at least one of three areas: WMD proliferation, state sponsorship of terrorism, and

human rights.

3. My conception of the pariah state builds on Harkavy, R. 1981. Pariah States and Nuclear Proliferation, *International Organization* 35(1): 135–163.

4. Saunders, Elizabeth. 2006. Setting Boundaries: Can International Society Exclude 'Rogue States'? *International Studies Review* 8(1): 23–53.

5. For a primer on "revisionism," see Buzan, Barry. 2007. *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in Post-Cold War Era.* Colchester: ECPR Press. Ch 8.

6. Walt, Stephen. 1996. *Revolution and War.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Snyder, Robert. 1999. The U.S. and Third World Revolutionary States: Understanding the Breakdown in Relations. *International Studies Quarterly* 43: 265–290; Zionts, David. 2006. Revisionism and Its Variants: Understanding State Reactions to Foreign Policy Failure. *Security Studies* 15(4): 631–657; Miller, Benjamin. 2009. Between the Revisionist and Frontier State: Regional Variations in State War-Propensity. *Review of International Studies* 35: 85–119; Davidson, Jason. 2010. The Roots of Revisionism: Fascist Italy 1922–39. *Security Studies* 11(4): 125–159; Colgan, Jeff. 2013. *Petro-Aggression: When Oil Causes War.* New York: Cambridge University Press; for a perspective that differs from the internal characteristics of these states, see Caprioli, M. and P.F. Trumbore. 2005. Rhetoric vs. Reality: Rogue States in International Conflict. *Journal of Confl ict Resolution* 49(5): 770–791.

7. Reid, Richard. 2005. Caught in the Headlights of History: Eritrea, the EPLF and the Post-War Nation State. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 43(3): 467–488; Mengisteab, Kidane and Okbazghi Yohannes, *Anatomy of an African Tragedy: Political, Economic and Foreign Policy Crisis in Post-Independence Eritrea*, Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2005; Reid, Richard. 2009. Eritrea's Role and Foreign Policy, in *The Horn of Africa: Past and Present Perspectives. in Eritrea's External Relations*, edited by Richard Reid, p. 19, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs.

8. Amahazion, Fikrejesus. 2015. The 'Isolationist' Myth: Eritrea, Global Ties, and Diplomacy. Shabait. Oct 3. http://www.shabait.com/categoryblog/20569-the-isolationist-myth-eritrea-global-ties-and-diplomacy.

9. It should be said here that one could make the argument that Eritrea no longer qualifies as an international pariah, given its increasing centrality to the GCC coalition in Yemen (a point that will be discussed later in this chapter). But even if one concedes that Eritrea has recently exited pariah status, as I will show, it most certainly did qualify as a "pariah" at one point in time.

10. One could add Russia to this list. This relationship was illustrated by the controversial visit of the Eritrean Foreign Minister to Russian occupied Crimea in June 2014. See MFA of Ukraine. 2014. MFA Expresses its Strong Protest to the Eritrean Side. *MFA of Ukraine*. June 14. http://mfa.gov.ua/en/press-center/comments/1610-ministerstvo-

zakordonnih-sprav-ukrajini-vislovlyuje-rishuchij-protest-jeritrejsykij-storoni-u-zvjazku-z-neuzgodzhenim-z-ukrajinoju-vidvidannyam-5-6-cher.

11. See http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/eri/.

12. For data on Chinese aid to Eritrea, see http://www.tesfanews.net/china-commits-millions-in-aid-to-eritrea/, accessed on August 30, 2015; for more on Nevsun payments to Eritrean government, see tesfanews.net/eritrea-earned-1-billion-in-revenue-from-bisha/, accessed August 30, 2015. Also, author's conversation, foreign analyst who recently visited Eritrea, June 2015.

13. See "Turkish Airlines Starts Direct Flights to Eritrea," which can be found at http://www.worldbulletin.net/eritrea/142803/turkish-airlines-starts-direct-flights-to-eritrea, accessed September 4, 2015.

14. Mesfin, Berouk. 2012. A New Dawn for Eritrea-South Africa Relations. November 23. https://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/a-new-dawn-for-eritrea-south-africa-relations.

15. See "Saudi Arabia, U.A.E. Paying Eritrea to Back Yemen Fight, UN Says," which can be found at http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-11-05/saudi-arabia-u-a-e-paying-eritrea-to-back-yemen-fight-un-says, accessed on September 4, 2016.

16. Solomon, Salem. 2015. EU Appears Poised to Resume Development Aid to Eritrea. VOA *News*. Oct 15. https://www.voanews.com/a/eu-poised-to-resume-development-aid-to-eritrea/3007701.html.

17. The 2012 Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) report (p.5) discussed the impact of the embargo through revealing commentary on the state of the Eritrean Air Force: "The general and complete arms embargo on Eritrea has had an adverse effect on the operational readiness of the Eritrean air force. The Monitoring Group estimates that only between one quarter and one third of air force aircraft are fully operational, because of lack of access to the spare parts and technical assistance required to meet maintenance standards. Nevertheless, it is the assessment of the Group that even the current reduced state of readiness of the Eritrean air force is indicative of ongoing imports of spare parts and external assistance, in violation of the arms embargo."

18. As is well known, the State of Eritrea imposes a 2 percent tax on all Eritrean nationals in the diaspora. It is believed that the sanctions, alongside increasing public dissatisfaction with the Isaias government, have led to reductions in the sums the Eritrean state has been able to raise through this tax over the last several years. However, the numbers remain hard to verify.

19. See http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Somalia%20S%20RES%202023.pdf, accessed February 2, 2016.

20. The Eritrean government's collection of tax in the UK and Canada remains a subject of continuing controversy and media speculation. See "Diaspora tax for Eritreans living in UK investigated by

Metropolitan police," http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jun/09/eritrea-diaspora-tax-uk-investigated-metropolitan-police, accessed on Sept 10, 2015, and "Eritrean consulate still extorting diaspora tax in Canada, a year after top diplomat expelled over scheme," http://www.news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/eritrea-consulate-still-extorting-diaspora-tax-in-canada-a-year-after-top-diplomat-expelled-over-scheme, accessed on September 10, 2015; Also, Author's conversation, British official, June 2015; A new consul general arrived in Canada in September 2015.

21. Eritrea's was not an active member at the AU between 2003–2011, having withdrawn because of the AU's inaction over Ethiopia's non-compliance with the Eritrea-Ethiopian Boundary Commission decision. It rejoined the AU in January 2011.

22. Hurd, Ian. 2008. *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the United Nations Security Council.* Princeton: Princeton University Press; Vreeland, James and Axel Dreher. 2014. *The Political Economy of the United Nations Security Council: Money and Influence.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

23. See "Europeans Track US on East Africa But Remain Reluctant to Sanction Eritrea, *Telegraph*, which can be found at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/somalia-wikileaks/8302251/EUROPEANS-TRACK-U.S.-ON-EAST-AFRICA-BUT-REMAIN-RELUCTANT-TO-SANCTION-ERITREA.html, accessed on January 16, 2016.

24. See recently released e-mails of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, which can be found at https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_Feb13thWeb/O-2015-08634HCE11_FEB13/DOC_0C05784125/C05784125.pdf, accessed on January 16, 2016.

25. For a useful summary of US efforts to push Eritrea sanctions regime, see "Wikileaks Exposes that Sanctions Imposed against Eritrea are politically motivated," which can be accessed at http://www.dehai.org/archives/dehai_news_archive/2015/apr/att-0578/WikiLeaks_Exposes_that_Sanctions_Imposed_against_Eritrea_are_politically_motivated.pdf, accessed on January 18, 2016.

26. This narrative can be gleaned from the official communications of the Eritrean state—particularly op-eds and press releases called "Hateta"—posted to the government website or read on state owned Eri-TV. Interviews and speeches given by government officials also carry this narrative, as do pro-government websites run from the diaspora.

27. Research and Documentation Department, PFDJ. 2012. Unprovoked US Hostilities Against Eritrea. *Shabait*, July 29.

28. There were allusions to "imperialism" in the EPLF's official publications that were no doubt references to the US. The accusation of cooperation with the American CIA was also leveled at dissenters within EPLF ranks, although this was more a pretext to purge certain individuals than a real reflection of the EPLF's ideological posture. Such

accusations were not uncommon in the postindependence period either.

29. The literature on the Eritrean revolution is significant. See Connell, Dan. 1997. *Against All Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution.* Trenton: Red Sea Press; Wrong, Michaela. 2006. *I Didn't Do It For You: How the World Betrayed a Small African Nation.* New York: Harper Perennial; Weldemichael, Awet. 2012. *Third World Colonialism and Strategies of Liberation: Eritrea and East Timor Compared.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

30. "USAID/Eritrea: Background And Issues Briefing," which can be found at https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacq017.pdf, accessed November 29, 2015.

31. See "Wikileaks – PM Meles, US Diplomats: On the eve of the Ethio-Eritrean War," which can be found at http://hornaffairs.com/en/2011/09/13/wikileaks-pm-meles-us-diplomats-on-the-eve-of-ethio-eritrea-war/, accessed on November 1, 2015.

32. See "Siye Abraha and the Ethiopia-Eritrea War," which can be found at http://nazret.com/blog/index.php/seye_abraha_and_the_ethiopia_eritrea_war, accessed on November 1, 2015. Also, these points were made to author in a conversation with a former Clinton era National Security Council staffer, May 2009, Washington, DC.

33. Author's conversation, a former Clinton era National Security Council staffer, May 2009, Washington, DC.

34. The White House. 2002. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Washington, DC.

35. While the US had likely cooperated with Ethiopia in channeling arms to an anti-ICU coalition suggestively titled the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism throughout 2005–2006 (before the Ethiopian invasion), it was apprehensive about Ethiopia's December 2006 intervention in Somalia.

36. Much has been written on the US and Ethiopia in Somalia. For a good overview, see Hansen, Stig Jarle. 2013. *Al Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

37. See "Eritrea Could Teach U.S. Much to Combat Terror," http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=42407, accessed November 24, 2015.

38. Greenberg Traurig was paid USD 50,000 a month for its services, and drafted a position paper suggestively titled "Why Not Eritrea?" The contract was apparently a year long, and valued at USD 600,000. See "Eritrea Pushes to Get U.S. Base," https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/11/21/eritrea-pushes-to-get-us-base/f730d0da-a727-43c1-ae16-15c8b06ae7a3/, accessed January 5, 2016.

39. There is also little doubt that human rights concerns were a deterrent to the establishment of a US military facility in Eritrea. The human

rights situation had steadily deteriorated since the September 2001 arrest of senior PFDJ officials that had publically broken with President Isaias. Moreover, in the subsequent purge, two of the US Embassy's Foreign Service Nationals—Ali Alamin and Kiflom Gebremichael—were arrested by the PFDJ's security apparatus. They remain in incommunicado detention, and as such, their status constitutes a major impediment to the deepening of US-Eritrea ties. See Mengisteab and Yohannes, *Anatomy of an African Tragedy*; Also, author's conversation, former US State Department official familiar with situation, April 2015. Official implied that for Washington, the dilemma was that the acceptance of FSN arrests would create a bad precedent.

40. See "Interview with Yemane Gebremeskel, Director of the President's Office," which can be found at http://irinnews.org/report/49359/ eritrea-interview-with-yemane-gebremeskel-director-of-the-president-s-office, accessed on January 7, 2016.

41. US Department of State. 2007. Eritrea Qs and As: Ambassador-designate Ron McMullen. US Department of State, July 1.

42. To see the full text of the Algiers Agreement, go to http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ ER%20ET_001212_AgreementEritreaEthiopia.pdf, accessed May 14, 2016.

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47. See "Statement by the Witnesses of the Algiers Agreement," which can be found at http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/ 62202.htm, accessed January 28, 2016.

48. Frazer's role in spearheading the initiative of the Witnesses can be seen from the following UN memo, "Notes to the Secretary General, Ethiopia-Eritrea: Meeting of the Witnesses of the Algiers Agreement," which can be found at http://search.archives.un.org/uploads/r/

united-nations-archives/f/a/5/
fa526508b951ff41b0551df173c70539e4776ac808051ada74b1fa50edc1b3c1
/S-1095-0001-01-00014.pdf, accessed on January 29, 2016.

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50. This view is implied by the US during November 2006 deliberations of the Witnesses. A UN memo summarizes the view of US representatives, noting "Washington no longer considers itself in a position to continue its diplomatic initiative with the parties, in view of its 'difficult bilateral relations with Eritrea.'" See "Note to Ms. Barcena, Ethiopia/Eritrea: Meeting of the Witnesses," which can be found at http://search.archives.un.org/uploads/r/united-nations-archives/e/4/8/
e48f9c5efc18e018cd40a53ddea2c3a8c0b87c4700cfd77ca4584a84326e3e
96/S-1095-0001-01-00032.pdf, accessed January 29, 2016.

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Conclusion: Eritrea's State of Exception and its Broken Mirror

TEKLE MARIAM WOLDEMIKAEL

Postliberation Eritrea: Quo Vadis?

In 1993, Eritrea burst onto the international scene with a strong sense of direction and potential. Since then, the country and the state have come a long way, but have long since departed from their original lofty purpose and vision. Today's scholarship on Eritrea reflects this outcome, as it consistently points to the worrying signs of emerging crisis in the management of the state's affairs. O'Kane and Hepner (2009) and Hepner (2009), for example, note the state's extreme militarization and its devastating outcomes, while Tronvoll and Mekonnen (2014) contend the state is in a constant "state of siege," and Bozzini (2011) has revealed the government's obsession with mass surveillance. This is all consistent with Mengisteab and Yohannes' (2005) verdict on Eritrea as a dismal economic, political, and diplomatic tragedy, one that conforms to the archetype of an African failed state. Other scholars, however, remain hopeful, and argue that the state in Eritrea is at a crossroads, struggling as it is to find its bearings and establish itself. They see the current problem as a temporary crisis in governance that might be remedied through the emergence of a more accountable leadership (Georgis 2014; Riggan 2016). For still others, Eritrea is a wounded nation personified (Selassie 2010), a nation of deferred dreams (Kibreab 2009), and a state challenged by alternative Eritrean nationalisms that are rising among the Eritrean diasporas (Bernal 2014). And there

are also scholars who see Eritrea, in spite of the vast challenges it faces internally and externally, as the "the strongest postcolonial state" in Africa (Dorman 2006, 1999), a verdict justified by that state's ability to consolidate its power and control the loyalty of its population. This control, however, is often organized through both consent and through the use of a strong machinery of security and surveillance (Müller 2012). Perhaps, at its core, it is a persistent sense of vulnerability that makes the Eritrean state discipline its wayward politicians and youth with such severity. A key feature that is evident throughout the literature on Eritrea is that the Eritrean state has been unhinged from its sense of direction and stated purpose "to build a stable political system which respects law and order, safeguards unity and peace, enables all Eritreans to lead happy and peaceful lives, guarantees basic human rights, and is free from fear and oppression, and "guaranteed through a constitutional political system" (EPLF 1994).

The Western democratic practice of civic participation and respect for individual rights and civic action provides an open field for transnational individuals and agents of foreign governments to operate with free rein to influence diaspora and refugee communities. Organizations and individuals representing the government of Eritrea view the existing diaspora and refugee crisis as an opportunity for the control and discipline of the Eritrean people. Although intensifying transnational links have produced new instruments for the state to exert control over Eritreans in troubled situations, recent events have demonstrated the weakening grip of the state. The state's lack of control is demonstrated in the people's death in multiple situations. For instance, hordes of refugees from Eritrea have drowned while crossing the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Other defectors have been abducted from refugee camps or captured by smugglers while travelling and held captive for ransom in the Sinai Desert in Egypt and Libya (there, the most unfortunate are routinely killed).

The proliferation of such stories in the global news media shows that the Eritrean state has little control over its international image.

This erosion of the state's image is further shown by the diasporas who write openly and defiantly about conditions in Eritrea, and who openly voice their disappointment with the disastrous policies of the regime. These critics in the diaspora, who are often refugees themselves, have been increasingly emboldened by their success in mobilizing themselves in public arenas abroad. Through political protests and demonstrations in Europe, Israel, the United States and Australia, and through their writings, songs of protest, and conferences, they are challenging Eritrean officials and seeking international support for their positions against the regime. The continuing, and increasingly negative, image of Eritrea has potentially grave consequences for the economic recovery of the pariah state, which is already an international outcast (Woldemariam, this volume).

   The isolationism of the state has not only had a negative impact on Eritrea, but has also impeded scholarship on the country. With almost all the avenues for conducting research closed, academics have relied on their ingenuity to find ways of studying Eritrea. Novel sources of data about Eritrea have been identified by contemporary scholars working on the country–through online communities and newly arrived refugees. As a result, these have led to the neglect of ethnic and religious diversity issues among Eritreans. So far, Eritrea's Muslims and ethnic minorities have been invisible to most researchers, and silent in such research-based academic writing. Nevertheless, the increasing focus of scholars on Eritreans abroad in Europe, Africa, the US and Canada reflects a deeper crisis of management on the part of the Eritrean state. Thus, the mismanagement of the Eritrean state has not only impacted scholarship inside Eritrea, but has also created a crisis of scholarship in Eritrean studies in general, which I have described as a broken mirror. In the next section, I explore what I mean by this.

The Broken Mirror

Today, Eritrea is not only a country in a state of exception (Agamben 1998, 2007) administered through arbitrary rule, but also in a state of crisis of scholarship. Many scholars are not allowed to legally conduct research in Eritrea, and even those who manage to enter and conduct research in Eritrea work under fear of being arrested or summarily expelled from the country. The government of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (the PFDJ, the single party that runs the Eritrean state), has allowed little space for scholars to freely conduct research and write about Eritrea. This is something that is entirely consistent with its demand for total nationalist commitment by the population to the nation. Researchers suspected of being critical of the regime's social and political policies are barred from gaining entry into Eritrea. To understand the dangers that domestic and international scholars face when writing about critical issues on Eritrea, one needs only to read the first chapter of Hepner's *Soldiers, Martyrs, Traitors, and Exiles*, and her harrowing story of the fear of being arrested and subsequent escape from Eritrea in 2005 (Hepner 2009).

This blocking of access to Eritrean research sites has not, however, prevented scholars (such as the contributors in this volume) from working on Eritrean issues; nor has it stopped them from finding Eritreans. Dan Connell discovered Eritrean refugees in nineteen countries around the world, Gaim Kibreab studied the research group in Europe, Magnus Treiber was able to gather ample data in Switzerland, Victoria Bernal encountered them through online networks, and Milena Belloni studied them in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Italy. All the scholars represented in this volume have found Eritreans almost everywhere, in refugee camps in Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East and in the archived voices, pictures, and written texts online. Even those whose articles dealt mostly on Eritreans inside Eritrea, including Amanda Cooper, Jennifer Riggan, and David Bozzini, have written

pieces that provide crucial analysis of Eritrean conditions, especially those that have driven so many Eritreans into the diaspora.

Together, their chapters itemize the economic, social, psychological, and political pressures inside Eritrea that pushed the youth to flee. And it is not only the youth that have exited Eritrea without sacrificing their national loyalty (Müller 2008; Kibreab in this volume): there are also the scholars also have migrated or exited from Eritrea without compromising their voices. These scholars focused on the plight of the people and have taken sides with those of lowest status in the Eritrean world, the refugees, who are mostly young people. This has enabled their development of novel research sites, because they took the displacement of Eritreans seriously, as a serious subject of study, and sought to explain the fundamental causes of that dislocation.

In response to these critical voices, several pro-PFDJ elements, and most prominently Eritrean-American writer, Sophia Tesfamariam, have made it their specialty to be the watchdog of academic and journalistic writings. They provide favorable perspectives on the present state of affairs in Eritrea. Sophia has targeted scholars who criticized current conditions in Eritrea, such as its militarization, the lack of rule of law, and its abuse of human and civil rights of the population. She labeled them all as "modern day carpetbaggers and scalawags" (Tesfamariam 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). She used those terms in order to discredit those writers, foreign scholars, journalists, humanitarians, and human rights activists who were critical of the state of affairs in Eritrea. She used the word "carpetbaggers" to attack all those from outside Eritrea seeking to understand the crisis in Eritrea as opportunistic outsiders. Her writings implicitly accuse them of exploiting the crisis for personal fame and profit. Moreover, she applies the word "scalawags" to smear Eritrean scholars, journalists, human rights activities, writers, and humanitarians as traitors, and unprincipled or dishonest persons. One should recall, as she apparently does not, that these are two words loaded with historical significance. They should not be employed lightly without proper discussion

and justification in any situation, let alone that of Eritrea, which bears no resemblance to the original place and time in which those words were used. That place and time was the south of the United States during the Reconstruction era (1865–1877), when those terms were first used for propaganda purposes: to discredit progressive whites (supporters of President Abraham Lincoln's faction of the Republican party) and prevent the full emancipation of blacks from the legacies and crippling effects of slavery. The term "carpetbagger" meant those northerners who were profiting or gaining power from the economic and political crisis in the South, while "scalawag" smeared progressive whites as traitors. These are odd words to apply to scholars on Eritrea. The condition of the US South during the reconstruction does not match that of postliberation Eritrea (Blight 2002; Tunnell 2006). In order for Tesfamariam's analogy to work, the current Eritrean government and its supporters would have to be viewed as similar to the post-civil war conservatives of the American south, who waged ideological battle on progressive and radical republicans. Despite using derogatory terms against scholars with whom she disagrees, Sophia Tesfamariam's smear campaign failed to identify any real weakness in the critical writings of those whom she attacked and vilified.

Eritrean leaders (and, to some extent, Eritrean society) do not seem to understand that a good society is one that allows free and critical engagement of scholars through their writings and speech. Scholars work to provide a critical gaze into society and, in the scholarly world, differences of perspectives and diagnosis are valued. Leaders and governmental elites must be able to listen to others' perspectives without treating them as an affront to their personhood, nationhood, sovereignty, or citizenship. Scholarship could serve as mirrors to states and societies and the relationships between them, and could provide critical reflections on the relationship between state and society. Free and critical scholarly engagement gives state managers and leaders mirror images of

their performances in local and international arenas, and reflects back to them their society's ills and shortcomings.

However, in order for scholars to conduct their fieldwork-based research access to their field sites is essential. In Eritrea, both the state and the society lack a culture of appreciation of critical perspectives on the state and society. The Eritrean regime conflated the criticism of its policies and actions with attacks on personhood and character of those elites in positions of power. Critical perspectives towards the existing regime and the state of affairs in Eritrea are very often seen as politically motivated acts to dismantle the sovereignty of Eritrea as a state. There is little space inside Eritrea to critically engage the public.

The problem in Eritrea is not that the dominant, hegemonic group is uninformed or does not read what is written about it. The issue is that once its members see what is written about them, and encounter critical assessment of their strength and their inadequacy, they personalize it and they become defensive. The public are still important, however: the state in Eritrea is aware of the need of gaining popular consent as an instrument of establishing its hegemony. To be hegemonic, the state has to be always learning about itself through reading what is said about it and correcting its ways through such self-reflection. Among the upper echelons of the Eritrean government, reading what is written about Eritrea is highly valued; however, they often appear unable to cope with critical comments and hence reject those criticisms as unmerited accusations, while basking only in praise. Even though these may be natural human reactions, what is not normal is the state's overreaction to all critical perspectives, to minor and major criticisms alike, and its inability to separate the criticism of a person from criticism of the practices or actions of that person. Diversity of perspectives and explorations of social and political issues is healthy and normal in the scholarly world, and should also be so in politics. State managers and leaders need to be able to listen to others' perspectives without treating other voices as an affront to their personhood, national sovereignty, or legitimacy. There should

be public space for free speech, free press, and mobility inside of the country.

However, we should listen to how new researchers who seek to conduct fieldwork in Eritrea are affected by the current paralysis of scholarship in Eritrean studies. Georgia Cole hints that she found the challenge not only from the state control of her activities inside Eritrea, but also from what she called "the polarized context within which academics operate" in the country. She found, as a new arrival in Eritrean studies, that the production of balanced analyses was challenging and, sometimes, impossible. She pondered whether it was even possible to find a fence that could serve as a middle ground for scholarship in Eritrean studies (Cole 2016). I believe the current crisis of scholarship in Eritrean studies needs to be mended through opening up spaces for free exchange of ideas and thought in and among scholars in Eritrean studies without fear of one another, or of the state's intervention and censure. For example, the state should take initiatives in greater confidence building measures towards those scholars whose works have been unnecessarily tarnished. The cases of new researchers who, like Cole, are struggling to find a stable point within the polarized field that is Eritrean scholarship indicates that many reputable scholars have been previously enchanted by the fascinating twists and turns of the Eritrean state of exception. Such forms of enchantment can have a crippling effect on new scholars.

Policy Implications

Most of the scholars in this volume have concentrated on Eritrean youth, those who left Eritrea after its liberation in 1991 as refugees. Each of their chapters provides nuanced, theoretically informed explanations of the lives and experiences of Eritreans in the diaspora. This nuanced and theorized stand did not happen by chance. I strongly believe that it is related to the state of scholarship

in Eritrean studies, which I have called a broken mirror. When mirrors are broken, solutions to public policy issues become more difficult. I will give two illustrations of this point. First, I will focus on the unresolved issue of Eritrean refugees in Sudan. Second, I illustrate some ways the impasse of the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia could be broken through a revival of the border relationships between the two peoples and reconnecting the divided families and relatives across the border. A focus on their interests would, I suggest, be more important than a concentration on the views of the power holders in Asmara and Addis Ababa.

First Illustration:

We have to start by acknowledging the existence of an important political issue whose resolution is long overdue: that of the Eritreans who have been living in refugee camps in Sudan since the mid-1960s. Their case is rarely mentioned and, indeed, often seems forgotten. The United Nations Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the Government of Eritrea, and the Sudanese government have all, in the past, made efforts to facilitate the return of these refugees to their homeland. According to Georgia Cole (this volume), the main cause of the problem of Eritrean refugees not returning to Eritrea after Eritrea's independence was the failure to find a solution that would satisfy both the Government of Eritrea and the UNHCR and donor countries. The cost and logistics of their return would have been near impossible and the failure was therefore a mutually satisfying solution for the UNHCR and the Government of Eritrea, though not a permanent or just solution for the refugees. Using the case of the 1993 Program for Refugee Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Resettlement Areas in Eritrea (PROFERI), Cole shows how the mutual construction of misunderstandings and miscommunication led to this failure of public policy in resolving the impasse of returning Eritrean refugees from Sudan.

Sadia Hassanen's study of Eritrean refugees who settled in

Kassala, a city in Eastern Sudan, where a number of Eritreans moved from the refugee camps, complicates the issue further (Hassanen 2007). She shows how the refugees would not return to Eritrea until the present government of Eritrea respects the demands of the Eritrean Liberation Front (the ELF), a rival liberation movement of the EPLF/PFDJ, even under the most ideal situation. These refugees continue to identify with and support the ELF, but the present government of Eritrea does not recognize any other competing political organizations as legitimate representatives of any segment of Eritreans (Hassanen 2007). Trying to meet the demands of those Eritrean refugees in Kassala that Sadia Hassanen studied, would mean allowing for social and cultural pluralism even at the risk of an emergence of a divided society inside Eritrea, thus dismantling the whole edifice of the nation built on a unifying slogan, "One heart, One people," (*Hade Libe Hade Hizbi*, in the local language, Tigrinya). At this point in its existence, such a demand would not be acceptable to the current regime in Eritrea, because it sees such demands as an existential threat to its status quo. The present "no-war-no-peace" state of affairs in Eritrea, however, is not a conducive situation for refugee's safe return to their homeland.

Second Illustration:

The end of the Border War between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2000 did not usher in a new era of peace and prosperity for the two countries. Instead, Eritrea, and to a lesser extent Ethiopia, entered into an unwinnable no-war-no-peace relationship with one another, an outcome which has had disastrous consequences for both countries. One of the important unappreciated consequences of the 1998–2000 Border War was that it revealed the existence of a regional economy encompassing Northern Ethiopia and Eritrea. This thriving regional economy had included both Eritrea and the Ethiopian provinces of Tigrai, Begemeder, Gojjam, and Wollo. It was a huge, unregulated regional market economy with intricate

economic interdependences and reciprocities, and the war destroyed it. As a result of the dismantling of this regional economy, the people in Northern and Western Ethiopia and Eritrea have faced, and continue to face, dismal economic lives. There is, therefore, a need today for confidence building through small-scale initiatives linking the two peoples. The two states could let people-to-people diplomacy work its way without political interference and commitment from either side. Both should be permit the reestablishment of the abruptly and arbitrarily broken family and kinship ties of those communities that straddle the borders of the two countries, something whose significance to peace building cannot be underestimated. This measure has not yet been tried or taken, but it is one that I believe should be explored.

Finally, as an endnote to this volume, I want to reemphasize the point that scholars have a responsibility to reflect on society's ills and success. In the case of Eritrea, those who dare to criticize the status quo are bitterly resented and banned. This has resulted in a state of stagnation and crisis in Eritrean scholarship. Scholarship anywhere, including in Eritrea, is at its best when tolerance and respect for scholarship exists, and when scholars are allowed to enter society at will. In return, vast and varied scholarly work serves as a mirror to the ills of the state and society, a mirror which could help state managers to pursue policies based on clear thinking and strategy.

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