

Dear PPW participants,

This is the draft of an article to be submitted to a journal. In its actual form, the text is way too long and I will have to cut some parts. I will be grateful if you have suggestions about this issue but above all, I am interested to hear from you how I can improve the ideas and discussions presented here.

I apologize for the style and the language oddities you will find in this paper. In case you want to quote this paper, please contact me first (david.bozzini@unine.ch).

Thank you,

David

Fears and Emotional Reflexivity among Eritrean Activists in Switzerland

Authors

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Introduction

This article explores different aspects of the fears experienced by Eritrean migrants who have deserted *permanent conscription* in their country and have arrived in Europe during the last decade. It focuses on social and political processes in which different categories of fears, anxieties and anticipations related to the Eritrean state and Party's transnational institutions (hereafter: the regime) are limiting, curbing but also shaping an adverse political commitment of these migrants towards the current Eritrean transnational regime¹.

Fears and emotional reflexivity have played a central role in the emergence of deserter groups in exile who call themselves “the youth” (*mānāsāy* in Tigrinya) and who oppose the current Eritrean government. Our ethnographically-based analysis contributes to the growing discussion about the role of emotions in politics and in social movement theories. In particular, it resonates with the body of studies and theories that James Jasper, Jeff Goodwin and their colleagues have developed during the last two decades (Goodwin 1997; Jasper 1998; Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2001, Flam & King 2006, Traïni 2010 ; Jasper 2011, etc.). These scholars have reintroduced emotions and affect in social movement theory in discussing their roles and importance in many processes and at various levels of analysis. They have highlighted the causal mechanisms related to emotions experienced by activists, the emotional work undertaken in social movements and the complex relationship between emotions, cognition and morality. This article contributes to this discussion by exploring the roles emotions have on the Eritrean deserters movement in exile. Our ethnographies of this movement put the emphasis on the social, cultural and political dynamics of fears in the Eritrean contentious politics. Beyond underlining causal mechanisms related to the fears experienced by young Eritreans, this article aims primarily to better understand the various dimensions and dynamics of fears that are deployed and resisted in an authoritarian context and during the emergence of the deserters' time in exile.

The emergence of protest from deserters who have arrived in Europe in recent years has been possible only through a collective re-evaluation of their fears about the regime. However, we show that such “emotional liberation” (Jasper 2011) has been undermined by moral responsibilities and family pressures, and that a politics of fear similar to that promoted by the regime has also been developed by activists against regime loyalists. We argue that emotions (and fears in particular) constitute several patterns of governance in Eritrean politics and are crucial to the construction of Eritrean subjectivities at home and in exile. Tensions, dissidence and transnational governance among the Eritrean diaspora have been analyzed already by many of our colleagues (see for instance: Hepner 2009; Conrad 2006; Bernal 2005; 2013) but the nexus between fears and politics has remained relatively unexplored, despite a long history of political violence in Eritrea. This article relies upon the analysis of the collective production of fear, mistrust and insecurity in the context of despotic governance in Eritrea

1 Despite the fact that emotions are often combined with each other (such as pride and shame or fear and hope) and are coexisting in tension during an event, we mainly focus on different types of fears. We rely on the typology developed by Jasper (2006) to distinguish urges, reflex emotions, affective allegiances, moods and moral sentiments. However, we delineate some relationships between fears and other emotions (guilt, pride, hope) as well as other moral and cognitive states such as mistrust, moral duty, etc. that have emotional textures.

made by Bozzini (2011a) and examines how these traumatic experiences are reenacted and transformed by deserters in exile. In this analysis, we discuss the role rumors have in the deployment of fears in exile. Intensification of fears of the regime's persecutions are mainly the result of the circulation of rumors and threats. Temporary easing are caused by discussions among deserters about fears and have been crucial in shaping the emerging mobilization of deserters². This would indicate that the regulation of rumors is crucial to emotional management. We also show that mistrust amongst activists is an important factor to account for understanding how fears are redeployed amongst the activists. Finally, we explore various consequences of emotional reflexivity: its central and ambivalent role in the political framing process of the movement but also how reflexivity has contributed to the fluctuation of emotion, moral duties and discourses in different situations. Migration studies have emphasized the importance of emotions towards the homeland mainly in terms of cultural, family and national longing and belonging (Svašek 2012 ; Brooks & Simpson 2012 ; Boccagni & Baldassar 2015) while fear and distress have been discussed mostly in relation to migration journeys and host countries' realities (Willen 2007; Guild 2009). While exploring the case of Eritrean deserters in Switzerland, this article attempts to start filling the gap that exists in the literature about emotions, and fears in particular, involved in exiles' political activism.

Protest organized by Eritreans in the diaspora is not a recent phenomenon. The emergence of deserters' movement (*mänäsäy*) in Western countries in 2011 was cast into an existing web of parties and so-called civil society groups that had already been opposing the current leadership for some time³. But for several reasons that we expose later, deserters preferred to organize their actions separately from these groups instead of rallying with them. Two years after its emergence in Switzerland the *mänäsäy* national assemblies convene several hundred members and sympathizers from all Swiss Cantons (i.e. States). This number remains limited when compared to the overall number of Eritreans living in Switzerland estimated to be above 25'000 in 2015.

The respondents of our respective ethnographic researches⁴ were Eritreans from 23 to 40 years old who have been enrolled permanently in National Service in Eritrea and who fled conscription. A majority of our respondents were from the Tigrinya ethnic group and almost all were male even though conscription is also mandatory for females in Eritrea. They arrived in Switzerland in recent years (2004-2010) and all have claimed political asylum⁵. They obtained residence permits and thus were not in the asylum process when we conducted interviews with them⁶. Some had refugee status with

2 Fears about the transnational regime and its power are not the only constraints to political resistance. Issues related to integration in Switzerland, command of the local language (German, French or Italian), opportunities to study or to work, asylum procedure and status, etc. also have an important impact on deserters' ability to organize and to resist against the regime in the diaspora.

3 The EPLF (Eritrean Popular Liberation Front) was competing with another Eritrean guerrilla movement, the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front) in Eritrea until the early 1980s. After its eviction from Eritrea, the ELF muted in several groups opposing the EPLF from abroad. Essentially, these groups constitute the historical opposition to the current Eritrean regime. After the independence, several coalitions and splits have reconfigured the opposition in exile. Including people defecting the regime, parties and civic organizations have constituted a loose transnational Eritrean civil society. For a recent overview of the history of Eritrean opposition see (Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad & Kjetill Tronvoll 2015)

4 David Bozzini's postdoctoral research has taken place in several countries since 2011 (SNSF Projects : "The Reach of the Eritrean State" and "Revolution Reloaded?"). Fabienne Glatthard was conducting research for her Master thesis in social anthropology at the University of Bern during 2011 ("Fear about Surveillance in the Eritrean Diaspora in Switzerland" (2012)), available at: http://www.anthro.unibe.ch/content/publikationen/arbeitsblaetter/arbeitsblatt_57/index_ger.html.

5 During the last decade, 22'000 Eritreans claimed asylum in Switzerland. They were approximately 1'000 residing in Switzerland before 2002 (<https://www.bfm.admin.ch/bfm/fr/home/publiservice/statistik.html>).

6 For methodological reasons, we have deliberately moved asylum seekers aside from our research cohort.

permanent residence rights in Switzerland while others received only subsidiary protection for political or humanitarian reasons and consequently had temporary residence permits. While all of them were members of or sympathetic to the emerging deserters' movement, some were also active members of churches, civil society organizations or Eritrean opposition parties. We also interviewed young Eritrean refugees who were carefully avoiding siding with any political groups and who wanted to keep a neutral political position regarding Eritrean politics. Unfortunately, it was not possible to carry out in-depth interviews among loyalists and Eritrean officials⁷. The ethnographic material has been collected through semi-structured interviews and group-discussions; sometimes in contextualized environment such as meetings, demonstrations or celebrations.

The following section presents the fears which exiled deserters have experienced in Eritrea and in Switzerland. The remaining sections of the article cover the ways in which some of them have reacted to these fears in recent years by building up a political momentum and protests. We argue firstly that many exiled deserters understood that fears of the regime have a political value, being instrumental to maintaining powerful transnational Eritrean state institutions and constitute in this sense an important obstacle for political mobilization against the current leadership. Two sections present in detail how the emerging *mānāsāy* movement has been shaped by discussions and actions aiming at downplaying fears of retaliation from the regime. The article concludes with a section that discuss the limits of such strategies and in the conclusion we suggest that a politics of fear is also part of the agenda of the deserters' movement.

Fears in Eritrea and among Eritrean migrants in Switzerland

Fears related to the power of the Eritrean state and its agents that emerged in the context of migration are deeply related to experiences of the despotic governance in Eritrea and to the presence of state institutions and the ruling party, the PFDJ⁸, in Europe as well as in other continents. This section discusses the fears about the state and the regime in Eritrea and abroad. We discuss how fears structure activities and define political subjectivities of exiles and how anxiety is experienced⁹ collectively in the diaspora.

Fears are central to the everyday life of most Eritreans in Eritrea but especially of those who are of an age to be conscripted into National Service¹⁰. The fears are mostly related to the state and are central to

7 We had the opportunity to have lengthy discussions with sympathizers and Party members. However, after a relatively short period of time, we were confronted with too many obstacles to be able to continue having discussions with them.

8 The People's Front for Democracy and Justice is the only party permitted in the country. It has reconfigured the guerilla movement (EPLF for Eritrean Popular Liberation Front) into a political party after the EPLF took power in Eritrea in 1991 and declared the independence of the country in 1993.

9 These fears can be of different kinds. Jasper has distinguished different types of emotions (2006) such as reflexes, moods, and moral sentiments which can designate different types of fears (for instance: reflex fear or dread, anxiety or anticipation, fear of a certain retaliation). We also want to draw attention to the fact that the danger or risk that causes various fears might be experienced differently, for instance either as a result of an event or a situation or simply as an outcome of a discussion or a rumor. Risks and dangers are imagined, anticipated and assumed or experienced in a more «straightforward» way.

10 National Service conscription (*haḡārawi aḡāḡlot*) of both male and female Eritrean citizens reaching the legal age of eighteen (GoE 1995/82) is the central pillar of the Warsay Yikealo Development Campaign aiming more at controlling militarily all social activities and at developing a command economy (Gaim 2009) than at protecting national sovereignty. Both military and civilian National Service has become indefinite in time: no demobilization has taken place since 1998 and the outburst of the Ethio-Eritrean war. The citizenship rights for conscripts are limited. They are not allowed to have a passport nor to leave the country, they cannot have land allocated or official documents without prior formal authorization.

the operations of a despotic state power and governance¹¹ (Bozzini 2011a). The main concerns for conscripts and their families are about police harassment including violence and incarceration without trial, reassignment in National Service and new regulations threatening access to all sorts of state supplies and services. Additionally, bureaucratic arbitrariness and dead-ends, dependency on official's discretionary powers, absence of legal protection and repression caused by failed attempt at surveillance all contribute to the regime's despotic governance and its “politics of fear” (Bozzini 2011a; 2011b; UNHCHR 2015). Fears, dreadful expectations and anxiety significantly contribute to define both the daily relationship between state agents and other citizens and the latter's beliefs about state power and their subjection to it (Bozzini 2011a). However, uncertainties and insecurity caused by the leadership and the state institutions have also created the condition for a “dispersed despotism” (Hansen 2005; Tarlo 2001) among the population, promoting the anticipation of fear spread by rumors and above all, denunciation between fellow citizens and in particular, neighbors. A situation that demonstrates Gross' version of totalitarianism (2002) in which the police act not only as an oppressive force but also allow citizens to engage in blackmailing and silencing their rivals (Bozzini 2014). A widespread acknowledgment of the limits of solidarity (even within a family) and the profound sense of mistrust among friends, neighbors and colleagues represents the two main elements of the fragmentation of the Eritrean society. In such a situation of intense and pervasive insecurity, anticipations, anxieties and fears deeply shape Eritrean subjectivities. Coupled with permanent conscription and the absence of freedom, there has been a mass exodus, with tens of thousands of young Eritreans deserting and fleeing their country to seek refuge in neighboring countries or further afield in the Middle East, America or Europe during the last decade¹². Virtually all asylum jurisdictions in the global North, including the European Court of Human Rights and the UNHCR, have acknowledged that deserters captured or deported in Eritrea are facing disproportionate sanctions that are far beyond usual military penalties imposed in other countries.

Fears about the Eritrean despotic state and its state agents do not vanish when one crosses the border into Sudan or Ethiopia. Fears accompany the migrants and take new shapes. If uncertainties due to migration, asylum seeking and exile generate many anxieties, fear about the reach of the Eritrean state beyond its territory is a discrete category of concerns that had considerable importance for most of the Eritrean migrants. Deserters in particular fear being deported back to Eritrea. Especially in Sudan, where many of them escape. They fear abduction as coordinated by Eritrean state agents and the complicit local police. In Europe, they mainly fear surveillance and retaliation to their families back home (Bozzini 2015). Exiled deserters anticipate many types of retaliation from Eritrean authorities also abroad, should they challenge the Eritrean government.

These common fears and beliefs among new migrants are closely related to the presence of loyalists of the current government in diaspora communities and the presence of transnational institutions of the Eritrean state and the unique PFDJ Party that has emerged from the EPLF in the early 1990s. During the 1970s and the 1980s, tens of thousands of Eritrean refugees fleeing the hostilities of the war for independence settled in several countries in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and America. Their support for the Eritrean national cause was channeled by a broad international network of associations

11 This modality of governance based on fear, arbitrariness, unpredictability, unaccountability and violence does not refer only to state management of conscripts but is also deeply rooted in the political history of state violence in Eritrea and the three decades of insurgency against the Ethiopian rule (1961-1991).

12 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 even intensified since 2007 with more than 17,000 new registrants in the refugee camps set up near the Eritrean border and over 20'000 in 2009. In 2011, the UNHCR bureau in Kassala (unpubl. document) estimated that on average 3,000 Eritreans arrived in Sudan each month and 1,000 in Ethiopia. Most people who registered in the camps were young men (between 17 and 25) and nearly all mentioned conscription to National Service as the reason for leaving their country (UNHCR 2009).

coordinated by the EPLF (Teclé & Goldring 2013; Ruth 1995; Hepner 2009). This dense network has been transformed after EPLF's accession to state power. Nowadays, these institutions, founded on a previous dense network of EPLF offices established before the independence (Hepner 2009), include Embassies and Consulates, Party bureaux, Party youth's organization (YPFDJ), Mass Organizations, community centers and other local associations close to the regime. Some Eritrean refugees from this first-wave (and some of their children born in exile) have remained loyal to the Eritrean leadership and are nowadays active in the new and the revived associations hosted in Switzerland.

Deserters can experience unease even when arriving in a country like Switzerland where relatively few fellow-citizens loyal to the regime are living. They fear Eritrean state surveillance and the presence of state agents monitoring the local communities. The acknowledgment of a ubiquitous power of the Eritrean state is condensed in the Tigrinya expression "*Id mengestena nwhi iyu*", which means "the hand of our government is long". Fitsum, another deserter who requested asylum in Switzerland in 2006, declared to us that: "[...] *they [EPLF/PFDJ] are very good at threatening their opponents abroad*".¹³

This fear of surveillance was widespread already during asylum application processes, where Eritreans supposedly close to the Party were working as translators in state institutions (including the police and the Federal Office for Migration) and NGOs in charge of delivering welfare benefits and legal assistance to asylum seekers and indigent refugees. It was widely believed that such translators could collect and report asylum seekers' personal information to the Embassy. Considering that in-depth interview is conducted by immigration officers and a lot of personal information has to be shared with social workers during the first years of settlement, it was believed that translators were therefore providing useful information for the Eritrean regime who were able to keep files on citizens in exile up to date. Sharing personal information with civil servants and social workers through the intermediary of such translators was perceived as a threat insofar information could be used to exert pressure on exiles and on their family back home eventually. Presence of translators supposedly close to the regime reignited the fear of informers, the unease caused by state surveillance and the risk of denunciation, blackmailing and intimidation experienced in Eritrea (Bozzini 2011a) inducing Semere, like many others, to declare to us that "*wherever you go, there is PFDJ, they follow you everywhere, they don't let us be [alone]*".

Although, unease, fears and mistrust are associated to a broader social spectrum, like in Eritrea. For instance, some deserters chose to rely only on a few people and to visit a limited number of friends and relatives in order to avoid taking any unconsidered risks in the local Eritrean community in which they just arrived. Yonas, who was a National Service member assigned in a Ministry in Asmara, immediately adopted strict strategies of dissimulation to avoid being harassed by loyalists when he arrived in Switzerland. To protect himself, he systematically blurred information about his place of residence. For several months people thought that he was living in Lausanne while he was dispatched by the Swiss authorities to another state. Like his friend who fled from similar offices, Yonas was using a Facebook account (posting pictures, etc.) intending to deceive people about the European country in which he had arrived. These few accounts illustrate how mistrust continues among the migrants and takes on new forms in the communities in exile. Strong feelings of mistrust toward acquaintances and extended family as well as vague expectations of harassment by state agents and fellow citizens alike is revived in exile due to the presence of loyalists to the regime and opportunists looking to take advantage of others in order to secure services from the Consulate or Party members. In such situations in which surveillance, risk of harassment and denunciation are not bound to certain areas or circles, and

13 For previous accounts of threats exerted on PFDJ contestants see for instance: (Hepner 2008; Conrad 2006; Al-Ali, Black, and Koser 2001)

in which many people remain vague and secretive of their whereabouts, gossiping flourishes and often intensifies mistrust, suspicion and deception. In this sense, people like Yonas or Fitsum not only fear the unmediated scrutiny of Eritrean state agents in Switzerland but their mistrust is more diffuse and murky, adding up to a prevailing feeling of anxiety and unease within the community. Such suspicions stimulate gossip and shape the deserter's everyday behavior, leading to daily discussions about who is who, who asks what and why, in order to uncover individuals with bad intentions and potential spies or covert agents¹⁴.

Eritreans not only expect to be monitored by the Eritrean state in exile, they also acknowledge that the current leadership can retaliate at any time on their families back home¹⁵. From 2005 to 2011, this has been the case especially for those who fled the country while they were assigned in National Service: the state retaliated on families of deserters with imprisonment of up to eight months of one relative and a fine of about 3000 US dollars (50'000 Nakfa) (Bozzini 2015). Many people have also consistently argued that some deserters' families in Eritrea have been harassed by the local administration and denied access to services even after they have paid the fine. These practices have considerably fueled discourses of fear about spies and undercover informers among exiled deserters (*ibid.*). The presence of loyalists who can report personal information to Party leaders or the Embassy at any time and more generally, the belief about the state's capacities to identify and locate someone and his/her family across borders have prompted many Eritreans in exile to fear anything from the Eritrean state and PFDJ members. In this sense, deserters continue to fear arbitrary measures in Eritrea knowing that their families are vulnerable but they also fear being blacklisted and blackmailed by state agents or loyalists in the diaspora. New threats and pressures can be exerted at any time and have justified precautionary measures as Hagos explained to us: "Everything is possible with HGDF [Tigrinya acronym for PFDJ]. We always have to be careful because they are smart." In public celebrations organized by the Party, Semere was asked several times to sign a petition against UN sanctions but he always declined. Since then he assumed that:

"[t]hey studied everything about my village, everything. As well about my family. One has certainly contacted the government, you know. Then they make some problems ... the system is like this! If my family is now asked to pay money, then it is because of this system."

Measures considered as intimidation and coercion are also often considered to be exerted in a "smart" and implicit way. If loyalists do not exert any form of coercion on exiled deserters, nevertheless sometimes a simple invitation to an event, a request to sign a petition or the collection of money for a development project can be experienced as a form of blackmail that obliges compliance in order to avoid all sorts of potential problems with the Eritrean authorities. In this sense, fears delineate social fractures or differentiate groups from each other along risks and expectations as Ahmed rightly claims: "[w]e might note here that fear *does something*; it reestablishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface, as a reading that produces the surface (shivering, recoloring)" (Ahmed 2004: 126). Many exiled deserters distrust Eritreans of certain groups of co-nationals who arrived with the first migrants' wave and who are perceived mostly as members of the Party. Others are even suspicious about their own relatives who have deserted during the war against Ethiopia that raged between 1998 and 2000. Many of our research participants indeed correlate the time of people's arrival in Europe to a gradation of political loyalty toward the regime and use this as a robust tool to categorize quickly their fellow citizens according to their political standpoint¹⁶.

14 These attempts to unveil informers are shared amongst many other communities in exile (see for instance: Kendzior 2015).

15 Most of them fear also troubles and exclusion from the community in Switzerland.

16 According to this classification the *mānāsāy* refers to individuals that were drafted into National Service for an

To fear and mistrust might be therefore a deliberate strategy to avoid risks for oneself and for one's close friends and relatives. In this perspective, fear is not a reflex emotion directly related to a discrete event that has happened or that might happen soon. Fear is indeed not only closely related to other emotions or feelings such as guilt but is also closely related to ideas of responsibilities and moral obligations not to be accountable for any prejudice that might occur to relatives or acquaintances. Such unease and individual strategies have of course larger social consequences and induce or curb collective dynamics but are considered more as the effect of the evil governance of the Eritrean Party-state than understood as promoted by individuals' agency. In other words, "the government" (*mängästi*) or "the Party" ("HGDF" Tigrinya acronym for PFDJ) conceals the fact that exiled deserters themselves have a role in actualizing and stimulating the propagation of fears and mistrust. In this regard, rumors play a crucial role in spreading new fears.

The most fear-inducing rumors spreading in the diaspora are about covert surveillance and its supposed effects: when Yoel returned from a weekend spent with his sister, he talked about news that scared him. His sister has heard that Robel, a well-known Eritrean living for decades in Switzerland (with a permanent permit and apparently not considered as an enemy of the Eritrean government since he visits family in Eritrea regularly during the last years) has been arrested at his arrival at Asmara airport a few days ago. Yoel explained that people were discussing whether or not Awet attended an opposition meeting the last time he was in the capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Abeba. In this case, Yoel's sister was not only frightened for the fate of Awet but this story and the assumptions made around the arrest were after all nurturing the idea that the Eritrean government gathers intelligence from the diaspora and can harm anyone whenever it decides to do so. Circulation of rumors and assumptions exacerbate fears. This exemplifies well the importance of what Ahmed calls an affective economy: individuals are "nodal point[s] in the [affective] economy, rather than its origin and destination" and in this regard, fear has to be understood more as a feeling "produced only as an effect of its circulation", rather than only as a feeling inhabiting the subjects (Ahmed 2004: 120-121).¹⁷ This perspective allows the underlining of the temporality of fears. Rather than an indefinite accumulation, fears tend to dissolve or are forgotten, having less significance in people's daily lives, before being potentially reignited.

However fearful rumors can have longstanding effects such as casting doubt on an individual or an institution by supposing hidden agendas behind apparently harmless and innocent deeds. After having outlined an integration course on health and schooling in cooperation with an Eritrean cultural association, a Swiss NGO intended to contact new Eritrean refugees who had settled in the immediate surroundings. The NGO approached the Eritreans with a letter written by the NGO and translated by the cultural association. The people receiving this letter mistakenly thought that the NGO had previously provided their own private addresses to the cultural association and that therefore this association now possessed all their addresses and personal details. This gave rise immediately to suspicions amongst the new Eritrean refugees and a small group of them decided to write a letter of protest to the NGO to cancel the program since they considered that the cultural association and its members were both close to the PFDJ chapter in Switzerland. The refugees' letter stated that the course was set up with the main objective of collecting information on the Eritrean refugees recently settled in the area and asked the NGO to stop their collaboration with the local cultural association and its

undetermined period of time after 2001 and who fled afterwards. However, the *mänäsay* includes also 40+ years old individuals who arrived in Europe at the same time as the National Service conscripts. Many of them were in the military or the civilian service after the 1998-2000 border war.

17 This is of course also valid for other emotions such as hope or anger. Circulation of rumors about the death of the Eritrean President in April 2012 provoked an enormous number of hopeful and angry messages but also drawings and montages on several social networks.

members. The integration course had to be cancelled because these allegations spread widely and compromised participation. Additionally, the NGO discontinued its collaboration with some of the members of the cultural association. Rumors scatter fearful assumptions that can divert all kind of projects or intentions and easily defame people and institutions, thus expanding distrust in new social arenas. In this perspective, assumptions based on fear (however true and legitimate) have socially salient effects such as shaping social boundaries and distances between subjectivities or groups.

The emergence of the deserters' movement

For several years, the fear of surveillance and blackmailing, anxiety and the fear about feeling guilty for those who may be in trouble in Eritrea have considerably constrained deserters from speaking out and challenging the Eritrean government and its supporters in the diaspora. However, despite considerable threats and fears of retaliation, a few deserters refused to remain passive and they started to organize actions against the regime.

The emergence of the *mānāsāy* movement occurred in various countries of Europe and Northern America in early 2011 during the Arab Spring and more precisely when Egyptian protesters occupied Tahrir square. However, deserters did not rally in local plazas at first. The emergence of the movement took place online on social media sites, in particular on Facebook. Anonymous postings online were crucial for inducing the emotional liberation that characterized the emergence of the movement (Japser 2011). Anonymously, deserters posted burlesque and gory collages representing the Party or the President Isayas followed by hate messages. Many also posted messages announcing that they were no longer afraid of the regime. These anonymous protestations against the regime and the Eritrean president rapidly gathered thousands of followers on some Facebook group pages where the first mobilization took place and public demonstrations in several cities were discussed¹⁸. Eventually, most of the local groups merged into two main transnational organizations: EYSC (Eritrean Youth Solidarity for Change) and EYSNS (Eritrean Youth Solidarity for National Salvation). In Switzerland, the first *mānāsāy* activists decided to call as many fellow Eritreans together as possible in order to demonstrate in front of a venue rented by the regime supporters and Party officials to celebrate the Eritrean twentieth Independence Day in June of 2011.

Their action was a fiasco. The local police fined many activists who were unable to protest in front of the venue and to prevent the festivities. But more importantly, protesters were quite disappointed about the number of people who answered their call. There were not much more than a hundred compared to almost a thousand Eritreans attending the celebration organized by the regime supporters. The organizers acknowledged that Eritreans didn't dare to come and to protest openly despite many having declared themselves ready to act against the regime a few days before the demonstration. Anonymous mobilization online was much more successful than direct face-to-face action against the regime's supporters, which was shockingly disappointing. During a follow-up meeting, unpreparedness on the part of the protesters was mentioned as a cause of failure to negotiate with local police. Leaders of the movement also acknowledged they had informed potential participants about the demonstration too late but fear about potential retaliation was mentioned as the principal cause accounting for the lack of mobilization. The following debate alluded to the long-established practice of intimidations and insinuations from regime supporters (Hepner 2009). Fear of retaliation against protesters was not only a justification of the failure, but the debate shifted toward the idea that fears should be challenged and undermined within the community in order to be able to conduct further actions against the regime.

18 This phenomena represents an online version of the satire and the carnivalesque protest mentioned by Flam (2005) in the case of Poland and East Germany.

Overcoming the fears of potential protesters became a necessity for organizing further actions as was the case for high-risk social movements such as the popular upheaval in East Germany before the fall of the Wall (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001). In other words, the movement entered into a phase of intense emotional management (Hochschild 1983) to encourage potential protesters to join the movement. But within the few groups who were at the inception of the *mānāsäy* movement in Switzerland, undermining the fears of potential retaliation became a crucial framing process in and of itself: *mānāsäy* debated about the fears experienced by Eritreans in the diaspora about the transnational power of the regime. Thus, besides being a private concern, such fears became a public issue discussed amongst deserters. Discussions about fears at meetings have shaped their political agenda, their strategies and their moral position with respect to the Eritrean regime and the popular support from which it continues to benefit. Since then, they have successfully organized demonstrations and rallies, have tried several times to cancel Party meetings and eventually, they intervened, sometimes violently, at various events organized by regime supporters.

The following pages present three types of discussions that were the main component of the management of fears in the *mānāsäy* movement. In framing fears as a central instrument of power of the regime, the first type of discourses underlined the moral necessity to understand, evaluate and manage certain fears in order to undermine the domination of the regime in the communities in exile. The second type of discussions have put the emphasis on the negative effects of rumors and have tried to curb this phenomenon for managing fears within the movement and to avoid disengagement. The third type of discourse introduced the importance of solidarity and proof of the absence of retaliation after actions to build confidence. The first two points have not been discussed by Goodwin and Pfaff (2001) but we believe they might have also been important issues debated within protesters circles in East Germany in 1989. Our case study is however quite different in that most Eritrean protests against the regime are taking place in exile¹⁹.

Politicizing fears or understanding fears as a political mechanism

In declaring that “*The government needs the fear of the people*” Nebi, like many other deserters, claimed that the politics of fear is a powerful and indispensable tool of the regime. For most of our research participants in Eritrea and in Europe, fears are deliberately crafted by the political elite to destabilize populations and to undermine the civil disobedience of those who disagree with government politics. According to the *mānāsäy*, the government promotes fears in order to limit dissidents’ mobilization in the diaspora in Switzerland. In this section, we argue that emotional reflexivity as demonstrated by the *mānāsäy* represented another dynamic (and in this sense a prolongation) of the emotional liberation that at first sparked off anonymously in social media. It is as if the expression of the liberation of fear by the Eritrean regime took on a more distinctive political flavor: the first performative speech act transmitted on social media supported not only by an understanding of the regime's deep politics and manipulative logic but also by the moral imperative to challenge such state of affairs. In other words, anger expressed by the deserters progressively allowed them to reflect on their own responsibility to contributing to a certain type of power relationship thriving both in and out of exile.

This understanding derives from various observations made by activists especially after their failure to mobilize a larger part of the community against the celebration of Independence in 2011. One major

¹⁹ Almost no collective protest happened in Eritrea from 2001 to 2015. One attempt of coup by a military faction took place in January 2013 in Asmara but was disrupted only after few hours. Since 2011, few actions of civil disobedience are taking place from time to time in Asmara only.

observation relates to the sheer number of active loyalists and their role in the diaspora. The *mānāsäy* see them as pivotal in supporting the effective influence of the regime abroad. Indeed they relay all kind of official discourses and government measures, and organize locally various events for the Party. In this sense, loyalists are seen as the instruments of the Eritrean political elite, carrying out the instructions of the Party and government officials. For the *mānāsäy* the loyalists embody the Eritrean regime abroad, as Semere explained us:

“These people are dangerous for us, they are here to make us fear. They do this work for the government because maybe they really believe what they say and have not a clue about the real situation in Eritrea or they maybe do this work selfishly because they just want to travel there or build a house there”.

Many exiled deserters believe that loyalists induce fears about the state in diaspora communities simply because they are under pressure to comply with orders or because it serves their vested interests. Few believe that loyalists create tensions because they are ideologically in support of the regime’s leaders.

Experiences of harassment, intimidation and pressure exerted by the loyalists constitute another cluster of observations raised by our research participants. Woldu concludes that the loyalists:

“[...] give information about newly arrived immigrants, they try to destroy our community here, [...] they do their work for the regime very secretly, always only secretly”.

However, dissidents have trouble in identifying clearly all the loyalists who might be harmful and this gave rise to ceaseless suspicions, promoting mistrust and fears within the diaspora. Active loyalists are difficult to identify especially for deserters who have recently arrived in a new community abroad. As Mikiel observed, loyalists are often seen as playing a double-game:

“principally they intimidate people by asking them for money, they pressure them to pay [tax] and make them fear by giving them a hint about possible retaliations that their families might suffer. They harass the ones they know that attend the meetings of the opposition. But on the other hand, those same persons, they ask for asylum and express criticism about the dictator.”

In such a murky situation, new asylum seekers like Simon are often reluctant to express their grievances about the Eritrean regime to people they don’t know well²⁰:

“I just cannot trust this man [...], when he asks me about a new person, from where he is, what he does, why did he come etc., then I just never answer the truth, cause I don’t know what he might do with my information”

Deserters do not automatically present themselves as active dissidents and many of them prefer to keep a neutral political position and do not want to voice their criticism of the current government and the Party. They also prefer to be discreet about their political views with friends and relatives as well, in case they might be disclosing their opinions to loyalists. Since many Eritreans hesitate to clearly express their grievances and their political ideas, people often do not know about the political opinion of their friends and acquaintances. As a result, doubts and suspicions become even more salient at a local level and also limit relationships of trust. Amlosom explained the paradox of feeling free while applying obvious self-censorship:

²⁰ People from the same region of origin, the same village, the same *enda* (Tigrinya lineage) are more easily trusted, the same goes with childhood friends and military and migration-route companions.

“I feel free, I feel safe. I don’t fear anything. But I never speak to nobody about politics [...]. If I would speak about politics, then the questions might come and I don’t want to let people know my political thoughts, I don’t want to put my family in danger.”

Similarly, Hailu explained that: *“People being trapped in fear are not able to voice their political opinion and to stand against the regime”* echoing what another Eritrean declared to a journalist in 2009:

“Even here, we cannot have trust in each other. All of the exiles have claimed political asylum but nevertheless most of them refuse to denounce the current Eritrean government. They do not fear for themselves, but they have concerns about their families living in Eritrea.” (Mounier-Kuhn 2009)²¹.

In this regard, Temesghen understood this situation as an effect of fear mongering that impacts positively on the support for the current Eritrean government:

“It doesn’t create a good understanding, this fear and mistrust. [...] That there is no trust, this helps a lot the supporters.”

Deserters acknowledged that such silences and mistrust considerably hinder the political discussion and network-building necessary to the formation of a movement able to challenge the regime. In this sense, such fears and mistrust were understood as politics. Accordingly, if a person does not evaluate the consequences of his or her own fears about the regime and the loyalists, he or she is considered as a victim of what dissidents see as the regime’s tactics. Our research participants declared that the lack of trust which they observe in the diaspora is a prolongation of the fears they experienced in Eritrea and the strategies they developed to keep safe from repression²². Such habits are difficult to change, as Tewolde carefully indicated:

“Those refugees are used to mistrust, they grew up under fear and here [in Switzerland] the fear is totally fabricated by the people themselves, because they are just used to thinking that they have to be afraid of everybody. As they attribute power to do harm to everybody, they create auto-censorship”.

The fears our research participants mentioned coincide with two different cognitive processes of unclear personification. The first one is related to the fear of potential retaliation. Such fears are more an anxiety (a mood in Jasper’s typology) than a reflex emotion. Although such dread can be experienced, or at least foreseen, in the sense that these threats are impersonated by regime supporters, it remains difficult for many deserters to clearly identify who the potentially harmful supporters are. As a result, the presence of substantial menace remains vague. Fuzziness is also an attribute of the second type of fears that derives from the experience of dispersed despotism in Eritrea. For a certain period of time, deserters feel uneasy about publicly disclosing their political views. Such unease is another complex mental state that is caused by uncertainty and the lack of trust within Eritrean communities. Such individual wariness and discretion have clear systemic affects: it contributes to continuous uncertainties, mistrust and suspicion amongst Eritreans in exile and certainly accounts as a problem for mobilization and more generally as a barrier in organizing collectively. Such unease is rather diffuse and it was difficult to collect definite reasons for it beside a general principle of precaution²³. Our

21 Authors’ translation.

22 See Bozzini (2011a, 2011b).

23 Reasons might be social tensions or conflicts as well as a desire to maintain a wide spectrum of relationships in a new social and cultural environment.

research participants also acknowledged their own role in nurturing these two types of fears and in doing so understood their emotions toward fellow citizens are actually part of what they should challenge.

This first type of discourse is what prompted the *mānāsāy* to adopt emotional mechanisms to undermine fears and unease. Moreover, these discourses of the regime's production of a fearful environment and the participative role of many in this state of affairs is part of the framing process of the *mānāsāy* movement that utilizes emotions, emotional reflexivity and emotional management at its core. The emotional reflexivity that informs our research participants' discourses in highlighting the widespread responsibility of exiles does not function to downplay fears and unease but helps to frame the role of fears and unease into a normative and political framework. From the anger related to the regime's production of fears, the *mānāsāy* acknowledge a popular responsibility for such a state of affairs. In other words, emotional liberation was considered quite incomplete at this stage. Emotional labour was still necessary and became even central in the emerging *mānāsāy* movement. It is however important to note that the acknowledged social construction of the fear and unease experienced in the Eritrean communities does not undermine its reality. On the contrary and quite in contrast to fear management mechanisms aimed at depleting or even sometimes deprecating such emotions amongst potential protesters, emotional reflexivity further solidifies the awareness of these fears. But at the same time, emotional reflexivity frames these existing fears into a moral and political framework that helps to challenge them²⁴. Ultimately in this case, emotional reflexivity is inherently part of emotional management mechanisms. Like Tewolde and Temesghen, other dissidents not only acknowledged a government's politics of fear but they also engaged with the social and political consequences which these fears induce in the diaspora communities. Considering this, the early *mānāsāy* have been discussing different strategies to neutralize the fears in order to mobilize more people.

Downplaying fears and reflexive behavior of rumors

Activists have tried to delegitimize fears of the regime in the diaspora by promoting reflexivity and self-criticism of common fears about retaliation. In particular, they attempted to redefine the boundaries of the transnational regime and the limits of its reach in reshaping beliefs and discourses about its power and policies. They especially have tried to undermine the role of rumors in the community, arguing that many of them trigger “unnecessary” fears, unease and anticipation. For instance, Zersenay adopted such a discourse in depicting certain fears as useless or unnecessary:

“We don't live in Eritrea, we live now in Europe and PFDJ cannot do all the bad things they can do in Eritrea without being punished. They cannot kill me here, they cannot put me in prison, and they cannot kidnap me and bring me back to Eritrea. No, they cannot do all this, so why should I fear?”

As Jasper noted recently “protest leaders work hard to persuade their followers to feel and display the “right” emotions.” (Jasper 2014: 345-6). Aside from politicizing and moralizing fears about the regimes tactics and reactions, the control of rumors has been a crucial means to manage emotions within and around the *mānāsāy* movement. Debates raging amongst activists ended up classifying fears under a binary model: on the one hand, unnecessary and meaningless, on the other hand legitimate and reasonable. Similar to the case presented by King (2006), this re-evaluation of fears distinguished inappropriate emotions that were arising from a restimulation of past experiences from those that

24 Such acknowledgment of the fears and unease experienced by exiles and deserters in particular followed also another rationality that is in line with the discourses deserters have with the immigrations authorities, the media and ultimately with the researchers that are part of their self-presentation as deserters, exiles and victims.

remained appropriate to the present situation (*ibid.*: 882). In doing so, the leaders aimed at getting rid of a general sense of anxiety, far fetched anticipations and reflex fears conveyed mainly by rumors within the community. From Zersenay's point of view for instance, government spies are not so present in Switzerland as some rumors had it. He also had doubts about Eritrean officials deciding to harm dissidents residing abroad in the same way as they openly and arbitrarily harm people in Eritrea.

However, fear of spies is very common in Eritrean communities abroad and was difficult to downplay in a "chronic fear situation" (King 2006). Many explanations and warnings include beliefs regarding covert surveillance. Every time suspicion raised, it required considerable energy and time to move away from such debates. This was the case when, in the middle of a national meeting of the *mänäsäy* one participant raised the issue and asked if it was wise to continue discussing about which upcoming strategies to embrace. He bluntly declared that it was obvious that spies from the Party were attending the meeting and he asked how many people wanted to know who were the regime's undercover informers among themselves. The ongoing discussion and decision-making were disrupted for a while. But eventually, the leaders convinced the audience to put this issue to one side and asked the whistleblower to leave the meeting. Participants around us were telling us that it was obvious that informers were present but addressing the issue would have created a complete mess that could possibly turn into a fight and a factionalization of the movement. At another occasion, more personal fears arose such as Omar's who disclosed to his friends his reluctance to continue engaging politically against the regime:

"Who knows what happens in ten or twenty years? When I die, they will maybe not let my body be transferred to Eritrea unless I follow now the main demands they [the regime] have"

His friends vehemently contested Omar's statement and declared his fears meaningless, driven by an individualistic consideration and based on vague information about one recent story that made the headlines for weeks in the Eritrean communities across the globe²⁵. One was quick to claim that Omar's statement was a lame justification for not acting responsibly for the community and for the wellbeing of his co-nationals in Eritrea. Similarly, activists often denounce the silence and passivity of most Eritreans in the diaspora, claiming that the motivation of fear which they use to decline invitations to protest publicly is driven by their interest in keeping a good relationship with family members, neighbors or acquaintances from the Party. Affective ties (romantic, familial, friendships, etc.) external to the movement are important in understanding protest dynamics and level of mobilization (Goodwin 1997). In the case of Eritrean families, "family withdrawal" is an important factor that accounts for disengagement (see below): Eritreans are often ambivalent about political loyalism as the result of multiple and opposing loyalties within the same family. It is not rare that deserters in exile have an older brother or an uncle who is a high-rank military officer or an active Party member. They may also have cousins or other family members in exile who are strong supporters of the regime.

The distinction made by activists between legitimate fears and lame justification allowed them to challenge the people ranking in "the Eritrean silent majority" and sometimes to blackmail the recalcitrants, even claiming publicly that they were hidden supporters of the regime. Family ties, reluctance to join the protest movement and disclose political views perpetuate the circulation of gossip within the communities and spreads online on social media. Contrary to rumors, gossiping wasn't subject to control. However, it played a crucial role in discrediting leaders and blaming people to become PFDJ snitches, as detailed in another section.

25 The Eritrean government did not authorize the transfer to Eritrea of the corpse of Naizghi Kiflu from the UK where this famous regime cadre (and close friend of the President) was when he died.

Despite these attempts to control rumors, fears continued to be easily influenced by them and they fluctuate considerably over time. Rumors were paralyzing the activist's work to ease the atmosphere and were therefore crucial to understanding how fears are negotiated. Rumors often reignited fears about the government's power to harm people in Eritrea or in the diaspora. Considering that from the activists' point of view the regime needs to spread rumors in order to stir up trouble, they were carefully monitoring them and were trying to limit their negative impacts on commitment. During a focus group discussion in April 2011 with four *mānäsäy* members, one of them, Tedros, shared the news of recent punishments imposed in Eritrea on the family of an activist living in Switzerland:

“Simon burned a photograph of Isaias [Eritrean President] at a demonstration two months ago. His mother was imprisoned in Eritrea some days after the demonstration and let free again after two weeks. This happened because Simon has burnt the picture”

The story came as a part of a rumor about a loyalist who allegedly denounced participants in a demonstration about migrants' human rights in Geneva. His friends participating in the focus group reprimanded Tedros, arguing that instead of a confirmed story he was just spreading a rumor that was fueling an unnecessary fear amongst the Eritreans in Switzerland. From their point of view, it was obvious that the relation between the imprisonment of an old Eritrean mother and the political activities of her son in Switzerland was not proven. They argued that there could have been many other reasons that could have caused her imprisonment. After a long discussion, the *mānäsäy* participating at the focus group concluded that their leaders should be exemplary in not spreading unverified information. Such vehement reaction illustrates *mānäsäy*' attempts to manage emotions through the control and the definition of what is relevant information. In certain situations, it was a form of collectively sanctioned censorship²⁶.

Fears considered legitimate by activists are those that are impeding individuals from harming their family or the community. Fears related to putting at risk the family in Eritrea were mainly tolerated but discussions often underlined that such risks were not important and should not hinder one's political commitment. Activists who took part in demonstrations assessed the probability that something might occur to their relatives in Eritrea. Kifle recalled that his parents had already suffered due to his flight²⁷ but emphasized that:

“You will never know, why she was imprisoned. You have no idea, what has occurred in Eritrea. Maybe your siblings there have done something wrong. Maybe it was only a coincidence, that she was arrested. How can you say that that they reacted on your actions?”

Thus, the *mānäsäy* were navigating between the acknowledgment of a politics of fear and awareness of the existence of risks on the one hand, and on the other the necessity to downplay, or at least regulate fearful rumors. In other words, they were trapped between the “good” and necessary fears that protect individuals and the “bad” ones that limit mobilization²⁸. Acknowledging the legitimacy of certain fears was important at particular times, either to recognize the burden felt by fellow citizens or to concur with queries, discourses and information from journalists, civil servants or researchers. At the same time, the *mānäsäy* tried implicitly to challenge fears (or the rumors inducing them) aside from those related to potential or actual retaliations targeting themselves, close relatives or acquaintances. However, the significance of potential threats were often subject to disagreement.

26 However, we never came across taboos, topics of discussion that have been avoided in the long run.

27 Kifle's father spent several weeks in jail and his family was asked to pay the 50'000 Nakfa fine (about 3000 USD) (about this measure and its consequences see: Bozzini 2015)

28 We use the word “fear” here to generally speak about all sorts: dread, anticipation, anxiety, etc.

In the case of a repressive, destabilizing and secretive governance, the presence of emotional management in a social movement might imply the control of rumors to induce and maintain mobilization. In the same fashion, emotional reflexivity used to both acknowledge certain fears and repeal others can be included in the list of mechanisms mentioned by Pfaff and Goodman (2001) in their study of two high-risk social movements. They mention six mechanisms shared by both US and East German Civil Rights movements: intimate networks, dynamics of mass meetings, strong identification of the activists with the movements, shaming, formal training in civil disobedience techniques, mass media coverage, and two others only in the later, firearms and belief in divine protection (2001: 286-7). Regarding meetings, these scholars underline the importance of emotional discourses, songs and protest chants that create a collective consciousness. Control over information and rumors circulating in such meetings as well as emotional reflexivity might be the other side of the same coin as they undermine fear and cowardice. In addition, we saw that shaming is another mechanism that is associated with the two others. The tensions we have mentioned between the good and the bad fears as well as the necessity to acknowledge or disregard fears shows the nuance, ambivalence and fluctuations (temporal and contextual) of the attempts to manage emotion in a group. If formal training, mass media coverage, firearms and belief in divine protection were not significant in the *mānāsāy* movement during our research, the next section discusses how courage and solidarity were induced during meetings. While intimate ties, affectual relationships and identification with the movement are discussed later.

Acting and performing against fears: proofs and solidarity

Another strategy to downplay fears amongst activists and to convince the “silent majority” in the larger Eritrean community has been to gather evidence from one’s own activist experiences to demonstrate the unfoundedness of some fears and to argue that public political actions have never been sanctioned by threats or retaliations so far. For instance Tadesse, who was particularly keen to change the mindset of his co-nationals, was convinced that:

“Eritreans in Switzerland must not fear the regime like that. Look, I am part of the opposition since 2000/2001. Some people I knew before that time, they only greet me now, they do not want to be seen with me. But at the same time, nothing happened to me or to my family in Eritrea. My own experience testifies that we should not fear the government.”

By introducing his own experiences into the debates, Tadesse once again depicted certain fears as unnecessary or even as counter-productive for those who are willing to see political change happen in Eritrea and in the diaspora. Other activists like Hailu dared to challenge the regime’s power in voicing his political point of view publicly and in radio broadcasts. He explicitly said that in provoking the loyalists he wished firstly to show to his comrades that the punishments so anticipated had not taken place yet. Wishing to become role models, Hailu and Tadesse posted videos and pictures about their political activities in the social media. They wished not only to prove that repression in Switzerland was far from similar to Eritrea and that their families were not as vulnerable as it is commonly assessed, but they also wanted to engage publicly those who continued to fear by asking them to explain their viewpoint. Again, such deliberate actions and references to experiences as proof aimed to downplay exaggerated anticipation about the reaction of the regime towards dissidents. More than simple demonstrations of courage or masculinity, these initiatives took place to demonstrate the absence of retaliation. In this sense, they represent a mechanism of encouragement.

Tentative steps to overcome fears were also taken through a more collective and performative process: group and solidarity building. As both a discourse and an action to undermine fears, the *mānāsāy* have aimed to diminish everyday uncertainties related to the risks of active political commitment by sharing information about retaliation against families, about harassment by loyalists or about the feeling of guilt, building thus a common experience of exile amongst the activists. Tesfay explained the necessity of sharing common experiences:

“What happens to one of us, that happens and could happen to us all, because we are all suffering the same dangers and the same fears. We support each other in whatever happens; our suffering was the same and our families are bearing similar situations.”

In Tesfay’s perspective, whatever happens weighs less when it is shared and discussed with others who have experienced similar situations. But what was really at stake was the founding of strong solidarity bonds amongst activists based on a shared history of experiences, suffering and emotions. During meetings, testimonies and acknowledgements of similar painful experiences and feelings, often clearly caused by the regime, played the role of closing the ranks against the regime's misdeeds while reigniting the anger of the *mānāsāy*. Intimacy and solidarity were promoted in this way during meetings and also making it difficult for one to disengage.

These bonds were furthermore presented as the elements of what can also constitute a form of protection against the regime’s evil intentions: the more united and numerous activists are, the more demanding and hazardous it will be for the regime to carry out retaliations on dissidents and their families. Thus, mobilization was understood as a crucial turning point in which fears might transform into confidence and actions. These ideas of mutual support and security were regularly presented to Eritreans, generally friends and acquaintances, who were not yet in the movement. Evidence of the absence of retaliation, sharing one's individual experiences of repression as well as regularly witnessing the growth of the movement were all mechanisms of (self-)encouragement and confidence building.

Solidarity and the development of friendships during meetings and protests also helped increase social pressure to remain in the movement. It has been already noted that deserters sometimes fear being ostracized by their friends should they decline participation in some protests organized by the movement. Pressures were exerted on individuals in at least two additional ways. First, the recurrent expression of the need to remain united and the sharing of testimonies of hardship contributed to make disengagement harder. As Goodwin and Pfaff already noted, shame increases the costs for individuals to not participate (2001: 295). Secondly, pressure to conform was actualized by the dichotomy made between necessary and unnecessary fears. In this sense, social pressure took shape also when one's fear was contested by others as a false justification. In such instances, some activists urged others to stop spreading false or unfounded rumors. For instance, raising the issue of the existence of spies has been repressed when it related to spies within the movement. Such control over what can be said and claimed by activists was at odds with the political ambition and program of a movement that seeks freedom of expression in Eritrea.

These remarks invite us to consider the importance and ubiquitous presence of norms and the development of a moral framework in conjunction with the emergence of the movement and in particular with the processes associated with the management of fears. Being considered political, experiencing fear or overcoming fear of repression are also moral acts. A normative framework is also necessary for spreading (useful) rumors, discarding “bad” ones or controlling them and, finally, moral duties, enforced by pressures and risks to a certain extent, lead to increasing solidarity, mobilization and preventing defection. Values and moral principles are thus deeply involved in experiencing

emotions and practicing emotional management.

The limits of confidence

Even though an increasing number of Eritreans acknowledged the importance of overcoming their fears about the regime, emotional reflexivity have a limiting effect on political mobilization. Collective expressions of fearlessness during meetings were not necessarily followed by protest actions. Fear was experienced at least for some period of time.

Unsurprisingly, moments of hesitation were clearly perceptible amongst activists when Eritrean government officials arrived at the venues where they were demonstrating. Reflex fears as well as fearful anticipations were still experienced: protesters vanished out of sight for a while to avoid direct confrontation or having their photo taken by loyalists. In this sense, emotional liberation is never completely achieved for good nor for all kinds of fears. Contrary to what Flam (2006: 32) declares, it does not necessarily “[...] prepares ground for [...] a transfer of loyalties” and cut people from their “[...] old emotional attachment” as we show below. For Eritreans, fear of repression did not evaporate as it was the case for the Chinese student protesters in 1989 (Yang 2000).

Sometimes, significant discrepancies existed between moral and political debates and the actual emotions referred to. Filmon repeated to various audiences that he had overcome his fear of the regime but when we interviewed him he suddenly asked us to stop the interview and to hide our notebook after he noticed that other Eritreans seating elsewhere in the café were possibly listening our conversation. Others who agreed to talk to journalists preferred to remain anonymous. Fears of being singled out by the regime remained at best latent. Therefore, unforeseen actions from the loyalists or the regime continued to trigger fears amongst the *mānāsāy* in various occasions.

The limits to overcoming one’s fears were also the result of conflicting responsibilities. The first and most important dilemma laid between the duty to act against the regime and the safety and wellbeing of the family in Eritrea. Often, contradictory pressures were exerted on deserters. On the one hand, they were pushed by peers to join the *mānāsāy* and they felt the moral obligation to engage against a regime that had forced them to flee their country while on the other hand, they were reminded by their relatives in Eritrea not to put them at risk²⁹. To neglect one’s responsibilities toward one’s family was considered highly immoral and consequently, family loyalty *per se* was never questioned within the movement. It was generally accepted that no one should take the risk to expose relatives, however, activists publicly and critically argued that some acquaintances were justifying their refusal to participate in political action by mentioning vague potential risks to their families. Although clearly against the regime, Tesfamariam told us his reason not to participate in the *mānāsāy* meetings and actions:

“I will be active in the opposition once I know that my brother will be out of Eritrea and safe. I do not want him to pay for me”

Expression of fears can sometimes denote the moral principle of prudence and justify the suspension of one’s political activities but this kind of general statement of responsibility for someone in Eritrea is an example of justification that was often criticized by the *mānāsāy*. Moreover, Tesfamariam also told us that he was reluctant to join a demonstration in 2011 because he had to renew an official document at the Eritrean Embassy and for this reason he preferred to maintain a neutral political position to secure

²⁹ This dilemma between collective political actions and an individual’s family protection was multifaceted and difficult to fully apprehend from our ethnographic positions.

this procedure. Public justifications can therefore cover less justifiable reasons and to avoid mentioning necessary compromises and payments to the regime³⁰. Tesfamariam's justification and choice is also a good example of what the Huk studied by Goodman have called "the problem of awaitism" (1997: 63): Rather than commit themselves to the struggle in a disciplined way, many cadres preferred to wait passively for the revolution to triumph. As family responsibility was one of the best justifications not to engage, it was also a useful excuse to explain his lack of commitment.

It is worth mentioning that most of the time, the ethical dilemma between political commitment against the regime and safeguarding the well-being of the family was experienced only on a temporary basis because of certain current rumors or because a particular family situation happened or was about to happen. Such family withdrawal (Slater 1963 quoted in Goodman 1997) from the movement were related to a relative's plan to flee Eritrea or because some relatives in Eritrea faced threats or had been detained in prison³¹. In this sense, expressing fears and temporarily abandoning the movement were an agreed expression of a principle of precaution and a strong desire to avoid any guilt feeling and accusation from relatives. Therefore, constantly evaluating risks was a necessity for all *mānāsāy* and the intensity of fears fluctuated according to personal or familial situations.

Besides the obvious fear and repulsion to see one relative in distress, the *mānāsāy* were afraid to feel guilt and above all to be accused by their family for one's mistreatment. Family withdrawal was also promoted also by family pressures as the following case shows: Mhreteab explained to us that his family was reluctant to pay the desertion fine (50'000 Nakfa) caused by his illegal escape. His father was imprisoned for six months and the restaurant he owned has been closed by the police. According to Mhreteab there was no doubt that the family business had been closed for seven years because he deserted the army and fled into Sudan. After his parents met with the local authorities to ask for the reopening of their restaurant, he reported to us the following:

"My family told me, that the authorities said: 'Mhreteab lives in Europe. If he pays the 2%-tax, then we can give the permission to reopen your business.' So my family asked me, if I could do that. I gave them a negative answer, cause I can't pay that, as a refugee I am not allowed to do that. Why should I do that, what for? [...] I can't know, where this money would go. [...] I am active against the government, so why should I pay? They can just let the business be closed until freedom reaches Eritrea".

Mhreteab can only cope with the pressure exerted by his family to pay his tax to the Consulate and still keep his political commitment because he is able to send money to his parents in Eritrea. Political commitment asks the *mānāsāy* to constantly renegotiate their own duties and responsibilities between different social relationships and loyalties.

The second dilemma that the deserters could experience has been exemplified already by the case of Tesfamariam and his necessity to navigate between opposite loyalties. For various reasons deserters who supported the *mānāsāy* could have felt the need to maintain social ties with loyalists and might therefore have only a limited participation in the movement. Reasons ranged from being able to attend some celebrations to providing for the wellbeing and the security of relatives in Eritrea (implying

30 To obtain a service from the Embassies or Consulates, Eritreans are required to pay income tax of 2% for all the years they have been abroad.

31 Such circumstances in Eritrea differ widely from region to region. In some districts, there are harsher retaliations applied to family members of deserters than in others. The difference of experiences of state repression in Eritrea nurture a certain instability within the movement. Fears and risk assessment differ according the origin and place of assignment in National Service of the deserters. Beside the importance of origins and lineage in the social fracturing of the movement, these different experiences of repression have also promoted the formation of groups organized by region or town of origin.

among other things the payment of the diaspora tax of 2% of annual income). They might have felt also the obligation to keep good relationship with loyalists in the diaspora who were relatives. Such ambiguous loyalties might in turn reinforce unease, resentment and the fear of potential surveillance from apparent peers who maintained relationships with some loyalists. Suspicion and prudence applied because all the deserters knew very well from their experience in Eritrea that anyone can easily be forced by a regime official to act against his or her own will and harm a close friend.

These moral dilemmas considerably shaped the emotional dynamics and the limits of the *mānāsāy* movement in constantly infusing mistrust and suspicion amongst deserters and have represented a significant, if not the most important, limitation for the movement. Political ambivalence, the desire to remain neutral for keeping social relations across different constituencies and allegiances and the gossips reinforced unease and mistrust related to the potentiality of covert surveillance and denunciations. As a matter of fact, mistrust was much more common than we have described it in this article so far. Interestingly, surveillance and denunciations were often expressed as threats from the Eritrean state or regime. At the time of our research observations and interviews, tensions among various groups and organizations in the larger opposition. In Switzerland but also elsewhere in Europe and Northern America (The Netherlands, UK, Norway, Washington DC, Bay Area), the tensions between the *mānāsāy* and the older generation of members of opposition parties were significant. In Switzerland, many *mānāsāy* activists were reluctant to collaborate with the opposition parties for several reasons. Firstly, they considered them useless since they were unable to actively challenge the regime while they were in National Service. Secondly, many young activists worked hard to remain independent from any party and from the influence of older generations. They argued that such collaborations would slow down their momentum and actions and that the traditional authority of the elders (the fathers) would jeopardize their projects and organizations. Fears related to potential hidden agendas of these political parties were also mentioned, including undercover collaboration with the Eritrean regime.

Mistrust was particularly conspicuous when an organization of long-established Eritreans in the diaspora (including former members of the current ruling party) tried to help the *mānāsāy* to overcome a crisis provoked by the police of Canton Zurich. At the demonstration that we mentioned at the beginning of this article, the police heavily fined more than fifty demonstrators because official permission was not granted. Most of the *mānāsāy* were unable to pay the fine and many started to criticize the organizers of the demonstration. As a first step in helping the demonstrators, the *mānāsāy* leaders to list all the participants who had been fined by the police in order to assess the amount of money they would have to raise in the Eritrean community in Switzerland. This proposition was received very coldly and at first the *mānāsāy* leaders declined the offer fearing that the list of participants might be addressed instead to the Eritrean Consulate in Geneva and thus expose their active members to the risk of further retaliation. Later, in 2013, the conflicts between EYSC and EYSNS, and within these two groups, drained most of the forces. Despite the importance of these problems within the *mānāsāy* and amongst the opposition in general, no attempts to manage mistrust were made. The *mānāsāy* decisively lost the momentum created during the two previous years and many silently disengaged from the movement.

The inversion of fear

Contradiction between the political objectives and actual practices of the *mānāsāy* took shape in other ways when we witnessed that the movement as whole was promoting an inversion of the politics of fear. Activists claiming they had overcome their fears related to the regime started to argue for carrying

out actions that would destabilize loyalists. As several put it when we discussed this issue, the time had come for the loyalists to be scared. As surprising as it is, the idea of promoting fear amongst the loyalists took different shapes. One purpose was to demonstrate that the balance of power was starting to tilt between the regime and the opposition. Such demonstration of fearlessness and power was aimed at mobilizing the so-called silent majority of Eritreans that was believed to be mainly sympathetic to the opposition, as well as reinforcing the momentum earned by the partial emotional liberation that was witnessed online and offline at that time.

A result of this dynamic has been the increasing occurrence of violent clashes between exiled deserters and supporters of the regime in Switzerland. Eruptions of violence took place frequently especially between 2012 and 2013, at various occasions such as meetings or celebrations organized by the Party or the Consulate or at parties organized by loyalists. These repeated clashes invited activists based in other countries to name their peers in Switzerland *the Swiss Komando*. Accordingly, the Eritrean Ambassador in the United Kingdom referred to Switzerland as a military front and made an explicit correlation with the historical battle of Afabet before Independence (1988) where the EPLF defeated the Ethiopian Army and marked the recapture of the Eritrean territory. This strategy coined *segud* in Tigrinya (for “hard hit”) has been discarded later by a large majority of *mānāsāy* leaders who envisioned not only problems with the local police and restrictions on demonstrating but also damage to the image of a movement seeking ultimately peace and democracy in Eritrea. However, violence still happens from time to time between some hardliner *mānāsāy* activists and loyalists in Switzerland, despite the reiterated recommendations of the movement's leaders to avoid such confrontations.

This phenomenon of inversion of the politics of fear reproducing the particular Eritrean state modality of governance in the deserters' movement (including intimidation) finds its best example in the attempts to denounce to the Swiss authorities “false refugees” who were allegedly spying on the deserters. Eritrean deserters who complied with the instructions and requests of the regime such as the payment of a 2% tax and the participation in political meetings for instance were quickly ostracized by the *mānāsāy* who considered them as covert state agents who had cheated the authorities during the asylum procedure. Instead of considering that these individuals might be siding with the Party once in Europe for their convenience or for helping their family back home, the *mānāsāy* initiated ferocious campaigns against these new loyalists, denouncing them several times to the cantonal and the federal authorities, sending lists of the names and addresses of these “false refugees” and arguing that they were instead state agents who were monitoring the other deserters in the same way as some translators working for the Eritrean Delegation did. In these denunciations the *mānāsāy* have asked the authorities to revoke the protection status of these individuals and to send them back to Eritrea. It is interesting to note that actually such denunciations has stuck not only to the notion of false refugee promoted by anti-immigration groups but has advanced (although with different and more specific reasons) the same political objective, deportation of the accused. The *mānāsāy* have expected thus to exert indirect pressure against the loyalists by mobilizing the host authorities to deport them.

Conclusion

Fears are at the core of contemporary Eritrean politics both for the current regime and the deserters' movements that have emerged in recent years in the diaspora. Covert surveillance and its outcomes such as denunciations and have considerably shaped Eritrean subjectivities for decades, especially those of the younger generations who were conscripted into National Service and who have faced ruthless arbitrary rule especially since the border war of 1998-2000. The regime's politics of fear is visible in many of its measures but mostly epitomized by the practice of retaliation on the family of the

deserters enforced since 2006.

As the Eritrean case shows, “exit strategy” does not undermine protest (or “voice” to follow the classic metaphor of Hirschman (1970)) when we look beyond the national borders of this country. If collective protest in Eritrea is nearly inexistent, opposition to the regime and protest against the leadership strive transnationally in Europe, the Middle East and in Northern America. But “exit” doesn't unleash “voice” abroad easily as well: for those dissenters who fled Eritrea recently, overcoming the fears of retaliation from the regime appears to be a necessary step before articulating collectively public grievances and actions against the Eritrean regime and its supporters in the diaspora. “Exit” and “voice” don't even work in tandem, reinforcing each other as it might have been the case in GDR in 1989 (Hirschman 1993: 177).

Fears of the regime have migrated with the deserters in the diaspora. These fears have been reanimated in exile when the deserters discerned that the regime's supporters were present and well organized in their communities. If the measures of retaliation targeting the family of the deserters have been instrumental in disrupting the mobilization of deserters for some years (see Bozzini 2015), this article shows that more recently, many of them have not stayed idle and passively fearful. They have built up a movement that has tried to challenge the regime and its supporters in the diaspora.

This political mobilization necessitated an “emotional liberation” (Jasper 2011) by which fears about the power of the regime were eased. If such emotional liberation took advantage of the hope brought by the Arab Spring and the sanctions of the UN against the government of Eritrea in 2011, this article clearly shows that more intimate reflections were necessary at a personal level for Eritreans who aspired to act against the regime that they fled. Discussions about the fears experienced took place amongst groups online and during meetings of friends. Leaders of the emerging movement in Switzerland and elsewhere promoted discussions and actions to undermine the chilling power of fears. In this sense, fears were negotiated among friends and activists.

We have discussed three general mechanisms that emerged in the *mānāsāy* movement. The first one corresponds to an extension of the process of emotional liberation: emotional reflexivity transformed anger and fear into a political and moral framework that considerably shaped the movement in its initial stages. Fears were not only important in the framing process but they were actually the framing process itself: the movement defined the fight against the regime's politics of fear as its moral imperative and its leaders quickly understood the necessity to control fears within the movement.

The approach to control fears in the movement was to control rumors. In other words, fear management was subsumed to the task of rumor management and discussions lead to defining unnecessary fears and legitimate and reasonable ones. Determining if a rumor or a fear was legitimate or not was always subject to negotiation and therefore fluctuated. However, in doing so, the *mānāsāy* perpetuated an ethic of fear that became a way to encourage people within and outside the movement to participate in the game of the regime. Lastly, emotional reflexivity, the control of rumors and the binary understanding of fears constituted the causes of a constant flux in which activists were caught between, on the one hand, the acknowledgment of a politics of fear and the awareness of certain risks existing and, on the other hand, the necessity to regulate but also sometimes discard “inadequate” fears. Solidarity and group-making is the third mechanism we have presented in this article. Intimacy and solidarity were promoted during meetings but we underlined that this mechanism also promoted pressures to conform by using coercion, making it more difficult for one to disengage.

Beside underlining the various dimensions of these three mechanisms, this article points at the

dynamics of different kinds of fears amongst the Eritrean deserters in exile. Discussed, contested, controlled, resisted or recast, fears together with other emotions are not only circulating but are entrapped into a sort of fluctuating magnetic field constituted of different social and political forces³². Fears neither completely disappear nor indefinitely pile up. Some vanished only to rematerialized later. Their expressions and instrumentalizations were context-dependent, varying according to situations and interlocutions. Fears of retaliation were sometimes brandished while at some other time, were discarded and seen as noxious. In this sense, emotional management is neither linear nor accomplished once and for all but, at individual and collective levels, it fluctuates and mutates, stops and resumes, redefining identities, behaviors, loyalties and disengagements.

Emotional management also has its limits: fears might be simply concealed to abide to the movement, pressures from family members raise guilt or fear of being accused of jeopardizing the well-being of the family while legitimate fears are justifications to wait or disengage or conceal ambiguous loyalties. After all, no *mānāsāy* can simply forgot that the Eritrean regime remains repressive and highly unpredictable. Lastly, we briefly reported on an inversion in the politics of fear the *mānāsāy* adopted, utilizing similar techniques of the regime to intimidate loyalists for several months at a time. If we can consider that all this represents a particular emotional climate we also have to account for the complex and often conflicting, and even antithetical, (micro)dynamics that are present in this emotional climate. Mistrust has also been influential in shaping the emotional climate as analyzed by this article. Tensions, silences, doubts and suspicions, like fear of repression, have also traveled with the deserters and have been reconfigured while in exile, amongst generations of protesters, within families, amongst friends, between leaders and participants and have thus far limited the movement and its actions. The dilemma between public political action and family responsibility inherent in the definition of useful and noxious fears has recast suspicion and mistrust amongst the deserters and the Eritrean opposition at large, shifting the energies aimed against the regime in the first place toward a fierce competition amongst groups within the opposition.

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32 Based on different studies, Pain (2014) and Taussig (1992) who are pointing mainly on intensity and oscillation of fears prefer using the metaphors of earthquake and seismology.

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