The link between Diasporas and Regime Change:

The case of the Eritrean Diaspora

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Abstract: This thesis identifies mechanisms related to diasporas (in-)ability to foster democratic regime change in their country of origin. The first section of the research discusses current explanations on diasporas' engagement and argues that they lack considerable explanatory power due to the deficiency of "transnational mechanisms" included in the analysis. The thesis contends that governments employ such mechanisms of (i) national identity building, (ii) surveillance, (iii) coercion, and (iv) co-option in order to hinder effective mobilization of the diaspora. By using process-tracing and an in-depth case analysis of Eritrea, this research illustrates the far-reaching impact of the government on the Eritrean diaspora community. In addition, it highlights theoretical and policy implications of such actions by suggesting further development of theorization and to consider counter-strategies for host governments.

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Introduction

In the last decade, diasporas have been increasingly acknowledged as important actors in influencing politics in the country of origin.[1] Although some scholars argue that undemocratic values, apolitical attitudes and nationalism can often thrive in diaspora communities (Al-Ali et.al., 2001; Newland, 2004; Hoehne et.al., 2011), others have emphasized the importance of diasporas in influencing politics and in fostering democratic regime change in the country of origin (Lyons, 2007, 2006; Koinova, 2009; Shain, 1999; Collier and Hoeffler, 2000).

As Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth (2003) noted:

> "Diasporas also operate as ethnic lobbies in liberal hostlands (countries of domicile), and as advocates of a multicultural foreign policy. They campaign to democratize authoritarian homeland regimes "and are a force in the global economy assisting homelands' economies. More generally, diasporas are increasingly able to promote transnational ties, to act as bridges or as mediators between their home and host societies, and to transmit the values of pluralism and democracy as well as the "entrepreneurial spirit and skills that their home countries so sorely lack" (2003: 128).

This quote highlights several aspects of diasporas engagement within their host country in order to influence their respective home country politically, economically and culturally. Empirical evidence suggests that the capacity to effectively lobby host and home governments (Shain, 1999, 1994-1995; Collier, 2000), engagement with civic society organizations (Giorgis, 2014), the transfer of western liberal and democratic values (Biswas, 2007; Shain and Barth, 2003),

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[1] This thesis adopts the definition of diasporas as proposed by Adamson and Demtriou: "A diaspora can be identified as a social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to: 1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland and 2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organizational framework and transnational links" (2007: 497).

the reason why people left their country (Lyons, 2007), the overall structure of the diaspora, the legal and institutional environment (Shea, 2013), and the diaspora's relation with the country of origin (Koinova, 2009), are all factors that explain diaspora's influence on the diaspora's homeland. Moreover, they explain to what extent diasporas are capable of mobilizing democratic regime change in their countries of origin.

Current literature on diaspora engagement suggests that a large proportion of a diaspora would form an opposition to the origin government in order to foster democratic regime change with the following features:

> *(i) a large, young and often well educated "conflict-generated" diaspora to western countries (Lyons, 2006; Collier and Hoeffler, 2000; Shain, 1999, 1994/1995);*
>
> *(ii) a large proportion of the diaspora consists of exiles and dissidents of the regime (Koinova, 2009; Shain, 1999, 1994/1995);*
>
> *(iii) discontent with the regime of origin is widespread in the diaspora (Schmitz-Pranghe, 2010);*
>
> *(iv) almost all of civil society and oppositional movements are situated in the diaspora (Giorgis, 2014).*

According to the literature discussing the nexus of diaspora and regime change, these features suggest that a large proportion of this diaspora community forms an opposition to the government and predict enhanced political engagement with home countries' politics.

Moreover, case studies conducted on Ethiopia, Gambia and Zimbabwe and others show that these explanations hold true (Matsilele, 2013; Kuhlmann, 2010; Mutsvairo, 2013; Jaw, 2017; Hoehne et.al, 2010). However, other cases illustrate that diasporas had little success in mobilizing to foster political and economic change at home (Story and Walker, 2016). The case of Eritrea is one such example, in which one cannot conclude the positive outcomes, even

though factors predicting oppositional mobilization in the diaspora to foster democratic regime change – are present. In fact, the Eritrean diaspora fails to achieve regime change in their home country.

This thesis investigates why that is so. I propose an additional explanation on the role of diaspora engagement in fostering regime change. I argue that current explanations fail to consider governments' active involvement in keeping their citizens abroad in check. Moreover, common explanations lack to effectively elaborate on why and under what conditions diasporas fail to mobilize in order to facilitate democratic regime change. Thus, the contribution of this study is to add transnational mechanisms employed by governments of origin into the analysis that can explain why cases such as Eritrea fail to actively foster regime change.

Context

After a thirty yearlong independence war with Ethiopia, Eritrea became a de-jure independent state in 1993. Two major liberation movements were the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the latter being a splinter group of the former. During the independence war, over 1 million Eritreans had already fled the country. A large proportion of those that fled Eritrea consisted of oppositional ex-liberation fighters and officials of the ELF which were expelled from Eritrean territories by the EPLF (Tronvoll, 1998). During the war of independence, the EPLF collaborated with the Ethiopian based Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and together defeated the central government in Ethiopia (Hoehne et.al., 2010). Yet, conflicts of interests and ideas, border disputes, and the failure to formulate unilateral trade relations lead to a disastrous border-war between Eritrea and Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000. Twenty-five years after independence, Eritrea has become what is increasingly described as a failing state (Anderson, 2016). Many of the country's people suffer from unemployment, chronic shortages of drinking water, electricity, fuel and basic consumer goods

(Hirt, 2014; Freedom House Index, 2018). Adult Eritreans, both male and female, are forced to serve in the military and participate in national service for indefinite periods (Ibid.) In addition, the existing Eritrean Constitution has not been implemented by President Isaias Afewerki, who rules the country with an iron fist and controls much of the country's institutions, including the ruling party, judiciary, legislature and media. Thus, democracy, the respect for human rights and the rule of law are absent. The Freedom House Index ranks Eritrea equal to North Korea with 3 out of 100 possible points (Freedom House Index, 2018). In the United Nations Human Development Index, Eritrea ranks 156 out of 177 countries (Human Development Index, 2018). The government's 2001 crackdown on the freedom of speech, expression and association has forced many EPLF politicians, most journalist, political activists and many members of the civil society to leave the country and join the diaspora (Transparency International, 2018). All this has in recent years compelled thousands more men and women, usually young and educated, to flee the country every month and join the diaspora abroad. As a result, at least one third of Eritrea's population lives abroad (Story and Walker, 2016). Today, Eritreans are the third largest group of migrants entering Europe, making Eritrea the largest refugee sending country of Africa (Danish Refugee Council, 2018).

Research Question

By answering the research question "Why does the Eritrean diaspora fail to mobilize in order to achieve democratic regime change in their country of origin?", this thesis is establishing explanatory factors that can explain diasporas failure of fostering economic and political reforms in their home country. In addition, this thesis argues that authoritarian governments may employ measures in order to effectively keep diasporas in check and to prevent effective mobilization of the opposition. Precisely, I argue that authoritarian regimes use certain tactics in order to prevent and control diaspora political engagement and impact.

The motivation behind this research is to accurately consider the active involvement of regimes to restrict diasporas influences. The vast amount of recent research has focused on diasporas role as "peace-makers" or "peace-breakers" but has failed to investigate measures at the disposal of regimes to disunify and demobilize diaspora groups. The case of Eritrea is argued to serve as an exemplary case in this thesis dissertation.

In sum, the purpose of this thesis is two-fold. First, it will contribute theoretically by proposing the inclusion of government's transnational strategies of (i) national identity building, (ii) surveillance, (iii) coercion, and (iv) co-option, in order to forestall oppositional mobilization in the diaspora, in the explanation model. Second, it will contribute empirically by analyzing how the Eritrean political diaspora operates and why it fails to effectively impact home country politics. This thesis will propose new key variables needed in the analysis to shed light on a larger population of cases with similar patterns and characteristics - on the basis of an in-depth single case analysis.

The analysis shows that the Eritrean regime proved to employ coercive tactics and measures to hold oppositional diasporas in check by fostering a strong division and a "culture of fear" within the diaspora. Moreover, the findings of the case study show that the inclusion of the proposed variables have enhanced the understanding of why some diasporas fail to achieve political change- while other do not.

This paper is divided into five chapters, the first being this introduction. The second chapter reviews existing literature on diaspora engagement. Moreover, it will discuss and criticize current explanations by highlighting the lack of applicability and propose transnational mechanism that are employed as state-practice. The research design and methodology employed for this research will be introduced in the third chapter. Next, the empirical case study

of Eritrea and the analysis will be presented in the fourth chapter. The final chapter will form the conclusion and summarize the main arguments and key findings.

Diaspora and Homeland Politics

This section reviews the existing studies and literature concerning diasporas political engagement to foster democratic regime change in their home countries.

First studies concerned with the question of diasporas' impact on homeland politics are ambiguous and inconclusive. It is to note, diasporas are not a homogenous group, but rather represent the various ethnic, ideological, linguistically and religious divides of a society (Hirt, 2014). Therefore, apolitical and non-democratic behavior may thrive in specific diaspora communities, leading to little or no impact on home politics (Hoehne et.al., 2011).

One strain of academics on diaspora and homeland politics contend that diaspora groups often maintain a strong relation to the home state and consist out of "careless" nationalists who help to stabilize the home state's power through financial support or political lobbying (Al-Ali, 2001; Newland, 2004).

Yet, a mixed view of diasporas political engagement has considered both, that diaspora's political engagement can either reinforce or challenge the state and its discourse (Adamson, 2002; Al-Ali et.al., 2002). In fact, diasporas have been increasingly recognized as significant players in the international political arena over the past 25 years. The Jewish-, Greek-, Cuban- and Armenian-American diaspora communities represent some of the strongest lobbies in the United States that influence foreign policies (Vertovek, 2005).

Researchers alike Collier (2000), Maimbo and Ratha (2005) found that diaspora groups often play a direct or indirect role in incenting, accelerating or prolonging conflicts through ideological support, lobbying on the local and international stage, and through financial support.

Evidence derived from case studies from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia highlight and substantiate these claims (Hoehne, et.al, 2011). Moreover, "conflict-generated" diasporas – those diasporas that were forced to migrate – are regarded to be particularly prone to incent and sustain domestic conflict and to challenge authoritarian regimes due to their grievances, discontent with the regime, and reluctance to compromise (Lyons, 2006; Collier and Hoeffler, 2000; Shain, 1999, 1994/1995).

The nexus on diaspora engagement and democratization has received far less attention (Koinova, 2009). Those few researchers investigating the impact of diasporas on democratization contend that they indeed exhibit attitudes towards democratization (Shain, 1999, 2007; Lyons, 2007; Biswas, 2007). In fact, those scholars argue that diaspora groups have the potential to form a sizeable opposition, facilitate democratic reform and foster peace and stability (Laakso et. al., 2014). For example, members of diasporas that inhabit great economic power can exert pressure on political actors at home to revise undemocratic practices. This was recently the case in Somalia in which the Somali diaspora called upon the government to release several imprisoned local journalists (Hoehne, et.al., 2011). Second, it is argued that diaspora youth and students in particular mobilize and participate in demonstrations against undemocratic practices and expose human rights abuses with the aim to "name and shame", thereby challenging source-countries' international standing (Shain, 1999, 1994-1995). Moreover, they can prevent and stall friendly relations between host and home country through effective lobbying, foster international pressure against the home regime and actively assist and participate in opposition parties (Ibid.). For instance, the Iraqi diaspora played a crucial role in encouraging the US military engagement in Iraq in 2003 (Vertovek, 2005). Thirdly, diasporas educated in western democracy and exposed to democratic ideas and structures might transfer ideas, values and concepts to their home country society (Levitt, 1998). Koinova (2009)

acknowledges this phenomenon and highlights that if "diaspora communities are socialized in the western world with democratic values in western societies, they could be expected to be sympathetic to the democratization of their home countries" (p. 42). While drawing evidence from diaspora activities of post-communist states (such as Serbia, Armenia and Albania), she concluded that indeed diasporas often show great political engagement to foster democratic reforms at home. Likewise, one often cited example is the Ethiopian Muslim diaspora since it effectively contributed towards peace-building by advocating for a more inclusive and plural society. These groups where inspired by ideas of cultural and religious pluralism in Europe and in North-America in which the majority of the Ethiopian diaspora resides (Hoehne et.al., 2011). Fourthly, several case studies - such as of China and Cuba - have revealed that oppositional parties and movements in non-democratic and repressive states are compelled to conduct their activities and organization in exile (Chen, 2018; Garcia, 1998). This highlights the importance of diasporic and exile communities' activities in regard to contesting politics in their homeland. Examples from Greek, Cuban, Mexican and Haitian cases in the United States have shown that diasporas challenge authoritarian regimes, especially if they are led by political exiles who have been engaged in politics prior leaving the country (Koinova, 2009; Shain, 1999; 1994-1995). Lastly, diasporas roles in democratization efforts is also evident in their links and relations to host land civil society organization by promoting democratic values through the transfer of financial contributions and information exchange (Shain, 1999). Diaspora communities residing in western countries have been regarded as vital in creating civil society structures that aim to influence home country politics, particularly in regard to democratization, the promotion of human rights and peace-building (Khayati, 2012). This highlights not only their transboundary impact on homeland politics but also their capability to foster democratic reforms (Cochrane, 2007). Yet, the creation of civil society organizations and movements is often controlled, discouraged or even prohibited in many authoritarian regimes (Freedom

House, 2017). This increases the importance of diasporas as trans-border agents since activism, especially aiming to challenge the status quo, is restricted and may only be possible in the diaspora.

Furthermore, case studies from across the globe have illustrated that diasporas indeed can capitalize and mobilize in less restrictive and open environments in western countries. The Zimbabwean diaspora played a crucial role in exposing human rights violations of the Mugabe regime, by lobbying host countries government, and using diasporic media outlets to disseminate information and their democratic agenda back home. This engagement arguably led to Mugabe's defeat in the first round of poll in the 2008 presidential elections (Matsilele, 2013; Kuhlmann, 2010; Mutsvairo, 2013). Similarly, it has been claimed that the Gambian diaspora has used the internet and social media to mobilize the opposition to the Jammeh regime. These groups established strong linkages to the international community, particularly human rights NGOs, which have raised awareness and support for their campaign that led to the removal of the repressive regime under Jammeh (Jaw, 2017). Fig. 1 illustrates this mechanic:
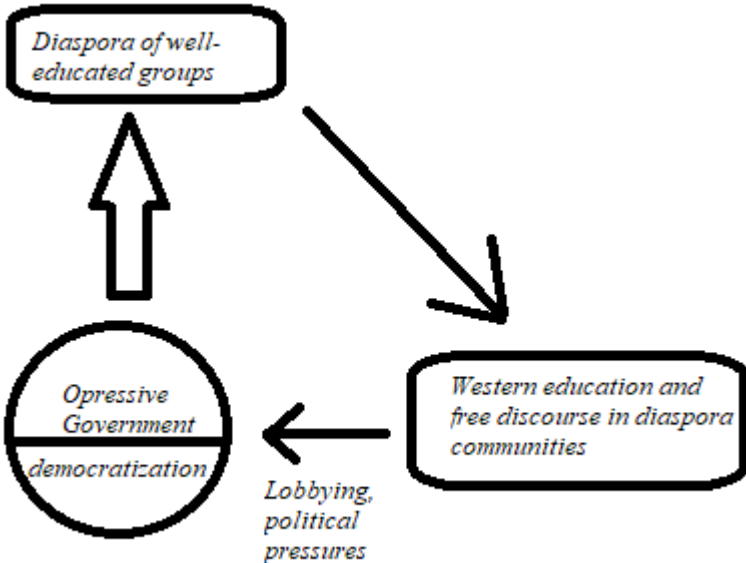

Fig. 1. expected theoretical outcome of diaspora influence.

Overall, as the above literature review illustrates, diasporas are indeed important actors and can do both, reinforce and challenge the regime. Further, empirical evidence derived from case studies as well as the major theoretical accounts in the literature suggests that if diasporas consist of political exiles, a young, educated, and conflict-generated diaspora in western host-countries, when discontent with the regime is widespread, and opposition movements are situated in the diaspora, it leads us to expect that they would mobilize to foster democratic regime change (The Freedom House, 2018; Giorgis, 2014; Shain 1999, 1994/1995; Koinova, 2009; Burgess, 2014; Conrad, 2006a). Despite the fact that some argue that diasporas can behave in nationalist ways and that undemocratic values and apolitical attitude often thrive in the diaspora (Koinova, 2009; Burgess, 2014), this thesis argues that this conception and other current explanations are insufficient in explaining the reasons why some diasporas do not succeed to mobilize unlike others, though fulfilling the above stated criteria - as the case of Eritrea.

First, the Eritrean diaspora consists to a large proportion out of veterans, officials and affiliates of the oppositional Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and dissidents of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) (Conrad, 2010; Hirt, 2014). As previously discussed, exiles who were engaged in political activity prior to their departure, are often expected to form an opposition and work towards unseating authoritarian governments (Koinova, 2009; Shain, 1998/1999). In addition, resentment and discontent with the Eritrean regime are widespread in the diaspora and opposition groups are gaining power and support within the diaspora (Conrad, 2006b). This leads us to assume that the Eritrean diaspora does not only consists out of careless and apolitical nationalists. Furthermore, the increasing number of opposition groups and independent civil society and human rights organizations in diaspora illustrates the Eritrean diaspora's political interest and participation. The theories suggest that diasporic civil society organizations situated in liberal host countries often adopt liberal and democratic values as well as they create linkages

to international organizations in order to collectively promote human rights and democratization. Further, the Eritrean diaspora inherits the feature of a "conflict-generated" exile community, and consists of young and educated individuals (Ibid.).

As a result, while exhibiting all these features, current explanations would suggest enhanced political engagement and mobilization to facilitate democratic reforms. Yet, the Eritrean diaspora had little success in mobilizing to foster long lasting political and economic change at home (Story and Walker, 2016). Moreover, it is puzzling why the Eritrean case does not exhibit the same effects as other cases; despite the similarities.

For instance, the Ethiopian diaspora shares a common history, origin[2] and characteristics with the Eritrean diaspora (Hoehne et.al., 2010). They are comprised of a young, educated, conflict-generated diaspora, and established a number of civil society organizations in exile which would have been discouraged or prohibited back home (Migration Policy Institute, 2014; Lyons, 2007; Mulat et.al., 2009). Despite these similarities, the Ethiopian diaspora had the ability to organize with relative autonomy and assumed a central role in influencing political reforms at home (Freedom House, 2018). Yet, we cannot disregard the difference in regime type between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government is characterized by authoritarian rule but leaves some room for political participation through elections and existing oppositional parties, whereas Eritrea is known as an even more repressive and militarized authoritarian state in which the independent media, political opposition and most of civil society has been shut down and no elections have been held since its independence in 1993 (Freedom House, 2018). Hence, it is from utmost importance to consider both, the type of government and diaspora engagement in the analysis. Consequently, one can argue that a more repressive regime would be more-likely to use coercive tactics to keep their diaspora and influence in check. As such,

the case analysis of the Eritrean diaspora will add additional empirical contestation to the current debate on diasporas engagement with home politics and democratization, and highlights governments transnational impact. Fig. 2 illustrates how the case of Eritrea enables us to construct a new theory of lacking diaspora influence if a government is aware, and a step ahead of, the mechanics in Figure 1.
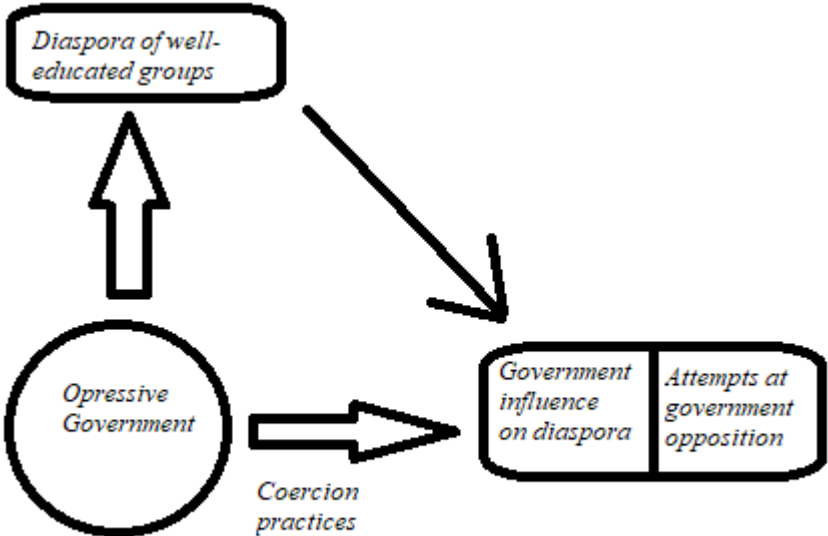

Fig. 2. reversed paradigm to diaspora influence to source country.

In sum, this thesis aims to contribute to this limited knowledge by investigating transnational mechanisms that are employed as a state practice. However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to argue that there is no existing literature on coercive tactics to manage diaspora activities, but that this literature is extremely scarce and inconclusive. While few have argued that states impose some governmentality on its citizens abroad (Gamlen, 2014; Deleno and Gamlen, 2014), other scholars have argued that some states manage their diasporas in "policelike" ways (Miller 1981:40). Yet, these studies fail to discuss and reveal the tactics and measures employed by these governments to control their diaspora. Further, studies on Eritrea have discussed mechanisms of repression and coercion to gain financial support from its diaspora (Hirt and

Mohammad, 2018), but failed to consider how the government uses these mechanisms to disrupt and hinder diaspora mobilization to effectively contribute to reforms in the country of origin. Thus, this thesis contends that further theorization is needed in order to accurately explain the Eritrean diasporas insufficiencies to foster political change at home. In line with the argument made by Cliff, Love and Tronvoll (2009) and Moss (2016), that governments may implement measures in order to forestall the challenges and threats of transnational activism and oppositional movements, this thesis examines the features of such measures and how they are used to disrupt an oppositional mobilization in the Eritrean diaspora. In addition, it will borrow on regime stability theory which states that governments employ repression, legitimation and co-option as domestic strategies to keep their citizens in check (Gerschewski, 2013). This theoretical explanation will be extended by claiming that governments also use those strategies in their engagement with their diaspora communities.

Consequently, the thesis illustrates that the Eritrean government employs transnational mechanisms of (i) national identity building, (ii) surveillance, (iii) coercion, and (iv) co-option, which explains their inefficiency in mobilizing to foster democratic regime change.

National identity refers to the identity of citizens which are shaped by a country's history, culture, ideas, believes and moral values. It manifests itself through the believe of individuals or societies to belong to a specific political community of a country (He and Yan, 2008). Governments can play a vital role in fostering and shaping such an identity, for instance through official government narratives and its dissemination through state-owned media and education, in order to disseminate the government's ideology (Lo, 2001; Miller 1981).

Government surveillance are measures and strategies employed by governments to monitor behavior and activities for the purpose of gaining information, influencing, managing and

directing individuals (Lyon, 2007). This may be done from the distance through electronic means or more directly through the employment of state agents and informants.

Coercion is another often used tool by governments. It includes strategies such as travel restrictions, repossession of property, denial or withholding documents, as well as government-perpetrated violence and assassinations (Stohlen and Lopez, 1986; Hirt and Mohammad, 2018). Lastly, co-option refers to measures that link strategically important actors in a society to the regime and political elite (Gerschewski, 2013).

Strictly speaking, regime change occurs when the type of political system is transformed to or replaced with a different political system. This includes a transformation of the rule, law and principles that guide leaders and government institutions (Kitschelt, 1992). This is in contrast to a change in government which simply refers to a change in leadership, but not necessarily of the overall political system. Thus, in this thesis, democratic regime change is regarded as the change from an authoritarian/autocratic system to a political system based on democratic values.

The mechanism developed will emphasize that authoritarian governments employ strategies that aim to (1) minimize diasporas political influence, (2) destruct oppositional activities in the diaspora, and to (3) coerce and co-opt diasporas for their economic and political support. Following this reasoning, this thesis argues that the Eritrean case does not exhibit the same expected outcome as other cases due to the negligence of government measures included in the analysis. It argues that the employment of national identity building, surveillance, coercion, and co-option hinders mobilization for democratic regime change. Thus, the following hypothesis will be applied:

H: Contrary to other regimes that caused a diaspora, national identity building, surveillance, coercion and co-option by the regime is sufficient to prevent democratic regime change at home.

Research Design

Methodology

Due to the small amount of materials and information available about Eritrea and its diaspora, a triangular method will be employed in order to gain and collect the necessary data. First, interviews are used to acquire key informant information about the Eritrean diaspora and its political relation to its homeland. This helps to organize this research project and establish the factors that might explain the diasporas relation with their home state that possibly have been overlooked in other studies. Yet, it is beyond the scope of this master thesis project to conduct a wide-range of interviews. Thus, this study uses a body of primary and secondary sources of literature to substantiate those claims and examine the underlying factors that may explain the diasporas inefficiency to mobilize. Besides scholarly articles and case studies, this includes transcribed interviews by other researchers, testimonies, content of diaspora websites, government documents, documents of international and regional organizations, legislations and laws.

In order to establish the link between the cause and effect, the thesis will make use of process-tracing (PT). This qualitative approach is often used by political scientists conducting case studies and involves an in-depth analysis of a single case (CDI, 2015). PT is defined as the systematic analysis of empirical evidence and examined in regard to research questions and hypothesis developed by the researcher (Collier, 2011). It is common to trace the proposed

causal mechanisms through identifying its empirical manifestation in the case. Yet, instead of claiming that the established causal mechanisms are sufficient in explaining an outcome, it aims to reveal mechanisms that have a causal link with the dependent variable (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). Thus, its aspiration is to develop an enhanced explanation and linkages of causal mechanisms that predict an outcome in a specific context which might be generalizable to other similar cases (Evans, 1995; CDI, 2015; Beach and Pedersen, 2013). More specifically, theory-building PT is used in this study by linking transnational mechanisms to our outcome of interest – diaspora mobilization to foster regime change in the country of origin (dependent variable).

As already noted above, this thesis makes use of a single in-depth case study of Eritrea. The rationale and selection strategy that lead to this decision is manifold and based on Yin's (1994) and Gerring and Cojocaru's (2015) methodological guidelines for case selection. Generally, case studies are well suited in cases where the context is relevant for the examination of the outcome. Although single and multiple case studies can both fulfil the purpose of exploring, describing and explaining a specific case or phenomenon (Yin, 1994), single case studies have the benefit to increase the descriptive power and devotion to contextual conditions (Shakir, 2002). The selected case study of Eritrea can be identified as a puzzling and interesting case because the expected outcome contradicts common assumptions about diaspora's political impact. Moreover, the case study of Eritrea aims to emphasize the widespread power authoritarian regimes have outside their countries, a phenomenon unknown or underestimated to outsiders. Eritrea is one of the largest migrant/refugees sending African countries and at least one-third of the Eritrean population lives abroad (Hirt and Mohammad, 2018; Danish Refugee Council, 2018). Thus, highlighting the social relevance to understand diaspora's political engagement and to find measures to oppose the repression of diaspora groups by their governments of origin. Fig. 1 highlights this dynamic.

This research notes several limitations to this study. First, the scarcity of reliable data on Eritrea depicts a challenge for conducting this study. This led to the use of a triangulating approach of information, and to conduct interviews. Second, researcher's subjectivity and the reliance on subjective information such as testimonies, interviews and scholar's interpretations expose this study to verification biases. However, this thesis argues that the mere perception of government's intimidation towards the diaspora is enough to hinder their mobilization. Lastly, the external validity and generalizability might be questioned due to the single case study design. One valid criticism is that a single case study may have difficulties to say something beyond that particular case, hence compromising a limit explanatory range. In addition, it is difficult to present our case as outlier due to the lack of statistical evidence. Yet, observations made lead us to conclude that the Eritrean case exhibits characteristics of an exceptional case due to its deviation of the expected outcome. One might argue, that a quantitative approach would have increased the explanatory power and generalizability of the results. However, due to the scope of this thesis, the nature of this research question and limited data, this was not possible but should be aimed for future research. Thus, this study can be regarded as a preluding single case analysis that explores the grounds for future research in this field (Yin, 1994).

Operationalization

In regard to the operationalization, this thesis will examine the independent variables (i) national identity building, (ii) government surveillance, (iii) repression and (iv) co-option, which are all explanatory factors explaining the Eritrean diaspora's inefficiency to mobilize and facilitate democratic regime change (outcome/dependent variable) in their country of origin. The thesis will examine these variables through the examination of the Eritrean diaspora history and civil society organizations, state-sponsored events and media, and the activities of state agents and institutions, such as embassies, consulates and informants. It is argued that these are

all sites or vehicles used for (i) national identity building, (ii) surveillance, (iii) coercion, and (iv) co-option in order to keep the Eritrean diaspora in check and disrupt oppositional mobilization.

Analysis

Eritrean History and the Diaspora

The transnational ties between the Eritrean state and the diaspora can be traced back to the beginning of the armed struggle for independence. The ELF was founded abroad, and the diaspora community played a vital role in organizing and allocating financial support for the armed struggle of their comrades at home. Similarly, the EPLF despite their notion on "self-reliance" was heavily dependent on external funding from the diaspora in order to pursue their liberation struggle (Shea, 2013). Already in the mid-1970s, the EPLF established outposts in Europe and North America to organize and engage in diaspora activities. In the following years, several mass associations were founded in Eritrea and abroad, coordinated by the EPLF in order to funnel political, economic and financial support for its cause (Hepner, 2008). These organizations held many political events and conference in the diaspora to discuss the future of the country. By the time the EPLF successfully defeated the Ethiopian oppressor, it could rely on a sophisticated transnational network of organizations that tied the diaspora with the state as well as with the wider society leading to a quasi-monopoly of control over diaspora activities (Kibreab, 2009).

However, while the diaspora initially was able to have open discussions about the future of Eritrea, influence the political agenda, and acknowledged as key actor during the independence struggle, it did not broaden the space for political participation in the post-independence period – unlike in other cases of transnational nation-states like neighboring Ethiopia (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002). Rather, the EPLF became increasingly authoritarian in nature by consolidating

and centralizing its power, reconfiguring, embedding and de-politicizing the various and often more autonomous mass organizations into local chapters of the ruling political party[3], embassies, consulates and government sponsored NGOs. This aimed in limiting political influence of its citizens abroad and to demand financial contributions (Hepner, 2008; Al-Ali et. Al., 2001). Due to EPLF/PFDJ's transnational strategy, it's almost exclusive control over exile activities, and the government's narrative of a "holistic trinity of people, nation and leadership", which depicts any criticism against the government as treason (Conrad, 2005: 223), Eritreans abroad had to politically and economically participate on state-terms in order to remain "Eritreans" or risked exclusion and repercussions (Hepner, 2008). Yet, in the following years the EPLF/PFDJ gradually lost its almost exclusive control over diaspora activities due to growing disillusionment, failed promises of implementing democracy and escalating human rights violations in Eritrea (Koser, 2002; Giorgis, 2014). Especially, the 2001 crackdown on several members of the government and the extension of the military service for indefinite time gave rise to various new organizations, NGOs, opposition parties and coalitions that were created in the diaspora by ex-ELF officials and PFDJ dissidents in order to challenge the official narrative and work towards regime change (Plaut, 2002). Moreover, diaspora groups effectively lobbied host countries governments in regard to the extortion of the government's diaspora tax[4], which led to the extension of UN sanctions in 2011 (Hirt, 2014).

This brief historical and diaspora background has emphasized the link between the state and the diaspora as well as the development of this relationship over timer. Further, it aimed to stress the initial EPLF/PFDJ's structures and control mechanisms to keep diasporic activities in check.

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[3] The EPLF renamed itself to People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) in 1994.
[4] This will be further discussed in the following sections.

State-sponsored Political and Cultural Events and the Media

State-sponsored political and cultural events and festivals have a long tradition within the Eritrea diaspora community of which the first are dating back as far as the EPLF's independence struggle. EPLF delegates used these events to inform its exiles about the progress achieved in Eritrea and to hold seminars (Bisrat and Senen, 1996). After independence these events and festivals continued to be important sites for the diaspora community to meet, socialize and discuss Eritrean politics, and engage with government representatives (Monsurro, 2014). Besides these festivals being sites to share and celebrate the Eritrean political and cultural heritage, they were also used by the government to form and reform the Eritrean diasporic national identity and to disseminate the official government narrative of Eritrean history. This was pursued by establishing a collective memory and identity based on solidarity. Personal and individual accounts became gradually replaced by a shared and imagined Eritrean identity (Conrad, 2011).

The "official" narrative disseminated by the EPLF in these diasporic events not only strove to divorce Eritrean and Ethiopian history, but also propagated national unity, solidarity, self-reliance, martyrdom and the EPLF's leadership as a driving force in the national struggle and nation building (Reid, 2003; Tronvoll, 1998). This strategy was used to not only provide and foster a strong transnational Eritrean diasporic identity, but also to legitimize the authoritarian government at home. According to Gilley (2006), legitimation is fostering support on the bases of 'legitimacy beliefs" that are acquired through ideological indoctrination and socio-economic accomplishments. The Eritrean government used this tool during the diasporic events to acquire support and justify its authoritarian rule (Conrad, 2006b). Furthermore, legitimacy can be nourished through the construction of an external threat which often leads to a rally-around-the-flag effect (Hirt and Mohammad, 2018). This is evident through the establishment of Ethiopia as its historic arch-enemy. Similarly, oppositional diaspora groups with linkages to

Ethiopia are also portrait as external threats (Hirt, 2014). The Eritrean government portrayal of external threats is used to legitimize authoritarianism and highlights the government's indoctrination as one Eritrean notes that the country is "under threat by Ethiopia, and our rights are disregarded by the international community, we just cannot afford something like democracy" (Hirt and Mohammad, 2018).

Moreover, the official EPLF/PFDJ discourse on national identity can be traced back to the independence struggle and is disseminated during these events by fostering a narrative of interdependence between the nation, the people and the leadership. According to this trinity, non-compliance of one component would destruct the whole construct and accordingly, risk the survival of the Eritrean nation (Conrad, 2005). Hence, those who voice their opinion and criticize the government are regarded as traitors by the government and many Eritreans. Such a discourse may lead to increased cohesion within the diaspora community and/or foster strong divisions between government supporters and oppositions, with little room for discussion and exchange.

Yet, those events also had a practical function for the government. Despite these events being sites for the production and reproduction of national identity, it was also used by government representatives and embassy employees to remind people of their duty to pay the two per cent diaspora tax (Monsurro, 2014). Moreover, it was also a site used to gain information about diaspora activities and alliances.

Thus, in 2014 the Dutch Country of Origin Report stated that:

"…the Eritrean government would have networks of informants in Eritrea as well as abroad. Members of the diaspora who did not participate in political and cultural events and fundraising abroad would be reportedly blacklisted. Non-loyal members of the diaspora would be the target of organized government campaigns […]." (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2014)

These political and cultural events are not solely used as vehicles to disseminate the official EPLF/PFDJ narrative of Eritrean history, but present also an instrument to gain information, coerce and co-opt the Eritrean diaspora.

Moreover, the EPLF/PFDJ has a quasi-monopoly on information and media outlets in the country and as a result, can shape the political discourse effectively. It has been argued that state-owned or –affiliated media, including newspapers, video productions and the internationally satellite transmitted TV channel Eri-TV is reaching more people, both within and outside of Eritrea, than independent and new multimedia covering Eritrea (Conrad, 2005). Thus, the only means of acquiring information about Eritrea is through state-owned media outlets or information derived from citizens inside the country. Yet, high levels of propaganda and the spread of rumors have made reliable information difficult. Due to the repressive and limited access to information, Eritrea has been referred to as the "North Korea of Africa" (Blair, 2013). As a result, the government can effectively disseminate and indoctrinate the diaspora with their official narrative.

Furthermore, the Eritrean government has actively tried to undermine the independent Eritrean media in the diaspora. For instance, Radio Erena, which was established in 2009 in France and gained popularity both within and outside of Eritrea, and has fallen victim to state repression. Its signal was jammed by a pirate transmission and its websites were hacked in 2011 by Eritrean state agents (Reporters Without Borders, 2016).

In sum, this section has examined how the Eritrean government is able to disseminate their official government narrative and discourse to the diaspora through social and cultural events and the media. As a result, the strategies of national identity building, legitimization of authoritarian rule, and monopoly of information, increase the outreach and impact of the Eritrean government on the diaspora, while simultaneously fostering a deep divide between

those in support and those opposing the regime. The thesis argues that this hampers the effective mobilization of the opposition.

The Web of Spies and State Agents

State surveillance is an inherent part of many authoritarian states across the world and is used to keep its citizens in check. Eritrea is no exemption to this. Despite the existence of official security service agents, the Eritrean government is highly relying on informers, undercover agents and informal collaborators. These "informal" agents are believed to be present throughout the public sphere, including schools, universities, bars, streets, markets, churches and internet cafes. Many Eritreans also fear that a friend, relative, colleague or a partner might work as a secret agent or government informer (Treiber, 2004). However, these fears and assumptions are not always grounded on the realities and Eritrean state surveillance capacities, but often based upon alleged threats and individual accounts (Bozzini, 2015).

Although discontent and resentment against the Eritrean regime are widespread in the Eritrean diaspora community since the government crack-down on dissidents in 2001 (Giorgis, 2014), the government can still count on a considerable number of EPLF/PFDJ loyalists which are known within all segments of the Eritrean diaspora (Müller, 2012). According to an Eritrean-Canadian journalist: "Wherever there are Eritreans, there are government spies who report your opinions and activities [.] Those that have opinions different than the government, they are just labeled as opposition, as against the country, as traitors" (Keita, 2010).

Moreover, according to some account's, Eritrean government agents and spies in the diaspora can be divided into two groups (Bozzini, 2015). Those that emigrated during the independence war and consist of EPLF loyalist, and those who fled to evade conscription and national service

more recently but decided to cooperate with state representatives abroad for several reasons, including financial incentives or out of fear. These individuals work closely with embassies, consulates and government representatives and report and collect information about diaspora activities by "maintaining watchlists, photographing or videotaping dissidents at protests or in opposition meetings" (Hepner, 2008: 486).

Furthermore, there is a widespread suspicion and belief that some newly arriving emigrants are actually "false refugees" and government spies instead.[5] However, there is no hard evidence to support that claim. Whether all these allegations are credible or not, it reveals that the diaspora is characterized by deep-rooted mistrust and fear about the states reach.

There is substantial evidence that state agents are actively monitoring the diaspora. For instance, there is evidence from a number of cases that some Eritrean state agents have infiltrated host countries government institutions and NGOs which are delivering welfare services and legal support for refugees and asylum seekers. In 2016, it was reported that Eritrean state agents were working for the German immigration service as interpreters (Allaby, 2018). Similarly, the Dutch government were forced to reform its immigration services after Mirjam van Reisen, a professor in International Relations at the University of Tilburg, exposed two interpreters that were siblings of Meseret Bahlbi, leader of the YPFDJ[6] in 2015. Although Bahlbi used the Dutch legal system in order to sue van Reisen for defamation, he lost his case in two instances (Allaby, 2018).

Since immigration services and its translators are the first with whom new arrivals get into contact with, knowing that an interpreter might collect personal information and report it back

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[5] Rather, this claim was derived from informal interviews with Eritrean opposition members of the diaspora. Moreover, it is based on rumors and "hearsay".
[6] The Young People's Front for Democracy and Justice (YPFDJ) is the youth organization of the ruling party (PFDJ).

to Eritrean embassies threatens many and implements fears of not being able to evade the governments grip and thus denied the refugee status due to the false translations. As Siid Negash, a spokesperson for the diasporic civil society organization Coordinamento Eritrea Democratica, noted:

> "You are asking for protection from the government and you find somebody who is translating your story, everything you know, everything that you have to say about the government, and you know that he is government himself. You understand how frightening this is?" (Allaby, 2018)

Others have recounted that translators in their refugee camps have deliberately spread false information, gave wrong advises and changed their stories in their notes (Bozzini, 2015).

Many Eritreans in the diaspora believe that embassies are keeping personal files of its exile citizens in order to blackmail or retaliate against extended family members or property in Eritrea of those who publicly voice their criticism of the Eritrean regime. Indeed, Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003) has provided support for this claim and argued that in order to suppress diasporic opposition, homeland government my use reactive measures such as harassing relatives in the homeland. One Eritrean opposition member whose father was detained due to his political activities in the diaspora, testified in front of the UN Human Rights Commission of Inquiry that:

> *"My father was imprisoned for 20 months when he returned from [a foreign country]… We do not know why he was arrested and he was not told the reasons either. But when he returned to Eritrea, before he was arrested, intelligence people asked him about my political activities. He was told to ask me to leave the political organization I was affiliated to"* (Plaut, 2015).

Due to this testimony and numerous others, including testimonies of former spies, and while recognizing that the Eritrean spy web has its outpost almost in every country Eritreans live, the UN Security Council formulated a resolution in 2009 that called upon the Eritrean government to "refrain from using threats of violence, extortion and other strategies to coerce and pressure its citizens abroad and implemented sanctions against the regime (UNSCR 1907, 2009). Similarly, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC) concluded in 2015 that:

> "The spying web has its outposts outside Eritrea, used to control the Eritrean population in the various countries where they reside. Eritrean representations in foreign countries recruit spies to conduct surveillance of Eritreans in the diaspora. Allegedly, Government operatives are active in almost every other place Eritreans live. Information obtained by the Commission indicates that, to conduct spying activities on their behalf, embassies often approach individuals from within the Eritrean communities abroad, in particular those who pay the two per cent Rehabilitation Tax as this is perceived as a form of support to the Government" (UNHRC, 2015a, para. 348).

According to a number of informants, Eritrean state-agents are also infiltrating and surveilling oppositional meetings and try to defame anti-government activists. These agents are present at almost every oppositional meeting and gather information and intelligence on participants and activities. Often, they photograph and video-tape these events for the government or publicize the material by adding defaming imagery (Plaut, 2015). Yet, such intimidation strategies do not stop there. For instance, during the 2014 Eritrean Festival in Bologna, anti-governments protesters were attacked by the official security staff patrolling the event (Plaut, 2014).

The Eritrean web of spies and informants are not the only government linked entity abroad that is fostering fear and coercion in Eritrean diasporic communities. Also, embassies and consulates

with their staff play a vital role in keeping its diaspora in check. For instance, request for passports, certificates or any other important documentation as well as access to send remittances and packages to their families, may be refused if the embassy or consulate deems a person to be oppositional to the government. In addition, it demobilizes those who are critical of the government to become active in the opposition, due to the fear of repercussions (Berhane and Tyyskä, 2017).

In addition, embassies and consulates play an important role in accumulating and extorting financial resources through a two per cent income tax. Since 2011, paying this tax is in violation of international law, due to the UNSCR 1907 prohibiting monetary assistance to support military activities (Canda Gazette, 2010). Although official data on the Eritrean economy is not available, it is estimated that these financial contributions amount to approximately 30-35 per cent of the overall Eritrean GDP (Fesschatzion, 2005). Thus, it can be argued that by paying this "diaspora tax" Eritreans abroad are substantially contributed to the survival of the regime.

Overall, this section has illustrated and examined the various coercive and retaliation measures used by the government. The existence of government informants and spies in the diaspora as well as the conduct of embassies and consulates have highlighted the far-reaching impact of the Eritrean regime. It not only reminds the Eritrean diaspora community that the state can still penalize or retaliate against individuals and their families at any time but has also illustrated the mobilization efforts to disunify diaspora communities. Further, coercion, fear of surveillance and the climate of mistrust it produces within the community can be all regarded as important transnational mechanisms that aim to demobilize and hamper the political organization of the opposition within the diaspora. Furthermore, by co-opting and coercing citizens abroad to pay the two per cent diaspora tax, the diaspora constitutes a vital support line for the regime and its stability.

Conclusion

In sum, this thesis has examined factors that explain the Eritrean's diaspora failure to effectively mobilize against the regime. The study has discovered mechanisms through which the Eritrean government keeps its diaspora in check, through the employment of a qualitative single case study and PT. First, the thesis has illustrated that despite the fact that diasporas can often behave in nationalist ways and that undemocratic and apolitical attitudes can be found within them, it is not evident in the case of Eritrea. Second, literature discussing diaspora and regime change suggests that a large proportion of its diaspora would form a opposition to the government in order to foster political regime change with the following features: *(i) a large, young and often well educated "conflict-generated" diaspora to western countries; (ii) a large proportion of the diaspora consists of exiles and dissidents of the regime; (iii) discontent with the regime is widespread in the diaspora; (iv) almost all of Eritrean civil society and oppositional movements are situated in the diaspora*. Yet, the case study of Eritrea has emphasized the inapplicability of such explanation despite the presence of the indicators. Rather, the Eritrean diaspora shows little success in influencing homeland politics to foster democratic reforms, contradictory to the theoretical expectation (Story and Walker, 2016).

Third, through the analysis, this thesis has shown that the Eritrean government uses transnational mechanisms to coerce and co-opt the diaspora and to legitimize its rule. The investigation of national identity building, surveillance, coercion, and co-option have highlighted the far-reaching arm of the Eritrean government to control and hinder any mobilization challenging the status quo. Moreover, political and cultural events, media, intelligence services, coercion and co-option strategies have undeniably proven to destruct diasporic oppositional movements. Specifically, the thesis has identified social and cultural events and the media as vehicles to disseminate government propaganda in order to co-opt and control large segments of the diaspora. Furthermore, social and cultural festivals are sites used

to collect information and financial support which aids the regime's stability. The thesis has illustrated that the Eritrean government uses a variety of coercive practices, surveillance and retaliation measures, in order to keep its diaspora in check and to minimize oppositional mobilization. This is conducted through the employment of informants, spies and diplomatic staff which not only gather information about diaspora activities but also actively coerce, threaten, and retaliate against Eritreans abroad. The employment of such transnational strategies produces a climate of deep mistrust within the diaspora which further hampers their successful mobilization of an opposition.

Lastly, theoretical and policy implications can also be derived from this research study. While borrowing from the literature of regime stability theory, it suggests that theories on the nexus of diaspora and their political impact on home countries politics should incorporate the possibility that some governments employ transnational strategies in order to forestall opposition mobilization and ensure the survival of the regime. Further, it also suggests that state authority is not bound to a state's border, but rather transcends far beyond, into diaspora communities. The case of Eritrea has highlighted the impact of such strategies and might be generalizable to other cases. The proposed additional explanation on the role of diaspora engagement in fostering regime change has added further theoretical contestation to the literature. Moreover, it has shown that existing explanations fail to consider governments role in restricting diaspora activities and enhanced the understanding, by answering the research question, why the Eritrean diaspora fails to achieve democratic regime change, unlike others. In addition, this research has underlined the academic relevance of the study because other diasporas are likely experience transnational control. This thesis has contributed to this limited knowledge and suggest further theorization and investigation of this phenomenon. In regard to policy implications, the study has shown that host governments should pay closer attention to

foreign governments activities in coercing their citizens abroad. Unlike many states, the governments of the Netherlands and Canada have expelled Eritrean consuls and closed their consulates (Berhane and Tyyskä, 2017; Conrad, 2010). This portrays a strong signal of disproval and intolerance of coercive measures towards diaspora members. Other countries and organizations should follow this example by implementing measures and strategies to avoid such interference and intimidation.

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