



Bern-Wabern, 28 June 2012

Agreed Minutes

Presentation by Dr. David Bozzini

February 16th, 2012

National Service and State Structures in Eritrea

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This document is a record of selected parts of the presentation given by Dr. David Bozzini the 26th February 2012 at the Federal Office for Migration, Bern. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Federal Office for Migration.

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1. Introduction

Eritrea is one of the most authoritarian regimes in the world. Inspired by a socialist-type of rule and ideology, it has developed its own militaristic ideology since fighting for independence from Ethiopia (1961-1991). Although Eritrea is considered a highly militarized state¹, the Eritrean regime is also characterized by its versatility. The Eritrean state bureaucracy is disorganized, ineffective in many aspects and unstable. Measures, rules and actions are not enforced and distributed homogeneously throughout all administrative sectors and areas and remain widely unpredictable and unforeseeable to most citizens. Lack of coordination amongst state institutions causes delays, inconsistencies and many disagreements. Bureaucratic rules are largely inconsistent. This provokes various types of uncertainty and insecurity among the population. Arbitrariness creates a climate of fear which is a main characteristic of the Eritrean state governance. In this sense rule of law is inexistent in Eritrea. Written laws and proclamations do not reflect rules and regulations as implemented on the ground. Although technically possible, almost no room is available for judicial review of state policies and bureaucratic measures. The state is largely unaccountable and the judiciary cannot be mobilized against bureaucratic decisions or police actions.

There is no cult of personality regarding President Isaias Afewerki, even though he's still considered a charismatic leader largely due to his leading role in the struggle for Eritrean independence.² His movement, the EPLF, now the only party in the country and renamed People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) monopolizes national politics.³ The leadership implemented a planned economy that is led by the government, the Party and its companies.⁴

Three general dynamics account for the uneven action of the state: institutional, individual and social. All three are deeply interrelated in Eritrea. Institutional change for instance cannot therefore be understood only through the institutional (legal, bureaucratic) perspective. It has to take in account individual and local implementation of the orders (that accounts for discrepancies) and social (over)reaction and anticipation to these changes mainly driven by strategies of risk avoidance, mistrust and fear.

2. "Under Siege"

The presentation is based on David Bozzini's dissertation in social anthropology entitled: *En Etat de siège: ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Erythrée*⁵ (Under Siege. An Ethnography of National Mobilization and State Surveillance in Eritrea). Bozzini has been researching in Eritrea since 2003 and spent two years in the field from 2005 until the beginning of 2007.⁶ His dissertation has been accepted for the completion of

¹ Human Rights Watch: Service for Life. State repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea. 16.04.2009. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/04/16/service-life-0> (16.05.2012); International Crisis Group: Eritrea: The Siege State. 21.09.2010. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/ethiopia-eritrea/163%20Eritrea%20The%20Siege%20State.pdf> (28.06.2012); Cf. U.S. Department of State: 2010 Human Rights Report Eritrea. 11.03.2010. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160120.pdf> (28.06.2012); Tronvoll, Kjetil: The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea. 2009. http://www.jus.uio.no/smr/forskning/publikasjoner/boker/2009/docs/Eritrea-the-lasting-struggle-for-freedom_2009.pdf (28.06.2012); Hughes, Howard: Eine Volksarmee besonderer Art – der Militärkomplex in Eritrea. http://www.connection-ev.de/pdfs/eri_militaer.pdf (28.06.2012); Landinfo: Eritrea: Nationaldienst. 28.07.2011. <http://www.landinfo.no/id/168.0> (28.06.2012); UNHCR: UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea. 20.04.2011. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de06122.html> (28.06.2012).

² Admiration for the President is observable mainly in certain groups which are loyalist to the Party in the diaspora.

³ Cf. U.S. Department of State: 2010 Human Rights Report Eritrea. 11.03.2010. P. 1. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160120.pdf> (28.06.2012); Human Rights Watch: Service for Life. State repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea. 16.04.2009. P. 11-19. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/04/16/service-life-0> (28.06.2012); International Crisis Group: Eritrea: The Siege State. 21.09.2010. P. 6-9. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/ethiopia-eritrea/163%20Eritrea%20The%20Siege%20State.pdf> (28.06.2012).

⁴ Gaim Kibreab: Eritrea. A Dream Deferred. 2009.

⁵ Bozzini, David: En Etat de siège : ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Erythrée. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

⁶ Information about Bozzini's past and current researches: http://www.ascleiden.nl/Research/Bozzini_D.aspx; <http://p3.snf.ch/person-515450#> (28.06.2012).

his doctoral degree in Social Science and Humanities (*summa cum laude*), by the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland in May 2011. The thesis explores and analyzes the experiences of conscripts, the despotic governance of the regime as well as acts of resistance or collaboration and the consequences of insecurity.

Bozzini used the usual ethnographic methodology sharing the daily life amongst National Service conscripts, conducting semi-structured interviews, repeated discussions and group discussions and observation. He followed-up various bureaucratic procedures and court cases during several months.⁷ Due to his limited access to data and materials, Bozzini adopted research strategies commonly developed under such fieldwork circumstances. A complete presentation of his methodology can be found in his dissertation, available online in French only.

The results of the dissertation are valid for the time period of active research on the case, i.e. until 2008. There have been some changes since then. Furthermore, the results are mainly valid for highlanders of ethnic Tigrinya and Christian background, since Bozzini didn't research in the lowlands, which are populated by various ethnic groups of Muslims confession.

2.1. The National Service

National Service is compulsory for all Eritreans between the age of 18 and 50 years. The National Service starts with a basic military training and lasts 18 months. Since 1998, however, the term is usually extended for a much longer period and mobilization has become practically permanent.⁸ Conscripts are demobilized on an individual basis only.⁹ There has been no comprehensive demobilization program in Eritrea since the end of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war (1998-2000).

The Eritrean National Service includes both a military and civil service. Conscripts in the civil sector are assigned to work in ministries, schools, courts, hospitals, local administrations or party-owned companies.¹⁰ They're not allowed to choose their assignments or jobs in the National Service. Many conscripts following further education, academic or vocational, do not necessarily choose their discipline or training. Criteria used to access education and to distribute students after their military training are unclear and partly based on academic results.¹¹

The education sector is highly militarized.¹² Since 2003, the 12th school year of all Eritrean pupils takes place in the military training camp of Sawa, not far from the Sudanese border.¹³ Conscripts are paid amounts between 145 and 500 Nakfa.¹⁴ After the so-called demobiliza-

⁷ Bozzini, David: En Etat de siège : ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Erythré. Chapter 3.23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

⁸ Cf. U.S. Department of State: 2010 Human Rights Report Eritrea. 11.03.2010. P. 27, 32. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160120.pdf> (28.06.2012); Human Rights Watch: Service for Life. State repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea. 16.04.2009. P. 3. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/04/16/service-life-0> (28.06.2012); International Crisis Group: Eritrea: The Siege State. 21.09.2010. P. 9-11. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/ethiopia-eritrea/163%20Eritrea%20The%20Siege%20State.pdf> (28.06.2012); Landinfo: Eritrea: Nationaldienst. 28.07.2011. P. 7-8. <http://www.landinfo.no/id/168.0> (28.06.2012).

⁹ Pregnancy, HIV and severe disabilities are the most common grounds. However successful demobilization process does not means always that the conscripts is practically released from national duties under National Service (cf. more information on demobilization in Chapter 5).

¹⁰ Gaim Kibreab: Eritrea. A Dream Deferred. 2009.

¹¹ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythré. Chapter 5. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

¹² Riggan, Jennifer: Avoiding Wastage by Making Soldiers: Technologies of the State and the Imagination of the Educated Nation, in: Tricia Redeker Hepner, D. O'Kane (Ed.): Biopolitics, Militarism and Development. Eritrea in the Twenty-First Century. 2009; Müller, Tanja R.: Human Ressource Development and the State: Higher Education in Postrevolutionary Eritrea, in: Tricia Redeker Hepner, D. O'Kane (Ed.): Biopolitics, Militarism and Development. Eritrea in the Twenty-First Century. 2009.

¹³ Cf. U.S. Department of State: 2010 Human Rights Report Eritrea. 11.03.2010. P. 18-19. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160120.pdf> (28.06.2012); Landinfo: Eritrea: Nationaldienst. 28.07.2011. P. 11. <http://www.landinfo.no/id/168.0> (28.06.2012).

¹⁴ Cf. Human Rights Watch: Service for Life. State repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea. 16.04.2009. P. 52. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/04/16/service-life-0> (28.06.2012).

tion process which doesn't imply a release from the National Service¹⁵, members receive a salary based on their level of education.¹⁶

2.2. Citizenship

Eritrean citizenship is regulated by the Nationality proclamation and involves completion of national duties but more broadly, citizenship is also fundamentally associated with nationalistic engagements and other militaristic values.¹⁷ The fighters who fought for independence are national heroes. Nowadays, citizens who did not participate in the struggle for liberation must serve the country in the National Service. The government follows the idea of a nation united in the struggle for freedom.¹⁸ The official ideology and governance practice allow almost no room for individual freedom, inclination or ambition. Basic citizenship rights are not granted to objectors and deserters even after a prison sentence. Conscripts in the National Service have their rights limited regarding marriages, property, business licenses, traveling, labour, etc.¹⁹ Those who didn't participate in the "freedom struggle" have to "acquire" their citizenship by serving in the National Service.²⁰

3. Control of Conscripts

3.1. Administrative Control

After completing the basic training or studies, conscripts are assigned to an administrative unit under a ministry, the Party, local administration or a company usually owned by the Party or one of its members. The conscripts are at the bottom of the hierarchy and are tributaries to their superiors.²¹

The assignment procedure is managed by the Ministries of Defense and Education.²² The latter is in charge of assigning Eritreans who have a higher education level. The fact that these ministries manage a huge share of the national human resources makes them quite powerful. Demobilization is approved by the Ministry of Defense. Former students of higher education (university, colleges, teacher training centers, etc.) must first have the approval of the Ministry of Education before claiming demobilization in the Ministry of Defense. Access to such a process depends on obtaining a series of letters of recommendation, e.g. by superiors, human resources departments and even by the Minister in some cases.²³ National Service members are entirely dependent on the will of their bosses and on the hierarchy within the office where they're assigned. Complaints aren't accepted and conscripts can't turn to an institution in case of mistreatment.²⁴ Discretionary powers are important and create a system of heavy dependency. Personal contacts are useful to speed up the process of obtaining such official documents.

Reassignment of conscripts:²⁵ In certain cases, it occurs as a form of punishment. In all cases, reassignment is extremely challenging to conscripts who are already in a very difficult

¹⁵ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 91-94. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

¹⁶ Gaim Kibreab: Forced Labour in Eritrea. Journal of Modern African Studies 41(1): P. 41-72. <http://ehrea.org/force.pdf> (28.06.2012).

¹⁷ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. Chapter 4. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

¹⁸ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. Chapter 4. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

¹⁹ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

²⁰ Hepner, TriciaRedeker: Soldiers, Martyrs, Traitors, and Exiles. Political Conflict in Eritrea and the Diaspora. 2009.

²¹ Bozzini, David: Les spirales de l'incertitude ou la construction collective de l'insécurité des conscrits érythréens. Journal des Africanistes. Forthcoming.

²² Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 84-87. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

²³ Bozzini, David: Unpublished fieldnotes.

²⁴ Bozzini, David: The Catch-22 of Resistance. Jokes and Political Imagination of Eritrean Conscripts. Forthcoming.

²⁵ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 215-222. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

situation, and experience stress and insecurity. The process of reassignment might take several months. During that time, the conscript is often in a kind of bureaucratic limbo.²⁶ In this case, conscripts have no access to services and payment. During the time of the reassignment procedure, the conscripts lack needed papers (e.g. military *laissez-passers*) and are vulnerable to police controls.

In early 2006, almost all conscripts in civil service were called to Sawa in order to renew their ID card.²⁷ This caused panic because many at first suspected a national mobilization related to an imminent conflict with Ethiopia. Later on, many suspected the call as being part of a national reshuffle of assignment which caused panic, too. Reassignment means one has to build a complete new network of solidarity in the locality the conscript will be sent to work. This jeopardizes his relationships and way to sustain himself.

Conscripts are also affected by purges in the Ministry they are working for or by swift suspension of their bosses: Changes in high positions always cause changes among the employees, often according to the ethnic or regional affiliation of the new boss or his team.²⁸ The conscripts then have to renegotiate all their relationships and alliances they may have built over the years and might in some case be harassed by the new team of employees.

3.2. Police Control

Police control is enforced through the control of identity documents at checkpoints and by police or military police who carry out regular roundups.

The blue *identity card* is issued to individuals over 18 years by the Immigration Office, which has branches in all *Zobas*. For obtaining an ID card, a citizen first has to approach the local administration (*Mmhdar*), which issues a letter of recommendation for the Immigration Office branch of the Zoba. In preparation for the independence referendum in 1993, millions of ID cards were issued. ID cards are used in all kinds of bureaucratic procedures. Not having an ID card can hinder access to civil services. However, since the border war with Ethiopia (1998-2000), military conscripts need only a *laissez-passer* (and no ID card) to pass checkpoints.²⁹

Conscripts in both sectors of the National Service hold *laissez-passers* (*Mänqäsaqäsi*), which are issued by the Ministry of Defense (for the military sector) or another ministry or civil institution under which the conscript is assigned. Military *laissez-passers* are yellow, and those of civil institutions are white. Not all have the same design and information, some are even simple letters.

Demobilization cards are issued to National Service members who have successfully carried out the demobilization process. This card replaces *laissez-passers*. It generally grants more freedom of movement within the Eritrean territory. However, holders of such cards are not properly demobilized.³⁰ On the contrary, they are still assigned to their position within the state institutions and do not have the right to change or to find a job elsewhere. Usually, Eritreans do not differ between the National Service period and such demobilization in the sense that the conscript is not released. Many people doubt that they are officially demobilized by the army. Everyone expects to be remobilized in case of a new conflict.³¹

Passports cannot be obtained by conscripts and so-called demobilized National Service

²⁶ Bozzini, David : Low-Tech State Surveillance : The Production of Uncertainty among Conscripts in Eritrea. *Surveillance and Society* 9(1/2): P. 93-113. <http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/low-tech/low-tech> (16.05.2012); Bozzini, David: Les spirales de l'incertitude ou la construction collective de l'insécurité des conscrits érythréens. *Journal des Africanistes*. Forthcoming.

²⁷ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. *Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*. P. 242-245. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

²⁸ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. *Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*. P. 250-253. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

²⁹ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. *Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*. Chapter 7. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012); Cf. Human Rights Watch: *Service for Life. State repression and Indefinite Conscriptation in Eritrea*. 16.04.2009. P. 63. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/04/16/service-life-0> (28.06.2012).

³⁰ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. *Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*. P. 91-94. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012)

³¹ Cf. Landinfo: *Eritrea: Nationaldienst*. 28.07.2011. P. 20. <http://www.landinfo.no/id/168.0> (28.06.2012).

members who still have the obligation to participate in the *Warsay Yikealo* campaign.³² Passports and ID cards can be obtained upon request at Eritrean embassies and consulates abroad. It's necessary to pay fees, others taxes and to fill out of a special form for deserters or objectors that clearly mentions their national felony. At least between 2004 and 2007, authentic passports and exit visas could be obtained through illegal procedures in Eritrea at a high price (40'000/70'000 Nakfa).³³ However, such opportunity was considerably limited after the police cracked down on a network of offenders in 2005.

3.3. Control of Laissez-Passers

There are military and civil *laissez-passers*. Military *laissez-passers* are issued by the Ministry of Defense (at the unit level). Civil *laissez-passers* are issued by the institution to which the conscript is assigned. Laissez-passers have to be shown at checkpoints, during roundups and identity controls by police patrols.

Until 2004, *laissez-passers* were issued almost only by military institutions. In November/December 2004, a comprehensive roundup organized by military police took place in and around Asmara. All persons without *laissez-passers* or other documents proving that they had fulfilled their military duty were taken to Adi Abeyto and other prisons.³⁴ Many institutions which employed conscripts in the civil sector of the National Service hadn't furnished their employees with *laissez-passers* so far (despite legal obligations), so consequently many conscripts were arrested despite serving in the National Service, for the lack of proof.³⁵

This unilateral move by the Ministry of Defense showed the lack of coordination between civil and military institutions. The work of several ministries was hampered because many of their workforces had been arrested. Ministries had to procure the release of their employees. After this incident, civil institutions started to issue *laissez-passers*, too. However, these are usually *ad hoc* documents with different designs, which may even change. Such a *laissez-passer* is therefore much easier to falsify than an ID card with better safety features.³⁶

Until autumn 2011, movement on Eritrean roads was controlled by many checkpoints. At these checkpoints, only *laissez-passers* were checked with no cross-checking other identity documents such as ID cards. It was never verified, if a *laissez-passer* really belonged to the person who was using it. Deserters using documents of friends or falsified documents were thus almost never detected.

Nevertheless, the controls were responsible for a climate of fear and incertitude. *Laissez-passers* have a limited validity period, renewal is not always easy. The bureaucratic procedure for the renewal is complicated and involves many different authorities. Some of them can be dysfunctional, e.g. because of the lack of electricity or because of the absence of responsible persons. This makes the renewal procedure time consuming – often, active conscripts therefore have no valid *laissez-passer* and they even have to hide at home.³⁷ There are also known cases of conscripts arrested after a design change of their *laissez-passer*, as the police considered the new layout as false.³⁸

³² Cf. Human Rights Watch: Service for Life. State repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea. 16.04.2009. P. 43. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/04/16/service-life-0> (28.06.2012); Landinfo: Eritrea: Nationaldienst. 28.07.2011. P. 8. http://www.landinfo.no/id/168_0 (28.06.2012).

³³ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 259. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

³⁴ Amnesty International: Eritrea: Fear of Torture/Incommunicado Detention/Arbitrary Killings: Thousands of People Held at Adi Abeto Army Prison. 09.11.2004. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR64/008/2004/en/dbef25e5-d561-11dd-bb24-1fb85fe8fa05/afr640082004en.html> (28.06.2012).

³⁵ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 140-144. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012); Bozzini, David: Les spirales de l'incertitude ou la construction collective de l'insécurité des conscrits érythréens. Journal des Africanistes. Forthcoming.

³⁶ Bozzini, David : Low-Tech State Surveillance : The Production of Uncertainty among Conscripts in Eritrea. Surveillance and Society 9(1/2): P. 93-113. <http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/low-tech/low-tech> (28.06.2012).

³⁷ Treiber, Magnus: Trapped in Adolescence: The Post-War Urban Generation, in: Tricia Redeker Hepner and David O'Kane: Biopolitics, Militarism and Development in Contemporary Eritrea. 2009.

³⁸ Bozzini, David: Les spirales de l'incertitude ou la construction collective de l'insécurité des conscrits érythréens. Journal des Africanistes. Forthcoming.

This situation provoked the emergence of a flourishing black market with forged *laissez-passers*, raising the suspicion of the military police and leading to more controls conducted by military patrolling in localities.³⁹ Since late 2004 arbitrary police measures and round ups have been intensified due to these shortcomings. Even with valid papers in hands, people in National Service were detained for a short period of time.⁴⁰ Thus, round ups increase the insecurity not only for deserters and draft evaders but also for conscripts. Controls at checkpoints were rudimentary. At the time this report is being written, there are almost no more military checkpoints along the highways, however, military patrols and round ups are still enforced throughout the country.

3.4. Grey "Surveillance" and "Social" Control

Many Eritreans live in constant fear of control and arrest. Additionally, there is covert surveillance, discrete but palpable – in Eritrea as well as in the diaspora. It is generally assumed that there are undercover agents of national security on the streets of Asmara, in cafés and restaurants, at the University and now also in the colleges.⁴¹ Some people feel uncomfortable with some members of their own family close to the regime leadership. Other well-known informers report to the local administration and the local branch of the Party.⁴² They are usually civilians and some of them are demobilized freedom fighters. They monitor house blocks. Others agents in civil patrol in the streets, they report to some contact working for the National Security in a hidden capacity.

Like in the former Eastern Block, individuals can be forced to observe their neighbors and friends.⁴³ They become “informal collaborators” for a certain period of time. Informal collaborators also work in the administration and in higher education institutions. Denunciation is therefore extremely widespread within the society. Lack of due processes and inquiry as well as complaining tools or judicial reviews such as appeal to unfair treatment and blackmailing, encourage such practices. It is common to take advantage of someone, discredit somebody or mar his reputation. This leads to a general climate of fear and mistrust that has spread well beyond the formal institutions of the state. Eritreans don't dare to speak openly. Mistrust is also spread within the families.

4. Women in National Service

According to many informants who have been to Sawa military camp, men outnumber women by three.⁴⁴ This shows that many women are objecting National conscription and are therefore living in a clandestine situation or have been effectively demobilized. There are several tactics to avoid recruitment. Young women often leave school in the 10th or 11th grade to avoid being called to the 12th school year in Sawa. They're afraid of going to Sawa, because of the high risk of being raped – not only by military superiors, but also by colleagues of the same age.

Women who left school and avoided the National Service are often in clandestine situation. There are two main strategies for these objectors: Either they stay at home and work as housekeepers in their own families, or they search employment in commerce (shops, bars, cafes). There is a certain degree of tolerance towards female objectors; they're usually left in

³⁹ Bozzini, David : Low-Tech State Surveillance : The Production of Uncertainty among Conscripts in Eritrea. *Surveillance and Society* 9(1/2): P. 93-113. <http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/low-tech/low-tech> (28.06.2012).

⁴⁰ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. *Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*. P. 130-132. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012)

⁴¹ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. *Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*. P. 253-271. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

⁴² Bozzini, David: En état de siège. *Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*. P. 253-271. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012); Bozzini, David: *The Fines and the Spies: fears of state surveillance in Eritrea and in the diaspora*. Forthcoming.

⁴³ Bozzini, David: *The Fines and the Spies: fears of state surveillance in Eritrea and in the diaspora*. Forthcoming.

⁴⁴ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. *Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée*. P. 75-77. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

peace by the police.⁴⁵ Women are able to travel more freely than men in Eritrea. They can often set up small businesses or even be active in the black market trade of items coming from Sudan to the western lowlands. However, it happens sometimes that they're recruited after a round-up. In some cases, people claimed that certain round ups were targeting young women. They believe that this happens when leaders of military units require new domestic workers.

After the age of 27 years, women in clandestine situations can regularize their status, i.e. they're demobilized without ever having joined the National Service. This possibility was introduced around 2005.⁴⁶

Another way to avoid conscription is marriage or pregnancy. Many marriages are arranged for this goal. Especially in Sawa, women often get pregnant in order to be demobilized. In both cases, such demobilizations, are fragile: Women aren't promptly issued a demobilization paper, which makes them vulnerable during police controls. Mothers usually aren't remobilized, but given the general arbitrariness in Eritrea, such cases can't be categorically excluded. Some women with children were in the National Service. But there's certainly no systematic practice to remobilize mothers.

These strategies have negative consequences for women: many of them do not have a school leaving diploma (which is obtained after the 12th school year in Sawa). They have no access to further education, so many have to work as domestic workers or in small businesses as sellers or waitresses.

Many Rashaida, Afar and most Saho women aren't recruited due to resistance in these ethnic groups. Jeberti (muslim Tigrinya) women are nevertheless recruited in Asmara.⁴⁷

5. Administrations and Juridical System

5.1. Local Administration

The local administrations (*Mmhdar Kābābi*, sometimes called *Kābālā*), play a major role in the Eritrean state, controlling and counting the population directly. Information on local dwellers is listed in various registration books, so called family files are also kept. The local administration decides about who gets food ration cards and financial aid e.g. for medical treatment. *Dukuan Rātawi* literally means "fair shops". They are related to the local administration and the distribution company, Red Sea Corp., for retailing food and goods at subsidized prices. Items can be acquired once a month in these shops by providing the shopkeepers with coupons obtained from the local administration.⁴⁸

Furthermore, the local administration is the intermediary between citizens and other authorities. Every interaction with state authorities begins at the local administration. For obtaining any kind of documents (even those issued by the Zoba), a letter of recommendation of the local administration is needed. Bureaucratic procedures necessary for marriages (e.g. HIV tests) have to be gone through at the local administration.⁴⁹

Access to services isn't equal within different local administrations. The discretionary power of the local administrators and the lack of communication and professionalism are some explanations for such discrepancies amongst local administrations. There is a high level of corruption in many administrations and offices but such practice is carefully concealed.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 137-140. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

⁴⁶ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 84-87. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

⁴⁷ United Kingdom Home Office: Country of Origin Information Report – Eritrea. 17.08.2011. P. 47-48. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e4e0b952.html> (28.06.2012).

⁴⁸ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 222-227. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

⁴⁹ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 222-227. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

⁵⁰ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 222-227. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

5.2. Juridical System

After *de facto* independence in 1991, a new juridical system was introduced, based on adapted Ethiopian laws (civil and penal codes). Laws are regularly added and revised in the forms of proclamations drafted by the ministries and approved by the cabinet of the President. It is unclear whether lawyers in the Ministry of Justice have any influence on proclamations drafted by other ministries. Eritrea has now a mixed juridical system comprising national, sharia and customary laws.⁵¹

There are community courts, courts at the level of Sub-Zobas and Zobas as well as high courts. Community courts are often reluctant to open trials and judges throw out as many cases as possible from courts.⁵² In such cases, elders and mediators are called by both parties to start a mediation-arbitration procedure (called peace or *erki* in Tigrinya) according to customary law previously selected by both sides. They have the task to mediate according to local customary law in order to avoid a court case. Agreements are revised by court judges. Mediators treat different types of cases: Injuries, compensation payments (e.g. if sheep have damaged a field), disputes between neighbors, cattle theft, land conflicts, divorces, etc. In cases of injury or even death, blood money (*gar*) is usually agreed upon through *erki* procedure.⁵³

Mediators are important figures in the village life and considered as moral authorities. However, some of them are *Tegadelay* (former combatants) with a rather modest knowledge of local customs, given that they have spent years fighting and were away from their village. There are mediators-arbitrators also in Asmara and other cities.

During mediations, blackmailing often takes place.⁵⁴ Therefore, many Eritreans prefer court trials to mediation hoping for a fairer trial and no social or cultural pressures. On the other hand, there is a lot of mistrust towards the juridical institutions of the state. Most people do not believe that the judiciary is independent.

6. Exile and Retaliatory Measures

6.1. Legal Exit or Desertion

Most Eritreans have no possibility to obtain exit visas and to leave the country legally. Exceptions are demobilized women older than 27 years (with the consent of her husband), very few students and National Service members, sportsmen and party officials are sometimes granted exit visas. There are many obstacles even for the majority of these individuals who can legally go abroad. Those who manage to get an exit visa often have to pay a deposit of 100'000 to 150'000 Nakfa as a guarantee of their return.⁵⁵

In most cases, crossing the border illegally requires financial support. Candidates to exile prefer not to talk to their families in Eritrea about their plan. Some trust close friends and together their departure organize. In many cases, contacts to facilitators and human smugglers are arranged by persons who left Eritrea recently.

6.2. Retaliatory Measures

Since 2005, conscripts in the civil sector of the National Service have to name a responsible relative (sometimes called a "sponsor" or "guarantor" (*wuhaz*))⁵⁶, who will be addressed in

⁵¹ Cf. Tronvoll, Kjetil: The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea. 2009. P. 24-37. http://www.jus.uio.no/smr/forskning/publikasjoner/boker/2009/docs/Eritrea-the-lasting-struggle-for-freedom_2009.pdf (28.06.2012).

⁵² Bozzini, David: Troubled judicial itineraries: the in-between out-of-court cases and the revitalization of customary laws in Eritrea. Paper presented at Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Legal Pluralism Group, 30.0.3007 (available upon request).

⁵³ Favali, Lyda, and Roy Pateman: Blood, land and sex. 2003.

⁵⁴ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 278-284. 23.05.2011. P. 19. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

⁵⁵ Cf. U.S. Department of State: 2010 Human Rights Report Eritrea. 11.03.2010. P. 19. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160120.pdf> (28.06.2012).

⁵⁶ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 160-162. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).

case of desertion or any liability. This measure was introduced by the Ministry of Education to facilitate systematic retaliation towards the the relatives of deserters. Authorities expected that it would inhibit would-be deserters, since they know who will be punished for their deeds. In case of desertion, retaliatory measures for the relatives include: Fines of 50'000 Nakfa, the withdrawal of business licenses and arrest. In some cases, for the renewal of business licenses, traders have to prove that their children have fulfilled their National Service duty in order to obtain its renewal.⁵⁷

Retaliatory measures are not applied systematically. Such measures are now less frequent but are still enforced. Repression of family members of deserters is used by the Eritrean regime set to achieve a certain amount of control in the diaspora, especially on new migrants who have fled indefinite conscription.⁵⁸

6.3. Turning a Blind Eye to Escape

For three reasons, the Eritrean government could not be reluctant to let a significant part of the conscripts to flee abroad.⁵⁹

- For high-ranking military officials, facilitation across the border to Sudan and Ethiopia is an important source of money (border crossing, selling *laissez-passers* etc.).
- Almost all Eritreans between the ages of 18 and 25 years are conscripted. The state has to provide accommodation and food. It is reasonable to assume that the government tries to maintain a certain balance between the number of new conscripts and the deserters each years ("turn-over").
- Eritreans living abroad send home money. In Eritrea, the remittances are paid out by the state-owned Himbol Bank according to the official exchange rate of 15 USD to the Nakfa. Many Eritreans therefore now use the informal *Hawala* money transfer system to send money to Eritrea. State officials and Party members are also involved in such networks. In both cases, money sent to Eritrea generates hard currency that sooner or later lands in the bank accounts of the Party companies.

7. Diaspora: Mobilization and Surveillance

7.1. 2 % Tax and Other Mobilization Forms

During the struggle for independence (until 1991), many Eritreans abroad were paying around 20 % of their salaries to support the *Eritrean People's Liberation Front* (EPLF) and the national cause.

After the independence, EPLF's successor, the *People's Front for Democracy and Justice* (PFDJ) institutionalized a new tax system. Nowadays, many Eritreans pay a 2 % "tax" at embassies and consulates abroad.⁶⁰ This payment ensures access to all kinds of consular ser-

⁵⁷ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. 23.05.2011. P. 153. http://doc.rero.ch/lm.php?url=1000.40.4.20110929154508-LX/These_BozziniD.pdf (28.06.2012); cf. Bozzini, David M.: Low-tech Surveillance and the Despotism State in Eritrea. *Surveillance & Society* 9(1/2). 2011. P. 109. <http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/download/low-tech/low-tech> (28.06.2012); Human Rights Watch: Service for Life. April 2009. P. 45-46. http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/eritrea0409web_0.pdf (28.06.2012); Tronvoll, Kjetil: The lasting struggle for freedom in Eritrea. 2009. P. 129. http://www.ius.uio.no/smr/forskning/publikasjoner/boker/2009/docs/Eritrea-the-lasting-struggle-for-freedom_2009.pdf (28.06.2012); Amnesty International: Eritrea: Over 500 parents of conscripts arrested. 21.12.2006. <http://www.amnesty.org/fr/library/asset/AFR64/015/2006/fr/e1cd5b18-d3c6-11dd-8743-d305bea2b2c7/afr640152006en.html> (28.06.2012); UNHCR: UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea. 20.04.2011. P. 17-18. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de06122.html> (28.06.2012).

⁵⁸ Bozzini, David: The Fines and the Spies: fears of state surveillance in Eritrea and in the diaspora. Forthcoming.

⁵⁹ Bozzini, David: The Fines and the Spies: fears of state surveillance in Eritrea and in the diaspora. Forthcoming; Bozzini, David: Les spirales de l'incertitude ou la construction collective de l'insécurité des conscrits érythréens. *Journal des Africanistes*. Forthcoming.

⁶⁰ Hepner, Tricia Redeker: Soldiers, Martyrs, Traitors, and Exiles. *Political Conflict in Eritrea and the Diaspora*. 2009.

vices: renewal of identity documents, transfer of money or material to Eritrea, land purchase in Eritrea, heritage matters, legal return to Eritrea, etc.

If somebody desires to travel to Eritrea and hasn't paid the 2 % tax so far, he has to pay it backdated to the moment he started his exile. Persons who don't want to pay the tax prefer not to return to Eritrea. There are some reports indicating that some Eritreans who returned home without having paid the 2 % tax did not face consequences such as fines or prison sentences.

Revenues from this tax and the remittances are crucial for the survival of the Eritrean regime, as they allow the funding of the state institutions in part. The Eritrean regime doesn't give any information concerning the use of these revenues.

The Eritrean state collects funds by using other methods. Organizations close to Eritrea's government party PFDJ (culture and women's associations) generate funds by organizing petitions, events, political reunions and charity concerts, or projects. These organizations try to influence their members to contribute more than 2 % of their salaries.⁶¹

7.2. "Spies" in the Eritrean Diaspora

Some members of the Eritrean diaspora monitor the local community on behalf of the embassy and the Eritrean regime. Members of opposition groups claim that spies are sent from Asmara to monitor the diaspora.⁶² This widespread rumor has not been confirmed. However, it is possible that some loyalists to the Party, most likely from the former wave of migrants which arrived in Europe during the 1980s may monitor the community and report to the Embassy in an official capacity.⁶³

Many migrants have arrived during the 80s are disappointed by the behavior of the Eritrean regime. Some have joined the opposition or have at least distanced themselves from the Party and the Embassy since 1993.⁶⁴ Lack of support has been clearly observed since the end of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war and especially following the events in 2001. The relationship between generation and political affiliation is therefore not straightforward. Additionally, young dissidents formerly conscripted in the National Service report consistently that some asylum seekers who shared the same background in Eritrea and who have deserted like them nevertheless deliberately position themselves under the umbrella of the official institutions and affiliated associations of the Eritrean state and Party.

It is widely believed (in Eritrea as well as in the diaspora) that communication to and from Eritrea such as emails and telephone calls are monitored by the state security.⁶⁵ Letters and parcels sent to Eritrea are often opened by post office employees. Probably this happens in the hope of finding money or goods rather than for reasons of surveillance.

⁶¹ Cf. Glatthard, Fabienne: "Überwachung" und "Angst" im Exil? Die eritreische Diaspora in der Schweiz. Masterarbeit am Institut für Sozialanthropologie der Universität Bern. November 2011

⁶² Bozzini, David: The Fines and the Spies: fears of state surveillance in Eritrea and in the diaspora. Forthcoming; Glatthard, Fabienne: "Überwachung" und "Angst" im Exil? Die eritreische Diaspora in der Schweiz. Masterarbeit am Institut für Sozialanthropologie der Universität Bern. November 2011; Bozzini, David and Fabienne Glatthard: „Shall we fear the regime?“ Anxiety and reflexivity of Eritrean migrants in Switzerland. Forthcoming.

⁶³ Bozzini, David: The Fines and the Spies: fears of state surveillance in Eritrea and in the diaspora. Forthcoming.

⁶⁴ Hepner, Tricia Redeker: Soldiers, Martyrs, Traitors, and Exiles. Political Conflict in Eritrea and the Diaspora. 2009.

⁶⁵ Bozzini, David: The Fines and the Spies: fears of state surveillance in Eritrea and in the diaspora. Forthcoming.

Appendix 1: Topics relevant for COI (country of origin information) and asylum procedure in Bozzini's doctoral dissertation⁶⁶

National Service

Camps Wia and Gelalo	P. 163-165
Daily routine in national service, Sawa camp	P. 75-77, 87-91
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Exemptions for women	P. 137-139
<i>Giffa</i> (round-ups)	P. 124-126, 130-131
Higher education	P. 77-81, 92
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Identity documents and checks

Birth certificate	P. 203
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Falsification of identity documents	P. 143
Families register	P. 222
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Military <i>laissez-passer</i> , control at checkpoints	P. 122-124, 132-135, 147-148
Passport (fraudulently obtained)	P. 258-260

Daily life and surveillance

2 % tax	P. 88
50'000 Nakfa fine, persecution of relatives	P. 152-160, 224, 285-286
Costs of migration	P. 187
<i>Enda</i> (clan or lineage)	P. 252
Salaries	P. 88-89, 93, 97
Security measures by the state	P. 128-130
Informers	P. 253-257, 260-266

⁶⁶ Bozzini, David: En état de siège. Ethnographie de la mobilisation nationale et de la surveillance en Érythrée. P. 160-162. 23.05.2011. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/25005> (28.06.2012).