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Why Didn't the Arab Spring Spread to Eritrea? How Mass Suppression and Fear Can Successfully Prevent Dissent

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Why Didn’t the Arab Spring Spread to Eritrea? How Mass Suppression and Fear Can Successfully Prevent Dissent

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Introduction:

The Arab Spring has had noticeable effects on twelve countries spanning from within North Africa to the Middle East including: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, Oman and Kuwait. Not only did the movement spark riots and protests, but the events also led to reforms in government and the removal of oppressive tyrants in countries like Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Egypt. There are theories as to why the reactions in certain countries, like the aforementioned, were intensified in comparison to those with less political and social upheaval, like in Bahrain, Kuwait or Jordan.1 Many authors suggest the intensity of uprisings is dependent upon these underlying factors: economic hardship, government corruption, and inflation of social media outlets like Twitter or Facebook. However, other social scientists deeply consider the youth bulge, disenfranchisement of religious sects, tribal differences, rising unemployment, and the use of technology as a uniting tool as factors of the Arab Spring. Other authors similarly attribute the Arab Spring to intertwined causes of economic, social, political, juridical, and diplomatic problems that all contributed to the massive uprisings and revolution that became the Arab Spring.2 In addition to these disparities, the Middle East lacked institutions willing to invest in the education and progress of the Arab-youth. The majority of investments made by Western countries centered on oil, gas, and other economic gains.3 If these factors are indeed the root of the revolutions and sequence of events that we recognize as the Arab Spring, there are a few lingering questions that this paper aims to address.

This paper will explore and evaluate how the Arab Spring took hold in certain countries and the reasons it did not have as grand of an effect in others. Moreover, this paper will move to

3 Pollack and Byman and Al-Turk, "The Arab Awakening."
evaluate the cross-national similarities and political patterns of those nations with Eritrea, specifically why the Arab Spring failed to lead to shifting Eritrea’s political climate. Lastly, I will investigate the possibilities of what Eritrea would have needed to successfully achieve variant levels of success, as the twelve countries most affected by the Arab Spring. In order to discover these possibilities, there will be research covering what Eritrea uses as its main mediums of suppression and how they relate to the Arab countries.

The paper itself is split into three sections beginning with a chapter that defines the Arab Spring, then moves into exploring the specific countries involved by comparing how far the methods of revolt progressed in a cross-national analysis. This includes the brief history of the North African and Middle Eastern countries most affected by the series of uprisings and political dissent. In evaluating each nation and research conducted through peer-reviewed journal articles, accredited scholarship and drawing comparisons through the cross-national chart, the chapter will explain why the Arab Spring succeeded where it did, and inversely why it was not as successful elsewhere.

The second chapter will study the origins of Eritrea from colonial rule to liberation to the modern state and investigate the distribution of power or lack of that keeps the government centralized. In doing so, this section will highlight how the government has risen to power from its former liberation guerrilla army and how the prohibition of separate political parties has allowed the standing government’s domination over all sectors engulfing public life. This includes socially conforming citizens to continue the legacies of the culture that existed prior to liberation, which will be discussed in the “Nakfa Principles.” This lens into Eritrea’s governmental structure will address the infamous conscription, otherwise known as national service, and how legislation has cemented its role in the lives of Eritrean citizens through the
Yikaelo-Warsay Campaign. While examining the logistics of conscription, this chapter aims to address how service has been framed as an inescapable and inherent civic duty of each citizen, and offers a cross-national comparative chart with the twelve Arab-speaking nations involved in the Arab Uprisings to provide an analyzing lens into the use of conscription in these administrations and how those that implement the practice closely resemble authoritarian regimes. In addition, this chapter will emphasize the root of Eritrea’s refugee exodus, which is overwhelmingly composed of the youth, and contrast who remains in Eritrea and the relevance of the remaining vulnerable population with the population that was able to incite dissent and peaceful protests within the Arab nations. Furthermore, this chapter will make the argument for why Eritrea is in fact comparable to its regional counterparts through the discussion of its shared religions, languages, lack of pluralism, multi-ethnic composition, social, economic and political characteristics. All in all, this chapter will strengthen the link between Eritrea with its North African counterparts as opposed to homogenizing it with the entirety of the Middle East.

The third and final chapter will discuss the main mediums of suppression in Eritrea and how the government has ultimately secured its power against any internal resistance, consequently discouraging organized opposition or vocalized dissidents within its borders. To do so, the chapter will research Eritrea’s policies and implementations surrounding freedom of religion, freedom of independent press, freedom of assembly, the role of civil society, and the freedom of Eritreans to enter and exit the country and provide detailed case study of the ‘G-15’, and examples of what repercussions citizens face when violating the societal norms of the aforementioned categories. Why does this matter? By highlighting the level of scrutiny that ordinary citizens face when expressing personal liberties and human rights as those mentioned above, the nature of a government is exposed and the more restrictive, the more likely the
government is acting as an authoritarian or totalitarian regime. Eritrea’s governance is relevant in comparison to those of the Arab Spring because authoritarian regimes and lack of good governance played significant roles in fueling the organized civil social and political upheaval observed in North Africa and the Middle East starting in 2011.

This final chapter will also address why political or social upheaval regarding Eritrea is produced amongst the Eritrean diaspora and expatriates. What are the lengths of censorship and why is there no scholarship available regarding opposing views within Eritrea’s borders? Why is this relevant to the Arab Spring? There are many arguments for why the Arab Spring has occurred and who it has affected but scholars have failed to draw the link between countries that are experiencing similar or worse conditions and this is reflected in the case of Eritrea. This chapter aims to examine Eritrea leading up to the Arab Spring and adequately address the underlying reasons that Eritrea has not faced a revolution since its independence. Eritrea is an anomaly amongst the countries in the Horn of Africa, from enduring a 30 years-long war for liberation with Ethiopia after previously being subjected to a sequence of Ottoman, British, Egyptian, Italian rule – to being ruled by the same administrator and overseer for over 25 years. It is imperative that these connections are made exposing how open political thought and speech are restricted in less-democratic nations and the significance that censorship has in both the Arab nations and Eritrea. Eritrea was born through struggle but more importantly, its citizens demanded freedom from their oppressors and sought a nation that was ultimately freer and centered on unity through a shared national identity. Similarly, the Arab nations hoping to form alternative political systems that would stabilize basic human rights, lessen censorship, seek democracy while upholding individual freedoms were the same countries that participated in the Arab Uprisings.
This paper argues the underlying reasons that Eritrea has been unable to participate in the Arab Spring, starting with its notorious military conscription or national service program, fastening what is left of Eritrea’s youth and simultaneously sparking the refugee exodus from Eritrea. In addition to providing insight into why Eritrea’s population is diminishing, this paper will make the argument that the citizens’ fear of punishment has sparked self-censorship and distrust that was not as widespread in its Arab counterparts that experienced neighboring populations engulfed in similar uprisings, disrupting the systems of oppressions in place. These arguments aim to raise awareness of Eritrea’s political climate and how it has been stunted in its transition towards democracy.
Chapter 1:

This chapter will argue what the major drivers of the Arab Spring were. It will prove that the unifying factor of the Arabs fighting against their governments was the desire for freedom and the hope to finally escape the cycle of authoritarian rulers. There is a glamorized role associated with the social media and simultaneous youth bulge within the respective countries involved. These Arab-speaking nations had revolutions that were able to happen because of the resources and varying intense relations between citizens and their government. In certain countries like Algeria and Saudi Arabia, the regimes could be united under a strong central government. In more destabilized countries like Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, they were less centralized and unable to unite under a stable government. In many countries, revolutions are unable to happen because of the tight control and strict enforcement of the government. But what happens when there is instability and unrest? When the government and the people cannot see eye to eye? When the people’s desires are unfulfilled by the government and the people demand change? The outcomes of the nations involved in the Arab Uprisings were unexpected and this section will evaluate each respective nation’s experience in depth to better understand their outcomes. Additionally, this section will argue that the Arab Spring was a compilation of organized political and social responses whose outcomes were largely shaped by each government’s restrictions of personal and civil liberties in each local context. The countries that failed to remove their dictators and were quickly silenced are the same nations that experienced heavy online censorship, a lack of multiple political parties and assemblies, as well as comparatively wealthier economies with rulers that were able to manipulate appeasing legislation for their constituents. The countries that successfully removed their heads of state experienced similar suppressions of political and individual rights; however, the aforementioned countries had poorer
economies and their governments were prone to turmoil as a result of disintegration with other forms of authority, not limited to the military and security apparatus. This paper will not predict what the Arab countries that did not successfully revolt needed to reach change, but instead, it aims to address misconceptions of what led to the successes and failures in each nation involved and why understanding the multiple mediums of suppression involved is relevant.

**What is the Arab Spring?**

Scholars have observed the slue of Arab uprisings that began in 2011 and have received a spectrum of names, ranging from: the Arab Spring, Arab Uprisings, Arab Upheavals, Arab Awakening, etc. Some scholars separate each country’s experience, i.e.: Tunisia’s Uprisings, Egypt’s Uprisings, etc. This paper will refer to the culmination of events that transpired in North Africa and subsequently, the Middle East as “The Arab Spring” and “The Arab Uprisings”, interchangeably. Much like author Kamal Eldin Osman Salih, this paper aims to delve deeper into what connects the events that transpired throughout the Arab world: “The Arab uprisings represent a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that swept the Arab world.”

Although this definition Salih gives explains the experience of the collectivity of countries involved, it falls short of explaining what linked the revolutions and uprisings, along with what sustained the events in each various local context or country. However, Salih goes further to link the protests in these Arab countries through their use of the same techniques of resistance, which included strikes, demonstrations, marches and rallies. A big source of contention has been the role and influence of social media throughout the Arab Spring. “Particularly pivotal to protest process as well has been the use of social media to organize, communicate, raise awareness, and issue danger alerts among the thousands of protestors in the face of state attempts at repression,

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internet censorship, crowd control and even physical attack…”⁵ Social media served as a vehicle for communication; however, the methods and forums used in each country varied based on the events that needed publicity or in certain situations, warnings. In order to grasp how instrumental these tools were, the importance of the various local contexts arises, requiring one to deconstruct what events shaped the country and inhabitants’ relationship with certain media. Not only have the demonstrators and countries involved in the Arab Spring been linked by their techniques and risk of penalty, but they also shared a uniform slogan in such a time of despair and revolution. The people in the streets would yell, “Ash-sha’b yurid isqat an-nizam: The people want to bring down the regime.”⁶ There were clear levels of contempt that fueled these uprisings until regimes were either dismantled or even more suppressive of their citizens, which is why it is necessary to define what rights were accessible in each nation.

Another trait that unified the people who fought in the streets and against the corrupt regimes was the respect of religion. The countries within North Africa and the Middle East have largely been connected through the recognition of a shared religion: Islam; however, there are Christian and other religious minorities that exist within these areas. Although not all religious, the people organized what would be known as “the largest, most organized demonstrations” as the “days of rage” and these would take place on Fridays after Juma, otherwise known as afternoon Friday prayer.⁷ However, just as one is able to observe these similarities, it is important that scholars understand and respect the differences each country faced in its opposition’s attempt to attain justice and a change in government, which is why some scholars refrain from referring to the period of regional unrest as the Arab Spring. In a comparison to the European revolutions of 1848, Anne Applebaum writes:

Each revolution must be assessed in its own context, each had a distinctive impact. The revolutions spread from one point to another. They interacted to a limited extent. … The drama of each revolution unfolded separately. Each had its own heroes, its own crisis. Each therefore demands its own narrative.⁸ (185)

While the nations of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya each navigated through a change or resignation in leadership in varying ways, one can conclude that Tunisia was the catalyst for the entirety of the Arab Uprisings and it is pivotal to understanding the latter rebellious movements. Applebaum referenced this excerpt from a text focusing on the European revolutions of 1848 to highlight the state of despair reflected in what has garnered global attention – a “complicated and messy” situation that so closely mirrors history. This excerpt also goes to provide the counterargument as to why there is a divide amongst scholars that recognize the regional unrest as combined or interlaced events versus those that recognize each instance within each respective nation separately. Salih compares scholars like Anne Applebaum and Mohammed Farazmand’s interpretations and analysis of the Arab uprisings to provide a holistic lens as to the new Arab identity that has emerged amongst those in the Middle East and North Africa. Salih examines Mohammed Farazmand’s article “The Nature of 2011 Arab Uprisings: A Comparative Analysis” claiming “a new Arab political identity with an anti-despotic, pluralist and democracy-seeking approach is dawning.”⁹ Spectators, news outlets, and the West have observed these developments that grew out of the Arab Uprisings, often witnessing a clear divide between the elites in Arab nations and the overwhelming youth population that is far more disadvantaged than the former.

Although several social scientists accredit the build up of these events to the influx of economic hardship, government corruption, suppression of individual liberties, and overall disenfranchisement, considering the population within the Arab-speaking nations that were the most impacted is critical for painting the framework of why these events took place and what unites them. Not only was the distinction between the elites and youth during this time clear, but as was the ongoing accumulation of wealth by the elites in contrast with the continual cycle of unemployment and borderline poverty for the Arab youth who were the majority in their homelands. The ruling elites obtained security through corruption, and they also made sure to find ways to ensure the continuity of their legacies through nepotism and brute force. These illegitimate regimes continued the practices of “…adopted policies that consolidate absolute rule, pave the way for succession within the family framework, and secure in a systematic way economic and social discrimination as well as political exclusion along ethnic and sectarian lines.”

Similar to other forms of patronage or the spoil system that was formerly used in the United States, the regimes of Algeria, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and other nations where the line of power has been retained within family lineage has made it easier for these same governments to remain in power in the midst of arising crises. These same members of the ruling class and social elites have been able to endure financial and economic instability that handicaps the lower classes and the unemployed as the former have already secured stability and securitization through the governments they choose to support. The demographic build up of these countries are not majority elite, they are in fact disproportionately composed of disenfranchised youth that struggle to survive in the midst of programs sponsored by international financial institutions like the IMF or the World Bank. These same international institutions impose “economic liberalization programs” such as the “Structural Adjustment Program (SAP)” that allow the

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government to halt subsidies that had previously been offered to those with lower incomes within their nations, and consequently, the same citizens that make up the majority of the populations are the same ones who are unable to afford common goods and foods in the midst of staggering rises in food prices. This has been observed as especially common amongst the youth, which have been credited at the forefronts of many of the nations that participated in the Arab Uprisings. In the midst of this argument, it is relevant that scholar Salih acknowledges the youth as “…the youth below age 25 who represent approximately 65 percent of the total population of the Arab world.”

There are shared lived experiences and cultural practices that existed prior to the emergence of a “new Arab political identity” which continues to unite those in the Middle East and North Africa, not limited to shared religions, languages, ethnic groups, and outcomes of government interactions with more developed nations in the West that base policies around furthering economic and political priorities.

What was different in North Africa?

When the Arab Uprisings began, the governments of Tunisia and Egypt collapsed much quicker than Libya or Yemen. Tunisia and Egypt were both heavily military operated states, and when the militaries shifted to supporting the uprisings instead of the rulers of the regimes, there were vigorous changes that counteracted the powers held by the former presidents in Tunisia and Egypt. Tunisia’s Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak both minimized the military’s level of control and political status as well as appointing businessmen and government officials, otherwise known as elites, to positions that would inevitably neutralize each nation’s military. In the case of Libya, the uprisings were not as swift as Tunisia and Egypt, especially as it garnered international attention and interventions. The ruling class went as far as hiring

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African mercenaries that were provided by Israel, which only heightened the atrocities committed under the Gaddafi regime. Each of the leaders of these nations received varying levels of support or resilience from their militaries and neighboring countries, which in turn affected the duration of the revolutions.

The next country to successfully remove its dictator was Libya; however, Libya’s political climate and tribal divisions varied from those of Tunisia or Egypt. In regard to Libya, the mass mobilization of civilians who were from the west, Cyrenaica, and the east, Tripolitania, had varying responses to the protests and if they would remain loyal to Muammar Gaddafi. Whereas in Egypt and Tunisia, there was not a substantial number within an elite class willing to support the dictators, like in Saudi Arabia, Algeria, or even Libya. A notable difference in the case of protest in Libya is that the major protest in Benghazi resulted in the Libyan army opening fire on its disgruntled citizens. The brute actions of Libya’s government triggered a response from Western powers as a broad international effort, specifically the United States and NATO members, interfered and led a military intervention. The 6-7 month conflict led to the death of former leader Muammar Gaddafí, and yet another removal of leadership amongst the Arab nations in North Africa.

Although the immolation in Tunisia is considered the impetus of the Arab Spring, the outrage and consistent neglect of the country’s overwhelmingly rural inhabitants fueled the widespread demonstrations. In fact, it was the organized labor movement that resonated with the youth decades later. The levels of corruption in Tunisia were evident by the infamous network known as “the Family” in Tunisia. “The Family” referred to “…more than half of Tunisia’s commercial elites that were personally related to Ben Ali through his three adult children, seven

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14 Pollack and Byman and Al-Turk, “The Arab Awakening.”
siblings, and second wife’s ten brothers and sisters”\textsuperscript{15}. Besides the transparent patronage that allowed the benefits of the ruling class to be shared amongst themselves, the rest of Tunisia had still been grappling with the lack of resources they had been receiving. Contrary to the experiences in Libya and Egypt, Tunisia’s revolution did not rely heavily on the interaction with its military. \textsuperscript{16} As the first country to experience uprisings, Tunisia’s experience was far more disorganized and sporadic; although, the repeated strikes of the labor movement solidified how instrumental the strikes were in fueling the protests to come.

Tunisia had been a popular travel destination, manipulated by the government to present a façade of a tourist-friendly country that was sustainable, but this only added fuel to the groups that were organizing revolts. Namely, the Islamists within Tunisia that unified masses under religion shouted claims that the government was essentially “prostituting the country for foreign exchange…”\textsuperscript{17} It is indicative that the religious extremists were able to garner support amongst locals against the unfavorable tourism and rapidly expanding Western interactions. Tunisia, however, is just one of the African countries that was able to incite a successful rebellion. The uproar was a unified response to the myriad of restrictions on civil liberties, imprisonment of political activists and journalists, limited academic freedom, and poor governance. The lack of a centralized government benefitted the protesters in the midst of the wave of anti-despotic uprisings while illuminating the divergent economic reservations of Tunisians in comparison to their regional counterparts in Egypt and Libya.

When observing Morocco, the legitimacy held by the state is a direct result of the relationship of the King with God and the State of Morocco. In fact, Larbi Sadiki writes in depth

\textsuperscript{16} Anderson, “Demystifying”.
\textsuperscript{17} Anderson, “Demystifying".
covering the interconnected relationship that King Mohammed is able to maintain. Sadiki’s article deconstructs the power levels and relationship between authority and citizens throughout North Africa. Specifically, he refers to Morocco as having a “holy trinity”\textsuperscript{18}. “The King, referred to as the “Commander of the faithful” because of the claim that he is a direct descendent of the Prophet of Islam. This gives him legitimacy…”\textsuperscript{19} Sadiki’s claims indicate that the citizens of Morocco prioritize the hierarchy of religion within society above all else. Furthermore, he is equating the obedience to the authoritarian ruler to an innate submission to Islam or Allah. He writes, “Hence, the king occupies a distinctive position within the Moroccan political system and any dissent or questioning of the king’s authority is by implication a reject of Islam and may be considered treason.”\textsuperscript{20} There is no other king or monarch or dictator that reigned during the uprisings that began in 2011, who has linked his lineage to the Prophet of Islam, Prophet Mohammed. Although, the rigid force of assuming one’s self innately related to an idol is a manipulation of ideology that has maintained the highest level of rule observed in Morocco. These claims scratch the surface of why Morocco’s experience was vastly incomparable to those of its rebelling neighbors. The experiences of monarchial Arab regimes included collectively resisting opposition through strong political, military and economic union – which explains why countries like Morocco and Jordan were invited to join the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).\textsuperscript{21} Those who are able to make the necessary changes to survive and thrive in rapidly changing conditions are the same ones who are able to prosper. This is an accessible advantage to the ones making the changes to the systems of oppression at hand.

\textsuperscript{19} Sadiki and Bouandel, “Post Arab Spring”, 109-131.
\textsuperscript{20} Sadiki and Bouandel, “Post Arab Spring”, 109-131.
\textsuperscript{21} Salih, “Roots and Causes”, 184-206.
During the Arab Spring, King Mohammed VI of Morocco made sure to implement reforms that appeared prudent, yet they were acts to ensure he would still hold power. For instance, Sadiki’s text aims to reveal that King Mohammed VI instigated a somewhat quasi revolution, which entailed redistributing roles of power and authority within the government to the members of the traditional opposition. The people of Morocco had not led the same levels of protests and outcries for a change in leadership, but the King responded proactively to the rising levels of disdain amongst the citizens by offering an appeasing resolution – reformation within the government and limiting some of his powers by appointing a prime minister. Through this same lens of manipulation, King Mohammad VI was also able to reconstruct the present norms of how individuals or officials engage in politics by redefining the positions within his administration and using this as a pretext for further legitimizing the state of Morocco. Therefore, Sadiki describes King Mohamed VI’s influences in Morocco as a “fulcrum of power”. The King was strategic in distancing himself and his policies from those of his predecessor and father, Hassan II, who has been accused of human rights abuses. Religion is not the definitive answer for why Moroccans did not revolt to the same extent as their neighbors, but it begins to illuminate how pervasive the manipulation of religion can be in demanding submission from a ruler’s people – take into account August 21 in Tunisia. The state discourages social and religious diversity by reinforcing religious policies such as passing legislation that mandates the Ramadan fast for Muslims. The people of Morocco did not demand their king step down like their neighbors in Tunisia and Egypt; instead they demanded

24 “Arab uprising: Country by country – Morocco.”
26 Mohammed’s birthday on August 21 is regarded as a public holiday in Morocco.
27 “Freedom in the World – Morocco.”
reforms in policies and governmental positions of power. Despite the restrictions, comparatively, Moroccans enjoyed a freer society than their regional counterparts. In Saudi Arabia, there is also enforcement of a similar Ramadan policy; however, this policy is indiscriminate, imposed upon Muslims and non-Muslims.

Much like Morocco, Algeria also resumed with its head of state. The cries for abdication and regime change were faint at best, as the citizens had been appeased through false promises of reformations as well as economic stimulants. Algeria is one of the richest countries in North Africa, and holds more legitimacy than many of its counterparts because of it is perceived as more “democratic” by comparison.  

28 Algeria used parliamentary elections to maintain its legitimacy, while many of its neighbors lacked similar procedures in the period leading up to the regional unrest. Within North Africa, rulers of oppressive authoritarian regimes enraged their citizens. Algeria had been an exceptional case because it had become clear that the people were not rallying for a change in government, rather reparations made to the economy and government subsidies that would allow locals the ability to acquire subsidized staple goods.  

29 According to Louisa Dris-Alt Hamadouche, the government’s announcements of reversals of price increases and new policies designed to lower the costs of food imports met protesters’ demands and resulted in the loss of momentum for mass public disobedience and protests. This strategic policy implementation mirrors the Moroccan government’s eager response in repressing and diluting dissidence, and in the case of Algeria, it was successful in maintaining the rigged elections that the government promoted as fair and free.

Historically, Algeria has faced a history of harsh police brutality in response to organized protests, like during the October 1988 riots in which security forces and the army fired live

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ammunition at the crowds. When the events in Tunisia sparked revolutions that motivated youth and dissidents across borders, one of the overwhelming fears had been the cries for government reform and impeachment. Algeria’s circumstances are especially unique under President Bouteflika, because the government and the people repeated the relationship of obedience and submission in exchange for improving social and economic needs. Hamadouche writes of the understood traditional social contract that had been imposed and normalized by the Algerian regime: “The administration provides better socioeconomic conditions in exchange for continuing (albeit grudging) political quiescence.” It could also be argued that much of Algeria’s population had not been prepared to have a full-blown revolution because of the fear of failed socio-political uprisings, like the October riots, or merely having been accustomed to reforms in response to complaints or in the midst of outrage.

In the midst of the 2011 uprisings, Algeria’s government had been involved in many forms of censorship, including: media censorship through blocking websites deemed “contrary to the public order or decency”; outlawing unapproved political parties (approved by the Ministry of the Interior); using criminal defamation laws to pressure independent newspapers; blocking radio stations; and explicitly blocking political parties’ website. The state was guilty of restricting religion, as non-Muslims may only gather to worship at state-approved locations as well as benefitting specific ethnic groups. Algeria is multiethnic consisting of Arabs and Berbers, yet the majority of elites consisted of Arabs and there was no national recognition of the Berbers’ cultural language which stifled their social and political mobility.

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30 Volpi, "Algeria versus the Arab Spring", 104-115.
Unlike Tunisia’s rural inhabitants, the demographics of those protesting in Egypt were youth from urban and cosmopolitan areas. While Hosni Mubarak reigned, he was unable to provide the people with basic services and unable to stimulate the economy, thus leaving tens of millions of Egyptians to the widespread unemployment and poverty that began to unite citizens. Egypt’s military has always held enormous influence in the country and the revolutions only illuminated its presence. Egypt’s government structure and implemented programs were unique in comparison to its North African counterparts. In fact, in the case of Egypt, one could observe how integrated Internet had become in society, as a result of information and communication technology (ICT) being introduced through the government, private sector, and civil society, which wholesomely formed public private partnership.\textsuperscript{33} The intended purpose of introducing ICT into Egyptian society was to bolster socioeconomic development, which could simultaneously progress living conditions within the nation and afford citizens of all backgrounds the luxury of access. A utopian and progressive proposal, unfortunately, the implementation of these programs indicated a clear divide between the youth and older generations. The introduction of ICT in Egypt illustrates the differences in government programs and intentions within North Africa, as Egypt sought for a literate, urban and technocratic system – which was not necessarily the same for the rest of its Arab counterparts. Throughout history, Egypt has been the hub for the exchange of media and culture entering the Middle East and even serves as a passage to the Middle East from North Africa, as visible by what has been exploited for capital, like the Suez Canal. Although the country’s leadership shifted from it’s the dictator Hosni Mubarak to the Muslim Brotherhood and then a primarily military autocracy, Egypt’s civilians were still able to remove a monolithic regime in hopes of change. The Freedom House

reports that the Egyptian government suppressed the freedom of assembly and denied the right to free and fair trials by banning the Muslim Brotherhood from previous elections that had been postponed. Academic freedom was limited and media works had been subject to censorship if deemed contrary to Islam or harmful to the country’s reputation.\(^{34}\)

In order to further understand the role of social media within the 2011 uprisings, it is imperative that its uses and benefits served are clearly defined. In the context of Egypt, scholar Sherif H. Kamel argues, “Facebook was used mainly to exchange excessive audiovisual content… Twitter was used for logistical purposes on where to meet, what to avoid and how to deal with tear gas among other uses…YouTube was instrumental in documenting all sorts of developments…”\(^{35}\) However, the Arab Spring has linked several countries in the Middle East and North Africa despite scholars identifying contesting causes for the political uprisings. The media has often oversimplified these series of events as the “Facebook Revolution” or the “Twitter Revolution”; yet, failed to prove a significant correlation as to why one should credit massive political rebellions and mobilized persons to social media. According to Gadi Wolfsfeld, a cross-cultural comparison that follows the politics-media-politics (PMP) principle\(^{36}\) prioritizes the political environment to be followed or sparking a presence of social media – which acts as a facilitator in the midst of rapidly changing political climates, to engage and potentially lead to further political changes in a political environment. This is a worthwhile argument as it negates the misconception that these uprisings within the Arab Spring occurred merely as a result of social media interference, when in fact, all of the countries involved, especially those that


\(^{35}\) Kamel, "Egypt's Ongoing Uprising", 78-91.

\(^{36}\) This principle states that the role of the media in a political process is best seen as a cycle in which changes in the political environment lead to changes in media performance, which leads to further political changes in the political environment.
resulted in high-conflict areas or removal of leadership, were suffering from economic hardships, volatility on the basis of inflation, long-standing grievances and rising levels of dissatisfaction with their respective governments. Furthermore, the claims to social media’s influence can be described as crucial to communication or a vehicle of dissemination rather than the determinant of the events.

There are contesting perspectives on the value social media held during the Arab Spring, but the insight of those that resist its impact will be referred to as cyber-skeptics and those that defend its role as cyber-enthusiasts. “The cyber-skeptics downplay the significance of the new technology, arguing that using the Internet gives people a false sense of participation and keeps them from actual physical protesting.” Although technology alone cannot guarantee revolts and instantaneous government reforms, a counterargument to the views of the cyber-skeptics can challenge these claims based on how social media allows communication across myriad forums and the exchange of beneficial ideas that further organize and mobilize efforts. In fact, “The cyber-enthusiasts express optimism about the ability of the new media to empower people living in nondemocratic societies and to allow insurgents to adopt new strategies.” Thus, scholars like Lisa Anderson argue that the way in which social media played a role in the midst of political upheaval was taking advantage of how technology resonated in various local contexts, spanning from Tunisia to Syria. For instance, the Gulf States that exhibited high levels of social media and low levels of protests were the inverse of Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Syria, which experienced lower levels of social media and higher levels of protest. However, scholars like Bellin assess the role of social media in countries like Egypt and Tunisia more reliant on four important

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38 Wolfsfeld and Segev and Sheafer, "Social Media and the Arab Spring", 115-137.
39 Wolfsfeld and Segev and Sheafer, "Social Media and the Arab Spring", 115-137.
40 Wolfsfeld and Segev and Sheafer, "Social Media and the Arab Spring", 115-137.
explanatory factors: long-standing grievances, an emotional trigger, a sense of impunity, and access to new social media.\(^{41}\)

In the case of Tunisia, the final event that sparked the catalyst of full-blown protests and social dissent amongst the streets was the self-immolation of 26-year old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi. Bouazizi was not the first to set himself ablaze, yet the public knows little of Abdesslem Trimech. Trimech’s immolation did not go viral, nor did it unite mass protestors as Bouazizi’s did when Al-Jazeera aired his footage on Facebook. This has become one of the crucial moments that led to collective action, enhanced by social media because if it weren’t for the publicity that led to longevity, the world may have never heard of Tunisia’s rebellions nor would the different regions been able to actively unite in protesting former Tunisian president Ben Ali.\(^{42}\) Wolfsfeld agrees that social media are important because they can provide information and images that motivate people, they allow groups to organize and mobilize much more efficiently than in the past, and they allow protestors to convey messages to the outside world. Figure 1 has been extracted from Byun and Hollander’s *Explaining the Intensity of the Arab Spring*:

\(^{41}\) Bellin, E. 2012. “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring.” *Comparative Politics* 44 (2): 127—49

Figure 1. Level of Unrest by Country.\(^4\)

Figure 1 depicts the varying levels of civil uprisings and the progressions experienced during the Arab Spring. The countries grouped together under each color experienced similar levels of social media usage as well as restrictions on civil and personal liberties. In the countries listed above, especially those that reached levels of militarization without regime removal like Bahrain and Syria, the role of social media had become especially relevant in broadcasting the atrocities experienced within a nation’s borders as well as in organizing participation.

The countries in the Persian Gulf had a relatively different experience than those in North Africa. Many of these countries, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain are wealthier states and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with governments that were able to quickly suppress dissidents, some transnationally. The members of the GCC were a part of the

Peninsula Shield agreement, which aimed to maintain collective security in the region as a deterrent for international conflict. This treaty is noteworthy as it pertains to how countries in the region have decided to address events that happen within and outside of their boundaries.

In the case of Oman, the government quickly suppressed protestors and jailed activists and journalists that supported the attempts to revolt. Certain Gulf nations did not face nearly as much chaos as other Arab nations whose neighbors had been experiencing increasing violence. Oman is an absolute monarchy – similar to the authoritarian wield of its neighboring dictatorships. The Sultan of Oman holds absolute power as no political parties or organized opposition groups were allowed within the country. Thus, there were enforced limitations on freedom of expression, freedom of assembly (which required official permission), online censorship, as well as government criticism allowed in Oman that led to self-censorship. In comparison to its neighbors involved in the Arab Spring, Oman exhibited serious levels of censorship, expected religious compliance and oppression that sparked its citizens’ outrage.

Kuwait experienced a fairly concealed series of protests and had not gained much attention in the media. When the local media outlet, Al-Jazeera, provided coverage of a brutal police crackdown on a public demonstration, it was shut down – indicative of the suppression of media Kuwaitis face. The government strengthened its restrictions by banning public rallies in 2010, banning political parties and censoring the internet; however, comparatively it allowed for a much freer state than its neighbors by allowing multiple independent media outlets, promoting academic freedom and allowing freedoms of assembly and association that meet governmental preferences. The Kuwaiti society had been so divisive that even those in favor of the uprisings

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45 “Freedom in the World – Oman.”
within the country had experienced rifts. This was advantageous for the government because of the lack of collectivism amongst its dissidents. However, there were countries in the area whose divisive populations fueled uprisings, like the rebelling Shi’ite minority in Bahrain against the majority Sunni rule.

The protests of Shi’ites as a minority in Bahrain incited fear in neighboring governments that minorities within their own national boundaries could also rebel, regardless of their size. This proved to be the case for Saudi Arabia, whose former leader King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud was inclined to convert the domestic crisis in Bahrain into an issue of regional instability. In this instance, certain leaders in the Persian Gulf worked together to neutralize the conflicts and halt any further acts of rebellion, while simultaneously suggesting Iran (a majority Shi’ite nation) was involved in the Bahraini revolution.

Bahrain’s king harnessed absolute rule over the government and outlawed political parties—mandating all political associations be registered with the Ministry of Justice. In addition to these restrictions, Bahrain experienced sectarian strife, censored Internet access, lacked freedom of expression and lacked freedom of press. All news outlets were government owned or had close ties to the government.

Similar to its neighbor, Saudi Arabia is ruled by Sunni Muslims and has a disenfranchised Shiite community in addition to being increasingly restrictive of personal and civil liberties. The government outlawed all political parties, as well as organized political opposition, resulting in the only forms of dissidence to come from exile. Although Bahrain and

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50 “Freedom in the World – Bahrain.”
Saudi Arabia were able to minimize the dissent and increase restrictions, certain rulers were unable to counteract the people’s calls for reform – like in Yemen.

Yemen’s political climate during the uprisings was especially brutal, and it is worthwhile to recall it is one of the two countries whose upheavals led to an ongoing civil war. Unfortunately, Yemen’s circumstances were exacerbated by its long history of conflict between the regions in the North and South, as well as Yemen’s security forces’ vicious tactics for aggressively halting protestors.\textsuperscript{52} When scholar Mohammad Farazmand describes Yemen, he writes: “A society which has been torn apart due to its tribal composition, separatism in the south and the Zaida Shia in the north, as well as Ali Abdullah Saleh’s divide and rule policy…”\textsuperscript{53} His text illuminates the ongoing insecurities and instabilities in Yemen, which are the result of more than just different sects of Islam or food insecurity. The people of Yemen endured a 32-year authoritarian rule by the former President Saleh, and despite refusing the people’s refusal to resort to violence, there was a collective sense of solidarity and unity that was visible as the people demanded the abdication of their dictator.

Syria and Yemen, both countries that resulted in ongoing civil wars even after their Arab counterparts’ uprisings came to a cessation, seemed to have varying results. Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, alongside the Alawite minority, has ruled over Syria for generations. This means that a small population that does not represent the larger percentage of Syrians, has been in an exclusive position of power over the other ethnic and religious groups, not limited to the Sunni Muslims, the Kurdish rebel groups and the Salafi rebel groups. Enraged Syrians vastly outnumbered the repressive regime and its supporters, whether global in Russia, or local; still, Syria struggled to see the same levels of change that others did in North Africa. Many scholars

\textsuperscript{52} Farazmand, “Nature of 2011 Arab Uprisings,” 7-30.
\textsuperscript{53} Farazmand, “Nature of 2011 Arab Uprisings,” 7-30.
attributed the lack of progression to the type of governance (ruled by the minority), as well as the level of heterogeneity compared to the more successful ethnically homogenous countries, which explains the levels of territorial disintegration.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, Syria has experienced irreversible conflict that has led to its classification as the world’s leading largest refugee producing country.\textsuperscript{55} Yemen experienced a similar situation, but it may have already been prone to conflict and violence because of its longstanding history of conflicts between the North and South. Nonetheless, both Yemen and Syria are comparable to Libya and the regimes alike because each ruler was willing to slaughter his people rather than relinquish the throne of power.

Figure 2 compares the restrictions on civil and political rights of the twelve countries most impacted by the Arab Spring as reported by Freedom House’s Annual Freedom Report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Freedom Rating</th>
<th>Civil Liberties</th>
<th>Political Rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
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<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
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The people in the Middle East and North Africa wanted basic civil liberties; Figure 2 conveys the lack of freedoms present at the time in which protestors took to the streets. The youthful generation of these countries’ citizens have rallied for a more democratic government through peaceful protests, hoping to form alternative political systems, end corruption, discrimination, and the political and economic prerogatives of the ruling elites – leading to freedom, equality, justice and welfare.\textsuperscript{56} Not all of the riots and rebellions subsided, as countries like Yemen and Syria protracted civil wars; however, the repression of civilians leads to an inevitable sense of disdain and need for change.

It is vital to observe the methods various governments used to suppress the rights of their people and the disparities amongst what individual freedoms were allowed in each respective nation. In most of the wealthier oil states, there were rigid regulations regarding religion, severe restrictions on freedom of speech, expression and media, heavy online censorship, and a lack of multiple political parties and assemblies. In North Africa, there were varying levels of freedoms associated with regimes, for instance, a multiparty system was allowed in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and reformed in Egypt, while not at all in Tunisia. In reference to the poorer North African nations, the youth were more successful in strategically organizing peaceful protests and capitalizing off the instability and decentralized state. This led to a direct change in government rule, whereas in the wealthier states (even in North Africa), the governments were able to alter the policies surrounding the economy and appease protestors by instituting reforms. In the

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Yemen & Not Free & 5.5 & 5 & 6 \\
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\textsuperscript{56} Farazmand, “Nature of 2011 Arab Uprisings,” 7-30.
countries that were unable to have large-scale protests due to immediate suppression, the governments tended to have tighter grip on its constituents as well as heightened fear.
Chapter 2:

This second chapter aims to provide the audience with the origins of Eritrea: from brief coverage of its historical oppressors to its long journey to independence to the current socio-political climate. This context is critical to understanding how the government of Eritrea has arisen to power from the former Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) and become the only political party allowed within the nation – The People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). In addition to understanding the political structures within the government, this chapter will convey the contemporary issue of conscription or national service within Eritrea and how this civic duty has morphed into being construed as every Eritrean’s duty, a concept reflected in the Nakfa Principles, which are commonly identified amongst Eritreans as moral and ethical values inscribed into their identity.

Although mobilizing citizens into the military and other forms of reconstructive service may seem superfluous, the problem of service is a continuation of the collectivist mindset and community based approach to life that is widespread in Eritrea and stems from a time in history when individual sacrifice was needed to reach independence. Over 25 years later and the government has framed the nation’s security as being at risk from its enemy and former oppressor, Ethiopia, as well as Western powers that support its neighbor. Furthermore, this section intends to contrast conscription in the North African and Middle Eastern countries that were deeply affected by the Arab Uprisings. In addition, this section will include significant cultural similarities shared between Eritrea and its Arab neighbors. Overall, the chapter will compare Eritrea and its relevance to the North African countries that experienced social and political upheaval during 2011 and how Eritrea’s socio-political relations were in route to a similar outcome of its regional counterparts, had mobilization and individualism been the
priorities. In a continuation of the previous chapter, this argument lays the groundwork to connect the relevance of the Arab Spring to Eritrea and why Eritrea has been stagnant in political dissidence within the country.

**Eritrea: From Colonialism to Liberation to the Contemporary Context**

The nation of Eritrea has had a long history of oppression in regards to the disenfranchisement of Eritrean peoples by the Ottoman, Egyptian, British, Italian, and Ethiopian forces. Eritrea was recognized as a federation of Italy in the 19th century, and then was seized under British rule from 1941 until 1952, when it was annexed as a federation of Ethiopia. Eritrea endured a thirty years armed struggle from 1961 to 1991, while simultaneously experiencing political upheaval between two competing guerilla armies: Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF). With varying ideologies, the first Eritrean guerilla army, ELF, attempted to suppress the arising dissident group, EPLF, from as early as 1972, until the two groups came to a truce in 1974. It was not until 1981 that the ELF was extinguished and exiled from Eritrea by the EPLF. The leadership of the ELF was formed amongst Muslim scholars and intellectuals, mainly receiving support from Arab and Muslim states like Egypt and Sudan. This movement later reached Eritrean Christians – also encompassing a multitude of tribes and clans within a pluralistic society. The tension led to the formation of the EPLF, which was spearheaded by Isaias Afewerki.

Isaias Afewerki, known to many as the freedom fighter that led the Eritrean people to victory, has held office in Eritrea as president since it reached independence. Officially, in April

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58 Connell and Killion, *Historical dictionary.*
59 Connell and Killion, *Historical dictionary.*
1993, the international community formally recognized Eritrea as sovereign after fulfilling the UN-supervised referendum. It has been nearly 26 years that Eritrean citizens have recognized themselves as a part of an independent nation, and technically 24 by the international community; all throughout, Isaias Afewerki has reigned. There has not been a single national election since the UN-supervised referendum, nor has the constitution been implemented, with an indefinite postponement. The only ruling political party allowed in Eritrea is the successor of the EPLF, known as the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). It is illegal for any competing nationalist party to exist in Eritrea, and the government refuses to permit the return of any of its rival factions. As the majority of Eritreans now live outside of the country, PFDJ has extended its membership to include diaspora living abroad in hopes of exercising an annual 2% tax to support the government. These recurring 2% taxes are masked as the government’s attempt at reconstruction post independence. The organization connected to the expansive diaspora network of government supporters is the Young People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (YPFDJ). With access to political power within Eritrea and abroad amongst its supporters, Isaias Afewerki and PFDJ have constructed an “iron curtain” around the country to protect it from its neighbors and the disapproving members of the international community. To further solidify the link between nationalism within Eritrea and transnationalism from the expatriates and diaspora communities across the globe, the Ministers and PFDJ officials attend the diaspora’s festivals and nation-wide community meetings outside of Eritrea. These events include: the Annual North American YPFDJ Conference, Martyrs’ Day, Annual Eritrean Festival in D.C., and events alike that connect the younger and older generations of Eritrea abroad with the agendas of PFDJ. The government is selective with receiving foreign aid, promoting that

63 Dorman, "Narratives", 203-222.
Eritrea will become self-reliant and exude resilience by avoiding the corruption that often lingers with foreign aid. There were 38 international aid agencies in the 1990s but only four by 2009. The 30-year long independence struggle bred not only freedom, but also overwhelming levels of nationalism that have left millions of supporters blind to the corruption inflicted by the despotic regime.

So what is distinct about Eritrea? Why has the country not followed in its neighbors’ footsteps? Contrary to the political climate of the North African countries during the Arab Spring, Eritrea’s citizens have been unable to mobilize an effort to rebel. In fact, the only case of mobilization within Eritrea has stemmed from the government. African Studies PhD. Researcher David M. Bozzini writes:

People whom I call conscripts are male and female individuals carrying out national duty as required by law: they are temporarily mobilised for military and civil purposes by the state... However, since 1998 and the two years war against Ethiopia, National Service has been indefinitely extended and no demobilisation program has taken place” (93).

The “conscripts” of Eritrea are born into a systematic oppression resembling modern day slavery. They are forced to serve their nation regardless of their political views and expected to remain obedient while earning less than necessary wage to survive and support their families back home. Bozzini articulates the conditions of service and the only instance where mobilization takes place in Eritrea. This obligation is resented by the youthful generation in Eritrea, much more than the older generations, which fought for the nation’s independence.

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There is a sizable gap separating what the older and younger generation view as civic duties, which explains the rise in those attempting to leave Eritrea. According to scholar Sara Dorman, “Since the summer of 2001, Eritrean youth have been at the centre of political crises. The rejection, by some youth, of societal and state expectations that they will ‘serve the nation’ challenges the post-liberation political institutions”.

The notion of service is glorified in Eritrea by older generations. The reverence is apparent in holidays of remembrance, like Martyrs’ Day, as scholar Bereketeab writes, “No one died; they simply became a martyr.” Despite the culture of youthful sacrifice, this was an overwhelming trait pertinent to a different era, one that was prior to independence. Scholar Tesfai writes, “Martyrdom was an inevitable outcome of liberation.”

The issue with this reflection in application to the contemporary context is that liberation has already been attained; yet the youth is placed under a cultural expectation to risk their lives when their freedom should have already been secured. National service spans from military service to civil service and public sector projects that contribute to the ongoing national reconstruction.

In addition to adult citizens fleeing Eritrea after being conscripted, there are children who have not even reached secondary school and are evading the draft, many of which have not even reached the age of 14. Regardless of age, this program contributes directly to the mass migration of Eritrean refugees to all parts of the world. “In 2015, the largest number of applications for asylum in the UK came from nationals of Eritrea (3,729)”

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70 Interview with author, April 25, 2017.
Eritreans that flee to Ethiopia and Sudan is colossal in comparison to those that make it to developed nations like Italy, United Kingdom, Germany and the rest of the Global North. In 2008, at least 43,000 fled Eritrea to Sudan or Ethiopia. Eritrea is ranked as the second-biggest source of asylum seekers by the UN, despite having ranked 113th in population size. It is estimated that at least a quarter of a million refugees live in neighboring Sudan and Ethiopia within refugee camps.

What the world views as the refugee exodus is the aftermath of those who are able to escape past the “shoot-to-kill” borders. The CIA writes, “His government has created a highly militarized society by pursuing an unpopular program of mandatory conscription into national service, sometimes of indefinite length”. According to the UN Commission of Inquiry, some of the terrible conditions during the indefinite duration of national service include “arbitrary detention, torture, sexual torture, forced labour, absence of leave and the ludicrous pay…make national service an institution where slavery-like practices are routine.” Not all who participate in national service experience these conditions; however, an overwhelming number of conscripts have been forced to flee because of these horrendous circumstances.

Eritrea’s regional counterparts in North Africa: Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Sudan and Morocco all have levels of conscription associated with each nation. Despite the similar laws, the difference between Eritrea and many of the other countries is the strict enforcement alongside the poor standard of living and quality of life. In many Arab-speaking countries, such

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72 Jopson, “Inside the Insular and Secretive Eritrea.”
as Egypt or Syria, conscription targets males between 18-30 that have another male sibling.\(^{76}\)

Conversely, Eritrea does not discriminate entry based on gender. In fact, Eritreans between the ages of 18-40 are required to serve in the national service as a direct result of the Warsay-Yikealo Development Campaign in 2002.\(^{77}\) In order to grasp context as to why this campaign was passed, it is essential to understand the prior 1998-2000 border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia over the major war zone of Badme. When describing the situation of Badme, scholar Jon Abbink describes it as, “One of the most intense and bloody wars that Africa has seen in recent years, with an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 deaths.” The highly politicized border dispute over Badme occurred within a decade of independence, which made both wars relevant in the politics of Eritrean daily life. In December 2000, a peace accord known as the Algiers Agreement ruled that Badme was a part of Eritrea.\(^{78}\) Despite this internationally recognized arbitrational ruling, Ethiopia has not accepted the terms and ruling of the decision. The state of Eritrea has used this war as a need for the Warsay-Yikealo Development Campaign as well as ongoing mobilization of citizens. By framing its neighbor as an existential threat, Eritrea becomes the referent object and its military is able to move towards securitization of the people by means of mandatory civic service.\(^{79}\) Alongside the post-structuralist framework of security studies, scholar David Campbell argues, “The constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries that serve to demarcate an “inside” from an “outside,” a “self” from an “other,” a “domestic” from a “foreign.”\(^{80}\) In the case of Eritrea, the government has constructed Eritreans as the “inside” and Ethiopia as the “outside” threat. The Eritrean people are able to


\(^{77}\) Dorman, “Narratives of nationalism in Eritrea,” 203-222.


\(^{80}\) Campbell, Writing Security.
retain and solidify this “inside” identity by subscribing to a set of principles or values that unite them within their culture: The Nakfa Principles. In the “Eritrean National Identity: A Case Study”, Ann Peggy Hoyle describes component values of Eritrean national identity in terms of ethical behavior, belief in critical public speech, perseverance or steadfastness, an emphasis on the community over the individual, and a commitment to self-reliance. The Nakfa Principles are in Tigrinya, which does not always translate smoothly into English, but Hoyle’s description encapsulates the general themes. In Tigrinya they are written as: Ma’arinet (Equality), Harinet (Individual Freedom), Natsinet (Independence or Liberation from the Colonizer), Tsinat (Resilience/Perseverance), Tewefainet (Sacrifice/Martyrdom) and Bitsaynet (Camaraderie).

These values are the closest way to describe the Nakfa Principles that have become engrained in the daily lives of Eritrean citizens; they are used as socio-cultural leverage to maintain the status quo and decisions made by the government. The aforementioned emphasis on the community over the individual is the reason that systems in place, like conscription, are able to exist. In theory, national service aiming to further reconstruction could bolster living conditions; however, in the case of Eritrea, the scarce nominal wage and excessive constraints on conscripts delegitimize the initial aims of the program while impeding citizens’ abilities to sustain a livable wage.

In 2011 as the first signs of rebellion occurred in Tunisia, Eritrea was experiencing ongoing repression in the form of requiring blind nationalism under the guise of civic duty. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), “The state has justified the mass mobilization with the need for national development and to foster a common sense of national

82 Interview with author, April 25, 2017.
identity.” The reason the youth are inherently incapable of organizing is the systematic oppression that is Sawa alongside the vehement control the government has in the lives of its citizens. The students in Eritrea are able to attend primary and secondary school until eleventh grade, then they must leave their homes and complete their final year at Sawa. Students are not able to travel freely from Sawa to their homes within this year and must receive specified permission from their respective authorities, unless it is a major national holiday. After the completion year at Sawa, there is a standardized national exam administered and pending results, students are to be placed in a university or vocational assignment. Unfortunately, many education sites have closed, so students are frequently placed wherever there is a shortage of labor, regardless of their ambitions. Despite the process of higher education placement, students are forced into a cloaked civic duty that typically extends far past the 18-month promise. Some are never able to reach higher education as their service is extended. According to the CFR, “In addition, the Government has subjected much of the population to open-ended national service, either in the army or through the civil service, often for years in harsh and inhumane conditions.”

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84 Sawa is a military training camp designed to ensure Eritrean youths are prepared to serve in national service.
85 The Eritreans who do not score above a certain caliber (score of 1.8) are sent to places like Mamose to learn trades such as plumbing, carpentry, etc. Only those who score above 1.8 are able to pursue higher education for professions like business, education, marketing, etc.
86 Interview with author, April 25, 2017.
Figure 3: Close up image of Sawa military camp, 2015.
Figure 3 and 4 depict the various secured facilities that students and prisoners occupy, all within a remote location. The dotted blue and dotted red rectangular lines in the bottom half of the image show the “Warsai Yikealo Secondary School”. Within these red lines is where Eritrean students who are studying for their final year of secondary school reside, while the dashed blue lines represent the “Accommodation of Conscripts”, where the Eritreans who are to serve for national civic duty are stationed. The close proximity of the two buildings is ironic because the former is for many students a direct pathway to the latter. Neither of the accommodations, prisons or schools, are in exceptional conditions because of the arid weather combined with the location and resources. After a student is given a placement, he or she is expected to remain within that field regardless of preference. The government chooses its citizens’ occupation and there is no further deliberation unless a need for an alternate service arises. In this case, a worker
would be permitted to change occupations, but this does not result in further education. Instead, one would be sent to the area requiring service and the worker would be trained on site.\textsuperscript{88}

In Figure 4, the nearby prisons depicted with green dotted lines, yellow dotted lines, and large red circles are where those who attempt to defect from Sawa end up, as well as those who express political dissent. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported, “The Eritrean government uses a vast apparatus of official and secret detention facilities to incarcerate thousands of Eritreans without charge or trial.”\textsuperscript{89} Many of these detention facilities in Eritrea, like the one depicted in the figures above, had not previously been revealed to the rest of the world until these images were made available in 2015. In fact, HRW revealed, “Many of the prisoners are detained for their political or religious beliefs, other because they tried to evade the indefinite national service or flee the country.”\textsuperscript{90} These conditions described by the human rights crusader may stem from concerns that began after the imprisonment of the ‘G-15’, the group of 15 former top government officials and former liberation leaders that were jailed after writing an open letter in 2001 calling for a ‘peaceful and democratic dialogue’. The following chapter will further unpack the methods and levels of suppression within the Eritrea, covering the ‘G-15’ in depth. National security continues to serve as the guise in which the government is able to reign without repercussion; however, Eritrea has gained traction in the global community for the claims of injustices within the country.

\textbf{Why is Eritrea Comparable to North Africa and the Middle East?}

Aside from having an authoritarian regime that has postponed elections indefinitely, Eritrea has many political, economic, and social characteristics that mirror those of the Arab

\textsuperscript{88} Interview with author, April 25, 2017.
\textsuperscript{90} "Eritrea: Repression Creating Human Rights Crisis."
world. Although the majority of Eritreans speak Tigrinya, the nation’s second official language is Arabic, followed by English. Islam is a prominent religion practiced in Eritrea; therefore, Arabic is the cultural language of many Eritreans. This separates many different types of Eritreans that are unable to have social mobility within commerce or government because their mother tongues, whether they are Bilen, or Kunama, as some tribes are not represented in government positions or popular businesses. Within the nine tribes of Eritrea, the Nilotic people consist of the Kunama and Nara tribes. The Cushitic people consist of Afar, Saho, Bilen, Hedarab tribes. The Semitic people are the Tigrinya, Tigre and Rashaida.\(^{91}\) Within these tribes, the Tigrinya tribe is the largest in Eritrea, followed by the Tigre, which correlates to how these tribes hold the largest recognition of social status, business owners and government office. These same Semitic people are recognized as Afro-Asiatic and having Arab roots dating back to the invasions by the Ottoman Empire and crossing over the Red Sea from the Middle East.\(^{92}\) Despite the nine tribes which each have a respective language, the official language systems recognized within Eritrea have been simplified to a binary construct – elevating the Christian-Tigrinya and the Islamic-Arabic. By administering two official languages that belong to distinct groups within Eritrea, the government has been able to separate socio-cultural groups, creating or further perpetuating a system of elites more inclined to positions of power and preserving distinct customs within the nation; these practices are similar to the treatment of Berbers in North Africa and various minority ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East. Just as the countries in Middle East are predominantly Muslim, with some answering to Sharia courts, Eritrea has a significant Muslim population that separates its judicial practices to respect the religious abiding


\(^{92}\) Connell and Killion, *Historical dictionary.*
to Islam. In fact, within *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, Connell and Killion note that Eritrea was one of the earliest non-Arabian sites for contact with Islam. Approximately half of the population in Eritrea is Muslim, mainly residing in the lowlands while Christians are mostly in the highlands.

There was a constitution approved in 1997 that still has not been enforced. This allows the chief of state, Isaias Afwerki, to monopolize levels of authority within the regime, subsequently allowing himself a life-long term. The individual rights have been disregarded for the rights of the collective.\(^93\) Scholars recognize safeguarding the nation shapes the climate within Eritrea, often disregarding the personal liberties that are celebrated in the West. Citizens within Eritrea are able to view others outside of the country enjoying the luxuries of living in a less restricted nation, which motivates the youth to flee the country in hopes of a better life. The CIA reports that Eritrea’s population was of 5,869,869 in 2016. Researcher Michael Aliprandini reported that Eritrea had a population of 6,527,689 in 2015. Previously, there had been a reported population 2.25% population growth;\(^94\) however, sources like the UNHCR report that 5,000 refugees leave Eritrea each month.\(^95\) The U.N. estimates that 400,000 Eritreans—9% of the population—have fled in recent years, not counting those who died or were stranded en route.\(^96\) This discrepancy indicates the lack of accountability within the records of Eritrea and the lack of focus that researchers give to the country. Like many Arab states, the value placed on Eritrea correlates with the natural resources that can be extracted. In 2015, Eritrea was ranked 186\(^{th}\) of 188 on the United Nations Human Development Index, which is indicative of the lack of decent

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\(^95\) Bereketeab, "Eritrea's refugee crisis."
standard of living in addition to the lack of basic human needs. The Human Development Index conducted by the United Nations Development Program listed Eritrea at 179th place as of 2016.\(^97\)

The Youth unemployment rate for those ages 15-24 is 13%, which is a rise from 2011.\(^98\)

According to the Eritrea Country Review, at least 50% of the population is living below the poverty line. As majority of the population participates in subsistence agriculture, families typically are getting by making what they are able to use themselves, instead of having a profitable surplus in which they are able to engage in market trades with. An estimated 80% of the population participates in agricultural subsistence, despite the recurring droughts and overgrazing of lands within the country year round. As economic conditions remain stagnant, it is no surprise the nation placed 162 out of 178 on the “Life Satisfaction Index” with a score of 146.67, which assesses the notion of subjective happiness with qualitative parameters such as health, wealth, and access to basic education.\(^99\)

In accordance with these facts, observers notice the driving factors of the refugee exodus include the ongoing results of “no war no peace”\(^100\) situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Within this, Bereketeab reports the factors of: constant threat of war, indefinite national service, harsh political environment, economic hardship, unemployment, blanket asylum provision by host communities, sanctions, and unfortunately, the hopelessness youth looking for alternative future.\(^101\) These driving factors parallel the significant driving factors that led countries within North Africa to start the Arab uprisings in 2011. The data shown in Figure 5 are meant to compare and convey conscription details of countries affected by the Arab Spring in North

\(^100\) “Eritrea: 2017 Country Review”
\(^101\) “Eritrea: 2017 Country Review”
Africa and the Middle East; all the statistics were all obtained from the CIA’s World Factbook.102

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Conscription Exist?</th>
<th>Age Range?</th>
<th>Length of Service?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Yes, Mandatory</td>
<td>17= min for voluntary military service, 19-30= legal min in case of general/partial compulsory mobilization</td>
<td>18 months service= 6 months basic training, 12 months civil projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>No, Voluntary</td>
<td>18= min for voluntary military service, 15= for NCOs, technician and cadets</td>
<td>No mandatory conscription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Yes, Mandatory</td>
<td>16= min for voluntary military service, 18-30= male conscript military service</td>
<td>18-36 month followed by 9 year reserve obligation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>No, Voluntary</td>
<td>17= voluntary male military service</td>
<td>Initial service=2 years, option to reenlist for 18 years, women not subject to conscription but can volunteer to serve in noncombat military positions in the Royal Jordanian Arab Army Women’s Corps and RJAF, Conscription was suspended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>No, Voluntary</td>
<td>17-21= voluntary military service</td>
<td>Conscription was suspended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Minimum Service Duration</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18=min for mandatory or voluntary service</td>
<td>No indicated timeframe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>No, Voluntary</td>
<td>20= min for voluntary military service</td>
<td>No conscription, service obligation= 18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>No, Voluntary</td>
<td>18-30= voluntary military service</td>
<td>No conscription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>No, Voluntary</td>
<td>17=min for voluntary military service</td>
<td>No conscription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18-33= male and female compulsory or voluntary military service</td>
<td>1-2 year service obligation, previously required before entering public/private sector employment has been cancelled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18= compulsory and voluntary military service</td>
<td>Conscript service obligation=18 months, women not conscripted but may volunteer to serve, re-enlistment obligation 5 years, w/ retirement after 15 years or age 40, or 20 years or age 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20-23= compulsory service, 18-23= voluntary service</td>
<td>1 year service obligation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>No, Voluntary</td>
<td>18= legal min for voluntary military</td>
<td>No conscription, 2 year obligation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Conscription during the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa.
There is a consistent trait of all of the countries in North Africa listed in Figure 5: they all have military conscription. This is parallel to Eritrea’s conscription policy, although certain nations make exceptions for service based on gender. All of the Middle Eastern countries listed in Figure 5, with the exception of Syria, have ceased any form of mandatory conscription and allow the option of voluntary military service. The relevance of these statistics aims to highlight the oppressive nature of service that Eritrea shares with its regional neighbors that are considered Arab and were deeply affected by the Arab Spring, with the exception of Sudan – who had just ended a civil war at the time with what is now South Sudan. The data that links Eritrea to the rest of North Africa reveals the similar situations of unemployment, lack of resources, food shortages, lack of government subsidies and overall lack of good governance. Much like its neighboring countries, Eritrea’s government has failed in providing its poorer communities with necessary resources to thrive, while maintaining restrictive policies on its people.
Chapter 3:

What is the significance of observing the Arab Spring and the environments of countries that were able to overthrow their political leaders versus those countries that were heavily suppressed? Does this signify the ability citizens have to mobilize within a respective context (or even what has been referred to as a “contagion effect”\textsuperscript{103})? How does the reaction to the “G-15” and tense treatment depict the repercussions of practicing forms of human expression and feelings of contempt within Eritrea? This chapter aims to connect the previous chapter’s coverage of Eritrea’s conscription with the essence of Eritrea’s state of surveillance. It is imperative that these comparisons are made in full, which means one can not neglect identifying the mediums of suppression used within the context of Eritrea to ultimately prevent dissent and simultaneously breed fear. The enigmatic nature of the regime’s political restrictions, which seep into socio-cultural interactions, is critical to identify when discussing how Eritrea has lagged in comparison to its regional counterparts with political upheaval in response to restricted liberties. Thus, this chapter will ultimately explore the possibilities of what Eritrea would have needed to successfully achieve variant levels of success as the twelve countries most affected by the Arab Uprisings, as well as if the preceding factors of dissent are applicable after investigating social and political institutions present in Eritrea.

Before reaching the conclusion of what Eritrea would have needed to reach widespread levels of dissidence within the country, this chapter will first research the government’s restrictions on civil and personal liberties. In addition to the exploration of political procedures and norms set in place, this chapter will delve into the topic of collective nationalism stressed

\textsuperscript{103} Scholar Ioana Matesan describes the contagion effect as a mechanism of revolutionary cascade that signaled nonviolent tactics have wide public appeal across the region. She references Eva Bellin, who suggests that the logic of deliberate diffusion, which refers to the conscious sharing of tactics by activist; and the logic of the demonstration effect, which suggests that successful precedents can set off waves of optimism and euphoria that become more powerful than rational considerations about risks and benefits.
over individual identity or ethnicity, economic restraints, homogeneity within the media and culture in Eritrea – allowing one to further understand the demographic build up that remains after those in danger have fled Eritrea and how the Eritrean diaspora relates to the apparatus of citizens.

**The Suppression of Media in Eritrea:**

In recent years, Eritrea has received immense negative publicity from the international community, but there was a catalyst that led to the current stigmas associated with the country in the Horn of Africa. Currently, there are only two news outlets allowed in Eritrea and they are both state-sponsored, meaning the government controls and approves the media that is distributed within the country and abroad to those in the diaspora that maintain their Eritrean identity transnationally. These aforementioned news media are known as EriTV and EriTV2 – the former is broadcasted globally via satellite and the latter is for the locals within the country; they disseminate information from Eritrea’s Ministry of Information.\(^{104}\) According to the Eritrean Embassy’s website, “Eritrea’s main objectives in this field are to: develop free, responsible and credible mass media: to promote the democratization process and strengthen national unity: to provide the public with news and timely information…to enhance public debate and discussion.”\(^{105}\) Despite the current state of press in Eritrea, obligatory state-controlled media was not always the case. In fact, there had previously been eight news outlets that operated independently.

In 2001, the government cracked down on private media and news outlets within the country, in response to the open letter calling for a ‘peaceful and democratic dialogue’ by a group of fifteen former top government officials and liberation leaders (The G-15): Mahmud

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\(^{105}\) “Media and Communication.”
Ahmed Sheriffo (PFDJ and National Council), Haile Woldensae (PFDJ, National Council, and Ministerial Cabinet), Mesfin Hagos (PFDJ Executive Committee, National Council), Ogbe Abраha (former General, PFDJ and National Council), Hamid Hmd (PFDJ and National Council Member), Saleh Kekya (PFDJ and National Council), Estifanos Seyoum (Former General, PFDJ and National Council), Berhane Ghebregzhabiher (PFDJ and National Council), Astier Feshatsion (PFDJ and National Council), Mohammed Berhan Blata (PFDJ and National Council), Petros Solomon (PDFJ, National Council and Ministerial Cabinet), Germano Nati (PFDJ and National Council), Adhanom Ghebremariam (PFDJ and National Council), and Haile Menkerios (PFDJ and National Council).\(^{106}\) To gain deeper understanding of the backlash these politicians faced, it is crucial to examine the collective legislation they presented to the rest of their political governing body, the PFDJ. In the Open Letter to All PFDJ Members, the G-15 expressed, “This letter is a call for correction, a call for peaceful and democratic dialogue, a call for strengthening and consolidation, a call for unity, a call for the rule of law and for justice, through peaceful and legal ways and means.”\(^{107}\) The letter that led to the imprisonment of the former politicians and Tegaldelti\(^{108}\) began as a nonviolent petition for the acknowledgement of a common goal established prior to the international legitimization of the Eritrea, yet it was immediately rendered a threat to national security as an attempt to overthrow the president. 2001 marked eight years of unrestrained leadership by a ruler instead of a progression towards a constitutional government and democracy – the same factors that oppressed Eritreans in the form of Egyptians, Ottomans, Italians, British, Ethiopians and arguably the ELF – which believed


\(^{107}\) “Open letter to all PFDJ Members.”

\(^{108}\) Tegaldelti is an esteemed term used to recognize the freedom fighters that fought for Eritrea’s independence.
Eritrea was not ready for a multi-party presence. The G-15 outlined their request contingent on the wills of the people who professed united aims when freeing the nation. They wrote, “In the Eritrean reality, guaranteeing and consolidating internal democracy within the PFDJ is essential to ensure a democratic process of transition and the establishment of a democratic constitutional government; and our aim and message is this, and only this.”

The motive behind this letter was a direct response to the limitedness of the regime; unfortunately, it defied the status quo of following the highest forms of authority within the country, obediently. Nevertheless, this was a clear attempt at reformation and justice starting with an internal assembly that answered directly to the head of the state. The rest of the letter went on to describe the experience of the EPLF, its preliminary stage, its plight until liberation, post-referendum, and concluded with methods to resolve the particular crisis the country had been facing.

In many democratic nations, there is an understood social contract that allows citizens to hold their respective governments accountable for areas of improvement, which is often addressed through electoral procedures. The twelve Arab nations observed throughout these arguments had unifying experiences regarding rigged and unfair elections, as well as restrictions placed on the right to assemble. What is to be done in the case of a nation that has indefinitely postponed elections? Can there be an accountability system in place when those who hold office are not required to respond to the pleas of their people, including the legislative members? Who is liable to the citizens or is there a lack of responsibility that has been enclosed in governmental positions of power? All members of the G-15 were part of the PFDJ and the National Council,

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109 “Open letter to all PFDJ Members.”
yet any opposing opinions were deemed intolerable and treasonous. The G-15 is a precedent for any aspiring journalist in Eritrea but that is not the extent of their representation.

The danger of being jailed for writing, reading or speaking ill of the president is what has been instilled through these acts and dispersed amongst the Eritrean people living within the country, a luxury that the diaspora is not in an immediate danger of. There is a powerful motive of remaining submissive when you are helplessly encountering fear in every social space. The accredited scholarship post-2001 that exists about Eritrea’s political climate and any sense of dissent is published outside of the country. Eritrea’s Ministry of Information releases the propaganda-like information published within the borders of Eritrea, and private sources of media or press are not allowed within Eritrea. This has sparked the demand for letters like the Open Letter to All PFDJ Members, international attention of human rights organizations and free press institutions, as well as Eritreans who have fled the country in an attempt to stay safe, i.e.: the refugee exodus.

In the case of the G-15, nine of the senior government officials have been confirmed as dead. Baraki Gebreselassi, Germano Nati, Hamid Hmd, Estifanos Seyoum, Saleh Keyka, Astier Feshatsion, Mahmud Ahmed Sheriffo, and Obge Abrha all died within captivity as a result of harsh conditions and the lack of thorough medical attention, except Berhane Gebregzabhier, who was executed. In addition to the deaths of the senior government officials, there were also arrested journalists who died in captivity. All of the political prisoners were initially held in Embat’kala prison and the rest in Era’ero prison. According to interviews conducted by Human Rights Concern Eritrea, “At first, it wasn’t a prison facility at all. It was a school and a training

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112 "Media and Communication."
centre for various kinds of skills.”114 Because of the initial purpose of the facility, the conditions for prisoners were much more tolerable. However, the descriptions of Era’ero prison encapsulate the severity in response to those who challenge the regime. In an interview with a former prison guard, Human Rights Concern Eritrea discovered, “Era’ero is different from Embat’kala. Embat’kala was not designed for prisoners and the prisoners could at least go out twice a day. In Era’ero however, they are kept in their cells for 24 hours. They don’t even know whether it is day or night…the climactic conditions at Era’ero were too harsh for the prisoners and prison guards.”115 When a former member of Eritrea’s security division can attest to the severity of the conditions, which both the guards and prisoners faced, it is indicative of the rights or the lack of rights of citizens within the nation. The means to solve the problem that is the oppression and regression of independent rights and denial to access of uncensored or free media is unified opposition. The former prison guard remarked, “the suffering is getting worse but the people have to show their opposition otherwise there is no resolution. They are showing their opposition. The fact that half of the population has left the country is the evidence.”116 If the testimonies above fail to prove the suppressive climate of media and personal liberties in Eritrea, then one could also turn to the international surveillance that has arisen in the aftermath of President Afewerki’s decision to ban investigative journalists and outside civil society.

According to reports made by Amnesty International, the detained prisoners of consciousness have been detained in Eritrea’s conspicuous confinements without any official charges or scheduled trials.117 The imprisonment of the ten journalists who assisted in publishing

115 “Eritrea: Ten Years of Torture.”
116 “Eritrea: Ten Years of Torture.”
the politicians’ open letter in 2001 has increased to 21 journalists by 2016. As of 2016, four of the journalists have been reported as dying in detention. The gravity of these arrests and subsequent deaths are symbolic of the gross suppression of private and free media in Eritrea. When any group of citizens share a political opinion contrary to that of the head of the state, they may be charged with treason or detained without any charges. This leads to an overwhelming fear amongst those living within the country that are unable to voice political opinions in public, unlike the diaspora who do not face immediate reprimanding or repercussions.

The government’s stronghold is virtually impenetrable through its grip over personal liberties that span past liberties. According to Amanda Poole, “The Eritrean state has maintained tight control over civil society and the actions of foreign-aid and development organizations.” There is a slue of scholarship detailing the methods of instilling fear that is associated with Eritrea’s authoritarian regime. This is oddly reminiscent of the fear held by Eritreans during the 1961-1991 guerilla warfare, when Eritrean spies lived amongst the population and reported any members of dissidence to the Ethiopian regime. Two Eritrean refugees in Switzerland described the levels of fear when discussing politics within Eritrea. They reported, “You cannot speak about politics in Eritrea, even within your own family circle.” This is a commonly shared consensus of the self-censorship that Eritreans experience daily inside the country. It is on these contingencies that Eritrea has been consistently characterized as a prison state by the media.

**Suppression in the Form of Religion:**

120 “2014 prison census.”
According to the Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world, the state of Eritrea is ranked as a 7 on a scale of 1-7 (1=best, 7=worst) in civil liberties, political rights and overall freedom.\textsuperscript{124} This level of freedom can best be represented in the limitedness of religiosity. The Freedom House has reported that there have only been four faiths recognized by the State of Eritrea since 2002: Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Lutheranism as practiced by the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. In case the tyrannical repression of religion is unclear or ambiguous, one should observe the remainder of religions that have been outlawed in Eritrea and the repercussions the devout worshippers face for expressing their religious affiliation.

According to the Freedom House, “Members of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches face persecution, but the most severe treatment is reserved for Jehovah’s Witnesses, who are barred from government jobs and refused business permits or identity cards.”\textsuperscript{125} Jehovah’s Witnesses are held to such a brute level of isolation and imprisoned because they refuse to enlist in the military service due to their religion. According to the Center on Conscience and War, many Jehovah Witnesses refer to Isaiah 2:4 within the scripture that says, “They will have to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4).\textsuperscript{126} If a citizen refuses to join a military service and the possibility of war, they are unable to fulfill their civic duty in Eritrea. This goes against the cultural norm of placing the collective over the individual, which is represented in the Nakfa Principles. This does not defend the lack of freedom of religion in Eritrea; however, it


\textsuperscript{125} “Freedom in the World – Eritrea.”

\textsuperscript{126} “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” The Center on Conscience & War, accessed April 26, 2017, \url{http://www.centeronconscience.org/component/content/article/49-words-publication/225-johovahs-witnesses.html}
offers an interesting perspective as to why the government may selectively allow certain forms of worship over others. In 2013, the United Nations published Sheila Keetharuth’s *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea*, which contained disclosed observations from Eritrean refugees’ experiences in Eritrea. Within her report, Keetharuth writes, “Those interviewed reported that the Government interferes in the internal matters of recognized religions through controls and invasive policies, including the lack of provisions for exemption from military service for conscientious objection.”

The draconian levels of suppression discovered within documents covering human rights injustices like Keetharuth’s report lack consistent coverage from the international community, which enable the current situation. The fear of religious persecution is yet another motivator for some of those who flee Eritrea in hopes of individual freedoms.

**Suppression in the Form of Assembly:**

The next civil and personal liberty that requires critical evaluation is the right of assembly. In many democratic nations, the right of peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of association can be observed in the form of meetings, protests, etc. These rights are reflected in Article 21 and 22 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Despite the international law, there are no non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations nor independent organizations allowed that are not affiliated with the authorities. One of the main assemblies of Eritreans recognized abroad is the Young People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (YPFDJ), which answers directly to the PFDJ and advances the

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129 “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”
legitimacy of the government across borders. For a nation without checks or balances, NGOs, independent institutions and civil society allow citizens a capacity to keep their governments liable to the people’s needs. Ultimately, these institutions reduce corruption by conducting on the ground research/fieldwork that shape government policies and development through policy recommendations and international coverage of clandestine issues pertinent to advancing or improving living conditions and as a result, human rights.

By banning these independent institutions, the state of Eritrea is strengthening its label as a surveillance state and consequently inciting fear in its people. These conditions have invoked thousands of Eritreans to defect, but not all within the country have the ability to flee. This leaves the most vulnerable population at a crossroads, to continue life within the perimeters of Eritrea or to flee to the neighboring countries of Sudan or Ethiopia, without certainty of a better quality of life. By operating as a state that does not answer to its constituents, Eritrea contradicts internationally recognized limitations of power, garnering international attention and sanctions when most convenient for world superpowers like the U.S in 2009 in the case of Al-Shabaab. These untimely restrictions fuel the regime’s hold on its locals and diaspora, defending the need for securitization while simultaneously promoting the “us vs. them” narrative. Additionally, it provides momentary lapses of validation to government supporters in the diaspora communities that promote the government’s need to stronghold the nation. Although these views are widely accepted by members of YPFDJ, they do not encapsulate the slue of ongoing criticisms voiced

131 During the liberation war, global powers supported Ethiopia with weapons and resources, which made the 30 years war (1961-1991) especially grueling due to the lack of support. Post-liberation and through its Nakfa Principles, the state of Eritrea has maintained its self-reliant narrative and has limited allies in the international communities as well as its acceptance of foreign aid. “Us vs. them” depicts the framework that has arisen prior to liberation and remains post-liberation that the international community is not concerned with the survival of the nation or its people. There is a national pride and unity that is attributed to being Eritrean because the nation attained independence ‘Against All Odds’ (which became the slogan of the war).
by the crusaders of justice and human rights like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and individual activists, hoping to expose violations of liberties and investigate the widespread fear. Eritrean communities worldwide are split between those who support the regime and identify as Shabait, and those who oppose the regime – many who often remain silent to avoid being deemed a traitor or worse, ‘Weyane’. Within Eritrea, there is no opposition community or collective of dissidents as present in the diaspora. Those that oppose the government do so in silence because of the widespread fear of covert reporters in plain sight. The next medium of suppression necessary to critique is the challenges deserters’ families face in government discovery of draft evaders and defectors. Through this method, the ways in which fear transpires and exacerbates the reign of the government and the generational distrust that arises in response.

**Suppression in the Form of Punishing Deserters’ Families:**

The 2001 crackdown on Eritrea’s free press combined with the 2002 Warsay-Yikaelo Campaign fueled the mass exodus of Eritrean peoples that soon realized conscription would extend far past its 18-month promise. There are no official policies that denote the punishment of those related to defectors or draft evaders; however, the spread of rumors, allegations, and forced remittances have led locals and scholars to associate the consequences that remain with the deserters’ families. In fact, Bozzini writes about the state in Eritrea between 2005-2012, “A new and unforeseen repressive measure was introduced whereby the police took into custody parents

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132 During the liberation war, the members of the ELF were Jebha and the EPLF were Shabait. As the state of Eritrea was founded through the EPLF that transformed into PFDJ, Shabait has been upheld as those in favor of the government. Shabait, which means the people in the masses in Tigrinya, has origins in Arabic (sha’ab).

133 When used in reference to an Eritrean (instead of an Ethiopian), Weyane is a derogatory term because it distinguishes the Ethiopian (Tigray) forces that have historically posed a threat to the livelihood of Eritreans. To call an Eritrean ‘Weyane’ is to denounce his or her identity and right to claiming the liberation that has affected every Eritrean family.
whose children were alleged to have defected from the national service.”\textsuperscript{134} This was not the only method of punishment that families faced. In many cases, there were additional taxes levied against families, many whom already lacked the capacity to sustain themselves. “Paying off 50,000 Nakfa to the local administration was the sine qua non condition for releasing a family member from custody.”\textsuperscript{135} With an informal and inconsistent practice of penalization, punishment became open to speculation and rumors within the public. The austerity has been normalized, leaving little to no alternatives to obeying fines or punishments and abiding by the status quo.

\textbf{Fear, Generational Distrust and Dissent:}

Speculation and rumors have a grave impact on the Eritrean locals and diaspora because they allow the government’s reign to surpass concrete legal declarations and policies, unintentionally granting it an omnipresent presence. The legitimacy and jurisdiction of the administration becomes fluid because the authorities’ wield is distorted by imagination or rumors that stems from exacerbating pre-existing fears.\textsuperscript{136} This is not to invalidate the fears and lived experiences of Eritreans that must flee to survive, yet it aims to showcase how pervasive the grip of the government and its instruments of fear that have seeped into communities locally and overseas. Furthermore, the inability to confirm the root of suspicions and penalties amongst dissenters, deserters’ families, and those unfairly imprisoned has led to distrust socially. “Accurate or not, such interpretations caused social ruptures among fellow citizens by supporting the idea that the state could intrude into personal relation.”\textsuperscript{137} How can Eritreans fully engage in their communities while filtering any speech that can be interpreted or morphed into opposition

\textsuperscript{134} Bozzini, "The Fines and the Spies." 32-49.
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sentiments? How can a citizen offer criticism and hold his or her government accountable if there are understood repercussions to voicing unpopular opinions? There is a level of helplessness followed by submissiveness that evolves with suppression that infiltrates multiple sectors of everyday life.

In its local context, Eritreans are unable to mobilize for a plethora of inhibitors, not limited to the aforementioned lack of freedoms of press, religion and assembly. Fear is one of the most powerful deterrents that international relations scholars have proven through examples in game theory such as the prisoner’s dilemma\textsuperscript{138}. With a population entrenched in fear, stagnation is the safer alternative to mobilizing a public meeting of dissent when unrestricted assembly is outlawed. Similar behavior applies to publicly expressing disdain towards authorities or governance.

Abroad, Eritreans who wish to hold citizenship, own property and travel freely upon return to Eritrea must submit remittances in the form of the infamous 2 percent tax, which the government relies heavily on. In fact, Bozzini reports, “Channeling hard currency from the Eritreans in the diaspora, who are increasingly refusing to support the state, is certainly one of the current challenges that the Eritrean leadership is facing.”\textsuperscript{139} Despite the resistance with the diaspora tax, some Eritreans abroad resist speaking negatively of the regime in public gatherings because of the risk of covert surveillance. Poole writes, “The tax on Eritreans living abroad is technically voluntary…however, refusal to pay this tax can have consequences for individuals abroad and their families in Eritrea.”\textsuperscript{140} So while many can evade the tax as expatriates, those with family living within the country or hoping to visit their homeland must comply with


\textsuperscript{139} Barclat and Raihini, “Partner Choice versus Punishment.” 263-271.

\textsuperscript{140} Poole, "Ransoms, Remittances, and Refugees.” 66.
remittances to possess visas to enter and exit, purchase and maintain land, and reap the benefits of an Eritrean citizen.

The majority of dissenters, similar to the activists in the Arab Spring, are composed of the youth. The youth abroad that refuse the 2 percent tax can be interpreted as an act of rebellion against the state. The youth of the Eritrean diaspora lack the stoicism of the liberation generation, one of the greatest factors of the generational divide. The Eritrean youth within the country defect as a means of opposing the state through placing the needs of the individual above the existing culture of sacrificing one’s self or one’s comfort to compromise for the good of the collective. Poole reports, “Recent escapees are treated as criminals if voluntarily repatriated to the country, facing imprisonment and sometimes torture.” The remainder of Eritrean youth is absorbed in national service and civil reconstructive positions assigned during conscription. There is an immediate luxury that Eritreans in the diaspora harbor; the ability to critique and express opinions of the government in a public forum without risk of immediate physical harm.

In Tunisia, the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi was broadcasted through the media and rapidly garnered international recognition through its visceral feeling of shock and sympathy. In Egypt, the thousands of protestors in Tahrir Square communicated in masses through instant communication via Facebook, Twitter and other forums of social media to organize and warn protestors. In Yemen and Syria, news outlets like Al-Jazeera and other independently operated press provided coverage during the ongoing civil wars. It is vital to recognize the level of access to communication, lack of implementation of (indefinite) conscription, and the disparities in resources accessible to the participants of the Arab Spring versus the people within Eritrea. The argument is not which country had it worse, rather what factors are responsible for delaying uprisings in Eritrea when it faces countless similarities as its regional Arab counterparts that

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141 Poole, "Ransoms, Remittances, and Refugees." 66.
were affected by the Arab uprisings. The presence of an authoritarian regime, lack of good governance, restricted civil liberties, and desire for democracy alone are not always sufficient in resulting in a change in government or civil unrest, as reflected in the current state of Eritrea.

In order for a revolution to take place in Eritrea, similar to the Arab Spring, those speaking out against the injustices must be the local Eritreans. The Egyptian diaspora in the US did not protest the government and set demands, nor did the Tunisian diaspora or any other Arab diaspora – the oppressed groups within each respective nation mobilized and united in the midst of crisis. The cries of Eritrean diaspora that were not born in Eritrea are often the only voices given to the people, unintentionally overpowering the focus given to the local inhabitants. How can we tell a story we have not lived through? There is a membership group for Eritreans abroad that support the government, YPFDJ, but there are no other organized membership for those that raise critiques or opposition. Although the current government would not easily accept an opposition group, there could be an attempt to remain involved and enact change in the form of non-political organizations. These non-political organizations could be dedicated to education, access to resources, and the vast adversities disregarded and underfunded issues prevalent within Eritrea.
Conclusion

How does a country’s population decide to rebel? What conditions push citizens to their breaking point? How long can one man rule before the people demand a change? What can be said in the case of Eritrea when compared to the Arab Spring? To synthesize what has been discussed through these chapters, one should review the primary factors of the Arab Spring, the relevance of conscription in both the Arab Spring and Eritrea, as well as how the state of Eritrea has constructed itself in the international community and amongst its citizens at home and in the diaspora. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to consider the input of scholarship towards what would have needed to arise in Eritrea to reach its regional counterparts and what policy recommendations the regime and the people could implement moving forward.

The Arab Spring varied within each of the twelve nations it affected the most, yet each respective nation’s population had common vehicles of dissemination (social media, independent press, etc.) as well as the physical capacity to mobilize its citizens, especially the youth which composed the majority of the nations involved. The culmination of declining economic conditions, authoritarian regimes, censored media, tribal conflicts, disenfranchisement of religious minorities, unemployment, and poverty were key factors in the revolutions and organized protests that reached North Africa and the Middle East in 2011. No two countries experienced the same uprising; however, there was a unifying presence amongst the people that at the very least led to government changes if not protests. In the countries whose populations did not succeed in revolting against the authoritarian rulers in place, the government used tactics to suppress its dissidents, whether through passing appeasing legislation like in the cases of the wealthier states of Algeria, Oman, Jordan, and Kuwait, or through cooperating with similar regimes, which was visible of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, where the former converted the crisis in
Bahrain into a regional instability. In the case of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the need to end the cycle of authoritarian rulers, corruption, discrimination, and poverty reached unbearable levels and sparked mass dissidence. Behind the unrest of civil war in Yemen and Syria, the countries within North Africa experienced some of the most gruesome responses from the militarized authorities but they did not deter the efforts of the Tunisians, Egyptians and Libyans. The shared goal of attaining freedom, equality, and justice for those continuously neglected by the government fueled the resistance and eventual prevail/triumph.

During the liberation war, Eritreans shared the same vision of attaining freedom, equality and justice in the form of a sovereign Eritrea, free from the reign of Western colonizers, imperial forces and its long-standing neighbor/enemy Ethiopia. Two decades after the fighting and the EPLF has transformed into a monolithic apparatus in the form of the PFDJ, the only allowed political state within the nation. Within this time frame leading up to the Arab Spring, Eritrea had regularly conscripted civilians at the age of 18, yet terms of service had surpassed initial promises. Although the rest of the countries in North Africa also had obligatory forms of conscription, no country held nearly as restrictive confinements with a lack of sustainability or opportunity to revisit the public sector post-service. Unlike its regional counterparts, Eritrea’s government created a calculated system in which Eritrea’s youth would have to complete their final year of post secondary education in a far removed location, normalizing conscription as a necessary aspect of service to one’s country. Although Eritrea’s populations pales in comparison to its Arab-speaking neighbors, it has had the most success in subscribing its citizens into life-long reconstructive assignments and triggering a refugee exodus from those who wish to have a life outside of stoicism.
The Arab Uprisings and those who flee Eritrea share traits of resisting authoritarian rulers with omnipotent capacities within their borders. With respect to Eritrea, flight is a direct response to suppression of civil and individual liberties, not limited to religion, press and media, assembly, expression and conscription. In a nation unaccountable to its constituents, those in Eritrea are subject to the mercy of authorities and live in fear of clandestine or covert groups incognito. Comparatively, suppression of foreign media and lack of secularism were present in the Arab nations that experienced political and social upheaval. The main difference between the countries that successfully took to the streets versus Eritrea is the physical capacity of those with a lack of individual rights to protest the only government to exist post-liberation.

First and foremost, the political structures of governance within Eritrea require constructive evaluation. The border war is no longer active and the need for mobilized military efforts has severely declined. In order to restore faith and due diligence within the Eritrean people, the country’s officials must cater to the needs of the immediate persons it aims to serve. The purpose of the government is to maintain order and security within its populous, but with ongoing repression in the form of national service, the nation’s population is drastically reducing. If at least 5,000 Eritreans are fleeing their homes every month, there is an interpreted imminent danger sparking their departures.

In a country that lacks sustainability, consistent electricity, significant foreign aid to stimulate economic progression, developed rural areas, as well as a government that strongholds its citizens, it is difficult to articulate what would have been needed to achieve similar levels of success as its Arab regional counterparts. Eritrea was involved in a bloody war barely a decade before the Arab Uprisings. Eritrean citizens had grown exhausted by the ongoing conflicts with Ethiopia and the growth of casualties and unrest. History and border disputes allowed President
Isaias Afewerki to construct an existential threat that put Eritrea at risk. These grievances led to the implementation of the Warsay Yikaelo Campaign in 2002, which is responsible for the ongoing mobilization of Eritrean conscripts.

After reviewing the current conditions in Eritrea, there are a few alterations that could benefit the people of Eritrea and its diaspora communities. There has not been a free or fair election, or any election for that matter, since the U.N. supervised referendum in 1993. Not only are elections within the nation overdue, but the stronghold invested in unitary political party must be revised. Without an alternative to the head of the state, the international community recognizes extended leadership as a dictatorship or authoritarian regime, which damages the level of cooperation and economic opportunity available from the international community. There must be an end to indefinite conscription; openness to political discourse; investment in education; and access to sustainable resources and subsidies provided to those in rural and poorer areas. Not only are there needs economically to bolster the state of the country, but there are needs for reform where current suppression exists. Without independent media, the government damages its own credibility and draws attention to the secretive structures within the parameters of Eritrea. Additionally, the freedom of religion is a human right that should not be dictated by a governing power. One’s religious beliefs are able to be separate from political and economic policies. Fear and the inability to mobilize disqualified Eritreans from being able to participate in the Arab Spring as the Eritrean government’s restrictiveness on its people made rebellion seem incomprehensible.
Bibliography:


