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Social Studies**

*Ezra*

**A generation in crisis or bloom?**

**A study on belongingness, identity, and transnationalism of  
Eritrean Dutch youth**

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## List of Acronyms

ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
PFDJ	People's Front for Democracy and Justice
YPFDJ	Young People's Front for Democracy and Justice
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid
LPF	Lijst Pim Fortuyn
BBB	BoerBurgerBeweging
JA21	JuisteAntwoord21
BVNL	Belang van Nederland

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Dedicated to my uncle Solomon and cousin Te'amrat, who gave their lives for an Eritrea that one day would be free but did not get to live to see it happen. And my parents Saba and Futsum, and my family in The Netherlands, who have raised me in an extended family with so much love, in a country they barely knew. I will never forget the sacrifices all of you made. For my sister Lilian, we did it all together, we both graduated and made mom and dad proud this year!

For my little sisters Rhodé and Delina. May your generation bloom unapologetically.

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<i>“All that life</i>	<i>Over love</i>
<i>That’s dripping down the wall</i>	<i>Over hate</i>
<i>Of a dream that cannot breathe</i>	<i>Through this iron sky</i>
<i>In this harsh reality</i>	<i>That’s fast becoming our mind</i>
<i>Mass confusion</i>	<i>Over fear</i>
<i>Spoon fed to the blind</i>	<i>And into freedom</i>
<i>Serves now to define</i>	<i>You’ve just got to hold on</i>
<i>Our cold society</i>	<i>You’ve just got to hold on!”</i>
<i>From which we’ll rise</i>	<i>~ Paolo Nutini – Iron Sky</i>

## **Abstract**

This study is focused on Eritrean Dutch youngsters, specifically children of Eritrean refugees that fled for the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia (1961-1991). The research tries to give an insight on how this group deals with their families history with conflict and migration, diaspora politics from Eritrea, anti-immigrant sentiments in the Netherlands and how they navigate between two identities and cultures. The research also explored how all these factors influence their feelings of belongingness in either the Netherlands or Eritrea. I interviewed 8 respondents and discussed all the topics above, after which I analyzed the interviews by categorizing the interview data and relating it to theories about transnational authoritarianism, large group identity, acculturation and belongingness. The results are multilayered and show that this group is affected by transnational authoritarianism as well as anti-immigrant sentiments in Dutch society. However, the research also showed that respondents are not affected by intergenerational traumas as much as expected and that most of them are well integrated into Dutch society, while still connecting with their Eritrean heritage.

In addition to existing studies on other diaspora youth communities in the Netherlands, this study brings new insights about a community that is relatively unacquainted in Dutch society and in academic research. The relevance to development studies exists in this gap. Diaspora studies are an important part of development studies, and when diasporas exist for a longer time, new generations arise. New generations with different points of view and challenges than the first generation, which are relevant for academic research on how diasporas develop throughout generations.

### ***Keywords***

belonging, chosen trauma, diaspora, transnational authoritarianism, identity, Eritrea, the Netherlands, transgenerational trauma, conflict, migration

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

In 2018, I became the first Eritrean Dutch person to be elected in a political office in the Netherlands. Ten days after my inauguration my grandmother, who lived in Eritrea, passed away. I couldn't go to Eritrea to attend her funeral, because of safety reasons. I had written critical articles and given interviews in Dutch media about the political situation in Eritrea and this had resulted in negative reactions from Eritrean government supporters in the Netherlands. In ten days, my identity as an Eritrean Dutch woman resulted in both a milestone for the Eritrean community in the Netherlands as well as a very low point for me personally.

I was born in the Netherlands. Into a family of Eritrean refugees who fled the war with Ethiopia and I grew up in a community that supports the Eritrean government in a society that is negative about immigrants. Both constantly questioned my loyalty throughout my life. 'Are you proud to be Eritrean?', 'What do you think about Black Pete?', 'Do you have two nationalities?' and 'Why don't you pay diaspora tax, don't you want to support your country?' are some of the questions I've heard many times, either from white Dutch people or from Eritrean Dutch people. I went through a phase where I wanted my hair to be straight as a pin and play field hockey, so I would look more like the white students at school and would fit in. I also went through a phase where I romanticized life in Eritrea, because I felt excluded in Dutch society and felt anti-Western sentiments. I struggled with 'survivors' guilt': several family members gave their lives for the future of the Eritrean people, and I was 'wasting' their sacrifice by not even living in the sovereign Eritrea they fought so hard for.

While I felt alone in this process as a teenager, as I grew older, I realized that my experience was not unique. I have many friends, colleagues and acquaintances who are born and raised in The Netherlands, have a migration background and went through the same process. A process that continues throughout our lives with every major life event: when we start to loosen our ties with our parents (did you lose the ties with their culture too?), when we get married (won't your wedding be too Dutch?) and when we have kids (will you raise them with two cultures and languages too?). It's a process of navigating between two identities and cultures, in a society that is not particularly positive towards immigrants and questions your loyalty, just as your ethnic community does.



In 1991, the 30-year long conflicts between Eritrea and Ethiopia came to an end. As a result of the war many Eritrean people fled their country and formed a diaspora all over the world. They started having children in their new countries, who were raised in an age of upcoming populism and an anti-immigrant discourse in Europe, heavy diaspora politics from Eritrea and by parents who may carry traumas from their past. Like many youngsters with a migration background in the Netherlands, all those things can lead to identity crises, loyalty issues and some would say: bad integration in Dutch society. There has been research about integration of migrants and refugees in the Netherlands, but in this research paper I would like to focus on the second generation of Eritrean Europeans that were born here or have been living here from a young age and how they are affected by conflicts and politics in Eritrea and the political climate in the Netherlands when forming an identity. I'm will particularly focus on politics (the so-called long arm of the Eritrean regime), intergenerational trauma due to migration and past conflicts in combination with racism and anti-immigrant sentiments in the Netherlands. What happens with teenagers that are trying to form their identity in a time that Dutch politicians are telling them to 'go back to where they came from' Especially when the government in the country of their parents is working extremely hard to convince young people in their diaspora that they are much wanted and needed in their country? How does this affect their feeling of belonging in the Netherlands and with their feeling of loyalty towards a country they sometimes barely even know?

Eritrea is one of the least democratic countries in the world and has a dictatorial regime that has been in power for more than 30 years<sup>1</sup>. In recent years, there has been Dutch media outlet on the so-called 'long arm' of the Eritrean regime in the worldwide Eritrean diaspora, which came to a climax when the youth wing of the only political party in Eritrea (YPDFJ) wanted to organize a conference in the Netherlands<sup>2</sup>. The Eritrean community in the Netherlands is also known to be one of the migrant communities in Dutch society that has issues

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<sup>1</sup> World report 2022: Eritrea (2022). (Human Rights Watch). Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/eritrea> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Rosman, C. (2017) "Zorgen om komst tweede man Eritrea naar Nederland". Available at: <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/zorgen-om-komst-tweede-man-eritrea-naar-nederland~a850e9ae/> (Accessed: 12 November 2023).

with integration<sup>3</sup>. However, there are many children of Eritrean refugees that have been born and raised here and are able to succeed in Dutch society, while still being influenced by Eritrean politics. The question ‘how it is possible that a foreign government influences a community in Europe?’ has been raised multiple times in the Netherlands in the past few years, not only about the Eritrean community, but also about the Turkish, Moroccan, and Chinese communities<sup>4 5 6</sup>. Apart from diaspora politics, young people in the Eritrean diaspora often also grow up with traumatized parents that fled a war to give their (future) children a safe place. What does this do with their feelings of safety and security, but also with a feeling of loyalty towards the country of their parents? Lastly, all Dutch millennials grew up in a time where politicians like Pim Fortuyn, Thierry Baudet and Geert Wilders were and are highly popular and even children were often confronted with anti-immigrant statements<sup>7</sup>. How does this influence their feeling of belonging in the Netherlands? Do they suffer from it, do they feel like outsiders, or do they not care and feel like they truly belong in The Netherlands?

The relevance of this research is that it can give an insight to how young people with a migration background in the Netherlands are influenced by politics and conflicts in their home country in combination with the political climate in their country of residence and how this affects their sense of belonging. It can also be a helpful research for policy makers who want to take measures to help the Eritrean community in Europe on the field of education

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<sup>3</sup> Sterckx, L. and Fessehazion, M. (2022) *Eritrese statushouders in Nederland*. SCP. Available at: <https://www.narcis.nl/publication/RecordID/oai:repository.scp.nl:publications%2F387>.

<sup>4</sup> Sterkenburg, N. (2018) ‘Dit is de lange arm van Erdogan’. Available at: <https://www.ewmagazine.nl/nederland/achtergrond/2018/08/dit-is-de-lange-arm-van-erdogan-146367w/> (Accessed: 23 June 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Groen, J. (2019) ‘De lange arm van Marokko slaat én streelt’. Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/de-lange-arm-van-marokko-slaat-en-streelt~b32db8056/> (Accessed: 23 June 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Schoof, R. and van Pinxteren, G. (no date) De lange arm van Beijing reikt tot diep in de Randstad. (NRC). Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/10/26/de-lange-arm-van-beijing-reikt-tot-diep-in-de-randstad-a4146460> (Accessed: 23 June 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Roest, D. (2021) Migratie: de splijtzwam van de Nederlandse politiek. Available at: [https://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl/id/vlggjpk0sbl8/nieuws/migratie\\_de\\_splijtzwam\\_van\\_de](https://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl/id/vlggjpk0sbl8/nieuws/migratie_de_splijtzwam_van_de) (Accessed: 12 November 2023).

and wellbeing, especially the second generation of Eritreans in Europe. No previous research has been done on the younger generation of the Eritrean Dutch community.

## 1.1 Research question

How are Eritrean Dutch youth influenced by politics from Eritrea in combination with the anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe and how does this affect their sense of belongingness?

### *Sub questions*

1. How do Dutch Eritrean youngsters reflect on their family's history with conflict and migration?
2. How does Eritrean Dutch youth navigate between two identities and cultures?
3. How is Eritrean Dutch youth affected by anti-immigrant sentiments and racism in the Netherlands?
4. How is Eritrean Dutch youth affected by diaspora politics from Eritrea?

## 1.2 Methodology

To answer the research question and sub questions, I have chosen to do qualitative research. I have chosen qualitative methods over quantitative methods to be able to get in depth information from respondents and not only get quantified answers to my questions, but also conversations that show why they feel about certain topics the way they do. I think this is important to answer the research question, because the research question touches on personal experiences and stories. To gather my data, I have interviewed Eritrean Dutch people under the age of 40, that have been born in the Netherlands or came here before the age of 7, when compulsory school attendance starts in The Netherlands, and therefore implies active participation in Dutch society. These criteria are important, because this research explicitly focusses on the second generation of Eritrean migrants in The Netherlands. The interviews were realized online, for the duration of approximately one hour and had a semi-structured form and were conducted in Dutch. The list of questions and topics discussed during the interviews can be found in appendix 1. The respondents were found within my own network or the network of Eritrean people in my own network and were interviewed in August and September 2023. The total number of interviews was ten, and with all respondents I discussed the same topics and questions. The reason I chose to do a maximum of ten

interviews is because the topics that are discussed are sensitive topics, and the Eritrean community is small. The news that someone is doing research on diaspora politics could spread quickly and bring myself and my respondents in danger, as happened with other researchers that are researching similar topics regarding Eritrea. I still recorded the interviews and took field notes while conducting the interviews but saved everything in a safe digital space (Erasmus University OneDrive). All names of respondents used in this thesis (including the appendices) are fictional Eritrean names, to guarantee anonymity of respondents. Amongst the respondents were two members of my own family and one friend I grew up with. I wanted to get their perspectives as well, but I found it important that the majority of the respondents were not too close to my inner circle, to get different perspectives and experiences in different families and social circles.

To analyze the gathered data, I have coded the interviews to organize the data into different topics (family history, identities, political climate in the Netherlands and diaspora politics from Eritrea) that interact with the theoretical framework to see if the theory applies to the stories of my respondents. This will be further elaborated in the analysis chapter of this research paper. I have gathered the rest of the information I needed to answer the research question through a literature review and desk research.

When doing qualitative research and interpreting qualitative data, it is important to reflect on your own position in relation to the research and the respondents. For me, this research paper is very personal: the research topic is my own community, of Eritrean Dutch youth, navigating their way through their family's past and their present and (possibly) future lives in the Netherlands. I chose to write about this topic, because I see Eritrean Dutch youngsters around me struggling and thriving at the same time, which made me wonder what underlying dynamics are present in this group. It is very likely that the fact that I am a member of the community I am researching has influenced my views on this topic, as I have experienced the same things most of my respondents did.

## Chapter 2 - Theoretical and conceptual framework

### 2.1 On Transnationalism and diaspora politics

Transnationalism is the concept of political, social, and economic activities (amongst others) crossing the borders of nation-states (Yeoh and Francis: 2022). Biao Chang (2022) describes a multi-scalar framework for transnationalism. This multi-scalar framework positions the scale of transnational interactions in a scope (local, national, and global) and a type (emergent or taxonomical), wherein all transnational processes have a different structure and dynamic. A taxonomical type is a scale that nests in a bigger scale, and the bigger scale covers the smaller scales. An example of this could be an individual, part of a community in a neighborhood, in a city that is part of a certain region in a certain nation, et cetera. An emergent type of scale is defined by the scope of mobilization and coordination following a group of people's action. Taxonomical types of transnationalism have clear boundaries, whereas emergent types do not. In practice, these two types of scales are often intertwined: for example, a mayor of a city may fail to implement policy in the city they rule (taxonomical) if they fail to work with other strategical actors in the city (emergent) (Xiang, 2022, pp. 45–59). This framework of transnationalism Chang builds on the multi-scalar-conjunctural approach of transnationalism by Çağlar and Glick Schiller (2018). This approach emphasizes that transnationalism needs to be understood historically (it is more visible and has more consequences on some historical moments than others) and structurally (transnational connections are bound to politics, economy, media, and military). Chang adds an extra dimension to this approach by looking at the scope and scale of transnational processes.

Tsourapas (2022) introduced the term *transnational authoritarianism*, meaning authoritarian regimes benefit economically from liberal migration policies, but then apply different strategies to ensure a politically loyal diaspora, that they can control to prevent security and political threats from citizens abroad. Tsourapas build on Gerschewski's (2013) framework of the three pillars of autocratic stability (being repression, legitimation, and co-optation) and applied a transnational perspective. This means, authoritarian transnationalism exists in the form of three strategies, used by the authoritarian regime in the homeland. Strategies of repression have the goal to get direct, sometimes even physical, control of transnational space. In extreme cases, such as the case of the Arab journalist Khasoggi, this can lead to threats or physical violence against members of the diaspora that are not loyal to the regime

in their homeland. Many authoritarian regimes have developed a transnational network of political operatives that are active in social networks of their diasporas. This strategy of repression can also lead to digital surveillance, especially in the current age of social media. To ensure a loyal diaspora, authoritarian regimes may also apply a strategy of legitimization, where they try to guarantee consent, compliance with current rules, passive obedience, or toleration within their diaspora. They might also actively promote a discourse of national loyalty abroad and define disloyal members of the diaspora as traitors. The last strategy an authoritarian regime might use on its diaspora is the strategy of co-optation (and cooperation). This strategy includes efforts to make a part of the diaspora part of the elite via personal perks, to ensure loyalty and dependency on the regime. Regimes might also cooperate with diaspora actors and other non-state actors, to use them as an instrument. It is worth noting that Tsourapas emphasizes that these strategies are often used combined, to maximize influence on and minimize political dissidents in diasporas. The strategies are also based on continuous processes: exogenous reinforcement (with power and material resources), endogenous, and reciprocal reinforcement (Tsourapas, 2022, pp. 128–140; Gerschewski, 2013, pp. 13–38).

Mazzucato and van Geel (2022) did research on transnational young people who grow up and are active in a transnational social field. A specific part of their research is reserved for ‘the second generation’: people whose parents left their country of origin and who were born in their parents’ country of residence. Mazzucato and van Geel state that young people with this background engage in a transnational network that is often influenced by their parents’ country of origin. As a result, they look for meaningful connections to form their identity transnationally and to position themselves in the country they reside in, but in which their parents were not born. Not only does this transnational activity influence their identities, it also affects their political engagement and social networks (Mazzucato and van Geel, 2022, pp. 198–210).

## **2.2 On trauma, conflict, and identity**

Transgenerational trauma is when (grand) parents pass on their traumas to their (grand) children biologically, emotionally, mentally, and socially. This phenomenon has been seen in Holocaust survivors, descendants of enslaved people and refugee families (Yehuda et al.: 2020, Halloran: 2019, Dalgaard et al.: 2020). When a trauma becomes collective, a

community of people internalizes their trauma as part of their group identity. Volkan (2013) examines the psychology of large group identity, the relationship with massive traumas and its role in (inter)national affairs. He refers to the concepts of exaggerated large group narcissism and masochistic large group narcissism, in which large groups of people come preoccupied and obsessed with a large-group identity, which can escalate in chronic victimhood of a society (Volkan and Fowler, 2009). He also describes how a large group identity is formed and how chosen glory and chosen trauma influence a large group of people and their children in an intergenerational way.

According to Volkan (2013: pp. 210-246), children go through ‘identification’ to develop a large group identity. Children identify with important figures in their environment and their psychological functions. Belief systems, large group rituals and similar aspects of their parents’ identity are used by children to expand their internal world in adaptive, but sometimes also maladaptive, ways and to relate to small and large groups they interact with. The identity of a child starts where identification ends, and when a child goes from being a ‘generalist’ to belongingness in a larger group. Volkan acknowledges the fact that children who grow up between two large group identities, may experience psychological problems when these two identities get in a conflict. For example, a child that is born from parents from two different countries may experience psychological distress when there is a conflict between those two countries or the large group identities that come with them. When children go through adolescence, they change their images of important figures in their childhood, and sometimes distance themselves from the identification they went through. Instead, they go through a new ‘identification’ process with their peers and others they meet when expanding their world and becoming more independent. Sometimes, they go back to the large group identity from their youth after adolescence. Usually, according to Volkan, a large group identity that survives through adolescence, lasts a lifetime of a person (Volkan, 2013, pp. 210–246).

## **2.3 On belongingness, integration, and homemaking**

There is a lot of literature about belongingness, but I found Allen (2020) particularly interesting. In her book, she defines belonging as a unique experience that relates to yearning to connect with others, the need for positive regard and the desire for interpersonal connection. It is so important to individuals that it shapes their relationship with others, communities, and groups. Belonging can be fluid and diverse: one individual can experience belonging

in different communities and groups. Belonging can be influenced by stressors: certain environments or events that influence one's belongingness in a negative way. Those stressors can be more influential for those who belong to a racial minority (Allen, 2020, pp. 1–5).

Boccagni (2022) writes about transnational migration and homemaking. He distinguishes three definitions of *home* in the transnational context: the ascriptive side of home, being the place, the biographical and family circumstances that lie behind everyone in time, and sometimes used as a synonym for the place of origin. The second type is the socio-material side of home, a more functional equivalent to the first type, with places and households people live in as a marker of home in the descriptive sense. The third type is more focused on *homemaking*, with a positive feeling of belongingness to particular places, which depend on context and time. Boccagni concludes that migrant' views, emotions and practices towards home are fluid and more of a lifelong project (Boccagni, 2022, pp. 141–154).

In social psychology and anthropology acculturation is a term that describes the cultural interaction between an immigrating person, family or group and the new host country that they are immigrating to. In his article 'Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation', John Berry (1997) describes different factors that influence a process of acculturation and four possible outcomes. Berry states that the acculturation of an individual, family or group depends on two questions: how much does the person seek to maintain connection with the culture of origin and how much does the person want to learn and adopt the new culture? The answers to those two questions can lead to the following outcomes, as shown in the model below (Berry, 1997):

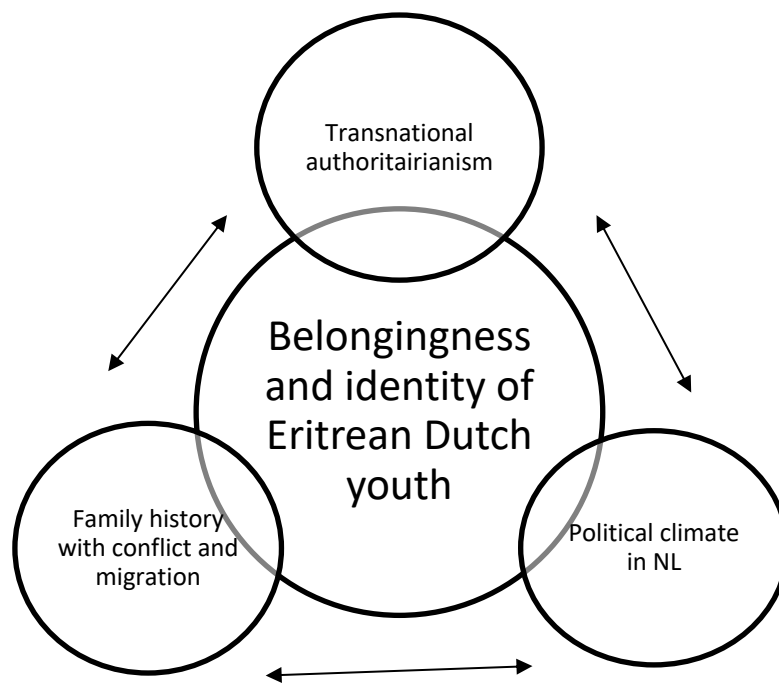
1. **Assimilation:** this applies to immigrants who consider their culture of origin as not important, but want to identify and engage mainly with the new culture and society;
2. **Separation:** immigrants that value their heritage culture as highly important and do not want to learn about their new culture or engage in their new society will ultimately form a separated group in society;
3. **Marginalization:** immigrants who do not identify with their heritage culture, but also do not adopt a new culture and do not engage in their new society will form a marginalized group in society;
4. **Integration:** immigrants that seek to maintain their heritage culture, but also participate in their new society and adopt a new culture will eventually reach the best outcome - according to Berry - biculturalism.



	High identification with heritage culture	Low identification with heritage culture
High identification with new culture	Integration (Biculturalism)	Assimilation
Low identification with new culture	Separation	Marginalization

Table 1: a visual display of Berry's theory

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework



## Chapter 3 - Context

### 3.1 History of conflict in Eritrea

During the big ‘Scramble of Africa’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Italians made their debut in Africa, more specifically in Libya, Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia (Ullendorff, 1990:90). While Ethiopia was never colonized but only occupied, Eritrea became a part of the Italian Empire (Van der Veen, 2002:46). In June 1940 Italy entered the Second World war, when Mussolini used his territory in the Horn of Africa as a base to attack Allied forces in the Region. British forces soon drove the Italians back in current Somaliland and Eritrea. Ethiopian Patriots and the Free French Forces of Charles the Gaulle were able to defeat the Italians in Ethiopia. The exiled Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie returned to Ethiopia and the Brits then formed the occupying power in Eritrea (Wrong, 2005: 26-52).

The Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie saw the end of the Second World War as an opportunity to expand his landlocked Ethiopian Empire. However, in 1951, the newly founded UN decided that Eritrea and Ethiopia should continue as a federation ruled from Addis Ababa by Haile Selassie and the Britons left Eritrea in 1952.<sup>8</sup> Months after that, Haile Selassie banned many freedoms in Eritrea, such as freedom of press, the use of the two national languages Tigrinya and Arabic, and the use of the Eritrean flag. At last, in November 1962 Haile Selassie annexed Eritrea as a new province in his Ethiopian Empire (Aremu and Buhari, 2018: 120-123). This was the beginning of a thirty-year long war that caused many

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<sup>8</sup> *Resolutions adopted on reports of the ad hoc Political Committee* (1950). Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/059/88/PDF/NR005988.pdf?OpenElement> (Accessed: 10 September 2023)

people to flee Eritrea, and in the 80's and 90's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, around 1500 Eritreans came to the Netherlands<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>.

Shortly before Haile Selassie's annexation of Eritrea, an exiled group of Eritrean intellectuals and students established the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), known as the *Jebba* in Eritrea. The ELF mainly consisted of Muslim Eritreans in its early days. The group was trained in Cairo and Egypt ensured support within the Arab League (Mekonnen Bekele, 2022, pp. 84–117). ELF started its armed battle against the Ethiopian emperor in September 1961, mainly using guerilla tactics. The ELF prevented Ethiopia to gain control over Eritrea entirely and was hostile against any other liberation movements, being the only liberation movement in Eritrea until 1971 (Weldeghiorghis Tedla, 2014: 42-43). Internal conflict between Muslims and Christians in ELF led to a faction splitting off, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), known as the *Shabiat* in 1970. The ideology of the EPLF was Marxist-Leninist, much more radical than the ELF (Connell, 1993: 73-91). This split off started a short violent conflict between the two groups, which ended when the Emperor Haile Selassie was ousted by the communist Derg in Ethiopia (Connell, 1993: 17-19). However, the revolution in Ethiopia did not lead to independence in Eritrea: on the contrary, the Derg-regime occupied Eritrea and ruled it with its so-called red terror (Harff and Gurr: 1988). The EPLF and ELF got into another violent conflict in 1980, because the ELF wanted to participate into peace negotiations with Ethiopia. This conflict led to the defeat of the ELF, and the whole movement was banned to Sudan (Weldeghoirghis Tedla, 2014:63-96). The communist regime in Ethiopia came to an end when the Soviet Union – the Derg's biggest supporter – fell apart (Henze, 2000:303-333). It is important to note that the EPLF received support during this time from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), that fought for the independence of the Ethiopian region of Tigray. This led to momentum for both EPLF and TPLF, leading to the de facto independence of Eritrea and the takeover of power by the TPLF in Ethiopia in 1991 (Henze, 2000:303-333). The Eritrean independence was then legally confirmed by a

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<sup>9</sup> Sterckx, L. and Fessehazion, M. (2022) *Eritrese statushouders in Nederland*. SCP. Available at: <https://www.narcis.nl/publication/RecordID/oai:repository.scp.nl:publications%2F387>.

<sup>10</sup> This number is based on the people registered as Eritrean in the Netherlands. Because Eritrea was a part of Ethiopia from 1961-1993, a lot of Eritreans were registered as Ethiopians by the Dutch government at the time. This means, the first group of Eritreans is probably bigger than we think based on official data.

referendum supervised by the UN in 1993, wherein 99,83 % of the voters voted in favor of Eritrean sovereignty<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.2 Eritrea after independence

In the years after Eritrean independence, Ethiopia was dealing with the economic aftermath of the communist plan economy and still experienced economic disadvantage because of its landlocked position: Ethiopia had no free access to sea or a haven since Eritrea became independent. This and the vaguely drawn borders after 1993 caused increasing tensions between both countries. In 1998, it came to a confrontation that was mostly a show of force, which again led to an armed conflict that would last until 2000. This short but quite intense conflict caused many casualties on both sides estimated to be as high as 300.000<sup>12</sup>. After 2000, the UN founded the Eritrean-Ethiopian Boundary Commission to draw clear borders between both countries. The commission made a verdict about the territories in question, mostly in favor of Eritrea, and decided that both countries had to withdraw their armed forces from each other's territory. However, both countries did not obey to the verdict, which resulted in a no war no peace situation between both countries until the Eritrean-Ethiopian Peace Summit in 2018<sup>13</sup>.

After the independence in 1993, the EPLF rebranded itself as the People's Front of Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). PFDJ and its leader, Iseayas Afwerki, have been leading Eritrea since its independence. After the independence, Eritrea was seen as Africa's hope: the international community felt and hoped that Eritrea would be a democracy and would bloom

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on UNOVER [United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea] (A/48/283 of 11 August 1993), paragraphs 52-53.

<sup>12</sup> (2005) 'Q&A: Horn's bitter border war', 7 December. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4041073.stm> (Accessed: 4 April 2023).

<sup>13</sup> *CNN.com - World - Eritrean, Ethiopian exchange of POWs begins - December 23, 2000* (2000). (CNN.com). Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2000/WORLD/africa/12/23/eritrea.ethiopia.02/> (Accessed: 10 September 2023).

economically<sup>14</sup>. However, after the border war had ended in 2000, Afwerki changed from a promising leader to an authoritarian one. Plans for elections and the implementation of the Eritrean constitution were cancelled. Publication of all eight independent newspapers became prohibited and a wave of journalists, opposition leaders and critics were arrested<sup>15</sup>. After 2000, not only was Eritrea controlled politically by the Afwerki regime, but also economically. Eritrea became a plan economy where all factors of production are in hands of the government, including its labor force (Tseggai, 2017: 125-145). Economic activities are actively limited by the government, Eritrea's gross domestic product was only 1,98 billion dollars in 2023<sup>16</sup>. The inflation is high and the employment is low, as the whole labor force is obliged to endless 'military service', where people have to work for the government for only 500 nakfa (33 dollar) a month (Tseggai, 2017: 125-145). Activities in this military service include building houses, teaching in primary schools, and guarding government buildings and check points. Military service is de facto infinite, and many youngsters flee the country to escape it. The human rights situation also worsened after 2001: there is practically no freedom of religion, freedom of expression or freedom of organization in Eritrea. Four religions are permitted in Eritrea (Coptic Christianity, Catholicism, Evangelical Lutheran Christianity, and Sunni Islam), the rest is prohibited<sup>17</sup>. Summarizing, the post-war situation in Eritrea is marked by a political move from authoritarianism to totalitarianism, excessive militarization of society and isolationist foreign policy (Hirt, 2008).

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<sup>14</sup> Tseggai, M. (2018) 'Optimisme in Eritrea en Ethiopië was niet zo gek', 16 July. Available at: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/columns-opinie/optimisme-in-eritrea-en-ethiopie-was-niet-zo-gek~bed266de/> (Accessed: 13 November 2023).

<sup>15</sup> World report 2021: Eritrea (2021). United States of America: Human Rights Watch, pp. 225–231. Available at: [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2021/01/2021\\_hrw\\_world\\_report.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/01/2021_hrw_world_report.pdf) (Accessed: 13 November 2023).

<sup>16</sup> IMF Data Mapper: Eritrea (2023). Available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile> (Accessed: 13 November 2023).

<sup>17</sup> World report 2021: Eritrea (2021). United States of America: Human Rights Watch, pp. 225–231. Available at: [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2021/01/2021\\_hrw\\_world\\_report.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/01/2021_hrw_world_report.pdf) (Accessed: 13 November 2023).

### 3.3 The diaspora and the long arm in the Netherlands

As said earlier, the Eritrean government became a dictatorship after the border conflict in 2001. The regime found its legitimization in the no war no peace situation with Ethiopia until 2018, but also through support from the diaspora (Hirt, 2013).

Eritrea is one of the most diasporic states in the world with an estimate of one third of its population living outside the country (Müller and Belloni, 2021, pp. 3–18). The following describes the Eritrean diaspora in the Netherlands, with some remarks on the diaspora worldwide. The Eritrean diaspora can be categorized into three waves of refugees. The first wave of Eritrean refugees in the Netherlands (around 1500 people) fled the Independence War between Eritrea and Ethiopia in the period from 1961 until 1991. This group highly sympathizes with EPLF that later became PFDJ, the ruling party in Eritrea. The second wave of refugees (around 6000 people) fled the short border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia in the period from 1998 until 2000. The third wave of refugees fled the Eritrean regime in the period after 2001 (around 15000 people) (Sterckx and Fessehazion, 2018). This research focusses on the children of the first wave of Eritrean refugees, that fled because of the independence war.

As said in the introduction of this paper, Eritrean community in the Netherlands is known to be one of the difficult integrating migrant communities in the country. A few factors explain this. First, Dutch society has very little knowledge about Eritrea and the Eritrean community, including policy makers, social workers, and politicians (de Gruijter and Razenberg, 2017, pp. 1–17). To integrate in Dutch society, a certain assertiveness is expected from the one trying to integrate in the Netherlands. However, Eritreans come from a culture where being assertive and direct is considered rude, which is the opposite of Dutch culture, that is known for open and direct communication (Sterckx and Fessehazion, 2018). Second, Eritrean people come from a country that hasn't been a constitutional state for the last 80 years, while the Netherlands has been a constitutional state since 1848 and is one of the most democratic and free countries of the world. When Eritreans arrive in the Netherlands, they quickly get included in the Eritrean community, wherein almost every organization and activity for Eritreans is politically orientated, including churches and mosques (Sterckx and Fessehazion, 2018). So even when one only wants to practice faith, confrontation with political matters is never far away. Combined with the closed Eritrean culture described earlier and propaganda from Eritrea which I will explain below later, the Eritrean community –

especially the first generation - has issues with taking root in the Netherlands. This applies to Eritreans who have been in the Netherlands for a long time, as well as for the current generation of Eritrean refugees that has just arrived (Sterckx and Fessehazion, 2018).

While the political and economic situation in Eritrea is quite bad, the PFDJ regime gets a lot of support from its diaspora, especially from the first generation of Eritrean refugees that fled the war with Ethiopia (Hirt, 2013) (Hirt and Saleh Mohammed, 2018, pp. 232–247). Some of them joined the EPLF army during the war or have family members who did. The EPLF maintained their support when becoming PFDJ and tries to maintain it more than thirty years after independence by heavy diaspora politics. Every country with a significant Eritrean community outside Eritrea has its own PFDJ chapter. The only Eritrean (state-owned) television channel Eri TV broadcasts worldwide, and has around 1-2 million viewers, mostly in the diaspora. Through Eri TV and other media the Eritrean Ministry of Information tries to influence Eritrean people worldwide. By making sure no Eritrean abroad forgets about the thirty-year long war with Ethiopia, the regime creates a diaspora wherein people are so scared for a new (civil) war, that they accept everything the regime throws at them. For PFDJ and its followers, the Eritrean sovereignty is under attack continuously and in this rationale, the goal of protecting Eritrea justifies any mean or sacrifice the people of Eritrea must make. Democracy, human rights, and economic development are considered too dangerous for national security, and the aftermath of the Arab Spring is often used as doom scenario for Eritrea (Tseggai, 2017, pp. 125–145). The regime finds its legitimization through external factors. Until the peace agreement with Ethiopia in 2018, the regime legitimized its existence and the situation in Eritrea by the illusion that an Ethiopian invasion in Eritrea could happen at any given day and that people who were critical of the government were being supported by Ethiopia (Tseggai, 2017, pp. 125–145). After the 2018 peace agreement the attention of the regimes propaganda shifted from Ethiopia to Tigray and the TPLF, the arch enemy of PFDJ<sup>18</sup>.

To make sure the children of the first generation of refugees in the diaspora would also support the regime, PFDJ founded the Young People's Front of Democracy and Justice

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<sup>18</sup> de Vries, E. (2022) Eritrea mobiliseert troepen, 'kan genadeklap zijn voor mensen Tigray'. (NOS). Available at: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2445853-eritrea-mobiliseert-troepen-kan-genadeklap-zijn-voor-mensen-tigray> (Accessed: 13 November 2023).

(YPFDJ) for young Eritreans in its diaspora. The organization is active in the Middle-East, Northern America and Europe, including the Netherlands. It organizes yearly conferences, where dignitaries of the Eritrean regime lecture youth about nationalism and geopolitics. The organization follows the same ideology as PFDJ, including fanatic nationalism and anti-Western sentiments. There is no room for criticism against the Eritrean government<sup>19</sup>.

Not only does the Eritrean diaspora support the PFDJ regime politically, but it also supports the regime financially. Every Eritrean abroad must pay a diaspora tax of two percent of income, even if they don't have Eritrean citizenship. Citizenship is no legal term in Eritrea: everyone of Eritrean heritage is considered Eritrean by the government, even if one has no legal ties to the country or is not eligible for an Eritrean passport, and therefore must pay the tax. Those who refuse to pay the tax, gets refused consular assistance from the embassy: this can vary from visas to birth certificates that don't get issued, as well as inheritances in Eritrea that cannot be claimed if the diaspora tax is not being paid. Those who don't have an income from work, but get government assistance, are also obliged to pay. There are cases known where Eritrean embassies abroad intimidate people to pay the tax or threaten family in Eritrea to make sure the family member abroad pays the tax<sup>20</sup>.

### 3.4 Anti-immigrant sentiments in The Netherlands

Because of the nature of this research, in which I'm trying to find out if racism plays a role in the belongingness of Eritrean Dutch youth, I will explain the Dutch political situation and the discourse surrounding immigrants shortly in this paragraph. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, right wing populism rose in the Netherlands. This started with Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn and his political party *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF), which was the first charismatic leader of a populist Dutch political party and therefore gained popularity quite quickly. With his anti-immigrant, anti-Islam, and anti-establishment views, he was in the race for Prime

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<sup>19</sup> *Niets is wat het lijkt* (no date). Amsterdam: DSP Groep. Available at: [https://www.dsp-groep.nl/wp-content/uploads/16pverit\\_Niets\\_is\\_wat\\_het\\_lijkt-DSP\\_2016.pdf](https://www.dsp-groep.nl/wp-content/uploads/16pverit_Niets_is_wat_het_lijkt-DSP_2016.pdf) (Accessed: 13 November 2023).

<sup>20</sup> *Niets is wat het lijkt* (no date). Amsterdam: DSP Groep. Available at: [https://www.dsp-groep.nl/wp-content/uploads/16pverit\\_Niets\\_is\\_wat\\_het\\_lijkt-DSP\\_2016.pdf](https://www.dsp-groep.nl/wp-content/uploads/16pverit_Niets_is_wat_het_lijkt-DSP_2016.pdf) (Accessed: 13 November 2023).



Minister. Fortuyn got assassinated in May 2002, a few weeks before the national elections and the party won 26 seats in Dutch parliament, but imploded because of Fortuyn's death and the lack of new leadership. This gap was filled by Geert Wilders, who was a member of Parliament for the conservative party VVD and left this party to start his own political party, the Freedom Party (PVV) in 2004 (van Rossem, 2010). Geert Wilders remains the most important Dutch populist and anti-immigrant politician in the Netherlands to this day and is the leader of the opposition with 16 seats in Parliament. In the last decade, the right winged populists got more fragmented, with new parties in parliament such as BBB (the farmer's movement) and Forum for Democracy as well as JA21 and BVNL that stem from the latter<sup>21</sup>. Not only in parliament, but also in the public discourse, debates about immigration and integration polarized Dutch society<sup>22</sup>. Research shows racism also exists in Dutch institutions in several areas: on the housing market, the labor market, in the educational system and the police system<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Fracties (no date). (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal). Available at: [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerleden\\_en\\_commissies/fracties](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerleden_en_commissies/fracties) (Accessed: 13 November 2023).

<sup>22</sup> Roest, D. (2021) Migratie: de splijtzwam van de Nederlandse politiek. Available at: [https://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl/id/vlggjpk0sbl8/nieuws/migratie\\_de\\_splijtzwam\\_van\\_de](https://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl/id/vlggjpk0sbl8/nieuws/migratie_de_splijtzwam_van_de) (Accessed: 12 November 2023).

<sup>23</sup> *Institutioneel racisme in Nederland*(2021). Utrecht: Kennisplatform Intergratie & Samenleving, pp. 1–42. Available at: [https://www.kis.nl/sites/default/files/2022-06/institutioneel\\_racisme\\_in\\_nederland\\_-\\_literatuuronderzoek1.pdf](https://www.kis.nl/sites/default/files/2022-06/institutioneel_racisme_in_nederland_-_literatuuronderzoek1.pdf) (Accessed: 12 November 2023).

## Chapter 4 - Findings & analysis

In this chapter, I will first give an insight in the results of the interviews with respondents on four topics, based on the transcripts and the field notes (see appendix 2). The topics discussed during the interviews can be found in appendix 1. After that, I will analyse the results by answering the sub-questions of this research.

### 4.1 How do Dutch Eritrean youngsters reflect on their family's history with conflict and migration?

All respondents were born in the Netherlands and have parents who fled the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. With one exception (Nigisti), all respondents stated that their parents don't like to talk about the war and that they don't know their parents' full history and past. What also stood out is that when the respondents' parents talk about it, it will often be in a casual way to make it less burdening on their children. Some respondents said their parents sometimes do mention family members they lost during the war, but don't go into detail about what happened.

*“Especially the stories she [the respondents' mother] tells, while we are drinking bun [Eritrean coffee] on a Sunday, she will mention it very casually and then I think ‘wow, this is very heavy’. She pretends like it's nothing, but I will ask more questions about how exactly everything went, because I have a certain interest in hearing her stories”* Makda

*“My parents try to spare me when talking about their past. They talk about their youth and the positive things, but not the negative parts. I think that is very typical for the Eritrean culture, people only want to talk about the positive things, but not about the negative things, at least, not with their children. I find it very difficult to talk about these things with them as well, because we have a small language barrier and I have a different view on things, but I am not the one who went through all that”* Meron

*“A lot of stories about the war come when drinking bun [Eritrean coffee] with the family, like my grandmother's sister who told me she would help Eritrean soldiers get extra food and clothes during the war. They don't talk about it often, but then they will casually tell you stories like that during the coffee ceremony”* Bilen

Respondent Nigisti said her mother talks about the war often and gets triggered when seeing violence or war related reports on the news.

*“I don’t often dwell upon the fact that my parents were refugees, I even kind of forget it most of the time. But sometimes something happens, like a new group of refugees that comes to the Netherlands and then I think ‘oh of course, my mom was a refugee once’. Or we will watch a war movie and then she we will walk away because she can’t handle it because she knows that type of fear and she doesn’t want to go through that again.”*

Nigisti

Two respondents (Isaac and Lydia) specifically called their parents traumatized.

*“My dad doesn’t want to talk about it, but I know that the war was a big part of his youth and that my grandfather fought in the war as well [...] My mom only tries to sugar-coat it. They will only say ‘thank god it’s over so let’s not talk about it’. [...] And I don’t want to ask too many questions, because I don’t want to trigger them”* Isaac

*“I think it was very difficult for my parents, and they must’ve been scared to leave Eritrea because they were forced to leave. I think they have some type of trauma and that they would’ve never left Eritrea if there hadn’t been a war”* Lydia

Some of them found motivation in the fact that their parents had their age when they fled Eritrea and came to the Netherlands, while others don’t reflect on their parents’ past too often. None of the respondents talked about emotional distress they experienced because of their parents’ past, but one respondent (Fiori) found it difficult to talk about and showed a strong emotional reaction when discussing her parents’ past during the interview.

*“My parents don’t talk about it. But when I got older, I started to ask more questions. And then my dad told a story about how he had to get up very early to get bread, before the Ethiopian soldiers showed up, because they could beat you up or steal your food. My mom lived at the countryside, in Adi Gidel, and she didn’t have a lot of stories about the war, but she did tell me that my grandfather’s farm was confiscated by*

*the Ethiopians, so they couldn't make a living anymore. [...] The older I get, the more I realize how grateful I am for my parents and that they gave me a chance at a good life, and I should really make use of it. [...] Sorry, I'm starting to get emotional [Fiori starts crying], because I know how bad my mother felt. I just can't imagine how it must have been for her, but she was so unhappy. Especially the first two years, because she never went to school and didn't know how to read and write, others taught her when she was on her way to Europe. And when she came here in The Netherlands, she didn't know the language, she didn't know anyone, they just placed them somewhere randomly. First, they went to Alkmaar and there they met some other Eritreans, but quite soon they got a house in Zandvoort, where I grew up. I think they were one of the first people of colour there, because we were also the only black kids in my primary school. Anyway, my mom was very unhappy, she had a miscarriage during that time, and she thinks it's because of how stressed and unhappy she was. But in the end, they somehow managed to pull through and they had my brother and me. And that's what she's always saying: I did it for you, for my future children." Fiori*

*"I now have the same age as my mom had when she came to the Netherlands with her friends. And sometimes, when I'm very scared of things, I think I already find this scary, but when my mom was 24, she came to a new country with new people and a new language, and she left all the people she knew behind in Eritrea"*  
Nigisti

Almost all respondents were able to speak relatively easy about their family histories. Except for one respondent, none of them showed signs of emotional distress during the interview when talking about this topic. However, the way they spoke about it showed that they did realize the heaviness of the topic and that they also understood that the topic was heavy on their parents as several respondents said in the quotes shown above. Amongst the respondents, no one referred to themselves as carrying a trauma from their families past, while some of them did refer to their parents as 'traumatized'. In conclusion, respondents are aware of the past they carry with them and while it is not easy for them to speak about it with their parents, most of them try to address the topic. The past of their family is not as much of a transgenerational trauma for them individually.

## 4.2 How does Eritrean Dutch youth navigate between two identities and cultures?

When respondents talked about their relationship with Eritrea and the Eritrean community in The Netherlands several points stood out. Almost all respondents said something about the fact that ‘not standing out due to the color of your skin’ made them feel more comfortable. Some respondents also talked about how they dealt differently with both identities as a kid but how their point of view changed after adolescence and that they moved to a more bicultural approach. Several respondents said they don’t feel 100% at home in either the Netherlands or Eritrea, while some respondents said they feel at home in both or that they ‘score’ Eritrea and the Netherlands differently in terms of feeling at home.

*“When you are in Eritrea, people look the same as me. But on the other side, I don’t speak Tigrinya perfectly, I have an accent, they see I’m a foreigner, so they behave differently when I’m around. So no, I don’t feel 100% at home there. And sometimes, you also don’t understand certain things. So, I feel at home in Eritrea to a certain extent, but not as much as I feel at home in Amsterdam.” Sennay*

*“When I was younger, I didn’t know if I really liked it there [in Eritrea], because it was a very different life than in the Netherlands, but I’ve grown to appreciate it more over the years. [...] I wouldn’t say that I feel 100% at home in Eritrea, but it is a certain feeling of coming home because you see people with the same culture, language and looks as you. [...] I don’t feel 100% at home in either Eritrea or the Netherlands, but still more in the Netherlands because I have my family and friends here. But in Eritrea I feel like I am with my own people. It’s not that I feel alienated in the Netherlands, but it’s just different in Eritrea with your own people, to put it like that” Makda*

*“I never had a culture shock whenever I visited Eritrea. I found it fun and inspiring. The people were very welcoming, generous, and peaceful. [...] I feel home both in Eritrea and in the Netherlands, but I particularly liked that I didn’t stand out as much psychically in Eritrea as I do in the Netherlands” Isaac*

*“I have been to Eritrea twelve times; the last time was in 2022. I find it fantastic. As a kid, I couldn’t appreciate it. [...] I like that I am offline all the time, I have more attention for the people around me and have better conversations with my family. [...] There are certain behaviors I have that are very Eritrean, I*

*know my way around, I speak the language. So yeah, I feel at home when I'm in Eritrea, but I wouldn't describe it as coming home. The Netherlands is coming home for me, my life is here."* Meron

*"I've started to look differently at it [Eritrean culture]. For example, when I was in Asmara last year, I bought a book and I started reading about the history of Eritrea and it makes me happy to know more about Eritrea, also about all the different ethnic groups. And when I was in Eritrea last year, I noticed a lot of things that I didn't notice before when I was younger. I hadn't been there for seven years, and I was like: "woah, there are a lot of nice things about our culture". How everyone is always helping each other, eating together, the close relationships between family members. And I kind of realized that last year, it made me feel more positive towards Eritrean culture"* Sennay

*"At primary school, I started to realize that we were different. For example, my classmates would go and see their grandparents and I was always wondering why I could not visit my grandparents. And we would always go to Eritrea during the summer while everyone else went on vacations to other countries and I didn't understand why we could never go on a 'normal' vacation. [...] But as I got older, I started to become prouder of my roots and I started loving the culture"* Fiori

Respondents also talked about the difficulties the two identities bring when interacting with older family members and that they have more Western points of view culturally.

*"I really like it to see my uncle [in Eritrea] and to see where my mother grew up, because she told me stories about her youth in Asmara and then I can see everything I talk about. But to be honest, I just think I'm too European, I can't handle the dirt, I can't handle the bad infrastructure, the lack of sanitary facilities. [...] And there is no internet, how could I forget that?! I hate it how people look at me, because they can see I'm not from there, I don't speak the language, so they think I'm stupid. [...] And Eritrean people are so judgmental about each other, and it makes me want to argue with them, but I can't do that because you always must respect the elders, and arguing is disrespectful. So, in Eritrea I feel an outsider"* Nigisti

*"When my brother decided to take a sabbatical and my mom reacted very emotional: she said he was throwing away his career and ruining his life. While, from a western point of view, you think it is very good for your personal development to live in a different country for a while. Same goes for gap years, marriage, children. She has a different point of view when it comes to these things"* Meron

If we go back to the theory, a few concepts from the theoretical framework apply. First, the process of identification in adolescence. A few respondents say they have come to appreciate the Eritrean culture more as they grew older, after not appreciating it as a teenager. As Volkan described, in adolescence children go through their own ‘identification’ but sometimes grow towards the large group identity from their youth again as they grow older. This seems to have happened with a few respondents (Fiori, Makda, Sennay, and Meron all talked about this).

The second theoretical concept that comes to mind when answering this sub question is Boccagni’s theory about migrants and homemaking. Boccagni (2022: pp. 141–154) described this as ‘fluid and a lifelong project’ and stated that there are different types of home (where you live, where you are from et cetera). Some respondents talked about the fact that Eritrea feels like home for them, but that they feel more at home in the Netherlands, because their lives are there. Some of them said they feel at home in both, but in different ways: their present lives are in the Netherlands, but their Eritrean roots result in feeling home in Eritrea as well.

The last theoretical concept that applies here is John Berry’s theory about acculturation. He describes four forms of this (see chapter 2), with integration and biculturalism as the best outcome. What stood out to me during all interviews is that the respondents try to take the best of both worlds, in terms of identity and culture. Some of them feel like this approach works for them. For example, Isaac talked about how he likes that Eritrean culture is generous, welcoming and collective, while later in the interview he talked about the fact that he doesn’t appreciate the ‘masculine’ sides of Eritrean cultures. Sennay told the same: when it comes to big life choices, he has a more western point of view, while when it comes to social standards and treating other people, he likes the Eritrean culture. There were also three respondents (Ngisti, Makda and Bilen) who seemed a bit ‘lost’ to me, or as Berry describes it in his theory: marginalized. They try to engage with both cultures and identities, but they struggle with both. Volkan also mentioned this: the fact that children who grow up with two large group identities, can cause loyalty issues or psychological distress when they grow older. The factors that are causing this struggle are (amongst others) Dutch racism and Eritrean diaspora politics, which I will cover in the next two paragraphs.

### 4.3 How is Eritrean Dutch youth affected by anti immigrant sentiments and racism in the Netherlands?

What stood out when talking about this topic, is that all respondents have told stories about racism or prejudices they have experienced at school, work, or other social encounters with white Dutch people. Some of them also talked about how they felt as an outsider or less belonging in the Netherlands because of this.

*“In high school, I felt like I was being treated differently by both students and teachers. I was the only black kid in my class, and teachers would treat me like I was stupid or less capable than the white kids. At first, I really tried to fit in and to change myself as much as I could. But at a certain point, I just accepted that this was the situation and I started to move more towards my Eritrean childhood friends outside of school. After high school, I moved to the UK after a few years, but right now I don’t know where I really belong. I think I feel most at home in the Netherlands. [...] But when growing up, I got treated as an outsider so much, it is difficult for me to say I 100% feel at home in the Netherlands” Lydia*

*“I think I will forever feel different in the Netherlands. If I would have a fully Dutch genealogy, life would be so much easier for me. It makes me feel less at home sometimes, but I have also come to accept that this is who I am: a Dutch person with Eritrean roots. I wouldn’t change that for anything” Bilen*

*“At work, I only work with white Dutch people. And sometimes I look around me, and I feel uncomfortable. I really must watch how I speak [...] and then I will speak in the most articulate way, but it makes me feel fake.” Nigisti*

Four respondents also gave examples of how anti-immigrant sentiments in Dutch society affect them individually. Every one of them deals with this differently.

*“I remember Rita Verdonk [former Minister of Safety and Justice]. Because Wilders left us Eritrean people kind of alone, he is more focused on Muslims. But Rita Verdonk, she was very unfair to refugees and sending back refugees to their countries, which weren’t safe. It worried me at that time. And then you have the whole Black Pete discussion. People will always ask me what I think about it and then act very awkward. But whenever people are being racist towards me, I just don’t take them seriously. I am no less than anyone else, so their racism is their own problem.” Meron*



*“I’ve heard very often that I am ‘one of the good ones’. And it drives me crazy, because when you say I’m ‘one of the good ones’ it means that when you first saw me you thought that I was a bad person, solely based on the color of my skin. It makes me feel like an outsider, while this [the Netherlands] is my country where I was born and raised” Nigisti*

*“I was born here, so the political climate is not affecting me as much, but I have a lot of empathy for immigrants, especially because my own family immigrated here. [...] I do notice that people look at me differently [...] but they don’t have the guts to say those things in your face. I realize that a lot of people could look at me in a certain way. And I know stories of Eritrean people that don’t speak Dutch as well as I do, and they get confronted with it [racism] more, and that really concerns me.” Makda*

*“When I grew up in Eindhoven, in the south of the Netherlands, it’s not very diverse culturally. So, I was one of the few students of color at my high school. [...] I felt like I was constantly getting extra attention, in a negative way. People would see something on the news about migrants and then confront me with it like ‘look at all these migrants’. I have now moved to the north of the Netherlands, I live close to Amsterdam. In Eindhoven I almost felt like I should wear a suit all the time to be treated nicely. In Amsterdam, people finally leave me alone. In the bigger cities, people are more openminded towards other cultures. There are all types of international restaurants and Dutch people really like it, it brings different communities together because they get in contact with a different culture” Isaac*

While listening to the respondents’ stories about racism and anti-immigrant sentiments, I found it very interesting is that each respondent deals with the racism they face in a different way. Allen (2020) wrote about belongingness and how this is affected negatively by stressors. For people of color, racism can be a stressor to their feeling of belonging in a certain place. This seems to apply to some of the respondents that were interviewed. Some of them found belongingness in a new, more culturally diverse place (the UK, Amsterdam, et cetera). And some of them really feel an outsider because of the racism they experience or feel like they must change who they are to fit in: less visibly ‘Eritrean’. As Nigisti and Lydia both mentioned they have tried (or still try, in the case of Nigisti) to change themselves to fit in more with another group than the group of their parents: this also comes back in Volkans concept of identification and distress caused by two large group identities.

## 4.4 How is Eritrean Dutch youth affected by diaspora politics from Eritrea?

The first thing that stood out to me when discussing this topic during the interviews is how much the respondents' wanted to talk about it with someone who is not pro-government. I think my own positionality plays a role here. The respondents know I am not a government supporter and that I am 'one of them': someone who grew up in the Netherlands and is part of their own generation. When asked about Eritrean politics, all respondents have stated that they feel some sort of restraint to talk about Eritrean politics with their families, friends, or other members of the Eritrean community in the Netherlands, especially with first generation Eritreans. Some respondents stated that they are warned by their parents or other family members not to talk about Eritrean politics because it is not safe and a sensitive topic. When asked specifically, none of respondents said to be able to speak freely about Eritrean politics in the Netherlands.

*"I always say I'm Eritrean. I love the culture, I'm proud of where I'm from. [...] But that doesn't mean that I'm ignorant about the bad things I see and hear, as my parents are. [...] But I can't have that conversation with my parents, because it is a very sensitive topic for them" Fiori*

*"In general, the people which whom I would talk about politics, I trust them. But my mom always says be careful who you talk about when it comes to these things [Eritrean politics], because I'm not particularly a supporter of Iseyas [Afwerki, the president of Eritrea], so she is scared for my safety. So, I'm careful and I wouldn't say these things to people I don't know or trust" Makda*

*"I have Eritrean Dutch friends, and we have very heavy discussions about Eritrean politics, because we really disagree sometimes [...] because oftentimes when I say I don't agree with the Eritrean government, people think that I hate Eritrea, which is not true. [...] It makes me feel like I can't speak freely about the topic. You just can't say out loud that you don't like the Eritrean president. If someone tells that I said that, I don't know what will happen with me when I go to Eritrea. It happened to someone my mother knows, and he has been imprisoned in Eritrea for a year now. No one knows where he is and I don't want to be next. "*  
Nigisti

*“No, of course I cannot speak freely about Eritrean politics. It’s a very sensitive topic. [...] Even when Eritrean people want to befriend you, they will first quiz you to see whether your progovernment or antigovernment, and then they will determine if they want to be friends with you [...] I see the Eritrean culture as a very masculine culture. You must be proud of your country; you don’t question authority and whenever there is a very small amount of friction it will cause a lot of commotion and even violence. It is impossible to have a normal dialogue, so I don’t feel like talking about it because people don’t listen to each other” Isaac*

*“I think I can talk freely about Eritrean politics with people of our generation, but older Eritrean people are very conservative. There is no grey area, what you say is either good or bad. And they really don’t appreciate it when I ask ‘Nementay?’ [why], they get very irritated. So, I will talk about it with younger Eritrean people, because it does concern me, you know. Whenever I go to Eritrea, I see that the situation is only getting worse instead of better. But my parents hold me back, because when I ask too many questions my dad gets irritated and will tell me that I shouldn’t ask these questions when I’m with other Eritrean people.” Meron*

*“Sometimes I feel like I have no choice but to speak positively about Eritrea. You can’t speak freely, not only about politics, but also for example about LGBT+ related issues. I take a more conservative attitude when I’m around older Eritrean people, because they don’t tolerate different opinions as much” Bilen*

The stories these respondents tell above touch directly upon the three pillars of Gerschewski’s (2013) model of autocratic stability and Tsouparas’ concept of transnational authoritarianism, as explained in chapter 2 of this paper. Especially the pillar of repression comes to mind here: while all these youngsters live in a democratic country with freedom of speech, none of them truly feels free to talk about Eritrean politics in a critical manner. They were warned by their parents, for fear of their safety as they know stories of violence or imprisonment.

When asked about the diaspora tax, none of the respondents expressed a positive opinion about it. All respondents who still decided to pay the tax, claimed to do this to be able to claim an inheritance in Eritrea after their parents pass. The respondents who do pay all stated that they resent the fact that they must pay the tax to claim an inheritance.

*“I will start to pay diaspora tax because my parents have a house in Eritrea and if I want to claim an inheritance, I will have to pay it.” Fiori*

*“Out of principle, I would never pay the diaspora tax. [...] I just think it’s weird to pay taxes in a country you don’t live in.” Makda*

*“If I don’t pay the diaspora tax, any inheritance I may have in Eritrea, will go to the government. But to get the inheritance, I will have to pay that same government. So, either way, they will get my money and I don’t agree with that. But if my inheritance has a lot of emotional or financial value, I might consider paying the diaspora tax.” Nigisti*

*“I pay the diaspora tax, but I think it doesn’t change anything. I tried to see it as a tourist tax, which I don’t have to pay whenever I go to Eritrea. I understand the concept of paying tax when you have properties in Eritrea, but this tax is a bit random, and you don’t know what happens with the money. But my parents have a house there, so I pay. But if that wasn’t the case, I wouldn’t pay the tax.” Meron*

When we go back to Tsouparas’ and Gerschewki’s framework, we see that the Eritrean regime enforces co-optation through the diaspora tax: one who does not pay the tax will be excluded from basic government services or even from claiming personal goods in Eritrea. This leaves Eritrean youngsters who want to ensure their inheritance with no choice than to pay the diaspora tax and therefore directly supporting the Eritrean government financially.

Based on my literature review (see paragraph 3.3) we can confirm that the Eritrean government also tries to influence the diaspora, including the second generation, by organizing political and cultural events. It seems that this is done not only to create support in the diaspora, but also to create a large group identity as Volkan described. Especially Lydia and Bilen talked about how these events impacted them as a child and how it appealed to their Eritrean identity.

*“I’m not active in any Eritrean associations, because I notice that people there don’t have an open mind on certain topics.” Fiori*

*“I’ve never been very active in the Eritrean community, but I go to Natsnet sometimes [Eritrean Independence Day] festivities, but that’s just for fun. [...] I don’t feel the need to be very active in a political way, most certainly not supporting the government.” Makda*

*“My parents found it very important that me and my sister knew the Eritrean culture. So, they would always take us to activities in the Eritrean communities. It is one of my favorite childhood memories and I have met friends whom I still have to this day. Everyone looked like you, had the same culture, went through the same things. I didn’t feel like an outside as much as I felt at school sometimes” Lydia*

*“In most European countries and in the US, the Eritrean community will celebrate Independence day very big and every summer they organize a cultural festival. My parents would always take me there as well and it made a big impression on me. Because I would meet other Eritrean children, who looked like me and spoke the same language and had the same culture.” Bilen*

Bilen also talked about how she likes that Eritrea is ‘self-reliant’, a frame that is often used by the Eritrean government (Hirt and Saleh Mohammed, 2022).

*“If I believe my parents, the Western media only write negative things about Eritrea and the West in general has a negative attitude towards Eritrea. I think Eritrea has both positive and negative sides. I admire the fact that Eritrea tries to stay independent, but I also see that that is at the expense of the population. But I also see that we have a better education system than other African countries and that education is free. On the other side, people in Eritrea don’t have the freedom that people in other countries may have.” Bilen*

Both Bilen and Nigisti also said something about the collective and chosen trauma of the Eritrean community.

*“I don’t think that I will get to live to see any change happen in Eritrea. [...] When I think about the future of Eritrea, I feel very depressed. I think it is such a shame, and I don’t understand why people here in Europe would support the government. I just think it is all so sad. A friend of mine thinks that her mom has lost so much when she fought for EPLF in the war, that she is scared that all of that has been for nothing, because at least now there is not a war anymore and that’s why the older generation holds on to Iseayas [the Eritrean President] as their saviour” Nigisti*

*“Sometimes, I feel guilty that I don’t do anything to make the situation in Eritrea better. Because in our culture, it is very important that you help other people and that is something that people admire. So I feel a certain amount of pressure to do that because I was born here in the Netherlands and I have so much more resources. The Eritrean culture is very much focused on the collective. It’s never ‘me’, it’s always ‘us’. And at a certain point a lot of people thought: ‘If I die on the war front, it’s unfortunate, but at least Eritrea will be free’. And that is the responsibility that is also put on my generation: Eritrea is your country and you should do something to help it. [...] Our community takes this very seriously.” Bilen*

What is interesting about the last three quotes of Bilen and Nigisti, is that it seems that certain frames (self-reliance and the chosen trauma) seem to have reached them, even though they live in the Netherlands. The two frames mentioned in these quotes relate to the theory. The self-reliance frame and the chosen trauma are ways to legitimize the Eritrean regime. By making sure that people know that Eritrea is not as dependent from Western donors as other African countries may be, the Eritrean regime tries to make sure the diaspora looks at them positively. And in the chosen trauma, the regime finds legitimization, as Nigisti described in the quote above. Lastly, the regime tries to make sure that the chosen trauma is part of the Eritrean group identity: not only for the generation that went through the trauma, but also for the second generation in the diaspora, as Bilen says above.

There is one pillar in Gerschewski’s framework that only applies partly in the second generation of the Eritrean Dutch diaspora: the pillar of co-optation. Gerschewski describes that regimes will often give their diaspora certain privileges or positions to ensure their loyalty. However, this doesn’t seem to apply to the Eritrean regime. When asked, none of the respondents stated that they think they might have any opportunities for a future in Eritrea in the current situation. Nigisti also referred to this in her last quote above. The Eritrean regime does however still ensure co-optation through the diaspora tax as mentioned above.

*“It’s just the current situation that makes me think, I just want go to Eritrea to visit family and don’t see a future there for myself. But I would really like it if the situation would improve, I just don’t know if I will live to see that happen” Makda*

*“I don’t know if I would ever build a future or start a project in Eritrea, because I heard stories that kind of got into my head. For example, if you have a successful business and someone doesn’t like you, they can tell the government you’re avoiding taxes and the government will just imprison you without any investigation. So yeah, in those circumstances, how could you possibly consider building something up there for? [...] Based on the stories I hear; I think it is very difficult.” Meron*

When I go back to the theory once again, every concept in paragraph 2.1 seems to apply to my respondents: the transnational authoritarianism, the repression, the legitimation, and the co-optation all showed in their stories about how they relate to Eritrean politics and what they experience when they try to address it in their social circle.

## Chapter 5 - Conclusion

This chapter is the end of a journey through my own community. It was a journey of familiarity, recognition, and hope. I started this research because of a personal observation that Eritrean Dutch youngsters seem to thrive and to struggle at the same time, which resulted in the following research question: *how are Eritrean Dutch youth influenced by politics from Eritrea in combination with the anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe and how does this affect their sense of be-longingness?* In this chapter, I will try to answer this central question of my research.

The refugee families the respondent were born into have a past that is not easy for them to talk about. This has resulted in a collective trauma in the community the respondents grew up in. However – but this needs further research – they don't seem to carry an intergenerational trauma as much as I expected. I am not a psychologist, but it stood out to me that the respondents were able to speak about it relatively easy and that they talked more about the emotional distress their parents have than their own.

The struggle of this group exists in navigating between two cultures, identities and points of view. Throughout the interviews, all respondents described a gap between themselves and their parents both politically and culturally. They try to take the best from both worlds but are sometimes treated as outsiders in either their Dutch or Eritrean community. In their Dutch circle, this often has to do with racism and anti-immigrant sentiments, while in their Eritrean circle their views are not accepted and they make them an outsider. They went to processes of identification and grew up with two large group identities. However, most respondents seem to have adapted a form of biculturalism: according to Berry's theory, the best outcome.

When it comes to diaspora politics, all aspects of the theory applied to the case of the second-generation Eritrean diaspora in the Netherlands. Eritrean Dutch youngsters in this research felt like they cannot speak freely about the Eritrean government, and they felt they had no choice but to pay the diaspora tax. They experience transnational authoritarianism.

Further research is recommended because this research has had its limitations. The topics discussed and analysed in this paper are multi-layered, but also a lot to research for one research paper. Each sub-topic discussed in the interviews could have been a whole research project on its own. And I think this is desirable to get an even more in-depth look into this community. Because of the available time for this research the number of respondents was



limited to 8. To further substantiate the conclusions of this research, it would have been desirable to interview more respondents.

The thought I had when starting this research - that the target group of this research struggles and thrives - at the same time, remains. But what gives me hope, is that I observed that each respondent navigates between all the topics discussed in the interview bravely. I am proud to be part of this new generation of the Eritrean Dutch diaspora, despite all the difficulties that come with it.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Interview structure

### 1. Family history

*How did your family experience past conflicts in Eritrea? Where there any casualties in your family related to the conflict? Did your parents or other family members join the Eritrean People's Liberation Front or the Eritrean Liberation Front?*

### 2. Migration history

*Were you born in the Netherlands, in Eritrea, or somewhere else during your parents' journey to Europe? What do you know about the process of migration in your family? In what countries outside of Eritrea do you have family? Was the process of getting a Dutch residency easy or tough for your family?*

### 3. Identity

*How would you describe your relationship with Eritrea? What country feels like home for you? Where do you feel you belong? Do you feel either Dutch or Eritrean or both? Did your parents raise you with the Eritrean culture and language?*

### 4. Political climate in Europe

*Do you follow Dutch politics and news? Do you vote during elections? What do you vote and why? How does anti-immigration politics effect you? Do you feel like you have social influence in the Netherlands (through politics or media for example)? Do you experience a lot of racism?*

### 5. Diaspora politics & conflicts

*Do you follow Eritrean politics? How is your relation to the Eritrean community in NL? Are you a member of any associations for Eritreans in NL? Do you go to Eritrea regularly and how do you feel when you go there? Do you pay the Eritrean diaspora tax? Do you follow the news from the region? How did you feel about the recent war in Tigray?*

## **Appendix 2: Interview field notes (based on transcript)**

### ***Interview with Sennay***

Sennay is a 28-year-old male, who was born and raised in Amsterdam and works as a business analyst. He has a bachelor and master's in Business Analytics.

His parents fled Eritrea because of the war with Ethiopia. His father has lived in the Netherlands for the last 45 years, his mother for the last 35 years. His parents talk about the war sporadically, especially about the fact that they have lost some family members in the war. He does not think about his family history with conflict quite often. However, he is well aware that his parents had a hard time when they came to the Netherlands. His parents often emphasize the fact that they did not have many chances to develop themselves when they were his age, and that he has to make use of the chances he does get in the Netherlands. He As a teenager, he felt that his parents said this to him to pressure him, but now he feels like it motivates him in life.

Sennay was raised with the Eritrean culture and speaks Tigrinya well enough to communicate with family. He has a diverse group of friends, some Eritrean-Dutch and some of other cultural backgrounds. After broadening his horizon by travelling to other countries, he started to appreciate the Eritrean culture more, while he finds Dutch people somewhat distant after his experiences abroad. He feels somewhat at home in Eritrea, but he still feels like an outsider when he is there, because his Tigrinya is not perfect, and he feels like he has a more western mentality. In the Netherlands, he only feels at home when he is not the only person of colour in a certain environment, for example in Amsterdam or other big cities, which are culturally diverse.

When it comes to politics, Sennay follows Dutch politics through Dutch (social) media. He always votes when there are elections, and considers which parties have an anti-immigrant view and which parties do not when deciding what to vote. He doesn't feel like anti-immigrant politics influence him individually, instead of taking anti-immigrant sentiments upon himself, he chooses to debate people who have an anti-immigrant view. When it comes to the situation in Eritrea, Sennay follows the news through Dutch media and social media as well. He feels obliged to pay the diaspora tax, even when he doesn't agree with the fact that he must pay it to claim an inheritance when his parents pass.

### ***Interview with Fiori***

Fiori is a 31-year-old female who lives in Rotterdam and works as a recruiter. She finished a higher professional education (HBO).

Her parents have been in the Netherlands since 1989 and fled Eritrea because of the war with Ethiopia. Her father, specifically, fled Eritrea because he didn't want to join the EPLF, and it felt too dangerous to stay as males were more prone to execution or imprisonment by the Derg regime than females. Her parents do not talk about the war often, but her mother has told some stories about the fact that she lived on the Eritrean countryside and was not exposed as much to the war as people in bigger cities. However, the farm of her family was seized during the war, and they couldn't provide for themselves anymore. This and the fact that her brothers were already in the army, made Fiori's mother feel obliged to make money in Europe to help her family through the war.

When arriving in the Netherlands, Fiori's parents had a hard time. Especially her mother told Fiori about how unhappy she was. She couldn't read or write and was in a country she didn't know. After a stay in an asylum centre in Alkmaar, Fiori's parents landed in Zandvoort, where they were one of the very few immigrants. Fiori was very oblivious about her parents' past as a child and teenager, while she now understands that they were only doing everything they could to give their children a better future. Fiori showed emotional distress when talking about her parents' past during the interview.

When growing up in the Netherlands, her brother was faced with more racism than Fiori herself. She explains her brother was more outgoing, while she was quieter as a child and she thinks this also plays a part in why her brother faced more negative reactions in Zandvoort. However, Fiori always felt different as a child because she didn't have any grandparents while growing up and because she would go to Eritrea in the summers, instead of going on a 'normal' family vacation. She also experienced micro-aggression or more subtle discrimination later in life. As a child she sometimes felt like she had to teach her parents how to raise children in the Netherlands, by telling them about certain traditions or customs (she mentioned holidays such as Sinterklaas). In her twenties, she showed more interest in the Eritrean culture and started feeling more Eritrean. She feels at home in Eritrea and experiences peace when she is there. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, she feels like people always see her as an outsider and not as a Dutch person. She therefore doesn't feel very Dutch herself.

However, amongst her own friends (some native Dutch, some of other cultural heritage) she never feels left out.

When it comes to politics in the Netherlands, Fiori follows Dutch news media and votes during elections. She has the feeling that in Dutch society, there are plenty opportunities to engage in politics or make social change as an individual. She does not engage into discussions with people who have anti-immigration views and doesn't have many people in her social circle that would support these views. Because of that, she doesn't feel like anti-immigrant politics influence her very directly. However, she acknowledges that racism is still a big problem in The Netherlands. When it comes to Eritrean politics, she tries to follow it via social media and via her parents. She states that her parents are not neutral and supportive of the Eritrean regime, and that this makes it difficult to discuss Eritrean politics. She talks about Eritrean politics with two close Dutch Eritrean friends. Fiori is not active in any Eritrean associations in the Netherlands but has been to a YPFDJ conference in Sweden in 2012. She felt as if there is no room for being openminded in these associations and still feels this way when she talks with people who are active in for example YPFDJ. Fiori hasn't paid the diaspora tax until now because she doesn't agree with it. Since her parents have some possessions in Eritrea, she decided to start paying it in the nearby future so that she can claim an inheritance if her parents pass. Fiori adds that even though her parents built a family house in Eritrea, she will probably not use it, as she sees no future for herself in Eritrea.

### ***Interview with Makda***

Makda is a 25-year-old female, who lives in Amsterdam and is finishing a master's degree in dentistry. The respondent pointed out in the beginning of the interview that she does not have any contact with her father and therefore can only speak about her family history from her mothers' point of view. Makda's mother left Eritrea in the 80's and ended up in Sudan, where she got trained by EPLF. After completing military training, she decided not to join EPLF, but to continue her journey to Europe, where she eventually ended up in Rotterdam in the Netherlands, living with other Eritrean women. Makda's mother had no opportunity to finish any education in the Netherlands. Growing up, her mother told her stories about the war and Makda often reflected on the fact that her mother had to flee a war at a very young age. Makda got raised by her mother with the Eritrean language Tigrinya and with Eritrean customs and cultures. She has been in Eritrea multiple times; the last time was in 2017. Makda finds Eritrea quite different than the Netherlands but appreciated the culture

and the fact that everyone in Eritrea 'looked like her'. While she feels comfortable in Eritrea because she doesn't stand out as much, she doesn't feel like she fully belongs in either the Netherlands or Eritrea. She does not see a future for herself in Eritrea as well.

When it comes to politics Makda follows Dutch politics through Dutch media outlets and always goes voting when there are elections. While she doesn't feel like anti-immigrant politics influence her directly, she feels a lot of compassion towards what she calls 'victims of anti-immigrant sentiments'. She resents the fact that many people 'don't have the guts to say it in your face' but vote for anti-immigrant parties during the elections. When it comes to Eritrean politics, she follows the news through social media and western media outlets. She sometimes tries to talk about it with family, but her mother reacts 'very panicky' towards any critical questions towards the Eritrean government and warns Makda to not talk about Eritrean politics with Eritrean people she doesn't know. Makda is not active in any Eritrean associations in The Netherlands, but she sometimes visits festivities during Eritrean Independence Day. Apart from that, she doesn't feel the need to have an active role in the Eritrean Dutch community. Makda does not pay the diaspora tax, because she thinks it is wrong that people are being forced to hand over a part of their income to the Eritrean government, while they are not Eritrean citizens. Should the political situation in Eritrea change, Makda would maybe consider working as a dentist in Eritrea for a while, but she feels that right now political, social and economic opportunities are not being seized in Eritrea.

### ***Interview with Nigisti***

Nigisti is a 24-year-old female, who lives in Haarlem. She finished a middle-level applied education as a pastry chef and is now working at the customer service of an energy providing company. Nigisti's parents fled Eritrea in the 80's, because of the war with Ethiopia. Another flight reason for her father was the fact that he was an active member of the ELF, which got defeated by the EPLF, after which he decided to flee to Saudi Arabia and ended up in the Netherlands via Italy. Her father always told her that he would tell the whole story when she was older, but she hasn't spoken to him since she was 15 and hence, she doesn't know all the ins and outs of her father's history. Nigisti's mother received asylum quickly, because of her health situation (tuberculosis). Her mother talks about it quite often and gets triggered when she gets confronted with anything that has to do with conflicts, war or arms. Nigisti draws strength and motivation from the fact that her mother was her age when she arrived in the Netherlands on her own. Nigisti visited Eritrea multiple times, the last time was in

2019. She really dislikes it when she is there because there are no general facilities such as water, electricity and internet. She also feels like she can't connect with the country because she is 'too European', she doesn't speak Tigrinya very well and she feels like people in Eritrea judge her for being 'too loud for a woman' and 'an outsider'. However, she did find it meaningful to visit the country her parents grew up in and it gave her a better idea of their youth. In the Netherlands, whether she feels she belongs depends on the place, but in general she doesn't feel like an outsider. She states that she sometimes has to be 'adaptive' in her work environment, because she is the only person of colour in her departments. She dislikes it, when her colleagues describe her as 'one of the good ones' and she tends to speak differently at work. Despite this, she still identifies as Dutch.

When reflecting on Dutch politics, Nigisti states that 'migration is a human right' and that she always votes for left winged parties because of this view. She follows Dutch politics through social media and Dutch media outlets. When it comes to Eritrean politics, she follows it mostly via social media. Nigisti comes from a family and social circle where people are both anti- and pro-government. This results in heavy discussions with friends and family members and she feels like people immediately see her as anti-Eritrea when she criticizes the government. She doesn't feel safe expressing her opinions about Eritrean politics. As a kid, Nigisti would go to activities for the Eritrean community in the Netherlands, but as an adult she doesn't because she has the feeling that she doesn't fit in. Nigisti does not pay the diaspora tax because she doesn't agree with it. She doesn't see a future for herself in Eritrea, as she is very pessimistic about any improvements in the political situation in the foreseeable future.

### ***Interview with Isaac***

Isaac is a 29-year-old male, who lives in Heerhugowaard. He finished an MBA but did not feel comfortable to share his job title for this interview.

Isaac's parents fled Eritrea because of the war with Ethiopia. Isaac's grandfather joined the EPLF-army in the war. His father worked in Sudan for a while, for the Dutch embassy there, which gave him an easy opportunity to move to the Netherlands. Isaac doesn't know his parents' full history because they don't like to talk about their past. Isaac thinks this is because his parents are traumatized. Because he doesn't know a lot about his parents' past, he doesn't reflect on it too often. Isaac has visited Eritrea twice. He states that he didn't experience any 'culture shock'. Instead, he found it inspiring and was curious about the

country and the culture. He felt at home in Eritrea because he didn't stand out physically, specifically referring to the colour of his skin. In the Netherlands, Isaac grew up in Eindhoven, in the south. He didn't feel at home there, because he was one of the very few students of colour in his high school. He felt disadvantaged because of that and often felt like 'he should've considered to wear a suit at all times to be taken seriously'. When he moved to the Randstad as a teenager, which is more culturally diverse than the south of the Netherlands, he started to feel more at home in the Netherlands.

When talking about politics, Isaac is very opinionated and tells that he follows Dutch news and politics through all major Dutch news outlets. He goes voting whenever there are elections, but he is sometimes hesitant whether voting makes a difference. However, he believes in democracy and would describe himself as an active citizen in Dutch society and in his own local community, where he does voluntary work as well. When talking about Eritrean politics Isaac follows the situation in Eritrea via social media, especially TikTok. He is not an active member of any Eritrean association in the Netherlands, because he does not actively support the Eritrean government and feels like this is not accepted. He notes that he tries to keep an open mind, but that he meets a lot of 'friction' when expression his opinions towards other Eritreans. He concludes that the Eritrean community in the Netherlands would need some open dialogues, but since this is not encouraged, he just doesn't feel like engaging in the community anymore. He does not pay the diaspora tax, because he doesn't understand the necessity. May one of his parents pass and leave an inheritance for him in Eritrea he will consider whether the inheritance is worth paying the diaspora tax.

### ***Interview with Meron***

Meron is a 30-year-old male, who lives in Amsterdam. He has a master's degree in human resources and works as a recruiter. Meron is the older brother of respondent Sennay.

Merons parents both fled Eritrea because of the war with Ethiopia. His father also decided to leave the country because of his work, but Meron doesn't know the full story. He doesn't talk about the past with his parents, because he feels like it is too difficult for them to talk about it and he also mentions a language barrier. His mother has been in the Netherlands for 40 years and his father for 50 years. He feels like his father is better integrated in the Netherlands than his mother, because he speaks the language better and understands Dutch culture better. Meron was raised with the Eritrean culture and speaks a bit of Tigrinya. He has visited Eritrea twelve times; the last time was in 2020. As a child, he didn't like it, but



now he really enjoys going to Eritrea. He feels at home when he is there and he enjoys the fact that there is very little internet connection in Eritrea, which gives him some rest from the hasty life he has in the Netherlands. However, the Netherlands and specifically Amsterdam is the place where he feels he really belongs. Meron mentions the fact that he feels more belonging at places in the Netherlands that are culturally diverse, which is why he feels at home in Amsterdam.

Meron remembers the rise of anti-immigrant politics in the Netherlands and specifically refers to former Minister of Justice Rita Verdonk, with 'strict immigration policies'. He recalls he was worried how this would affect his family. He also tells that many people address the topic of Black Pete when talking to him, but he tries not to take this personally. Meron states that he doesn't take people with racist views seriously and does not feel the need to debate them for this reason. When further discussing Dutch politics, Meron says he doesn't follow the news very closely, but he does vote whenever there are elections and has faith in democracy and possibilities to enhance social change in the Netherlands as an individual citizen.

When it comes to Eritrean politics, Meron does not follow the news, but he hears about it via his parents and other family members. He feels like he can speak freely about the topic when he is with his Eritrean friends, but not with older Eritreans. He feels like their thinking is very 'black and white and conservative'. He feels constrained by his parents when talking about Eritrean politics, because they always tell him not to talk about it with people he doesn't know well. Meron does pay the diaspora tax, to be able to claim an inheritance in Eritrea when his parents pass. However, he doesn't agree with the fact that he must pay the tax for said inheritance. Meron doesn't see a future for himself in Eritrea. He knows Dutch Eritreans who tried to work there but came back disappointed. He feels like there are no chances for development in the country because many youngsters left the country and there are no opportunities to create social change in Eritrean society as an individual.

### ***Interview with Bilen***

Bilen is a 23-year-old female and is a master student at Erasmus University Rotterdam. She lives in Haarlem.

Bilen was born and raised in Haarlem. Her parents fled Eritrea because of the war in Ethiopia. Her parents talk about the war superficially (her mother lost two of her brothers in the war), but they don't talk much about how it was for them personally to grow up in a war and to leave their country under these circumstances.

Bilen's parents raised her and her sister with a lot of Eritrean culture, customs, and the language. As a child, Bilen used to go to Tigrinya classes every Saturday and to activities that were organized for Eritreans in the Netherlands, such as Independence Day festivities and an annual cultural festival. As a child, she liked going to these festivities because she liked playing with other children that looked like herself. However, she didn't stay in touch with these children and doesn't have Eritrean-Dutch friends in this stage of her life. She also doesn't visit these activities anymore. Bilen states that she feels at home in the Netherlands, because her whole life is here and not in Eritrea. However, she sometimes struggles with this, because her family is very 'Eritrea-orientated'. She mentions the fact that in Eritrean culture, you always must help other people. As someone who grew up in Europe, she is more individually orientated and this sometimes causes friction in her family, for example whenever they discuss LGBT-related issues and to her, individual freedom is very important. She also mentions the chosen trauma in the Eritrean community, where the sacrifice that people made for independence is strongly emphasized and admired. She feels that Eritrean people prioritize collective goals and culture too much, and because of that she doesn't feel she can freely express herself. However, she does feel at home when she visits Eritrea, although other people might see her as an outsider. In Dutch society, Bilen got used that people are sometimes racist towards her, but she sees that as a problem of society and not so much as something that influences her.

When discussing Dutch politics, Bilen says that she follows Dutch politics via social media and that she always goes voting when there are elections. She believes in democracy, but she sometimes gets frustrated by the compromises that political parties must make in this system. However, she adds that she is aware of the fact that there are many ways citizens can influence decision making in the Netherlands and that this is something she really likes about the Dutch political system.

When it comes to Eritrean politics, Bilen states that mainstream media is 'not neutral' when it comes to Eritrea. Her parents also think that Western media are too negative, which she doesn't agree with, but she says that she would like mainstream media to consider 'both sides of the story' when reporting about Eritrea because she thinks Eritrea has both positive and negative sides. She likes the fact that the Eritrean government is 'independent' and 'self reliant' compared to other African countries, but she does acknowledge the growing influence of China and Russia in the country. She thinks that the infinite military service and lack of basic amenities are negative sides of Eritrea, but adds again that 'it is worse in other African

countries'. When talking about Eritrean politics with other Eritreans, Bilen feels like she *must* to speak positively about the country and that she cannot express her concerns freely. Bilen does not pay diaspora tax at this time, but if this would have any repercussions in her personal life (not able to visit Eritrea or to claim an inheritance) she would pay it.

### ***Interview with Lydia***

Lydia is a 24-year-old-female who lives in Manchester, United Kingdom. She works as a social media manager for an NGO.

Lydia was born and raised in the Netherlands, and she moves to the United Kingdom three years ago, for education purposes. Lydia's parents have been living in the Netherlands for 33 years and they fled Eritrea because of the war with Ethiopia. Lydia's family lost three family members in the war, but it is not somethings her parents like to talk about. They sometimes talk about how it was when they first came to the Netherlands and that they experienced a culture shock. Lydia thinks that it was all very hard for her parents and that they maybe preferred to go back to Eritrea.

Lydia's parents raised her with the Eritrean culture and customs. They also used to take her to festivities organized for the Eritrean community in the Netherlands, which Lydia likes as a child. She still has contact with the people she met there. At school, Lydia felt as an outsider, especially in high school, where she was one of the very view students with a migration background. Lydia says that teachers would treat her differently and sometimes underestimated her and she was trying hard to fit in as a teenager. She also experienced racism outside school. This is one of the reasons Lydia decided to move to the United Kingdom, because she didn't feel at home in The Netherlands. When visiting Eritrea, she feels a little bit more at home, but it bothered her that people still see her as an outsider. When discussing Dutch politics Lydia added that the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments in Dutch politics prove to her that her individual experiences are a symptom of a bigger problem in Dutch society (racism). Lydia follows Dutch politics because her family still lives in The Netherlands. She follows Dutch news and politics through social media. She doesn't feel like she has a lot of influence on decision making, she has been to a Black Lives Matter demonstration once but in retrospective she feels like it didn't have any effect.

When discussing Eritrean politics, Lydia says that she follows the situation via social media and her family sometimes talks about it. When the war in Tigray was happening, she

tried to follow the situation more closely, but she found it difficult to find trustworthy media sources. She feels like it is very difficult to make a difference when it comes to Eritrean politics and that it is only possible to help people in Eritrea through small charity initiatives. She finds it unfortunate that the Eritrean government doesn't encourage the diaspora to make social change in Eritrea happen and finds it 'demotivating'. She doesn't see a future in Eritrea for herself because of this, amongst other reasons (lack of economic activity).

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