FAILED DEMOCRATISATION AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT: THE CASE OF ERITREA

VALENTINA FUSARI

ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the long-term relationship between the patriarchal system and women's empowerment in Eritrea. Women in Eritrea underwent a 'forced emancipation' mainly attributable to the liberation struggle, and the policies promoted by the current ruling party. The differing mortality rates in terms of gender, mobilisation, and migration within the Eritrean population have resulted in women having greater responsibility and power in society. This has shifted the roles of women from those that tradition had given, despite their experiences in the national liberation struggle and the existence of national policies that promote gender equality in Eritrea. Therefore, this paper offers a counter-narrative that highlights colonial and liberation periods and moves beyond it to pay more attention to independent Eritrea (1991-2018), which is less explored in literature, particularly in relation to the link between the (failed) democratisation process and patriarchy's dilution.

Keywords:

Eritrea, Democratisation, Migration, Mobilisation, Liberation Movements, Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy tends to be deployed as an overarching concept to signify a power difference between men and women, in which women are the victims and men are the unnamed perpetrators of gendered wrongs (Sultana. 2012). In Eritrea, patriarchy has outlined the conditions for unequal structural relations in every sphere of life and has justified women's marginalisation, rooted in social classification and stratification. This social classification and stratification is reinforced by the interplay between nature and culture (MacCormack, Strathern 1980; Stolke 2004). Therefore, patriarchy is a useful descriptive tool for discussing social patterns because it does not have a single form or site, but it encompasses a much broader realm. It comes in many varieties and evolves through different stages. By positioning gender at the centre and factoring voices from the margins, the paper explores the long-term changes in the agency of the Eritrean female population and investigates how they carry or counter patriarchal values. The paper further looks at the prevalent discourse about the lessening effect of the patriarchal system on women in order to evaluate whether it depends on real empowerment enhanced by gender-oriented policies or whether it is a consequence of the worsening socio-political environment.

Colonialism, the liberation struggle and human migration patterns are all involved in the reworking of traditional power relations. However, the exclusion of women still exists, and patriarchal perspectives continue to determine women's status, despite the promotion of gender equity and equality through the country's policies. Colonialism and the liberation struggle are both periods that have already been studied by several scholars using a gender perspective. However, there is scope for new insights that traces the continuities and discontinuities that stem from that period, which is understudied. New insights reveal an interesting nexus that has developed in the long term between democratisation, patriarchy's dilution, and women's empowerment in independent Eritrea. Therefore, this paper centres the liberation struggle (1961-1991) because women actively joined the liberation front, fostering new women figures within Eritrean society. This study moves on to focus on independent Eritrea (1991-2018), which is less explored, because of government's suspicion towards fieldwork that aims to understand how the direct and indirect population policies promoted by the government have affected gender roles.

Following from a glimpse at Eritrea's patriarchal traditions and images of women disseminated by the Italian colonialism, I analyse the nature of women's participation in the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the challenges faced in adapting the EPLF's model of gender equality for civilian life–at a national scale. Finally, the paper focuses on how the current socio-political environment in Eritrea affects the patriarchal system, leaving room for women's agency and vulnerability simultaneously.

Between Tradition and Colonialism

The patriarchal norms entrenched in the Eritrean's traditional systems limit gender equity, access to material and immaterial resources (e.g. land, food, education, job opportunities), and women's entitlement to legal and political representation. These traditional systems have cemented relations of subordination and domination that have now been institutionalised in many aspects of social life: including family, law, and education (Cowan, 1983). Socialisation through formal and informal institutions facilitates correcting and enforcing behaviours present in different Eritrean cultural groups and does this by assigning specific gender roles to men and women. Girls are socialised from early childhood and developed to be submissive, passive, meek, and quiet in society (Senait Bahta, 2004). Their roles in their respective communities are often viewed as being less important for the livelihoods or the survival of households- and society more broadly. Instead, the roles played by men in Eritrean society are highly valued. This imbalance appears in the norms and rules that affect social life, which is defined and controlled by men, and aimed at dominating women's sexuality. The domination of women through their sexuality can be attributed to the fact that women are considered the protectors of family virtue (Favali, Pateman, 2003).

The strength and value of tradition and the perceived appropriate gender roles drawn from tradition are likely to render any changes unacceptable and, therefore, untenable in many situations. Traditional beliefs and patriarchal structures profoundly create barriers towards attaining gender equality and agency. Instead, traditional beliefs and structures perpetuate a subordinate position in which women are limited to their reproductive and wifely roles. Such roles lead to the exaltation of women as mothers and as both protectors and socialisers of traditional principles (Gaim, Kibreab, 2008). These roles, therefore, constrain them to the domesticity and limit job opportunities for women. As a result, this creates a labour market segregated into male and female sectors, where any social mobility or nonconformity is viewed as going against tradition.

Italian colonialism (1882-1941) brought about political, economic, social, and cultural transformations, which divided ethnicities and kin groups and further resulted in the reshaping of authority structures and local economies. The Italian domain and the subsequent British Administration had long-term effects on the Eritrean society, which opened new opportunities for women (NUEW 1985; Araia Tseggai, 1990). However, the creation of new opportunities did not reverse their subordinate position in society (e.g. salaried labour system and domestic work) and, instead, introduced

new stigma (e.g. *madamato*[1]). Italians inaugurated a curious connection that can be compared to a leitmotif in Eritrea. The less democratic the environment is, the more diluted the patriarchy seems. Indeed, since men joined the colonial army (i.e. *askari*), women managed their households, particularly during faraway military campaigns.

The widows of the soldiers of the indigenous troops had the right to widow's pension, and often they advanced their demands directly to the Italian authority. This demonstrates a certain degree of agency and guaranteed access to economic resources that they could manage independently, but as a result of a loss of their husbands. Certain roles that women had in the labour force such as religious careers in Catholic missions, domestic work in Italian families, employment as low-cost labour in light industry and foreign-owned plantations are examples of female social and spatial mobility during colonial times. Such roles that were granted to women gave them a certain level of economic and familial independence, even though they were accompanied by social stigma. Despite these opportunities, the indigenous population suffered from unequal access to material and immaterial resources (e.g. land tenure systems and grabbing education, and politics). However, living conditions under colonialism were diverse and disparate based on whether the household was in an urban or rural area. Despite this, women continued to experience pregnancy and childbirth that, combined with the poor nutritional state, contributed to high maternal mortality.

Joining the liberation front

The ever-increasing presence of women in conflicts across Africa demonstrated that war is not exclusively a male endeavour and that women are not always peaceful, neither are they always the victim, the spectator nor the prize. In Eritrea, women are indispensable in non-state armed groups when they wage their wars against states, for example, women comprised almost a third of the troops at the front, and 13.0% of front-line fighters during the liberation struggle (Pool, 1997). Women played their socially prescribed gender roles, but also assumed new responsibilities by performing an array of activities that include nursing, spying, fundraising and fighting, because of their nationalist sentiments and identification with the ideology of the liberation movement. The EPLF was a syncretist, secular, multi-ethnic, independent Marxist-oriented guerrilla movement, and their members appeared to transcend gender norms because men and women performed the same tasks and lived communally as comrades in mixed units (Bernal, 2001). The EPLF tried to expand the notions of

1 Italians used to call the concubinage between Italian men and African women, madamato or madamismo. Such a colonial concubinage was usually referred as "something" that was neither marriage nor prostitution. Indeed, African prostitutes were usually called by Italians sciarmutte (recycling an Arab expression), while concubines were called madame, through an ironic distortion of the French world Madame. Italians used such terms only to refer to the Horn of Africa and to a specific intimate and sexual relationship, the most of the time resulting in 'misgenation' (Barrera 2005; Campassi 1987; Iyob 2005; Stefani 2007; Trento 2011; Volpato 2009).

what women could do by breaking down the gender barriers that had kept women out of certain socio-economic positions. The EPLF's approach to gender equality was grounded in Marxist ideas, rather than feminist ones, and policies regarding gender were conceived and implemented in a top-down way by male leadership–instead of by women themselves. Therefore, despite the EPLF's claims on gender equality, no women sat on its governing council until 1987.

Upon the election of women to the Central Committee, General Secretary Isaias Afwerki voiced his desire that the six new female members would approach their new role 'not as women' (Akinola, 2007). Since the EPLF constructed gender equality, in part through the erasure of the feminine, many women combatants adopted masculine attitudes and values to fit into a new empowered role: the *tegadalit* [female fighter]. The *tegadalit* is characterised as a woman in unisex dress and with an unkempt hairstyle which is personified as an image of progress, a rupture of the past and liberation from oppressive traditions (Weber, 2011). Many of the first women fighters came from urban and educated backgrounds, but they were successful in mobilising other women from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The first women fighters mobilised peasants who had waged lifelong battles either with the landed gentry or against colonial land grabbing and formed alliances with women who resisted patriarchy and had flocked to the EPLF (Jameson, 1988; Wilson, 1991).

Since the EPLF constructed gender equality, in part through the erasure of the feminine, many women combatants adopted masculine attitudes and values to fit into a new empowered role: the tegadalit [female fighter]. The tegadalit is characterised as a woman in unisex dress and with an unkempt hairstyle which is personified as an image of progress, a rupture of the past and liberation from oppressive traditions (Weber 2011).

During the armed conflict, woman combatants experienced transitory emancipation from the patriarchal social order, although they continued confronting gender-based discrimination in varying degrees. Even with this emancipation, they remained susceptible to patriarchal control, as it was still deeply embedded in society. The continuous reinforcement of discriminatory patriarchal values ensured that positions of superiority and power were reserved for men before, during, and after conflict (e.g. liberation front and the party hierarchy). Hence, patriarchy did not cease to operate, even when equality was a projected goal of the liberation, so women suffered in gender-specific ways that include countless experiences of sexual harassment (Gaim Kibreab, 2017a).

The EPLF promulgated several new laws and policies in the liberated areas to promote women's equality and enhance women's rights. These changes were present mainly in customary practices perpetuated as the key locus of women's subordination (e.g. land and marriage laws, stopping female genital mutilations). The EPLF tried to revolutionise the social position of women by changing the ideas that men have about women and about what they can do, by virtually eliminating the family as a social institution within its ranks. Many civilian women had to assume traditional male roles and their responsibilities of managing households, properties, and businesses in the absence of their brothers and husbands who were fighters, exiles, and refugees. However, once they returned, they reasserted their claims to family resources and authority.

Erase and Rewind

Patriarchal ideology was partially diluted during the conflict but resurfaced as soon as the violence subsided, and peace attempts were initiated. Women's visibility in conflict quickly became invisibility in the peace-making process. This change took place to legitimise the return to roles prescribed by patriarchy at a familial and institutional level since there was no place for female cadres to take part in peace talks. Despite its intentions to facilitate the contrary, the EPLF was unable to break entirely with tradition (Gruber, Garcetti, 1998) and over time, women combatants were not recognised as equal stakeholders in nation-building and became the victims of selective amnesia - save during national celebrations.

The difficulties of translating women's gains within the front into a gain in social life during peacetime lie in the resurgence of domestic relations, and also in the difference between the relationship that a liberation movement has with its members and the relationship that governments have with their citizens. In the aftermath of the war, Eritrean women became second-class citizens. About 30,000 female ex-fighters began new lives in Eritrea, but only 14.0% of them had readily employable skills, and many did not have a home or a family to return to (Hains, Ijumba, Nicholls, 1994). Thus, opportunities for employment became crucial to reintegrate into civilian life in a context where the EPLF could no longer guarantee subsistence. In such an environment, neglect, apathy, and stigmatisation replaced the euphoria of the glorification of women as the backbone of the liberation struggle.

Since independence, the return to civilian life has encouraged ex-fighters to resort to assuming traditional gender roles which have different outcomes for women and men. Women were painfully caught between the revolutionary aspirations they learned through political education and in the *mieda* [battlefield] and the conflicting gendered values and expectations that were being asserted in newly independent Eritrea. However, women ex-combatants rarely conformed to the traditional roles of

wife and mother, which led to the common experience of rejection and marginalisation as soon as marriage and marital status re-emerged as defining elements for women's social and economic well-being. Fertility problems were also common among ex-combatants because of war wounds or post-traumatic stress disorder, which penalised them twice, as both wives and mothers, and an independent society that had returned to patriarchal norms that redefined their value in Eritrean society based on their contribution to kinship and the nation, in the form of fertility.

In 1979, The National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) was established as the EPLF's mass organisation and, after independence, changed into an "autonomous non-governmental organisation" dedicated to improving women's status in society. During the liberation struggle, the organisation succeeded in organising and encouraging women's participation in war efforts. Once independence was obtained, NEUW's primary goal was to ensure the protection and development of those rights achieved by women during the struggle. It had the role of enhancing women by raising their political consciousness through literacy campaigns, credit programs, English language lessons, and other training. The task was arduous, given the resilience of traditional gender roles based on patriarchal structures, and the new challenge of male dominance in the new government.

The shift from the governance in EPLF to the *Həzbawi Gənbar nəDämokrasən Fətəḥən* (PFDJ), which is the political party in government, also mirrored what took place during the transition from war. Besides this, the shift also traded a nationalist project for a developmental one. Female ex-fighters continue to deserve respect because of their wartime contribution (Müller, 2005). However, once they returned to civilian life, where women's roles had not been transformed as radically as they had in the field, the skills they had learned had very little marketability (Gebremedhin, 2001). During the liberation struggle, women served as labourers and fighters gaining skills for guerrilla time, but the capitalist development in Eritrea called for a different set of skills and assets. This resulted in the new labour market rewarding men and women differently and also shaped certain feminised labour sectors (e.g. textile factories, *beit cursi* [bar] service), and reinforced the so-called glass ceiling (Afewerqi Weldemichael, 1996). This situation is not unique as it is also common in other post-war societies, where sex work and other stigmatised informal jobs become a survival and resilience strategy (Coulter, Persson, Utas, 2008) because of the hard reintegration process that did not allow them to support their livelihoods in civilian life.

Although post-war policies had implications for gender relations, like the Family Law and the Proclamation of Land Tenure 58/1994, patriarchy survived. It was not as if patriarchy did not exist during the conflict, but it was further reinforced in the post-

conflict situation, which contradicts the proclaimed democratisation process. Any partial breakdown of the patriarchal system in wartime turned out to be temporary, as this had no significant implications for the rearrangement of the social structure in peacetime Eritrea. In such an environment, the NUEW still tries to ensure that all Eritrean women confidently stand for their rights and equally participate in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres of the country and share the benefits of that amongst themselves. The mission of NUEW practically meant fighting against several factors that continue to inhibit women's progress, namely early and arranged marriage, female genital mutilations, and other traditional barriers, that are rooted in the patriarchal culture and that discourage female education and access to political rights. Women's lower socioeconomic status, the everlasting transitional political situation, limited institutional capacity and the lack of public dialogue on women's issues hinder efforts to increase women's political participation.

Despite the difficulties faced in implementing the declared gender-oriented policies, the constraints of everyday life transformed resilience into women's empowerment under adverse conditions, especially at the familial level. This links back to the experience women lived during colonialism and the liberation struggle. The side effect of the Eritrean National Service programme that has been running since 1994 (Gaim Kibreab, 2017) and the following Warsay Ykealo Development Campaign (WYDC)[2] is the Eritrean exodus of women's empowerment, leading to more and more female-headed households, as confirmed by the Eritrean Demographic and Health Surveys. Female-headed households increased from 31.0% in 1995 to 47.0% in 2002 and to 47.2% in 2010. However, there are differences based on residence and age. In urban areas, the trend is much more evident because in 1995 female-headed households were 44.2%, 52.2% in 2002, and 53.0% in 2010 (National Statistics Office, Macro International Inc 1995; National Statistics and Evaluation Office, ORC Macro 2003; National Statistics Office, Fafo AIS 2013). Female-headed households are more common in the 20-44 age group, as compared to the older age groups that have more male-headed households. The following factors have culminated to cause this increase: the male death toll because of the liberation struggle (1961-1991) and the last border war with Ethiopia (1998-2000), embedded with a set of domestic political processes, regional dynamics, and international policies (Lyons, 2009; Tekeste Negash, Tronvoll, 2001).

2 Proclamation No. 82/1995 introduced all Eritreans' forced recruitment in the National Service regardless of family responsibility or gender, with the sole exclusion of the veterans of the independence struggle and the physically or mentally impaired. Then, in May 2002, in the aftermath of the border conflict against Ethiopia (1998-2000), the Eritrean government introduced the WYDC requiring Eritreans in the National Service to serve indefinitely due to the 'no war no peace' situation with Ethiopia. Thus, conscripts are assigned to the Eritrean Defence Forces, allocate to ministries or to private firms, and participate in productive activities to ease the national socio-economic development but they are paid uniform pocket money (Gaim Kibreab 2009; 2017b).

It was not as if patriarchy did not exist during the conflict, but it was further reinforced in the post-conflict situation, which contradicts the proclaimed democratisation process. Any partial breakdown of the patriarchal system in wartime turned out to be temporary, as this had no significant implications for the rearrangement of the social structure in peacetime Eritrea.

These intermeshed issues have resulted in male displacement within the nation as civilians or army servants, because of conscription into the national service and the WYDC. Both factors have also led to international migration by the male in Eritrea. Also, tightened control over the population and human rights violations have resulted in a women's 'forced empowerment', characterised by an increase in tasks and responsibilities that women have to cope with despite scarce resources. Though some women have access to resources usually entitled to males, they are struggling with scarcity or the low quality of such resources. In other terms, the post-independence dire conditions opened new horizons for women, but simultaneously, women also have to overcome new challenges to translate entrance into domains previously closed off to them into realms of durable empowerment.

Given the recruiting process in the WYDC, the labour market has become biased in terms of gender. The latest estimates report that 78.7% of the over-15 years old population is employed and that the labour force participation rate for individuals in the same age group is 84.8% (80.0% for females and 89.8% for males), but 77.4% are classified as 'working poor'. They have purchasing power parity equal to $2 per day (United Nations Development Programme 2015), which is below the international poverty line. This creates reliance on remittances from the growing Eritrean diaspora for survival. Such figures result from the widespread mobilisation since conscripts have not been demobilised *en masse* since 2001. Until demobilisation takes place, there will be no labour market capable of absorbing the working-age population and one that guarantees a fair wage. It will be hard to realise a painless demobilisation.

Over time, the policy position of 'service for life' has become the main driver of migration out of the country (Bozzini, 2011). Besides this, the other factors include the high rate of inflation and the high cost of basic products, after introducing the new government-issued notes in 2016 that cancelled the black market. These developments have made wages received within the Eritrean economy insufficient for family survival, which explains the need to resort more and more towards the support got from remittances. However, together with economic remittances, social remittances may stiffen the gender roles, particularly in Muslim communities where relatives have migrated to the Gulf States. Muslim communities seem to grow over time because of higher fertility and return rates. Besides, their investments in commercial activities in the country are increasing because of money remittances from people living in Gulf States (Abbebe Kifleyesus, 2012). Although this has positive implications on the economy, there are also conservative gender roles, sometimes perpetuating harmful social conventions that are promoted through cultural and religious remittances (Hirt, Mohammad, 2018).

Migration reduces the likelihood of civil conflict within Eritrea and allows people to express their discontent abroad. However, on the one hand, women's migration is also a feature of the Eritrean migration and allows women to assume more emancipated roles, and this they share as social remittances. On the other hand, the 'youth drain' diminishes the potential that youth groups could have in being able to demand change to the patriarchal order, as it is mainly older people who are more tied to traditions that remain in the country.

From failed democratisation to women's empowerment

Eritreans have fled the country in large numbers since the 1960s because of guerrilla wars, poverty, and the lack of freedom. In around 30 years, the independence war produced a diaspora of over a million people mainly based in Sudan, the Middle East,

Europe and the United States; only a few returned during the 1990s. Also, the border conflict with Ethiopia (1998-2000) and the mobilisation policies that followed resulted in further mass displacement (Fusari, 2011).

The leader of the nation, Isaias Afwerki, used the crisis following the border war as a cover to exert control over society and the state. The ensuing policy, designed to expand the sovereignty and the control of the state over the population, is the immediate cause of the current economic, political, and citizenship and refugee crisis (Woldemikael, 2013). The more Eritrea pursues a stringent policy to protect its national sovereignty and control the economic and political sphere: the more it will generate continuous economic weakness, political tension, social upheaval and more refugees will join the Eritrean diaspora communities around the world. Young Eritreans aged between 15 and 40 are most likely to leave to avoid the long-lasting WYDC and also in response to their perceived limited prospects within the country (O'Kane, Redeker Hepner 2009; Müller, 2012). This conscription mobilisation has progressively led to family disintegration, as men are kept away from their families for long periods. Further family disintegration is because of the deteriorating economic conditions (Mohammad, 2013). Such conditions make households increasingly dependent on remittances from abroad and increase the motivation of young people to leave the country to support their families; some young Eritreans even consider leaving the country to be a patriotic duty (Riggan, 2013).

Bio politics and forced migration have resulted in female-headed households *de jure* (widowed or divorced) and *de facto* (absence of adult male). There are key differences between these two categories. For example, in the case of male migration, *de facto* female-headed households may receive and manage remittances from husbands or other male relatives. Besides this, they may have closer links with their husbands' wider kinship for material and financial support[3]. With mobilisation, although the couple is separated, women cannot rely on remittances. Remittances are estimated to be around one-third of national gross domestic product and a significant proportion of private household income. They are used in subsidising livelihood costs, subsistence costs and financial outlays such as education (Tewolde, 2008).

Many Eritreans cite their country's conscription policy as the main reason underpinning their decision to move, together with other key factors, including poverty, lack of opportunities, and inadequate government services. Migrants leaving Eritrea are mostly men under forty; although the feminisation of migration is increasing it seems

3 However, it is important to underline that Eritreans face huge risks during their journeys, because of traffickers' activities along the borders, the dangers associated with smugglers' services and states' border control activities. Nevertheless, it is not only routes within Africa that are risky, as journeys from Libya to Italy are often undertaken on overcrowded makeshift boats, with a mortality rate across all journeys of 2.0% (Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat 2015).

to remain within a 'patriarchal framework'. It is rarely a free woman's choice, but it is more often linked to family needs or the mobility of male relatives. This mobility challenges traditional gender roles and raises questions for women remaining at home (land) on how to provide adequate support for their households, as the male demographics crumble. In Eritrea, poorly educated or uneducated women usually enter the formal unskilled labour market or the informal sector. This increases their autonomy and decision-making power, but with limited demanding power to aspire to better working and living conditions given the economic conditions.

Conclusion

Despite *mieda* socialisation and gender-oriented efforts, Eritrea experienced an 'evaporation of gender policies in the patriarchal cooking pot' (Longwe, 1997), since in practice custom remained more important than law and family and became more powerful than government.

Although during the liberation struggle and the border conflict, women were mobilised ostensibly in the name of social change and gender equality, the primary purpose was to increase the fighting capability of the liberation movement. Thus, what women gained in wartime did not automatically translate into a progressive public policy after the shooting stopped (Gaim Kibreab, 2017a). As an additional factor, the policy that has expanded the control of the state over the population to maintain its security and sovereignty has not been of any help. This policy has had the unintended consequence of making Eritrea a refugee producer, which has resulted in many *de facto* and *de jure* female-headed households in the country of origin. This situation charges women with decision-making and management responsibilities; however, they still struggle to translate this into a collective agency capable of breaking down the patriarchy structures because of the economic conditions, even when such 'forced emancipation' is indirectly undermining the patriarchal system.

In the labour market, underdevelopment prioritised investments in economic development, which, as a result, have reversed Eritrean society back to old gender relations upheld by patriarchal policies (Turshen, 2010). Despite the progressive ideological foundations of the liberation movement, women and girls still face vulnerabilities and exploitation, which goes against the revolutionary changes gained in gender roles in exceptional situations. These exceptional situations are not fixed, and there is a high risk that revolutionary changes are reversed to an earlier patriarchal social setup. For example, immediately after independence, in Eritrea, men blocked the distribution of land to women, reversing the progressive gains during the liberation struggle. In this gap between policy and practice, the peacetime society gave a new challenge for the war veteran women, where they still had to confront the conservative

values of their people in civilian life (Connell 2010). However, the NUEW as a war veteran organisation remains the institutional vehicle for representing women's interests in the wider society. The side effect of Eritrean migration seems to weaken the patriarchal culture and female subordination. This suggests that 'forced empowerment' is the response to the low democratisation process and is rooted in necessity and contingency, which involves the struggle to settle in the entire society, especially in rural areas, where over 70.0% of the population still lives.

Eritrean women are still facing the highs and lows of the liberation process, where they have to keep engaging in a fight against patriarchy in everyday life. Meanwhile, at national level, they have to merge the changes in gender roles brought from war experience and migration, even though a brief phase of open borders has followed the 'summer of love' with Ethiopia (Peace Treaty in July 2018). Following the peace agreement, Eritrean and Ethiopian citizens could cross the border with no passport or permit and without having to indicate a possible return date. This lack of restriction has resulted in an inflow of tourists and traders into Eritrea, and in outflow to Ethiopia, which is mostly made up of Eritrean asylum seekers. With the temporary opening of the border in Bure and Zalambessa, the new entries have risen to around 390 people a day. The new situation has been taken as an opportunity to leave Eritrea, reducing migration risks, so that around 15,000 people arrived between mid-September and late October 2018. About 10,000 have applied for asylum by registering at the UNHCR office at Endabaguna and over 80%, mostly women and children, crossed the border to reunite with their relatives. Therefore, the *détente* between Eritrea and Ethiopia resulted in a high gendered cross-border mobility, which does not bode well for the potential for change left at home (land). Although migration is beneficial, its impact on the struggle against restrictive social norms or gender specific vulnerabilities is not yet clear.

REFERENCES

Abbebe Kifleyesus (2012). "Women Who Migrate, Men Who Wait: Eritrean Labor Migration to the Arab Near East". *Northeast African Studies*, 12(1): 95-127

Afewerqi Weldemichael (1996). *Women's Barriers for Top Managerial Position: Case Study in Asmara Area*. Asmara: Unpublished manuscript

Akinola O.A. (2007). "Politics and Identity Construction in Eritrean Studies, c. 1970-1991: The Making of *Voix* Éeythrée". *African Study Monographs*, 28(2): 47-85

Araia Tseggai (1990). "Eritrean Women and Italian Soldiers: Status of Eritrean Women under Italian Rule". *Journal of Eritrean Studies*, 4(1-4): 7-12

Barrera G. (2005). "Madamato". In AA.VV., *Dizionario del fascismo*, Vol. II, Torino: Einaudi, 69

Berhane Tewolde (2008). *A Socio-Economic Analysis of Migration and Remittances in Eritrea*. Roma: GAN

Bernal V. (2001). "From Warriors to Wives: Contradictions of Liberation and Development in Eritrea". *Northeast African Studies*, 8(3): 129-154

Bozzini D. (2011). "Low-tech Surveillance and the Despotic State of Eritrea". *Surveillance & Society*, 9(1-2): 93-113

Campassi G. (1987). "Il madamato in Africa Orientale. Relazioni tra italiani e indigene come forma di aggressione colonial". *Miscellanea di storia delle esplorazioni*, XII: 219-260

Connell D. (2010). "Strategies for Change: Women and Politics in Eritrea and South Africa". In Turshen M. (ed), *African Women: A Political Economy,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 137-154

Coulter C., Persson M., Utas M. (2008). *Young Female Combatants in African Wars. Conflict and Its Consequences*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet

Favali L., Pateman R. (2003). *Blood, Land and Sex: Legal and Political Pluralism in Eritrea*. Indiana: Indiana University Press

Fusari V. (2011). *Dinamiche etnodemografiche all'interno dello spazio geopolitico eritreo*. Siena: Libreria Scientifica

Gaim Kibreab (2008). "Gender Relations in the Eritrean Society". In Tesfa G. Gebremedhin, Gebre H. Tesfagiorgis (eds), *Traditions of Eritrea: Linking the Past to the Future*, Trenton: Red Sea Press, 229-262

Gaim Kibreab (2009). *Eritrea. A Dream Deferred*. Melton: James Currey

Gaim Kibreab (2017a). "Sexual Violence in the Eritrean National Service". *African Studies Review*, 60(1): 123-143

Gaim Kibreab (2017b). *The Eritrean National Service. Servitude for "the Common Good" and the Youth Exodus*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer

Gruber J., and Garcetti E. (1998). "'He Gave Me Permission to Go'. Gender in Post-War Eritrea". Paper presented at the African Studies' Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, October 29 – November 1

Hains, Ijumba, Nicholls (1994). *Gender and Development Strategy*. Asmara: World Vision Eritrea

Hirt N., Mohammad A.S. (2013). "'Dreams Don't Come True in Eritrea': Anomie and Family Disintegration Due to the Structural Militarisation of Society". *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 51(1): 139-168

Hirt N., Mohammad, A. S. (2018). "The Lack of Political Space of the Eritrean Diaspora in the Arab Gulf and Sudan: Torn Between an Autocratic Home and Authoritarian Hosts". *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies*, 5(1): 101-126

Iyob R. (2005). "Madamismo and Beyond: The Construction of Eritrean Women". In Ben-Ghiat R., Fuller M. (eds), *Italian Colonialism. Italian and Italian American Studies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 233-244

Jameson J. (1988). "Eritrean Women: Fighters and Peasants". *Eritrea Information*, 10(4): 6-12

Longwe S.H. (1997). "The Evaporation of Gender Policies in the Patriarchal Cooking Pot". *Development in Practice*, 7(2): 148-156

Lyons T. (2009). "The Ethiopia–Eritrea Conflict and the Search for Peace in the Horn of Africa". *Review of African Political Economy*, 36(120): 167-180

MacCormack C.P., Strathern M. (1980, eds). *Nature, Culture and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Müller T.R (2005). *The Making of Elite Women: Revolution and Nation Building in Eritrea*. Leiden: Brill

Müller T.R. (2012). "Beyond the Siege State–Tracing Hybridity during a Recent Visit to Eritrea". *Review of African Political Economy*, 39(133): 451–464

National Statistics and Evaluation Office [Eritrea] and ORC Macro (2003). *Eritrea Demographic and Health Survey, 2002*. Calverton: National Statistics and Evaluation Office and ORC Macro

National Statistics Office [Eritrea] and Fafo AIS (2013). *Eritrea Population and Health Survey, 2010*. Asmara: National Statistics Office and Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies

National Statistics Office [Eritrea] and Macro International Inc. (1995). *Eritrea Demographic and Health Survey, 1995*. Calverton: National Statistics Office and Macro International Inc.

Nicole A. Cowan N.A. (1983). "Women in Eritrea: an Eye-Witness Account". *Review of African Political Economy*, 10(27-28): 143-152

NUEW (1985), "The Position of Women in Colonial Eritrea". Paper presented at the International Conference on Eritrean Women, Bergen, Norway, March 29-31

O'Kane D., Redeker Hepner T. (2009). *Biopolitics, Militarism, and Development. Eritrea in the Twenty-First Century.* New York: Berghahn

Pool D. (1997), *Eritrea: Towards Unity in Diversity*. London: Minority Rights Group International

Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2015). *A Certain Catalyst: an Overview of the (Mixed) Migration and Development Debate with Special Focus on the Horn of Africa Region*. Nairobi: RMMS

Riggan J. (2013). "Imagining Emigration: Debating National Duty in Eritrean Classrooms". *Africa Today*, 60(2): 84-106

Senait Bahta (2004), "Women's Folklore: Eritrea". In Peek P.M. (ed), *African Folklore: an Encyclopaedia*, New York: Routledge, 512-514

Stefani G. (2007). *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in africa Orientale: una storia di genere*. Verona: Ombre Corte

Stolke V. (2004). "La muer es puro cuento: la cultura del género". *Estudos Feministas*, 12(2): 77-105

Sultana A. (2012). "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis". *Arts Faculty Journal*, 4: 1-18

Tekeste Negash, Tronvoll K. (2001). *Brothers at War. Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*. Athens: Ohio University Press

Tekle M. Woldemikael (2013). "Introduction to Special Issue: Postliberation Eritrea". *Africa Today*, 60(2): V-XIX

Trento G. (2011). "Madamato and Colonial Concubinage in Ethiopia: A Comparative Perspective". *Aethiopica: International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies*, 14: 184–205

Turshen M. (2010), *African Women: A Political Economy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

United Nations Development Programme (2015). *Human Development Report 'Eritrea'*. New York: UNDP

Volpato C. (2009). "La violenza contro le donne nelle colonie italiane. Prospettive psicosociali di analisi". *DEP. Deportate, Esuli, Profughe*, 10: 110-131

Weber A. (2011). "Women without Arms: Gendered Fighters Constructions in Eritrea and Southern Sudan". *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 5(2): 357-370

Wilson A. (1991). *The Challenge Road: Women and the Eritrean Revolution*. London: Earthscan