

# The Eritrean Coup That Never Was

By Simon Tesfamariam

January 24, 2013

At 6AM EST Monday, January 21st, 2013, many Eritreans around the world became the victims of rumors and anti-Eritrean propaganda that spread through both social media and print media. The rumor was that a coup was taking place in Eritrea. It was later shown to be false. This is not the first time that Eritreans have witnessed such ridiculous claims that have spread across the internet like wild fire and I doubt that this will be the last. The purpose of the text that follows below is to analyze how this rumor became started, understand the direct and indirect forces that spread and perpetuated it, and recognize future methods of preventing and mitigating the effects of similar propaganda against the state and people of Eritrea. Because many pictures are included below, I have chosen to use an outline format followed by more standard free form text in the conclusion.

So here goes....

- As we review all the initial Twitter tweets on #Eritrea during the morning of January 21, 2013 we discover that the first person to make any mention of the alleged incident in question was Meron Estefanos (@meronina). She claims it all started via a supposed broadcast by Radio Erena. At 6:06 AM Eastern Standard Time, she writes the following tweet:



6:06AM, Jan 21, 2013 (EST)

- So who exactly is Ms. Meron. Well according to her Twitter page she is a "radio presenter for Radio Erena" based in Sweden. What is Radio Erena, exactly? We'll get to that in a second. Anyway, here's a copy of Ms. Meron's page:



- The next tweeter on the scene is a fellow who goes by Mahfuz H Yousif (@majnoon1). He's the first person on Twitter to use the word "coup d'etat" in regards to #Eritrea.



6:29AM

- Notice that he tags Al Jazeera and anti-Eritrean journalist Martin Plaut. Both are unaware of the faux news at this time.

- Then comes along Leonard Vincent with this Tweet:

 **Léonard Vincent** @leonard\_vincent 21 Jan  
 Une centaine de soldats fait le coup de force depuis ce matin à #Asmara. La journée va être longue... erythreens.wordpress.com /2013/01/21/cou... #Erythrée  
 View photo

6:38 AM

- He cites a link to his [French blog post \(English\)](#), which claims that 100 Eritrean soldiers captured the Ministry of Information and that a coup d'état is underway in Asmara. He then claims that the soldiers forcefully broadcasted a message calling for implementation of the constitution and release of political prisoners. He cites no sources. And as we'll see shortly, it was only after his report was found to be bogus that he [gave up his sources and deflected his responsibility](#).
- So who is Leonard Vincent anyway? According to Twitter:



- On further investigation, it turns out that he's a Frenchman and the former director of Reporters Without Borders Africa Desk from 2004 to 2008. After writing "Les Erythreens," a scathing book on life in Eritrea as seen through the myopic lens of the exiled journalist, he helped to establish Radio Erena in 2009.
- Radio Erena, [according to Reporters Without Borders](#) (RSF) is:

Based in Paris and run by Eritrean exile journalists, Radio Erena has been operating for the past nine months. Broadcasting by satellite to Eritreans in Eritrea and on the Internet to the Eritrean diaspora, the station serves as an independent news source for a country where press freedom is non-existent and anyone straying from the official line is severely punished. This original project is supported by Reporters Without Borders. (16 March 2010)

In other words, RSF funds Radio Erena. And according to this [article](#), the station is managed by Amanuel Ghirmai the Biniam Simon, exiled Eritrean journalists.

- Next up, we have an eager and excited Martin Plaut, a known anti-Eritrean journalist, awaiting more information:

 **Martin Plaut** @martinplaut 21 Jan  
 Any confirmation? @majnoon1: #ERITREA there is an attempt of coup d'etat. Armed soldiers tanks in control of Ministry of information  
 Expand

6:52 AM

- For those who may not know, Martin Plaut is a vehemently anti-Eritrean journalist, who has been [deliberately skewing the facts and analysis](#) on Eritrea, Somalia, and other African nations.

- So anyway, Mr. Leonard Vincent responds to Plaut with the following tweet:

 **Léonard Vincent** @leonard\_vincent 21 Jan  
 @martinplaut Several confirmations. A statement was read on EriTV. Stand-by right now. Info I've got: erythreens.wordpress.com/2013/01/21/cou...  
 View photo

6:56 AM

- He says "several confirmations" but, again, fails to cite any sources. Why?

- For the lazy Martin Plaut, that was enough. He then went on a Twitter rampage, promoting the rumor via these next 5 tweets:

1.  **Martin Plaut** @martinplaut 21 Jan  
 Eritrea: I have this report. Around 100 members of the Eritrean Defence force and two tanks stormed the ministry of Information HQ.  
 more  
 Expand

7:18 AM

2.  **Martin Plaut** @martinplaut 21 Jan  
Eritrea: They forced their commanders and also the top officials at the ministry into one room (more)  
Expand

7:19 AM

3.  **Martin Plaut** @martinplaut 21 Jan  
Eritrea: then went on to force the news reader Asmelash to read announcements that: they will be freeing all prisoners of conscience (more)  
Expand

7:19 AM

4.  **Martin Plaut** @martinplaut 21 Jan  
Eritrea: they will implement the constitution, that the ministry of information is under their total control. (more)  
Expand

7:20 AM

5.  **Martin Plaut** @martinplaut 21 Jan  
Eritrea: Eritrean TV has been off air since then  
Expand

7:21 AM

- o Seriously, who writes like this without definitive confirmation, without citing sources, and without presenting any serious facts to corroborate his claims?

- Finally, Plaut pens an article and cites it with this tweet:

-  **Martin Plaut** @martinplaut 21 Jan  
Eritrea coup? [wp.me/p1OD48-au](http://wp.me/p1OD48-au)  
[View photo](#)

7:26 AM

- o In the [article](#), which has been updated multiple times since its original publication, he cites disgruntled journalist Dan Connell:

"Dan Connell Eritrea expert writes:

'News coming out now suggests the mutiny may be facing a counter move from other military units. If this is stopped, it will be imperative to make a lot of public noise about the dangers of bloody recriminations. And to use this event as a moment to call for international action on the human rights situation there through pressure on the mining companies (Nevsun, Sunridge, Chalice) to halt production until the situation changes. The demands raised here are clear and simple: implement the constitution, free political prisoners, establish a transitional government with broad representation.'" (Emphasis mine)

Connell is clearly hoping to internationalize this faux coup. However, Connell doesn't cite his sources. Many Eritreans are already very aware of Mr. Connell's [destabilizing](#) role towards Eritrea.

- Next we have [Mr. Mark Anderson](#), another so-called journalist, who tweets the following:

-  **Mark Anderson** @MarkC\_Anderson 6h  
#Eritrea: Unconfirmed reports of a military takeover of Eritrean state TV channel EriTV  
Expand

7:03 AM

- o About an hour later he claims to have a live shot of Eri-TV off air:

-  **Mark Anderson** @MarkC\_Anderson 5h  
#Eritrea: live photo of EriTV off-air from @felix85  
[pic.twitter.com/lzvZHWVx](http://pic.twitter.com/lzvZHWVx)  
[View photo](#)

8:23 AM

- Here's the picture:



- After RSF-funded Radio Erena, Leonard Vincent, Dan Connell, Martin Plaut, and Mark Anderson have all had their say on the supposed "coup," Radio France Internationale picks up the rumor--I mean, "story." Remember that RFI, like Radio Erena and Reporters Without Borders, is also Paris based. At 7:12 AM, RFI tweets the following:



7:12 AM

- RFI is the first Western media source to carry the rumor. For your convenience, here's a screenshot of the brief and factless [article](#):



- How is it that "forcing a state TV off air" constitutes what "may have been a coup attempt"? Perhaps Wikipedia can help RFI better understand what a military coup or a [coup d'état](#) actually is:

A [coup d'état](#) (/ˌkuːdeɪˈtɑː/; plural: coups d'état), also known as a coup, a putsch, or an overthrow, is the sudden, illegal deposition of a government, usually by a small group of the existing state establishment—typically the military—to depose the extant government and replace it with another body, civil or military.

- From this point on, other western media organizations promote and escalate the unfounded rumor, which then bounces back -and- forth between the social media world and the print media world. We see little facts between the two. We also see the rumor spreading among groups opposed to the Eritrean government and supposedly East African media groups. See this list of 7 select ed tweets below as an example:



7:18 AM

- Keep your eye on that symbol of the hand. It's the same symbol used in colored revolutions around the world that follow the [Otpor!](#) model. See this short [documentary](#) for more details:



- Other interesting links ([1](#), [2](#)) talk about talk about the role of the NED, Soros, Gene Sharp, Otpor!, Kefaya, and other subversive element opposing Western imperialism

2.  **Mahfuz H Yousif** @majnoon1 21 Jan  
unconfirmed News: General Philipos behind the coup attempt reported to be going on in Eritrea right now. #Eritrea  
Expand

7:26 AM

- Remember this guy (from above)?

#3

3.  **Eritrea Activist** @EritreaActivist 5h  
Rumors of a military coup in #Eritrea, Soldiers said to have taken Ministry of Information (and thus state TV). #Asmara  
Expand

7:27 AM

4.  **Horn of Africa News** @Horn\_News 21 Jan  
Reports of a military coup in #Eritrea, soldiers are said to have taken the Ministry of Information and state TV.  
Expand

7:27 AM

5.  **Africa Hand** @AfricaHand 5h  
via @Horn\_News: Reports of a military coup in #Eritrea, soldiers are said to have taken the Ministry of Information and state TV.  
Expand

7:33 AM

6.  **Africa Hand** @AfricaHand 5h  
via @majnoon1: unconfirmed News: General Philipos behind the coup attempt reported to be going on in Eritrea right now. #Eritrea  
Expand

7:33 AM

7.  **Habesha Media** @HabeshaRadio 4h  
#Eritrea Developing Report: The situation in Asmara has transformed from attempted Coup to hostage negotiations of #Ministry of Info workers  
Expand

8:06 AM

- Then we have our next interesting development: the very active involvement of [Anonymous](#), the supposedly leaderless, anarchist, hacktivist group. They tweet the following:

 **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
Eritrea coup? [wp.me/p1OD48-au](http://wp.me/p1OD48-au) via @martinplaut  
[View photo](#)

7:35 AM

- They pose the question of a coup in Eritrea and cite Mr. Plaut's article, which is based on unconfirmed rumors. This begs the question: how did they catch on to this so early when everything was still unclear? They sent this tweet only an hour-and-a-half after Ms. Meron's initial tweet at 6:06 AM and less than ten minutes after Mr. Plaut's article. Do they have a relationship with Plaut?
- Then interestingly, they go on anti-Eritrea propaganda spree with these next 13 tweets:

1.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
International mining companies rushing to invest in #Eritrea run serious risk of complicity in forced labor, says @HRW. [trib.al/o4fAlcL](http://trib.al/o4fAlcL)  
Expand

7:48 AM

- This tweet cites a recent biased and politically-motivated Human Rights [report](#) that claims that international mining companies in Eritrea use forced labor. Aside from the fact that the report is [filled with errors and misrepresentation of facts on the ground](#), why does Anonymous feel the pressing need to cite this article when they could instead talk about matters

more relevant to their organizational mission like those relating to internet freedom and privacy? What does the HRW report have to do with the supposed coup? Furthermore, what does the supposed coup have to do with internet freedom and privacy? For all they, given such little facts, the leaders of the supposed "coup" might be repressive warlords in waiting. The fact that they are jumping the gun on tweeting this is quite telling of their position on Eritrea.

2.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
Rights group says **Eritrea** used forced labor to build a gold mine co-owned by Canadian firm [washingtonpost.com/business/right...](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/right...)  
[View summary](#)

7:48 AM

- They cite [this](#) article.

3.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
**Eritrea**: Mining Investors Risk Use of Forced Labor [bit.ly/X9Podg](http://bit.ly/X9Podg)  
[Expand](#)

7:50 AM

4.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
**Eritrea**: Mining Investors Risk Use of Forced Labor - #Canada Firm Failed to Adequately Address Issue [bit.ly/W3hfwL](http://bit.ly/W3hfwL)  
[Expand](#)

7:50 AM

5.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
We are unable to confirm or deny if there is a ongoing coup d'etat in #**Eritrea** being led by general Philipos and 100 troops right now.  
[Expand](#)

7:54 AM

- Interesting. So apparently Anonymous knows enough about Eritrea to talk about "General Philipos." Who is their source? Mr. Mahfuz, from above?

6.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
The ministry of information has been taken over by troops & there is a rumor that the presidents daughter is among the detained.  
[#ERITREA](#)  
[Expand](#)

8:08 AM

7.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
If this is a coup d'etat; was the president's daughter the target or the #**MOI**? If both, which is the largest gain? #**ERITREA**  
[Expand](#)

5:13 AM

- More unconfirmed rumors!

8.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
Ofcourse with the drips of information coming out of #**ERITREA** this all may be something completely mundane & a repeat of last year.  
[Expand](#)

8:17 AM

- They even acknowledge false reports from the past but they still post unconfirmed rumors as fact. Why? What is their agenda?

9.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
This guy --> @CFKlebergTT Reports of gunfire & explosions near #**MOI** | Which suggests a battle may have occurred. Between who though? #**Eritrea**  
[Expand](#)

8:30 AM

- This is completely false. When I check CFKlebergTT's page, I couldn't find any tweets about gunfire. Anonymous is either lying or CFKlebergTT must have deleted the supposed tweet.

10.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 4h  
RT @martinplaut: #**Eritrea**: seizure of radio & tv now confirmed by reliable source from Asmara // and a testcard on screen too kinda seals it  
[Expand](#)

8:33 AM

11.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 3h  
Link for Eritrean State TV: [eastafro.com/EriTV1/](http://eastafro.com/EriTV1/) #**Eritrea**  
[Expand](#)

8:38 AM

- 12.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 3h  
The #Eritrea regime could only afford one online propaganda account. This is it. @Ternafi  
Expand

8:45 AM

- Let me get this straight. Because someone provides an alternative view to Plaut and Leonard they must be working for the Eritrean regime? I don't know this "Ternafi" fellow but I do know that to stoop down this low is unprofessional for the mouthpiece of a global organization that expects to be taken seriously.

- 13.  **Anonymous** @CIApressoffice 3h  
What is confirmed: State TV is down. Tanks & troops are surrounding the ministry of information. #Eritrea  
Expand

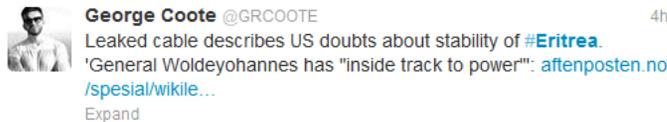
5:50 AM

- Source? The CIA? Maybe. For a group that claims to fight the powers that be, the funny thing is that their Twitter name is ironically named @CIApressoffice.
- Is Anonymous a genuine anarchist liberation group? Why do they focus on some governments while ignoring others? In particular, why do they focus on anti-imperialist states like Eritrea, Syria, and Iran while turning a blind eye to states like Israel, which represses the Palestinians to a far worse the degree than aforementioned countries do their citizens. An example of this double-standard is exemplified by this later retweet:



7:07 PM

- Then we have folks like George Coote, a [researcher](#) for BBC, that uses the rumors from Wikileaks' diplomatic cables to capture the imagination of the Twitter-world:



7:39 AM

- He cites [this](#) article suggesting that petty diplomatic gossip translates to fact.

- By this point, #Eritrea topic begins trending on Twitter and all the major media organizations start to spread the rumor:

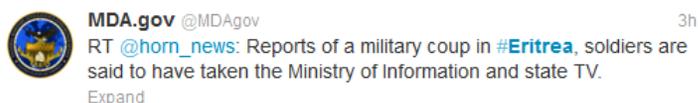


8:19 AM



8:34 AM

- The US government also decided to chime in, retweeting Horn of Africa News (@Horn\_News), which should tell Eritreans a thing or two about @Horn\_News (see above):



8:40 AM



8:41 AM

- Why is an official government agency quoting Horn of Africa News?



**BloombergNews Africa** @BNAfrica 3h  
 200 #Eritrea soldiers have mutinied and stormed the Ministry of Information building in Asmara, an unidentified diplomat was cited  
 Expand

8:51 AM

- More from Anonymous' "GHC" division:



**Anonymous GHC** @Global\_hackers 3h  
 Report: Group of soldiers launch what may be a coup attempt in Eritrea's capital; force state TV off air - @RFI\_English rfi.my/Ueksez  
 Expand

9:00 AM



**Anonymous GHC** @Global\_hackers 3h  
 Reports of a coup attempt in #Eritrea, but how are we expected to know?. No independent journalism in a closed state.  
 Expand

9:04 AM

- And Anonymoose:



**Anonymoose** @DareoTheOreo 3h  
 "@CIApressoffice: We are anti-imperialist; all other tweeps who claim the same and support oppressive regimes are not. #Eritrea"  
 Expand

9:21 AM

- Then we get to BBC, which publishes this [article](#). The next tweet is responsible for the "troops deployed" meme which caught on like wild fire. How do these memes spread so quickly? We'll get to that shortly.



**BBC News feed (UK)** @BBCNewsUKfeed 3h  
 'Troops deployed' in Eritrea city [bbc.in/10gLXTZ](http://bbc.in/10gLXTZ)  
 Expand

9:22 AM

- In the article they explain that, "the UK Foreign Office said that it had received reports of 'unusual military movements in and around Asmara', and noted that local radio and TV appear to have been shut down."

- More from an Anonymous affiliate:



**Anon Intelligence** @AnonIntel 2h  
 'Troops deployed' in Eritrea city [bbc.in/T9Vij6](http://bbc.in/T9Vij6) #Anonymous  
 Expand

9:51 AM

- Then Reuters reporter Aaron Maasho releases his [article](#) on the matter:



**Aaron Maasho** @AaronMG 2h  
 #Eritrea troops surround Ministry of Information in Asmara - Reuters [reut.rs/13Wdy1w](http://reut.rs/13Wdy1w)  
 Expand

9:58 AM

- Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO), an openly terrorist organization which has threatened to conduct terrorist acts in Eritrea, released the following tweets:



**RSADO\_Mission** @RSADO\_Mission 1h  
 Has the Arab Spring finally arrived in Eritrea, aka The North Korea of Africa? [reut.rs/13Wdn6f](http://reut.rs/13Wdn6f)  
 Expand

10:36 AM



**RSADO\_Mission** @RSADO\_Mission

1h

Thinking of our Afar brothers and sisters inside **Eritrea** right now.

Expand

10:45 AM

- Soon, Al Jazeera hits the scene:



**Al Jazeera Live Feed** @AJazeera\_Live

1h

#SNN Eritrean troops lay siege to information ministry: ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) - A group of E... [bit.ly/10h04Zz](http://bit.ly/10h04Zz) #Reuters #worldNews

Expand

10:40 AM



**AJELive** @AJELive

2h

Reports: Group of dissident #Eritrea soldiers lay siege to information ministry [aje.me/10hh1mB](http://aje.me/10hh1mB)

[View summary](#)

10:50AM

- When I checked the link at noon, it was down:



- Perhaps they were getting second thoughts about rashly posting information with little facts.

- However, our friend Mr. Mahfuz chimes in explaining that the issue has reached Al Jazeera televised network:



**Mahfuz H Yousif** @majnoon1

21 Jan

Aljazeera [pic.twitter.com/iYCzUDKa](http://pic.twitter.com/iYCzUDKa)

[View photo](#)

10:26 AM

- Here is a screenshot of the Twitter picture:



- It would be two days later, when Al Jazeera joins the bandwagon and attacks Eritrea

- The Associated Press is also significant in this whole scenario in that they were responsible for the "unrest" in Asmara meme that spread like wild fire after this tweet:



**The Associated Press @AP** 57m  
 Unrest reported in small, closed African nation of #Eritrea; soldiers flood information ministry: [apne.ws/11LRuab](http://apne.ws/11LRuab) -MM  
[View summary](#)

10:36 AM

- o Meanwhile, no one in the press, clearly intent on using a Twitter to source and promote questionable information, was actually listening to people tweeting from Asmara:

 **tekereb anelim @tekerebanelim** 21 Jan  
 Soldiers at Mol BUT #Asmara is calm, all's normal in town. ST @AfricanMyMind @me] can u pls update what is happening in Asmara #Eritrea?  
[View conversation](#)

8:06 AM

 **Rahel Weldeab @RahelWeldeab** 21 Jan  
 Ppl in #Asmara are going about their daily lives while "experts on the #Horn" cry coup. I live right near the airport. NOTHING IS HAPPENING  
[Expand](#)

1:09 AM

 **Rahel Weldeab @RahelWeldeab** 21 Jan  
 If those who cry concern over #Eritrea really care, why don't they contact those within? B/c @martinplaut is more credible? SMH  
[Expand](#)

1:22 AM

- By the end of the day, Jeffrey Gettleman, the New York Times' go-to journalist on all things East African, wrote a sloppy [piece](#) in regards to the faux "coup" titled "Coups Attempt by Rebel Soldiers Is Said to Fail in Eritrea."



- o Flippantly referring to Eritrea as a "sliver of a nation" in the Horn of Africa (it's roughly the size of England), he starts out by explaining that "mutinous soldiers stormed the Ministry of Information and took over the state-run television service, apparently in a coup attempt." He cites no sources other than "several people with close contacts inside Eritrea." Again, what coup? Not even Mr. Plaut or Mr. Vincent claimed that the supposed soldiers were attempting to overthrow the government (definition of a coup). Without presenting any other details relevant to the alleged coup, he hastily goes on a wordy diatribe against the Eritrean government for nearly the entire length of the article, wrongfully calling Eritrea the "the North Korea of Africa." He also quotes Dan Connell on unrelated issues, which reveals to Eritreans once again the extent of the journalistic incest that limits this small group of Western journalist from presenting a more balanced view of the nation while simultaneously giving tacit credence to the Eritrean government's claim that opening the up the nation to the private, Western press will promote the agenda of Western special interest groups. Sadly, it's irresponsible, external journalists like these--and their Eritrean minions--that delay the allowance of the free press for the rest of us.

- Also, let us briefly step back to earlier in the day when, interestingly, a fellow who goes by Rob Bates calls for people writing on the supposed "coup," to contact a central source:

 **Rob Bates @rewbates** 5h  
 If this really is a coup attempt in #Eritrea, and you're thinking about writing about it, contact Dr Richard Reid at SOAS first.  
[Expand](#)

7:10 AM

- o Why contact [Richard Reid](#)? The answers is not clear but we do know that Reid published a book for Chatham House, in which Dan Connell writes multiples essays. Again, is this not journalistic incest? Chatham House often takes a non-neutral and undoubtedly hostile position towards Eritrea as it relates to the conflict with Ethiopia.
- o Anyway, Mr. Bates then makes this completely irresponsible tweet:



- The above tweets and articles concludes the media flurry that took place on the first day the false coup rumor broke out. Jus t to put things in perspective in regards to how much weight and influence western journalists have in spreading rumors on Eritrea, co nsider that in reviewing all 1425 tweets that took place from 6:06 AM to 6:26 AM, Martin Plaut was tagged 143 times, which is approx imately 10% of all those tweets. Is that right for someone who's not in Eritrea, provides no confirmation for his outlandish claims, and has a very checkered history of journalism on Eritrea?

### Day Two

- Day two opens up with a BBC [article](#) titled, "Eritrea: Asmara calm after 'information ministry raid'" and we suddenly see a bombardment of identical tweets citing the that article:



5:22 AM, January 22, 2013

- o As I scrolled down the list there were at least hundreds, if not thousands, of tweeters who tweeted this same exact message around that same time. There were so many that I had to stop scrolling down the Twitter page on #Eritrea. Who are all these people that feel that they need to cite this article? Well let's find out! If we look at all their individual pages we will learn that these people are essentially identical in what they tweet. I thought it was some sort of autotweet setting through a dashboard or a subscription service but then I noticed that the autotweet from the BBC website would have read as follows:



This is clearly different from the tweets of the tweeters above. This tell us that they must have typed it in. The next interesting observation, shows us that these people not only tweeted the exact same tweet for the "Asmara raid" article but they also for an array of selected BBC articles. Notice the 100% concordance when I place these tweets side-by-side:



The image shows three Twitter profiles side-by-side. Each profile has a bio and a grid of tweets. The tweets are identical, repeating the same BBC article link and text. The profiles are:

- Tonisha Heglar** (@tonishaheg): non practicing anthropologist, love books, sporadic gardener, mother of teen. Taoma. 3,736 Tweets, 228 Following, 209 Followers.
- Mittie Goodly** (@mittiegoog): making art, making noise. Elyria. 3,728 Tweets, 168 Following, 157 Followers.
- William Horton** (@williamhortd): I'm in love, always in love, helping you understand love! Jefferson City. 4,014 Tweets, 215 Following, 203 Followers.

The tweets are identical and read: "Evictions warning over benefits: Changes to housing benefit later this year could lead to a rise in evictions, t... [bbc.in/10ytoe9](#)"

As I scrolled down the seemingly endless list of tweeters who were tweeting the same exact BBC article using the same exact words, it became of obvious that these were not people at all but, more likely, robots or programs. Reviewing each of these accounts I saw familiar trends: they all had a first and last name twitter name that represented their supposedly real name rather than some creative pseudonym (as is common on Twitter); they don't interact with other users; and they don't retweet or comment on anything. Could this be the work of [sock puppets](#)? In my opinion, these probably aren't military sock puppets but more likely sock puppets used by BBC to increase their article rankings (and their biased views) around the world. Is it any surprise then that the BBC article tweeted by these users has been the top news article listed at the top on the #Eritrea Twitter page all day Tuesday January 22nd? Here's a screenshot:

The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter search result for "eritrea". The top news article is "Eritrea calm after 'Asmara raid'" with a small image of a map of Eritrea. The text below the title reads: "Eritrea's capital is calm a day after a group of mutinous soldiers reportedly stormed the information ministry, sources say, while state TV is back on air. [bbc.co.uk/news/world-afr...](#)"

In regards to that BBC article suggesting that the calm has returned, one Tweeter actually in Asmara makes an astute observation:

The image shows a tweet by Rahel Weldeab (@RahelWeldeab) dated 22 Jan. The tweet says: "To say calm has returned implies it wasn't calm. Wish I took pics of #Asmara, #Eritrea yesterday but it was so normal, I didn't think of it." There is an "Expand" link below the text.

8:30 AM, January 22, 2013

- And since we're on the topic of robots, I should also mention that phone robots were also being used by members of the Eritrean opposition when word of the faux coup got out. In fact, they are partly the reason why so many Diaspora Eritreans who fell for the rumors and tried to call Eritrea, particularly during the evening, were unable to get through to family members because the phone lines were busy. According to the political gossip website [Asmarino.com](#):

"On Monday 21st of Jan 2013, the Diaspora based youth initiative ArbiHarnet (Freedom Friday) sent nearly 10,000 automated phone messages to members of the public in Eritrea.

The messages that were translated and posted on Eritrean Face Book Pages outlined the positiveness of the movement and encouraged the public to support it as a natural continuation of their struggle for democracy and justice.

...Realising that the Eritrean public was in the dark about all this, Project ArbiHarnet mounted a quick operation to send 10,000 automated messages on the evening of Monday the 21st and of the 10,766 numbers dialed 9,419 received the message successfully."

However, in a recorded [interview](#) with RFI's Michel Arseneault, Meron Estefanos, one of the members on the team of callers, admits that she was using robots to make those calls:

"Michel: So it's really a robot calling...?"

Meron: Not only a robot call, we also do one-to-one calling as well. We do the same thing. While we hire a robot calling company, at the same time the team would call at least 20 numbers a week, each.

...

Michel: How much does this kind of operation cost, especially when you have to hire a robot?

Meron: 10 calls cost \$3.00.

Michel: And the funding comes from...?"

Meron: ...from Eritreans on Facebook."

Two days after the robo-calling incident, Meron begins to promote the so-called "Freedom Fridays" campaign on Twitter while remaining silent on the use of robots:

 **Meron Estefanos** @meronina 14h  
Following a momentous move 4 democratic changes in Eritrea, Freedom Friday sent nearly 10,000 phone messages 2 the public in Eritrea.  
Expand

2:47 AM, January 23, 2013

 **Meron Estefanos** @meronina 14h  
Freedom Fridays encouraged the public to support it as a natural continuation of their struggle for democracy and justice.  
Expand

2:50 AM, January 23, 2013

 **Meron Estefanos** @meronina 14h  
Realising that the Eritrean public was in the dark about all this, Project ArbiHarnet mounted a quick operation 2 send 10,000 automated  
Expand

2:51 AM, January 23, 2013

 **Meron Estefanos** @meronina 14h  
messages on the evening of Monday the 21st and of the 10,766 numbers dialed 9,419 received the message successfully.  
Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More

2:51 AM, January 23, 2013

 **Meron Estefanos** @meronina 14h  
10,000 phone messages of support for the movement for democratic changes. [asmarino.com/press-releases...](http://asmarino.com/press-releases...)  
Expand

2:51 AM, January 23, 2013

Excited about what transpired, Ms. Meron attempts to turn this scenario into a campaign dubbed "Forto 2013" (Forto is the name of the MOI building):



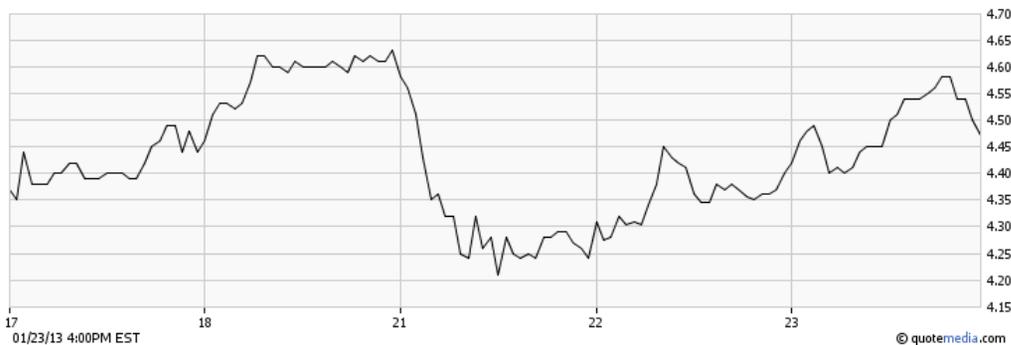
- Leonard Vincent also shows he true colors in the days after he promoted the non-existent coup. He insults our intelligence by implying that the word coup d'état was a foolish mistranslation of another French phrase:



He also throws his formerly concealed sources under the bus after it was learned that his unconfirmed claims were completely false. He disingenuously calls Beniam Simon and Amanuel Girmai the "[ordinary heroes](#)" behind what transpired on Monday, January 21. Had this story showed any credibility, would he have even mentioned their names? When will Africans learn that many of these Western so-called "journalists" that cover the continent are only using them for their own self-promotion?

## Conclusion

Alas, we come to our final analysis of this highly educational event. What exactly does it all mean? First off, we must remember that Eritrea has entered into a new stage of its development. Despite the many internal and external obstacles that hindered and held hostage the political, social, and economic development of Eritrea, the nation is now set to become one of Africa's [fastest growing economies](#) for the foreseeable future. This coming February, Eritrean investors in both Eritrea and the Diaspora are set to officially become equity holders of [dozens of former state-run businesses](#). Now that the basic infrastructure has been laid down from the sweat and sacrifice of thousands of Eritrean youth, the focus is now on developing the business sector so that Eritreans may benefit from the fruits of their toil. There is also increased interest by mining companies and their investors to do business in Eritrea. However, when false reports about coups and the [imminent death of the Eritrean president](#) capture the imagination of investors, they hinder the growth and development of Eritrea. For example, below is a copy of the chart of Nevsun's (TSX:NSU) stock price before, during, and after the January 21st coup rumor:



Fortunately, investors saw beyond the lies and deception and now the stock price is almost where it was prior to the incident.

It must be understood that Western nations led by the special interest groups in the United States are pushing for measures that retard Eritrea's economic growth. They have pushed for sanctions targeting mining companies suggesting that they are indirect supporting terrorism. They have released reports suggesting mining company involvement in "forced labor." Why all this focus on the mining companies? Why now? The distortions and lies are endless and many Eritreans believe it will only get worse as they continue to develop on the course towards self-reliance. To become self-reliant is in direct defiance to imperialism and Empire America will not watch as an African nation sets a precedent for other African nations to follow in suit. Need we mention the recent experiences of Libya, Zimbabwe, Sudan, etc.?

From this event we also learn of the tremendous weaknesses and obstacles that Eritrea faces in regards to information, propaganda, and public relations. Often times, rumors and lies are spread with reckless abandon or, perhaps, more nefarious aims. Groups like Anonymous

that claim to act in the name of people around the world should be looked at with a skeptical eye by every Eritrean. They have worked very closely with Julian Assange and Wikileaks. And we must recall that when Wikileaks first went online in 2007, its "About Us" page said the following (as reported by [CBC](#)):

"Our primary interests are oppressive regimes in Asia, the former Soviet bloc, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, but we also expect to be of assistance to those in the west who wish to reveal unethical behavior in their own governments and corporations," the group said on [wikileaks.org](#).

Notice how their "primary interests" are non-western "oppressive regimes" around the world. Why this preference? Why not focus on home, where most of the hactivists come from? As Wikileaks gained more notoriety, the above quote was taken down from their website for obvious reasons. Luckily, the CBC article documented their true aims. The aims of Anonymous and all affiliated groups also become obvious when you see them silent on the apartheid in Israel but loud on the supposed "revolution" in Syria. The hypocrisy is quite stark. We now see the same double standard of press coverage when it comes to Eritrea.

We must also remain vigilant of social media being used as a weapon of imperialism. Sock puppets may be a serious threat in the propaganda war. Social media outlets are quickly becoming the intentional or unintentional tools of regime change around world. We must consider the following quote from the Council on Foreign Relations' Foreign Affairs [publication](#) during the time of the now defunct Arab spring and Libya "revolution":

Technology, therefore, played a role, as did the intrepid Arabic news channel Al Jazeera, whose reporters blended in with the demonstrators and sent out regular reports to electrifying effect. Activists used Twitter and Facebook to mobilize street demonstrations and spread warnings on police tactics and concentrations. WikiLeaks, moreover, had weeks earlier published the U.S. ambassador's confidential reports of corruption within the president's family. These had the effect of turning gossip and rumor into fact and fueling popular anger. In this case, then, I would argue that some benefits have been gained: a dictator has fallen, and reporting from U.S. embassies has gained new credibility.

It's now looking like the same is coming to Algeria and Eritreans must be wary that the same does not happen to Eritrea.

Therefore, there is much to be learned from what transpired on Monday, January 21st, 2013. From the event, we learn that the odds are stacked against Eritrea. As the nation continues to blaze its own course towards development, on its own terms, there will be progressively more anti-Eritrean propaganda, more attempts to isolate the nation, and more attempts to turn the Eritrean people against their own government. It is important that all Eritreans remain wary and continue on the charted course.