

A strong identity, unity, and common vision; these are the qualities that determine the success of any nation in nowadays' global political arena. The lack or the presence of these three lies at the heart of the stark disparity among nations in terms of development, security, or the power to influence others. However, whether or not any nation possesses these qualities, has its historical explanation. Although it is unfortunate, it is not inexplicable why countries that were colonized, could now be struggling to attain these qualities and sometimes fail. The simple reason is that unlike the colonizers, the natural evolution of their identity and state formation was thwarted by colonialism. And after their creation, these countries could not be able to foster a strong identity, though some decades have passed since then.

Countries like Eritrea however, could in some way be mentioned as an exception to this although their creation is much the same. Many attribute this quality to the mutual coexistence of the different people even before colonialism, and most importantly the armed struggle which has served as a hub for all the people to share the same experience and foster common vision of independence. The experience of the struggle and all its components was indeed the pillar of Eritrea's identity before independence. And even after independence it remained a shared history of pride. But as in elsewhere, the challenge in this respect is much more difficult after independence. Of course, the challenge of building a nation state is by itself a unifying factor; but it is much more abstract. That is why we need to address this issue constantly. After all identity is a fluid concept and could change with experience and this has made the issue deserve a constant and consistent concern. In this enormous and formidable task, our festival plays one but a crucial part. The festivities, the colorful cultural performances, the various works of talent, the recreational activities, and others in general has a much deeper meaning than just being excuse to a get together. During the struggle time our festival was a forum through which national issues and the struggle for independence was deliberated. In doing so, it has brought basically the Eritreans in Diaspora together and was able to forge and strengthen the Eritrean identity. In this respect it has proved the assertion that the process by which identity is formed can indeed take place within or without a given country. Even after independence, our festival has been playing a great role in enabling the Diaspora identifies with their nation, even when most have not even been to Eritrea. They have also shared in the endeavor Eritrea takes on during war and peace time, starting from contribution to defending the country and development programs, to helping the families of our fallen heroes and heroines. The strong link they have with the nation could perhaps be well expressed by taking the recent mobilization against the unjust sanction on Eritrea.

The interpretation and common understanding of the culture, past history and present challenge also lies central to the issue of identity. By introducing the different people in the nation, their culture and way of life, our festival is playing a crucial role in further tightening the unity of the people within Eritrea. Eritreans coming from outside can also be introduced with their people. The different aspects of the current challenges and opportunities that are either exhibited in the festival or are experienced by the Diaspora due to their coming here and hence the opportunity they have to be exposed to the state of the nation; are very important component of their identity. This is because the appreciation ultimately brings together all Eritreans as they will come to a common understanding and also get the real value. It is often said that the worth of

anything is determined by what you have to give or pay to get it. As people are enlightened on how much was paid to get the independence of our nation and is still being paid to sustain it and develop the nation, its value becomes appreciated. This in turn can stir a spirit of common vision and forge solidarity among the people.

Whether in the time of struggle or independence our festival continues to play a major role in nurturing the Eritrean identity. And the task taken to enhance it all over the world and within Eritrea is bound to have a great impact. Especially the youth festival organized by the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Student in Sawa brings the youth, the future of the nation, closer together and provide a platform to a shared understanding which is a prerequisite to a strong nation. This is the real value of our festival as the national pilgrimage continues from year to year with strong fervor and enthusiasm. That is why just as in the past, our festival still guarantees Eritrea's confidence to a bright future.