

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY STUDIES

**THE IMPLICATIONS OF RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES
FOR NATION- BUILDING IN NEWLY FORMED STATES-THE
CASE OF ERITREA**

By: Hailay Gebregziabher Gebremariam

June, 2016

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES OF
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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction and Research Methodology.....	1
1.1 Prefatory Introduction	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	3
1.3 Objectives of the Study	5
1.3.1 Specific Objectives	5
1.4 Research Questions	6
1.5 Research Methodology.....	6
1.5.1 Method of the Research	6
1.5.2 Data Sources and Collection Techniques	7
1.6 Scope of the Study.....	9
1.7 Significance of the Study	9
1.8 Limitation of the Study.....	10
1.9 Ethical Consideration	10
1.10 Organization of the Research.....	10
CHAPTER TWO	12
Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework.....	12
2.1 Concepts of Nation, Nation Formation and National Identity	12
2.1.1 Nation.....	12
2.1.2 Nation Formation	15
2.1.3 National Identity	20

CHAPTER THREE	29
Eritrean Nation Formation and National Identity	29
3.1 Brief Description of Eritrea	29
3.2 Eritrean Nation Formation.....	32
3.3 Eritrean National Identity	35
3.3.1 Eritrean History and National Identity.....	37
3.3.2 Eritrean Culture and National Identity.....	41
CHAPTER FOUR	45
Data Presentation, Dissection, and Discussion of the Findings.....	45
4.1 The Implications of Reconstructing National Identity on the Eritrean People	45
4.1.1 The Implications of Reconstructing History.....	45
4.1.2 The Implications of Cultural Reshaping.....	51
4.2 The Implications of Reconstructing Eritrean National Identity vis-à-vis Ethiopian People	55
4.3 The Implications of Reconstructing Eritrean national Identity on Peace and Stability of the Horn Africa.....	59
CHAPTER FIVE	61
Conclusion and Recommendations.....	61
5.1 Conclusion	61
5.2 Recommendations.....	63
References.....	64
Appendix.....	68

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

APA	American Psychological Association
AU	African Union
CCE	Constitutional Commission of Eritrea
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CCS	California Contents Standard
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
ELM	Eritrean Liberation Movement
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PFDJ	People's Front for Democracy and Justice
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America

Abstract

The pith point of this study is examining the implications of reconstructing identity with regard to history and culture on the Eritrean people and, with relation to Ethiopian and the peace and stability of the Horn of Africa. Building strong national identity is not a harmful act per se. If anything, having similar cultural values, historical agreements and believing in common social destiny are among the basics to create firm democratic and political principles. However, all nationalist ideologies do not fit for all. It has been discussed that the process making of the Eritrean nation have resulted in serious troubles inside and outside the state.

The researcher has used qualitative research method in order to gather data for the study. Eritrean citizens who live in Addis Ababa are used as main informants. Some Eritrean (Eritrean-born) and Ethiopian scholars are also included in the process of data collection. The primary data is enriched by certain secondary resources. By using inductive approach, all gathered data are analyzed and discussed.

For the sake of forging unique and strong national identity, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) now known as Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), has been reshaping some historical and cultural features of the Eritrean people. Some historical events and cultural aspects which could be used as a reference to the long lasted connection of Eritrean and Ethiopian people are becoming the victims of abuse and distortion. Thus, this thesis gives analysis on the implications of such processes. It investigates the troubles that are instigated on the people of Eritrea and their relation with the Ethiopians. It then examines the effects on the peace and stability of the Horn Africa.

The 'differentiation' and 'prioritizing the political culture' methods are being widely used as instruments of making unique Eritrean national identity. As the result, some aspects of history and culture are tailored. Many historical and cultural ties with Ethiopians are glossed over or replaced by other new ones which vindicate the formation of national identity. This makeover has brought many implications on the people about which this thesis discusses.

Key terms: Culture, Eritrean Identity, Implications, Nation building, National Identity

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Research Methodology

1.1 Prefatory Introduction

According to Castells (as cited in Tsyfra, 2013) all identities are constructed. The construction of the identities can be at the result hinging on historical background, geographical setting, biological pedigree, “productive and reproductive institutions, collective memory, personal fantasies, power mechanisms and religious revelations” (p.2). It is from these roots that all actual and powerful identity phenomena are subsisted nowadays. In similar vein, all national identities, irrespective of their lifespan, acquired their genesis from such cumulative and eventual forms. As identity can be born, developed or disappear (ibid), some identities can be dated back so many years. Contrary to those, others have short time of expectancy.

Eritrea as “a de jure nation” has not more than three decades of age. Although many have dichotomous standpoint on this issue (see Bereketeab, 2007), some of the Eritrean identities have the same age as the state. The feeling of unique national identity is one of them. Many historians agree that the history of Eritrea as single unified territory started since the Italian occupation around a century ago (Lapiso Dlebo, 1993; Bahru Zewde, 2002; Alemayehu Abebe in Bartniski and Niyechko, 2014,). The current cultural, social, political and psychological identities of Eritrean society commenced to be established since then (Bereketeab, 2007). On the top of that, it continues being reconstructed and reformed as a result of many phenomena. Despite its relevance with its past history or cultural background several defined identities have created. This thesis, in a specific way, aims to find out the products of these reconstructed identities in terms of reconstructing history and reshaping culture in post-independent Eritrea. By avoiding digressions and focusing on the post independence era, this thesis highlights the dominant and potential implications which are instigated as a result of such constructed identities.

Today the majority of the collective identities or “national identities” are the product of social, cultural, political traditions, the result of adherence to certain values and memories, which have evolved over time and produced a common collective heritage (Tsyfra, 2013). When states declare their independence or autonomy, they claim to have some particular identity, constructed

or natural feeling of distinction which plays a great deal of importance in shaping the internal and bond of the society and international relation with the outside world. Benedict Anderson (1991) called these “imagined communities” meaning that most of their *raison d’être* depends on the smart and intentional creation and modification of their genesis by historian nationalists who are the pioneer nation builders. Color, history and religion have played a huge role in demarcating the identity of the youngest state, South Sudan, thereby helping to gain its independence. According to Coulby, ever since countries are granted their independence, the first big task they tend to prioritize is to construct and maintain the so-called “national identity”. This identity is constructed in accordance with its political or national interest (Tsyfra, 2013). Shared predicament had and still having of leading role in the creation of Eritrean identity. Although some intellectuals do not accept this statement (Bereketeab, 2007), all nine Eritrean ethnicities had little in common in terms of history, culture and religion before the struggle for independence. The highlanders and the lowlanders (as they are called Kebessa and Metahit respectively), is the major dichotomy which exists conspicuously in the country. However, this kebessa-Metahit dichotomy is highly denigrated by the government and the civic identity is being given high place in order to consolidate a single national identity. The Ethio-Eritrean war has had also its own share in creating “other” threat for the national identity thereby reshaping the perspective of the national identity.

This national identity serves as code to conduct its own domestic and foreign policies based on deeply-realized and clearly defined national interests. It also is of paramount significance in nation-building. Nation-building is generally seen by the governing elites of these states as an indispensable tool for the consolidation of national identity and loyalty to the state. Without it, the survival of the nation-state is felt to be at risk. Nation-building architects typically make use of history and literature education to promote historical narratives that embody the teleology of self determination (Tsyfra, 2013).

This national identity formation instigates its own implication in all socio-cultural, personal and psychological components of the society. Moreover, it plays a great deal role in categorizing the “others” as a threat for the national identity and cause tension and hostile attitude toward these parties.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Since Eritrea gained its independence in 1991, the government has launched new regulations which serve to help shape the identity of the nation. As clearly put in the EPLF's communiqué (with which the official history of Eritrea is made to go hand in hand), Eritrea had never been as part of Ethiopia (as cited in Bereketeab, 2007, p.66; Henze, 2001). Any values which contradict this statement and regarded to be, let alone the same, but even similar, with the Ethiopian one is forced to be rejected and replaced by another constructed value. Several status quo situations were thrown away and overhauled or become no longer valid. Those getting rid and changing norms are considered as the crucial part of forming state identity in the country. Fostering this case, Benedict Anderson argues that nationalist movements create their own mythologies by *promoting suitable events and conversely by quashing unpleasant episodes-and by constructing real or imagined narratives that evoke deep sentiments*(cited in Breketeab, 2007, emphasis mine). In Eritrea histories and situation that are supposed to strengthen the national identity, primarily the struggle for independence, are highly prioritized and other situations which might be considered to make some connection with Ethiopia thereby weakening the national identity are glossed over, not to say, deplored. For instance, immediately after the independence, the liturgical calendar for Christians in Eritrea and Ethiopia became no longer used for office and governmental calendar. Instead, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) led Eritrean government introduced the Gregorian calendar. New Year is celebrated on the first January. Other feast days take place upon the Gregorian calendar. Many cultures, histories and values which reminisces any prior connections with Ethiopia whatsoever are considered as evil tackle to the Eritrean Nation-building process.

Iluiia Tsyryfa (2013) in the article *Formation of Modern State Identity* explains the formation of state identity is constructed by highlighting 'historical injustices' committed by 'foreign oppressors'. This narrative carefully constructs an argument legitimizing the newly attained political independence. This task constructing and reconstructing of identities has its own outcome in the citizens of the country in particular and for the peace and stability of the region in general.

This task constructing and reconstructing of identities has its own outcome in the citizens of the country. Since most of identities are constructed upon "We-them tandem" (term taken from Iluiia

Tsyfya), Eritrean national identity is constructed against outsiders, mostly against Ethiopians. Erlich argues Eritrean nationalists were dissatisfied Ethiopians, “Eritreanism . . . was essentially the negation of Ethiopianism” (cited in Hoyle, 2001, p.12).

Ever since the researcher was teenager, he had heard many discourses on Eritrean radio explaining how Eritrean identity is unique and different from that of Ethiopian one. As Tigrigna speaker he could not understand where the difference was. The researcher has always wondered if there is a real difference or it is just claimed to exist. Since then, he has developed a great deal of interest in investigating the consequences of those recently-constructed identities on the people of Eritrea. Do they welcome everything they are told? Did this identity formation bring forth any repercussion in their everyday life? Following the construction of the identity, how did it affect their relation with neighboring countries like Ethiopia? This research gives an answer to these and other similar questions.

National Identity formation has many components such as demarcating territorial boundary, history, culture, myths, symbols, language and foreign relations (Smith, 1991). For the sake of this thesis, nonetheless, the researcher will focus on the implications instigated by reconstructing history and reforming the *folk culture* for the sake of *political culture* thereby achieving the so-called ultimate project of “national identity”. As this nation engineering can reach its goal, some type of excluding and including processes are used (Tsyfya, 2013). This creates deep-rooted hostility towards the outsider because of which the national sentiment is defined. The “we-them” hostility can result into some potential conflicts, and if the conflict is not addressed duly, subsequent violence.

Many studies have been conducted in relation to the Eritrean and Ethiopian situation: some with the support of historical evidence (Tekeste Negash, 1997; Tesfu Alitaseb, 2015), others by focusing on the recent phenomena (Abbink, 1998; Henze, 2001). Another author, Richard Reid (2003), argues that the Ethio-Eritrean border conflict is caused not just by economic and border disagreements but by much older schism which have existed between the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) and Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). While Seyoum Yohannes Tesfay (2012) discuss on the arbitration process of the very conflict the International Crisis Group (2012) urges the UN Security Council to pressure Ethiopia to accept the border decision. However, less has been said about other undermined, but in the researcher’s view crucial,

factors. National identity reconstruction and its attendant consequences is one of them. Identity, if it is constructed with comparison to others, can have serious effect on the welfare of the society and the coterminous areas.

Understanding this way, the research discusses about the implications and outcomes of reshaping and reconstructing identities in Eritrea thereby finding better ways to improve the relationship of Eritrean people with other neighboring countries particularly Ethiopia. The researcher believes that this thesis will shed light on finding another perspective to the Ethio-Eritrea conflict and hereby helping for the provision of another insight to resolve the problem. It is a strongly belief of the researcher that it gives some starting viewpoints for other researchers who have the willingness and commitment to find a helpful and peaceful way of dealing with the Ethio-Eritrean situation.

Although the main aim of the thesis is to inquire the effects of major identity reconstructions in Eritrean people and their neighbors, the researcher has full confidence that it will be used for studying one spectrum of solving conflicts in young states. Thus, by finding out these consequences the research will pave a way to see some perspectives of identity formation influences on peace and stability of The Horn of Africa.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this thesis is to investigate the effects of changing identity for state formation in Eritrea and to explore the consequences on Eritrean people and their attitude toward other people particularly Ethiopian.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

1. To explore the implications of national identity formation processes of Eritrea on its people.
2. To inquire effects of identity shaping on the attitudes of Eritrean citizens towards Ethiopians.
3. To explicate the major historical and cultural parts of changing identities in Eritrea and to study the reaction of the people.

4. To find out the main implications of identity changing in Eritrea and their impact on the peace and stability of the Horn Africa.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the implications of reconstructing history and reshaping culture for the sake of nation building in Eritrea?
2. How does changing identity instigate consequences on the cultural, social and psychological well-being on the people of Eritrea?
3. What are the effects of reconstructing identities in terms of history and culture in Eritrea vis-à-vis the neighboring countries especially with Ethiopia?
4. What are the repercussions on the peace and stability of the region?

1.5 Research Methodology

1.5.1 Method of the Research

This study explores and finds out the major implications of identity changing for nation building. Hence, the research is carried out using exploratory methods. To do so, the entire studying process have implemented through qualitative research method. Bruce L. Berg (2001) explains qualitative research as the signification, notions, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions way of explicating things. As result, the very importance of qualitative research method in social science studies is mostly to define the study as a specific and systematic way of discovering and understanding how social realities arise, operate, and make influence on individuals and collection of individuals (p.13). Thus, the thesis uses inductive approach of analysis. First it points out the implication of identity shaping in Eritrean people. Then it move on to discuss on the implications in relation to the Ethiopian people and to the peace and stability of the Horn Africa subsequently. The opinions and perceptions of the informants are used as primary data. Significant secondary data are also used. Both data are implemented analytically in accordance to the theoretical framework and the related literature.

All the discussed concepts are briefly reframed and recapitulated. All the implications are put together and hence provided with the concurrence of their evaluation. Some final standpoints are then drawn in the conclusion section.

Understanding this way, the thesis is conducted using qualitative research method. The researcher believes that Qualitative method has enabled him to obtain the optimum outcomes of the impacts of identity changing for nation building in Eritrea.

1.5.2 Data Sources and Collection Techniques

A. Sources and Data Collection Tools

The study of the thesis is hinged on primary and secondary resources. The major method of collecting data is, obviously, primary data obtained from Eritrean refugees in Addis Ababa, intellectuals who have enough knowledge and information about the issue and other Eritreans who live in different parts of the world. Some Ethiopians who have good acquaintance about the issue were also interviewed to keep the balance of data. As far as secondary data is concerned, I have used journals, books, reports and articles, historical books, prior interviews, news and other pertinent publications.

In terms of sampling technique, snowball sampling techniques and purposive sampling were used. This is because finding voluntary informant was a major challenge. Hence informants were selected according to their full willingness and their familiarity to the subject. Eritrean and Eritrean born informants were chosen for the inquiry of the data.

The researcher had first to find 50 Eritrean and 5 Ethiopian informants. However, due to data saturation 32 Eritreans and 5 Ethiopians were used. All informants were first asked about their willingness and resourcefulness to discuss about the matter. People from different parts of Eritrea were discerned and used to collect as various data as possible.

The data gathering method is prepared in two groups. The first and main group includes Eritreans from all across the world. This group is classified in two strata. The first one is encompasses Eritreans who are above 30 years old. Young Eritreans who are below 30 years old are grouped in the second stratum. This stratification is made in order to find out if there is a

difference of perception between the people who were born before and after the Eritrean independence. Hence, the researcher was able to acquire different standpoints by obtaining the data from different strata thereby come up with certain justifiable analysis.

The second group includes Ethiopians who have good familiarity with the issue. One informant is actually a person who was born and raised in Eritrea and an author of a book about historical relationship of Eritrean and Ethiopian people. The other four informants also have good familiarity with the issue. Two of them have lived in Eritrea for some time.

Accordingly the process of data gathering has taken into accounts of various reflections. A triangulation of Focus Group Discussion, Interview and personal observation are widely used. The researcher has visited the Jesuit Refugee Service –Ethiopia (JRS Ethiopia) where many of the informants are met. Eritreans Citizens who study in Addis Ababa University were also contacted.

B. Data Collection Techniques

The data for this thesis were gathered in virtue of interviews, FGDs, and questionnaires. As far as interview is concerned, it was conducted to individuals and group of persons. 30 questions were prepared and posed to the informants according to their familiarity to the subject. For those who had limited knowledge English language, the questions were prepared in Tigrigna. These questions presented to the FGD were also more or less the same. The FGD was also conducted in Tigrigna language. The researcher has made very through cross-check in order to check the translation process to English. Three FGD groups, six participants in each, were organized. The first group includes Eritreans where above thirty years old. The second one had informants aged below 30. The third one was mixed group of people who come from different parts of Eritrea and who had different occupations while they were in Eritrea. Two of these informants had higher positions when they were in Eritrea. One of them was military officer who used to uphold regulations.

For those who could not make interview, the same questions were given by form of questionnaires. For instance, Professor Tekeste Negash an Eritrean born Swedish historian, have been contacted by the researcher. He was given 20 questions via email and he replied all

questions. The same thing was done for another five Eritreans who couldn't be available due to many factors. The questionnaires were open-ended questions all of which have the same content with the interview questions. Informants were told to answer the questions that they know and familiar with. The data gathered using these methods are conscientiously analyzed and reviewed with the help of theoretical framework. This is done in order to get as maximum and unbiased as possible data.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The formation of Eritrean national identity has long history started from the era of Italian occupation (Bereketeab, 2007). However, due to several situations, this research only focuses on the implications reflected after independence by constructing and reconstructing history and reshaping the folk culture. It studies the effects of identity changing which are constructed in order to reshape the nation –building process of the country. Studying the very beginning of identity changing and its implications is set aside for other historians and experienced researchers. Therefore, this thesis only looks at the main implications of identity changing instigated by reconstructing history and reshaping culture in post independent Eritrea.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is aimed to look at the identity changing influence in post independent Eritrea thereby studying the condition of Eritreans regarding their country's nation building. Hence, the research makes a significant contribution by finding out the effects of Eritrean national identity building on peace and stability of the region. By doing so, it gives some perspectives in solving the Ethio-Eritrean conflict.

Furthermore it provides certain necessary aspects of knowledge on the condition of Eritrean identity after its independence. By involving and allowing ordinary and intellectual persons, the research has given a chance to Eritreans to express their thoughts about their identity formation and its attendant consequences.

Finally the researcher believes that this thesis can be served as a striking point to conduct other similar studies. By indicating the highlights, it has a great importance in attracting the interest of

experienced researchers and hereby conducting extensive inquiries which can obtain exhaustive notions about the field of study.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

This topic is relatively new and there are no or quite a few researches which can be used as starting points. Due to the nature of the study, the researcher has come across some challenges while carrying out the research. Among others, the researcher had to deal with the challenges of getting enough population for the research. Some Eritrean refugees who live in Addis Ababa were skeptical about the purpose of the research. They feared that it might have something to do with political agenda. Many Eritreans have refused to give their opinions because they did not want to have any tie with interviews or other similar processes.

Another limitation is that the research did not include other Eritreans living outside of Addis Ababa. Although the researcher had planned to go to the Eritrean Refugee camps in Tigray, this plan did not realize due to many factors such as financial and other personal ones. Be that as it may, the researcher believes that sufficient data are gathered from Eritrean informants living in Addis Ababa. Hence, the research has been conducted duly.

1.9 Ethical Consideration

While carrying on this research there surely were certain regulations which had to be followed. Firstly the researcher is completely honest to the results of the study. All findings are presented without any affiliation or misdirection. The researcher did absolutely not take any side. He did neither pressure participants to take any side. Nevertheless, he used cross-checking technique to prove the credibility of the data.

1.10 Organization of the Research

This study is organized in to five chapters. The first chapter deals with the background of the study, statement of the problem, definition of key terms, significance of the study, methodology of the study, scope of the study and limitation of the study. The second chapter explicates review of literature. The third chapter deals with Eritrean nation formation and, historical and cultural features Eritrean national identity. The fourth chapter concerns with the presentation of data

analysis and discussion. The final chapter provides the conclusion of the findings and recommendations of the study. All the data used for reference and additional supports are duly cited according to American Psychological Association (APA) manual. All the materials, books, articles and other documents used for the reference are thus cited appropriately.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Concepts of Nation, Nation Formation and National Identity

2.1.1 Nation

The concept of nation has become a buzzword on the contemporary subject of social science in whole, and in the field of international relations in particular. Many definitions have been given to the term so that everyone can have the tool to comprehend it in better ways. However, as many as the definitions and the perspective become; it is hardly possible to reach in to single conceptual consensus.

When we look at the primordial definition of nation, it had very distinct meaning from that of popular contemporary one. The original (ancient) definition of a nation- foreigner, unknown, backward barbarous (Bereketeab 2007), had entirely different meaning, if anything dichotomous from its modern meaning-sameness and uniqueness with regard to culture, language, ethnicity, history and blood-relatedness. Benedict Anderson (1991) argues a nation is “an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (p.6). Anderson goes on to argue that it is imagined as community, because, irrespective of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this brotherhood that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as voluntarily to sacrifice one’s life for such limited meanings(ibid).

Ernest Gellner (1983) in his book *Nations and Nationalism* states that nations are the outcome of modern social industrial organization. He states that:

“Nations are the artifacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. Nationalism, the tool by which nations are

formed, is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population” (p.7).

From the above two modern conceptions of nation we can sort out two shortcomings. While Anderson ignores the importance of existing primordial ethnic, cultural and ancestral sameness; Gellner underrates their very importance for a nation to be authentic. Comprised these two missing points, Antony D. Smith gives consensual-up-to-date concept of the nation. He adds the role of existing naming of collectivities; *their boundary definition vis-à-vis outsiders*; their myths of origin; and the activities of symbolic cultivation (Smith, 2009 emphasis mine). He continues to contend that, not just as cultural nor ideological phenomena, nations were, rather, forged in stages over longer periods out of pre-existing cultural and political ties.

Bereketeab (2007) states that scholars and elite nationalists of nation formation quite often emphasize the ways in which symbols, mythologies, historical fabrications, legends, and imagined genealogical descent contribute to the realization of nations and national formations (p.21). Such concepts are in many ways far less contentious vis-à-vis how nations have taken their current structure. For instance this notion have earned some places in Peter Allen definition of nations as “results of complicated educational process”, Hugh Seton-Watson as “community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, [and] a national consciousness”, Max Weber as “the outcomes of propagation of predestined intellectuals who have access to cultural values” (cited in Peggy A. Hoyle, 2001 p.10), Gellner as products of industrial revolution, Anderson as byproducts of invention and expansion of print-media and mass communication.

One of the early modernist, but highly subjective as stressed by Peggy Hoyle (2001), is that of Ernest Renan. Renan puts a nation as “soul” or “spiritual principle” comprised of “*a rich legacy of memories*” and “*present-day consent, the desire to live together*”(ibid, emphasis mine).

Joseph Stalin put if a nation is to be an authentic one, it is needed to be a historically defined constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a consensual common culture (ibid).

Irrespective of some distinction in conceptualizing the term nation, one cannot neglect noticing the subsequent accounts on nation. The first one is territorial foundation. In order a nation to be realized, territorial space and boundary is mandatory, if not sine qua non. The second equally important instrument to define a nation is commonality in history, language, myths, symbols, shared values, common consensus about and future the wish to live together. The latter is the very indispensable aspect to exist its realization on the future. Imagined or really existed the consideration and protection of those shared values is the main instrument that keeps all members together having not only similar sentiment and emotion but also the vision and destination about their nation.

The third one is although the engineers of nation building, nationalists, are the intelligentsia who have the access to high culture, i.e. folk art and standardized educational accomplishment (as put by Gellner (1983)), or who have the ability to use the *remote past* to create the nation and to mobilize the people, the sense of nationalism should be accepted by the grass roots to hit its goal. Emerson elaborated this concept contending “the people of a nation concerned must have a will to live together—To have done great things together and the will to do more, these are the essential conditions for a people . . . The existence of a nation is . . . a daily plebiscite”(as cited in Gil, 2014, p.2).

In addition to these all requirements, a relatively new feature is also essential to the will to live together as a nation. This feature is called ‘common accomplishment’. If people have removed a common sufferings, problems or enemies they create a common sentiment of brotherhood and comradeship. This common achievement might lead them to accept the will to live together and plan to struggle for potential challenges in the future.

Putting all the concepts in nutshell, we can use the concrete definition of nation give by Anthony D Smith as:

“A nation is named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, common achievement, common destiny, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members”(Smith, 1991, p.14)

2.1.2 Nation Formation

Scholars have given many concepts regarding the process of nation formation. Bereketeab (2007), for instance, mentions the two paths of nation formation-European and African paths. He, consolidating Seton Watson's argument, states that "the early European nations, French and English, are created whilst they created their states. The nation was shaped within the common framework of the state and that those who were excluded from this common framework (boundary) were not considered members of the nation." (p.12). Seton-Watson puts two types of nation formation which is, to some extent similar to the distinction given by Bereketeab. The first type, "old continuous nations, refers to the states which are believed to have begun in the Medieval Ages and developed through an evolutionary process in which the integration of a greater section of society took place" (ibid).

The other path of nation formation, African one (although it is not limited to Africa), is the outcome of European colonialism. Most nations in contemporary Africa, Bereketeab (2007) continues to contend, are the construction of colonial rule. "The colonial powers amalgamated a variety of geographical regions and ethnic groups into artificially constructed territorial nations."(p.28). When the colonial powers left, these nations gain their own state with existing territorial boundary. The formation of most African nations such as Algeria, Mali, Sudan, Kenya, Angola and others is typical to this classic. Seton-Watson calls this type as the formation of new nations. He postulates that "the new nations, were formed in the era of nationalism and, as such, were the ideologized products of educated élites who muddled their populations according to the national models of the old nations" (cited in Bereketeab, 2007, p.29). The European nations such as Croatia, Slovakia, Latvia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Estonia, Lithuania and Finland are classified in this group (CCS, 2002).

Christopher Clapham (2001) argues that successful and strong nations are formed by making war. He gives an account to warfare as an extremely important source of national mythologies and eponymous ancestors, to which and to whom leaders constantly appeal in times of peace. For instance, the Eritrean war for liberation, as put by Bereketeab (2007) and Connell(1997), played a great deal of role in igniting sentiment among the grassroots and the bombarding of the

Eritrean villages by Dergue army made the people to join the armed struggle and create strong national sentiment.

According to Iuliia Tsyryfa (2013), the cultural factors of nation formation have two aspects. The first, exogenous aspect, is formed, shaped and reshaped through globalization, interaction between different states, geopolitical interaction, and economic relation. The other, Endogenous aspect, the better ground for nation formation, gives most of the credits to interaction between the society of the nation, historical memory, common destiny, cultural heritage. The latter aspect has a great role of significance in instigating 'we-feeling' supported by its members of the society, thereby laying a steadfast foundation for the ever-perpetuating reformation of the nation.

Nation Building Vs State building

Although this thesis deals with nation formation and nation-building accounts it would be necessary to give brief concept about the two seemingly conflating subjects, most importantly because, people tend to understand them as synonyms and use them interchangeably. Nation building is about the *creation of unique cultural identity* that refers to the particular territory of the state (Scott, 2007). If the nation is not independent, this cultural identity eventually may lead to call for autonomy and self- determination. The Catalonia in Spain, the Scotland in United Kingdom, and the Tamils in Sri Lanka can be considered as examples.

State building, on the other hand, refers the strategies to build or rebuild the institutions of the state such as bureaucracy. The state building process can be supported by external actors such as NGOs and international community (ibid). Quite contrary to this, the nation building process is achieved by the elite nationalists and the involvement of the very society.

Using these critical issues lets now look at the popular theories of nation formation so that we can pick the appropriate model with which the Eritrean nation formation corresponds.

Theories of Nation Formation

1. Perennialism

This theory of nation formation lays the very sense of its argument on the concept of primordial essence of nations. Anthony D Smith (2009) states that:

“In the beginning’, the nation was perennial. It was everywhere and in every period. Ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, not to mention Indians, Chinese and Japanese were all ‘nations’, when they were not ‘races’. For British imperialists, the ‘English race’ had conquered a quarter of the globe, just as for pan-Slavists, the young Russian ‘nation’ was the new vigorous power about to replace an ailing West. In the same terms, Europeans and Africans could equally speak of the ‘African race’ as of an ‘African nation’. And, if Napoleon was intent on eradicating a Jewish ‘nation’, so as to give individual Jews French citizenship, anti-Semites from Wagner and Drumont to Hitler were bent on exterminating a Jewish ‘race’” (p.3).

Thus, one can easily comprehend that a nation was born simultaneously with its race. The pith point of this argument is that nations, like races, are primeval and natural on their essence. Proponents of this theory such as the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke and alike extreme nationalists, as stated by Anthony D. Smith (2009), argue that while individual nations have high possibility of coming and going, ‘the nation’ as a category and historical community was eternal, an historical datum whose origins and lineaments could ultimately be traced back to human biology, but which currently manifested itself as a specific type of socio-cultural community.

‘Crude’ (to use Smith’s term) nationalists are the leading exponents of this theory. They choose to perpetuate the line of denial about the possible making up human features for the state formation and they try to convince the population of the nation as the nation was, and by this crucial reference shall be, its state of its own. Although this ideology is somehow popular by nationalists of modern times it is dumped mostly by modernists because it glosses over the very phenomena of modern times like inventing traditions, structuring history thereby shaping the

formation of the nations. On top of that using ‘race’ and ‘nation’ interchangeably is its notorious defective for there are some races which do not, and according to the basic elements of nation formation cannot, create their own nation. The African-Americans are such a perfect hallmark of this argument. They own a single race but they have neither nation nor state of their own.

Understanding this way, the assumption is that the formation of Eritrean nation does not go along with this theory for two main reasons. First the nation is multiethnic and multi-cultural, and secondly, even the Eritrean elite nationalists argue that Eritrea is the result of Italian colonization which occurred around a century ago.

2. Modernism

The prevalence of this school of thought has started after the World War I. Smith (2009) contends that:

“The shock of two World Wars, and the horrors of the Holocaust, undermined both racist and nationalist ideologies, as well as the theoretical naturalism of the ‘perennialist’ understanding of nations. Not only was nationalism condemned along with fascism – the two being often conflated as forms of ‘tribalism’ – it no longer became possible to equate the concept of the nation with that of ‘race’”(p.5).

Proponents of this theory, such as Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Carl Deutsch, assert that nations are the product of modern phenomena such as liberalism, rationalism, nationalist ideologist and the rise of Modern Western values. For Benedict Anderson (1991), for instance, argues, the invention and subsequent dissemination of printing played a significant deal of role in creating nationalism and the nation. He sustains his argument saying that the proliferation of using vernacular languages (rather than Latin) on print media, which later led to create high culture of these languages, instigated the sense of national sentiment and nationalism.

Gellner (1983) in his book *Nations and Nationalism*, with some similarities but obviously also with some other distinctions, postulates that the modern nation is the result of industrial revolution and subsequent social organization. While disproving the primordialist theory, he continues to argue that although that is how it does indeed present itself, nationalism is *not* the

awakening of an old, latent, dormant force. He continues to contend that nationalism is in reality the direct outcome of a new form of social organization based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state. To vindicate itself, it utilizes some of the pre-existent cultures, generally transforming them in the long process, but it cannot possibly use them all for this purpose.

For Deutsch, as mentioned in Smith (2009), the emergence of participant nations was based on rapid social mobilization and increasing social communications such as the Western states had experienced from the eighteenth century. He states that it was possible to chart the steps by which nations were 'built' through urbanization, social mobility, rising literacy rates, media exposure and voting patterns by using their experience as a model. Therefore, all these become the products or dimensions of 'a giant step forward in social evolution' which is called modernism.

According to modernists (as discussed in Smith, 2009), modern society was growth oriented and encouraged mobility and context-less messages. As a result, it was secular education in a specific language that provided the key to modern identity and citizenship. However, modernization was uneven. It replaced small village units with large states able to fund and support mass, standardized education systems. But, as urbanization proceeded, conflicts over scarce resources arose in the city between the former inhabitants and the influx of newcomers from the country who, if they happened to speak a different language, or have a different religion or skin color, were most likely to find themselves excluded from many urban benefits. At this point, their intelligentsia urged their co-cultural proletariat to secede by forming a new nation and state. In the modern epoch, therefore, it was nationalism that invented nations where they did not exist (Gellner, 1983); and, whereas nations had no place in earlier 'agro-literate' societies with peasant masses ruled by tiny elites, they now became not merely a sociological necessity but positively functional for industrial modernity (ibid).

Eric Hobsbawm (1983) in his book *The Invention of Traditions* maintains this argument explaining that the formation of nation is primarily fostered by inventing traditions, myths, symbols, heroic tales, social values and distinct norms of the societies. The nationalists, the engineers of nation formation, pick or fabricate these features and disseminate them to their mass

population so that they can serve as the foundation of national commonalities thereby mobilize the people and create a huge sentiment of oneness and national identity. The documentation and emission of public culture and history ensure the sustainability of these processes to the next generation by virtue of education which plays of paramount significance.

In order to bring this elites and nationalists driven nation creation to its ultimate fruitfulness, Gellner (1983) mentions two sorts of mechanisms. On one hand the agents use the art of persuasion to create ‘voluntariness, consent, willed adherence, extraneous incentives and hopes, loyalty and solidarity’. On the other hand, and may be if the first tool does not seem to work, they take the actions ‘fear, coercion and compulsion’. The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism side, he continues to assert, are often arbitrary historical inventions.

Summing up this modernist perspective of nation formation, the core point is being that the nation is a byproduct of modern states of affairs and its attendants. Nationalism, the operation by which the nation is formed, “is the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population” (ibid, p.48).

This perspective, despite its prevalence, particularly among scholars, is criticized by intellectual nationalists because of its denigrating the primeval distinctions of human beings such as language, history, race, religion and tradition all of which are the major instruments for nation formation. They give counter- argument to the modernist concept claiming that nations, as well as their main vehicle nationalisms, were historically embedded, not just in terms of temporal sequence, but also in geo-cultural terms. Although the ideology and movement of nationalism might be recent and novel, nations were seen as forms of extended kinship and as such were ubiquitous and coeval with the family (Smith, 2009).

In the case of Eritrea the constructed Modernism is the fittest theory of its formation about which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter.

2.1.3 National Identity

Likewise the nation formation, national identity is built and shaped by nationalism and its adherents. Nationalism, Gellner (1983) argues, uses the pre-existing, historically inherited

proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth by utilizing them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. To nationalists, Smith (1991) gives another argument claiming; “to the nationalist, as to an earlier generation of scholars, there was therefore no special problem about the origins and causes of nations, no need to explore the processes of their formation. Nations were perennial; only their degree of self-awareness and activism varied” (p.14).

Additionally Smith puts the key features of existence of national identity as following:

1. *An historic territory or homeland*
2. *Common myths and historical memories*
3. *Common, mass public culture*
4. *Common legal rights and duties for all members*
5. *A common economy with territorial mobility for members (ibid).*

These features given by Smith are not exhaustive. Of course there are other factors such as common achievement, shared predicament, common vernacular languages, religion, shared values and belief systems among the members. Despite being many, those common assumptions of national identity, more or less, go in tandem with each other. The first criterion is a sine qua non for national identity. National identity, as nation, needs to own its territorial boundary and space on where the authenticity of the national identity is built. Asserting this common assumption Peggy Hoyle (2001) asserts that national territory is the very place which serves to qualify for the exercise of self determination, as it is recognized by the international community, territory—specifically, territory within colonially defined borders—is essential, because, mostly, the nation’s unique history is represented in the nation’s unique piece of territory—its ‘homeland,’ the primordial place of its ancestors. This homeland or historic territory can further be described as the ‘museum of historic memories and associations, the place where ‘their’ sages, sacred saints and heroes lived (ibid).

Scholars explicate different assumptions for the features listed on the fourth and fifth aspects elements of national identity formation. Here, this thesis will not discuss about these issues either. It is to the second and third elements of national identity that very focus of the research is given. The very role of history and culture for creating national identity will be elaborated subsequently.

A. History and National Identity

Many scholars argue that most of nationalisms and national identities use the reference of past history to legitimize their nation and national identity claim. History, for nationalists, “serves as a toolbox from which they wittingly select past themes which fit with their present purpose.” (Bereketeab, 2007, p.43). Bereketeab continues to express that this ‘toolbox’ is utilized as a major bridge which connects the past existence of the nation and, not only to the present but also to the future continuity and strength of the national identity. It is also used to express the *sui generis* national identity thereby differentiating from other national identities. It is this important instrument, true or fabricated, to which elite nationalist appeal the plausibility of their movement so that they can mobilize the society. It serves as a psychological bond between the past and the present. Therefore, the forging of the national identity is started by forging national history. The national identity must, essentially, encompass all parts of the society and should touch upon every aspects of the society’s sense.

Consolidating this concept Hobsbawm (1983) asserts that the very foundation of national identity consciousness is built upon the ability to ‘*control the past*’ to write history and invent tradition (emphasis mine). Here what he means by ‘to control the past’ is nationalist historians write the history of their nation according to their nationalist vision and their myths of political history. The past is being in control so that the present and future can be shaped. The past is being restructured in order to define the present direction of national identity because having distinctive history is among the key measures for the creation of national identity, as Smith put it, in national identity, “God has removed to the margins of the world and society. In its main tenets, nationalism has no place for the divine” (Smith, 2007, p.14).

Regardless of the historical accuracy, the very importance of history in creating national identity is to enhance the sense of shared belongingness and making the people of the nation to have the concern and will to live together by stressing their ancestors have done things together (Smith, 2007) thus, underscoring the significance of the continuity of this chain to do more.

Rapheal Utz (2005) amplifies the necessity of history for national identity formation, giving the term ‘usable past’. According to Utz, ‘usable past’ is “the search for historical experiences which might be drawn on in the effort to legitimize and stabilize the new system” (p.14). History, for

nationalists, is the Holy Book of the people. This Holy book of the people, Utz continues to posit, “is of great importance because, invaluable, it is the mirror of their past and their doings; the record of revelation and morality, the legacy of ancestors to their descendants, it is supplement to and an explanation of the present, and an example for the future” (p.13).

Nationalists could only hope for a plausible, and approximate, reconstruction of the successive epochs of the community’s ethno-history, one that could fulfill their requirement for continuity in the designated homeland, but always within the parameters of received knowledge. By seeking documentary evidence and using the ideas of the new social ‘sciences’, cultural nationalists hoped to place their political projects on firm historical foundations and convince their kinsmen, as well as a hostile world, of the truth of their claims (Smith, 2007).

Understanding this way, nationalist historians takes the lion’s share in shaping, or creating national identity for that matter. It is them, in the modern times, who take the *usable past* from the history and use as a powerful tool to construct the present and the future of the national identity. They do not, obviously, take the past history as it is. They cautiously pick the parts which are only *serviceable*. Other unimportant facts are glossed over. If they disprove the national identity they are severely criticized and ignored, or labeled as the dangers of national identity.

The nationalist historians and intelligentsia are the men and women, who rediscovered, selected and reinterpreted existing ethnic symbols, memories, myths, values and traditions, and out of these elements forged the narratives of the nation (Smith, 2007). This point is to illustrate that nationalist historians have the access and, according to their ideology the right, to reshape, alter the history the nation so that it can fit with the recent design of the national identity. Supporting this concept Ernest Renan (1882) in his letter, ‘Qu’est-ce que’est une nation’ (what is a nation?) points that in nation-building “forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of nation formation” (cited in Bereketeab, 2007, p.89).

Montserrat Guibernau (1996) stipulates two elements of national identity—continuity and differentiation. Continuity asserts the primordial nature of the nation and defines a nation as “a historically rooted entity that projects into future. It takes the members of the nation to their remote ancestors and earlier cultures in the homeland in a relatively unbroken line of succession”

(cited in Hoyle, 2001, p.11). By doing so, the national identity confirms its originality and historical authenticity by which the set of shared experiences and commonalities are ascertained.

Differentiation, On the other hand, ensures that the nation is *sui generis* in such a way allows its members to distinguish themselves from other strangers. This constructed modernist 'Us-them alienation' is a very powerful instrument of creating national identity and maintaining it for eternity. Discussing this stance Martin argues that despite the fact that identity implies both uniqueness and sameness, one identity cannot be defined in isolation: the only way to circumscribe an identity is by contrasting it against other identities (İnaç & Ünal, 2013). This dichotomization theory is further backed the constructivist notion of Anna Triandafyllidou. She claims that "for a nation to exist, it is presupposed that there is some other community, some other nation, from which it needs to distinguish itself. The nation thus is understood as a part of a dual relationship rather than as an autonomous, self-contained unit" (Mahoney, 2012). Taking this perspective, Mahoney (2012) argues "if Namibia had failed in its ability to create an 'us' versus 'them' relationship with the Germans, and more importantly the South Africans during its liberation struggle, they would have failed to create the *nation* of Namibia" (p.9).

Sorenson (1990) states Eritreans consider themselves disciplined and civilized than Ethiopians. Abbay (2001) contend this idea saying an Eritrean professor in a conference of political economy of Ethiopia held in John Hopkins University, at the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in 1988, has mentioned that Eritrean have internalized technology more than Ethiopians. He goes on to argue that Eritreans perceive themselves as more modernized and developed than Ethiopians. These dichotomization methods are used to maintain the discrepancies between two groups or societies and then to create Us-them mentality. This mentality results in comparing one's identity with others and praising your identity and denigrating the 'other'. For instance Eritrean use many times the phrase 'Nihna Ertrawyan', meaning 'We-Eritreans' in their expression. It is even like a logo. This expression is intended to encompass all the people and to differentiate from other people.

Another scholar S. Chuhrov offers to name as the "xenotransplantation" (in medicine – the rejection of an alien tissue). The value "transplants with the alien blood group" are rejected with the national value systems. The latter values constitute themselves in the international political

continuum (or affirm their identities). The clash of values usually leads to self-identification, and the more intense it is, the harder (but at the same time clearer) is the identification process (Tsyfra, 2013). Erikson termed it contending that in order any identity to be consolidated; it is indispensable “being the same as one self as well as being different” (Erikson, 2010).

In a similar vein the nation history can be used as *continuing* and *differentiating* factor for the consolidation of the so-called national identity. The former aspect, it can be an instrument to form a shared past experiences and heroic deeds against external forces. Thus, the continuity factor urges the necessity of perpetuating these deeds for generations. To do so, the nationalists aim “to ground the nation on firm and authentic foundations, preferably with sound documentary evidence, and they do this rediscovering, selecting and reinterpreting the past in order to provide a cognitive framework” (Smith, 2007, p.102).

The other factor, differentiation, can use the nation’s history as a tool. Wars, resistances, rebellions and past violence are among the major issues which instigate alienation and we-them tandem. Any identity, no matter its richness in culture and history, cannot stand by itself. It needs an “other” to define itself. Understanding this way, history is the narration of struggles and heroic battles against the significant “other” against insider or outsider. The more distinct the differentiation is the identity becomes stronger and more solid. The historical victories and triumphs against external forces create a unifying factor inside the society and, as the same time expand the distinction from the “others”, hence, forming strong national identity.

The overall assumption is that history plays a crucial role in forging a nation and forming and maintaining national identity. Nationalists or to use Anthony D. Smith’s term ‘Political archeologists’ utilize history as *double-edged dagger* in order to continue the process of unifying the people, and to differentiate from other external ones. Smith (2007) helping this case argues that the task of the ‘political archeologists’ is to “reshape the present state of affairs of the community through a reinterpretation of its past or pasts at the point where the basic social and symbolic processes have developed and converged to create the possibility of a national form of community” (p.76).

B. Culture and National Identity

In its modern definition of, “culture is a derivative of individual experience, something learned or created by individuals themselves or passed on to them socially by contemporaries or ancestors” (Avruch, 1998, p.2). As mentioned earlier, Smith considers common public culture as one of the five instrumental factors to create national identity. Martin Glassner in his book *Political Geography* defines “nation” as [a] group of people with a *common culture, sharing one or more important culture traits such as religion, language, political institutions, values and historical experience*”(cited in Hoyle, 2001, p.9 emphasis mine). The importance of culture in creating and shaping national identity is, thus, straightforward. If it so, the follow-up question to this statement would be; what about in the multi-ethnic nation or nation-to-be where there are more than one major religions, languages and other cultural dimensions?

Nationalist or “political archeologists” draw upon possible best solution in this state of affairs. The very practical up-to-date are ‘promoting political culture or and ‘differentiation method’. The political culture refers to national holidays, civic rights and public cultures based on historical victories and myths. In a multi-cultural milieu, modern nationalists prefer to construct their own types of public culture by making suitable to their ideals and visions of national autonomy, unity and identity. Their tasks are therefore to rediscover, select and reinterpret the past or pasts of a given community, reshape its conception of its present state thereby helping to regenerate the community (Smith, 2007).

Moreover the very priority is given to political culture at the expense of folk culture. National holidays are supposed to be more important than religious or other cultural holidays. Traditional values are replaced by overarching national political values, and if they are competitive the former ones are highly denigrated and glossed over. The homogenization process of the different cultures by virtue of citizenship and patriotism leads to “the creation of newly constructed identities. The continuity of the process will also lead to be permanent in the identity as well” (ibid).

In a nationalism which aims unique single national identity culture has little or no place. Instead of promoting diversity and traditional values the nationalists prioritize in creating political culture which can be used as a vehicle to take to their goals. This political culture is created,

shaped and reshaped by reconstructing the encompassing and exhaustive character of any given common identity unit within historical viewpoint. In order to this identity get stronger and solid there should be preponderance of *necessity*, *urgency*, *external threat* and relative capability as well as its internalization by the given society (Eralp 1997:26, cited in İnaç & Ünal, 2013 emphasis mine).

The importance of *necessity*, *urgency* and *external threat* to construct firm political culture and, hence, creating steadfast loyalty to the national identity lays on one very essential rationale. This rationale is that these three factors are very useful to reminisce about national identity and to bring back national consciousness which was dormant for many reasons. Clapham (2001) even dares to assert that it is war which makes the nation and the national identity strong. Therefore civic (political) culture is basically a sort of ‘melting pot’ that subordinates ethnic, racial, and cultural differences to the assimilating logic of a common culture (Gilroy 1993: 72, cited in İnaç & Ünal, 2013).

The ‘differentiation method’ is another instrument to carve strong national identity. In the previous topic, we have in detail discussed that no identity stands by itself. It needs “other” rival identities against which it can define itself. This conception works for, if not especially, cultural dimension of identity. Distinctiveness is as equal, if not more, necessary as commonness for authentic cultural identity. Derrida elaborates this concept saying that all cultures or cultural identities have their ‘other’ of the ‘self’ (as cited in İnaç & Ünal, 2013). Exclusion, not to say detestation, the ‘other’ of the ‘self’ is the key to create strong national identity, or any identity for that matter.

Taylor argues that identity is partly constructed by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition and alienation of the others (ibid). Gellner (1983) postulates that the cultural distinction and the capacity to alienate themselves from others, can be and eventually is a positive advantage for the entire collectivities, or potential collectivities, of these victims of the newly emergent world of theirs. It enables them to conceive and express their grudge, resentments and discontents in intelligible terms. In this situation they merely are united by shared culture but shared exclusion or shared predicament such as suffering together, oppression, horizontal hatred, common traumatic experience and colonialism.

On the other hand, this condition of imagination and feeling of separation and uniqueness has its own repercussions. The practice of collective self-definition by means of boundary delineation is the result of “differentiation and exclusion of, if not suspicion and antagonism towards, neighbors and others in general” (as cited in İnaç & Ünal, 2013, p.4). According to Breuilly, “to the degree that the culture of nationalism is rigidly exclusive and defines its membership in terms of narrowly based common culture, nationalism tends to be xenophobic, authoritarian, and expansionist” (ibid).

Cultures which contradict or undermine the cohesion and vibrancy of a sense of national identity are less-emphasized or eliminated, if possible changed so that the national identity can be unique and distinct. ‘Transnational cultures’ are the first victims of this process. These cultures can be the existent or potential threats to weaken the sense of uniqueness. If something exists somewhere else it is no way that it can be regarded as unique. For this or other unmentioned reasons, these cultures are worth reshaping or, if there is possible chance eliminating from the national value. This can be achieved by educational policy, ceremonies, and narratives, denigrating their importance of the cultures and, creating hostilities toward them or their carriers. This leads “to hostility, contradiction and discrepancy as well as denying, humiliating and negating the ‘other’” (İnaç & Ünal, 2013, p.5), thereby instigating a potential conflict between the ‘unique’ nation and the ‘other’.

The two aforementioned factors for prevalence of cultural national identity are undertaken at the expense of traditional and ethnic identities. Supporting this notion Gellner (1983) contends that nationalist ideology claims to protect folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture; it claims to speak for an old folk society while in fact building up an anonymous mass society. It preaches and defends cultural diversity, when in fact it imposes and promotes homogeneity both inside and, to a lesser degree, between political units.

As far as the Eritrean national identity is concerned both the differentiation and prioritizing the political culture are used as main tools of constructing national identity (Abbay, 1997; Hedru, 2003). The ‘we-them’ strategy is broadly implemented to create distinctive identity. In a similar vein, the political culture also plays its role in encompassing all the people with different cultural background, religious beliefs and language. This issue is discussed in detail in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Eritrean Nation Formation and National Identity

3.1 Brief Description of Eritrea

Eritrea is said to have its name from Greek word '*erythrea*' meaning 'red'. The name was first adopted for Italian era in 1890, as *colonia primogenita*, first born colony (Abbay, 2006). With its capital at Asmara, it is bordered by Sudan in the west, Ethiopia in the south, and Djibouti in the southeast. The northeastern and eastern parts of Eritrea have an extensive coastline along the Red sea.



Map of Eritrea within Africa: source upload.wikimedia.org

Some ruins found in Eritrea are thought to date from Pre-Aksumite civilization. The powerful kingdom of Aksum, which began to develop around 4 century B.C, made its capital Axum, covering its territory from Tigray, northern Ethiopia and the most of the present day of Eritrea extended to the Red sea and southern Arabia. Adulis, an ancient port, was used for foreign trade exchanges during the civilization (Henze, 2001). After the decline of Aksumite civilization around 7 century AD, the coastal Red sea areas and the Dahlak islands became under control of Muslim traders. The highland area was administrated by local aristocratic rulers (ibid).

The Turkish arrived in the red sea at the beginning of 16th century. For the next 300 years (with a few short-lived intervals) the coast including the port of Massawa belonged to the Ottomans. By the middle of 19 century, the Egyptians invaded modern day Sudan and occupied the highland part of present Eritrea which was under administration of Emperor Yohannes IV of Ethiopia. He appointed Ras Alula as the governor of most highland parts. The Western lowlands of modern day Eritrea were taken by the Egyptians including the port of Massawa. The Ethiopian Emperor Yohannes eventually forced a battle. In 1875 at Ghundet, in Adi Quala in modern day southern Eritrea, and later at Gura, near Dekemhare, Emperor Yohannes defeated the Egyptian Armies. After then, much of the present day of Eritrean territory was administrated as integral part of Abyssinia. After a decade, Italy stepped in as successor of the Egyptians. The Italians took control of Assab in 1869 and Massawa in 1885. Alarmed by further expansion, Emperor Yohannes IV challenged the Italians by defeating them in Dogali and other few places (Henze, 2001).

In 1889 Emperor Yohannes was killed in battle with Mahdists (Sudanese) in Metemma. This created a golden opportunity to the Italians to step in to the highland parts of Eritrea. At the struggle with Mahdists preoccupied the Ethiopians, the Italians were left to get on with the realization of their colonization and military ambitions. In 1889 the Treaty of Wechale was signed between the Italians and the later to be Emperor Minilik. In exchange for granting Italy the region that was to later become Eritrea, the Italians recognized Minilik's sovereignty and give him the right to import armies freely through Ethiopia (Henze, 2001).

At last in 1890, Italy declared the birth of its *colonia primogenita* or *first born colony* of Eritrea. Then after, the Italians continued to colonize Eritrea for five decades. With breaking out of WW II the British army waged war against Italians in East Africa. In 1941 the British drove out the Italians from Eritrea the Italian colonization came to an end. Eritrea had begun to be administrated by the British Military Administration (Abbay, 2006).

In 1947 a Commission of inquiry consisting the UK, USA, France and the Soviet Union found the population divided into three main factions: pro-Ethiopian Unionists, anti-Unionists and members of a Pro-Italia party. Following this, the Eritrean case was referred to the UN General Assembly in 1948 in order to decide the Eritrea's fate. Consequently, the UN resolution 390 A

(V) passed an adoption to Federate Eritrea with Ethiopia. The resolution called for Eritrea and Ethiopia to be linked through a loose federal structure under the sovereignty of the Emperor. Eritrea was to have its own administrative and judicial structure, its own flag, and control over its domestic affairs, including police, local administration, and taxation. The federal government, which for all intents and purposes was the existing imperial government, was to control foreign affairs (including commerce), defense, finance, and transportation. Following two years, the federation was implemented (Henze, 2001).

In 1958, a group of Eritreans founded the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM). The organization mainly consisted of Eritrean students, professionals and intellectuals. Under the leadership of Hamid Idris Awate, it engaged in clandestine political activities intended to cultivate resistance to the centralizing policies of the imperial Ethiopian state. However, by 1962, the ELM had been discovered and destroyed by imperial authorities (Bereketeab, 2007).

When Feudal government of Emperor Haile Selassie unilaterally dissolved the Eritrean parliament and annexed the country in 1962, the Eritrean Liberation Front (hereafter ELF) was formed and waged an armed struggle for independence. The ensuing Eritrean war for independence went on for 30 years against successive Ethiopian governments until 1991, when the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), a successor of ELF, defeated the Dergues forces (Henze, 2001).

Following the UN-supervised 1993 referendum in which the Eritrean people voted for independence, Eritrea declared its independence de jure. The EPLF took power changed its name to People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), established a one-party state along nationalist lines and banned further political activity. Issayas Afewerki (formerly the vice leader of EPLF During the armed struggle), is the incumbent President of the county since its independence (ibid). It has now six administrative zones (in Tigrigna, Zibatat) called Anseba, Central, Gash-Barka, Northern Red Sea, Southern Red Sea and Southern.



Political and administrative map of Eritrea, source www.mapsopensource.com

3.2 Eritrean Nation Formation

After three decades of bloody war, Eritrea gained its independence in 1991 de facto and two years later de jure. The Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF) became Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and begun to administrate the country being the only legal political Party. One of the main listed priorities to be achieved by the party was sustaining and constructing the formation national identity (Bereketeab, 2007).

The Eritrean nation, like most African countries, is the result of Italian colonization. It is the perfect epitome of multiethnic nations with one dominant ethnicity. The population size of Eritrean is 6,527,689. It has nine recognized ethnicities: Tigrinya 55%, Tigre 30%, Saho 4%, Kunama 2%, Rashaida 2%, Bilen 2%, other (Afar, Beni Amir, Nera) 5%. The main religions are Muslim, Coptic orthodox Christian, Roman Catholic and Protestant (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). The languages are also as many as the ethnicities.

In this multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and as a result multi-cultural society, the very basics to form as a nation is the common history of colonization and the struggle for independence (Bereketeab, 2007). This suggests that multi-ethnic society of Eritrea become a nation not because of shared culture, common language, common religion or the same primordial history but because of 'shared predicament' and its subsequent 'common accomplishment' of the

shared predicament, one of which is colonialism. Ernest Renan (1882) provides an optimum illustration to this concept saying:

“People share a glorious heritage as well, regrets and a common program to realize. Having suffered, rejoiced, and hoped together is worth more than common taxes or frontiers that conform to strategic ideas and is independent of racial or linguistic considerations. “Suffered together”, I said, for shared suffering unites more than joy does. In fact, periods of mourning are worth more to national memory than triumphs because they impose duties and require a common effort.” (p.10)

Bereketeab (2007) states that the communities that later constituted the Eritrean nation had very minimum, if not nothing, common experience of integrated socio-economic and cultural life prior to Italian colonial rule. Therefore, it is this ‘common suffering’ and the struggle to remove the suffering that made them collaborated and, thereby constitute as a nation. Lobban notes that the argument is that this common tradition of colonial oppression and suffering has brought a common national culture (as mentioned in Bereketeab, 2007).

That being said, there is no documented nationalist movements during the Italian colonization. Even though the territorial formation Eritrean nation was made by the Italian colonizers, “the very sense of Eritrean nation was made largely through its very struggle for independence against Ethiopia” (Bereketeab, 2007, p.225). In the modernist theory of nation formation, as discussed previously, nationalist elites and other intelligentsia play the main role in forming, shaping and constructing the nation. They draw upon ‘usable past’ to authenticate the legitimacy of the nation formation.

In the case of Eritrea the elite nationalists and combatants were and still are the engineers or political archeologists of the formation of the nation. Myths, traditions, shared exclusions and sufferings are taken as the basics to create the commonality. This commonality has its own other in order to ‘define’ itself. As discussed in the theoretical framework of nation formation, modernists postulate that the nation formation process has to be authenticated by differentiating itself from the ‘other’.

Smith (2007) argues that in nation formation process, the nation does not need to be artificially fabricated *de novo*, careful selection of popular ethnic traditions, symbols and memories, and the elevation of some of them to the exclusion of others. It simply works on reinterpreting and adjusting the historical narratives conceived by different intellectuals to the ethnic realities on the ground, or choosing a narrative and dialect from one region or ethnic community to represent the whole. Nationalist selection has to respond to the needs, values, memories, symbols and traditions of different segments of the designated population, just as the latter in turn had to be taught the virtues and ideals of ‘their’ nation at the very moment of its creation.

In the Eritrean case, the struggle for independence takes the lion’s share for its formation. As stated by Professor Tekeste Negash, Italian colonialism is not strong enough to propel ex-colonial society into nationhood. The struggle against the ‘other’, in this case Ethiopia, creates common culture over the course of history. The Eritrean society has built images and myths of its heroes that enrich its common history and consolidate its common culture (Bereketeab, 2007, p.217). The shared exclusion and suffering created common civic culture. The common history of resistance and struggle serves a powerful or major tool, for that matter. In every Eritrean public and national holiday, in every national anthem, songs and arts the struggle for independence is disseminated. As a nation is being constantly built, this process seems to be ever-lasting. The assumption is, thus, the civic or political aspect of Eritrean national identity is of great significance. Eritreans celebrate their nation as being exceptionally ethical and contend that dignity and fairness are what differentiates them from other societies (Hoyle, 2001). The elite nationalists believed that they are more way modern than the Ethiopians. This comparison plays a great deal of significance in praising the nationalistic ideology of Eritrea.

What constituted Eritrea as a nation is barely the ethnic aspect but political aspect. And what holds up its existence is not the common culture, if there is any, but the civic aspect of national identity. Bereketeab (2007) explains the very aim of nation-building of the fighters during the struggle for independence (particularly the EPLF) had no basics of ethnicity, religion, language or culture. If anything, referring to these aforementioned elements would have, for some period of time had, forestalled the formation of the nation. It was, and even now it is, the commonality of resistance and “suffering” (actual or invented) which had been mirrored in the widespread

belief in common ancestry. The common accomplishment made to remove the “suffering” also has its very role in consolidating the commonality.

The resistance of, Woldemikael, Bahta Hagos, the wichale Treaty (see Bereketeab, 2007, pp. 66, 78, 217,) and other *usable pasts* are used to create genealogical connection thereby forming the binding means with the current generation and proofing the formation of the nation is authentic and legitimate. Sorenson argues, “Eritrean nationalism does not typically appeal to a deeply-rooted historical identity, but begins with Italian colonialism and stresses the development, through several stages, of a new identity based on common experience” (as cited in Hoyle, 2001, p.18). Be that as it may, the common experience of *shared predicament* does not suffice to create the nation. Some sorts past actions such as resistance and other heroic myths against common enemies are required to form the sense of togetherness. As it is argued, no nation can come to reality without creating its own unique ‘usable past’. This ‘usable past’ of us-them has to be upheld through sacrifice. Smith (2007) argues that the most strong of the cultural resources of the nation was the ideal of a national destiny that required constant striving and sacrifices on behalf of the community. Struggle and sacrifice were the key ingredients of political Romanticism. Some have even claimed that regular blood sacrifice of the nation’s youth is essential to the creation and preservation of the nation and national visions. The current duty for military conscription of young Eritrean for unlimited period of time is the perfect earmark of this concept.

Putting altogether, these actual or imagined historical experiences that members of the society have experienced or believe themselves to have experienced, (Bereketeab, 2007) gave a path to formation of the Eritrean nation.

3.3 Eritrean National Identity

In 1950 the UN General Assembly declared that “Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown” (Hoyle, 2001, p.1). The Then Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia’s claim was that Eritreans have the same historical and ancestral origin with the Ethiopians which dated back to 3000 years ago before and the Eritrean territory had remained as Ethiopian sovereign territory before the colonial Italy snatched it. The Ethiopian government’s statement was that:

“Ethiopians and Eritreans are incontestably one and the same people . . . The history of Eritrea has been one with that of Ethiopia . . . The race is the same, the language except for dialectical differences, is the same. The culture and habits are identical . . . (quoted in Sorenson, 1990, P. 2).

The Tigrigna and afar speaking, and other societies in Ethiopia and Eritrea were the very proof of this argument which used by the time.

Supporting this notion Clapham maintains that “the northern part of Ethiopia, which included Eritrea, was historically the core of the Ethiopian empire, but lost its position of primacy as the core crept southward over time. The movement of the core southward was evidenced by the relocation of the Ethiopian capital from Axum to Lalibela to its current location of Addis Ababa. Consequently, the south grew in stature while the Eritrean north became more dependent and isolated—peripheralized” (cited in Hoyle, 2001, p.16).

Following this resolution the Eritrean elite nationalists and nationhood proponents opposed this resolution by claiming that Eritrea was never really part of Ethiopia and Eritreans have nothing in common with the Amharic-speaking dominant Ethiopians (Bereketeab, 2007, Hoyle, 2001). However their claim for independence and nationhood was not accepted and they considered that “the world community had denied Eritrean independence on the grounds that *Eritrea was not a distinct nation* but instead a compilation of tribes, half of which—the Christians—were part of the Ethiopian nation” (Hoyle, 2001 p.14 emphasis mine).

When the Eritrean elite nationalists commenced armed struggle for independence, the very motive was that ‘Eritrea were not and cannot be part of Ethiopia’. Thus, the basic of Eritrean Identity is that being different from Ethiopian one. If it is the existing similarities with the Ethiopian culture and history which forestall them from having their own nation, creating difference should bring it. During the struggle for independence the process of nation building was one of the key tasks of the elite nationalists (Bereketeab, 2007). The nation-building process had the vision of creating single Eritrean national identity that override other identities and eliminate other rival identities. As it is impossible to build a national identity with transnational histories the Eritrean elite nationalists sought to forge a *sui generis* national identity with which they proof the uniqueness and authenticity of the nation. Even after independence this forging

the nation is being undertaken. In order to achieve this, the common past with Ethiopian, especially Tigrean people, had to be rejected. And other new identity had to be invented or modified. As Abbay (2001) put it “ in the process of building a nation, Eritrean continued to invent a distinct identity, invalidating pre-existing kinship, ethnic and religious allegiances” (p.31).

Although, as it is discussed in the earlier sub chapters, there are many components to construct national identity, this thesis only discusses the historical and cultural features of Eritrean national identity.

3.3.1 Eritrean History and National Identity

The Eritrean history is of paramount significance for the national identity, but of course not all of it. In fact, the Eritrean history is of an overarching factor for the Eritrean national identity. Smith (2009) argues that nationalists are very selective and precautionous in terms of utilizing ‘usable past’. The Eritrean nationalists, thus, only select the historical events which promote the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Eritrean national identity.

Historians play a great deal of role in shaping the present and future by controlling the past. German historians such as Treitschke, Karamzin and several others were had active engagement not only in conducting historical research but also in constructing usable past for the unification of Germany (Utz, 2005). This case is the same in Eritrea. Eritrean historian nationalists have constructed and are reconstructing the Eritrean history for the sake of national identity building. It is the struggle for independence which covers the major history. Any historical event which disprove the core point “Eritrea had been never been part of Ethiopia” (Bereketeab, 2007, p.167) is glossed over or severely denigrated. This shaped history disseminated in all educational textbooks and media.

This ‘differentiating’ aspect of national identity is derived from some sorts of usable past. The rebellions and resistance of Bahta Hagos, Ra’esi Woldemichael, Degiat Tessema Imam and others (Bereketeab, 2007) are deemed as a basis for the Eritrean nationalism. In this resistance is shaped to nationalism. As smith (2007) stated ‘Getting history wrong is part of being’ and as far

as this gives any contribution to forge national identity, applying it, no matter its repercussions, is for granted.

In a similar vein, in the PFDJ's Eritrean history, any connection with Ethiopian whatsoever is denied or omitted. On the media, historical books, national holidays, educational programs, historical researches, art galleries and other events it is the struggle against Ethiopia is over-emphasized. On the contrary any historical event which enhances the uniqueness of Eritrean national identity is given a huge place. An EPLF publication in Tigrinya alludes to Wolde Michael Solomon as a pre-colonial leader who bravely fought the Ethiopian Emperor, Yohannes IV. But this member of the traditional highland nobility was the notorious scourge of many Muslims because of 'his bloody assaults and cattle driving', and could hardly be an Eritrean nationalist hero, revered by both Christians and Muslims alike - he retreated when the Italians arrived, fought against them on the side of Ethiopia, and went to Axum, the centre of the Christian Amhara/Tigrean culture (Araya, 1990).

No country but Ethiopia has, based on legal international laws, claimed Eritrea as its part of Territory. In a similar vein no country but Ethiopia has very similar, if not indistinguishable, culture, ethnic kinship, language and religion as most societies of Eritrea. But all these are denied and rejected, because mostly, it sternly contradicts with the vision of creating sui generis national identity. Contending this standpoint Abbay (2001) argues that the EPLF have refused to summon the rich and romantic trans-Mereb past because it is not serviceable. This is done to achieve the quest to be different. Thus, 'not being Ethiopian' is the pillar 'other' of Eritrean National identity. And history, according to the nationalists, has to provide evidence for this statement. History, here, is instrumentalised and utilized as a defensive element and the starting point for 'we-them' tandem of national identity. This in turn involved much inventive reconstructing of Eritrean history, in the interests of 'national unity' (Clapham, 2001).

Erlich argued that "Eritreanism . . . was essentially the negation of Ethiopianism rather than a historically rooted supratribal, supralinguistic, and suprareligious sense of Eritrean affiliation" (cited in Hoyle, 2001, p.16). Eritrean nationalists were labeled as 'dissatisfied Ethiopians'. However, No matter the authenticity of their nationhood was, they are now able to brought to reality their vision of independent nation. History, therefore, had been used as 'differentiation'

and 'continuity' factor. In the former case, they used it as to exclude from the Ethiopian identity thereby alienating other contradictory identities to the national identity. On the latter one, history of resistance and rebellion served as the starting point so that the current generation would adore these past deeds and continue to make sacrifice to defend the nation against potential or invented threats. These two identity components are what allow members of the nation to both appreciate their collective continuity and to differentiate their nation from others. In the field of nations and nationalism what counts is not what is, but what is felt to be (Smith, 2007). These methods had been widely used to forge the national identity. Most importantly what matters is not what the history exactly was but what it is wanted to had been. And as every nation is an ongoing and always unfinished project (Gill, 2014); these same methods are being broadly being used. They continue to "embark upon a conscious invention of identities, in effect assaulting the past" (Abbay, 2001, p.31).

Abbay (1997) states that:

"The burden of the past that Eritrea shares with Tigray was turned into a tabula rasa where an ideological history was being written afresh. According to the EPLF, the peoples of present-day Eritrea and Ethiopia lived essentially apart from each other and in a state of mutual isolation' until the close of the nineteenth century. Hence the argument is that 'these two neighboring peoples have had their own distinctly separate courses of historical development even before the coming of Italian colonialism.'" (p.11)

This standpoint of the EPLF contradicts to the fact that most of the Eritrean highlanders, in effect, have the same language, religion, culture, history and kinship with the people of Tigray. Thus, the Eritrean nationalists have chosen the act of denigrating the similarity thereby using differentiation method to convince the people.

For instance, the appointment of Ras Alula from south of the Mareb as the governor of the areas to the North of Mereb river in 1876 gave it a remarkable peace. Alula made Asmara his capital by avoiding the traditional seats of authority (Abbay, 2001). In addition to being judicious, he was known for his victory against the insurgence of Italians to the region. He defeated Italians in Dogali. Abbay (1997) states that his informants had witnessed that Ras Alula was a respected

leader by the people lived on both sides of the Mareb. “Stanzas in varying sequences instantly and fondly stated the folk epic: ‘Saintdom like that of Lalibela’, ‘Longevity like that of Methuselah’, ‘Justice like that of Alula’” (p.9).

However, in Eritrean national history he is depicted as oppressor and foreigner and all the local resistances against him are narrated as pioneering for Eritrean nationalism (see Bereketeab, 2007). Abbay (1997), supporting this notion, contends that the EPLF misrepresented Eritrean historiography, for instance, when they mentioned Gundet, Gura, and Dogali as historical sites where Eritreans shed their precious blood to successfully maintain their independence, and presented Alula as a national enemy of Eritrea. He continues to sustain the argument saying “Almost all my political informants in 1994 regarded Yohannes and Alula as foreigners and conquerors, but some could not justify such misrepresentation” (p.13).

“I cannot call Alula even a military hero. The wars we are told he fought were actually fought by Eritreans. Tell me where Alula fought? He is just the making of Ethiopian history writers....

How can one forget the atrocities committed by Alula? When the Italians came in 1889, many regions of the Kebessa [highland] were totally abandoned - wiped out by Alula's wars against the Eritrean people.” (p.12)

All these points demonstrate that history have become the victim of reconstruction in order to legitimize the distinctiveness of Eritrean identity thereby using as differentiating instrument from the ‘others’.

Perpetuating the agenda of creating “others”, right after the independence many thousand Ethiopians who lived their entire lives in Eritrea was expelled (Haile Yibrah, 2012). Those who acknowledged the historical the long historical ties Ethiopia and Eritrea were victims of mistreatment and displacement. They were even deprived of their property. This is to cut the relationship of these people and the attendant outcomes. “The nation building began in 1991 with cleansing Eritrea of co-ethnic Tigreans (Abbay, 2007, p.32)”. The first thing the EPLF did upon taking power was to deport thousands of Ethiopians, mostly Tigreans” (Haile Yibrah, 2012). This is because the Tigreans and other Ethiopians are found irrelevant in the process of nation

building. The existence of such societies would impede the formation of unique national identity that appeals to the past. The others, in this case the Ethiopians, do not have something in common from the needed basics of the national identity formation. Their fathers and grandfathers of these “others” weren’t suffered together with the Eritreans. They didn’t accomplish anything to the needed national identity. Hence, they are labeled as “bad others” and unfitting to the national identity. This is because it is inherently nationalistic behavior to seek the ‘bad others’ (Abbay, 2007).

In 1984, when thousands of Tigreans refugees were on their way to Sudan through the western lowlands of Eritrea the EPLF refused to them a passage. Hundreds of children, women and aged persons perished and buried in the sands of western Eritrea (Haile Yibrah, 2012). The cluster bombing of Tigrean primary school children in Mekelle by Eritreans on 5 June, 1998, a town miles away from any military installation may also have had the objective of accelerating the invention of the Tigrean 'others' (Abbay, 2001, p.12). Theses differentiating methods is to alienate the “others” to justify that they are outsiders and they do not belong to the national identity.

3.3.2 Eritrean Culture and National Identity

It is widely conveyed that culture is one of the overriding factors for national identity in many different ways. And the Eritrean culture is no exception of this hegemonic concept. Here, for the sake of not to digress, the researcher focuses on the major aspects of shaped Eritrean culture which make huge influences on the national identities.

It is argued that nation-building is full of cultural interventions. In the case Eritrea this cultural intervention by the nationalists and nation builders takes colossal place. Promoting *political culture* at the expense of *folk culture* is one of the prominent actions. Since there is no single language, religion, ethnicity and culture on the basis of which the national identity can be built, civic or political culture plays the role of doing so. The celebration of Eritrean Independence Day is supposed to be emphasized more than any religious holidays. This is based on the reason that, first, it includes all Eritreans, and then, it excludes the “others”.

In Eritrea asking people from which province or ethnicity are is a taboo (Sorenson (1990), Bereketeab (2007)). Hedru (2003) mentions the issue of social identities (family, religion, language, religion) and political identity (Eritrean) was never addressed openly inside Eritrea. “As early as 1973, identities deriving from ethnicity, region, clan and religion were denigrated by the EPLF as ‘sub-national’ (tribal) and ‘sectarian’. Current PFDJ ideology requires that social identities should be effaced to accommodate the consolidation of a unifying national identity.” (p.3). The Constitutional Commission of Eritrea (CCE) adopted an anthem that vowed to combat this crime. It was made quite clear that ethnic group concerns that challenge the EPLF/PFDJ's version of a mythical, homogeneous, national Eritrean culture would not be tolerated. Impeding of religious freedom and cultural autonomy, vindicated as combating fundamentalism and 'cultural pollution', were other straws in the political wind (ibid). By practicing the concept of cultural homogenization into ‘melting pot’ the community is shaped into common and shared way of life. And these are implemented under the auspices of the political or civic culture.

This is because that sectarianism, regionalism and other rival identities can weaken the overarching national identities. This issue per se, nonetheless, is not the concern. Building good national identity is better not only for the country, but also for the whole region. The concern lays on how the national identity is built. Building nationality by cultural homogenization and pigeonholing some “others” create some serious repercussions such as antagonism and hostility toward others. In effect, these actions are harbingers of conflict and violence.

The ‘differentiation’ concept comes here again. As discussed previously, differentiation refers to some sorts of reshaping and restructuring the elements that undermines the uniqueness of the nation. Cultural differentiation is one part of it. When Eritrea gained its independence, some cultural differentiation had been made. For instance, the government inaugurated the Gregorian calendar. New Year has begun to be celebrated on 1st January rather than on 11th September. Christmas and other holidays have received the same fate. All the usage of traditional and ancient Geez calendar became limited to Orthodox Church utilizations. Its cultural aspect is undermined as if it is only religious matter. No matter other reasons are given for doing so, what matters here is that such cultural alteration plays a great deal of role in differentiating the cultural identity from that of Ethiopian. Moreover, “despite the fact that almost Eritreans know nothing about the Latin script, cars in independent Eritrea have been given licenses in the Latin alphabet”

(Abbay, 2001, p.31). All dropping and adopting such cultures are the hallmarks of national identity matrix. This matrix is drawn “to canalize boundary with their kin in south of the Mareb who use the indigenous Geez script. The formulation of “Eritreans have nothing in common with Amhara” (Bereketeab, 2007, p.168) concept, is drawn to support the uniqueness of the nation, irrespective of its accuracy. These all are made to create unique national identity by means of alienating “others”.

Most importantly the differentiating method excludes the other and conceives them as ‘alien, dangerous or imminent enemies’. Differentiating creates prospective antagonism. And this eventually leads to conflict and precarious violence. The very foundation of this kind of national identity is constructed on ‘the urgency of defending the nation from those ‘who are not like us’. In fact Clapham (2001) postulates that these kinds of national identities are prone to weaken amidst the problems of peacetime administration. And Eritrean national identity is one of them. Abbay (2001) supports this notion maintaining “as Napoleonic wars enhanced Russian self-consciousness, the Ethio-Eritrean war and the concomitant deportations of Tigreans out of Eritrea and Eritreans out of Ethiopia may petrify the ‘us-them’ dichotomy among the Tigrigna-speaking of the two sides of Mereb” (p.32).

Based on the differentiating concept, the assumption of all this is that in order create unique Eritrean identity from, mostly but not limited to, Ethiopian or other threatening cultures, it must alienate or reject all norms which make the nation similar with the Ethiopia mass public culture. Modernists usually emphasize the socializing effects of cultural interventions and the continuity they give to nations. But, equally important is their role in the creation of the nation’s narratives, images and moralities, again as part of a cultural network that serves to unify the members of the nation and distinguish them from outsiders (Smith, 2001). Commonalities with the ‘others’ are harshly disregarded. This cultural alienation serves as ‘double-edged axe’ to fix and demarcate communities from the distinct ‘others’.

If constructed ‘shared predicament’ is deemed as culture and can be used as the basics for the national identity formation, what about after the shared predicament is eliminated? What would be the key elements that uphold the sense of national identity? Scholars give some explanation to this such as creation of common enemies, potential or invented and thus pigeonholing the as

threats to the nation thus evoking their consciousness and mobilizing the society. 'They have done bad things to your fathers and grandfathers and they will not sleep to you too.' This notion of political culture can be used to strength the national identity. This notion asserts to the stance, to use Abbay's (2001) term, 'Not with them, not without them'. As any national identity cannot be defined by itself, the 'other them' part is always, important, if not prerequisite, for the national identity. However, it is important not because they are complementary but the latter is dependent, though antagonist, of the former. The very strength and consciousness of Eritrean national identity seems to hinge upon this differentiating we-them tandem.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Presentation, Dissection, and Discussion of the Findings

4.1 The Implications of Reconstructing National Identity on the Eritrean People

Even though building strong national identity is not precarious per se, the ways it is intended to be realized have the potential to instigate a great deal of impact on the society of the nation. As principle, no matter their ulterior motive, all national identity formation processes have the aim of creating harmonious, beneficial, and suitable-for-all common culture in the milieu of the society. Be that as it may, sometimes against the expectations, their negative implication could outweigh. Here by negative implication, the researcher means, the repercussions that worsen the livelihood on the people. The implications might be social, economic, cultural and psychological ones. The effects of structuring the historical and cultural trends of Eritrean national identity on its people are presented here. The first part discusses the implications of reconstructing history and the second will show the consequences of shaping the culture.

4.1.1 The Implications of Reconstructing History

History is one of the most important features in order to create a strong national identity. It serves as a psychological bond between the past and the present. It is a mirror by which the people of the present see the lives of their ancestors. “The past has a social purpose of stressing the virtues of courage, endurance, and sacrifice. Picturesque folkloric characters such as Robin Hood and Nicholas Chauvin become models for selflessness and patriotism (Abbay, 1997, p.1)”. Nationalists utilize it in accordance to their design of national identity model.

Hence, the Eritrean political archeologists are no way exception. The process of writing history is made to go hand in hand with the goal of national identity. Most parts of Eritrean history is reshaped and restructured. An Eritrean pointed that:

“The [Eritrean] history that is told to us and the situations that we are faced makes us confuse about our true history. The Eritrean national history purports that Eritrea has historical enemy and these historical enemies still exist. And they told us that we must be always suspicious of these enemies.”

In order to support the antiquity of nationalist sentiments, serviceable, and shaped or exaggerated history is presented. In the EPLF-PFDJ document of Eritrean history some personalities are exaggerated and depicted as pioneer of Eritrean nation movement. For instance, the resistance of Bahta Hagos was presented as nationalist movement (see Bereketeab, 2007).

In the contrary, the history of Ras Alula who brought peace and stability to the region by removing local disputes and fought Italians is little known if anything denigrated. This is because that it is believed; mainly by the political archeologists this part of history has the prospect to weaken the sentiment of national identity. An “outsider” hero has no place in the history of Eritrea just because it does not fit to the design of national identity. A group of Eritreans interviewees, one of whom used to work to the national intelligence of his country states that

“Most of our national history focuses on what differentiate us from others, especially our enemies. It stress on what other people have done to us. It doesn’t state our past good relationship with our neighbors, particularly Ethiopia. In public holidays, seminars, mass media, songs they underscore only what make us different and superior than others.”

Another interviewee said, “In bars, night clubs and other entertainment areas playing Amharic song causes a fine up to 500 Eritrean Nakfa. I was one of the enforcers”. The argument here is that this kind of regulation is aimed to support the historical statement of “Eritrea had never been part of Ethiopia” (see Bereketeab, 2007 p.167).

Another interviewee goes on to express that “these kinds of reconstructing of history do not let us to have full access of it. They mostly stress on our struggle against ‘foreign enemies’. It is right that every Eritrean should know what their fathers and grandfathers did for freedom. However, it must not be reshaped or changed even for good reason.”

This process of using deformed past to shape the present is to realize the goal to create revolutionary culture and identity (Elf 1971; EPLF, 1977, in Bereketeab, 2007). The reshaped history is taught in all levels of schooling system through mass standardized and academy supervised educational system. The media, which are completely controlled by the government, also play the role in disseminating to the grassroots level.

All these actions of reforming the history for the realization of national identity instigate further negative implications. Starting from the data collected from the two different FGDs indicate that it is the nature of building national identity that makes hundred thousands of people run away from their country. One of the reasons is the military conscription. Eritrea has historical enemies and they are still there. One day they might come again to destroy the country. In Eritrea every man and women aged above eighteen has the duty to give national service at least for two years. Historical justification is given to stipulate and to assure the righteousness of the duty. Thus, refusing military conscription is directly considered as opposing official nationalism and anti-nationalist act, and treason. At the result many youngsters are fleeing out of their country, dying in deserts, seas and have become the victims of sufferings and other disasters. The 'differentiating' model of national identity building and its attendant military conscription are, among others, to blame for putting the livelihoods of the people at risk. "No collective protests or acts of resistance have emerged since 2001 in Eritrea. Dissidence manifests itself only through indiscipline, obstruction, desertion, and exile" (Bozzini, 2013, p.1).

After the 1998- 2000 Ethio- Eritrean border war "demobilization of the soldiers who participated in the war was delayed: of the 350,000 soldiers counted in 2001, only 104,400 were demobilized in 2006. Tens of thousands of new recruits continued to be conscripted each year to national service. This national service, although legally limited to eighteen months, has become permanent. Nowadays, national service represents the central pillar of the national developmental campaign known as 'Wofri Warsay Yka'alo, [the campaign of the heir who is capable] which aims to reconstruct the country devastated by the recent war. In reality, it aims above all to implement a planned economy through forced labor and to facilitate the authoritarian control of most social activities" (Rena 2008; Gaim2009; in Bozzini, 2013 p.4).

"This militarization of Eritrean society reflects the party's and government's obsession with security policies, founded in the three decades of struggle for independence and justified by the absence of a border demarcation with Ethiopia"(ibid).

Putting these points in nutshell, all stated actions are justified by the urgency to fully uphold the regulation of national identity. History is served as a toolbox to legitimate the task shaping the present. The historical achievements by EPLF against the so-called 'Ethiopian colonialism' are

as the proudest accomplishment ever and all rules and regulations that are passed by the elite nationalists are supposed to be accepted without ever questioning them. People who provide different opinion are accused as criminals and face different sufferings. Here the national history is used as means of the legitimization of any act of implementation. One of the FGD group describes the situations as following:

“If you show any end of rejection or opposition to do what you are told, you are deemed as traitor and punished as so. You cannot question anything. We are told that we have proudest history in the world and we are always reminded that it is our turn now to do the same. Personal interests have no place in today’s Eritrea. No place indeed!”

Two Eritrean singers named Taniqo and Wedi Tikabo, sung a song which supports the aforementioned point. The song and its translation in English are put as follows:

*ከምቀደምናሞ ንትረረ
ተቐይሩሞ ኣብ ልዕሌና መን ዘይፈከረ
ከምቀደሙ ኣሎ ከይተቀየረ
ከምኡ እዩ ዘሎ ትወረ
መቐፀልታ ናይቲ ዝነበረ
ኣብ ኩሉ ኩርናዓት በቢእረ
ዝተገዛእናዮ ልዕሊ ዘመን
ኣሻኽ ግዜ ተናካሲ ተመን
ደቂ ዑከት ኩሎም ተናኸስቲ...
....ሰብ ከይህሉ ዝተደናገረ*

*Let’s be strong as we have always been
Who haven’t been changed and not cowed us
Nothing has changed*

*It's all the same old story
The continuation of the past
At every nook and cranny
On the era when we had been colonized
The thorny time, the biting snake...
They are children of the old crickets and they all bite...
No one shouldn't be confused... (translation mine)*

This song which is mostly played in national holidays made a reference of the past history and infers that it is the same now as it was before. It is to say that Eritrea had enemies in the past and it has also in the present against which it must be set all the time to defend for itself. This assumption has made its citizens suffer. “Eritrea set up one of the most massive youth mobilization efforts ever seen in Africa. . . . In the eye of the governing circles, the young generation has no agency and no autonomy but must continue to follow the precepts of nation building as defined by the leaders” (Abbink 2005:28, cited in Bozzini 2013: 14). Past history is serving as an instrument to darken the lives of young generation. It has deprived them from actualizing their dream and their right to live as human beings. By labeling the “the ‘others’ as threat to their national existence” they are obligated to always keep their eyes on the “others” not to live their own decent lives. Another Eritrean stated that:

“... The PFDJ regime is doing its best to realize exactly that by collecting all school children to Sawa for indoctrination in valueless extreme nationalism. The result has been so far disastrous. The young today is confused more than ever, because it has been devoid of its roots. The Eritrea they came to know is the one not to be proud of. It is a hell on earth, where they are forced into slavery like life. Don't accuse the young for not being patriotic. They don't see anything in the name –Eritrea except oppression, mistreatment, misery and shame” (Haile Yibrah, 2012 p.9).

The other obtained implication by structuring the national history is identity crisis. Consolidating this nation an Eritrean blogger states that,

“...This [Eritrean true identity] is the feeling of shame many Eritreans purposely don't want to talk about. Many Eritreans are afraid to know their identity, because if they know and accept their history they think that the independence and sovereignty of Eritrea would be compromised. In fact many Eritreans, especially the elites are not only afraid to know their true history, but they also have been concocting a false history to themselves and have been busy in deceiving others for the last thirty years with dire consequences to Eritrea's future generations and its development. Most of Eritrean elites have been working hard since the 1960s to convince the people of Eritrea and the world at large that Eritreans are of different breed, that they have no relation what so ever with the peoples of Ethiopia. They have been in complete denial about their true identity all the way through. This attitude has led to frequent conflicts with their neighbors. Here lie the reasons to the present predicaments in which Eritrea finds itself today” (Haile Yibrah, 2012, p.10).

The history that has being told in public and the actual one do not fit each other. They have been taught that their history, kinship and ancestry are different from the “others”; they are modernized than the others. It is when they found out about the “others” they get confused. A youngster in his early twenties mentioned that:

“When I was in Tessenai I grew up hearing bad things about Ethiopians. We were told that Amharas are enemies of Eritreans though out all our history. But here I found out the opposite is true.”

Based on the collected data many Eritreans do not know there were many Eritreans who had higher authority during the previous regimes. Mesfin Araya (1990) states that:

“Survey of regional representation in the highest governmental offices between 1941 and 1966 shows that Eritrea enjoyed a relative advantage compared to other Ethiopian regions, except the leading Province of Shoa. Similarly, the 1963-64 survey of secondary-school students in Ethiopia showed that Eritrea was second only to Shoa as regards numbers” (p.18-19).

However, Eritrean nationalists see Ethiopians as much colonizers as Italians, who were very segregationist, par excellence, having separate windows at post offices, separate seats in buses and separate taxis (Abbay, 1997), and prohibited Eritreans not to study more than 4th grade. The 'us' and 'the Ethiopians' tandem - obscures the modern political history of Eritrea, typical of the most nationalist literatures (Araya, 1990).

History is a segment of identity. Therefore having deformed history makes the identity questionable and thereby leads to identity confusion. Girma Asmerom, an Ambassador of Eritrea to the African Union once said: “I have reservations with history. I do not know which is fact and which is fiction ... History has no place in my mind” (Abbay, 1997 p.12).

An Eritrean interviewee highly disagrees to this notion saying:

“I’d rather prefer to know all my history, good or bad; I’d rather prefer to know the truth rather than the falsified one. One should not convince me it is for good reason. It is up to me to decide that. The past makes me think about my direction. One side of my fathers’ and grand fathers’ history is not really enough.”

No matter of the intentions of the Eritrean political archeologists, the shaped history is bringing an implication on its people. And it is not good implication indeed. It is a negative one which instigates identity crisis, being suspicious about the past and the future. Eritreans are flying out of their homeland because they start to credibility of past by using the current actions of their government as a proof. Their struggle for independence is not something to be proud of anymore because it didn’t bring anything fruitful but another era of extended suffering, oppression, death, immigration and hopelessness. Some have even started to doubt the very aim of the struggle (see Tesfatsion Medhanie, 2015).

4.1.2 The Implications of Cultural Reshaping

In the previous chapter of literature review, it is widely discussed that transnational cultures are, among other things, the weakening factors unique national identity. Another postulation is that “there is no culture or cultural identity which does not have its ‘other’ of the ‘self’ ” (Derrida 1992: 129 as cited in İnaç & Ünal, 2013). Putting these notions together, there is an assumption that if transnational cultures do exist in a nation, it is a very probable that these *transnational*

cultures will be pigeonholed as the ‘other’ of the ‘self’. The issue is no less different in Eritrea. As far as cultural reshaping is concerned, several tasks have been done. One instance is naming. This differentiating by naming has several features of applying it.

The Tigrigna speakers in Eritrea are called Tigrigna. The ethnicity and the language have the same name. Many argue that this is done in order to differentiate the Tigrigna speaking people in Eritrea from the Tigrean in Tigray. Despite having the same ancestry, kinship, language and the same culture, this differentiating method is applied just because having link to Tigray can slacken the process of creating unique national identity. Supporting this notion an Eritrean from other nationality (rather than Tigrigna) mentions that:

“I don’t know any nationalities which are called by the language they speak rather than in Eritrea. I don’t know why they make ashamed. The two people are the same in terms of culture, religion and language. Even if they have any cultural differences they are too insignificant and common in anywhere. And they are not sufficient to change the name of the nationality.”

While answering the interview questions of this thesis, Professor Tekeste Negash has used the terms “The Tigreans in Eritrea and in Northern Ethiopia”. He contends that the difference exists between the Tigrigna speakers in Eritrea and Ethiopia is as the difference which exists between different zones in Tigray. It is by no means enough to differentiate them by naming. This is the very explanation that despite the naming that are given to differentiate them they are actually of the same kinship, culture and history and as the result they should be named as such. However, this differentiating method is implemented to make a distinction on the two peoples hereby singling out those who do not fit to the national identity formation.

Another interviewee who has the knowledge of the current cultural situation in Eritrea and Tigray contends as follows,

“Some cultural aspects which are considered to be linked to be Tigrean are not welcomed in Eritrea. For instance one of the traditional musical instruments called ‘čəra’, in Amharic masinko, does not have that much acceptance in the

Tigrigna speaking society because it is considered to belong to Tigray. There are similar cases in traditional dresses too.”

Additional to the aforementioned points, many interviewees give their witness that traditional holidays are not celebrated by the media as the national holidays do. This evidence supports to the theory that in a multiethnic state, the political culture is put in priority than folk culture. This is because the very *raison d'être* of the nation is its political aspect not the cultural one. The people, if they really did, agreed to live together because they had suffered together and they succeeded in removing their common sufferings not because they have the same kinship, culture or religion for that matter. As a result of realizing the plan of creating single national identity, people are being made to prioritize the political culture at the expense of their folk culture.

Although the Tigrigna speakers in Tigray and Eritrea have very strong cultural ties which have lasted for centuries the ‘differentiation’ and ‘political culture’ has been used to separate them and thereby creating distinct national identity. The Tigrigna speakers in Eritrea are made to cut loose any connection they have with the Tigreans and instead to turn to their companions, other Eritrean ethnicities, who have different culture and kinship.

Another Eritrean female interviewee states:

“When we were back in school, Arabic language was among the compulsory subjects. However our parents wouldn’t want us to learn it because they considered it as one of the ways of Arabazation of Eritrean people.”

It is the argument of the researcher that using Gregorian calendar is another divisive instrument to differentiate the Eritrean people by means of culture from Ethiopian in general and, from the Tigrean particularly. Abbay (2001) asserts this point arguing that:

“They [Eritrean nationalists] prefer to scour the colonial era for symbolism so much so the more the Italian heritage faded to the annals of history, the more fanciful the claim of Western heritage became. For instance, the Gregorian calendar with January 1 as its New Year has been adopted, although native Eritreans have never used it. They use the Ethiopian (Geez) calendar with September 11 as their New Year” p.31.

In order to acquire evidence to this view the researcher asked two Eritreans the same question “on which exact date do celebrate New Year, on September 11 or January?” The first informant, aged 41 said “Before Independence September 11 used to be celebrated both as New Year and Kidus Yohannes, (in Amharic Enqutatash). But after Independence it has become only a religious holiday, Kidus Yohannes.)”

Another young informant, aged 24, replied to the same question by saying “we have been holidaying New Year on 1st of January. When I come here [to Ethiopia] it is deferent. How come to people who speak the same language have different New Year”.

The informants commented on this process of shaping the cultural identity contending that holidays are being made to be only religious. Their cultural features are being trivialized. As culture and religion are intertwined, making them mutually exclusive has serious consequences. The incumbent government of Eritrea has been implementing the plan of altering folk cultures by civic and political ones. A participant of Focus Group discussion of suggested the ensuing opinion:

“I want to know my culture. I want my kids to now our true tradition. I want to have complete identity As much as I want to be modernized and connected with other world. What is the problem of using Geez calendar, even if it is supposed to be Ethiopian calendar? Irrespective to the dogmatic approach of PFDJ, I strongly believe that Geez calendar is originally Eritrean as much as it is Ethiopian.”

On the contrary, another informant argues that:

“In Eritrea there are many ethnicities other than Tigrigna speakers. The Geez calendar is religious calendar that serves for the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Muslims have Hegira calendar. You can't tell them to use Geez calendar. So using Gregorian calendar for all national and administrative issues is a good solution to mediate the differences.”

Be that as it may, this is not enough reason to limit the use of Geez Calendar. The Hegira calendar doesn't have cultural aspects as the Geez calendar does. Moreover, there are Muslim

societies such as the Tigre and the Jeberti which have close cultural ties with Tigrigna speakers. The Ethiopian Muslims also use Geez calendar as cultural calendar. Besides using alien calendar as means of lingua franca indicates that there is some sense of ambivalence in the willingness of to live together.

Even though, nowadays, economic relationships seem to override culture in shaping the destiny of nations, nations prefer to be linked economically with those who have close cultural relations. The USA and UK, the Arab countries, the Commonwealth member countries are classic examples of this perspective. In a similar vein, the cultural and historical relationship of the Eritrean and Ethiopian people should be used as vehicle to create economic and social connection between them. The rich cultural and linguistic relations between the Eritrean and the Ethiopian people should not be regarded as liability to national identity of Eritreans. This notion is well-put by an Eritrean as ensuing:

“Young Eritreans need not more of nationalism and isolation. They need to know about their real history and about their cultural values. They need to know more about their relations with peoples living across the borders, about tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Today is the era of integration, not of isolation” (Haile Yibrah, 2012).

4.2 The Implications of Reconstructing Eritrean National Identity vis-à-vis Ethiopian People

Many scholars argue that nationalist ideologist tend to be severely xenophobic and extremist (see İnaç & Ünal, 2013). As no national identity stands by itself, there need to be some “other” which is despised, denigrated and against which the national identity can compare or defend itself. However, this practice of making discrepancies by using the ‘Us-them’ delineation results exclusion, suspicion and animosity towards the others.

The findings of this research indicate that this assumption is becoming in Eritrea. Having extreme antagonistic attitude against Ethiopians is considered as unflinching loyalty to the Eritrean identity. For instance, during the referendum in 1993 the Eritreans who voted to stay with Ethiopia had become the victims of eviction and sufferings. First of all, the referendum had

only two options; freedom or slavery (Tesfu Alitaseb 2015). Staying with Ethiopia is taken as willing to be slave. The people who chose that option were treated as such. The fate was the same for the Ethiopians who have lived their entire life in Eritrea. They were deported because they were deemed as anomalies for the Eritrean national identity. The strength of Eritrean Identity is constructed on condemn the “others”. And the “others” are not Sudanese, Egyptian, or not even Italian. The “others” are Ethiopian.

Essayas Afewerki once said that “If a European nation did to us what the Ethiopians did in 1962, it would have been universally condemned by African states” (Araya 1990 p.11). In the EPLF manifesto, as stated in Araya (1990), Eritrea was the colony of Ethiopia. Ethiopians in general and the Amharas in particular, are hereby described as oppressor, cruel, and expansionist. Many Eritreans still depict ordinary Ethiopians as such. As the result of this depiction in their mind, some of them have already conceived a strong sentiment of hatred and hostility. There are some people in Eritrea who believe that Ethiopians are just as bad as their past governments. An Eritrean informant expresses that:

“It is when I met people who have been in Ethiopia that I found out the very truth about Ethiopians. We have been told that Ethiopians are our historical enemies because they deprived us of our freedoms, our rights to use our language. We have been told that they are the main threats of our existence. But when I first met people who have lived in Ethiopia and later when I come here I found out that the truth is quite the opposite.”

The two aforementioned Eritrean singers, called Taniqo and Wedi Tikabo, have reflected about what Eritrean youngsters should be cautious on their song named, ‘Kemu’eyu zelo twere’ meaning “the rumor is as it has been”. Some epics of the song and their translation are translated as follows;

ከምቀደምናም ንትረረ ተቐይሩም ኣብ ልዕሌና መን ዘይፈከረ

ከምቀደሙ ኣሎ ከይተቀየረ ከምኡ እዩ ዘሎ ትወረ

መቐፀልታ ናይቲ ዝነበረ ኣብ ኩሉ ኩርናዓት በቢእረ

ዝተገዛእናዮ ልዕሊ ዘመንኣሻኽ ግዜ ተናካሲ ተመን

*ደቂ ዑከት ኩሎም ተናኸሱት መን ይደቅሱ ድቃሱ ከሊኦምና
ረጋገና ከምሳ ዘይነበረ መን ይኣምኖ ሕብረ እንተቆየረ
ሰብ ከይህሉ ዝተደናገረ ርግቢ ኣይኮነን ኩሉ ዝነፈረ
ፋይዳ ኣይበሉን ጩኻን ዝጠበረ ቁርሲ መዓር ምሳሕ ድራር ዕረ*

*Let's be strong as we have always been, who haven't been changed and not
cowed us
Nothing has changed, it's all the same old story
The continuation of the past, at every nook and cranny
On the era when we had been colonized, the thorny time, the biting snake...
They are children of the old crickets and they all bite...
How can one sleep, they deprive us of sleep...
As if he was not our oppressor...who can trust him even if he altered his colour
Any one shouldn't be perplexed; every flying bird is not a dove
There is no benefit of taking care of the cruel but honey for breakfast and aloe for
lunch and dinner (translation mine)*

The lyrics of the song are written not just for entertainment and dance. It is aimed to ignite strong feeling of national identity by hating the “others” and by being proud of not being them. The song is mostly played on Independence Day and other similar national holidays. Every lyric of the song has a point of reference to the past and conveys what should be now. The song is written to resonate with past deeds and hereby conveying the youngsters should be always wary of these “historical” enemies.

An interviewee, who has published a book on the past and present relationship of Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples, has articulated a similar idea saying:

“There are many media programs that denigrate the Ethiopian people. Children are being taught that Ethiopians are their sworn enemies. They [Eritrean political archaeologists] do not want them to know anything good about Ethiopia. On the television, on the radio and other mass media Ethiopians are bad people who can never be trusted. For instance, in children programs like Wari, the Eritrean

soldiers with higher authorities tell the children how they killed and expatriated the Ethiopians. When these children grow up it is straightforward that they will have a strong feeling of hatred against any Ethiopian.”

Here the pith of the argument is being that the mechanisms that are used to create Eritrean identity eschew the rich relationships with the Ethiopian people and, have an obstinate, narrow collective self definition. Consequently one of the spillover effects is described here. Many Eritreans have strong feeling of anger and rage just because they think what they heard is true. This opinion is succinctly expressed by an Eritrean in an article as following:

“Most of Eritrean elites have been working hard since the 1960s to convince the people of Eritrea and the world at large that Eritreans are of different breed, that they have no relation what so ever with the peoples of Ethiopia. This attitude has led to frequent conflicts with their neighbors. Here lie the reasons to the present predicaments in which Eritrea finds itself today” (Haile Yibrah, 2012).

In addition to the antagonism and attendant conflicts, the repercussions have been more than that. For instance, the incumbent government of Eritrea has been using the Ethio-Eritrean border war as means to prove the righteousness its national ideology. It has been using as evidence that any Ethiopian administration is a threat to Eritrea. The war is manipulated and given other agenda (See Clapham, 2001) and as a reason to hate Ethiopians. These all deeds are the earmark of Us-them identity constructions and its attendants.

In the eye of nationalist Eritreans, Ethiopians are always labeled as bad neighbors who dream of the lands, and belongings of Eritrean people. According to Breuilly, to the degree that the essence and culture of nationalism is rigidly exclusive and defines its membership in terms of alienation and narrowly based common culture, nationalism tends to be xenophobic, authoritarian, and expansionist (İnaç & Ünal, 2013). As widely elucidated above the Eritrean nationalism is one of its kinds, if not exact.

4.3 The Implications of Reconstructing Eritrean national Identity on Peace and Stability of the Horn Africa

The Horn of Africa has been prone to conflicts. Due to its nature of multi-ethnic societies, among other things, many wars had been fought. The Ethiopian civil war, the Ethio- Somalia war, the Eritrean war for independence and the Ethio-Eritrea border war are good examples of the statement. Recently, Eritrea have been considered as belligerent country because its action toward other countries. (International Crisis Group, 2010). Two devastating wars had been waged between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Eritrea's relations with Sudan have been in ebb and flow. Yemen and Eritrea fought a brief but intense war over the Hanish Islands in 1996. There have also been disputes with Djibouti, including minor border clashes in 1996 and 1998. Relations collapsed during the war with Ethiopia, when Eritrea considered Djibouti an Ethiopian stooge. Eritrea has been warned to stop its military support for the Jihadist group Al-Shabab. At the result, many sanctions have been imposed against Eritrea. The sanctions enforce for a weapons embargo, a freezing of assets, and a travel ban on civilian and military leaders and associated business people (Bereketeab, 2013). The member states of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) had reached a consensus on Somalia policy, prompting Eritrea to abandon the organization ((International Crisis Group, 2010). However, the government has been using the situation to convince the people that the whole world is against their country.

During its armed struggle for independence, the EPLF is convinced that the AU (and its OAU predecessor), like the UN, has never supported it and cannot be trusted. The president of Eritrea has criticized the organizations many times. Helping rebel and terrorist groups has seemed to be one of the ways to show their grudge to the international community in general and to the Horn of Africa in particular. Due to its stubborn national ideology,“ the EPLF's foreign policy is dominated by a political culture characterized by deep-seated militarism, in internal as well as external dealings, suspicion of outsiders, however defined, and long cycles of violence in the region” (Ibid, p.29).

As the national identity of Eritrea is assured to be achieved by means of militarism, the Eritrean government has still the position that they would always use military action to defend their national identity. Negotiation, economic, cultural and social relationships seem to have no place in the national identity. Building harmonious atmosphere in the region would benefit Eritrea and

the region as whole. However integration with neighbors, especially Ethiopia, is considered to weaken the sense of nationality because Ethiopians are the 'other' of Eritrean nationality. Since Eritrea considers the other neighboring countries as allies of Ethiopia, the other neighboring people are also labeled as such. This situation has installed to the successful integration and cooperation of the Region.

An informant asked about this idea pointed out that:

“We live now in the era of integration. Countries of the world are working mutually. You can see the European Union. People from different countries are using one Visa. But here, Eritrea has become a siege state. The rigid Us-them ideology of the EPLF is causing troubles to the stability of the harmony of the region. People need to work on what make them similar not on what them distinct. Searching for distinction by itself is usually a source of disagreement and hostility.”

The researcher is on the same page with the opinion of the informant. The despotic rule and its attendant obstinate nationalist attitudes in Eritrea have caused many thousands of Eritrean refugees to come to the region. These states of affairs have been scourges that affect the livelihood of the society of the region. Due to arrogant and xenophobic nature of the Eritrean national identity the troubles have not been confined in the Eritrean territory. The whole region has also become the victim. The war in Somalia, the occasional skirmishes with Ethiopia and Djibouti have resulted in exile and suffering of the people. For what's worse, it can be even catastrophic.

Bereketeab (2013) argues that the sanctions imposed on the Eritrean government have the potential to put the lives of Eritrean people at risk. He contends that there is a real risk that the outcome of the sanctions could be the collapse of the Eritrean state. The damage is not just only to Eritrea but also to the Horn African and to the world in general. Having failed state in the region will have catastrophic repercussions to the region. From all obtained data, the researcher has come to conclude that, the rogue behavior of the Eritrean state is emanated from the model of that the state used to build its national identity. And its belligerence results in hostility and security threats to the region.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Nation-building is an ongoing process. Any project of forming a national identity cannot be ever finished. Since Eritrea is of the result of Italian colonization, Eritrean nation formation commenced with coming of Italians. With nine ethnicities in the country, what make the ethnicities to live together are not culture, religion, language and other cultural factors but the shared predicament and the common accomplishment to remove the shared predicament. Being colonized together was the main factor to the formation of collective identity which is called national identity.

In order to forge a unique national identity in Eritrea the reshaping of history and culture take the lion's share. The EPLF, since its formation of struggle for independence, has been shaping the history of Eritrea in order to fit to its nationalist ideology. Many historical events are distorted and if dangerous for the nation identity altered by other ones. Traditions and myths have to be invented to justify the nation formation process. As a result its struggle for independence glorified and exaggerated. On the other side, historical events which encompassed other societies or do not include other ethnicities are denigrated and glossed over. For instance the rich trans-Mereb which lasted for century is denied. The historical and cultural relationship of Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples is denied and it is narrated as the two peoples lived without any contact and connection. The fact that the two peoples have similar kinship, religion, language is stubbornly underrated. In the national history of Eritrea, which is written By EPLF elite nationalists, the historical connection of Ethiopians and Eritreans is expressed as colonizer and colony. This is made to create Us-them tandem thereby creating unique national identity that includes the people who suffered together and, consequently, excludes the people who didn't.

This cultural differentiation method is employed upon the historical definition of the national identity. Transnational cultures which also exist outside of Eritrea, mainly in Ethiopia are reformed and underestimated. This is done because these transnational cultures are considered that they have the potential to weaken the unique national identity. Instead the political culture

which includes all ethnicities in Eritrea is prioritized. As no collective cultural identity stand by itself, Ethiopians are labeled as the “other” for Eritrean national identity. Underestimating the “other” is used as means of strengthening the Eritrean national identity. Many cultural values which equally belong to the two peoples are pigeonholed as ‘anti-national identity’ by other new ones.

These all tasks of abusing history, reforming folk culture, prioritizing political (civic) culture are applied so that Eritrea can have unique and firm national identity. However these processes of shaping identities have brought various implications on the people of Eritrea and their relations with Ethiopia. This divisive nature of the Eritrean national identity creates grudge, hostility and xenophobic attitudes. It has also instigated some troubles which have significant impacts on the peace and stability of the Horn of Africa.

The national service in Eritrea and its attendant consequences such as exile, death, oppression, political, cultural and, economic freedom are discussed as the main implications. Identity crisis is also another repercussion created by the shaped national identity.

Concerning with relationship of Ethiopian people the national identity of Eritrea depicts Ethiopians as historical enemies thereby creating hostility, antagonism and sense of grudge. The reason why some Eritreans still do not have good attitude about Ethiopians is because they have been told many bad things about Ethiopians for long period of time. They cannot hence change this engendered attitude.

Additionally, this process of making unique national identity by differentiation and political culture instigated consequence on the peace and stability of the Horn of Africa. The differentiation strategy of the Eritrean national identity has obligated the country to live in isolation. As the result being isolated from other parts of the region, the country has sanctioned for helping and becoming the safe host for land militant groups such as Al-shabab. The stability of the region is therefore troubled. The political, economic and social relationship of the region have somehow deterred due to lack of cooperation of Eritrean state.

5.2 Recommendations

This study is inspired by childhood memories of the researcher. The fact that he grew up listening to the Eritrea's government media made him to question everything he heard. He was always wondered that despite the culture and the language of the half Eritreans and Tigreans being the same, what would be the very motives to be presented otherwise. Therefore, this research is carried out with the intention of giving another perspective to improve the relationship of the Eritrean and Ethiopian people. It is also the researcher's belief that it might be served as a starting point to perform other similar inquiries.

The researcher is hereby calling on that the political archeologists of the Eritrean nation should dare to revisit their mechanisms of building national identity. Since it has become a source of problems for their citizens and the region, they should take actions in order to change by other model. Instead of dwelling on one "us-them" divisive system, the national identity of Eritreans should take into account of their rich past relationships with their neighbors and here should create a harmonious cultural, economic and political interaction.

The historic and cultural relations of the Eritrean people have to be widely disseminated to both peoples. It has been almost two decades since the two people stopped any kind of interaction and this have brought serious problems on both of them. The young generation knows nothing about what is actually going on both sides. This discrepancy might result in further conflict. The two people have related cultural values and historical ties more than any other people. These must be the exact time to work on their problems and make decisions benefiting for both people.

Furthermore, experienced and elite researchers should see another perspective of the dispute between the two countries and propounding significant solution for the no-peace no-war state. The researcher is calling on other researchers to find possible ways of resolving the problems of the two countries in specific and work on the maintenance of peace and stability of the region, because mostly, the future is one of our making.

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ዓለማየሁ አበበ (2006 ዓ.ም)፡፡ የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ እስካሁን ዘመን፡ በ አንድርዕይ ባርትራንስኪ እና የአና ማንቴል ኒያችኮ ተጽፎ በ ዓለማየሁ አበበ የተተረጎመ፡፡ አዲስ አበባ

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Appendix

Focus Group Discussion, Questionnaire and Interview Questions

Dear informants I would like to thank you for your willingness and taking your invaluable time to answer my questions. These questions are completely for academic purpose and there is no political or other ulterior reason for conducting this interview and discussion. Therefore I would like you to discuss all of your opinions freely.

- What are the implications of shaping identities for the Eritrean nation formation?
(positive or negative)
- How do Eritreans think about formation of their national identity?
- Do you think that there are consequences brought as the result of forging national identity? If any, in what aspects?
- How do the media and the government describe the Eritrean national identity?
- What are the perceptions of the people on that?
- Are there any attitudinal consequences toward Ethiopians?
- What do the people think about prioritizing civic culture at the expense of traditional culture?
- What are the repercussions of the 'Us-them' tandem of identity construction toward Ethiopians?
- Are there any consequences of changing cultural aspects such as calendar and holidays on the society?
- What are the roles of differentiating the culture of the Eritrean and Ethiopian, particularly Tigrean people?
- Are there any consequent upshots on the relation of the two people?
- Is there any way of possibility that this differentiating aspect can be harbinger of conflict and thereby instigate potential violence?
- Do you think there are any cultural similarities between Ethiopians (other than Tigray) and Eritrean society?
- How do Eritreans feel on celebrating New Year on the 1st January rather than 11th September?

- What do you think about the issue of “Ethiopia colonized Eritrea”?
- What are the possible consequences of this “distorted history”?
- Does this narrative have any means of affecting the relationship between the two people currently or in the future?
- How do you put it the relationship of the two people?
- How do you feel by the name of Tigrigna that is given for the ethnicity of Tigrigna speakers in Eritrea?
- Are there any effects of this process in terms of cultural identity?
- Do you believe on the issue Ethiopia colonized Eritrea?
- If so, what sort of feeling toward Ethiopians does it create?
- Do you believe that Eritrea is promoting its civic culture at the expense traditional culture in order to create single the national identity?
- What do you think about the current Ethio-Eritrean situation?
- Do you think the use of Gregorian calendar has a role to differentiate the two people?
- What do you think about using Gregorian calendar instead of the Geez calendar in terms of losing one’s identity?
- What is your attitude toward Tigreans based on the history of Ras Alula and Emperor Yohannes IV?
- How related are the people of Eritrea and Ethiopia in terms of culture and identity?
- In what aspects are they different?

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declared that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree at any other university, and that all source of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Hailay Gebregziabher Gebremariam

June, 2016

This thesis is submitted for examination with my approval as an advisor of the candidate.

Mesfin Gebremichael (PhD)

June, 2016