

AFRICUS ERITREA



N. 10

Periodico Culturale dell'Associazione Onlus Italia Eritrea

giugno 2012



Foto Lusci



PERIODICO CULTURALE DELL'ASSOCIAZIONE
ITALIA ERITREA ONLUS
Trimestrale - Reg. Trib. di Roma 87/2005 del 9/03/2005
Piazza dell'Unità 13 - 00192 Roma
Segreteria Lun./Giov. 15.00-18.00
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**Ambasciata dello Stato
di Eritrea**



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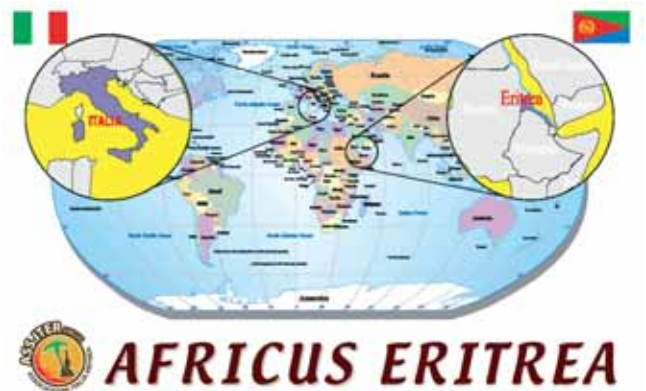
Istituto di Cultura Eritrea



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Archivio fotografico: Antioco Lusci, Michelangelo Ciminale
Progetto grafico e Stampa: Arti Grafiche San Marcello S.r.l.
Viale Regina Margherita, 176 - 00198 Roma
Abbonamento annuale euro 25,00
Ass.Iter Onlus c/c postale n. 84275023
Finito di stampare: giugno 2012
In copertina: Donna Saho, tramonto nella valle dei Sicomori
(foto Lusci)
Hanno collaborato a questo numero: Lidia Corbezzolo,
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EDITORIALE

di Lidia Corbezzolo

Carissimi Amici e carissime Amiche

Il 2012 ci vede impegnati ad implementare e sviluppare l'asilo Denden con il progetto "IL DENDEN CRESCE".

Al nostro fianco come partner l'Asilo l'Arcobalena di Roma che infaticabilmente e con grande professionalità lavora nel progetto per gli scambi culturali. Nel numero di marzo è stata riportata la prima missione effettuata per questo progetto: grazie Luisa, grazie Claudia, grazie Michelangelo.

Lo sforzo è notevole perché non mi stancherò mai di ripetere che abbiamo una grossa difficoltà nel reperire i fondi. Anche se vinciamo bandi e concorsi abbiamo un grosso ostacolo da sormontare: anticipare la somma necessaria alla realizzazione del progetto perché solo a progetto realizzato gli enti erogano la somma vinta. Quindi abbiamo bisogno del Vostro aiuto soprattutto con il 5 per mille.

Ma anche se gli sforzi da superare sono tantissimi e molte volte manca la forza fisica e psicologica per poterlo fare, con grande soddisfazione guardo il lavoro svolto in questi anni e con tranquillità posso affermare che non potevamo fare di meglio: lavoriamo gratuitamente, il nostro operato è cristallino e nel cuore abbiamo l'Eritrea e le sue genti da aiutare.

E quando i bambini festosi ci vengono incontro per darci la mano e i loro occhi morbidi e lucenti incontrano i nostri, una nuova energia ci invade e ci da il coraggio di continuare il nostro cammino per la vita.



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5X MILLE

Hai uno strumento unico per promuovere il diritto all'educazione e alla salute per i bambini e i giovani dell'Eritrea destina il 5 x mille dell'IRPEF alla nostra Associazione.

Il 5 x mille non sostituisce l'8 x mille (destinata alle confessioni religiose) e non è un costo aggiuntivo per il contribuente.

È una quota di imposte a cui lo Stato rinuncia per destinarla alle organizzazioni no-profit per sostenere le loro attività.

Trasforma la denuncia dei redditi in una dichiarazione di solidarietà per i bambini e i giovani dell'Eritrea

Ecco come fare: Firma nel riquadro della dichiarazione dedicato alle organizzazioni Non Lucrative, riporta sotto la firma il codice fiscale dell'ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIA ERITREA ONLUS C.F. 96 10 45 30 587

Foto: by David Bellone - Riprodotto da www.assiter.org e www.assiter.com

FINE DEL MAI TAÇLI. GRAZIE, MARCELLO!

di Cristoforo Barberi

Cessa le pubblicazioni, con l'ultimo numero del 2011 dopo trentaquattro anni di vita ufficiale, il periodico bimestrale Mai Taçli che significa, nella lingua locale: alla lettera "acqua chiara" e nell'accezione "fonte pura". Lo dichiara il Direttore in modo inaspettato e repentino, un fulmine a ciel sereno!

La fonte quindi si è esaurita, prosciugata come spesso accade in Africa, il deserto avanza!

Il giornale ha dato voce, per tutti questi anni, alla Comunità Italiana dell'Eritrea (1889-1975) e non solo; ha consentito a tutti di esprimersi, di immedesimarsi, di ritrovarsi e di ricordare. Il Mai Taçli ha rappresentato, per tutto questo tempo, l'anima collettiva della Comunità sopravvissuta all'esodo (1941-1975) da quelle terre.

Il nostro giornale ha pubblicato immagini belle, sempre significative, a volte rarissime; ha rinverdito, ampliato, a volte corretto la Storia che ci riguarda; non avrà mai il successo universale che gli sarebbe spettato ma conserverà la riconoscenza e l'amore di chi è nato o vissuto in Eritrea o di chi ci ha conosciuto apprezzandoci. Tutti aspettavamo con ansia l'arrivo del Giornale.

A tutti noi ha regalato, ogni anno, calendari bellissimi, sempre in tema e relativi a quel periodo storico che, nonostante tutto, noi amiamo e non potremo mai dimenticare.

Ci ha catalogati, seguiti, ha permesso per il suo tramite che ci ritrovassimo annualmente organizzando il Raduno della Comunità, che pur

andava assottigliandosi, in varie belle zone d'Italia a partire dal 1975 e per ben trentasette anni.

Ha organizzato raccolte di grandi ricchezze per sostenere attività a sfondo sociale, educativo e di amicizia con la nuova Eritrea e per mantenere almeno le più sacre vestigia della nostra presenza.

Noi Asmarini, Italiani d'Eritrea, abbiamo fatto poco perché questa Istituzione, non la chiamo più "giornale", sopravvivesse ed abbiamo fatto nulla nei confronti dell'Uomo che questa Istituzione ha incarnato: Marcello Melani e dei suoi (pochi) più stretti collaboratori. Anzi alcuni, a volte, hanno osato criticarlo; critiche che però si scontravano con la sua generosa signorilità e con il suo fine sarcasmo toscano.

Marcello Melani, a noi tutti noto come il Signor Direttore, è stato forse lasciato solo ed ha retto sin che ha potuto.

Perdonaci Marcello, ma almeno un GRAZIE, oltre la stima ed il bene che ti vogliamo, ce lo consentirai ed è un GRAZIE non sussurrato, ma gridato ai quattro venti. Un GRAZIE che deve essere testimoniato a tutte le altre organizzazioni, associazioni, enti che hanno a cuore la Storia della Comunità Italiana dell'Eritrea e non solo, che archiviano e consultano l'opera tua e che vedono, purtroppo, cessare la tua Istituzione.

THE HIGH HOISTED BANNER OF PRIDE AND GLORY

by *Meron Abraba*



About a week ago, talking with a journalist friend about the Independence Day Anniversary celebrations, he happened to mention that he was preparing a television segment on the

Eritrean flag. Curiosity got the best of me and I started wondering, there and then, how much I, or anybody else for that matter, knew about subject.

If I were to say that there are people who don't know what the Eritrean flag looks like or what the colors stand for, I would be making the biggest understatement of the century. And that would make me totally way out of line.

But as regards questions pertaining to the origins of the Eritrean flag; the significance of the geometric symbols; the flag's code of conduct; and so on... then perhaps things could get a little bit tricky.

The questions are really not that many but unfortunately neither were the people who knew all the right answers. And that's what got me writing this piece on flags today.

If we were to talk about how flags originated in the first place, we would have to go way back in time to ancient history when flags were nothing

but simply decorative streamers, or perhaps just ceremonial images. They were usually respected in the

same manner as the person or thing that they represented.

Theories abound that flags were most likely developed long ago as something soldiers could recognize as their own during a war. In the thick dusty air of battles for instance, soldiers had trouble staying with their group so they would look up in the sky, see their flag waving through the air, and then could get back with their fellow combatants. The loss of a flag was a severe blow in a battle while the capture of the opponents' flag could be a turning point in that battle.

The modern flag is said to have arisen in the seventeenth century, with the creation of the first modern states. Countries made flags an important aspect of their official identity.

Flags are used by countries for other reasons beyond just having something to fly in the air. A flag in fact represents an idea, or an ideal for that matter. It is neither a mere piece of decoration, nor an object to be honored for itself. It is honored for what it represents. Many flags are held in high esteem for their history; for the sacrifices made by the people; for the qualities for which the country and people stand. These flags represent a nation at international podiums, global conferences and other occasions held at the international level.

The Eritrean flag, the core issue of my article, is indeed the proud possessor of these traits and else. Divided into segments by a red triangle based on the hoist, the Eritrean flag comprises of three triangles with green, blue and red colors.

There is a yellow wreath with an upright branch in the center and this whole motif is placed in the hoist-



side of the red triangle. The upper segment is green and the lower blue.

This national banner, or the current flag of the State of Eritrea, has the same basic layout of the flag of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which has a yellow star at the hoist instead of the yellow wreath.

But Eritrea had its own sovereign flag and emblem as far as back in the 1950s. Following the temporary British administration until 1952, a UN mandate federated Eritrea with Ethiopia, consenting for Eritrea to retain limited control over its local affairs. And it was then that the Eritrean flag with a blue field and a green emblem, depicting an upright olive wreath and a single branch within, was adopted.

Although the origins of this blue flag are not conspicuously clear, documentations from that period reveal that the late Mohammed Omer Hakito, one of the prominent political leaders of the 1950s, had proposed a light blue flag with seven stars in the middle. The proposal was fiercely debated upon in the Eritrean Parliament, whose members finally voted unanimously for the blue field flag with a green olive wreath emblem in the middle to be the official flag of the State of Eritrea.

There are also assumptions suggesting that the blue flag was donated by the UN, which enforced its will on Eritrea through its commissioner, Anze Matienzo, the Bolivian appointed to oversee the Federation's implementation and draft its constitution. These assumptions however, hardly hold water.

This flag was used until the end of the 1950s, when the territory was absorbed and then forcibly annexed into Ethiopia. This triggered the armed struggle for independence.

The blue and green Eritrean flag, however, continued to be in use as the "flag of liberation" until the 1970s, until the EPLF officially came to being and proposed its own flag during the front's First Organizational Congress in 1977.

The EPLF's flag is dominated by a red triangle extending from the hoist to the fly

(right) with complementary green and blue triangles above and below respectively. A yellow star is placed in the red triangle.

The colors and symbols that constitute a flag are illustrations of the idea or thought that make up the ideals of a country. Also reflected in the design is the patriotism and pride of the people of the country.

Accordingly, the green stands for the fertility of the country; blue stands for the sea; and red for the blood lost in the fight for freedom. The yellow star has double meanings: the color represents the mineral resources of Eritrea while the five corners of the star stand for Equality, Unity, Liberty, Justice and Prosperity respectively (and not necessarily in the same order).

The Eritrean flag from 1952 and that of the EPLF coexisted as the flags of Eritrea until independence and the subsequent referendum in 1993. When Eritrea finally took its rightful place in the world, following its declaration as an independent and sovereign country on May 24, 1993, the new National Flag that flew in the air was in fact the EPLF's flag with the wreath and upright olive branch symbol derived from the 1952 flag replacing the yellow star.

Because a flag is a country's way of portraying itself to the rest of the world, time, energy and creativity is invested in its design.

Vexillology, the discipline that deals with the scientific study of the history, symbolism, and usage of flags or any interest in flags in general, tries to promote flag design principles based on a body of research on flag history and design. And some of the prominent examples of these principles are:

1. *Keep It Simple*: the flag should be so simple that a child can draw it from memory.
2. *Use Meaningful Symbolism*: the flag's images, colors, or patterns should relate to what it symbolizes.
3. *Use few Basic Colors*: limit the number of colors on the flag to few colors that contrast well and come from the standard color set.
4. *No Lettering or Seals*: never use writing of any kind or an organization's seal.

5. *Be Distinctive or Be Related*: avoid duplicating other flags, but use similarities to show connections.

I am not a *vexillophile*, and definitely not a *vexillologist*, but I was excited to find out that our flag indeed complies, to the letter I might add, to these principles. Children can in fact draw it with ease, the colors are in good contrast with each other; there is no lettering of any kind; and it is very distinct.

I didn't forget the fifth one. I instead saved it for last because when it comes to meaningful symbolism, the patterns in our flag have their own story to tell.

The yellow wreath symbol in the red triangle has 12 leaves on each side, with six more on the upright branch in the middle, totaling altogether to 30, which is the number of years of the armed struggle for liberation that the Eritrean people had to endure.

That's not all. The red triangle, which has its base at the hoist, extends towards the left representing the **declining** amount of blood spilt for the independence and sovereignty of the country. The complimentary green and blue triangles either sides of the red triangle represent the **growing** amount of fertility as well as land bounty on one hand and the vast marine resources and clear (unpolluted) skies respectively.

A flag can be unifying to a country, as it is the case in Eritrea, which can look to its flag flown high above the landscape in times of trouble and remember that the country will indeed go on. People that have never met before can feel unity towards one another knowing that they're part of the same country and fly the same flag. It makes all Eritrean citizens feel like part of one team.

One of the persons to whom I ventured my questions about the significance of a flag is a high school teacher in Asmara. I have known him to be a man of rather unusual principles in life, and, true enough to his character, dismissed the importance of having a flag at all.

He was of the belief that the world was like one big village and there is no need of differentiating one another with flags and symbolic representations. He was adamant that flags were nothing but mere symbols and that people could in fact identify with each other through their cultural practices and languages.

His quite relevant knowledge of political science, despite having majored in physics, hindered me from trying to convince him otherwise. I could only wonder what would the women, who dress up and braid their hair in the colors of the Eritrean flag, say to him if they ever confronted him.

And talking about dressing up in the colors or patterns of our national flag, I think it's worth mentioning that people do that because they equate the flag with the country they love. But as far as international codes of conduct of flags are concerned, flags should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery. But then of course, it wouldn't be completely misguided to feel its wearing as a mark of patriotism, although some of us feel very differently about this issue. The very conservative recommend the use of patches and pins as appropriate, respectful and patriotic for people who want to display the flag on a personal level.

At any rate, the fact remains that to fly the national flag is a sign of pride and patriotism. It is a positive affirmation of loyalty and commitment. It marks out a country that has confidence in itself, and is comfortable with its place in the world, its history and its future.

Taking into consideration the importance of our flag, its deep significance, and of course the fact that the respect for the flag is one indication of patriotism, my journalist friend had raised an important question in the end of his program:

Shouldn't we dedicate a National Day in honor of our flag?

A timely question, I dare say!

VOLUNTEERISM, THE HEART OF INDIPENDENCE

by *Daniel Semere*



An Eritrean writer once stated his dilemma in writing a fiction book out of the Eritrean struggle for independence by saying “There are many real stories, but how can one make them seem more fictional. Many of the stories are simply unbelievable.” That is why, he explained, he finally resorted writing the stories of selfless commitment of the then Eritrean youth as they are. That is perhaps why one can not get enough of hearing the stories of the struggle told again and again.

One of the hallmarks of Eritreans’ struggle for independence was the unmatched voluntarism that was displayed by the complete selflessness and commitment of the youth. It has been said time and again that the real strength of the Eritrean struggle was not the modern weapons, or the alliance with the then superpower or any external help. One of the fundamental sources of strength of the Eritrean struggle was the selfless commitment of the Eritrean youth that prevailed over the seemingly impossible task. Indeed among the pillars of our principles was the belief in the decisive role of human factor proving what many have argued that voluntary associations contributes to the quality and strength of a society.

It is perhaps, precisely for the above fact that one can tell the success or failure of any endeavor, be it in revolutions or development effort, way before it ends. For the initiated it was not difficult to foretell the failure of America’s infantry in Vietnam, or even in

Afghanistan and Iraq. The terrible failures of the various civil wars and some of the so called struggle for liberation of suppressed sections of society can be explained by the lack of voluntarism on the part of the participants. This might be due to lack of belief in the cause of the struggles or lack of faith in the motive; nonetheless the result strengthens the above argument that with out the heart of a volunteer, no major success can be achieved. If we ask for the failure of grand schemes and excellent policies to materialize on the ground, we would invariably find that it lacks the participation of the people full heartedly.

There is nothing stronger than the hearts of volunteers. And if there is anything the voluntarism in our struggle for independence has taught us, is that nothing is impossible. The Eritrean youth have historically been at the centre of social change. Just like in the struggle times, after independence also they have played a catalytic role in the humongous task of nation building; in the re-construction of the Eritrean economy and infrastructure, and in the many extended social services. They have also paid with their life in the defense of the nation and sacrificed a lot. What made all these endeavors successful and effective is that it addressed the heart of the problem that concerns the entire people, and hence it invoked the voluntarism and civic participation. All these benefits are attributed to the voluntary organization of the youth because it increased and enriched the stock of social capital that a society possesses.

The concern now should be the maintenance of the voluntary participation of the youth. Because as far as voluntarism is concerned

there is a global concern that large section of the youth particularly those who live in rural areas have become marginalized and are not effectively participating in the transformation process. In these countries the failure of the most promising and largest population to participate constructively in the socio-economic transformation of their society could undoubtedly cause a deep frustration for many young people. Indeed in many developing and even developed nations this frustration has been the main cause of frustration that in many cities it is causing the growing levels of youth crime and violence, growing levels of drug and alcohol abuse, increased level of HIV/AIDS incidents, lack of discipline at school etc. All these can undoubtedly affect the social fabric of the society that will eventually lead to destruction.

Eritrea has depended much on the voluntarism of its youth. And now, more than any other time, in the face immense challenge this reliable source of strength is needed. The trick in prevailing over these challenges lies in maintaining and augmenting youth involvement in the national development discourse and implementation. However the involvement of youth in the unfolding development processes should not be always be induced from above. Our youth should proactively seek to be part of the process of development through their participation. It is this voluntarism of our youth that has been the critical interventions in our struggle so far. And it is the most reliable guarantee of the nation's endeavor in search of economic liberation and independence. Maintaining this in the heart of our youth is all we have to do to see it accomplish miracles for times to come.

Daniel Semere, is a researcher at Research and Documentation Center, he is also a columnist in Eritrean profile.

SEIZING OPPORTUNITY. A SUCCESS STORY OF AN ERITREAN YOUTH

by *Daniel Semere*



Born into a family in a village called Ala Bolosto, 30 kilometres north of Dekemhare, in a time when Eritrea was still under the occupation of an alien power, with no viable infrastructure for education, the challenge could only be humongous for Said Mohammed Ali. But what would anyone do if that person has a burning desire and an insatiable appetite for knowledge and more knowledge. What could that person do if sheer curiosity for new things and experiences prods that person every time he or she met a challenge? Of course the person would try to utilize everything she or he could find to acquire new things and knowledge no matter how limited that could be or how hard it is to find. For Said it meant walking as far as 30 kilometres, to the nearest library, every now and then to supplement whatever was given to him in a classroom and search for anything new. It might not be surprising that in such situation in a given place, such a person would usually ace most subject and amass the top ranks in a class. Said would always get first up to third ranks in his elementary education. It may now be proved that ranks meant of little significance as far as knowledge is concerned. But back then it was considered to be a quality of a genius. But still it wouldn't make news when it comes to Said, for his effort and desire was conspicuous and visible and hence his achievement expected. However, if any person who has a tendency of good understanding in a classroom could somehow keep his curiosity, it is almost certain that that person is bound to achieve something. And

that was what young Said was able to do as he left his village to study his junior and secondary education in Dekemhare Comprehensive Secondary School. If there is a curiosity to instigate something and perseverance to keep and work hard to attain it, one would definitely advance. In his 8th grade biology class Said somehow took an interest in taxonomy and set out to prove whether a certain worm, generally believed by the society as naturally unable to see, could actually have a sight or not. This task might seem formidable and even ambitious. And if we consider the realities in Eritrea that there are very few laboratories with which one could test and experiment one's hypothesis, the task taken by Said could as well be considered impossible. The significance of this task of his is however, the initiative and the audacity to think big on any task his curiosity brought to his attention and the perseverance he kept on as his study continues for a couple of years. It was this quality of his that made him exceptionally good in Maths. Here was a subject that doesn't demand much, if some books could be provided. Of all the subjects Said attended, Math was one where material for experiment, in this case books, are available and could be accessed with relative ease. And even this, he sometimes had to go to the



libraries in Asmara for materials. These relative advantages combined to set him in a project of developing his own Theorem while he was in grade 11. This was a task that was going to take three years; two in formulating a sound idea and hypothesis and one in proving it. After three years of tenacious and painstaking work, Said is now the discoverer of two new Theorems.

From the household mathematical formula of Pythagoras, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$, Said has been able to derive and discover two new Theorems; the double angle triangle theorem and the triple angle triangle theorem.

Said's Theorem I
Double Angle Triangle Theorem
 $C^2 = a^2 + ab$

Said's Theorem II
Tripled Angle Triangle Theorem
 $(c^2 - a^2) (ca) = b^2a$

Just like any other theorems, these theorems, Said believes, are also going to contribute in various fields and areas like navigation, survey, astronomy, physics, engineering, maths, and solving other problems.

All along this journey, he said it took nothing but hard work. He seems to have proved this assertion and we can take a note of the process he had to go through even after he proved his new discovery. After Said formulated the idea, the next step was unclear; 'I didn't know where to go to verify my discovery' Said recalls. With the help of a teacher he finally was able to publicize his findings in a seminar in the College of Health and Science. And in March 2010 he was able to contact the Pan African Journal based in Nigeria via the internet to get acknowledgement for his work. After three months of waiting the journal notified him that his work has

been awarded a provisional acceptance with full acceptance due very soon.

This discovery affirms once again that hard work always yields an outcome that makes everyone proud. It also recognizes that Eritrea and Eritreans are capable of making contribution in the field of science. However, its important significance is the wonder it provokes as what Eritrean students could accomplish had our schools been fully equipped with laboratories and necessary materials. It should also be noted that there has to be a system through which such people like Said could be encouraged and given the ground. If nothing, they shouldn't wander confused where to verify their experiment when they did have one. Our colleges should be crafted in such a way to address such issues.

To his Eritrean younger brothers and sisters, Said can be an inspiration. If a person, who came from a house where there was no books but the Koran, can accomplish this, then it might be worth asking what we should and could do with what we have. As Said put it in his life guiding motto 'some things are difficult but not impossible.' That is what we, the youth, need to get and understand. After all 'geniuses are those who have been given opportunity and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them'. It is nothing more and nothing less.



Daniel Semere, is a researcher at Research and Documentation Center, he is also a columnist in Eritrean profile.

MESOB: THE SYMBOL OF AFFLUENCE AND PROSPERITY

by *Sirak Kbrom*



It is one of the various Eritrean traditional handicrafts made of the palm raffia, adorned in a diversity of colors and accomplished through efforts of creativity. This beautiful household utensil, where food (injera – the sourdough flatbread) is kept or even a traditional Tigrigna dish is served is Mesob, or the breadbasket.

Its name has been used for long as an idiom for prosperity and affluence as it is the hub of food security among the Tigrigna society in particular. Thus describing Mesob as a symbol of Eritrean prosperity, unity and creativity would only be doing it justice.

When Eritrea presented its cultural artifacts at the 2010 World Expo in China, the Mesob, beyond the expectations of the organizers, was among the biggest attractions. Undoubtedly, Mesob has the artistic touch and beauty. Whether it has food in its bosom or not the Mesob is always at prosperity in its traditional beauty.

The way the Mesob impressively stands straight hints perhaps to its primarily intended design to stand as a perfect symbol of affluence. Looking at it with analytical eyes, it looks like a champion of artisanship. Wide at its base, it goes on narrowing until its waist. But the head appears again to be the widest circular structure. This bestowed it the structure of a woman

with tight waist, giving the dexterity of art as though it was born out of thoughtful attempt of a professional architect. Moreover, the structure resembles the traditional way of dressing of Tigrigna women, which again stands as a token of beauty. As you proceed from just seeing to looking, you can't help noticing the secret symbol of the society: the circle. Most other household items are based in circular structure, the Mogogo (clay oven), the Kitcha (the traditional bread), the Tsahli (traditional earth ware casserole) and the Injera itself all feature a circular structure. It then dawns on you that this is simply the traditional invention of the Eritrean mother who, apparently, didn't have any idea of designing.

Many years ago, an Eritrean mother had to come up with something that would serve her as storage for injera, her most delicate food. And she had to do it with materials readily accessible to her. So she came up with the idea of using the palm raffia (or the fiber from its leaves). She split it into tiny strands and made tiny bundles, wrapped them with a straw fiber, which she then wove together to make the beautiful Mesob.

Looking at the intricate process of making a Mesob, one can only imagine that it might have taken a very long time. A woman can complete one Mesob in around five months. And this is taking into account the fact that the mother only does it in her part time, after a tiresome day of domestic chores. But the beauty is worth the wait. The mother takes one stitch at a time understanding one of best nature's secret that time and patience always reward their clients.

It seems as though Mesob was deliberately made to denote the unity that Eritreans proudly boast, as one discovers that Mesob takes part in the culture that incorporates harmony and togetherness: the Meadi. If a western invention provided us with the dining table to gather around for a meal, a traditional family of the Tigrigna society would use Mesob. While the sunken top of the Mesob serves as food basin, usually another Mesob is there to perform as a

tabletop where everybody gathers around. As everyone extends his hand to take his share from the food provided over the Mesob, it's as if some sort of gravitational force draws everybody to integrate.

It is not an arbitrary choice then, for Eritreans to attempt to symbolize their unity and prosperity with this simple but ponderous invention.



Sirak Kbrom, is a program producer for EriTv and regularly contributes articles to Shaebia.org.

QUEST FOR FINDING TOMORROW'S STAR

by Meron Abraba



Doesn't it seem just like yesterday when we had two seasons of Shingrwa looking for a star that couldn't be found? Well, after Shingrwa judges

revealed that this time around the coveted "star" was indeed found, the only suspense that hung in the air at the packed hall of Cinema Roma this past Sunday, April 15, was who would stand as the winner following the six outstanding performances in the third season's finale.

I haven't been update with the previous stages of Shingrwa's third season to be able to predict which artist delivered the overall best performance. But based on some of the episodes I did manage to watch, I had quite a picture of who stood where in the competition as I waited for the anxiously awaited final stage to begin.

Coinciding with Easter Sunday, the finale for Shingrwa 2012 was, as both of its previous season finales, staged at the elegant and comfortable Cinema Roma Hall. Although I could have stayed at home and watch the whole thing live on television, I opted to go and witness the whole drama and excitement in person. There's nothing like a first-hand experience, after all!

After opening statements from the Guest of Honor and one of the judges respectively, the six finalists presented each one modern song.

Sudanese-born Simon Kahsay kicked off with a mellow rendition of one of Taniko's hit songs. He was well accepted by the audience but not any better than the contestant who succeeded him on the stage. In fact, the moment Meriem

Shawush got on stage and started singing in a highs-spirited manner, loud cheers accompanied her all the way through her song.

The enthusiasm of the audience kept momentum with Nur Osman and Abraham Haile, the singers that followed, but got to the highest level with the two final singers, Eden and Yohannes (Wedi Kerin). From the number of people who by then were standing on their feet, waving big banners with pictures of their favorite contestant, and cheering and shouting out loud from their hearts, Eden and Yohannes were probably the two singers that had the biggest number of fans in the audience.

If that was cheering and support at its greatest, then words can hardly describe the thrill and excitement that ensued as the six Shingrwa finalists returned once more to the stage for a traditional song.



Each contestant tried its level best for an astonishing performance. Viewing the audience's reaction, which was also my opinion of course, I dare say Meriem was unequalled in her stage movements to her animated song. Abraham and Wedi Kerin also did a wonderful job with their *guaila* selection. Nur Osman and Eden's upbeat choice of songs saw them perform better this time around while Simon's rendition of *Habibi Teal*, earned him a big hand from the hall.

In the brief interlude where the three judges retired to deliberate on who would walk away with the coveted title, if found at all, everybody in the audience, myself included, hardly paid attention to the comedy show presented by comedian Hagos (Suzinino) but was instead busy predicting which artist would stand in which place.



The consensus was that Meriem, Yohannes, Eden and Abraham would definitely fall within the top winners' circle.

Judgment time came. Yoel Ghide, one of the three Shingrwa's judges, said that the judges had "made careful and meticulous considerations as to who would be fit for the title of Shingrwa Star," and to the utter joy of all watching and listening, he said that this year they indeed found the 'star.'

But the suspense was not yet over. The host called all contestants to the stage and after receiving a closed envelope from the judges, he announced the bottom three starting with fourth place winner Nur Osman. Eden Kesete and Abraham Haile followed as fifth and sixth place winners. The announcement was not well received by the audience. Dissatisfaction was highly visible, and the murmuring and shouts of disbelief echoed around the hall.

Shingrwa was a competition, and as in every competition, there have to be winners and losers. These three composed the latter group and were handed out monetary prizes of 5,000 Nakfa, 3,000 Nakfa and 2,000 Nakfa respec-

tively from the Director General of Eritrean Television, Mr. Asmelash Abraha.

When the second envelope, containing the name of the new star, was opened the tension and anxiety got indescribable. As previous predictions were not fulfilled, at least not to the maximum, the audience waited impatiently. Most were almost confident that Simon would be the second runner-up. And the assumptions were grounded. Simon indeed became the second runner-up, winning 50,000 Nakfa in monetary prize and a roundtrip air ticket to Sudan (his birthplace, call it coincidence or not).

After Lorenzo, the show's host du jour, proclaimed Meriem Shawush the winner of the contest and the first Shingrwa Star, pandemonium hit the stage. Meriem's fans got on stage and the host was barely audible as he called out Yohannes' name as the first runner-up and winner of 70,000 Nakfa in cash and roundtrip air ticket to Dubai.

The guest of honor, Minister Arefaine Berhe, handed out the prizes and then bestowed a sparkling glass miniature statue of a camel with



a star on top to the beaming Meriem, who surrounded by her family and fans, was literally incapable of singing one of the tunes that brought her victory that day. She went home with the coveted title, a roundtrip air ticket to Paris, France and of course a 100,000 Nakfa richer.

Most of the people I met outside the Cinema or elsewhere that day were not totally complacent with the decision. Most had hoped Yohannes would win the title this year. He was himself convinced that he would win. He was in fact heard as confidently saying that he had no doubts that he would own the title.

You can only imagine his disappointment. Pardon me, but I must say he had it coming. In his interview the day before, he appeared to be a little too full of himself. Many disapproved of that seemingly arrogant behavior, particularly coming from a young artist whose future still lies bright ahead.

Stardom in Eritrea is earned and never handed, and Meriem, against all expectations, earned her victory.

One thing however remains true: the six of them were dynamic singers and each delivered great performances. I am sure we'll be hearing many great things from them in the future.

The Eritrean music talent show, Shingrwa, which in the Bilen language means "tomorrow's star," was launched in 2007 in an effort to explore the talent pool in the country and in the process provided a platform for young and talented stars who may have lacked the opportunity to explore their potential.

While the importance of music in preserving

and promoting the culture and identity of a society is obvious, music in Eritrea has not only highlighted the people's culture, but also shaped and immortalized the different stages in their history.

The Minister of Tourism, Ms. Askalu Menkerios, during her speech at the show's second season's finale, had put it plain and simple:

"Music and other cultural activities played a decisive role in turning Eritrean cultural diversity into a blessing rather than a curse as is the case in most parts of the world."

And now Shingrwa has opened a new door in the endeavors to promote and shape the art of music in the country. Its popularity among Eritreans of all ages has enabled many of the contestants to have a broad fan base rooting for their victory.

"Just by being on the show the participants are able to familiarize themselves with the public as singers," Barnabas Mebrahtu, one of the Shingrwa judges had once said of the show.

Shingrwa 2012 was different from the previous two seasons in that the first stage was conducted in the six administrative regions, where the rich Eritrean cultural diversity was reflected and strong competitors observed. From 360 competitors in the first stage, 100 passed on to the next level, out of which only 30 made it to the third stage. Top 10 were selected for the fourth stage, out of which only six made it to the finale.

The finale of Shingrwa 2012 got live television and satellite coverage.

SANGANENE: CONFLICT RESOLUTION AT ITS BEST

by Samuel Mengsteab

Amongst the Kunama ethnic group in Eritrea, there are people called *Sanganene*. *Sanganene* is plural of *Sanganena*. There can only be one *Sanganena* in any Kunama community at a time who is usually the chief.

Sanganene is a family that only deals with reconciliation. If a murder occurs, all the reconciliation process is processed by the *Sanganene* family. The practice of *Sanganene* dates back to 2000 years and the elders of some villages say that the concept of *Sanganene* came into being during times when there was no government. The ancients created the idea of reconciliation in order to settle murderous conflicts between families.

There is no one who dares to fight or do something bad in front of these respected families. If people are fighting and someone from the *Sanganene* family appears in the scene, all fighting stops immediately. Insults and bad behavior are never allowed in the presence of a *Sanganena*.

In number, the *Sanganene* are many. They live at different places within the Kunama ethnic group's area. In Fode there is one *Sanganena*. And there are some *Sanganene* in areas such as Sona near the Gash River. There is a concentration of *Sanganene* families in villages such as *Binbilina*, *Shambiko* and *Bishuka*.

If someone kills a person, the chief who lives in *Binbilina* assumes the responsibility of a surrogate for the perpetrator. He sorts out the problems in the entire Kunama ethnic group which makes him the chief *Sanganena*. The living *Sanganena* is called father Gaallee Ella. Except father Galee Ella, no one is allowed to perform any reconciliation activity. No one can perform the reconciliation even if they know the ritual.

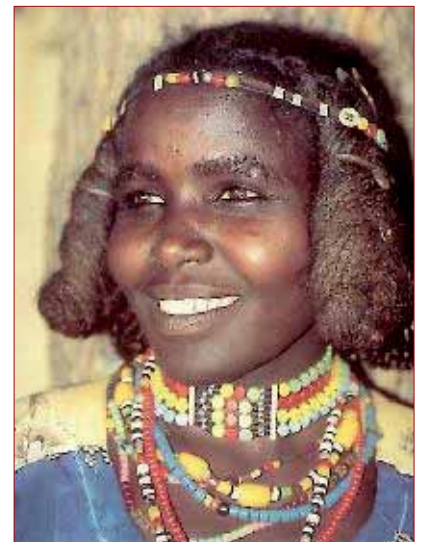
Only after his death can someone else inherit the title.

If there has been a murder, the killer takes refuge in either one of the *Sanganene* families. Having done that, he has to inform his immediate family. Following such an incident, his entire family and other relatives are in danger of falling victim to an act of vengeance so the whole family and relatives have to take refuge at the nearest *Sanganene* family.

Once word is circulated, the *Sanganene* families organize a shelter for the killer's extended family and provide round the clock protection against retaliation by the victim's family. The next day, the main *Sanganena* calls for a meeting between all the families involved in the feud.

The *Sanganena* formally informs the victim's family that the alleged killer is under his protection and that it would undertake full investigation to determine whether the accused is guilty or not.

Once the investigation is conducted and any guilt is ascribed to a person, his or her family is ordered to provide compensation which is usually in goods and livestock. The family of the guilty party is allowed a certain period of time to put together a compensation package. In the meantime the family of the victim must refrain from avenging their kinsperson. While the family of the guilty man



or woman try to put together the compensation, they must regularly update the Sanganena with a progress report. In turn, the Sanganena reports to the victim's family. All communication between the two parties is always conducted through the mediation of the Sanganena.

During the day of reconciliation between the two families, nobody is allowed to go to work. On that day, all the families meet at the place of the Sanganena. At midnight, they slaughter a goat and collect the blood in a *Taffera* – a small gourd. A young and strong boy from the Sanganene family is selected to go to the hut of the guilty man's or woman's family unnoticed and throw the gourd on the roof. This symbolises the need for reconciliation.

The actual reconciliation itself is conducted in a wild and uninhabited area. The Sanganena supplies a fat ox. In the wild, they go near an anthill and cut the first leg of the ox with a sword while he is alive. After it is dead, half of it is eaten by the men present in the reconciliation process while half of it is taken back to the village.

Once they are all back in the village, a fully made up couple adorned in jewellery from each feuding family are presented to the reconciliation process. Each woman then proceeds to do the other one's hair – both hairstyles have to

match. Both men, dressed as if they were going to a wedding ceremony, also sit facing east.

The uncooked bone from the upper arm of the ox, bared of all the meat and blood, is then placed in a hole on the ground along with a *Teffera* (gourd) filled with goat's blood. Following that, the Sanganena spits on the *Taffera* three times and on the fourth go, hits the bone as hard as he can. When the bone is broken he mixes the marrow with a concoction prepared ritually. He spreads the mixture on the two men from forehead to chest.

Both men are then instructed to touch forehead to forehead, nose to nose, and chest to chest and the action subsequently symbolize the merging of the respective families. Once that process is completed, there is no fight or any thought of revenge – instead, the two families become relatives. The philosophy behind Sanganene is that a killing does not get resolved by punishment but through unity.

The reconciliation process does not involve dancing and singing like other ceremonies and the Sanganena is not paid for his services. The process helps to prevent bloody fights between families from getting out of hand and consume whole communities.

(ELEM Magazine, March 2012)





Donna Saho (Foto Lusci)



Foto Lusci