

# **The Martyrs' Gift and the People's Mandate: Reclaiming May 24th as an Act of Historical Reconquest**

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*This article was developed at the proactive initiative of Yohannes Tsegai Berhe, the owner and manager of [Snitna.com](http://Snitna.com). Yohannes is a figure who works day and night at the frontlines of our struggle for democracy, the rule of law, and justice. Through [Snitna.com](http://Snitna.com) and its expansive social media network, he has created a vital digital vanguard that educates the Eritrean public and the global community on the humanitarian and political issues essential to our survival. This piece reflects our shared commitment to reclaiming the Eritrean national narrative from the parasitic regime that seeks to hold it hostage.*

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**Building upon the strategic necessity of distinguishing the permanent State from the temporary Regime, the following analysis argues that reclaiming Independence Day is not just a celebration, but a jurisdictional duty of historical reconquest.**

As **May 24th** approaches, the Eritrean political consciousness faces a pivotal crisis. A grave and pervasive mistake has taken root among many well-meaning citizens: the



tendency to equate the “Rapacious Regime” (PFDJ) with the sovereign State of Eritrea

itself. Disillusioned by decades of absolute tyranny, some have come to view the celebration of Independence Day as an act of complicity, or worse, as an endorsement of the pathocracy in Asmara. This conflation is not merely a misunderstanding; it is a profound strategic victory for the regime. By allowing the dictator to become the face of the nation's birth, we effectively allow a "scalawag entity" to evict the people from their own history. This act of reclaiming national symbols is not unique; it is a hallmark of the global democratic tradition - exemplified by the upcoming American Semiquincentennial - where independence is understood as an enduring mandate of 'We the People' rather than a patronage handout from a temporary ruler. As a political analyst and concerned citizen, I argue that reclaiming **Independence Day** is a "jurisdictional duty." It is an act of "historical reconquest" required to strip the regime of its stolen legitimacy and restore the state to its rightful owners: the Eritrean families (Gebremariam 2025a, 2026a).

### **The Vanguard vs. the Parasitic Syndicate: An Essential Distinction**

The primary source of our current malaise is the deliberate "strategic deception" used by the regime to blur the line between the Eritrean People's Liberation Front



(EPLF) and the current PFDJ apparatus. We must be intellectually fearless in making this distinction. The EPLF was the vanguard of the people – an organization that synthesized a century-long "will to power" into a force that defeated an occupying

army and facilitated the 1993 Referendum. That referendum, which saw a 99.83 per cent mandate for sovereign nationhood, is the “legal birth certificate” of our statehood (Gebremariam 2026b).

The PFDJ, by contrast, is a “totally different animal.” It is a parasitic syndicate that has ruled by force since 1997, acting as a “parasitic pretender” to the very people who built the nation. This regime is the anti-thesis of the “Eritrean Cause.” While the EPLF sought to create a sovereign home for its people, the PFDJ has presided over a “vicious cycle of criminality” – characterized by forced labor, human trafficking, and smuggling networks (Gebremariam 2025b). To abandon the celebration of independence because of Issaias Afeworki is to allow a thief to claim the “title deed” to a house built with the blood of our brothers and sisters.

### **Independence as the Modern “Higi-Endaba”**

Our heritage is anchored in a “rule-governed life” and a “cage of norms” that has historically protected our society from the “poison of absolute tyranny.” For centuries, our customary laws (*Higi-Endaba*), such as *Higi- Adkeme Milgae*, *Adgna Tegeleba*, *Logo Chwa*, *Loggo Sarda*, *Karneshim*, *Seharti*, *Lamza*, *Weqerti*, *Damba*, *Shew’ate Anseba*, *Beni-Amer*, *Tigre*, *Bilen*, *Mada’a (Afar)*, *Saho*, *Kunama*, *Nara*, *Deqqi-Teshim*, *Habslus-Gerekristos*, *Mehen Mahaza*, etc. established that the law was the “communal property of the people,” not the private possession of a ruler (Gebremariam 2025c). Independence was never intended to be an end in itself; it was designed to be the **highest stage and modern summary of this customary jurisprudence.**

The victory of 1991 and the mandate of 1993 were intended to scale up the village assembly (*Baito*) to a national constitutional life. However, the current regime has increased the “degree of entropy” in our social fabric by shattering these norms and declaring the 1997 Constitution “dead” (Gebremariam 2026a). When we celebrate **Independence Day**, we perform a **jurisdictional act**: we are reasserting the sacred **Social Contract** of 1993 and reclaiming our sovereign mandate from a regime that has flagrantly breached it. We are declaring that the state is a “precious gift” from the martyrs to every living Eritrean family, and that its sovereignty is independent of the “scalawag entity” that currently holds it hostage (Gebremariam 2026b).

### **Extractive Institutions and State Construction Under Arrest**

History attests that nations flourish under inclusive institutions but wither under extractive ones. In the Eritrean context, we must recognize that we are not witnessing a classic failed state; rather, we are witnessing **state construction under arrest**. From the outset, the regime substituted the inclusive promise of the 1993 mandate with extractive political and economic institutions designed to transfer the nation’s

resources to a ruling syndicate (Gebremariam 2026a). Instead of inclusive institutions that encourage education, innovation, and investment, the regime has built a system designed to “transfer resources from the population to the ruling group” (Gebremariam 2026a). Under this “vicious cycle,” the state’s resources – land, labor, and capital – are treated as the private property of a “homegrown dictator.”

This extractive synergetic relationship introduces a devastating feedback loop: political power enables the elites to control smuggling networks and “forced labor” parastatals, which in turn enriches them and helps consolidate their dominance. The mass flight of our youth is a “silent referendum” on a regime that has failed in its political, educational, and socio-economic duties (Gebremariam 2026a). These youth are not fleeing their identity; they are fleeing a life of “indefinite servitude” and hopelessness. To win them back, the democratic movement must offer a vision where **May 24th** once again stands for liberty, the Rule of Law, and inclusive institutions that were the original promise of our thirty-year struggle. Reclaiming the day is the first step in “mending the leaking bucket” of our national spirit.

### **Reclaiming the Day: A Psychological Counter-Occupation**

The democratic struggle must realize that the regime thrives on the opposition's alienation from national symbols. The regime *wants* us to hate **Independence Day** because that hatred cedes the entire moral and historical ground to the dictator. Reclaiming this day is an essential tool for **National Legitimacy**. We do not celebrate to honor a pathocrat; we celebrate to honor the families who paid a price that was unparalleled by any account.

Reclaiming the day is an act of **Psychological Counter-Occupation** because:

**It strips the regime of its “Identity Laundering”:** When we celebrate independence while condemning the dictator, we expose the regime as an alien, “scalawag” entity that is holding our nationhood hostage.

**It affirms Popular Sovereignty:** It reminds the world that the 1993 referendum is an inviolable legal mandate that no “homegrown dictator” can dissolve.

**It reclaims the Martyrs’ Legacy:** It asserts that the state is the individual and collective property of the families who suffered, not a “patronage hand-out” from a single man.

## **The Democratic Tradition of Celebration: Lessons from the American Semiquincentennial (250th Anniversary)**

As the United States prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary - the Semiquincentennial (250th Anniversary) - of its **Independence Day**, a profound lesson in popular sovereignty emerges for the Eritrean struggle. Across every town, city, and rural community in the United States, preparations for **July 4th** are already underway. Significantly, these celebrations are not state-mandated top-down directives; they are grassroots, community-led expressions of national ownership. For two and a half centuries, this tradition has persisted regardless of who occupies the White House or which political party holds power. This American experience offers a vital mirror for Eritreans as our own **Independence Day, May 24th**, approaches

The American tradition teaches us that national independence belongs exclusively to “We the People,” and its celebration is a performance of the **People’s Mandate**. This is a historical process where the citizenry - rather than the government - takes active ownership of the founding documents and the national narrative (Maier 1997)<sup>1</sup>. Just as Americans do not abandon **July 4th** because they disagree with a specific administration or a particular set of policies, Eritreans must refuse to surrender **May 24th** to a parasitic regime. In the United States, the celebration is an act of **jurisdictional continuity** - a recurring re-validation of the 1776 Declaration. For Eritrea, honoring **May 24th** must be viewed as a similar re-validation of the **1993 Referendum mandate** (Gebremariam 2026b).

By observing how local American communities take independent ownership of their national holiday, we see a society that understands the vital distinction between the **permanent state** and the **temporary government**. In Eritrea, the “Rapacious Regime” has attempted to erase this distinction, masquerading as the state to ensure that celebrating our liberation feels like celebrating “absolute tyranny.” By adopting the American model of community-led celebration, the Eritrean democratic movement can transform **May 24th** into a tool for **Historical Reconquest**. We must celebrate in our homes, our community centers, and across the diaspora as a defiant assertion of our ownership over the “**Martyrs’ Gift**.” To reclaim the right to celebrate is to practice the very “will to order” and “constitutional life” that the PFDJ seeks to suppress (Gebremariam 2026a).

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<sup>1</sup> *Pauline Maier’s work, **American Scripture**, specifically argues that the Declaration of Independence only became a “sacred” national document because ordinary Americans celebrated it and used it to hold their leaders accountable. **Eritreans can also do the same thing**: we can make our Independence and our Referendum “sacred” by celebrating them ourselves, thereby taking that power away from the PFDJ.*

## Conclusion

Celebrating Eritrean **Independence Day** is the ultimate act of defiance. It is a refusal to allow a “ruthless homegrown dictator” to hijack the sacred narrative of our



liberation. Anyone struggling for justice, democracy, and the Rule of Law must honor this day, for it is the foundation upon which any future constitutional life must be built. By honoring the day, we align our struggle with the enduring democratic tradition - best exemplified by the American experience - that asserts the celebration of independence as a grassroots mandate of the citizenry, independent of any temporary administration. We celebrate for the families; we celebrate for the martyrs; and we celebrate for the “will to order” that has defined us for a century. **May 24th** is the day we reclaim our soul as a people. It is time we take the day back from the “parasitic pretender” regime and finally fulfill the promise of a liberated and democratic Eritrea.

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