

The Issue behind the Issues

Diaspora Kinijit's meltdown

(Paulos Dandego, [ETP](#))

The divide within Diaspora Kinijit is on the fast track to competing with Paul McCartney and Heather Mill's divorce for the nastiest split of the decade title. From money squandering to outright stealing, from sabotaging the struggle to being a double agent; the accusations have been flying back and forth leaving bystanders confused and bewildered. But what is the real issue here? What caused the sudden collapse? This article examines what really happened inside Diaspora Kinijit. *Readers are advised not to interpret words or phrases found in this article out of context, but rather to construe words and phrases in the framework of the obvious intent of the article as a whole.*

KIL

One entity that is being blamed the most for the dispute is KIL. There was, and still is, a big hoopla over KIL (Kinijit International leadership); but aside from ***squabbling over who should be a member***, there seems to be no concrete argument against it. In fact, when you carefully examine what both sides had to say on this subject, most of the diaspora's top leaders are in favor of the ***concept*** of KIL. Clearly Ato Andargachew and Ato Berhane are in favor; and Shaleka Yoseph himself has (on an interview with Nigat radio, 10/15/06) acknowledged the need for an international entity tasked with coordinating efforts of the different support groups.

Therefore, we can conclude KIL or rather the ***idea*** of it, is not the real issue here; since both sides more or less support the idea. Indeed, what possible rationale could there be for opposing a more synchronized and coordinated front? Now, there are some within the diaspora who have opposed the establishment of such an organization. Frankly speaking, reasons they outlined so far, supporting their stand, have all been frail at best. ***While the KIL issue brought forth underlying tensions that existed before, it is not the real culprit in the rift.***

Recently foreign newspapers, such as the Indian Ocean Newsletter and pro EPRDF websites have tried to paint the division within Diaspora Kinijit as steaming from a rivalry between Hailu Shawil and Berhanu Nega - Does this have merit?

The Myth of Hailu vs. Berhanu

Lessons from Addis lost on the diaspora

When Berhanu Nega arrived in Ethiopia after a long stay in the United States; he returned full of concrete ideas and plans to transform his drought and poverty ravaged country. Dr. Berhanu was an economist by profession but had also participated in political activism in his younger days. After his epiphany, in which he says he realized that poverty eradication and economic advancement were directly correlated with good governance and democracy, he decided to join the political process once again.

Engineer Hailu on the other hand, has been a familiar figure in Ethiopian Politics. A big supporter of an inclusive inter-ethnic policy, Engineer Hailu transformed the AAPO (All Amhara people's organization) into a multiethnic unity party; the AEUP (All Ethiopian Unity Party). He was met with fierce criticism at the time from the right wing of the old AAPO; He was accused of exhibiting *anti-Amhara tendencies*; some even considered taking the case to court to stop the evolution of the AAPO. This inclusive policy - later adopted by the four member parties - was instrumental in shaping Kinijit's pro-unity policy where members of any ethnicity were free to participate as members or in leadership positions.

Even if, theoretically, a member of the old school (for lack of a better word), Engineer Hailu was a visionary and was not afraid of new ideas, he was the unifying factor that filled the gap between the old school and the new, allowing democratic strategies and ideas to flourish within the party. If Hailu Shawil was the soul of Kinijit, then Berhanu Nega was definitely the brain. And together they formed this dynamic duo that managed to transform the outlook of an entire nation within a matter of months. (For the sake of not digressing, other individuals that greatly contributed to the success of kinijit are not discussed here)

It is true that Berhanu and Hailu were members of different generations and schools of thought; however, they utterly complemented each other and in no way can they be considered rivals. Each knew what role the other played; and allowed the other to excel in his element.

As a result, their differences turned out to be their real strength, Hailu managed to rally around Kinijit - the well established, older/traditional generation; while Berhanu appealed to the young progressives. And when they stood together, Ethiopians from both generations and schools of thought could see something they can relate to in these two individuals.

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Cliques rooted in conflicting schools of thoughts and the unwillingness to compromise

While the opposition (Kinijit) in Addis was thriving on its diversity; most in the diaspora were divided and saw themselves loyal - not to the ideals on which Kinijit was formed - but to the different personalities within the organization. Functions tied together by personality cults were emerging within the support groups.

Kinijit Ethiopia however, was moving in a totally different direction. They were getting rid of barriers to unification, dissolving their original organizations and were presenting a more unified front where no one person, or faction, took center stage; rather things were done after mature deliberations in ways that benefited the party and the democracy movement as a whole.

After the imprisonment of Kinijit's leaders, Diaspora support groups were left with the task of moving the struggle for democracy into the next phase. Shaleka Yoseph was rising to the top of the political sphere, as were Berhane Mewa and Ato Andargachew Tsige. **Most believed this trio provided a real possibility of duplicating the potent formula of Kinijit Addis** - in which, Shaleka Yoseph plays a unifying paternal role also rallying the traditional well established diaspora old schoolers (again for lack of a better word) - while Berhane and Andargachew take to mobilizing and strategizing in order to point the struggle back in the right direction; **These two roles are equally important and crucial for the success of diaspora Kinijit.**

Even as they worked for the same organization and belonged to the same committees; the rift between the two factions was getting wider. The generational differences in idea and methods could only be overruled by strong personalities not afraid to step out of their comfort zones to meet the other side halfway.

Unfortunately, give and take was clearly lacking on both sides. Each was certain that they and their clique alone held the key for Ethiopia's deliverance and were dismissive of the other side. The progressives viewed the traditionalists as arrogant and shortsighted while the traditionalists viewed the progressives as impertinent and vying for power.

It is this inherent tension that finally exploded leaving behind mutilated remains of goodwill and cordiality. Currently, both sides are gearing for war, amassing ammo and preparing for the inevitable showdown.

There are three possible outcomes to this confrontation

- One side will come out victorious; which side? It's hard to say. While it seems Andargachew and Berhane have, so far, the support of most of the mainstream Ethiopian media and are dominating the chatter - when it comes down to substance, like monetary strength and an established support base - Shaleka may have the upper hand.
- Another possibility is that a compromise will be reached between the two sides. Some Kinijit supporters are already advocating this outcome. However, there are those who argue if this happens, it will be just more of the same and diaspora kinijit will remain a tepid, lukewarm organization.
- The third possible outcome is that there will be a split in diaspora Kinijit; the two sides walking their separate ways - taking their supporters with them. This will be a heartbreaking scenario for most Ethiopians but there are those who argue that this is just what the struggle needs. Two, competing organizations, trying to outdo each other in performance – and competing for the same constituents. Nevertheless, there are already a multitude of political parties out there, what is lacking in the diaspora is unanimity; as a result, a split in Kinijit diaspora will probably harm rather than help the struggle for democracy.

In conclusion, simply put: Ato Berhane and Ato Andargachew are not TPLF agents nor are they trying to sabotage Kinijit diaspora. In the same token, it is utterly ridiculous to

accuse Shaleka Yoseph of corruption or using Kinijit's money for personal gain. Both parties involved are true Ethiopians who have dedicated their time, energy and money for the love of their country. The problem arises from dissimilar methods and differing points of views concerning; strategy issues, money issues, administrative issues etc...

However, these types of disagreements are nothing new, they occur everyday in very functional companies, households and political parties. We cannot blame differences for the meltdown. The real culprit for the rift in Kinijit diaspora is the unwillingness of both sides to meet the other side halfway; **the failure to identify the value of the other and his/her unique contributions to the struggle.**

It has been a year since the original Kinijit leaders entrusted the struggle to the diaspora and exited the political scene without their consent. It is important for all involved to take a step back and ask the question; what has the diaspora done in this one year? What can we learn from the mistakes we've made? And where do we go from here? These are all crucial questions everyone should ask – so that we are able to continue the struggle in a way that honors Kinijit's imprisoned leaders and those who brutally lost their lives, courageously facing down the barrel of a gun, armed only with hope and a strong desire to live free of tyranny.