

A Critical Appraisal of the Diaspora Organized Groups Opposed to the Regime in Ethiopia

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An Overview

The collective staying-power of the opposition within the Ethiopian Diaspora community against the regime in Addis Ababa still remains in a state of paralysis after more than two decades of cry-out for a unity of purpose, goals, and objectives. The opposition has not been able, as yet, to help stamp out both authoritarianism and a minority ethnic oligarchy, which are both well-entrenched in Ethiopia. As its primary objective, this commentary strives to address some of the salient issues that affect unity amongst Ethiopians in the Diaspora. More importantly, it deciphers the adverse consequences of such issues on efforts to usher in a positive political transformation of our country, while offering some possible remedies central to forging a united front among the variety of groups that make up the opposition. Nonetheless, the essay does not purport to be a research-based study on the hard-to-pin-down unity of the Diaspora opposition, but is an opinion that is based on both personal reflections and a keen awareness of the issues with which the writer has been familiar over the years, as a long-time observer of Ethiopian Diaspora-based political activities.

The Nature of the Problem and Purpose of the Commentary

The writer posits that the ceaseless divide, which ostensibly characterizes the Ethiopian Diaspora community in general and the opposition particularly, has unquestionably offered a golden opportunity for the regime in Addis Ababa to continue the ethnic-based authoritarian rule that it has imposed on our country--- practically unchallenged. Furthermore, in the opinion of this writer, there has not been a serious challenge exerted against the regime at a level necessary to force the rulers--- even at a minimum---to come to a bargaining table for a possible compromise with the opposition on any possible power-sharing modalities. This has stemmed from the undeniable fact that the opposition, both inside and outside of the country, is divided and thus has failed to marshal its collective resources to confront the regime on the many fronts that would be necessary to weaken its grip of power and strangulate its narrow support-base throughout the country. However, the scope of this essay is limited to and exclusively on the Diaspora opposition, although the domestic foes of the regime are also central to any broader examination of the issues.

Indeed, more than two decades have elapsed since the opposition throughout the Diaspora started a campaign of struggle against the Ethiopian regime through peaceful means, mainly aimed at forcing the ethnic minority regime to negotiate with its political opponents on ways to bring about not only a lasting political reconciliation in Ethiopia, but also a national unity government that will lead the country on a genuine path of democracy, transparency and the rule of law. However, all efforts to that end have fallen on deaf ear, as the Tigrean People Liberation Front (TPLF)-dominated government in Ethiopia appears to see the opposition simply as ***an inconsequential political adversary not worthy of any recognition***. Why has the opposition failed regretfully to impel the regime to change its behavior of

intransigence for more than 22 years? Retrospectively speaking, why have protests, demonstrations, and condemnations of regime policies throughout the years failed to budge the minority rulers from the North, making them amenable to a negotiated political settlement of power-sharing? Why has our plea for help become so pointless that Western governments have dismissed us as seemingly irrelevant? What have been the glaring consequences of failure of the opposition to wage an effective, united struggle against the regime in power? What lessons have been learned so far from this failure? Are there any changes of tactic that the opposition should explore in order to find a lasting solution to a minority ethnic oligarchy that is well entrenched on the home front? What should we, as concerned and despondent citizens of Ethiopian descent, do to put an end to all the crises beleaguering the Horn of Africa country and shorten the life of a regime hell-bent on pursuing a totalitarian control of all aspects of life in Ethiopia? This essay navigates through these and other related issues here forth.

The Character of the Divided Opposition

First and foremost, the truth has to be told that the Ethiopian Diaspora opponents of the dictatorial regime in Addis Ababa still remains divided; we may not like to admit it, but this is the reality. The varieties of groups that make up the opposition are so many that listing them here would be an unrewarding exercise; they simply don't speak with one voice, nor do they challenge the regime in unison. The division can encompass the tracts of politics, religion, ethnicity, and even generational gap. On the top of this, there is the silent majority of Ethiopians in the Diaspora that neither is interested in learning about the multitude of the crises afflicting Ethiopia nor cares about supporting any efforts to overcome them. In other words, this majority is totally indifferent to or completely detached from any activities that advance the Ethiopian national agenda. In this connection, members of this majority have become "*apolitical*," a term often used to define people who have no interest or involvement in political affairs, or simply show an aversion to politics in their actions. Whether we like or not, however, there is nothing in life that is outside the realm of political discourse.

Of course, at a time of national crisis, such as the one in which we find ourselves today, the tendency to minimize and ignore our differences, problems and even brazen apathy, as if they did not exist, can be understandably tempting. *Since* unity is the desired outcome of our collective wish, highlighting our divide at the expense of our unity and harmony may appear unpatriotic to some, and even offensive to others. ***But one cannot seek cure for an illness without diagnosing first the causes of the ailment.***

Differences on Political Grounds

The exact number of Ethiopian politically-organized groups active throughout the Diaspora is very difficult to pin down. Throughout the decades, such groups have come and gone in large numbers. While some have survived continuously, others have split and formed new ones. The Ethiopian Medhin Democratic Party, for example, is among those that have survived, although considerably weakened from its once mighty presence in North America under the leadership of Colonel Goshu Wolde in the early 1990s. "The Ethiopian Medhin Democratic Party, founded discreetly in Washington D.C. in March 1992 by Goshu Wolde, the former Ethiopian foreign minister under the ousted Colonel Mengistu and who fled to the US in 1986, is currently making headway in the race to profit from the movement in

support of national unity, currently a strong political argument in Ethiopia,” acknowledged *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, No. 539, at that time. Others such as the EPRP, which is the longest surviving organization of any Ethiopian organized groups, have split into factions and still pursue their cherished goals of freeing Ethiopia from the yoke of TPLF dictatorship.

In the same vein, coalitions of organized groups have been formed over the years, but among those that came to the fore, none has survived. Just to name one, the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF) was a political coalition formed in 1991 by former arch-rivals MEISON and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party during the final phase of the Derg regime. That coalition is hardly mentioned today, as other coalitions have either absorbed it since then, or it simply has withered away. More recently, efforts to bring exclusively ethnic-based groups into the fold and create multi-ethnic coalitions for a better and stronger organized opposition have been made. One such coalition is the Alliance for Liberty, Equality, and Justice in Ethiopia (ALEJE), which was established in 2010 comprising of Ginbot 7 Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy; Afar People's Party (APP); and Ethiopian Unity and Justice Movement (EUJM). This obviously has been a positive development, and yet it remains to be seen to what extent the coalition will carry on and become a model of unity in the years to come. Another recent attempt to bring both political and civic organizations under one umbrella came to fruition in July 2012, with the formation of Ethiopian National Transition Council (ENTC). Yet another recent comer to the scene is the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), a non-political and non-violent social justice movement established in 2008. A portion of the mission of SMNE states that “We work to mobilize Ethiopians in the Diaspora and within Ethiopia to unite in a coalition across ethnic, regional, political, cultural and religious lines around principles of truth, justice, freedom, civility, equality and the protection of human rights.” It is a non-profit organization that seeks to unite the many Ethiopian ethnic groups based on two guiding principles--- **“Humanity before Ethnicity, and No One is Free until all are Free.”** Still, there are several other politically-organized groups that operate separately, pursuing their specific targeted goals and objectives. Dozens of civic organizations claiming a non-political stand have also mushroomed over the years, although, by and large, the burgeoning of organized Ethiopian Diaspora opposition seems to have ebbed in more recent times after years of uncontrolled increase immediately following TPLF's exclusive grab of governmental power in the early 1990s.

In essence, all the Diaspora organized groups, big or small, civic or political, have the same and shared interest--- the disposing of both dictatorship and single minority hegemony in Ethiopia. While they continue to function as separate entities, they fight the regime as their common foe silently, as is mostly the case with the civic organizations, and through the war of words, as it is true with the politically-vocal groups. Yet no one knows for sure why all these organizations cannot come together under the aegis of a united front and function as such. At least with the politically-oriented ones, neither their political objectives nor their ideological orientation necessitates the pursuit of a separated existence, or of functioning in isolation. Rhetorically speaking, they are not in tune with ideals that advance unity over separation. The ideal of unity can, for example, be best sloganeered in this quotation: **“The multitude, which is not brought to act as a unity, is confusion. The unity, which has not its origin in the multitude, is tyranny.”** A slogan that offers even a better characterization of our need for unity is this: **“Where**

there is unity, there is always victory.” Yet we have failed to become victorious to this point perhaps because we have been deprived of unity, although no one yet knows for sure whether the deprivation is by design or the result of own complacency.

Differences due to Ethnic Affinities

To the dismay of those of us who uphold dearly a nationalist view, the ethnic entrapment designed for Ethiopia by the regime in power has worked to some extent even within the Diaspora community, thereby amplifying our division and weakening our resolve to advance our shared beliefs for the collective good. While many have been above the fray of the ethnic artificial lines, drawn by the TPLF as a strategy to “divide and conquer” us and thus rule Ethiopia in perpetuity, there are unfortunately many who have been ***infected with the ethnic bug*** and thus see all the issues only in ethnic terms. However, there is nothing more damaging for a country and for the advancement of the national interest than having a people divided on the basis of ethnic affiliations. The TPLF designed the ethnic reconfiguration of Ethiopia with this in mind, and many have become easy prey to its plot. Therefore, within the larger Ethiopian diaspora community, separateness by ethnic identity has become a common trend today among some groups and individuals, as they fail to see beyond the confines of ethnic exclusiveness and embrace rather the larger national identity of *Ethiopiawinet*; that is, acknowledging our shared destiny and compassion, and celebrating our unity in diversity. While most of the organized political groups within the Diaspora take the spirit of *Ethiopiawinet* as the guiding vehicle for their groups’ missions and goals, there are unfortunately others organized under the ethnic regimentation, pursuing parochial ideals and narrowly-defined goals to the detriment of our collective unity and solidarity.

Ethnic exclusiveness, whether imagined or practiced, is a symptom of social malaise that has no rational justification for existence especially in a country such as Ethiopia where the dividing line is so blurred that it raises more questions than answers to make it a governmental instrument of hegemony, as is the case with the Woyane regime in Ethiopia. The negative facets of ethnic exclusivity often manifest among members of the Diaspora who cling to grievances that had historical roots, to which the current generation is understandably, if not justifiably, oblivious. Discussion about ethnic domination of one group by another throughout the country’s history is a subject that cannot be handled in a commentary as limited in scope as this one is. It is not only a subject that requires a depth analysis, but also an area that is certainly beyond the purview of the author’s expertise. However, one fact must be unequivocally clear--- Ethiopia’s ethnic-related issues can be, in most instances, the creation of ruling elites that vie for political power to advance their own personal gains. Using the ethnic factor, political elites have engineered ways to raise the level of interethnic feuds, while fueling tension and animosity that had never existed in the past at a level they are real today. This has been the paramount obsession of the TPLF ruling elites since their ascension to power.

Thanks to the ethnic-based federalism created by the regime, interethnic conflicts in Ethiopia have escalated to the extent that members of one ethnic group have been victims of extermination by members of another, often based on ancestral origin and/or linguistic distinctions. Cases in point are the mass expulsion of 78, 000 Amharas from Benji Maji in Southern Nations Regional State last year and the most recent displacement of 5, 000 members of the same ethnic group from Benishanguel-Gumuz in the

western part of the country. The regime's ethnic policy is all to blame for these and many other similar interethnic conflicts, and even violent incidents at times, that have occurred during the last two decades.

Ethnic consciousness has been rearing its ugly head here in the Diaspora, as well. Although few in number, some restaurants, churches and political organizations, community centers across the United States may have exclusive ethnic memberships, catering only to those they identify with, ethnically and linguistically. In most cases, unfortunately, such groups and individuals are very unlikely to identify with causes that give preeminence to the Ethiopian national interest, as defined by the majority, or with the shared and broader ideals of *Ethiopiawinet*. This reality not only must be acknowledged but also brought to the front burner of the debate on issues affecting our unity within the larger Diaspora community.

Differences on Account of Religious Issues

The religious facet of our predicament in the Diaspora is even far greater in scope than any other, complicating matters in our midst, as we continue to be both critics of the regime and advocates of nationalist causes. Two major religions have shaped our history throughout the centuries: Christianity and Islam. For the most part, these two great religions have co-existed side by side, maintaining both cooperative spirits and a remarkable respect for each other, and almost with no known organized conflicts that we know of, to this day. Of course, the ethnic overemphasis under TPLF's re-configured Ethiopia has crossed over some times during the last two decades to the religious arena, especially in the southern parts of Ethiopia, causing interethnic collisions between members of the two religions; yet, the two religious communities have over the years avoided any form of organized conflicts against each other, as has been the case in some parts of Africa, for example Nigeria, or the Middle East, where Christians are the minority. In fact, what we have been witnessing lately within the larger Ethiopian Diaspora community is an unprecedented unity of the two religious communities, advancing nationalist causes and calling for religious and political freedoms within Ethiopia. In fact, there has been an unprecedented resurgence of inter-religious solidarity and fellowship lately that was never seen before, wherein the leaders of the two religious communities, standing side by side and working in unison, have publicly denounced the Ethiopian regime for its interference in religious affairs. By so doing, they have made it abundantly clear that the divide-and-conquer strategy employed by the regime, using religion as a wedge between the two communities, has failed miserably.

Unfortunately, however, we cannot say the same for the Orthodox Tewahedo community in the Diaspora. Of course, the divide within the Church came about when the TPLF took the reins of power in 1991 and orchestrated the removal of the incumbent Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), replacing him with someone of their choice and thus violating the long-standing canon and practices of Oriental Orthodox Churches, of which the EOTC is the largest. The Church has been in a spiraling crisis since then. For reasons very clear to everyone, the religious divide within the Diaspora EOTCs has been a case of enormous discomfort for the ordinary followers of the faith. Consequently, many writers and religious scholars have devoted their attention to the issues affecting our Church for a long time, having analyzed them even to the extent of overkill. Innumerable website-based articles and airtime slots on Diaspora radio stations and satellite TV broadcasting have been devoted in more recent

times to this very subject. On his part, this writer has made modest contributions to the discussion particularly during the most recent past by examining the root causes of the problem and even making some recommendations as part of the possible solutions.

So, the crisis within the EOTC is not one that can be just glazed over when we speak of issues of divide within the Diaspora opposition. A united Diaspora opposition against a dictatorship in Ethiopia under a minority ethnic oligarchy can only be possible when different segments of our community are in pursuit of a common purpose; feel a sense of collectivity in their faith; and uphold values that cater to the greater good of our national interest and of our people back home. As divided as members of the Orthodox Tewahedo community in North America and elsewhere are today, working toward the common good would be an illusion rather than a possibility at our grasp. The fact is we are divided shamefully because the regime in Ethiopia has made it possible for us. And many of us have simply lost our reasoning power to come to terms that we, as a community of believers, must take a stand and challenge the forces of division every step of the way. As this writer has tried to argue in other commentaries on this same subject, our division is a function of a leadership crisis at the Church back in Ethiopia. The EOTC under the current regime has become an arm of the government, and thus been riddled with political- and ethnic-related issues. In a country where single ethnic minority domination has become a fact of life, freedoms of thought, assembly, dissent, among other things, are not a luxury. In fact, the facts below tell vividly the extent of single ethnic minority hegemony in TPLF's Ethiopia:

- 90% of the command posts in the Ethiopian army, the air force, and national security and military intelligence are held by a single ethnic group (Tigreans);
- Among the latest 37 promotions awarded to high ranking military personnel, 26 involved Tigreans;
- 20 of the richest Ethiopians, excepting Mohammed Al Almoudi, are Tigreans;
- 66 parasitic companies with millions of dollars in both cash and assets belong to the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), the largest business conglomerate that rivals Al Almoudi's MIDROC (Mohamed International Development Research Organization Companies);
- Even within the EOTC, minority ethnic overrepresentation is clearly reflected in the composition of the Holy Synod in Ethiopia itself, as 16 of the 47 members of Synod are of Tigrayan descent;
- The EOTC is clearly under the command of the regime in power. Expecting otherwise would be a denial of Ethiopian realities under the TPLF-dominated governance in that country today, as the latest election of the 6th Patriarch has undoubtedly revealed;
- All the so-called elections that have taken place in Ethiopia since the early 1990s have been rigged in favor the ruling party;
- Taking everything into account, there is no doubt that minority ethnic oligarchy has taken a fanatical hold in Ethiopia since the change of regime in 1991; and
- Let us not also forget that whoever controls the prizes of power also dictates the behavior and functions of those entities that the power holder thinks are essential for the perpetuation of societal domination.

In spite of these and other abysmal facts of ethnic minority dictatorship in Ethiopia, the Addis Ababa regime still claims that the country is on a democratic path of development and that freedom of religion is enshrined in the country's constitution; however, the facts say otherwise. In a democratic system of governance, as practiced particularly in the West, freedom of religion is a civil liberty that is constitutionally guaranteed to citizens. For example, under the U.S. Constitution, two specific provisions of the First Amendment sanction freedom of religion. First they bar the government from establishing or supporting any one religious sect over another, and second, they ensure that individuals are not hindered in the exercise of their religion. So, government neutrality is a constitutional mandate in this regard. By contrast, in countries that follow a system of government known as theocracy (a Greek word for rule of God), state and religion are enmeshed and thus an official religion is enshrined in the law of the state. Countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen are governed by Sharia law and thus a theocracy. So, the reality around the world is that there are secular states that do not allow religion and/or religious considerations to exert any control or influence over the government, but there are also governments that rule by religious decrees.

Ethiopia, as we know it today, is a follower of neither theocracy nor democracy in practice. While the constitution imposed on our people by the TPLF-run regime stipulates that Ethiopia remain a secular state, what we have seen during the last two decades is the government actively intervening in the affairs of the two religions---Islam and the Orthodox faith. In fact, Ethiopia today is governed under perhaps the most authoritarian minority rule that the country has ever experienced in its history. The Church has not been spared from this absolute domination as the most recent facts surrounding the selection of the 6th Patriarch reveal. The latest efforts made by a Peace and Unity Mediation team of concerned clergymen and prominent members of the laity to bring the divided Holy Synod---the Home Synod and the Exiled one--- into reconciliation ended up being foiled by the regime because the ruling minority clique did not wish to reinstate the exiled Patriarch whom they removed upon their ascension to power more than 22 years ago. Following are some specific examples of regime intrusion into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to institutionalize ethnic supremacy:

- Removal of the Patriarch in 1991 and replacing him with the late Abune Paulos (a Tigrean), against the long-standing canon law of Oriental Orthodox Churches;
- Erection of a statue for the most controversial Patriarch (Abune Paulos) ever enthroned in the history of the Church;
- Caretaker Patriarch Abune Nathnael (a Tigrean) giving an interview with VOA at which time he announced that the return of His Holiness Abune Merkorios to his throne was unthinkable before the team of negotiators returned home from the United States;
- Abune Nathnael, in what seemed to be under duress from the regime, reprimanding President Girma Wolde-Gorgis and demanding the retraction of the letter of invitation that the latter wrote to Abune Merkorios asking him to return to his throne;
- President Girma Wolde-Georgis under pressure from TPLF invalidating that same letter he wrote to invite the Patriarch;

- Sibhat Nega, the stalwart of TPLF, recommending that those in the Holy Synod in Ethiopia who pushed for the peace and unity of the church and the return of Patriarch Abune Merkorios should be “hanged”;
- Abay Tsehay, Minister of Federal Affairs, likening the attempt to return Abune Merkorios to Ethiopia from the U.S. to an attempt of bringing back former Ethiopian President, Mengistu Haile Mariam, from his exile in Zimbabwe;
- 18 of the Archbishops from Tigray threatening to have their own Patriarch elected in Axum should the peace and unity effort were to allow Abune Merkorios back into the position from which he was removed;
- Expulsion of one of the peace and unity mediators upon his arrival in Addis to report on the mediation effort in the U.S.;
- The mediators’ eventual communiqué placing the blame squarely on the government and the group of Archbishops the regime has charged with hindering the peace mission;
- The recently appointed Patriarch of EOTC, Abune Mathias, telling priests at the Jerusalem Ethiopian church that a new archbishop will replace him, thereby giving the hint that he was going to be anointed by the regime;
- The publication of a book, funded with thousands of dollars by the regime, aimed at denigrating the integrity of the Fathers of the Exiled Synod in the same way as the film, titled “Boko Haram in Ethiopia,” denounced the Islamic leaders of the now year-long protest movement for greater rights;
- After being appointed to the position of the 6th Patriarch, Abune Mathias (a Tigrean) allocating funds to be used for legal costs that would be necessary to take the neutral churches and those churches affiliated with the Exiled Synod to court in the U.S. and other places, so that they would not use “the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church” trademark in an official record; and
- There is no question that the election of the 6th Patriarch was engineered to produce the result that the regime wanted just in the same way that the election of 2010, which produced the 99.5% win for the regime.

Even with all the facts outlined above, the Diaspora EOTCs still remain divided instead of being united. The disunity is well reflected in three types of churches that have existed for two decades--- those churches that have declared allegiance to the Synod in Ethiopia; those that recognize the Legal Holy Synod in North America; and those that belong to neither group, claiming neutrality. The EOTC throughout its storied existence has never gone through a crisis of this magnitude. Many of the conflicts that arise from time to time in some of the churches within the Diaspora are the result of the division that was created by the regime two decades ago. Whether the EOTC is in Uganda or Great Britain, where ongoing tensions have been reported recently, the root causes of the crisis center on factions within each church fighting over decisions to join the Holy Synod-in-Exile as a protest against the regime’s total control of the Church at home, or just to remain neutral. In some cases, some members of the clergy within the neutral churches mobilize a faction of their supporters among the church membership and attempt to align the church with the Home Synod, or in some extreme instances want to maintain their own control of the church by advocating neutrality, which gives them a say-so to run the church as they desire; that is, without answering to a higher authority. Some of the clergymen do

this even at the expense of violating the Church's basic principles and doctrine, so long as they find gullible individuals among the faithful who they can easily influence to go along with their plan. All things considered, this is the state of the EOTC in the Diaspora today.

How then does the current state of affairs in the divided Diaspora EOTCs affect any efforts to fight the dictatorial regime in Addis Ababa as part of the united opposition from abroad? This is where it can get too complex and even extremely disquieting for anyone genuinely seeking to understand the problem in its entirety. First and foremost, most of the faithful unfortunately do not regard opposing a government that suppresses dissent and maintains ethnic hegemony as a righteous act and thus within the purview of a religious obligation. They mistakenly assume that people of faith should avoid taking a political stand, especially those who are our spiritual leaders. This thinking in and of itself is based on a distorted reality of the times in which we live and therefore devoid of any reasonable thought. When this kind of fuzzy belief is added to the division that already exists among the various churches, it is not hard to imagine the extent of apathy that can be exhibited among the Orthodox faithful toward any political discourse that gives value to issues of national interest, or to the advancement of the true ideals of *Ethiopiawinet*.

No argument can invalidate the fact that unity is the hallmark of strength that gives a community its success and vitality. In this connection, no divided churches, as the EOTCs are within the Diaspora, can speak in one voice and become a force to be reckoned with. With division, no clergymen can even spiritually influence the faithful to speak out for what is right and what is wrong. That is why the moral authority of our clergy is at its lowest today because our churches are not united; and the faithful understandably see this fact, and as a result some choose to remain distant from even regular church services.

Neutral churches, in particular, are operating without any form of religious hierarchy, functioning practically as independent entities almost in the likes of Protestant churches. These churches do this in violation of Oriental Orthodox long-standing practices. Why the neutral churches would not embrace the Exiled Synod and be united with their sister churches, especially when considering what has happened with the regime-run EOTC in Ethiopia, is not only inexplicable, but also out of character for reasonably-thinking believers of the faith, who most, if not all, of the members of neutral churches are. The moral value of the unity of all Diaspora EOTCs and of coming together under one higher institution, such as the Legal Holy Synod-in-Exile, should not be underestimated. At a minimum, it would provide the political opposition with the support base and the moral and financial resources that are desperately needed to marshal a united front to put diplomatic pressure on Western governments to work. Unity of the churches would bring the faithful into a collective mode of thinking for the common good and shared beliefs, which could also have a ripple effect on how we, as concerned individuals and groups, can shepherd our energies, limited resources and even intellectual capital, while focusing on a prioritized list of important issues that are key to our national interest.

Differences Stemming From a Generational Gap

The generational gap that exists within the Ethiopian immigrant community can be extremely relevant in the overall analysis of the issues that divide us. Still yet, the divide is by no means as critical as those discussed previously. In the absence of demographic data on the immigrant Ethiopian population, it is difficult to decipher this issue at a level necessary to get the full picture of our community's makeup. Under normal circumstances, population demographics could include such significant variables as age, sex, education level, income level, marital status, occupation, religion, birth rate, death rate, average size of a family, average age at marriage, but these data are currently unknown in the case of Ethiopian immigrants because no systematic study has ever been done yet. Given the lack of concrete facts, therefore, it would only be a conjecture at this point to speak to issues pertaining to the generational gap. Regardless, it exists. We can even see it just by surveying informally the age differences of Ethiopian-Americans within the community in which we live.

By and large, Ethiopians in the Diaspora may be conveniently divided into two major population categories: the younger and the older. Without specifying the gender and age ranges of the population, we can still make a clear distinction between those who had spent the greater part of their adolescent years in Ethiopia during the "good old days," which in essence was the period prior to the coming to power of the Derg, and those who came along later. Thus, the generation that tasted relatively the "good times" of the pre-1974 era cannot help but reminisce about a period in which the feelings of Ethiopian nationalism were at their greatest height. However, the generation of Ethiopians that grew along with the "dark days" of the Marxist regime after the fall of the monarchy in 1974 was one that paid dearly, as the experiences of the "Red Terror" still paint the worst elements of *Ethiopiawinet* in the memories of those affected by it. In essence, the ways in which these two generations view issues of national interest today arguably can be different because of not only the experiences of the past and the most recent, respectively, but also because of the generational gap that separates them. In this connection, the question that can be asked rhetorically is, do both groups share the same nostalgia about Ethiopia and *Ethiopiawinet*? This writer thinks not.

While the older generation cries out more loudly and frequently against the dismantling of Ethiopian national ethos by the regime in power, the younger one may not have a sustained identity and probably would less likely celebrate such institutions as special treasures of the country as the older generation would. Without going too deeply into the subject, the prevailing trend that some of us from the older generation see today within the Diaspora community is that the Ethiopian culture of respect for our elders and religious figures, which was an integral part of our social mores during the earlier generations, has almost become the thing of the past. It can also be argued with certainty that a substantial segment of the younger generation of the post-1974 era shows little interest in the celebration of Ethiopia's historical milestones; our proud and illustrious history appears to be little or no interest to them. They know barely about our national heroes, uniqueness in the annals of world history, mosaic culture, and other related national symbols, which are held dearly and nostalgically by the older generation. At the same time, we have to recognize that among the younger generation there are those who are the fiercest advocates of *Ethiopiawinet*, although we cannot say the same for the majority of them. In fact, the greater number of the younger generation is indifferent to any political discourse that advances the ideals of *Ethiopiawinet*. For example, at any given Ethiopian gathering in any major

American city, where issues of national interest are topics of discussion, individuals who attend such gatherings are predominantly those who value highly the ideas of *Ethiopiawinet*. Unfortunately, the young and those who have left Ethiopia in recent times as political refugees find very little interest in such gatherings as they struggle to make a living in a foreign land where they find the culture and way of life to be very difficult to cope with during the process of assimilation. In sum, it would not be an exaggeration to conclude that the larger majority of the younger generation of Ethiopians in the Diaspora is totally detached from any discourse that gives preeminence to Ethiopian political issues, be it at discussion forums or other settings. At the same time, it would be disingenuous not to recognize that among them are also who are just as patriotic and a strong advocate of Ethiopian nationalism as any member of the older generation. And yet in the overall skim of things, the number of such individuals in comparison with the larger segment of their generation might turn out to be insignificant. Still yet, the writer wishes to remind the reader that generalizations such as these can always be subject to debate and that they should never be taken at their face value.

In what ways then could the generational variant, as characterized above, impact our unity in the Diaspora adversely? The answer is clear and simple---it does affect us in more ways than we want to admit it. First, without unity, an organized group faces a diminished chance of being effective in the realization of its prescribed goals and objectives. In the same vein, an organized Ethiopian Diaspora opposition cannot be effective with a divided constituency that has had different world views shaped by different life experiences and events. The generational gap that exists within our community thus may work against the opposition, as it endeavors to garner support and forge a united and viable force that would be effective against the regime in Ethiopia. This is even true when we know that majority of Ethiopian immigrants are young, less inclined to be active in political affairs, and detached from the rest of us who are relatively informed about the events and crises confronting our country. On the other hand, the silent majority of the younger segment of Ethiopian immigrant population still remains uninvolved politically, and it is difficult to make inroads with this group when both apathy and political consciousness have had a significant bearing on the way they see their role in the broader context of Diaspora political activities. Nonetheless, mobilization of the youth and garnering their backing would be indispensable for the opposition, as it attempts to expand not only its support base but also the resources that it would need to challenge the regime at home.

Conclusion

In this commentary, four important factors were identified as sources of divide affecting our unity as a community of immigrants. An attempt was also made to link each of these factors with realities that have adversely impacted the vitality and potency of the Diaspora political groups that are opposed to both dictatorship and ethnic minority hegemony in Ethiopia. The lesson learned from this discussion is that unity is central to the collective strength of any organized group and that the Ethiopian diaspora opposition has lost strength because our community is divided on the grounds of political, religious, ethnic and generation-based differences. Thus, the possible remedy is that the opposition must push for a much stronger united front that could require several prioritized courses of action, including the following:

First and foremost, it would be necessary for all politically-organized groups, irrespective of their mission and make-up, to come together under one umbrella organization (a national coalition), with a set of common national goals accepted consensually. Ethnic-based groups particularly should join forces with their fellow multi-ethnic counterparts and espouse a national agenda for a change, discarding any form of parochial objectives that have not helped us except perpetuating disunity within the political opposition. The national unity that is proposed here does not necessarily relegate such well-intentioned organizations as the Ethiopian National Transitional Council (ENTC) to oblivion. Rather, it is suggested that all organized forces including the ENTC come to a national summit with new vigor and determination to discuss ways to unite all organized entities under the auspices a united national organization; all relevant details as to the name of the organization, mission, vision and goals will be open to discussion. The option of retaining the ENTC as such should also be on the table for negotiation. The least the national summit would do automatically is sending a positive message to our community at large, proving to them that the days of unifying the Ethiopian Diaspora have finally arrived;

Secondly, just as important would be a separate summit for all faith-based organizations to come together to map out a unified stance on national priorities and give a spiritual boost to adherents of the faiths; that is, interfaith cooperation is acceptable in addressing issues of national interest, irrespective of beliefs and dogmas. With respect to the EOTCs, particularly, a separate summit under the auspices of the Exiled Synod should take place wherein all Diaspora EOTCs, including those affiliated with the Legal Synod and those that espouse a neutral stand, could establish the foundation of unity for a common mission and vision with a renewed vigor, goodwill, and aura of enthusiasm; issues of “ill-feeling” of the past should have no place for discussion since it will no longer serve the renewed spirit of unity and solidarity for the sake of promoting our national interest. In pursuit of this imperative, the faithful must put pressure both on the boards and clergy of neutral churches to adhere to the Churches canon and practices, while urging them to rescind neutrality and forge unity with other churches in the spirit of *Ethiopiawinet*. It would be unwise to expect the clergy of neutral churches to renounce neutrality because it would go counter to their own personal interests. In neutrality, for instance, they would be able to maintain their authority and control of the individual churches in which they serve currently without ever looking over their shoulders from a higher spiritual authority, which would likely mean Archbishops that could have jurisdiction over their churches under a hierarchical form of church administration--- a common practice of Oriental Orthodox Churches.

The above two proposed courses of action reinforce each other very well. They, in return, could lead to three interrelated positive outcomes, which might include the following:

First, the entire Ethiopian Diaspora population would see the future brighter as the plague of division that has infected our community for so long could come to an end. This would also brighten the hopes and dreams of our people back home who look up to us in the Diaspora to free them from the shame and hardship to which they are being subjected under absolute authoritarian rule of a minority regime in Addis Ababa. All hopeful signs would light up the imagination of our people, and this would also encourage those seeking a regime change through the peaceful struggle to feel a greater sense of urgency and heighten the movement to the level that it should be to bring about the desired end;

Secondly, a united and stronger Ethiopian Diaspora community could also yield enormous advantage to the opposition, particularly in the diplomatic arena. For more than two decades, the Ethiopian Diaspora opposition has been dismissed by Western governments as unworthy of recognition because the division within it has been so rife that giving legitimacy to any one group at the expense of another would not have been diplomatically wise. There is no doubt that the United States, Great Britain, and the European Union, from which the Ethiopian regime receives much of its foreign aid, are mindful of the undemocratic tendencies of their client state in the Horn of Africa. They are certainly aware that the regime in Addis Ababa rules by force and that the overwhelming majority of Ethiopians, inside and outside the country, are opposed to the government. However, the divided opposition in the Diaspora has given them no choice other than subsidizing the TPLF-led dictatorship based on their own national interest and the geo-political realities of the Horn. However, a much stronger and undivided opposition could change all of that. There is no doubt that Western governments would be willing to listen to the opposition more favorably about policies supporting the peaceful struggle that the opposition is waging, both inside and outside Ethiopia, if the opposition was united, as being proposed in this paper. A united opposition could have a better political clout with Western governments than a divided one, as has been the case during the last two decades. Already, reports by Western human rights organizations have shown the true nature of the regime in Ethiopia, exposing its atrocities and brutal policies that have caused incalculable damage to human lives, as well as extreme destruction to the habitats of indigenous people around the country.

Finally, the value of unity could also be realized by making the ethnic minority regime in Addis Ababa to rethink about its intransigence and seek ways to give negotiation a slim chance. If the opposition was successful in the diplomatic arena and made some inroads into convincing Western governments that peace and stability in Ethiopia could come only when diplomatic pressure was brought to bear on the regime, the potential for a negotiated settlement could be enhanced. We should have no illusion that with a united opposition, coupled with diplomatic pressure having to bear on it, the regime would have a better reason to consider reconciliation as way out from the crisis into which the country is likely to plunge as the regime's enemies build momentum day by day. No dictatorship, no matter how powerful, will survive forever, especially one that is becoming more totalitarian by each day, as the TPLF-led regime in Addis Ababa has become.