

Good Example of Bad Reasoning (Professor Medhane)

Part 1

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A Post mortem Reading

Meles was a great leader. Hence, his comrades, compatriots and the global community as well will deeply miss him. In his time, failures and frailties of Ethiopia give way for hope. National despairs vanished. Hence, Ethiopian people adorned him with great love. They love their great leader –Meles– who set them free from centuries old enmeshes of awful historical legacies. Cutting the Alexandrian knot of Ethiopian politics, he renovated the ruthless political environment mottled with turmoil.

Meles’s death would instigate a prompt interest to assess its impact on the national and continental politics. Taking Meles’s death as a kick to appraise the political economy of Ethiopia in the last two decades, Medhane wrote an article title: “Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian State.” Medhane, found it imperative to understand “the meaning of [Meles’s] death and its impact on the nature of political power in Ethiopia.” Hence, a piece of writing under the title just mentioned.

Medhane indicated in his endnote “Writing this piece has been started long before the untimely death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and it became apparent to update it to fit into the current reality.” Therefore, right after I finish reading his article, I began wondering what its original title, thesis, scheme of argument, rendition etc could be.

I want to engage Prof. Medahne on two levels. One, on ordinary reason basis; on the other as Medhane called for "on a higher level of discussion" (as far as my limitation allowed).

Though Medhane claimed, the witting of his piece "started long before the... death of Meles Zenawi", it nonetheless remained to be a *post mortem* reading -on one hand. On the other hand, despite the longer time space it has, it is totally bereft of an old vine flavor.

I found it insipid. It is simply feign of a research work and infested with vulgarity. It is draped with a scholarly attire made of a 'free -quotation' from owns work. However, the citations have given it a coarse resemblance of an academic piece.

As his 'analysis' is devoid of any theoretical framework that would enlighten his rendition, it would be difficult to take it as serious academic work. It lacks not only an ideal excellence, but also rudimentary standards of a research work. However, it has that talismanic endnote "**Medhane Tadesse is academic specialist on peace and security issues in Africa**" that gave it magnanimity.

I do not know whether Medhane tried to judge his article, not in terms research norms but at least in what he has promised to accomplish. I simply guess that he feels complacent about it. Sure, this is declared in his decision to let it see the light of the day.

However much the author tried to give his article an air of a research work; adorning it with some irrelevant endnotes; it just remained to be a piece of writing expressing the personal and political opinion of the author.

In any case, Medhane is entitled to his opinion. He is entitled to think and express his thoughts the way he sees it fit and pleased him. He has this inalienable right, be it as an academician or ordinary citizen. In as much as

his academic freedom awarded him with the right even to say, "The sun rises in the West, and sets in the East" he is strictly required to come up with substantive evidences to support his claim. Moreover, the scheme of his argument should rigorously follow the rules of logical thinking and rational presentation. Nevertheless, the general scheme of argument exhibited in his article has a confused structure and it is infested with a number of fallacies. Hence, it is a botched article.

It all begins with the following opening paragraph:

Meles Zenawi and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) led Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991 after a sixteen-year armed struggle in the countryside. In subsequent years, Meles Zenawi rose to have a disproportionate power in the Ethiopian state rising above the TPLF/EPRDF. As an instructor, theoretician, military strategist, intellectual and all-around, all-star politician of the EPRDF Meles shaped Ethiopian politics for over two decades and worked hard to sustain the political system he helped create. This is crucial in understanding the meaning of his death and its impact on the nature of political power in Ethiopia. And equally important, to understand what this says about the character of the Ethiopian state.

From the word go Medhane made a grave mistake that go against the central thesis of his argument. The preferred style of the opposition party in designating EPRDF is "*TPLF led EPRDF.*" Though Medhane claimed that, "TPLF the most organized political force in the post-1991 Ethiopian landscape is immobilized" (P: 3) he lingers on the designating the ruling party as "TPLF led EPRDF" which is a signature tune of the opposition parties. Saying, "TPLF led EPRDF" would be an antithesis to claiming, "The

power base is relocated from Tigray and the TPLF to the Center and the EPRDF" (P: 4).

That is a passing remark.

The article is an expression of his effort to understand the "meaning and impact of Meles death on the nature of political power in Ethiopia. And what this says about the character of the Ethiopian state" -Whatever he means by his last sentence.

However, in my opinion, Medhane failed not only to cash his promises, but also his premises. And, I was about to say, "Is this a writer or a liar?" Confounded by the scheme of his argument I said, Medhane's article, would be a good example of a bad reasoning. Your '*whys*' will be answered in due time.

Medahne tried "to draw from the existing analysis" (whatever he means by that) with a view of having "a comprehensive understanding of Meles's political trajectory" which he alleged, would help us grasp "the otherwise-puzzling aspects of legacy of Meles."

This being his objective; he began his piece of writing with a description of Meles's political personality. Then, "with a touch of overstatement," said Medhane, "Meles Zenawi is the most important person who has ever lived in the history of the TPLF and the post-1991 political order in Ethiopia."

Moreover, without a taint of any "overstatement" he continued his assessment and affirmed, "Only few political leaders in contemporary Africa have been both great thinkers and astute political operatives." According to Medhane, of these few political leaders in contemporary Africa, "Meles Zenawi is perhaps the most gifted of them all." As we can see from Medhane's assessment Meles has an unparalleled excellence not on a national but on a continental scale.

Again, without coloring his statement with a phrase like “with a touch of overstatement” he affirmatively characterizes Meles not only “as intellectual and all-around, all-star politician” in the EPRDF but also in the contemporary Africa at large.”

These are just fig leaves. Do not be inflated or get enraged. Just wait and see what Medhane had to say.

Medhane is bemused about “Meles’s early rise to political supremacy” and Meles’s “early rise to political supremacy has always been [For him] an object of fascination and yet one shrouded with mystery.” Now a wish-wash visited Medhane and he said, “Meles’s rise to prominence [is] shrouded with mystery”

As Medhane’s wisdom points, there are “three, in fact four, major factors” that explain Meles’s rise to prominence. Though Medhane promised to point “three”, in fact, “four” factors he end up soliciting ten, as of my inventory. According Medhane:

1. Meles has quick intelligence and communication skills.
2. He is the most gifted orator.
3. He is a formidable debater (particularly in a closed circuit among party disciples)
4. He could be convincing as well as flirtatious (Often).
5. He is a voracious reader who reads everything that mattered to his cause.
6. He read at a prodigious speed, extracting the essence of a book along with a vast amount of detail.
7. Has a piercing intellect and brutal study schedule.
8. He is also an unusually gifted thinker.
9. He blends what he read with the information derived from other sources and the reality of his environment.

10. He is hard working and has a propensity to supply fresh ideas.

This is Meles, both in reality and in the eyes of Medhane. After enumerating, such qualities of Meles Medhane unwarrantedly concluded taking a *deux-machina* that put him at odd with basic principle of logical thinking. After eliciting Meles's qualities, as rehearsed above, Medhane concluded, "these would cumulatively convey the image of a brilliant leader." All the same, "Meles's raise to supremacy is one that is shroud with mystery" for Medhane. This I think is a fallacy that breaks the ordinary norm of reasoning.

"Pandora Box" of Medhane

To be honest, attributes of Meles, which Medhane highlighted, would set anyone with unparalleled excellence and would convey an image and essence of a brilliant leader one could find just one in a million. Medhane's statements have incessantly bemused me.

The above unparalleled qualities of Meles which Medahne has rightly described; are discernable not only to those who are in the closed circuit of the party but also the outsiders like Medhane himself. Then why Meles's early rise to political supremacy become a thing "shrouded with mystery" for Medhane?

However, Medhane who described Meles as "unusually gifted thinker and an accomplished politician" has found "Meles's rise to political supremacy as an object of fascination." A writer who starkly saw Meles's merits and represented him thus, with virtues that would undoubtedly qualify him on a continental level is puzzled by Meles's rise to political supremacy. Being contradictory to himself, he said Meles's rise something "shrouded with mystery."

Medhane puzzled by “Meles’s rise to political supremacy” set out to find answer. According to Medahne, “Meles was, by default or design, strategically placed to make an impact in the early days of the struggle.”

“The young revolutionary, whose rise to prominence owed everything to quick study in the TPLF Cadre School, had little involvement in the war. Meles’ work on political and ideological perspectives to the exclusion of military or other responsibilities permitted him to develop a considerable level of knowledge, as well as the opportunity to train and organize cadres and disseminate his views. ... He got on well with students, the rank and file and his colleagues alike, because they expected him to know more than they did, and they rarely knew enough to challenge him. These roles also gave him a unique relationship with, and understanding of, the cadres that was to prove beneficial in the future.”

These are the basic points on which Medhane will build his argument on. This is the “Pandora box” of Medhne; and when you look in to the sentences packed in this praising box, you will find every evil admonition. This is an instance where you witness as the dove change in front of your eyes into a poisonous snake.

In any case, let us continue our discussion by raising basic questions *vis-a-vis* the points described in the above quote. A party like TPLF will have ideological and political agendas to accomplish. This is obviously indispensable for a political party like TPLF. Hence, it needs to have cadres and these cadres must be trained. Therefore, somebody must be assigned as a trainer. And by default or design, Meles Zenawi took that responsibility.

Does the person who would be assigned, as an instructor will get to know all the cadres he teaches? Yes! Does anybody in the party can assume that position? No! Does anyone assigned to that position would become a good

teacher? No! Was Meles a good teacher? YES! And, as Medhane said, **“He got on well with students and win their respect and love and favor.”**

Medahane tried to picture Meles as a manipulative politician who made “a stealthy rise to power” by feasting on a windfall opportunity and employing a calculated move. The writer who depicted Meles as, inter-alia, “a military strategist” had concluded that Meles “had little involvement in the war.” But he goes on to say that “[His] work on political and ideological perspectives to the exclusion of military or other responsibilities permitted him to develop a considerable level of knowledge.” And noted, “the rank and file and his colleagues alike, they expected him to know more than they did, and they rarely knew enough to challenge him.”

Then he asked himself, “Was this sharp intelligence, inexhaustible curiosity, and encyclopedic knowledge intimidating?”

He answered “Certainly.”

But the “sharp intelligence, inexhaustible curiosity, and encyclopedic knowledge” which Medhane referred as “intimidating” might be intimidating not only to young cadres but also to university professors like you. However, the struggle for freedom is not an engagement where you run after your mundane interests. It is not a venture where you strive to gratify your hypocritical motives. It is not a fashion show, where you are out for a show-off. It is a struggle for freedom and right that involve death and blood.

However, Meles as you rightly said, is a man with “sharp intelligence, inexhaustible curiosity, and encyclopedic knowledge.” And as you might have heard the witness of the *Cambridge University* professors Meles is even an awe-inspiring academician and head of state. Then what is wrong, if the young and veteran cadres “expected him to know more than they did.” What

is wrong if “they rarely knew enough to challenge him?” After all, they attend his lecture/class to learn. These are trivia.

A person with higher motives and a good sense of self-respect would be disgusted to take issue like this. A person who is blessed with an awe-inspiring title like ‘professor’ should never come up with issues of the mediocre. You must engage yourself with issues of importance. And you are expected to talk sense.

Assume that you have “sharp intelligence, inexhaustible curiosity, and encyclopedic knowledge” and that would naturally create a respect from an audience. I do think your students would feel intimidated by the “sharp intelligence, inexhaustible curiosity, and encyclopedic knowledge” you may have. They rather consider themselves blessed for having a chance to be taught by such an instructor who is endowed with a “sharp intelligence, inexhaustible curiosity, and encyclopedic knowledge.”

You must have also heard that many senior politicians of the West said that they love to hear Meles talk in his Shakespearean English. They get enticed by his analysis and comments while they admit that they do not agree with his ideology. UN Secretary General Ban-ki-Moon commented, “Meles Zenawi is a great leader of high distinction.” Former US president Mr. Clinton, Dr. Jendayi Frezer and Mr. Susan Rice said the same. You must have also heard that many senior politicians of the West love to hear Meles talk in his Shakespearean English.

“A world class” mind like Meles’s should deserve nothing but admiration. Oh who said, “It is a blessing to see something greater than mine?” Of course, no need to say that; for that matter Medhane can flatteringly describe Meles. However, as he is torn between two interests, he ended-up confusing his readers and himself. Half way between admitting an un-coverable genius of

Meles and smearing his earned virtues, Medhane wind up irrational. But Medhane being antithetical to the entire argument of his article said:

“Meles didn’t claim it; he earned it.”

Did Medhane really understand the meaning of these words of his? I cannot help saying; I doubt. I really doubt; because the idea he tried to impart by the statements in the above paragraph would be none-sense if one belief that “Meles didn’t claim his position as a leader but earned it.”

Prof. Medahne, let me you a simulation your argument.

A Simulation of Reasoning

Right after I finish reading Medhane’s article I had an urgent desire to know more about the scholarly trajectory of the author; just like as he had an insatiable urge to analyze Meles’s death. Going to my shelf, I picked up a slim book by the same author. It was a book titled: *“Turning Conflict to Cooperation in the Horn of Africa;”* (2003) – a book that is copy righted by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Turning the front cover, I read a self-advertisement note on its title page that says, “Conflict and Defense Analyst in the Horn Africa.” And I began wondering how he rose to such a status. But before long I settle this bemusement, absent mindedly closed the book and began ruffling the pages through and had a look to the back cover page where I found a praising message of the director of an organization - Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, who sponsored the publishing of the book.

Following the blurb of the director, there you have a hypocritical and self-aggrandizing note of the author, which runs (verbatim), “Medhane Tadesse – a specialist on the Horn of Africa- has written extensively on various historical and political issues of intra and interstate conflicts, and is uniquely

qualified to write on the Horn's international relations. For information about securing Medhane for your executive retreat, panel discussion, conference, or executive briefing email at...."

Now, with due respect to Medane's active intellectuality, I would respond in rhyme, to what he had said about Meles and give him a taste of 'himself.' The following is the simulation:

Medhane Tadesse's disproportionate rise to the status of "Conflict and Defense Analyst in the Horn of Africa" is a mystifying issue to me, and it has always been an object of fascination yet one shrouded with mystery. There might be many ways to explain, Medhane's rise to a "Dr. Cookies" prominence in Ethiopian. But my own sense points to three, in fact four, major factors. The prominent among which is his self-advertizing skill as exhibited above. With a touch of overstatement, he might have been a good analyst, particularly in a closed circuit among NGOs and aid industry practitioners. He must have been convincing as well as flirtatious to these people. However, this is not the place to write about the turning points in Medhane's rise to the status of "conflict and defense analyst in the Horn Africa", but instead to identify the existing fallacies in his article, "Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian State" which would help us in having a comprehensive understanding of the scheme of his argument and the trajectory he tread on as a self-styled specialist on the Horn of Africa and the otherwise puzzling message of his article.

Medhane has the tendency to write pseudo-academic article or anything that mattered to his personal advancement (political causes). He was known for his brutal analysis of Ethiopian politics that helped him to rise, above himself as a "uniquely qualified" expert who make himself accessible and available to the 'heads of states' and all other executives of the higher echelon in the aid industry for executive briefings in their retreat.

Medhane has been trying to raise his life to this prominence for over two decades and worked hard to sustain the tactics that helped him create an enviable CV as analyst. This is crucial in understanding the meaning of his latest article and its impact on the current political situation in Ethiopia. And equally important, to understand what this says about his character as an academician or analyst.

Take it or leave it. However, this is how Medhane argued.

I found Medhane's article to be foggy in its message and unclear in its intent. Foggy, because its scheme of argument is arranged in such a way that one can draw as many messages as the number of readers we may have. One may say, "The article is all about the excellence of Meles in politics and his unimaginable success in his economic endeavor. Save the failure, as he alleged, in the political sphere.

Medhane's article commences with the aim of "understanding the meaning of Meles's death and its impact on the nature of political power in Ethiopia."

This is the basic and the general statement, that would be, in his opinion, "crucial in understanding the meaning of his death and its impact on the nature of Ethiopia politics." His stated goal of writing the article was to "understand the meaning of Meles's death and its impact on the nature of political power in Ethiopia, and what Meles's death "says about the character of the Ethiopian state."

Medhane promised to assess both the meaning and impact of Meles's death. I do not think Medhane has squarely defined his "research topic" and it is a failed venture for many reasons and reasoning.

Of course, Meles's death might have every kind of impact on the political spheres, but nothing "on the nature of political power in Ethiopia." For the nature of political power in a given country is an interplay of so many issues

that involve all socio-cultural, legal and historical elements. This is where employing theoretical framework revealed itself important. In a kind of discourse, Medhane has engaged himself theoretical framework is necessary. This I think is one of the deficiencies his article is suffering from.

Whether a constitution of a given political community is the product of environment, or the environment is product of constitution, is a perennial question. It is Meles's actions in his lifetime, rather than his death, which will have continued impacts on the nature of political power in Ethiopia. That means, Meles's impact on the nature of political power in Ethiopia will go beyond his physical death. His in this regard impact transcends his death and it would be lasting. Hence, seeing the impact of his death on the nature of political power in Ethiopia is an epistemological error.

Moreover, in Medhane's article, you have another grave error that has the same magnitude as the previous one. To begin with, it is impossible and nonsense to attempt to evaluate "the meaning of Meles's death." I think one would take the expression "understanding the meaning of Meles's death" simply mean "the impact of Meles's death." It would be safe and sound take that way. But this is not the case with Medhane. It is Mumbo-jumbo.

No rational being, would set out to extract meaning from the rolling of a stone - even the physicists. For one thing, death is not a volitional action. The meaning of Meles's death is nothing but death. One can talk about the meaning of his death only from God's perspective, which Medhane had no intension and predisposition to do. As for the impact of Meles's death, we have a lot to go about; save the nature of political power in Ethiopia. For another thing, it is a common fate of every mortal being like Meles, which would render any effort to understand or dig the meaning of somebody's death a foolish task.

In his discussion nothing of these issues were addressed. All those sexy topics obviously remained unmentioned. Rather Medhane tried to identify factors that explain "Meles's rise to prominence in Ethiopian politics." He mentioned two factors; the first one is "his little involvement in war." In Medhane's view, Meles's qualities (that he extensively accounted) is the result of his "his little involvement in war" and the other which Medhane described as "Far more interesting, and potentially more consequential" was "his sense of appreciation of power."

His Little Involvement in War

Let me paraphrase Medhane's entire argument. And it looks like the following, that Meles's "had little involvement in war. And solely work on political and ideological section of the party to the exclusion of military or other responsibilities. This has permitted him to develop a considerable level of knowledge and the opportunity to train and organize cadres as well as disseminate his views. These have paved way for Meles rise to prominence in both the party and in the government posts."

Medhane is reserved to assert that this was a "default" turn of events. He also said nothing whether that was a premeditated decision of Meles's party. He left this for imagination and he conjured up things in such a way that it gives us a "designed" move on the part of Meles who consciously worked for a long time to assume the supreme position of power in the party and state.

This of course does not seem to be the *prima facie* meaning of his text. However, deciphering all the conventional arrangement of his text would reveal this gist. It is rather an implicit gist of the text embedded in the sub-text.

From the very beginning, Meles was lucky enough to have a position where he could pursue his reading, which permitted him to develop a considerable

level of knowledge that was instrumental to influence the cadres in the party and win them as friends. In his own words:

It was his skill as a political operative, his devotion to reading and writing that won him the favor of his party leaders that it can be easy to forget that he has spent the better part of his 16 years in the armed struggle not as a military leader but an ideologue and debater. Likewise, in the last three years that led to the downfall of the Derg, while certainly immersed in military affairs, spent much of his time putting out political fires and preparing himself for big roles

In Medhane's view, had it not been for Meles's "skill as a political operative, his devotion to reading and writing" he would not have been elected as leader to his party; because he had little involvement in war. His devotion to reading and writing influenced his party members "to forget that [Meles] has spent the better part of his 16 years in the armed struggle not as a military leader but an ideologue and debater."

In Medhane's eye, Meles is always apt to change every situation- default or design- to his advantage and finally became the unchallenged leader of the country. Meles is intelligent; because he had, "by default or design", held the strategic position that enabled him to "got on well with students, the rank and file and his colleagues alike." In sum, "From the beginning of the armed struggle, Meles was well positioned to advance in the leadership of the TPLF."

According to Medhane, "Meles's early rise to political supremacy has always been an object of fascination yet one shrouded with mystery." In his sense there are "three, in fact four, major factors" that will explain Meles's rise to prominence in Ethiopian politics.

In Medhane's view "the Prominent among the [four major factors] are, his quick intelligence and communication skills that often made convincing as well as flirtatious, his formidable ability in debate, his being voracious reader

and his known piercing intellect and brutal study schedule.” But these are all virtues born out of the womb of his “little involvement in war.”

As he had little involvement in the war and because he was, “assigned to work on political and ideological perspectives to the exclusion of military or other responsibilities” Meles was able “to develop a considerable level of knowledge.” Medhane continue his argument “the opportunity to train and organize cadres [had created a chance] where Meles could disseminate his views and get across his arguments.”

He got on well with students, the rank and file and his colleagues alike, because they expected him to know more than they did, and they rarely knew enough to challenge him. These roles also gave him a unique relationship with, and understanding of, the cadres that was to prove beneficial in the future.

His conclusion is [Meles was] “by default or design”, strategically placed to make an impact in the early days of the struggle.... And his sharp intelligence, inexhaustible curiosity, and encyclopedic knowledge were intimidating in the eyes of the cadres who expected him to know more than they did, and they rarely knew enough to challenge him.”

In sum, “his hard work and his propensity to supply fresh ideas would cumulatively convey the image of a brilliant leader....The intertwining of these talents forms the overriding force behind his quiet and stealth rise to power.”

Praising statements such as “Meles is an accomplished politician. He is also an unusually gifted thinker. He read at a prodigious speed, extracting the essence of a book along with a vast amount of detail, which he blended with information derived from other sources and the reality of his environment” among others are intermittently inserted after every other affirmative statements. Of course, their collateral negative statements will regularly follow these affirmative statements. Nevertheless, do not take as a casual error which every one of may fall in to. In

Medahane's case, it is a well-mediated scheme of his argument. More interesting in Medhane's comment is culminated by an affirmative phrase "He didn't claim it; he earned it."

The most disgusting characteristic of Medhane's argument is that, he accused Meles for what he himself has acknowledged as meritorious traits of Meles.

- Medhane interpret his being a voracious reader as a mischievous act, which is aimed at distinguish himself from his comrades others. Medhane implicated Meles's assignment as an instructor in TPLF cadre school as a wicked plan of paving his way to power; by winning the hearts of his colleagues and the rank and file cadres using his good-office.
- His good communication skill (with a flirtatious element) which Medhane accounted in a way that would seem a thing of flattery; was interpreted as an act of conceit.
- His assignment as instructor was inferred as a calculated move on Mele's part to make way and create an opportunity for self-promotion that won him everything in matters of power.
- In short, Medhane accused Meles for what he is. Vilify him for being an excellent human being. He tried to depict Meles as someone who devotes his time and energy to cut through the ascending tread to the top leadership position.

We might say that Meles is judged "guilty" of being excellent. The writer's strategy is to tell us explicitly the best qualities of Meles to an extent that may lead some to redeem it as "sheer flattery" and turn his virtues against him. One fell astonished by how Medhane turned the explicit qualities of Meles against him. This I think is a new strategy of dismissing an opponent.