Prelude

I heard a rumor in early 2011 that the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi released an outline of his proposed dissertation with the above title for qualifying for his PhD graduation. Now, the officially released document of the dissertation under progress at his death is at my hand as a focus. Time wise, Meles made a speedy progress in, at least, laying down the key conceptual and empirical cornerstones of his unusually voluminous research project within two years. From commonplace experiences in research writing of this scale, it is interest begging here whether Meles left initial handwritten or computer-saved notes. It is unlikely that he did not have such initial and preliminary documents. I therefore hope that his family and colleagues will do something probably some day to bring them into intellectual purview.

Meles left his dissertation regrettably incomplete but with substantial weight of flesh and skeleton of his entire study. In addition to his rich literature sources, about 240 documents and more than 100 authors, Meles completed the Introduction, the Conclusions of 10 Chapters and the full details of Chapter 7 (Democracy, the Developmental State and Development), Chapter 17 (Outcome of Economic Reform) and Chapter 21 (The African Renaissance and the Need for a Paradigm Shift). Meles apparently postponed the writings of Chapters 3 (Market Failure in developing countries), 5 (Foreign Investment and Development) 15 (Botswana: the Exception that Proves the Rule), 16 (the Neo-Liberal Diagnosis and Prescription), 18 (Outcome of the Political Reform), 19 (Some Country Stories). He did not start either the main body of the conclusions of these Chapters or their conclusive remarks as he did in others.

This unquestionably makes a scholarly appreciation of detailed accounts even more incomplete than Meles’s dissertation itself. My comments are therefore limited largely to reviews of the general gist of his study with a painful effort of tracing logical routes in some of his arguments. My intention here was and is never to seriously criticize Meles’s unfinished project, which would be both technically impaired and ethically improper. I rather tried to appraise the overall methodological trends and technical and tools Meles demonstrably employed across the partially or wholly written parts. I took more time on the apparently completed Chapters of Meles’s work including Conclusions. A critical investigation shows that these Chapters have much in themselves to supply some kind of discernible conceptual picture. I could not avoid making as reasonable interventions as possible at a few silent portions based on the general approach Meles frequently used.

I reviewed how and what typology of methodology and methods Meles used in his dissertation to attain his goal still based on his writing as it is. I also attempted at appreciating the generalized insights and enquiries Meles had had into the main topical crux of his dissertation.
1. Methodological Meles: Insights and Enquiries

Meles constructed the title of his dissertation out of three major thematic issues—the African Development, Dead Ends, and New Beginnings. While the theme ‘African Development’, technically speaking, is Meles’s what scholars call ‘Dependent Variable’ which he sets as a focused and unchanging enquiry of his study. In other words, the main store of scholarly worry and curiosity for Meles is the controversial theme that asks how Africa could achieve development. This thematic backbone of Meles’s dissertation does not change its concern and course throughout his 56-page paper. The two other enquiries, which Meles separates from the Dependent Variable and combines into one Statement—Dead Ends and New Beginnings—constitute what scholars call the ‘Independent Variable’ of his study.

This variable is ‘Independent’ because it is free to flexibly change and shift from dialogue to dialogue. In that way, the author, Meles Zenawi, could employ it to finally test the plausibility of his conclusions against the reliability and validity of the date he uses as well as the relevance of his hypotheses, if any. Meles appeared to prefer metaphoric terms to the direct use of technical jargons in curving up his title. As details of his paper tell, Meles uses the metaphor ‘Dead Ends’ to represent the technical concept, Neo-liberalism as lying at its death bed. In parallel, he uses ‘New Beginnings’ to represent the opposite concept and alternative to the former, the Developmental state or Developmentalism. Meles sets these two contrasting world outlooks of the ‘African Development’ into a most bitterly dialectical battle through out his paper. Meles targets that the ultimate resolution of the contradiction between these two alternatives at the end of his dissertation would cancel one as irrelevant and hold the other high as a panacea to the problems of African development.

Meles’s Dependent Variable—the African Development in the title bears within itself a critical enquiry. It is this enquiry, which shapes the course of his systematic search for plausible and credible answers at the end of his paper. Meles put this enquiry in implicit terms and as a given reality on the ground. Thus, a reader could iron out and complete the essence like this: which pathway between neo-liberalism and the developmental state could leverage Africa’s development out of its present underdevelopment? Meles’s title again contains the crude possible but tentative answer, which scholars call the ‘hypothesis’ before conducting the dialogue throughout the research writing. Though Meles hints a good deal at his Introduction, he leaves which one of the two outlooks, Neo-liberalism or Developmentalism, is a ‘Dead End’ or a ‘New Beginning’ just open to get answers from the details of the dissertation.

This methodologically makes Meles’s research a literature provoking deepened curiosity in his readers to trace the complex lines of his reasoning to judge one as ‘appropriate’ and the other ‘inappropriate’ for Africa’s development. As his synopsis and some of the detailed arguments tell, Meles intends little to capitalize on defining what such concepts like development, African development, Liberalism, Developmental state or Developmentalism, etc, in greater details. He apparently out leaves these concepts as given and well understood by his future targets and audience as well as his advisors. This again makes Meles’s enquiry and insights much closer to the literary level of highly conceptualized and deeply synthesized

---

dissertations. The usual targets of such papers are high profile policy makers and decision-givers, pundits and think-thanks, critics and analysts, etc. As such, one can rightly categorize Meles’s dissertation primarily as what scholars call an ‘Applied Research’. It is an ‘Applied Research’ in the sense that it seeks to expose secrets behind which one of the two paths of development does or has been doing the best for African development. This is not the end of the story, however, as research of this scale is beyond this simple categorization.

To attain this goal, Meles employs a blend and combination of various other research techniques in his methodology. To systematize the meanings and relevance of either Neo-liberalism or Developmentalism, Meles uses more of practical/experimental techniques than concept-bordered abstractions. He mentally shuttles back and forth among a list of states succinctly describing them and the historical trajectories of their socio-economic development as they are. Meles, for example, brings Botswana from Africa, Italy from Europe, Japan, China, South Korea, Thailand and others from Asia into skillful exhibition for his readers by way of expounding what Liberalism versus Developmentalism means.

Despite the estimably voluminous size of Meles’s dissertation, this technique helps him to translate abstract theories in his mind into concretized case studies simplifying comprehensions for readers. For this reason, one can safely also say that Meles uses a methodology, which scholars identify as a research through a blend of Exploratory (first time assessments), Case Study (research on a selected subject) and Descriptive methodologies (exposing a phenomenon as one finds it with out asking cause-and-effect relations). Still, Meles does not restrict the enquiry and insight of his dissertations to identifying relevant case studies and describing socio-economic faces, trajectories and current postures of a selected case of states as far as development is concerned. He picks Africa as a continent as an experimental litmus test for strengthening his argument that neo-liberalism in Africa is a development fiasco. Meles recurrently resorts to Botswana to empirically underscore the relevance of his argument in favor of developmentalism as the best available choice for African development.

By this, Meles directly and indirectly argues strongly that the key responsible factor and culprit for Africa’s underdevelopment is neo-liberalism and the neo-liberal African state. Meles deepens his dialogue by skillfully establishing a logical link between neoliberal policies of the African state and African underdevelopment. For Meles, the liberalized post-colonial African state as an intermediary agent between the capitalist north and the poor African populations, the western-driven Structural Adjustment Program in the 1980s, and other factors have kept Africa and its populations far beyond the edges of development. By contrast, Meles stresses and details how the developmental state has caused for the successful development and transformation of once extremely marginalized and impoverished societies within a short span of time.

This typology of research explaining effects by their causes and vice versa for research scholars is a perfect Explanatory Research. The major goal of scientific researches in the

---


Explanatory category is building a new scientific body of knowledge and developing a new insight. Meles’s dissertation fulfils this quality beyond doubt as demonstrated below.

1. 1. Descriptive Meles

Meles adopts a social science methodology that progresses from descriptive to prescriptive techniques. In the descriptive part, he attempts at theoretically and conceptually determining the African socio-economic realities in the ‘as is’ technique. However, Meles’s descriptive approach, as implied above, opts for more abstract ways of expositions than a simple ‘as I saw it’ method—structural approach. That Meles uses structural views of the African society helps him to emphasize the most relevant and essential stepping-stones toward his prescriptive formulation of the key enquiry of his work—African Development. A critical examination of Meles’s methodology reveals that he demarcates visible thematic boundaries among the key components that aggregately constitute the basic socio-economic structures of the African society.

Meles systematizes these components of the African societal structure in a comparative research technique against the historical and intrinsic repository of the opposite socio-economic structure—the Western society.

However, Meles applies an unusual method for his comparative description of the West versus Africa by picking a more subtle case study—Italy. By doing so, Meles diverges not only from the African traditional authors of political economy but also from those in the West. While African authors conventionally compare Africa versus the West, Western authors usually pick Italy as divided into the North versus the South. They raise Italy mostly in their discussions on the irregularities in the formation of the state and the process of nation building. Meles picks Italy (North Italy dichotomized by the South) rather as an immediate case in point to demonstrate symbolically the structural differences between the West and Africa. In addition, Meles argues that Italy in this dichotomy, which he describes as ‘Italy as two countries in one’ better does the job. Though Meles’s emphasis on Italy is in connection with his argument on ‘democracy’, he technically uses the opportunity to underpin his divergent insights into a third path for African developments.

In Meles’s view, the north represents the modern capitalist state and society operating in a free market environment while South Italy lags structurally to function in a virtual pre-capitalist socio-economic and cultural order. Meles’s description of North Italy exactly fits a descriptive exposition of what capitalism under a liberal paradigm looks like. He applies a set of attributes inherent only to a capitalist society. These include, for instance, the incidences of civic organizations, the extensive proliferations and rules of horizontal social networks absorbing the individual member into more than one associations, public participation, civic trust and respect for the law, strong sense of both public and civic honesty, bottom-up and top-down culture of mutuality, and the low political culture of taking politics as a zero sum game.

Though Meles did not cite the author, his description of the western capitalist society in the case of North Italy reminds us the German early 20th century sociologist, Auguste
Comte. Comte summarizes Meles’s views in a phrase naming the nature of social fabric in such a society as ‘organic solidarity’. Soon, Meles turns his face to South Italy to describe his contrast against the North still focusing on what moral philosophers call ‘the governing character of society’. Meles depicts the basics of social relations and networks in South Italy from different angles. He describes the issue of horizontal civic organizations as ‘thinly available and vertically linked’; he points to the dominance of ‘amoral familialism’ and the crop up of amoral organizations like the mafia.

By ‘familialism’, Meles defines it as a variant form of social organization where the family is the key network. Meles exposes low public involvements in public affairs, use of political parties as tools of patronage, prevalence of structural corruption and poor regard for the law as established societal norms. Here Meles appears to borrow the philosophic pictures given by Thomas Hobbes when he writes that ‘there is very little trust and every one expects everyone else to enforce the law and impose it.’

Meles did not stop here; he went further to add some more details describing capitalist society still in his representative case study of North Italy but now by comparing it against that of South Italy.

The North has ample social capital, the South has very little of it. The North has ample civic virtues, the South has very little of it. The North has been the home base of democratic and progressive thinking in Italian politics. The South has been the home base of the Mafia and anti-democratic tendencies in Italian politics. Since the introduction of regional governments in Italian politics, the North has had effective regional governments that people are satisfied with and politics in the regional arena has been relatively free from patronage and rent seeking. The South has had very weak, ineffective and corrupt regional governments. Regional politics has been riddled, through and through with patronage and rent seeking. If the South had been a separate country its politics would have been comparable only with Africa and not with Europe.

Meles still continues to appreciate the differentials between capitalist versus pre-capitalist societies in the case study above largely from bottom-up direction of research. He compares the two societies sharing the same Italian state as demonstrating essential divergences in their values, norms, traditions, thoughts, and views of the world. This divergence of Meles again appears to pick commonalities with that of Auguste Comte. Comte calls relations within communities like those of South Italy as ‘mechanical solidarity.’ other scholars may also agree that Meles’s dichotomization, one way or another, fits the dichotomy between traditional populations and modern societies. By all measurements, African societies resemble, more or less, the society of south Italy, but both have been destined by history to live and function together despite this much wide and structural disparity.

---

Meles’s description of the typical African state in the following words helps him to specifically locate his conceptual trajectory from description to prescription after a thorough diagnosis into the African real headache.

The African state which emerged from colonialism had essentially the same characteristics irrespective of the socialist ideological pretensions of a significant number of them. It was a predatory state driven by the logic of maximizing rent for the rulers whatever its implications for the economy. Its capability to collect rent was based on its intermediary status. It was the intermediary between its people and the international system, and collected rents through foreign aid in return for diplomatic clientage, through providing privileged access to domestic resources and market and taxing trade.

At this stage of his writing, Meles refrains from reasoning out why this happens, as his existing concern is more of description.

What Meles precisely does here is that he implicitly invokes the simple question of what one can prescribe for South Italy, which in transitivity or directly applies to Africa. This takes us to the discussion of the prescriptive Meles before we go the review of his diagnosis into hurdles, the major challenge of academics everywhere.

1.2. Prescriptive Meles

Once a scholar describes a social phenomenon adequately in ‘as is’ method, it is usually a relatively simple and agreeable task to provide prescriptions. In line with Aristotelian traditions, while descriptions help to locate the illness, prescriptions suggest the likely medicine. Meles does not however follow this tradition strictly; he cruises back and forth where he blends both descriptions and prescriptions along with each problem he raises and deliberates. As an average reader could expect at this normative stage of any analysis, Meles prescribes ‘African development’ as the panacea for all the said African agonies and backwardness in a world divided by two brands of societies. In short, Meles’s prescription of African poverty is to attain a stage of growth that more or less resembles the description of North Italy, next-door case of advancement.

Meles however goes beyond simple prescription to lay down some attributes of development in the specific context of Africa. These attributes have two major aspects: temporal and spatial. Temporally, Meles suggests not simply an ‘African development’ per se but development within ‘accelerated speed’ and today, never tomorrow, of course, in the metaphoric sense. The rationale for the exceptional rapidity of African development for Meles is the unbelievable widest gap between Africa and the West. ‘Time’ takes a crucial place in prescriptive Meles. Spatially, African development for Meles is the development of the structurally dominant and majority rural population. These populations come at the top in

---

5 See Andrew Heywwod. 1994. Political Ideas and Concepts. Baskingstoke: Macmillan for a detailed explanation on the formation, pronouncements, alignments and maintenance of political views of differing gradations across the political spectrum of a society regardless of level of socio-economic growth and the major factors that operate at their backgrounds.
Meles’s list of priorities for the simple reason that they are the essence of African demography and distinctiveness.

African development for Meles is that these populations would change into citizens on the model of North Italy, educated, productive, less dependent on the state, continuously prospering with a minimum of inequality, almost in a blanket fashion and, of course, innovative. Meles takes all scholarly cautions where he never gives theoretical or empirical leeway for this definition of ‘African development’ to get confused with other meanings like growth, modernity or others. The very cardinal matter in Meles’s prescription is nothing but African development within the global framework of the statuesque and amidst all stumbling blocks of any nature and extent. Meles, at this point, makes all ground work systematically to delve into the fundamental questions that unavoidably arise in the most difficult academic task of linking the description with the prescription.

So far, either Meles’s description or prescription have not sufficiently clarified to essentials of his research theme: first, what are the ultimate and root causes explaining the African quagmire resembling that of South Italy? Secondly, which trajectory takes African societies from the described deplorable stage and state of situations to that of the prescribed development? Meles still restores to his brief case study of Italy within the same Chapter to prepare himself to the argument by curving a temporal and spatial trajectory in the growth question between North Italy and South Italy. Let us the following extract of his dissertation:

The path of economic development of the two parts has also been very divergent. About ten years after unification, in 1881 Italy was still a predominantly agricultural country. The South and the North did not differ much in terms of economic development. 60% of the population of the country lived in the rural areas, only 15% was engaged in industry including in cottage industry. The South was slightly more urbanized than the North. But Northern Agriculture was more productive and as a result per capita income was 15% - 20% higher in the North than in the South. By 1911 the North had made enormous strides in industrialization while the South had become less urban. Per capita income differences had increased to 50%. Despite the huge amounts of money thrown at the South to accelerate its development and the many twists and turns of Italian politics in the twentieth century, the South continued to lag and by the mid eighties, the difference in per capita income had reached 80%.

By this, Meles shows that the fact that South Italy is part of the prosperous North could never cause development in the former. If the ‘development challenge’ is as serious as this magnitude, what holds for Africa, which is geo-politically and anatomically, in Meles’s word; ‘marginalized’ from the developed and industrialized West? As far as Africa is concerned, Meles argues that neither colonization of Africans by European powers nor all forms of external hands have ever contributed anything for its development. Rather, Meles highlights the 1980s in which Africa underwent the west-initiated Structural Adjustment Program suffered the worst crisis under the heaviest western influence. Why? This sixty four thousand dollar question is the central issue of Meles’s dissertation. There, Meles grapples with a dozen of what he calls ‘misplaced and mistaken’ approaches in the mainstream of neo-liberal political economy. With this, Meles passes to his diagnostic stage of the enquiry.
2. Diagnostic Meles

In order to study Meles in his diagnostic stage, let us once again recapitulate the key blind spots in the modern political economy about the puzzles enveloping what he calls ‘the African development.’ Going back to Meles’s example above, South Italy, like Africa, enjoys a huge sum of monetary, technological, infrastructural and other assistances from North Italy. However, South Italians could never catch up with their donor. In Meles’s words, south Italy, like Africa, is triplet with a multitude of socio-economic bottlenecks. Almost all malaises characterizing societies in South Italy and roughly resemble those of Africans are absent or minimal in North Italy. Meles succinctly puts this notion as follows:

High social capital in the North has been blessed with virtuous circle, low social capital in the South has been cursed with a viscous circle, no policy turn, no amount of money has been able to overcome those differences and reverse the differing economic fortunes. The North has had a flourishing democracy, which is relatively free of rent-seeking and patronage. It is based on mutuality and public spiritedness. One can legitimately doubt as to whether the South would have been democratic if it had been a separate country, but as part of Italy, it has had democracy but its politics has been patronage politics par excellence.

Thus, why is it so? Was north Italy borne so while South Italy was cursed to suffer all these social agonies? Meles here travels directly headlong against most approaches of modern political economy. Western African polices and a dozen of arguments prevailing existing thought. The Achilles Ankle in the search for African development for Meles is the erroneous neoliberal growth policy overwhelming global thinking to date. This policy rationale, according to Meles, could be rightly compared with those of North Italian attempts to develop South Italy by forcing the latter to follow the trajectory of the former. In Meles’s view, the culprit in the wide gap between the North and the South fundamentally sprigs from the corresponding extreme gaps of what he persistently calls ‘the market failure’.

Meles identifies ‘market failure’ as the conceptual and empirical pillar of his analysis to underline structural commonalities of the African people as opposed to differentials with those of the West. For Meles, ‘market failure’ and the degree in its depth and intensity have always been the organic factor separating the African society from those of the West. Meles argues that both the malaises and panaceas of African development have to be searched, therefore, within this differential concertized by again market failure. For Meles, the basic explanation why one society is more developed than the other is nothing but it is the length of the distance between the depths in the respective market failures. There has been a market failure in both North and South Italy respectively. The problem however is the market failure in South Italy is much deeper and deeper than the north.

Meles applies this logic to explain the core source of African malaise. In Africa, the market has been essentially undeveloped or non-existent to provide the ingredients of socio-economic development in the way it has done in the West. Meles argues that the defining cause for African crises in the previous half a century was that the west imposed...
its liberal tradition of the ‘limited state’ on the African state. The neo-liberal notion of what Meles calls the ‘night watch state’ whose hands are tied idle has had little or no intervention in the market. For Meles, the neo-liberal rationale for the limited African state has always been that the market has to get the chance to provide what the society demands. Meles says this is creating a situation where neither the non-existing market nor the existing state could provide anything for the African people, as they lacked them initially there.\(^6\)

In addition to the above, Meles identifies a set of liberally oriented western theories and models of political economy as responsible agents for enormously misleading the African state mentality in the wrong way. He focuses on such approaches, for example, like the ‘exogenous theory of growth’, the ‘Hammar-Domar Model’ (he dealt with it in a different way) and others.\(^7\) While all neo-liberal theories bear within themselves the basic commonality of the ‘night watch state’ argument for Meles, he discerns a set of divergent perspectives among them. Meles criticizes ‘exogenous theory’ for example, for its limitations in that it capitalizes on ‘technology’ per se as the surrogate of African development. Meles refutes this theory for its weakness that wrongly separates technology from the profile of its users, the African population.

Meles also criticizes the ‘Hammar-Domar’ Model (the naming is mine) in the context of African development for the reason still that it is largely de-humanized because of its narrow emphasis on ‘saving’. Meles singles out ‘saving’ per se as a poor explanation of African development for it is an argument in that those few who save would initiate growth. For Meles, this is at the same time the initiation of a society hyphenated by wide income inequality. Practically, Meles argues, the majority of African populations have a structurally homogenous socio-economic basis where ‘saving’ lacks a prior condition to serve as a development surrogate. Meles dismisses these and other approaches including the thrust of western Structural Adjustment Program for the justification that they have proven to be grossly exterior solutions. As he hints in his Italian example, Meles reasons out that the South could not catch up with the North. This is because the development project has never grown out of the very socio-economic structure of the South from within.

Meles also goes against the neo-liberal caricature of what he calls the ‘patrimonial and the corrupt state’ of Africa as the growth of its pre-capitalist social structure. He challenges this thesis by showing that such government failures also persist in South Italy within a capitalist socio-political order under the unified Italian state. Meles seeks the root causes of what he names as ‘rent seeking behavior and patronage’ within the African state structure but against the neo-liberal background of the limited state principle. An African state tied to play limited roles in bridging the widest market failure, in the words

---


\(^7\) See Andrei Heywood, Pp. 44
of Meles, is a ‘predatory institution’ seeking its survivals out of patrimony than a dynamic socio-economic development. He argues and asks that if importing neoliberalism would have solved the problem, why did then colonialism leave behind it such a predatory state in Africa?

Meles proposes the most critical replacement of what he calls the ‘rent collecting state’ of Africa by a ‘developmental state’ as a third path of African development. The question here is: what does Meles mean by the Developmental state?

Meles, the Synthesizer: Conclusive Remarks

The Developmental State (Developmentalism) doctrine of African development is the pillar in Meles’s thesis. Meles’s paper has made substantial progresses in diluting bordered impressions between traditionally opposing views through skilful synthesis of descriptive Africa with the prescriptive one. Here, Meles knits his argument by his prognosis on the developmental state as a catalytic agency. For Meles, the engine of the ultimate African development is of primarily a domestic source rather than an external one. Secondly, Meles fights that the last dynamo where African accelerated development is located is within the vast potentials of its human wealth.

Now, Meles appears to remember that Africa is a continent racked by a multiplicity of diverse and conflicting interests. How can one deal with this? Meles progresses to furnish the answer by stressing both a principle and a strategy-democracy and coalition building. He argues that the African society and their diverse demands require democracy for peaceful and stable developmental project to succeed. This goal, in its turn, demands political parties at any level to search for coalition building with their supporters and followers. However, Meles views that many governments in Africa have failed to realize this and do accordingly, due to their rent-seeking basis of existence and survival. Coalition generates an enduring and reliable mass base curved up as a constituency of supporting masses. This broadens the chances for a developmental party and its programs to garner as many as votes in a free and democratic election.

According to Meles, the primacy of agricultural development as a realistic choice of broad-based, accelerated and dynamic socio-economic transformation in Africa, coalition building with the rural Africans behind the agrarian sector, democracy, a government committed to anti rent collection and patrimonial decay, social capital and inward-looking national policy, etc, are the foundations of the African democratic developmental state. This, a state determined to attain these governance, for Meles, is the developmental state, which must flourish as a new beginning. Contrarily, neo-liberalism or the patrimonial African state as a development option for African development is the dead end.

Meles outlines that African development, primarily, is political in that it demands a type of state in the model of the developmental state. It then follows to be social development where the human side of national wealth has the priority of state investments. What comes last os fast economic advancement all but within a short span of time.