

Dear Messay Kebede: Social Science Never Cares about Your Bias and Hatred from the Balcony

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Dear Messay Kebede

I read your article titled: ‘Beyond Derailment and Canonization: Assessing Meles’s Rule’ written and posted in response to my article: Medhane Tadesse and his Post-Meles Reform Agenda: Quest for Logic and Relevance. As the title shows, my paper revolves around pre-and-Meles politics, reform, the developmental state, above all else, socio-economic dynamism, (no matter how much bitterly you hate to hear the terms), etc. I started the discussion as a response to Medhane, and of course, at the point from where he stopped. I have to correct you here for one mistake you made: you stepped in the matter after Medhane’s paper was sent to Aiga’s web archives while mine was still on the screen. Like you, I asked the editors to locate me where Madahne’s paper was to be found, which I retrieved at getting repose while, I think, you failed to do so. Your statement that my paper was a replacement for Medhene’s is completely wrong.

Back to the crux of the matter, despite my understanding that you actually read almost all arguments, which you call a “paper rambling through 20 pages”, I could not make out why you got focused only with the tip of the iceberg, at least, for your disparaging purposes of my paper. I have been convinced that the list of your logical, definitional, methodological, and ethical shortcomings in your apparently emotionally written article must have come from your, what communication psychologists call, ‘deep cognitive dissonance’ specifically about Meles personally. That you started your introduction with extremely boring polemical vocabularies of politicians led you to your loss of the intellectual compass to finally arrive at a grossly erroneous conclusion. And, methodologically speaking, once you based your arguments on a flawed premise, there is no way out for you but to march ahead in order to justify it. Consequently, you became a

prisoner of your own wrong premises, which are never falsifiable or pursued as a subject of dialogue.

The first and major flaw in your argument is how you understand the logic of both ‘intellectual’ as well as ‘political motive’. If it is your exclusive intellectual privilege to confidently understand and express the background motives of authors, then, what is your motive behind your article? Can I say your motive was and is to serve the political goals of Opposition parties like Ginbot 7 or any other? Unless I myself say it or I give a reasonably understandable hint, what unethical verbal violence is it to have written in the following way?

Scholars loyal to the Woyanne regime, often for the sake of ethnic solidarity, but with some scruples left for the objectivity of scholarly studies engage in a risky project when they undertake the assessment of Meles’s rule of Ethiopia. While their main intention is to bring out and defend what they consider to be undeniable achievements, their scholarly bent prevents them from simply overlooking or painting in rosy terms his obvious shortcomings and failures. So they adopt an approach that presents the good and the bad sides of Meles with the hope that the positive aspect will significantly outweigh the negative one. Unfortunately for them, even their modicum objectivity ends up by sneaking drawbacks so toxic that the general picture becomes that of a colossal fiasco.

Clearly, this is a serious error, which political scientists call the ‘fallacy of false motive’ which you made in your rush to satisfy your declared higher personal appetite of some nature. By the way, if the accurate motives of people could be stated with this much certainty and confidence of yours, why have scholars worried from Plato till now for scientific research? Why do people attend university classes? In our case, how did you know, for example, my ethnic background to use it as a premise for your arguments that it was to serve what you call the goals of ‘ethnic solidarity’? It is terrifying that ‘ethnicity’ is established in your mind as a codex of identifying politically who is who in present Ethiopia.

Dear Messay Kebede

Your misguided and fallacious conception of ‘motive’ makes reappearances across your entire paper from A to Z not apparently as a nervous use and reply but as an inherent methodological deficiency. As a man of some kind of specialty in some field of social sciences as you are, I would prefer you progress to inscribe your ingrained biases at the conclusion of your article. Motive wise, you again frantically went headlong against ethical considerations in your views of Meles almost saying: ‘I have a divine power to know what people think before they speak or do it.’ Your haphazard analysis again proves consistent with this distorted methodology where you never hesitated to argue that Meles’s initial intension was ‘dictatorship’ and he picked the ‘developmental state’ as a guise.

On my part, social science methodology never gives me such an arbitrary leeway to confidently say of ‘this or that motive’ in exactly a lay man reasoning tradition. On this score, I assure you hundred times that you can never find a single political science literature which argues that the motives of rulers in their own articulations from Hamurabi to Idi Aman Dada, or from Napoleon to Mengistu Haile Mariam, if you like, were quoted to have been said like this: ‘my political program is to be a dictator’ or ‘my ultimate motive is to be an absolute authoritarian’ and so on.. The task of a responsible scholar is to prove otherwise through scientific comparison between stated policies or words and intensions against actual practices and deeds as they are. Leave alone Meles Zenawi who started guerrilla war as a leftist revolutionary, for a sober intellectual mind, even Mobutu never had no such a project like ‘erecting a dictatorial regime’. For me, ‘dictatorship’ is, first and foremost, a possibly acceptable or unacceptable caricature from outsiders like you but needing substantial evidence before it is allocated to a leader and one’s regime.

Meles might appear for you, dear Messay, as a superhuman creature haunting against your peace probably for some political or ideological or, as you yourself hinted, for

cultural reasons-ethnic animosity or any other. In my case, however, my paper is a witness that I studied Meles as any rational political actor who, as any human being, chose among alternatives, decided and cared for himself, his party and country's survival. What historical or theoretical evidence do you have to convince one that a leader could pursue 'dictatorship' as a political motive and just for its own sake? Have ever read any literature that arguing that Hitler and Mussolini were creations of their inborn dictatorial passion? Under what specific internal and external conditions that a dictator survives in office for long?

It is perhaps in your cynical and naive political dictionary that a student of political science may find such a 'fallacious motive' behind Meles to rule the Ethiopian people as a 'dictator' two decades without an appreciable degree of utilitarian changes across the board. Your point of departure here quickly surfaces itself to mean the other way round this: the Ethiopian people were born stupid and irrational volunteering to shoulder the burdens of dictatorship, which Meles by motive held to his death. This is my comprehension not by misinterpreting you in the wrong way like you did but by identifying the missed links of reasoning across your article.

What I remember from your words is exactly the days of our emotional languages of the early 1990s when Meles was perceived by many of us as a heretic errand-boy who did not have his own agenda and vision other than given to him by others. You can call it variably: the 'days of strong elite cynicism'. How could I believe that you still uphold a debate over 'motive' which currently almost died even by the standards of die-hard conservative Opposition leaders?

Dear Messay Kebede

Your fallacious understanding of 'motive', philosophically speaking, forced you to stick to viewing Meles as a single-cause factor of your 'derailment story' in separation of not only his practical deeds but also of his influence as a leader, any caricature by any one of us aside, on Ethiopia and Ethiopians. This, in its turn, forced you to absolutely cling to

the ‘obsession’ with him as a person by dragging the essence of the entire discussion to the center of your value war against Meles along a ‘pro-Meles versus Anti-Meles’ border. To serve this appetite of yours again, you tried to surgically cut my arguments out of their background contexts when you thought it possible and by injecting them with ideological and political tastes when surgery was not possible.

Where was, for example, that I wrote like this: it is correct that Meles suspended the process of democratization? I never wrote and will write so because I did study Meles in direct relations to his and his party’s performance, the role of his government, the issue of dynamism, reform, policy, and the Ethiopian people and so on. It is true that I argued and will argue that reform is not a project to be undertaken for its own sake. What is wrong with this? At which part of my paper did you read a statement saying: future benefits justify the continuation of dictatorship? Even so, what is wrong for an author to defend the statuesque solely on the condition that the regime is dynamic and functioning? Do you ever expect me to write in blind negations of positive and most encouraging changes on the ground? Where did you read a statement saying either Meles or his party and government were completely flawless?

Unfortunately, your bias did not allow you to genuinely realize that I argued that the post-2005 election crisis in Ethiopia, first and foremost, was triggered because citizens could not find material and psychological reasons to vote for Meles’s party particularly in urban areas. The relevance of this argument to the subsequent political climate in Ethiopia, to your bitter taste, was that election 2010 proved to be absolutely peaceful. While this election for you is the extension of the usual ‘manipulation and treachery’ by Meles seeing it from your balcony, it perfectly represents for me, seeing from the rear side, that it was a result of positive dynamic developments at the background. Unfortunately again, this background factor is your blind-spot, shrouded by failure to carefully mark boundaries between political actors of any level or their experiences.

Meles and the Ethiopian people were alive at the events of the two elections but with diametrically opposite views, at least, at good majority level, to each other, shaped and

reshaped by dynamic moves in the mean time. If this debatable and falsifiable assumption is wrong for you, how and through what theory, on earth, could you explain the opposite political developments within a difference of five years? I am well aware that you never hesitate to repeat, more or less, what I implied above, as an answer from your pockets: the authoritarianism of Meles matched the stupidity of the Ethiopian people. Am I not logically safe to conclude so based on your unbounded hatred personally for Meles? I strongly believe that this is the most likely prognosis for a sound research finding out that when prejudice is allowed to enjoy the warmth of intellectual phraseologies, exactly the way you did.

Against your bias, I feel the duty to examine and say something why A is different in 2005 from B or C in 2010. I also feel that I am under ethical and intellectual restrictions that I have to have a holistic view of seeing things. I have no any miraculous chance to ignore Meles as if he were not there nor insulate the people in a similar way from the purview of such studies. This is what I accurately did in my response to Medhane. I still believe that reform has to be carefully examined particularly against temptations by outspoken elites who want to impose their beliefs by simply picking them up like a super market good either within the ruling party or outside.

To your chagrin, I also argue and will continue to argue that the dire demand for dynamism should stand as a living criterion for entertaining any proposal for reform. I also argue that Meles, democracy and the developmental state thesis in Ethiopia should be studied and judged against their effects on the fundamental limitations and expectations that most Ethiopians share as cardinal problems. Still for me, Meles's successors had had no other option than insuring a socio-economic lift-up and unstoppable dynamism as the ultimate guarantee of their legitimacy and their stay in office. This is not a new story told now but a mercilessly advanced argument by Meles himself. As a political science student, (because I am not an Angel like you, Messay) it is between this argument versus the real development on the ground that I tried to search for Meles and the logic of Medhane's reform agenda. I did not start and finish every debate on hostile discussion on Meles, like you.

On the question of democracy and democratization in Ethiopia before and after Meles, I do not know for sure what you exactly think on its nature and manner. I however suspect from your anathema to the developmental state that your immediate reference could be America and its democracy on the Fockuyama model. On my part, I am pragmatic arguing that democracy (democratization) again should be measured by its contribution to move Ethiopia's history forward. I do not want to hide from you my conviction as an Ethiopian that every thing or every measure is right so far as it culminates in insuring a utilitarian boost. This might sound like what you call the language of Meles's followers viewing from your balcony again, which I give it no damn value at all.

Dear Messay Kebede

From your arguments, I also suspect that you failed to correctly define and understand some political science concepts of the ABC level that tempted you to giggle a foolish laugh over their implications. Let me cite one:

To give you an idea, we find such laughable statements as “in clearest terms, Meles Zenawi is both a regime breaker and a regime founder as much prominent as Moa and Lenin were....

What meaning the concept ‘regime’ does convey for you, be it a developmental state or another? Do you remember at what point of comparison did I say Meles is comparable with Lenin and Moa? I am afraid that you wanted to say Meles and his party did not break Derg's regime, along with its ideology, values, symbols, constitution, institutions, rules and procedures. Whether one may like it or not including Mengistu Haile Mariam himself, Meles and his party crushed one regime down and replaced it with another which they thought fit to Ethiopian realities. Yes, of course, many other individuals and groups elsewhere are also on the list as examples of breaking entrenched regimes. The point is, however, that it requires exceptional political wisdom of a prominent leader to insure that the substituted regime proves to be dynamic and working.

If this is what I meant by my argument that Meles was a regime breaker and regime founder, what did Lenin or Moa do other than this? I still believe that if the existing regime continues with its current dynamism, Messay hates or Habtamu loves Meles, Meles will continue equally to overwhelm in the memories of the Ethiopian people as the regime's designer, creator or chief game-changer of history. Here, I am not stupid to make out that you, Messay, bitterly targeted Meles not for objectively and convincingly listed shortcomings but for his refusal for not living up to the typology of regime, democracy and path of development, which you strongly believe in and hold firm to your death.

Going back to reform, what would be the arguments and explanations in your profession for the following political developments after official news of Meles's death reached the ears of Ethiopian people?

There was massive traumatic shock across the public at large; then, mourning broke out everywhere with no any instruction from the government; a successive wave of large demonstrations took the streets with a big shout of promises of loyalty to the visions of Meles. After weeks, power transition was undertaken unmistakably smoothly and peacefully. So far, the Meles engineered regime continues stably with no covert or over signs of bottom-up arousals of demands for policy change.

You may say either the time is not ripe or some other nonsense but my profession tells me to study it based on working theories, as I tried to do in my paper. The interpretation of these developments was also the basis of my reform from the rear side with the people at the center of my investigations. Remember my friend, Messay, reform should be a project among this people, not among word-spiting elites from the balcony. I am not a Marxist but from my training and readings, I strongly believe in the natural dialectics of conflicting interests among the people as the locomotives of policy formulation including reform. What is, therefore, wrong with this for a scholar living in a poor country?

Still, your understanding of the concept the ‘developmental state’, like that of Medhane, is excessively top-down, elitist and self-aggrandizing shamelessly pushing the Ethiopian people as irrelevant to the matter. You explained Meles as a dictator, you logically associated the developmental state with Meles and concluded that developmental state is Meles’s guise to cover up his ‘dictatorial project’, What argument is this? While I tried to see the developmental state against its operations and results in the previous decade, your hatred for Meles arrested you immobile against social science methodology to define it out of its theoretical boundaries as the sole domain of Meles. What a bloodiest hatred it is!!

I am under duty to impart the fact to you finally here that whether one is pro-Meles or anti-Meles, any analysis that ignores developments at grass roots level is methodologically self-defeating and doomed to total failure. Social science never cares about your distorted biases, fantasies or hatreds about Meles or about the relations between Meles and the Ethiopian people. You, Messay and I, Habtamu, could never change the reality that Meles will remain to be an inexhaustible subject of social science enquiries and debates forever.