

A MESSY DISCOURSE

ON

WHY MELES HATES ETHIOPIA

Part I of a II Part Response

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I shall first begin by one critical remark and subsequently lay bear the grounds of my contention against Messay Kebede's latest posting --- ***Meles's Shame and Dead-End of Hatred***. It seems to me that Messay is overeager to surpass himself as he continues, with renewed zeal and anger, his never ending one-man crusade against Meles Zenawi. Perhaps Messay reckons that by upping the ante, he can dispel the false rumor that going soft on *Woyane*. As it will be recalled, much to

the good Doctor's displeasure, this palpably false rumor about his U-turn where *Woyane* is concerned begun to circulate no sooner than his dubious power-sharing proposal appeared back in late 2011. Kneejerk reaction aside, the truth is that this former card-carrying ideological heavyweight of Mengistu's Workers' Party has a solid anti-EPRDF credential that no firebrand Diaspora fanatic can upstage. Indeed ever since the Red Terror Regime collapsed, Messay has never and could never be outdone by any self-proclaimed *Ager Wedad* when it comes to Meles-bashing. No doubt, Messay's advantage lies in the fact that he is versed in a totalitarian world-outlook and its close cousin, state-centered ultranationalist doctrine. Whereas, the dwarfs in his camp can only mangle a smattering of ancient mythology that they can barely defend against even a modicum of critical probe. In his latest article, in fact, Messay claims to have sharpened his intellectual tool by which he thinks he can unmask the prime minister's shame-driven congenital "*hatred to Ethiopia*" and thereby de-legitimize his government. It is to this effect, then, that this time around, Messay chose to deliver his endless anti-Meles diatribe in a Freudian register. Unfortunately, as we shall see below, his foray into psychoanalysis proved to be nothing more than what Americans scoff as pop psychology.

In any event, through this intricate discipline in which he is apparently only a novice, Messay claims to have discovered the deepest psychological motives behind Meles' "*anti-Ethiopian stand and his open contempt for whatever is Ethiopian*". In other words, by analyzing the prime minister's family

background, Messay claims to have finally solved the big ‘puzzle’. A mystery, as it were, that only Messay has the rare distinction of being the first to ‘decipher’? Well, according to his own account, this riddle which, lucky for us, he finally cracked is, “*Meles Zenawi’s blatant hatred to Ethiopia*’, which “*Ethiopian intellectual circles have in vain tried to decipher.*” Who can blame them? For which every way one chooses to look at it, decoding a pseudo puzzle is not an easy task even to the greatest minds of the world. However, Messay has one simple but ingenious way of getting around this impossible dilemma. A functional equivalent of a secular Orthodox cleric that he sometimes is, what Messay does is mumble in a chanting rhythmic tone the mantra -- *Meles hates Ethiopia* -- so many times until it takes on the trappings of a virtual reality, at least, among his circle of fellow anti-Melesists. Possibly, mesmerized by what this repetition conjures up in anyone’s mind, Messay’s anti-Woyane friends must have taken Meles’ putative grudge against Ethiopia for granted. Intellectuals as they are who never rest until they get to the bottom of any problem, they, then, must have wrecked their brains out to explain that which by virtue of its non-existence cannot be explained. But try as they may, the honor of proving a negative or, at any rate, an alleged scenario where a prime minister, in this case Meles, conspires to humiliate the very country he happens to administer goes to Messay. He and he alone has the requisite intellectual acumen to unravel such an imaginary anomaly by tracing its root cause, as Messay does, ‘back’ to another simulated realm i.e. the ‘disturbed’ mental world of Meles Zenawi’s childhood. A small wonder, then, that Messay quickly declares, in a triumphal air no less, that he has finally unlocked “... *one important element libel to explain Meles’ hatred*’. In a disingenuous gesture of humility, Messay adds, “*this element has been with us for quite some time.*’ Waiting, as it were, for a genius mental archeologist like him to unearth. And what, we must ask again, is this hitherto buried ‘*element*’ that explains the vindictive hate that drives Meles’ ‘*perverse polices*’? Messay quickly let us in on what he has in mind.

I have in mind the history of his family, which is a history marred by collaboration with occupying Italian forces. Notably, his grandfather not only worked for the Italians, but he was also an appointee and office holder.

Bravo! But Messay must have quickly noticed that, in and of itself, this discovery does not explain much about Meles let alone why he hates Ethiopia so much. So Messay instantly goes into a damage control mode. And, what does he do? He instantly tells us that he has uncovered revealing cause-and-effect relationship between Meles’ grandfather’s service to Rome, and the prime minister’s “*shame and hatred.*” From this, at best, sketchy reference to what Meles’ grandfather did as long ago as the mid-nineteen century (we don’t even know which of Meles’ grandfather he is talking about) Messay extracts the following meaning. “*What this means is that Meles had to deal very early with his family shame*”. Overly impressed by this discovery, Messay’s fans

might exclaim, “Gee! Why didn’t we think of it first”? In actual fact, however, it is, in a figure of speech, a stupendous jump from pillar to post with a dead-end in between. One that takes a big leap of faith to credit even among those who gladly echo whatever damning thing is uttered against Meles Zenawi. Anyone with even a slight familiarity with rational mode of argumentation can see the missing links here without which neither Messay’s opening or closing statement holds water. Where, for instance, is the behavioral pattern or the telling psychological indicators that betray Meles’ inner tension as he wrestled with the emotional effects of his family’s history? Was Meles a juvenal-delinquent who behaved unruly on account of his pent-up vengeful rage? And, if saddled by *shame* as Messay claims Meles was, is there even a rumor let alone hard data that the EPRDF leader was an emotionally withdrawn pupil who did not respond well to instructions at school? As much as Messay’s admirers would like to believe his fantastic rendition of Meles’ evil beginnings, he gives them nothing to duplicate his discovery without sounding ridicules. It is strange, then, that Messay, who must have taught freshman logic at AA University, thinks that it is possible to arrive at a valid conclusion from an unexplained and anecdotal conjuncture without a connecting logical progression. Nowhere in his article does Messay furbish causality that explains the passage of ‘*betrayal*’ from a grandfather to grandson. How could he, in the absence of any warrant for his starting proposition in the first place? To make up for this oversight, what Messay does is extrapolate “objective facts” from subjective analysis which, in any case, lacks coherence let alone rigor. Messay clearly forgets to meet his obligation of firmly establishing his premise that the Meles family suffered “*scorn and isolation*”. Before, that is, smuggling in his impermissibly derived conclusion that Meles himself “*had to deal very early with his family shame.*” It cannot be overstated that Messay conveniently ignores that, to be taken seriously, he had one cardinal task to perform. Namely, that the burden is on him to provide symbolic or practical illustrations that support his claim that Meles had to cope with a daunting legacy that can only be described as ‘original sin.’ Similar or analogues to what we poor Christian souls have to contend with on account of Adam’s transgression.

The intention here is not to be satirical. Rather, it is to draw attention to the parallel between Messay’s therapeutic prescriptions to Meles Zenawi, and the church’s redemptive sermon to the laity. Let me explain by an example familiar to many. In early Christian tradition in particular, the faithful were presumed to be weighed down by a heavy burden of guilt brought on by Adam’s sinful betrayal of God’s command. Ever since this almost unpardonable primal offense, the faithful have been urged to seek salvation in rituals of atonement. Since in the modern era psychology has replaced faith, Dr. Messay Kebede has to don his Freudian garb and counsel Meles that he has two, but underneath, equally unappealing options. A positive and a negative path, as it were, to deal with his “*existential predicament*” associated with his inherited “*shame and guilt*”. But immediately Messay tells us that he knows beforehand that Meles would take the negative and not the positive path of redemption. How he

knows this without laying claim to a godlike omniscience, is another matter. For what it is worth, however, I will quote what in Messay's taxonomy of penance constitutes the positive and the best option that Meles has to be cleansed of his ancestral sin.

a positive way according to which the person affected by family disgrace tries to behave in such a way as to repair the fault. In the case of Meles, this would mean showing a renewed and active commitment to Ethiopia. This is the path of expiation, which requires a serious self-examination and, mostly, a great amount of courage.

Apparently, since Meles is presumed to lack courage, he will never take this first option, but the worst alternative which is

negative and consonant with the lack of courage. It is the path of denial, that is, the denial of betrayal. In order to accomplish this metamorphosis, Meles has to demean Ethiopia and devalue all its accomplishments. The more he belittles Ethiopia, the more he weakens the gravity of the family betrayal, and the less guilty and stained he feels.

What makes Messay's sermon difficult to follow is its fluidity. For instance, as the above quote shows, he seems to suggest, if not assert, that the option of redemption is not available to Meles. Messay then, like the rest of us ordinary mortals, changes his mind. In the last paragraph where he explains why he wrote the article in the first place, he says:

This is, then, an appeal to Meles urging him to psychoanalyze himself so as to become aware of the deep wound that constantly perverts his policy and contradicts his dream of becoming a great leader. As we all know, in matters of spiritual illness, awareness of the cause is an efficient cure so that the second path, the path of expiation through great deeds is still open to him.

Amen! Let by God's grace what we heard dwells in our heart – so would say Messay's Abyssinian orthodox audience. I can't think of any apt response than this given the conflation between, on the one hand, Messay's prognosis and curative recommendation to Meles Zenawi. And on the other, what the clergy preach to the faithful as the path of *expiation*. In both cases, the duality of original sin and guilt is presumed to be ontologically inherent that one has to bear by virtue of a random existential accident of being born into a Christian household and a Zenawi family. Hence, as in the Pontiff's infallible bull, we have to take Messay's 'scientific' diagnosis of Meles' mental 'afflictions' and the cure thereof on blind faith.

It is little surprise, then, that the only thing that Messay manages by way of producing any supportive evidence to any of his countless fatuous statements is a pitiful phrase which reads "*according to testimonies*". What does "*according to testimonies*" mean? If such a compilation of testimonies exist, should it not be available for all to see and even inspect? Why is Messay reluctant to submit it? He couldn't be saving it for a rainy day, when it is clear that his entire contention depends on such evidence? Surely Messay must know that just because one says '*according to testimonies*' one is not free to spew whatever shameful garbage that comes to one's sick mind. In any event, such a vague allusion to 'evidence unseen,' as it were, amounts to nothing. At the very least, it does not license Messay to besmirch the reputation of those he happens to dislike. Nonetheless, like a typical muckraker of 19th century America, he obviously cares less that it is not an option but mandatory to back one's claims by concrete and tangible citation of source material. Instead, Messay prefers to stoop to the level of those who are only good at character assassination. To me, to descend to this level not only represents moral bankruptcy, but also indicates that, for all his academic pedigree, Messay has run out of mental steam. That is why, then, rather than taking the prime minister on the merit or demerit of his policies, Messay is obsessed with his own chronicle of Meles' family background. Actually, Messay's inordinate focus on the genesis of Meles' psychological makeup with no justifying merit rings a bell. It reminds me of the saying that goes something like: *small minds discuss personalities while great minds discuss ideas*. Be that as it may, a good illustration of Messay's red herring can be found where he says "*All available and trustworthy evidence about Meles agree on the fact that courage was and is not one of his virtues.*"

Again, if such material evidence is abundant, why does Messay conceal it from his admiring readers who relish any perceived blemish on Meles' character? Could it be because, to borrow a line from Henny James, Messay has such a '*high regard for truth that he does not produce it under ordinary circumstance*'? Messay, however, is not dealing with an ordinary person, but prime minister Meles Zenawi. A man whose impact on a nation of eighty million people not even Messay can deny without inviting doubt about his own sanity. Citing one or two of these trustworthy alibis would, therefore, have lent Messay a measure of credence and rescued his article from a sinking down a slippery slope from one paragraph to another. In short, Messay should have resisted the temptation of psychoanalyzing the prime minister, for all he ended up doing instead is peddling hearsay. In fact, his is a downright fabrication where among the learned in his chosen country is frowned upon as unbecoming of a professor of philosophy. That this is so is attested by the fact that, in all the years he has been waging war on Meles, not once has Messay invoked the explanatory advantage of this easily '*available and trustworthy evidence.*' The reason is not hard to fathom. It is a recent invention, full stop! A fresh invention though it is, it seems to have come in handy as Messay embellishes his odious campaign in the hope of discrediting Meles Zenawi. Be that as it

may, I find it hard to believe that Messay himself takes seriously his own testimony about the prime minister's lack of courage.