

# A MESSY DISCOURSE

ON

## WHY MELES HATES ETHIOPIA

*Part II*

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Surely, no wimp abandons a promising medical career like Meles did for the hazardous life of a prolonged spell of armed clash with a totalitarian titan in the harshest terrain of rural Ethiopia. To the contrary, it is a mark of courage to even think of confronting a colossal tyrant backed by Africa's largest army. And, flanked to top it all, by a squadron of ideologues of Messay's ilk, adept at minting bloodthirsty slogans of mass murder. Let alone, I hasten to add, to have the grit to hope that in the final analysis a possibility

would arise for lasting peace --- the most noble of all causes that only the daring have the moral fortitude to rally behind. On a slight shift of register, I must ask: what could be more courageous than, undaunted by domestic political backlash, to cede a costal territory to save the rest of the nation from a lost war of death and destruction? Naturally the ultranationalists in the Diaspora disagree. Why shouldn't they as they have the luxury to talk tough, so long as it is not their life that was on the line? Safe as they were no matter what happened, they would have preferred the impossible war to drag on. Long after, that is, it was clear even to the ordinary fighting men who bore the brunt of the consequence that the cause was lost. And, that all that could have been achieved by staying the course was total chaos, possibly even worse than what Somalia has to endure to this day. \

Obviously, the Messay Kebedes are dying to see the 'uncourageous' leader who sued for peace jettisoned, not least for flatly telling them to do the fighting in Eritrea themselves. That is why year-in and year-out, they endlessly issue threatening warnings to oust Meles' government which they hold responsible for recognizing Eritrean independence. Without, no doubt, ever acknowledging what this farsighted decision has meant to Ethiopia as well as to the people of Eritrea. For all their posturing, however, I am not so sure EPRDF's detractors have the courage of their conviction to act on what they never tire of preaching. None among the émigré paper-tigers, it seems, is willing to go the route Meles and the founding members of the EPRDF did once they were resolved to talk back to Mengistu in the only language he knows best. What I am certain about is that Messay & Co. will continue shooting from the hip and hurling incendiary rhetoric of mass incitement from safe distance. On top of rewriting, I must

add, Meles' biography in a character assassination vane, which, sorry to say, is the next best thing they can possibly manage.

On second thought, I will take that back. To give the devil his due, Messay has tried to throw in a few examples, albeit mostly passé, to salvage his otherwise insupportable fable about Meles' desire to see Ethiopia humiliated. One such indicting 'evidence' that Messay rehashes without adding anything new is Meles' dismantling of the Ethiopian Army. I am always amused by this repeatedly aired grievance, because I don't know how else the EPRDF could have seized power with Mengistu's army intact? The EPRDF is not a putschist outfit *a la* Derge, but a revolutionary front. Hence, at least from his Leninist days, Messay of all people should know that what revolutionaries do is smash the coercive apparatus of the state: End of discussion! Besides, why should the EPRDF have treated Mengistu's war machine with kid-gloves and run the risk of a counter-revolutionary military coup with the likes of Messay Kebede pulling strings from the Diaspora? For all I care anyone could endlessly shed tears and lament the decomposition of the Derge's ironclad protective shield. But, to me under the command of the Derge's political commissars, this conscript army that Messay mourns had by the time in question deteriorated into Mengistu's praetorian-guard. A force, implicated in war crimes as it was in acts of torture and mayhem of innocent civilians.

Another tired and tiring anecdotal that Messay cites fifteen years or more after the fact, is Meles' purported verbal desecration of the national flag. Messay here is obviously referring to Meles' supposed chutzpa of calling the tricolor flag a piece of 'cloth'. Again, I am tickled by the fact that lately it is the émigré who switched allegiance to a foreign flag who seem to make the loudest noise over this matter. Self-serving as this flag-waving clamor is, I need not remind Messay that he is mistaken if he thinks that he can milk a political mileage out of this overexploited and forgotten disinformation, especially living in America where in some states flag-burning is legal. At any rate, Messay would do well to refer back to the full and unedited version of Meles' controversial remark pertaining to this subject. I am sure, though he would not admit it in public, Messay would be surprised to discover how both the spirit and the letter of the said statement is at variance with, thanks to its spin doctors, the opposition made it to be.

While we are on this subject, for once I have to join Messay, albeit for a completely different reason, and say that it was insensitive of Meles to use an incommensurable metaphor to describe the old flag of the unitary state. I say this because to the politically conscious segment of the formerly disadvantaged nationalities, it was more than an innocuous piece of fabric. To put it bluntly, in the eyes of those who suffered subordination, it was a symbol of Empire and forced national integration where 'some were more equal than others.' Let it not, therefore, be forgotten that not all nationalities felt the same way about the symbolic inclusiveness of the previous national banner. That is why parliament made correction on the insignia and banned foisting the old plain tricolor. In consequence, today not just some, but all the peoples of Ethiopia feel comfortable to pledge allegiance to an emblem which truly reflects their equality and the constitutional enshrinement of their sovereignty. To move to another item of a

recent vintage that Messay counts on to prove Meles' "*delight in debunking Ethiopian heroes*" is Meles' "... *ritual of jailing pro-Ethiopian leaders and releasing them after forcing them to sign degrading letters tec.*" Messay naturally does not include the not so pro-Ethiopian offenders of the law that Meles brings to justice. But only the select few who were tried and convicted in an impartial court of law for grave crime committed behind a veil of patriotic rhetoric. In any event, Messay's audacity to cite this episode as proof of Meles' disrespect to *Ethiopian heroes* raises at least two closely related questions. One must certainly wonder, as a man immensely proud of *Ethiopia's heroes*, how Mengistu would have dealt with these *pro-Ethiopian leaders* which Meles "*humiliated by releasing them after forcing them to sign degrading letters tec.*" Since the answer is a foregone conclusion, should Meles have done the same to prove that he has respect for *Ethiopia's heroes*? I don't think that free as they are the '*pro-Ethiopian leaders*' who pleaded with Meles for mercy would be too happy with the ominous implications of Messay's logic here.

All the same, this is the kind of logic Messay follows throughout his article, although the argumentation is punctuated by psychoanalytical jargon derived from a half-baked reading of Freud. As mentioned above, the shallowness of Messay's application of psychoanalytic theory can easily be spotted in his attempt to have us believe that "*Meles hates Ethiopia*" because he comes from an "*isolated and humiliated family.*" Now, even to the uninitiated this must sound like a clever circular maneuver, if not, a tautology. For the preposition – Meles came from *an isolated and humiliated family* – is presumed to be self-evident which needs not even a single footnote. And, the conclusion derived from it – *Meles hates Ethiopia* — is taken as self-explanatory that need no elaboration. Hence, in this way Messay circumvent the psychoanalytical trouble of scanning Meles' subconscious to locate the root cause of his '*hatred to Ethiopia*' in his Oedipus-like complex, which from an embryonic stage on, instilled in him a latent desire to *humiliate* the 'father-land.' I need not delve any further into an area that I know little about to punch a hole into the heart Messay's logic. All I have to do is use my good old native intelligence and ask: If, according to Messay the Meles family was shunned and ostracized by everyone Tigray, how come that it stayed in Adwa where the father lived all his life until he passed away recently? In other words, how is it that the head of the household never considered of moving the family to another location? Say, for instance, to Addis Ababa, where the siblings would not have been judged by the choice made by their grandparent? Hasn't Messay himself fled as far away as America? Not from the Office of Special Prosecutor *per se*, which after a brief interrogation under police custody, had cleared him of direct and personal involvement in physical acts of genocide; but probably to avoid the unbearable reproachful eye of the residents of his community where he served as Keble chairman under the Red Terror Regime.

At any rate, Messay would have been better off had he at least made one random telephone call to any resident of Adwa and inquired about the Meles family and its social standing. Had he done so, he would have, to his advantage, shifted the setting of his riveting psychological thriller to an inaccessible location. Where, that is, no one could prove or disprove the authenticity of his plotline. Much less, the psychological

profile of the antihero of his drama in whom all the worst human foibles of anger and shame, on one level, hatred and vengeance on another, are fused together. By the same token, Messay could have avoided the shame of being exposed for spreading rumor under the guise of a clinical, but a messy analysis that neither squares with Meles' biodata or exhibits coherence in exposition that one often admire in Freudian texts. That is why Messay willfully denies that the man he maligns so much has a starkly contrasting background and upbringing than his (Messay's) article portrays it in utter disregard for the facts on the ground. In actual truth, the current prime minister was among the few prize-winning students of his graduation year that the editorial board of country's daily praised as a promising cluster of youth from which the country expects much. Today, the man who, on Messay's exceedingly pessimistic psychological evaluation, could not have amounted to anything, except perhaps a Kebele torturer, has by all counts, lived up to that expectation. Yet Messay pontificates that "*hatred partially explains Meles' rapid rise to the leadership of the TPLF.*" If so, what explains Meles' 1974 election to the congressional assembly of the Union of Students of Addis Ababa University – the only revolutionary democratic political association of its time in Ethiopia? Since Messay, despite his claim to be an expert on Meles, is clueless about this fact, I don't expect him to respond to my query. To be fair therefore, I shall turn to a recent development which Messay can't feign ignorance or claim not to know about. In other words, if "*hatred partially explains Meles' rapid rise to the leadership of the TPLF*", how are we to understand his growing international stature as Africa's eloquent spokesman? Or, if Meles were afflicted by congenital hatred, how is it that he regularly receives invitation to global forums where a select group of world leaders deliberate on the state of our planet?

Messay can never answer this question lest he is forced to admit that it is this kind of recognition that does honor to any country, much less to Ethiopia whose image has been anything but honorable. One would, therefore, think that Meles deserves credit for at least showing the world that an Ethiopian leader can hold his own in an august assembly of the globe's high and mighty. Many Ethiopians do. And even feel proud whenever Meles takes that floor in an international conference and deliver, as he often does, an impassioned plea for the debt owed to Africa. But not Messay, who I bet follows the prime minister's *tour de force* performance through a U-Tube with jaundiced eyes. How could it be otherwise when Messay's sole purpose is transfiguring Meles into a monstrous evil bent on *demeaning* this country? Why is Meles set on *demeaning* his own country, his own people? Well, the answer lies in Messay's psychoanalytic interpretation which holds that, "*the more Meles belittles Ethiopia the more he weakens the gravity of the family betrayal.*" From my vantage point, the only thing here that has any gravity is how the vulgarity of Messay's Freudian pretence is exceeded by his lack of a civility and the savagery of his choice of language. Worse still, he insults our intelligence by his temerity to even think that he can convince us that everything Meles does is intended "*to humiliate Ethiopia in order to feel good about himself.*" Parenthetically, this bizarre spin on what Meles does "*in order to feel good about himself*" stands in sharp contrast to at least Donald Yamamoto's highly technical and detailed typological placement of the prime minister's character. According to this former US ambassador, Meles seeks and appreciates third-party

recognition for the country's impressive achievements under his government. If you ask me, Yamamaoto can, with good reason, claim to have arrived at this conclusion from a first-hand observation of what ticks Meles. Whereas, Dr. Messay could at best only claim that he intuited what makes Meles '*feel good about himself*' with the aid of a remote-control magnetic sensor.

Alas, it means nothing to Messay that Meles' illustrious public life flatly contradicts his polyester Freudian reading of it. Much, perhaps to the disappointment of his able former students, Messay would never retract anything. I understand where his stubbornness comes from, and, in a generous mood, I could even empathize with his dilemma. Consider his predicament, if you will. In the one exception where, on surface at any rate, he offered a half-decent proposal of a grand coalition government, he took a beating from his own audience. Since Messay will never dare to go down that road again, what is he left with? Except to hope to regain and reassert his rightful place in the *anti-Woyane* camp among the first rank warriors who shoot to kill with poison arrow. Doubtless Messay is certain to regain his old status so long as he swallows his intellectual pride and disseminate a wicked lie that Meles is afflicted by '*the feeling of being despised by others*. And perjure himself by fabrications that '*Meles had a strong torment: he was humiliated and could rest until he humiliated the source of his own dishonor*.

No offense intended, but to me, this sounds more a description of Mengistu Hailemariam than Meles Zenawi. If, as Messay seems to suggest that, the desire to torment others originates from the torment that one might have suffered as a result of being unloved, then, Mengistu, to me, is the likelier candidate who fits this description. Has Mengistu not openly decried, in a foul tongue at that, the ungratefulness of the Ethiopian people for giving him a cold shoulder despite, in his own estimate, his unique contributions to this country? Did he not regularly press-gang a huge crowd at Masqel Square just to listen to his own tedious monologue interrupted by a stage-managed thunderous roar of a well rehearsed slogan "*Forwarded with Comrade Mengistu?*" Moreover, Messay notwithstanding, it is not Meles but Mengistu, patricianly during the latter part of his seventeen-year reign, who complained about being surrounded by enemies. Messay must, of course, be aware that in one book at least, Mengistu, along with Idi Amine, is compared with the world's ruthless dictators of the cold-war era. Notorious men, as the author describes them, who, driven by paranoid suspicion, killed even their closest friends, and struck fear, as Mengistu did, in everyone. Not least among those perched at the innermost circle of the regimes, dreading the moment whenever their boss went into his frequent nervous fits of wrathful rage.

Is it not a bit odd, then, that Messay plays favorites in that it is Meles that he subjects to a cavalier psychological treatment, and not Mengistu --- a serial mass murderer, who is known to derive a warped sense pleasure from tormenting his victims just before he put them to the sword. In fact, those who witnessed the ferocity of Mengistu's grotesque symbolic act of smashing blood-filled bottles to terrorize everyone into submission will agree with me. Yet, as we shall see below, Messay is determined to absolve this criminal fugitive with a proven genocidal psyche by an invidious

comparison of moral equivalence, designedly prejudicial to Meles Zenawi. It goes “*Harsh dictators have ruled Ethiopia in the past, but all considered themselves as Ethiopians. What is new with Meles is his anti-Ethiopian ...*” In other words, regardless of the nightmarish outcome of his reign of terror, Mengistu, for instance, has one saving grace that Meles woefully lacks. The colonel at least “*considers himself Ethiopian*”. Whereas, poor Meles Zenawi, unmindful that in this era where PR is the only thing that counts, he still believes that action speaks louder than propaganda. May be, like Mengistu did on every conceivable occasion, Meles should indulge the public by announcing how much he “*considers himself Ethiopian*” Put differently, instead of declaring war on poverty, Meles should occasionally at least declare his romance with motherland. Probably then, he may be spared the effrontery that, in their frustration, the remnants of Mengistu’s regime direct against him.

Apropos of love and hate where one’s country is concerned, one thing has to be said. If Messay seriously wants us to believe what he thinks of Meles, he must first have the stomach to tell us what the implication of his thoughts are, vis-à-vis our country. In other words, he must accept the conclusion of his own logic and openly say that Meles hates Ethiopia so much that his government is building the largest hydropower dam in Africa on top of Tekeze, Gillgel Gibe One, Two and Three. And further, he must tell us to our face that Meles bitterly despises this country b that the federal government is building a five thousand kilometer railway to meet the challenges of Ethiopia’s growing need for bulk freight transportation. Since that does not cut it, Messay must add that EPRDF’s unprecedented expansion of the country’s asphalted roads, telecom lines, power supply, healthcare centers, sanitation facilities, schools, and universities is Meles’ idea of dishonoring Ethiopia. Failing in that, perhaps the most indicting evidence that Messay could bring to bear to prove Meles’ hostility to Ethiopia is EPRDF’s long term plan: Namely, its ambition to raise Ethiopia to the level of a middle-income country. To cap it all, Messay would have no choice but to simply declare out loud: The EPRDF aims to end Ethiopia’s humiliating dependency on food aid to fulfill Meles’ desire of shaming this country.

Obviously at this point even his sympathetic audience would begin to question his sanity. Messay’s best bet, therefore, is to find a credulous bunch of retards that easily fall for this kind twisted reasoning. Who else with a sound mind can fail to see the trap that lies ahead if one were to follow Messay’s line of argumentation? Indeed no one can take Messay seriously knowing that it leads to an awkward position of accepting the proposition that what this country needs is a leader that hates it most. Surely, on Messay’s logic, this is an inescapable conclusion because Ethiopia seems to fare infinitely better at the hands of not a pro- but an anti- Ethiopian leader. How else, without a leader like Meles who hates Ethiopia, could the country have become the fifth fastest growing country in the world? Conversely, has this country ever achieved a Tiger rate growth under any of its previous leaders whose devotion to the nation is beyond question? Take Mengistu, for instance, the most boisterous control freak that ever ascended to absolute power. Yet, by far the most insecure tyrant that this country had the misfortune to endure as he, without even a blink of an eye, killed *en mass* in the name of patriotism. Mengistu was not only capable of bloodcurdling acts, he was also

cunning. Recall how with a contingency exit plan up his sleeves, i.e. a one-way Addis-to-Harare air ticket, Mengistu bragged with deafening frequency about his resolve to fight to the last drop of his own blood. Only, as it turned out, to flee to Zimbabwe at the moment of truth, leaving the rest of his compatriots to choose between the *Motherland or Death!* Lucky for Mengistu, he still has old comrades who try to hide his cowardice and ‘normalize’ his regime, as it were, by sanitizing its abominable atrocities. So, on Messay’s account, for instance, Mengistu’s genocidal crime is just another variation on the same theme of what “*harsh rulers*” who “*consider themselves Ethiopian*” do in this country. This is not all what Messay does to sneak Mengistu into the pantheon of the morally upright men and women that ever sat on the Ethiopian throne. For instance, if we were to accept his logic, we ought to take comfort in the hope that, whatever crime Mengistu may have committed it would eventually pale in comparison to Meles’ ‘evil deeds’. Likewise, the surviving family members of the Derge’s victims are to forgive Mengistu in the understanding that, although he murdered their loved ones, he did it out of devotion and loyalty to country. In the same vein, we are to console ourselves by the thought that, although it led to hail, Mengistu’s *Abiotawi* national path was paved with good intentions. And, finally, Messay nudges us to admire colonel Mengistu’s courage. For, albeit to the last drop of someone else’s blood, he fought to the bitter end in the name of Ethiopia. Thus goes professor Messay’s perverse line of reasoning, which only makes sense to his target audience. I am referring here to those who can’t bear the discomfort that often comes with the gutful decency of accepting what is not to their liking. In this case, those who can’t bear even the thought of admitting that Ethiopia is not falling apart have no one but Messay to thank. Who else has the right academic credential, to vouch for the validity of their self-indulgent pretensions to sit in mourning over Ethiopia’s tragedy? With a man of Messay’s stature to shield them from rude awakening, they have nothing to fear. For the luxury is theirs to continue driving satisfaction from the ‘sour/ sweet’ thought, as it were, that Ethiopia is going down the drain under Meles Zenawi’s “*perverse policies.*”

To end in a serious note, from the preceding argument, it seems to me that it is not Meles, but Messay himself who needs to do a thorough self-examination and deal with his hateful anger that often gets the better of him. What other factor, but deep-seated hatred, could blind Messay so much as to deny the undeniable truth about what is happening in Ethiopia.? How could he have overlooked that Meles could not have humiliated Ethiopia any more than it was already humiliated long before he assumed office? Had Messay not been blinkered by visceral animosity, my hunch is that he would acknowledge that Ethiopia is actually doing well under Meles. No doubt Meles does not claim to be flawless. Neither does the EPRDF. Hence, there is ground for Messay to consider constructive engagement where, without being dismissive, he can criticize Meles’ policies and recommend remedial measures. After all, in this day in age, thoughtfulness couched in ironic distance is what is expected of those who claim to be scholars. All the more so because, as in moments of sobriety, Messay himself would admit, Ethiopia has no shortage of fire-spiting politicians and windbags who have nothing positive to offer. As an eternal optimist, I am inclined to believe that, with some moderation of temperament, which I expect from a man of his age and learning, Messay will realize at least one thing. Namely that what the Meles government is trying

to do is not to *demean* Ethiopia, but to close the chapter of its history of humiliation. If proof need be, I recommend that Messay read the recent article in the current issue of *The Economist* where the correspondent writes “*Ethiopia is in the first stages of industrialization.*” I do so in the hope that maybe then Messay might come to terms with the fact that what the Meles government is aiming at is nothing less than industrialization.

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