

# REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRACY IN ETHIOPIA: ORIGIN, EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

### ABOUT THE PAPER

This paper is an extract from my book entitled: The Cruces of Post 1991 Ethiopian Politics: Revolutionary Democracy, Democratic Developmentalism and the Late Meles Zenawi. The book is first published in December 2017, and republished in September 2018. The book gives a comprehensive account on the rules of the game in the system of governance of politics, economy, bureaucracy and Security in Ethiopia since 1991.

This article is organized into two parts. In the first part, the underlying factors triggering for the genesis and development of revolutionary democratic concept is discussed. The first section further addresses competing views on the lines of revolutionary democracy. Moreover, the status of revolutionary democracy is subjected to question, as a single party program or as a full fledged concept that comprehensively addresses on all aspects of governance.

The second part discusses on the evolution, development and/or consolidation of ideals of revolutionary thought in Ethiopia. In this regard, the theory and practices of revolutionary democracy is framed. The late Meles Zenawi having been ideologue of Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF), a party that has been ruling Ethiopia since 1991, the political and leadership personalities of the leader is analyzed.

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**REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRACY IN  
ETHIOPIA**

**Origin, Evolution and Development**

**By**

**Habtamu Girma Demeissie**

**JULY, 2019**

**JIGJIGA, ETHIOPIA**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# **1. ORIGIN AND DISCOURSES ON IDEALS OF REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRACY IN ETHIOPIA**

## **1.1 The Genesis of Revolutionary Democratic Thought in Ethiopia**

Revolutionary democracy was initially ideological tool to lead the political economy of nations in transition from Feudo-capitalism to Socialism. He was Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Russian Bolshevik revolution, who asserted that socialism could be practiced in countries which are not reached a capitalist level by mobilizing the urban working class. This was unlike to Marxian lines of characterizing socialism, which depicts that countries has to pass through capitalism as a prerequisite for socialism to evolve. Indeed, the Russian revolution succeeded by mobilizing urban peasantry to successfully overthrow the age long Tsar dynasty.

Lennin's revolutionary democracy was adopted by leaders of the Chinese communist revolution. Mao-Tse-Tung was the ideological father of the Chinese version of revolutionary democracy, Maoism. As distinct from the Leninist revolutionary democracy, Maoism relied up on the rural peasantry- 'revolutionary mass mobilization' to push forward a successful revolution that ended up in establishing the People`s Republic of China in 1949.

In Ethiopia, idelas of revolutionary democracy were imported in the early 19070's, when fierce ideological debates was the order of the then University environment. Progressive sudents of Addis Ababa University were divided ways to bring chanage in Ethiopia. Students were organized underground in two camps. The first camp, named as the *Crocodiles*, was formed by radical Marxists who believed there needs an overthrow of the

imperial rule through revolution. The second camp was a *reformist*, whose members argued the installed system can be corrected, and that will be achieved through peaceful political struggle.

opia, and what most characterized the oppression was considered much of cultural and identity, not to mention the right of self rule of various nationalities in Ethiopia. Those events were by far the background of the formation of ethnic based political groups, like Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). With those political developments, revolutionary democratic ideals graduated from being an issue of debate in university campus to get institutionalized as a line of political program capable of mobilizing hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians in the armed struggle .

In the late 1980's, various political groups, making revolutionary democratic line a common denominator, have forged a strong coalition. That remarked the establishment of the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the incumbent political party who took the government overthrowing the Dergue regime in 1991.



Figure: Meles Zenawi (1955-2012) is Credited for giving  
Revolutionary Democratic Concept an Ethiopian Perspective

The EPRDF version of revolutionary democracy largely credited to Maoism. The 'New Democracy', a book by the famous Mao-Tse-Tung, leader

of the China Socialist Revolution is considered as a theoretical reference for Ethiopia revolutionary democrats.

However, the Albanian socialism, which can be considered a variant of Maoism, was best considered for theoretical and practical circumstances of Ethiopia. In the process of customizing Albanian socialism and hence conceptualizing revolutionary democracy in Ethiopia, the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia and long standing leader of EPRDF, Meles Zenawi, was the ideologue

## **1.2. Discourses on Revolutionary Democracy**

Narratives on revolutionary democracy are quite conflicting. In this regard, there are two groups: one is those from the ruling party and some from academia; the other is narratives from opposition parties/groups/figures/ and academia. While the party and its affiliate groups argue for revolutionary democracy ideal to the very historical, ethno-cultural diversity, socio-economic and political realities capable of leading the country into prosperity, those on the other side depicts that the very principles of revolutionary democracy do not socio-economic and political progress.

### ***1.2.1. The EPRDF`s and other related Narratives on Revolutionary Democracy***

Dictations of EPRDF`s revolutionary democracy connotes that revolutionary democracy is not an end, but a means to liberal democracy. Hence, the essence of revolutionary democracy is to create conducive political and economic grounds to realize liberal democracy. In the political front, practice liberal democracy, addressing respect of group rights should get primacy. In its economic goal, revolutionary democracy puts that people has to win economic freedom first to exercise liberal democracy.

### ***1.2.2. Alternative Narrations on Revolutionary Democracy***

According to Merera Gudina (Ph.D.) professor of political science, revolutionary democracy is not genuinely work to uphold the very principles of democracy: respect for the civil, property and political rights. In his book, entitled ሶዲያላዊ ዲሞክራሲ የፖለቲካ ፈተናዎች እና የሚጋጩ ህልውና፡የኢህአዴግ ቆርጦ ቀጥል ፖለቲካ, (page 73-75), Merera Gudina (Ph.D) makes the following notes



on the political principles of revolutionary:-

*“.....There is no clear distinction between the party and government lines; the party govern its party politics on the principles of Democratic centralism; the government bureaucratic lines should be staffed by those who can best serve the interest of the ruling party; revolutionary democracy works against the flourish of free and independent civil society and media.”*

Merera`s characterizations of revolutionary democracy seems to be narrow and incomplete, for it regards only the political aspects of revolutionary democracy, missing its broader economic stands.

Gebru Asrat, a veteran politician and heavy weight in earlier years of EPRDF`s rule, preferred a comparative analysis to depict the principles of revolutionary democracy, where he outlined how revolutionary democracy differs from liberal democracy. In his book (written in Amharic language), Gebru gives a brief on the political and socio-economic principles of revolutionary democracy (9):-

*“.....revolutionary democracy is divisive, creating rifts among citizens as ‘friends’ and ‘foes’, attaching one group dominant (exploiter) and the other dominated (exploited) on wrong interpretation of the past; the exploiters must be denied of their rights and freedom; every aspect of life, be it political, economic or social should be under the control of the ruling party.”*

One should not underestimate the assertions of Gebru Asrat, for he was insider in the time of construction and conceptualizing process of revolutionary democracy. It is also worthwhile to remember Mr. Gebru Asrat has been *charge de` affair of revolutionary democracy* in those years where the ideology was reckoned a ‘strange’, and was to be introduced,

both to the party members and the wider public.

### ***1.2.3. Academic Intervention in the revolutionary democratic discourse***

A look into literature reveals that very limited academic intervention towards characterizations and conceptualization. The existing few, though undeniable for shading lights on the issue, lacks standards of academic writings. In this regard one can raise issues of relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks, better evidenced, depth of inquiry, among others.

One can get clear depiction on the revolutionary democratic lines in a short article entitled: '*Making the Case for Liberal Democracy as an Alternative to Revolutionary Democracy*' as against the extreme ends of the two political ideology continuum: socialism/communism and Neo-liberalism.

*“.....communism as a political system in which individual interests are succumbed to the common interests of the society, and, Liberalism as a political system in which group interests are traded off for the individual interests..... complete communism would be autocracy and complete liberalism would be anarchy”*

The article emphasizes the need to depict ideological line that is within the '*recommended political space*', to mean that the one which borrowed some principles from socialism and also accommodated some values of liberal democracy too. Accordingly, revolutionary democracy is dubbed within '*recommended political space*'. In this regard, the border of the space begins with revolutionary democracy and ends up including liberal democracy. This connotation on revolutionary democracy is likened with what EPRDF stresses, which is revolutionary democracy is just the

beginning, and the end would be liberal democracy.

Another effort to investigating the concept of revolutionary democracy is found in an article entitled '*Setting the Accounts of Revolutionary Democracy in Ethiopia after Meles*'. (10) The author tries to clear some ambiguities apparent in the discourse of revolutionary democracy. While stressing that revolutionary democracy is the synthesis of Meles Zenawi, the paper also tries to shades light on the fate of revolutionary democracy after the death of Meles.

The paper, although appreciable as it is an attempt to address a topic largely lacking academic response, it has flaws in terms of giving the proper shape and picture about revolutionary democracy. This is largely because the analysis made without a relevant conceptual and methodical issues analysis over a particular political and/or economic philosophy like revolutionary democracy requires. As the author makes no reference of the key revolutionary democratic documents, which depict the theoretical lines, and without exploring the political landscape of Ethiopia since EPRDF takes government power, the paper would not endow a comprehensive picture on the concept of revolutionary democracy, as the practices (policy, strategy and tactics) of inference.

Hence, it ended up in some misleading conclusions. For example, it considers revolutionary democracy is concept that is only limited to the party issues. To attest his argument, the author put forward the following arguments: one is he mentions the position of the late Meles Zenawi, the master of revolutionary democracy, as he speaks on the scope of revolutionary, where he stressed revolutionary democracy was a matter of inner party doctrine applicable to its members.

Moreover, in support of his argument that the scope of revolutionary democracy is limited to party politics only, the author puts forward the following argument: “.....*No one can find revolutionary democracy in any of constitutional provisions, nor can you find it across all government policy documents.*” The author tries to further consolidate his argument as in the following: “...*The heavy influence of revolutionary democracy on state functions is indirect through the behaviors and actions of EPRDF leaders from the chairman down to locality cadres.*”

To consolidate his position, the author even goes beyond logic, to criticize the longstanding high ranking EPRDF official, Tefera Walewa's say on revolutionary democracy, which he described it as the concept touches virtually every business. However, this conclusion is fallacious, as the conclusion made is without referring the doctrine of revolutionary democracy and also without consulting the empirical evidences and actual working of the socio-economic and political landscape of Ethiopia under the rule of revolutionary democracy.

### **1.3. Revolutionary Democracy A Full-Fledged Thought or a One Party Program?**

Since the introduction of into the ontology of Ethiopian politics dating back the early 1970`s, revolutionary democracy has been evolving to be a concept to consult in justifying the revolutionary democratic government and system of governance.

Theorizing revolutionary democracy began by framing the underlying foundations of the system of political, economic and bureaucratic governance. Those endeavors were a revisit on Ethiopian history, identifying the political and economic goals, devising for the bureaucratic and institutional setups that complement the predefined goals.

In their moves to effect those goals, revolutionary democrats opted on constitutional and ideological tools. The service of the constitutional tool was primarily to better address unique contexts and realities of the Ethiopian political system. The essence of ideological tools were meant to deal with global dynamics in a way to better serve their goals.

Essentially, revolutionary democracy uses ideology a tactic, not an end. Hence, ideological shifts is a tool meant to adjust time and hence their ideological affiliations, thereby switching their ideological affiliation with a bloc dominating the world at a particular time.

Such a move by revolutionary democratic line persisted until terrorism replaced ideological affiliation a number one agenda of the Western powers to define their course of relation with countries.

### **1.3.2. Why Understanding Revolutionary Democratic Line is often in Blur?**

As one manifestation of the blurs about revolutionary democracy is existing views about its status, as a concept, a party program or an ideological line. As inferred from narratives in chapter two of the book, there are two camps in this regard.

The first camp encompasses those who tend to take for granted revolutionary democracy as full-fledged ideology, quite overstating its true existence. The second group is one which inclined to belittling the essence of revolutionary democratic teachings. This camp considers the scope and hence relevance (importance) doesn't go beyond a one party program. Hence, it is both relevant and sensible to question where to locate revolutionary democratic teaching: an ideology, tactic or a mere political program of a party.

Finding viable and sensible answer on the issue above is not that simple, perhaps as difficult as understanding revolutionary democracy itself. Finding a document that depicts the ideals of revolutionary democracy, even in its premature existence is pretty difficult. Perhaps the only source to consult in making inferences on ideals of revolutionary democracy is probing into its chief ideologue, Meles Zenawi.

Indeed, inferences drawn on the essence, evolution and development of ideals of revolutionary democracy takes to recounting the life and works of Meles Zenawi in his role as a political leader and a statesman, that counts nearly three decades since late 1980's.

## CASE STUDY ONE

### DIVISIONS WITHIN THE TIGREAN PEOPLE LIBERATION FRONT (TPLF)

Divisions within the bigwigs of Tigrean People Liberation Front (TPLF) has been inherent and is old as the party itself, which counts more than 43 years. There were at least three times such divisions displayed, two while TPLF was a guerrilla fighter, and the third was decades later since assuming state power in 1991. Those divisions were termed *Hinfishfish*, roughly meaning weakening in Tigrigna language. Though the immediate causes of those divisions vary, the underlying cause is one and the same. That is the very political personality of officials, which is largely shaped by socialist values of democratic centralism, allows little room for idea differences through discussion and dialogue.

The first *Hinfishfish* happened in 1984, which ended up by evicting the first camp, composed of the two founding leaders of TPLF, Gedey Zeratsion and Aregawi Berhe. A look into documents that shades light on the political temperature of the time indicates the reason for the division of TPLF was idea differences over which approach to pursue to go ahead with the struggle. The first faction, which Meles Zenawi was a member, adhered to the need for a changing strategies and ideological line as the time allows. This camp argued to changing ideological lines as a tactic, which they opt to align to one of the two camps in the world, socialist versus capitalist, whichever is powerful to dictate the global order and hence influence the success of their struggle. For the rival faction, which was spearheaded by Gedey Zeratsion, TPLF should make ideological alignment to socialist bloc. As time progresses, the latter proved to champion. That was with the onset of Marxist-Leninist League Tigray (MLLT). The rift in the top leadership of TPLF should have been resolved with socialism the ideological line of the struggle. However, the rift kept on, even heightened.

One showcase of the growing tension among the bigwigs of TPLF is the 1984 general assembly called by MLLT. The event was meant to discuss on political issues and a debate session on alternative strategic political courses set forwarded by the top leadership for a resolve. In the tradition of TPLF, when there is idea differences, the dividing parties came in front of the cadre. And it the assembly of cadre which vote as a resolve.

The debate session of 1984 was held between the two camps within MLLT/TPLF, with one camp headed by Gedey Zeratsion and the other camp by Meles Zenawi. Quite unique about that debate session was the spirit of the debate session, which was undemocratic. (18) In the debate, Meles seemingly used his close proximity to the cadre as a leader of the cadre training school to gain support from the cadre. Meles was ably alienated both the ideas and personalities of the rival camp, who assassinated the characters of his rivals as *gangrene*, arguing for their elimination from the party if the political (and armed) struggle to end up in success. Finally, with the end of the debate session, the two founding leaders of TPLF, Gedey Zeratsion and Aregawi Berhe, were forced to go away from their leadership positions and also from TPLF altogether.

The second *Hinfishfish* was between the top men of TPLF, predominantly those within the political wing of the struggle, MLLT. The rivalries among the MLLT leadership was not that clear, and the division was too fragmented to end up a single individual - Meles Zenawi - not a came a winner. The rivalry was between Meles Zenawi, Sebehat

Nega, Seye Abraha, Abay Tsehaye and Seyum Mesfin. In those times of rivalries among the top leadership of TPLF, Meles was smart enough to engage each of one after the other to put them to dearth of support from the wider cadre to remain at the fore front in the end. Meles` rivalries all ended up passive to surrender under the chieftain of Meles Zenawi in TPLF political plays in subsequent years.

After roughly a decade since EPRDF seized state power in 1991, Meles Zenawi, chief of executive of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), encroached a similar set-back he endured in the two *Hinfishfish* as a guerrilla fighter. This new showdown among TPLF top men is referred as the *Third-Hinfishfish* in the political history of TPLF. This time, his opponents forged a strong alliance of almost all influential in the face of wider public and those in the EPRDF men. Spear headed by Tewolde Wolde Mariam, one of handful of TPLF men who sided with him, the opposition membered the likes of Seye Abraha, Aregash Adane, Awalom Woldu, Gebru Asrat, Abay Tsehaye (who later turned to Meles` group), among others. The top military ranks were also against Meles, with the chief of armed forces, Tsadkan Gebre Tesay and commander-in-chief of the Ethiopian air force, Lt. General Abebe Teklehaymanot.

Frankly speaking the two camps appeared to have had wide gaps in terms of their size, both aligning figures and their relative influences in the party and government affairs. Meles` camp was only consisting three or four, with Sebehat Nega, Seyum Mesfin, and later by Abay Tsehaye. The profile of Meles camp as against to the rival led by Tewolde Woldemariam was incomparably trifling in paper. In practice however, Meles camp was well nurtured with what the Ethiopian Politics, the Shoan politics, requires. Particularly the three, Meles, Sebehat and Seyum were often praised for their extraordinary talent how and when to hit their rivals with political and propaganda bullets.

Looking at the assessment of the showdown by Gebru Asrat, Aregash and Seye Abraha in their books or commentaries tells how the Meles camp thrashed his opponent using their political and propaganda machines. As he did in time of the *Second Hinfishfish*, Meles moved in pursuit of backings from the cadre of TPLF in particular and those from other three parties (OPDO, ANDM, SPDM) forming a front, EPRDF. The end of the political showdown remarked similar incidents as was in the first *Hinfishfish*,.

The third *Hinfishfish*, as distinct from the previous two, had some peculiar features. For one, the division and its impact was not limited a one party affair, for TPLF has been the most influential in EPRDF leadership and its government. Second, the division, though attempted to take it a secret, it was unable to reach the wider public. This was unlike the previous ones, which remained a secret among the top cadres of the guerilla fighters. Third, Meles Zenawi has championed to appear a sole power at the top of TPLF/EPRDF and its government. Such an end up, for many political commentators, remarked the onset of dictatorship in TPLF and EPRDF rule. But it is undeniable that Meles has shown in all of the three divisions, particularly in the third one for having astonishing capacity of dealing with what the Ethiopian political practices, often dubbed as *Showa Politics* requires.



## 2. EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF IDEALS OF REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRACY

The role and importance of Meles Zenawi as chief ideologue of revolutionary democracy is often raised by political pundits and those in the academia. The position of Meles in terms of mastering revolutionary democracy is well said by Habtamu (2008) and Donald Yamato.

According to Habtamu, “....*No one can find revolutionary democracy in any of constitutional provisions, nor can you find it across all government policy documents*”.

For a seasoned U.S diplomat who worked as the ambassador of U.S.A to Ethiopia from 2006-2009, ‘*no one can understand revolutionary democracy except Meles himself*’. (13)

Meles Zenawi being at the forefront, both in his role as a leader of TPLF/EPRDF and its government since 1991, understanding his role in all the course amounts an inference on evolution and developments of ideals of revolutionary democracy.

The conceptions of Meles on key subjects of political economy are found in all fragments. Meles' conceptions can be learned as extracts from formal interviews he made and/or panels & forums he addressed. The policy lines and strategies virtually on all ventures of governance in Ethiopia since 1991, for which Meles Zenawi was the mastermind are also important sources to infer on the governing philosophy of revolutionary democracy.

## 2.1. HOW MELES ZENAWI BUILT HIS POWER AND INFLUENCES?

In the early days of armed struggle, the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) was not having clear-cuts on ideological alignment with either of the then duo: socialist or capitalist camp. In those times, Meles' role in the armed struggle was limited in the realm of military and was little known by the wider cadre and the peasant army.

As the year progressed, however, TPLF officiated affiliation with socialist camp, more specifically to the Albanian socialism. Hence, the political wing of the armed struggle established a cadre school, then followed by the formation of Marxist-Leninist League Tigray (MLLT) in early 1980's. Meles was tasked to headmaster the cadre school.

Those years as headmaster of the cadre school coupled with his active role in MLLT marked the start-up of Meles Zenawi's hegemony in the party politics and in the armed struggle at large. A particular importance, in this regard, is Meles used his years as the headmaster of the cadre school to capitalize on his role to garner the support base of the cadre in TPLF, which he repeatedly used to outplay his political rivalries within TPLF at different times.

For obvious reasons, Meles' influences as a guerilla fighter limited within TPLF; and the sphere of influence of the man has been more of ideological and political. In the 23 years of his rule as a statesman, the scale of his influences has been of two. The first ranges from 1991-2001 and the second from 2001 to foreseeable time to come, even after his death in 2012.

### **2.1.1. Meles as a 'Passive' Statesman**

In the month of May 1991, a guerilla fighting forces, with Meles a leader, completed the 17 years of armed struggle, which ended by toppling down the militarist regime, the Dergue rule. For Meles, however, the struggle was yet to end. Meles' new fight was against the rising contenders in his party, TPLF. His fight was justified not for a prominence in his party, but to guarantee his power and role vested upon his position at the helm of the party and the government.

In the first decade since Meles Zenawi assumed a statesman, which counts between 1991-2001, he was elected twice. The first was in June 1991, when Meles elected president of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). In his four years term as President, Meles was principally tasked with two: to lead the process of formulation of the political roadmap of the country and to deal with the fragile security situation across the country in transition of a regime change.

In his roles and influence as president of TGE, Meles has been active in institutionalizing his ideals to take constitutional and institutional backings. As member of a council tasked to promulgate the constitution, Meles was at fore front in moves to making core ideals of revolutionary democracy constitutional. And he has successfully finished his mission where the FDRE constitution was ratified in the month of December, 1995(Hidar 29 1987 E.C).

Then comes the next phase of his process to building the ideals of revolutionary democracy, which can be considered as conceptualization of ideals of revolutionary democracy and implementing its political and economic goals.

In the first national election in Ethiopia, which was held in 1995, Meles Zenawi elected to represent his constituency in his birth place, Adwa district in Tigray. With the system of governance established parliamentary, where Meles' party dominated the 547 seated parliament, he became the Prime Minister of Ethiopia. That remarked the start of practicing the ideals of revolutionary democracy with installation of a government and institutions were structured in a way to. As such, the establishment of federal system on linguistic(ethnic) lines established.

All in all, the first five years of his rule in the period 1991-2001 can be considered when Meles has laid a ground for his mission in the second half.

In the course of consolidating his power and influences however, Meles had to endure challenges of wider sorts, which for analytical purposes can be segmented as *domestic* and *global*.

Domestically, Meles was unable to exercise his full power as a leader of the country, mainly from set-backs against the bigwigs of TPLF/EPRDF. From global contexts of those times, Meles hasn't able to garner a leverage that will help relieve his government from the shackles of policies imposed by the Western countries and their institutions in return for the massive aid and grants.

### **2.1.2. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) 'Infightings'.**

Political rivalries among the top leadership of TPLF has been recurrent, and can be regarded as old as the establishment of the party itself. The relentless fighting Meles has been enduring within TPLF tells many. For one, how Meles achieved hegemony over his contenders in TPLF and EPRDF speaks a lot how the man really fits that sort of political personality one is required to outshine in a rocky Ethiopian political landscape.

In additions, those times of political rifts were important as fore fronting the role and importance of a host of factors, ranging from domestic to global, whose realm of influences appeared shaping the political landscape of Ethiopia.

The political upheaval among the top leadership of TPLF that has been continued from years of guerilla fight, has been intensified since the late 1990's. In the year 2001, it exploded and was easily from where it emerged, the TPLF polit-bureau, to get transmitted to the whole structure of TPLF itself and other three front parties that formed EPRDF.

The politburo has been the decision making body on key intra-party and national affairs. The Prime Minister, though bestowed with a list of powers and mandates, has been kept powerless. Meles has been relegated to implementing the interests of the majority vote within the polite bureau, with the five membered body empowered to draft laws, decrees and regulations (directives) and force to the implementations. That is how Meles himself recounted his role for having been been nothing more than public relation official of the government for which he was the 'head'.

With the members of the politburo were orchestrated '*a coup d'état*'

against Meles, he was no more to put up an attempts of a political murder inflicted against him and his supporters. That remarks the burst of a political tensions within the politburo in particular and the TPLF/EPRDF in general in 2001. Meles championing his opponents, he likely acquired a sole dominance over the mandates and powers of the politburo.

That was portrayed from the defeated camp the doomsday of the long standing democratic traditions installed within TPLF to handle idea differences democratically with the cadre representing all the members of TPLF a sole decision maker on which idea to pass as a policy or principles to govern the party and its government.

In practical terms, however, Meles has showed a leader who champions over the poverty and underdevelopment of Ethiopia. He came with a mastermind of a newer strategy to fight poverty and put Ethiopia on the development band.

### **2.1.3. How Meles Fought the Challenges Sparked by Global Circumstances**

Meles Zenawi, who clearly understands the influences of the global order, has been very attentive of those circumstances to twist and turn his tactics to readjust time so that he would be able effect his short and long term ambitions. A pragmatic figure who plays time for those in support of him, for the critics and opponents of Meles that is a self-serving personality, to portray him as reactionary.

A pragmatic Meles once has turned himself from an old-Marxist to white-capitalist (to borrow his term to refer neo-liberalism) when the time required him so, since the late 1980`s. In his early years as hea of government, Meles has been playing his game under the mask of

neoliberalism. For the mentioned and other reasons in the realm of global order, Meles was unable to fully and officially practice the ideals of revolutionary democratic economic teachings.

That doesn't mean however Meles fully surrounded to donors' terms and conditions. While he has been transferred key and strategic sectors to the EPRDF affiliated economic units and individuals, he was bold to resist the privatizations of the financial sector and public utilities, among others.

The new global order gets a new face with the turn of the new millennium. That was the coming of China to challenge the sole dominance of the west in the global economic, political and security ventures.

With that development, Meles' government seems to have relieved of the policy strings attached with loans and grants from Western world. On top of that the 2001 terrorist attack on American and its interests overseas changed many things. In the aftermath of the fight against terrorism taking the agenda of the U.S.A and its allies, Meles appeared showing his dedications to effect the Western agenda in the horn of Africa.

One showcase, as often propounded by political pundits, was his staunch line to send troops to Somalia in the year 2006. According to many political analysts, Meles used his active role in the fight against terrorism to build a leverage get loans from Western sources, not mention the freedom he enjoyed to openly criticize neo-liberal theories and policies. The coming of China an alternative source of aid and grants was an impetus to the moves of Meles to relieve those Western imposed policy havocs.

In subsequent years, Meles keep on capitalizing his leverages his trusted alliance to West in the fight against terrorism to come up with a shift in ideological lines of his government. That was marked by the

introduction of democratic developmental state a newer paradigm to direct the course of his government in the year 2006.

The new shift however was rather a strategic one, an open move to live by the short and long term goals of his revolutionary democracy. The then global dynamics further deepened the influences of Meles Zenawi in the course of politics in Ethiopia.



## 2.2. REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRACY CONSOLIDATED TO DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENTAL STATE (DDS)

Since assuming state power as president of transitional government of Ethiopia in 1991, Meles has been shouldering this extensive task of theorizing revolutionary democratic teachings. In this regard, the earliest effort by Meles was when he produced a thesis work (14) in 1998, entitled '*African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings*', can be considered a blue print for 'Democratic Developmental State'. (15)

The very foundations of *Democratic Developmental State (DDS)* were to give an ideological support to the teachings of revolutionary democracy. In compliance to the teachings of revolutionary democracy, promoting a political and economic system that forestalls *elitism* is what justifies the political and economic goals of Democratic Developmental State (DDS).

According to DDS, a political system is democratic if it works in favor of the larger mass of population with all the means to exercise politics. The corollary of that is the need for a political system to work for socio-economic progress that benefits the larger segment of the population a priority. On the other hand, economic governance is democratic if it is meant promotes economic and social justice. Hence, democratic developmental state works for fixing structural, infrastructural and institutional elements which are vital problems of the economic system, promoting fertile ground for few elites to amass from the economy while disdaining the economic benefits for the larger mass.

The economic goals of Democratic developmentalism are justified on policies, strategies aimed at enabling the government to promote an independent economy whose base is large local market, maintain a balance

between the regions and the sectors; inter-sectorial linkages sectors that support each other and that promoting for a fast economic growth which benefits the larger mass of population and which ensures social justice.

In the period between 2001 and 2003, Meles has been busily undertaking a series of studies to complement his preparations of a policy documents, which can be regarded as tools to implementing his newer synthesis, Democratic Developmental State (DDS). As a byproduct of those studies of Meles were a series of sectorial policy and strategic documents ranging from trade & commerce to education to industry to foreign relation, among others (16).

Meles seemingly to have been completing the blue print of DDS, he appeared before the top leadership of EPRDF in August 2003. In subsequent months and years, democratic developmental state ideals massively inculcated virtually in all ventures of public life: from schools to ritual places to art stages and scene.

## 2.3. THE CONSTRUCTS OF REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRATIC THEORY AND PRACTICES

As one of multitudes of drawbacks, if not features, of Ethiopian political landscape in the past quarter of a century since 1991 was little understanding about Meles Zenawi and his government. One would say the quest of Meles and his thoughts has been all futile for local political and academic figures. That doesn't tell the general truth, with some efforts particularly from foreign analysts and political commentators better pictured the personality of Meles Zenawi as a statesman and political leader.

### 2.3.1. Understanding Meles Zenawi

Sophisticated as his conceptions were so for his supporters, the personality of the man is equally cloak for his critics. Some branded the late Prime Minister as selfless, pragmatic, and democrat, there are also people who rather depict the man as eccentric, dogmatic, and undemocratic. With all that featuring the most influential but controversial leader, understanding Meles means understanding the political economy of Ethiopia, at least in the past quarter of a century since 1991.

Indeed, to make a proper inference on Meles Zenawi requires to go beyond conventional biographic sketches. To draw inferences out of the life and works of Meles, it takes to be investigative. Perhaps, the trademarks of Meles from both sides of narratives about him ascribes to his grow-ups as a school boy. The backdrop of his personality is also lies in his years of armed and political struggle, which accounts almost all his youth and adulthood. A particular importance in this regard is *Hegelian philosophy* and its Marxist-Leninist extensions: *exploiter-exploited* dictum &

## *dialectical Materialism*

### **2.3.1.1. Meles as a School Boy**

The personal memories of those who share same playfields and classrooms with Meles as school boy was telling about the foundation of the personality of the man as a political leader and a statesman. For his fellows at play yards, it was an adventurous boy that most remember about Meles. The extension of such personality is likely behind bolder policies of Meles, which often challenge the traditional or customary states of affairs as untouchable. The leader even came up and insisted on ideas largely dubbed as dangerous - the likes of ethnic federalism.

A curious student remembers Meles as a schoolboy, who used to spare much of his times in his career reading and studying. For a leader who is widely celebrated as wise, tireless and workaholic, those traits were worked out. Often described by those who were close to Meles as a man solid to his ideals, such personality is rather grown up with him. His mother once described Meles as a boy who was extremely resistant to be appear weak or outsmarted by others of his ages. His teachers also recalled Legesse Zenawi - the school name of Meles – same old as a politician and statesman, someone who always work on to find himself excelling (over his contenders) in debate sessions, a student exhaustive enough to defend his line of arguments. Perhaps the extension of that is his political personality, with which his political contenders always cry foul for his alleged political tackles.

### **2.3.1.2. Meles and the Hegelian Philosophy**

A careful look into the thoughts of Meles virtually on every subject of political economy entails *Hegelian philosophy* is at the heart of his

explanations and/or narratives. Many describe Meles' policies as *adventurous* for intermingle of ideas or concept widely regarded as irreconcilable, *Hegelian philosophy* seems to have shaped how the man think. According to the Hegelian philosophy, a certain subject or concept is a *synthesis* of the two opposing sides - the *thesis* and *ant-ithesis*.

A leader often portrayed by his political rivals as a 'reactionary' or as his adherents call him 'pragmatic' for jumping on opposite corners of ideological lines, Meles always tangled, and knows how to do so, to breed ideas on the opposite corners to give up a new synthesis. His political and/or economic philosophy is the product of such a synthesis of concepts which appears largely opposing.

While conceptualizing democracy, Meles adheres to *Revolutionary Democratic* concept, which merges two concepts often portrayed repelling, '*Revolution Versus Democracy*'.

In laying his vision for his country as a political leader is built upon a principle '*Unity through Diversity*, an emblem subjected to wide array of critics for magnifying ethnic nationalism at the cost of 'Ethiopian identity'. For Meles, his ethnic based political line rather cement the cohesion of diverse groups of Ethiopians. The extension of such conceptions of Meles gave rise to most condemned constitutional article, article 39 of the FDRE constitution, which stipulates the rights of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (NNPs) to self-determination unto and including session. Meles always argued article 39 is a warranty for NNPs *to live under one roof, which dries the roots of mistrust and hostility among the diverse ethnic groups averting the possibilities of political system of one ethnic group domination in the future Ethiopia*.

Contradicting the conventional narratives on *Developmental State Paradigm* and *Democratic Systems*, which outlaws for any possible go-with of the two, Meles has come up with a new conception stating '*Democracy could be maintained while Developmental state paradigm being the rule of the game*'. Indeed, *Hegelian philosophy* explains the synthesis of Democratic Developmentalism (DD), a brand-new philosophical line of economic, political and bureaucratic system of governance which is credited to the late Meles Zenawi.

### **2.3.1.3. Meles a Socialist**

A leader as 'reactionary' for some and a 'pragmatic' for others, Meles has always been portrayed man with double faces – as a socialist and capitalist. For his political opponents mostly from his party, TPLF (EPRDF), Meles was treated as subservient to imperialists upon his departure from *Marxist-Leninist* lines. The opposition political figures on the other hand accused Meles who trades in the name of democracy and capitalism, chractrizing him as a socialist and as a dictator. Actually, the revolutionary democratic leader borrowed socialist and a capitalist ideals in his theorizations and policies.

If it takes to mention one about the Socialist face of Meles Zenawi, it would be his adherence to the concept of *material determinism*, a methodological tool scientific socialism relies upon in its narratives on every subject of political economy. Material determinism entails that every aspect of life be it – history, socio-cultural, moral standards, political system, wellbeing and security - is predominantly shaped by material or economic forces. Indeed Meles embodies economic forces as fundamental, perhaps as his governance envisioned to build up of one economic

community.

Worth noticing is Meles was curious about where and when material determinism appeals. For instance, as opposed to Marxian narrative of history, dialectical materialism as it is doesn't explain the Ethiopian history, the historic relationships among nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia.

With Meles' narrative on Ethiopian history goes *exploiter-exploited* dictum on account of cultural or religious domination of one ethnic group – it is resounding that Meles having been realigned Marxian tool of conceptualizing history, *dialectical materialism*. The modification Meles has made was to redefine the form of relation in the *exploiter- exploited* narratives of history. Accordingly, the Amhara ethnic group at the corner of exploiter (dominating) for it has imposed its language (Amharic), culture and religion (Orthodox Christianity) over other Nations, Nationalities and Peoples.

This historical conception is by far the foundation of the political philosophy of revolutionary Democratic Party and its government, for which Meles was the ideologue.

Though Meles disregard dialectical materialism to explain Ethiopian history, he doesn't rule out it altogether. Unless for the installment of a political system that works for a just economic order which benefits all Ethiopians, such an *exploiter-exploited* sort of relationships is inevitable. Realizing such a political system which targets to end elitism, is the backdrop of ideals of revolutionary democracy, which in the mean time have graduated to take the pillar of '*Democratic Developmentalism*'.

## CASE STUDY TWO

### HEGLIAN PHILOSOPHY, DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND MARXIAN CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

In explaining virtually every subject of political economy, revolutionary democratic teachings rely on the Hegelian Philosophy. Hegelian Philosophy is a German philosophy that dominated the intellectual world as far back as 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Hegelian philosophy, which is largely credited to a German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, is the foundation of Marxian theory of history, which is dialectical materialism.

Accordingly to Hegelian teachings, a certain object or concept which is the *synthesis* or the fusion of two opposite forces, the *thesis* and *antithesis*. Hence, the Hegelian way of trying to understand or making inference about a certain concept or happening takes to look it from contradicting sides. Hegelian philosophy has been the tool Karl Marx used in his theory of history, which entails that understanding history is understanding the *exploiter-exploited* dictum of human society. And history is record of the inevitable conflict arising out of the contradicting sections of human society.

For Marx, though there are numerous forms of the *exploited exploitation* dictum, the material antagonism is the most powerful of all that explains the nature, form and development of human society irrespective of differences in time or place variables. Such analytical tool used by scientific socialism to making historical narrative is known as *dialectical materialism*. The teaching of dialectical materialism entails that when we refer to history, we mean a depiction or a note on the genesis, nature, development and fusion of those two antagonistic groups in human society.

According to Marxian theory of history, since antiquity, human society underwent five modal of production relationships: collectivism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism (communism). While the nature or form of exploitation characterizing a particular modal of production relation changes through time, the resentments of the exploited against the exploiters triggers conflict to erupt, which result a new form of social and economic order. Such is how the evolution of the five social and economic orders that human society has passed through since antiquity.

In collectivism, human material needs has been simple where everyone can fulfill its basic needs from the bounty of nature hunting and gathering. Through time, those who were equipped with better material tools to hunt and gather, perhaps better arrows and fishing materials, emerge a dominant over others who didn't own those tools. And the time progresses, the former class evolves a slave master and the latter slave. That is the genesis of a new modal of production relation, called *slavery*.

As the time goes by, the population size increased, nature exploited, and hence it was fairly difficult to fetch all basic elements of survival from forests. That has changed the fabric of human society where it necessitates a man to engage in cultivating land. That was the point when land bears economic value. The slave masters were graduated to land lords and slaves to tenants, to define a new form of economic fabric called *feudalism*.

In feudalism too, the landlords and tenants are subjected to compelling material interests. And out of the fusion of the two classes is the genesis of a new modal of production relation, called capitalism. Here is how Marxian narrative goes on why and how feudalism turns out capitalism. With the advent of industrial revolution, the tools to cultivate land were modernized resulting into the mechanized farming, hence raising the produce of farming. Bounty from land tilling means food surplus that goes beyond



serving food demands of families of the landlords and the tenants. That in turn means there arises the scope for food trade (agricultural market). Therefore, landlords were able to sell part of the agricultural surplus to the emerging urban class, the working class, which lives on wages from industrial employments.

The capitalist class keeps on investments in mechanization of agricultural practices to raise productivity in agriculture, hence augment the earnings from surplus. That gives the feudal lords a start up capital to open up industries, where they graduate from feudal lords to capitalists. More over, the new dynamics within feudalism furthers technological improvements, speed up the rate urbanization and urban development, making urban life relatively conducive to live and attractive. And it is inevitable that tenants flock to urban areas. That adds the speed of transformation in feudalism where the tenant class turn itself urbanite and be the nucleus of the working class. All those developments within feudalism triggers a new form of production relation to dominate the sphere of the economy. This newer production relation is called *capitalism*.

According to Karl Marx, Capitalism is the last stage of economic relationship in history. In capitalism, two antagonistic elements exist. These are the *capitalist class*, the exploiter and the *working class*, the exploited. In capitalism the capitalist class, which consists smaller section of the society, monopolize the economic life. On the other hand, the working class, despite composing larger segment of population, leads an impoverished life. With the advent of capitalism, the breadth and depth of exploitation by capitalist class cumulated, resulting into revolution. The revolution results a new economic order called *socialism*

In socialism, the working class, the have-nots, appropriate means of productions, i.e land, capital and the technology. And the ultimate role of a government in socialist order is creating favorable condition for communism to hold. To that end, a socialist government reorganizes the production system where the peasant and urban proletariat would collectively own means of production.

The working principle of a socialist system is *from each according to his ability to each according to his work*. When the socialist government realized that, it withers away from resource reallocation to yield communism. In a communist system, the antagonism over material acquisition vanishes, where people live in cooperation and harmony. In such a system, the working principle in the economic order is *from each according to his ability to each according to his need*. Therefore, as per the dialectical materialism and Marxian conception of history, the onset of socialism would end up antagonistic groups in the society over material possessions.

Worth noticing, however, is that communist system do not contradict the very Marxian teaching which says, irrespective of time and place, conflict is inherent to human society. Conflict prevails even in communism, but existing antagonism in communism is such narrow and shallow that it doesn't trigger for a newer production relation.

## 2.4. THE THEORY OF MELES ZENAWI

After his two-decades long twin-roles as a political leader and statesman, Meles Zenawi departed in natural death just five years ago. If it takes to sketch the life of Meles is a statement, it would be *a man who tirelessly expended his years in struggle*.

As a youth and an adult, Meles spent as a guerilla fighter and in a series of political showdowns against his rivals within his mother party, Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF). As a statesman, Meles incessantly fought the Western powers and their subsidiaries with pens & lecterns on ideological and/or policy lines.

A leader who has been a winner in all those confrontations, the underlying factors explaining his triumphs is good to see, not just to hail the late prime minister, but doing so is telling many on the politics and economics about Ethiopia. Indeed, why understanding Meles Zenawi is so important is perhaps as Donald Yamamoto said it once, *“understand Meles means to understand the underlying philosophy of his government”*.

Even more so, understanding the man means understanding the political economy of Ethiopia since he ascended to apex of Ethiopian political rule. To question the life and works of Meles Zenawi also means to deduce inference on what may hold in the future of Ethiopia, whose legacy is yet to fully divulge and his policies having a firm existence to rule in the foreseeable future, at least up until his party remain an incumbent in Ethiopian politics.

More important of all, a systematic look into the most influential but controversial leader shades light on the foundations on his thoughts which has ranked him a great leader, as an ideologue and a thinker too. Indeed,

the conceptions of the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia in the realm of politics and the economy is telling about the pillars of revolutionary democracy and/or democratic developmentalism.

#### **2.4.1. A Leader who spent his Life Fighting against Elitism**

Meles portrayed unpredictable, if not blurred, his goals in his realms has been unclear not only for those in aloof with him but also to his closest as pals, disciples, coworkers or colleagues. Such a baffle about the ambitions of the man is not without a reason, nor does his thoughts, policies, strategies and tactics were that buried too.

The leader has both overlooked and disdained, a reflection of that was his thought were blanketed in the covers of politics, and denied the right place in the realm of academia, being as alternative philosophical lines as a political and economic governance. The very constructs of political and economic philosophy of Meles lies in fighting *elitism*.

For Meles, what justifies politics and/or political power is the need to promote fairness, fairness in a sense that the larger mass of population better enjoys to exercise. The very foundation of Meles`s economic and political philosophy lies in promoting a system of political and economic governance in favor of *collectivism* rather than *elitism*.

##### **2.4.1.1. Restating Ethiopian History: Fighting Historical Elitism**

Meles staunchly argued elitism for having been the major face of Ethiopian historical, political and economic past. His denial of the Ethiopian history, disregarding both the plus 3000 years stretch and its content full of narratives on a king-only of palace-only matters is how he has portrayed conventional Ethiopian history as disingenuous.

For Meles, narratives on historical notes about Ethiopia before 19<sup>th</sup> century were all shady to embrace all Nations, Nationalities and People (NNPs) of Ethiopia while the history of Ethiopian people unheeded altogether tainted by *elitism*. The plus 3000 years of sketches on Ethiopian

history were all about the elites from dominant ethnic groups, mainly the Semites Northerners. Meles the Amharic and Tigrigna speaking people who share same appellation in many historical notes as *Abyssinians*.

#### ***2.4.1.2. Underlying Political Philosophy: Fighting Political Elitism***

For the later Prime Minister, the very essence of politics is promoting a political system where there is no a hegemony of a certain group, whatever justifies the group, as religion, culture, language, economic, political or any.

The history of Ethiopia is reflective of political elitism, where the Amhara culture, language have been imposed over other Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia. Moreover, despite diverse religious groups, orthodox Christianity has been favored, declared as a state religion. The ruling regimes in have been waving a policy of one people and country, despite diversified populace in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, and culture, among others.

In general, revolutionary democratic' political goals, with Meles being the chief ideologue, arises from the need to fight political elitism. It is once political elitism dissolved that it could be possible to exercise liberal democracy, which forefronts individual right over group rights. Unless rushed to individual right, those elites privileged in the past regimes will have monopolized politics, as they are in possessions of all the means and tools, the propaganda machines, the media, the economy and even intellect.

In all that Meles underscored the need for a strong and dominating political party that works for those political goals. For Meles, the pillars of revolutionary democratic system of political governance would be installing the constitutional, legal and institutional mechanisms to end

political elitism. By way of envisioning a political system against elitism, Meles appeared staunch about article 39 of FDRE constitution, by far a very contentious constitutional article.

#### ***2.4.1.3. Underlying Economic Philosophy: Fighting Economic Elitism***

The economic philosophy of revolutionary democracy stems from the two basic issues: one is that the country`s economy misses the essential institutional and structural elements which amounts to being foundation or corner stones for an ideal economy.

As a manifestation of that, according to revolutionary democratic teaching, involves the economy lacks sectorial diversity; experience structural problems; unjust resource distribution where the country concentrated to urban sector, while the rural sector being the major source of employment and foreign exchange earnings of the country.

Moreover, the basic nature of its economy has made it exposed to a great deal of foreign influence and the change in the global political economic order. In general, the Ethiopian economic order has been subjected to aggravating economic elitism to flourish. Hence, it is on the background of fighting economic elitism that Meles tried to assert his economic lines, as defined in the revolutionary democracy and later consolidated in democratic developmentalism. That is why revolutionary democrats argue Ethiopia cannot practice neo-liberal economic system, which otherwise, according to Meles Zenawi, would amounts to ***swallowing before chewing***.

## 2.5. THE PRACTICES OF MELES ZENAWI: *PRAGMATISM OR DOGMATISM?*

Looking at the personality of Meles Zenawi as a political leader and statesman, one can infer that he believes there are many ways to reach a particular destination. Meles adheres that a particular thought or ideals may take an update as the time calls. In his creeds, what is objective reality is the exertions each way may take is different, some costly in time, sweat or blood, while the others less costly. Such conception is a direct anti-thesis of dogmatism. Indeed, what describes Meles better is pragmatism, which can be taken for granted as pillars of practices of revolutionary democratic ideals in Ethiopia since 1991.

The foundations of his values, political & economic philosophies and tactics are all the built-ups of his adherence to pragmatism.

The pragmatic faces of Meles Zenawi are clearly displayed in his conceptions on ideology, how Meles appreciate the concept of *Power*; his creeds to the principle of measuring the true weights of rivals before taking them on in political and/or ideological contentions; how Meles understood the concept of time.

### **2.5.1. Meles` Conception on Ideology**

Existing accounts reveal that Meles` stance on ideology is displayed even before his ascendance to apex of party. For Meles, ideology is a tool or tactic to implement vested interests of world powers. His firm conception on ideology as a tactic was openly displayed in the early 1970s, when he opposed the idea proposed by Gedey Zeratsion, where the latter argued the need for TPLF to align with socialist blocs. Gedey was firm on the need to mobilize the cadre and the peasant army for one creed, powered by Marxian line.

However, Meles seemingly opposed the proposal, arguing the need to consider the inevitable set-backs from the western bloc in response. He stressed for caution before making ideological alignment with the socialist world. Quiet interesting is that Meles himself knew he was with little influence to make his comrades buy his idea. His comrades were his seniors in ages, education and power at their helm. Meles understood that the time was too early to openly confront with his ideas against his opponents. Perhaps he left the issue time will make a resolve on it. Meeting was called by the TPLF polit-bureau to decide on the proposal of Gedey Zeratsion and Aregawi Berhe. And ideological alignment was taken relevant, with Marxism-Leninism to be the ideological line for their political struggle.

Following the pass was the onset of the Marxist-Leninist League Tigray (MLLT) as a political wing of TPLF, with Meles a headmaster of the cadre school. Meles was tasked to inculcate ideals of scientific socialism, where he tirelessly read books on Marxist- Leninist lines. Quite different from his comrades, however, Meles was not a radical Marxist. While many of his equivalents in TPLF leadership considered socialism a religion, Meles was not. If it takes, definitely Meles was willing to trade socialism for capitalism, its antithesis. But what determines that is time. Meles understood either of socialist or capitalists blocs can claim global hegemony at any point in time, for both sides were equally heavy in terms of economy, technology, military, and sphere of global influence.

With time, Meles would be able to build his influence. His years as head of MLLT has endowed him all those essentials to appear influential and later put him to the apex of TPLF. When such was the time, Meles



would not only be willing to trade socialism for capitalism but also be able to do so. That explains the departure from MLLT after he assumed the title chairman, of TPLF in 1989. Indeed, Meles massively invested his expertise, time, energy and spirits perhaps since he ascended top of his party.

At least, in his first decades of his rule as head of government, the time was not allowing his governance to depart from ne-liberal lines. As the western world remained the sole global power after the dissolve of Soviet Socialist Republic following the Michael Gorbachev's Perestroika.

For a leader who knows his game, who shy away to play a game he cannot manage, what Meles had to declare was his adoption of neo-liberalism. For a leader often portrayed passive or reactionary for alleged switches in ideological lines, it seems that both labeling are unfounded, if not dishonest to mode the behavior of Meles Zenawi. Such a conclusion arises from two: a deliberate disregard for facts or a personal incapacity to explore the man. The incapacity lies in differentiating the ends and means. In fact, Meles as a political leader and statesman, had opted various means in his ventures as a tactic to adjust time.

Hence, in the process of achieving strategic goals in every ventures of governance, be it political, economic, bureaucratic, diplomatic, security or military, Meles knew the need to twist and turn to adjust for change in circumstances and/or time. Indeed, he has shown capable how to do so. By far, what has given Meles exceeding over his contenders were those two traits of his pragmatist leadership style – appreciating for prevailing circumstance (context) and time before taking action.

### **2.5.2. Meles` take on the Concept of Power**

What explains the very fact about the improper modeling about Meles, be it his personality, his thoughts, and breadth and depth of influences spheres of influences is ill understanding about his conception of power. A probe into how Meles Zenawi understands power is boldly telling his leadership principles. Hence, such a probe helps clarify the personality of the man as a leader in political and state ventures as: introvert or extrovert; socialist or capitalist; democrat or dictator.

Questioning Meles` take on power also enables to infer how Meles thinks: the backdrops of his thoughts, also the synthesis of his thoughts.

Meles Zenawi was a leader who well understood true power comes not just by appointment and/or nomination. For Meles, true power is earned, and is bestowed by oneself. The leader was well aware on ways & means to come out influential: as power build up is a process, where massive exertions required excelling over contenders.

Such understanding of power is apparent in the journey of Meles` all the way from guerrilla fighter to political leader. It is also telling how he philosophized political and state powers, manifested in the constitutional and institutional arrangements his governance has brought into the political landscape of Ethiopia. His conception on power as a process embodies two things matter, which is personal capacity and time elements.

In his role as political leader, Meles conspicuously invested a lot in self-enrichment in terms of knowledge, tactics, support base and eloquence to take hegemony over his contenders within TPLF/EPRDF. A gifted speaker, eloquent writer, a book-worm reader, workaholic, Meles was wise enough to understand those precious qualities were not sufficient to drive

him forward in triumph.

Meles understands power not only comes from one side, the strengths of the possessor; but also from the contenders sides too. Hence, it takes to know the strong and weak sides of the rivals.

### **2.5.3. Meles Knows Why and How to Measure the True Weights of his Rivals**

In addressing differences against his equivalents at the helm of political and/or ideological differences, Meles was very cautious. Before taking his opponents, he gauge not only his capacity but also evaluate the strength and weaknesses of his rivals.

Before trying to practice his ideals, or even less to confronting his challengers, he objectively look the matter in depth, make sure of enough resources not only to take him triumphant, but also guarantee him for a hideout lest for possible setbacks.

All that tells a curious Meles, who always prepare himself to deal with possible circumstances before passing decisions or take sides on key agendas as a political leader and statesman.

Worth noticing, however, is that characterizing Meles as a pragmatic leader should not be misunderstood that he lacked clear ends as a leader. Meles embrassed a well built up and consolidated goals/objectives in political and economic governance. Therefore, if there were twists and turns, it was mainly a strategy or tactic, just to achieve those ends.

Hopping that long between the two ideological continuums, socialism and capitalism, Meles was ill understood. Looking at his life as a guerilla fighter and a statesman, Meles has been rather consistent in his economic and political thoughts and goals.

#### **2.5.4. Meles Adheres to 'Brave is time, not man'**

Another face of pragmatic Meles is how the leader appreciated time. He also knew those privileges as not enough to push forward his own ideals openly and confront rivals. He was wise enough to understand the power of time, seemingly catered to the well-known Amharic saying, *Brave is time, not man*.

Meles recognizes what give his ideals get legitimacy and effect is not all those possessions, but time. Indeed, in his roles both as a political leader and as a statesman, Meles has shown able to play time.

Since the start of his leadership of Ethiopia to his death, Meles has been staunchly defied Neo-liberal thoughts, derivative policies and agents subservient to neo-liberalism. The only difference is how he confronted his political and/or ideological rivalries. Meles was so cautious when, how and where to held his bouts.

In all that, the concept of time is critical. In time, the rules of game in all spheres of governance, be it politics, economy, bureaucracy or security may change. As time passes, there may happen shift the power of major agents that influence political and/or state leadership, both from local or global perspectives. As a leader, Meles` well appreciate the concept of time a key ingredient to pass right decisions. More importantly, the revolutionary democratic leader understood time concept key to amass a real power at the helm of his leadership.

## **End Notes**

**13** See <http://www.strathink.net/>, entitled “Understanding Meles Zenawi: Conversations with U.S. Diplomats -Part 2)

**14** Meles prepared the document as partial fulfillments required to earn Master’s degree studies as a student at Erasmus university

**15** Alex de Waal, The Theory and Practice of Meles Zenawi, African Affairs, Volume 112, Issue 446, January 2013, Pages 148-155.

**16** Abay Tsehay, one of the heavy weights in TPLF and EPRDF has once given a testimony on the issue in his interview with the state media, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporate.