

Developmental States in Africa? A Review of On-going Debates and Buzzwords

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This article reviews the literature concerning the emergence of developmental states in Africa and gives an overview of debates on the usefulness of the 'East Asian model' for sub-Saharan Africa. The conclusion highlights how historic developmental states were often the product of trial and error rather than a grand plan; the concept of a developmental state therefore often works less as a model and more as a 'buzzword' with its own uses and effects.

Key words: Developmental states, African development, Africa-Asia

1 Introduction

The possibilities of 'developmental states' in Africa have become a subject of interest for scholars, development practitioners and African leaders alike. In the 1980s and 1990s structural-adjustment and good-governance interventions were concerned with rolling back the state in Africa, as it was seen to be bloated, inefficient, badly administered and corrupt. The discourse is, however, shifting, with the state becoming increasingly understood as significant for development. There is also a palpable attempt in parts of the continent to seek to emulate the developmental successes of East Asia (Fourie, 2011). Within this context there has been a growing interest, particularly inside Africa, in the possibility of African developmental states, and this concept has recently become a popular idea for hastening development in the continent, with a flurry of conferences and publications on the prospects (Edigheji, 2005; 2010; Meyns and Musamba, 2010). The African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa has already utilised the concept of a developmental state in its electoral campaign material (Meyns and Musamba, 2010), and the late Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi promoted the model as the way forward to African Finance Ministers (New Business Ethiopia, 2011). Developmental states have also been called for by the Economic Commission on Africa (Africa Focus, 2011).

If such states are possible and desirable in Africa, what kind of developmental states are being promoted? Here the discussions, statements and plans of proponents in South Africa and Meles Zenawi's proposals for Ethiopia have probably been the most clearly and widely articulated, and, as will be discussed, centre on democratic, mass engagement approaches.¹ These interact with ongoing debates about the usefulness of the 'East Asian model' being utilised in sub-Saharan Africa (Mkandawire, 2010; Ohno and Ohno, 2012).

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1. There are, of course, other examples of states within Africa discussed as developmental states, notably Botswana and Mauritius (Taylor, 2005; Meisenhelder, 1997). There are also other states seen to have developmental elements, notably Tanzania and Rwanda (Lockwood, 2005; Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2011).

These moves are accompanied by recent research which highlights that development outcomes can emerge from certain kinds of patrimonial behaviours that have previously been widely seen to be a barrier to development (Kelsall and Booth, 2010), as well as research demonstrating how successful developmental policies in East Asia have focused on agricultural policies that have reached a large number of people (van Donge et al. 2012).

This article moves away from the well trodden set of discussions of whether or not selected African states can be said to resemble a developmental state model. Rather, it contends that the concept of the developmental state is significant for how it is shaping debates about governance and development within countries and development circles in Africa. This is illustrated by the use of the term as a political agenda within Ethiopia and South Africa. As well as the adoption and extension of the ideas of developmentalism, the role of the state in development and of Africa learning from East Asian examples undertaken by projects such as the Africa Power and Politics (APP) and Tracking Development programmes.² The point of departure, for this article, is that the idea of a developmental state is a political idea, as much as it is an academic model. Here perhaps I am unintentionally implying too neat a division between academic concepts and political ideas, which is clearly erroneous; political theory and political events always dissolve into each other. Although it should be acknowledged in this context that the academic provenance of the term is perhaps part of its appeal, since the concept is seen to come unencumbered with ideological 'baggage'. And whilst it can carry a negative association with authoritarianism, this, as will be discussed, is often ameliorated by the proposal of a democratic developmental state. It can thus be seen to be refreshing in terms of its abandonment of value-laden policy prescriptions, undertaking instead to learn from comparative history and the analysis of the empirical data (Fritz and Menocal, 2007: 531). Learning from the 'success stories' of East Asia seems sensible and pragmatic – although what precisely those lessons are is a matter of some debate (cf. Routley, 2012).

This article reviews recent discussion of the developmental state in academic circles, but also as political rhetoric and policy. The realms of the academic and the politician are not so removed from each other in these debates, with the late Ethiopian Prime Minister's contribution to these debates consisting in part of a chapter published in an academic book (Meles Zenawi, 2012). The following sections explore some key aspects of the promotion and contestation of the idea of the 'developmental state' across both realms, drawing particularly on the debates in Ethiopia and South Africa. To set the scene, the next two sections review debates around the definition of the term 'developmental state' and the broader question of whether the emergence of developmental states in Africa is possible.

2 How to identify a developmental state?

The meaning of the term 'developmental state' is both disputed and evolving (Evans, 2010a; 2010b). Even the constituent elements of the term are not unproblematic: for instance, 'the state' as a term is highly contested (Abrams, 1988: 59). State-society relations

2. More information on both these programmes can be found on their websites – www.institutions-africa.org and www.trackingdevelopment.net. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their overlap of interests and influences, researchers from both programmes have recently started new research on developmental regimes <http://www.institutions-africa.org/page/initiating-developmental-regimes>.

play an important role in the narrative of developmental states, their success often being seen to rest on a very particular form of interaction that Evans (1995) terms ‘embedded autonomy’. This term describes a situation where the state bureaucracy is not adversely influenced by interest groups but also remains connected enough to society to be able to act to ensure growth and (to an extent) redistribution (Evans, 1995; 1998). Within these accounts the state does not always remain a unified cohesive entity; instead, many researchers examine the relationship not only of developmental states to their societies but also how different parts of the developmental state, such as the executive and the bureaucracy, interact with each other (Johnson, 1982; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth, 1993; Haggard, 2004).

Scholars started to define and elaborate the concept of a developmental state as part of their explorations of the economic-growth stories of countries in East Asia, and this particular experience has tended to dominate the framing of the concept (Johnson, 1982; 1987; Evans, 1995); although there were a number of previous examples of economic growth in which the state has been seen to be the key actor (List, 1904; White and Wade, 1988: 1; Leftwich, 2000: 155). Johnson argues that the concept of the developmental state also exists as an abstract generalisation (Johnson, 1999: 43), and this abstraction is usually synthesised from specific East Asian cases to form a model, an ideal type of developmental state. This approach has been criticised by some scholars as overtly homogenising the diverse experiences of East Asian states (Haggard, 2004: 56; Putzel, 2002; Ohno and Ohno 2012). Given the diversity of experiences, it is perhaps not surprising that researchers of developmental states differ in the precise composition of the traits they attribute to developmental states and the conditions which allow them to emerge.³ However, there is general agreement that there are two aspects to a developmental state, which Vu calls developmental structures and developmental roles (Vu, 2007: 28), and which have been termed elsewhere as structure and ideology (Meles Zenawi, 2012: 167) and can be discussed more generally, as state capacity and commitment. Vu highlights how both these elements can exist separately from each other, whilst they are still needed in combination for a developmental state to be successful (2007).

Whilst this combination of the two attributes of capacity for and commitment to development is useful, it has pitfalls arising from its close association of the form of the state with its successful outcomes. This makes it difficult to identify developmental states prior to their attainment of successful growth (Fritz and Menocal, 2007: 534). Moreover, this can seem to render the term tautological ‘...since evidence that the state is developmental is often drawn deductively from the performance of the economy’ (Mkandawire, 2001: 290). Mkandawire therefore argues that, for the term to have any real meaning, it has to be possible for the state to be developmental but not achieve economic growth because of unforeseen external shocks. In other words, there has to be the possibility of there being failed developmental states, which requires the developmental states to be defined not by their successes but by their commitment to a widely held ambition – a hegemonic ideology – of development (Woo-Cummings, 1999). This definition is useful, as it allows for failure and makes the definition of developmental states less tautological. Moreover, it emphasises the significance of this driving communal goal – often associated with nationalism (Woo-Cummings, 1999; Johnson, 1999) – to the

3. For a fuller review of this literature see Routley (2012).

developmental state. It highlights the hegemonic project or consensus around development that marks out a state as developmental, in contrast to a state which achieves or attempts to achieve growth or other developmental outcomes by means of acting as a different kind of state (for example, regulatory).

If a developmental state is one which (successfully?) produces or pursues developmental outcomes, what is a developmental outcome? Whilst what outcomes are considered developmental is clearly highly contestable, it has, surprisingly, been the subject of relatively little debate until comparatively recently. Developmental states have been mainly associated with economic growth (Mkandawire, 2001), which has often been seen to be the result of 'upgrading' the economic basis of the national economy to undertake activities higher up the global value chain, resulting in considerable emphasis being put on industrialisation as a key element of the developmental-state story (Doner et al. 2005; Evans, 1995: 7-8). This growth was, however, seen, in addition, to have social benefits, and the concept of a developmental state is often used to denote not only states which have achieved significant growth rates but rather growth rates alongside widespread legitimacy and elements of redistribution (Leftwich, 2000: 166-7). Scholars have also highlighted that there have generally been significant increases in the standard of living for a large proportion of the population of developmental states (Johnson, 1987: 143; Leftwich, 2008: 16). The legitimacy of developmental states in East Asia rested on these significant improvements in standards of living for a broad cross-section of society (Wade, 1990: 7; Fritz and Menocal, 2007: 534; Lin and Monga, 2011: 278). So, the central elements of the developmental outcomes for much of the developmental-states literature were growth, with widespread increases in the standard of living (through increased employment and industrialisation in the case of East Asia and Mauritius) and broad-based legitimacy. The emphasis placed on these various aspects varies between scholars, who often focus on different outcomes – growth, living standards, legitimacy – as being central to defining a developmental state. Similarly the precise combination of attributes or capacities that a state needs to be developmental is highly debateable. However, for the purposes of this article a working set of attributes can be summarised as a capable, autonomous (but embedded) bureaucracy (Evans, 1995); a political leadership oriented towards development (Musamba, 2010; Fritz and Menocal, 2007); a close, often mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationship between some state agencies (often discussed as pilot agencies) and key capitalists. (Johnson, 1982; 1987); and successful policy interventions which promote growth (Wade, 1990; Beeson, 2004).

3 The (im)possibility of developmental states in Africa?

To some, talk about 'developmental states' in Africa, let alone of '*democratic* developmental states', may seem no more than a pipe dream. Have we not been told that our neopatrimonial institutions, our ethnic diversity, our geographical location and globalisation, all make 'developmental states' simply unimaginable in Africa? (Mkandawire, 2010: 74)

In debates about the transfer of the model of the East Asian developmental state to other regions, it is the transfer of this model to Africa which has generated the most discussion within the literature. Some have espoused what Musamba calls the 'impossibility theorem':

that African states will not be able to become developmental (Musamba, 2010: 30-1). There are three key substantial strands to the arguments made about the difficulties of transferring the developmental state model to the African context: first, the changed geo-political situation (compared with when East Asian states became developmental), especially increased globalisation; secondly, the generally problematic nature of the transfer of institutions; and thirdly the absence of state capacity and developmental commitment in Africa, due in part to the persistence of neopatrimonial tendencies (Musamba, 2010: 30-3; Mkandawire, 2010: 74). This article will concentrate on this last set of arguments (although the other two are touched upon) concerning the difficulty of developmental states emerging in Africa because of the perceived characteristics of the African state.

The changed global context is, however, significant: there are general debates about the reduced overall possibilities for new developmental states to emerge in the East Asian mode, given the changed global economic and political environment. One of the key changes is globalisation and global economic liberalisation which is seen to constrain developing states' developmental space in terms of the policy options available to them to protect their emerging industries; many of which were utilised by the East Asian developmental states (Wade, 2003: 622; Beeson, 2004: 32; Hayashi, 2010: 60; Chang, 2006). In addition, the significant strategic geopolitical position of East Asian states meant that the US (subsequently a key driver behind the pressure to liberalise and open up national markets in order to level the playing field) was well disposed towards these states and in fact opened up its markets to them (Chang, 2006: 18; Pempel, 1999: 155; Hayashi, 2010: 46). Moreover, newly emerging developmental states face considerably slowed growth in global markets, making it harder if not impossible for them to achieve growth using the same strategies that the East Asian states utilised (Wade, 1990: 347-8; Hayashi, 2010: 59). There are also connected changes in the global labour market which affect the strategies which will be necessary for emerging developmental states (Evans, 2010b). This in turn requires a developmental state which looks quite different from its East Asian precursors.

Mkandawire has highlighted the disjuncture between two sets of literature on this subject. The first analyses the nature of the African state and, from this basis, refutes the possibility of the replication of East Asian successes in Africa. (Mkandawire, 2001: 289, 294). Indeed, much of the literature understands African states to be neopatrimonial, weak, predatory or kleptocratic (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Diamond, 2008; Bayart et al., 1999). The other is prescriptive and presupposes that African developmental states could exist, detailing what types of policies, structures and relationships would make this possible (Mkandawire, 2001: 289). This results in the ironic situation where

States whose capacity to pursue any national project is denied at one level (theoretical or diagnostic) are exhorted, at the prescriptive level, to assume roles that are, *ex definicione*, [by definition] beyond their capacity, character or political will. (Mkandawire, 2001: 289)

This tension is significant and I suggest that it reflects broader tensions in the literature between analytic and prescriptive approaches towards development within Africa. Mkandawire highlights how states have been examined in comparison with idealised models of states from elsewhere, in this case idealised models of the developmental state

(2001: 290). As such, there can tend to be an over-emphasis on the 'ought', on what states should be rather than what they are.

The strand of literature which argues against the possibility of developmental states emerging in Africa sometimes commits the temporal error of saying that developmental states *cannot* emerge, since they are not currently emerging. It mutates current circumstances to intrinsic intransient attributes. This essentialising move is often short-sighted; the East Asian miracle itself occurred despite some early twentieth-century evaluations of Japanese workers as lazy and unproductive (Ohno and Ohno, 2012: 224). . More specifically, dismissals of the potential for developmental states because of a lack of state capacity tend to overlook how this was not necessarily *a priori* but rather how in the East Asian experience capacity-building occurred dynamically as part of the developmental process (Ohno and Ohno, 2012). This does not detract from the value of examinations of the significant factors that could potentially constrain the emergence of developmental states in Africa. However, my interpretation of Mkandawire's ire is a perception of Africa as a continent being dismissed, and the diversity of the African experience being homogenised in a way which undermines a fuller understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of African states (Mkandawire, 2001: 290). After all, Botswana and Mauritius are frequently discussed as key examples of developmental states (Meyns, 2010; Taylor, 2005; Meisenhelder, 1997). There are also a number of states in Africa which have been highlighted as showing promise of the appropriate capacity and commitment, including Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda and South Africa (Lockwood, 2005; Vaughan and Gebremichael, 2011; Kelsall and Booth, 2010; Edigheji, 2010).

If developmental states are emerging and/or are being advocated in Africa, what types of developmental states are they? The next section examines recent discussions of the forms of developmental state that are present, or it is hoped will arise, in Africa.

4 African developmental states

4.1 *A democratic developmental state: embeddedness and autonomy*

There is a distinct strand in the recent literature, which envisages that new developmental states emerging on the African continent will be democratic both as a likelihood and as normative desire. The argument runs that these developmental states are likely to be democratic, in part because the majority of states are currently democratic and also because there are considerable external and internal pressures for democracy (White, 1998). Democratic developmentalism is also an aspiration, with many advising that it is this form of state that could bring about the 'best' developmental outcomes (Edigheji, 2010; Musamba, 2010).

This literature runs counter to the association between developmental states and authoritarianism which emerged out of examinations of the East Asian developmental states. A number of factors have been put forward to constitute a positive linkage between authoritarianism and the emergence of developmental states. An authoritarian government is seen to be able to take a longer-term view (Johnson, 1987: 143). Democracy has been seen as problematic for the emergence of developmental states due to the short-termism that electoral politics can breed, as opposed to the long view that those pursuing a developmental vision in developmental states are required to take (Kelsall and Booth, 2010:

27). Authoritarian developmental states are able to suppress, or ignore, interest-group demands, which enables their necessary bureaucratic autonomy (Wade, 1990: 375; Vu, 2007: 30). Authoritarian states are not, however, necessarily developmental (White, 1998: 7; Fritz and Menocal, 2007: 536; Vu, 2007: 49),⁴ and there have, of course, been democratic developmental states, for example Japan and Botswana. Authoritarianism is seen to allow states to be autonomous from the pressures of society. However, for Peter Evans, this autonomy is only one side of the coin and these states could not be effective if completely isolated from society; they were therefore both autonomous from broader society and also embedded in it in specific ways – a dynamic he famously describes as embedded autonomy (1995). In the Korean context for example, it was within a fairly narrow group of bureaucrats and industrialists with whom the dense links of embeddedness were formed (Evans, 1995). East Asian developmental states therefore are often seen to have rested on a narrow, but vital, coalition between the state and capitalists (Evans, 1995; Vu, 2007). In the Ethiopian case it is the relationship between smallholder farmers and the developmental bureaucracy which has been seen as the most significant, both by the regime and by observers. Democratic Developmentalism relies to an extent on its coupling with the other plank of the Ethiopian approach Agricultural Development-Led Industrialisation (ADLI). This is due to the support base of smallholder farmers (who account for 80% of the Ethiopian population) which the ruling party draws on (Ohno, 2009: 6). Democratic contexts, however, *may* (after all) necessitate a broader-based coalition, as in Botswana (Poteete, 2009). Evans also examines case studies of broader-based coalitions in India and Austria and suggests that

a broadly defined embeddedness may offer a more robust basis for transformation in the long run. This suggestive evidence argues for further exploration of potential variations of embedded autonomy. (Evans, 1995: 17)

Thus, for Evans, broader incorporation of social groups such as labour and other civil-society interests under a democracy may in fact be both possible and desirable in newly emergent developmental states. He has therefore recently argued that the twenty-first-century developmental state will, in contrast to the twentieth-century version, need to build close ties and be embedded in a broad cross-section of society (Evans, 2010a; 2010b).

This focus on a broader coalition is because he sees the twenty-first-century developmental state as being basically a capability-enhancing state, looking to promote the capabilities of its citizenry through the provision of collective goods such as health and education (*ibid.*). He does not see this as a complete departure from the developmental-state model of the East Asian states and highlights the high levels of investment in education (Evans, 2010a: 5; 2010b: 47). However, the focus on the development of capabilities means that the ‘knowledge’ required by the state cannot be obtained solely by building the close ties that Evans and others have documented between business leaders and the bureaucracy in the East Asian case (Evans, 1995; Moon and Prasad, 1994). Instead, there will be an acute need for ‘information on collective priorities at the community level’ (Evans, 2010b: 49). This requires that policies are not created by technocrats: rather, Evans argues, they

4. Japan as a developmental state was formally democratic, but Johnson discusses it as a case of ‘soft authoritarianism’ (Johnson, 1982).

'must be derived from democratically organised public deliberation' (Evans, 2010b: 43). This incorporation would, however, require considerable infrastructural ability to create and sustain broad-based developmental pacts/coalitions (Mkandawire, 2010:72). The challenges of maintaining this broader coalition are likely to be considerable.

This capability-enhancing state with a focus on building up the capacities of 'the people', and the inclusion of them in political processes, resonates closely with the developmental state envisaged in the ANC's *Adopted Strategy and Tactics* which outlines its vision of the developmental state as part of the National Democratic Revolution (ANC, 2007: point 59.) For the ANC in the South African context, whilst the developmental state is seen as desirable, democracy - and this concept comes with its own historical connotations of racial struggle - is seen to be paramount. This is starkly reflected in the *Adopted Strategy and Tactics* where not only is considerably more reference made to democracy but democracy also appears on the first line, whereas the developmental state is not mentioned until about a quarter of the way into the text (ANC, 2007). This is significant, since the question raised for South Africa is 'Can a democratic state also be a developmental state?', whereas much of the literature examining democratic developmental states frames it as 'Can a developmental state be democratic?'. Much as this may seem to be semantics, important differences in approach emerge from this reframing: what is being looked at is the possibilities of developmental traits being incorporated into a democratic context, which poses different challenges from the introduction of democracy to a developmental state.

A sharp distinction between an authoritarian and a democratic state is perhaps too simplistic in many senses, as Johnson's analysis of Japan as 'soft authoritarianism' despite its formally democratic status shows (Johnson, 1982). A number of African states which are discussed as democratic and developmental have electoral systems which are *de facto* (if not *de jure*) dominated by one party. The Ethiopia Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has held power in Ethiopia for over 20 years, and Botswana and Rwanda are similarly formally multi-party systems which are dominated by a single party (it should be noted that the ANC has also held power in South African since 1994). One exception here is Mauritius which has a competitive multi-party system.

This does not mean that democracy is seen as a marginal concern within these states, although critics of all these regimes would dispute their truly democratic credentials. The Ethiopian government under Meles Zenawi promoted a strategy of Democratic Developmentalism which, whilst, as the name suggests, it stressed the importance of democracy, also pursued a single developmental party remaining in power for a long period (Ohno, 2009: 4). This longevity of one party in power is seen as positive since it acts to counter the short-termism that more competitive forms of electoral politics may encourage. The vision of Democratic Developmentalism is also that the perpetuation of this long duration of rule is due to the legitimacy gained through both 'economic performance and democratic procedure' (ibid.). However, for Meles Zenawi, whilst democracy was significant for legitimacy, citing the work of Evans and others he contended in his own writing that there was the need for a developmental state to be autonomous from society and therefore it could only be 'semi-democratic, semi-parliamentarian at best', (Meles Zenawi 2012: 167). The tension between the concepts of democracy and developmental states, and the balance between autonomy and embeddedness, are then often also concerned with the nature of the coalition of embeddedness, how broad-based or narrow it is. While a

developmental state is required to be responsive, who it responds to is often seen to be a narrow set of actors and interests, rather than the breadth and plurality that democracy implies. Maybe Meles Zenawi's half-way of 'semi-democracy' is one answer to the balance of embeddedness and autonomy.

4.2 A developmental patrimonial state

The intimacy of the narrow form of embeddedness in the case of East Asian developmental states meant that they could be seen to be at risk of clientelist capture by business interests. '[South] Korea pushed the limit to which embeddedness could be concentrated in a few ties without degenerating into particularist predation' (Evans, 1995: 53). In a number of South-East Asian states this 'over-embeddedness' was discussed as crony capitalism (Putzel, 2002).

One of the key departures of the Africa Power and Politics (APP) programme's work on developmental patrimonialism is challenging the assumption that clientelist behaviours and neo-patrimonial regimes *automatically* undermine bureaucracies (Booth, 2010: 15,17; Williams et al., 2011: 340). Developmental Patrimonialism is the term coined by David Booth and Tim Kelsall to describe patrimonial state systems that have developmental impacts due to the leadership's centralised control of rents and adoption of a long-term view (Kelsall and Booth, 2010). Ethiopia is seen to exhibit these elements (Vaughan and Gebremichael, 2011); South Africa has not been examined by scholars utilising this concept. The departure point for APP's explorations of patrimonial developmentalism is that different kinds of patrimonial and clientelist behaviours have different types of impacts (Booth, 2010: 7). Its body of work includes detailed case studies of African patrimonial states which are identified as developmental, such as Rwanda and Malawi (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2011; Cammack and Kelsall, 2010), and some states that are not, such as Zimbabwe (Dawson and Kelsall, 2011). In a key study Kelsall and Booth (2010) hypothesised a link between centralised rent processes, where leaders were able to take a long view of economic growth, in an attempt to identify what types of patrimonial behaviour could be seen as developmental. They examined five African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania) during periods they identified as being characterised by long-horizon centralised rent processes, and scrutinised the economic and political landscape to probe any connections between the long-horizon centralised rent processes and economic growth. They came to the conclusion that there was a relationship, but that these processes were not sufficient on their own. A skilled leader and a competent bureaucracy were seen as significant elements required, alongside long-horizon centralised rent processes, to achieve economic growth.

In this respect, factors associated with the mainstream developmental states model can be found in the examples of 'developmental patrimonialism' discussed by the APP programme. In particular, the importance of the civil service, especially in terms of its professionalism and its capacity, emerges from some of its work: for example, Kenya's autonomous bureaucracy (Kelsall and Booth, 2010: 19) and the professionalism of the bureaucracy during the first period of Banda's rule in Malawi (Cammack and Kelsall, 2011). The latter case reflects many of the qualities ascribed to the bureaucracy in developmental states, inasmuch as bureaucrats were highly educated and drawn from prestigious institutions, with a clear career path and promotion based on merit (Cammack and Kelsall, 2011: 90).

Kelsall and Booth do not claim these instances as simply fitting the developmental state model: rather, they suggest that what developmental patrimonialism describes is a different way in which a more developmentally focused state may come about, with the attendant gains of economic growth and, to an extent, social improvements. Evans (1995: 12) argues that ‘Only when embeddedness and autonomy are joined together can a state be called developmental’. Perhaps the developmental patrimonial state tips the balance towards a certain kind of embeddedness, but nonetheless retains these two elements. After all, one of the key elements that emerges from the APP studies is the importance of a well respected, in some senses effective, professional and disciplined bureaucracy alongside patrimonial elements (Booth, 2010; Kelsall and Booth, 2010: 19). In this way, perhaps, patrimonial developmental states could be seen to be another way of pursuing developmental goals.

However, there are problematic elements of patrimonial development which rest on the personalised nature of the developmental rule in many of the examples of developmental patrimonial states. The developmental outcomes are often lost at the point of leadership change or in the case of the leader’s waning capacities (Cammack and Kelsall, 2011). The problematic nature of developmentalism resting on a particular leader is also highlighted by the recent death of Meles Zenawi. The closing point in Vaughan and Gebremichael’s study of Ethiopia, which was published almost exactly a year before Meles Zenawi died, highlights that succession crises have the potential to result in the shift from developmental patrimonialism to ‘less economically productive forms’ of governance and that the ability of the Ethiopian rulers had not yet been challenged in this regard (Vaughan and Gebremichael, 2011: 61). The succession to the post of Prime Minister of HaileMariam Desalegn, who was seen as close to Meles Zenawi, and his subsequent pledges to continue with the same policies, may mark a successful change of leader – but it is too soon to gauge the broader effects of this leadership change (BBC, 2012). The impacts when they emerge may, however, tell us much about Meles Zenawi’s rule and the form of governance that took place under it. As Vu outlines:

Politicians can consolidate their personal power base differently... For example, if politicians seek to build a professional network of loyal clients in the bureaucracy, this network helps them but not the state they run. Instead, if they consolidate their power base by building effective coercive state apparatuses, these may stay with the state long after they have left the scene. (Vu, 2007: 36)

This highlights that one of the key difficulties with developmental patrimonial states is in sustaining the gains made and the absence of institution-building. The types of state capacities which patrimonial developmental leaders build may not have much longevity beyond particular leaders. They are successful in conducting developmental roles for a time, but they do not build the developmental structures or institutions required for these practices to obtain some sustainability (Kelsall and Booth, 2010: 27).

4.3 A pro-poor rural developmental state

In a number of recent publications on developmental states, rural and agricultural development has been understood as a keystone. In addition, it is argued that this is a

constituency which African leaders have generally neglected (Mkandawire, 2011: 72). Research by the Tracking Development project examines pairs of countries from East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa,⁵ but whilst this is highly relevant to the debates on developmental states, it does not engage with the developmental-state model *per se*. Rather, it seeks to examine the divergence between the development trajectories of countries in the East Asian region and sub-Saharan Africa. A recent publication from this programme by van Donge, Henley and Lewis makes a convincing case for the significance of agricultural reform prior to states emerging as industrialising developmental states. They argue that in South-East Asia:

Agricultural and rural policies raised rural incomes and levels of well-being, leading directly to mass poverty reduction, and indirectly to the creation of a conducive climate for industrial development. (van Donge et al., 2012: 12)

Such policies were not instituted in sub-Saharan Africa where governments spend relatively little on pro-poor, pro-rural policies, and therefore this can be seen as the root of both South-East Asia's successes and sub-Saharan Africa's failures. One of the elements which the study suggests may have been significant in South-East Asia's undertaking pro-poor rural policies, in contrast to the experience in sub-Saharan Africa, is the perception of a more imminent threat of rural rebellion in East Asia (van Donge et al., 2012: 19; Henley, undated). This echoes Doner, Ritchie and Slater's concern with threats of unrest that push elites to follow a developmental course of action (Doner et al., 2005).

Land reform is also viewed as a significant part of an environment which provided economic freedoms to small-scale entrepreneurs and peasant farmers, that were vital to the economic successes of South Asia (van Donge et al., 2009). In addition, it has been seen as a significant element which preceded the emergence of the developmental state; Korea, Japan and Taiwan all underwent significant land reform (Kuznets, 1988). Whilst most scholars do not posit that agricultural policies and land reform are a sufficient condition for a developmental state to emerge, they are often argued to be a necessary precursor. Wade cites Taiwan's as one of the largest non-communist land reforms, and he sees land reform, alongside a ceiling on land ownership, as significant, arguing that they limit wealth accumulation in land and improve agricultural productivity (Wade, 1990: 241). Not only does he view land reform as advantageous, but also proposes that an ongoing cap on ownership is required to prolong these benefits (Wade, 1990: 297).

The absence of dispossession and the undertaking of land reform may also be significant as they are elements, and evidence, of a weakening or a removal of agricultural elites. Evans argues that India has a relatively Weberian bureaucracy, but that it struggles to be developmental and to build close relationships with business because of the sizeable influence of large landed rural elites (Evans, 1995: 67-8). The class relations and the relations of the smaller agricultural producers with the state which occur in the absence, or the political weakness, of these elites may help to create developmental outcomes and possibilities. The existence of agricultural elites *per se* does not mean that a close relationship with industrialisers and pro-poor rural policies cannot take place. Mauritius did

5. The pairs that they examine are: Nigeria-Indonesia; Kenya-Malaysia; Tanzania-Vietnam; and Uganda-Cambodia. More information about this project can be found at <http://www.trackingdevelopment.net/>

not get rid of its large sugar estates and the elites associated with them. However, the state was able to enact policies that were not in line with the interests of this elite, but were, in many senses, pro-poor rural policies. The epitome of this was the sugar tax which was ‘applied most harshly to the large estates, while small cane growers were assisted and subsidised by the state’ (Meisenhelder, 1997: 284). Equitable growth in agriculture can, therefore, be seen as a key driver of development in developmental states.

This accords with research emphasising how part of the significant impact of these agricultural activities lies in the number of people that these development strategies reached (Henley, undated) and the equity of the growth strategy (Nyanjom and Ong’olo, 2012). Henley contrasts the broad outreach agricultural policies pursued in Indonesia and Malaysia with Kenya’s less successful policies which were centred on more elitist schemes that favoured ‘progressive farmers’ and disregarded the majority (undated: 5). It is this ability to have an impact on a large number of people, and especially to undertake pro-poor policies, which he argues had a broad impact across large numbers – quantity not quality – and which make agricultural interventions potentially so productive.

5 Conclusion: the developmental state as buzzword rather than model

Many scholars agree that there is not an East Asian model that can simply be copied, cut and pasted over to Africa (Manor, 2008; Ohno and Ohno, 2012; Evans, 2004). Development policy-makers with greater social benefits in mind may, however, crave clear policy choices and plans. Policies that have been proven within the context of East Asia which can be applied (once tailored to local circumstances) in the poor countries which constitute much of Africa are therefore highly desirable. In the discussions of developmental states this comes through in a dual emphasis on the importance of vision and planning but also on flexibility and experimentation (for example, Gumedde, 2009: 10-11). Yet, whilst the academics and policy-makers have often focused on the planned nature of the developmental state, it may be that the lessons of East Asia are somewhat less planned and programmatic: in fact, they may highlight the need for action which is not about steady planning but about meeting immediate needs (Henley, undated).

Henley’s highlighting of the immediate problem-solving focus of the East Asian developmental states is not as much of a departure from the developmental-states literature as it may appear. From the outset of the research into developmental states, one of the clearest messages was the absence of a neat, universally applicable template and, conversely, the gains to be made from local processes of negotiation, trial and error. Chalmers Johnson was one of the first to lay out the character of what he called ‘the Japanese model’ and identify abstract features which other societies could use as a guide (1982: 314-15). Interestingly, the country which he identified as being able to learn from Japan’s experience was the United States (Johnson, 1982: 323). Despite Johnson’s outlining of a Japanese model, he argues that:

other nations seeking to emulate Japan’s achievements might be better advised to fabricate the institutions of their own developmental states from local materials. (ibid.)

Similarly for Evans, it is the ability of East Asia's developmental states to reinvent rather than copy that was vital to their success, and this may constitute the key 'transferable lesson' of their experience (Evans, 1998). Adaptation and innovation should, then, be the hallmark of any emerging developmental state rather than a dogmatic following of the East Asian model.

The taking up of opportunities in the East Asian cases was not, for the most part, pre-planned, and there was no clear model or master plan in mind: rather, there was a focus on problem-solving and urgent action (Ohno and Ohno, 2012; Henley, undated). The concept of a model implies that there are discrete stages through which you can proceed to a pre-determined destination. It connotes the idea of a controlled process in which decisions are made according to a plan which builds towards achieving long-term goals. In contrast, many of the decisions made (which did ultimately bear longer-term fruit) were actually concerned with serving immediate needs (Henley, undated: 8). East Asian bureaucrats and leaders urgently deployed what resources and ideas were available (to hand) in order to solve problems: they dealt with priority issues rather than fulfilling plans (Henley, undated). Ohno and Ohno contrast this approach with the idealised-models approach taken by economic advisers who regard implementation as not their problem, and thus concentrate on identifying the 'solution' without engaging with the specific issues to hand; their advice is thus unconsidered in terms of its feasibility (Ohno and Ohno, 2012: 226).

They also make similar criticisms of the good-governance approach for its idealisation of what 'should' be. In this way they echo Mkandawire's comments about the too frequent disconnect between the analytical and the prescriptive (Mkandawire, 2001: 289). This concentration on 'should' can lead to an over-concern with what is lacking in comparison with an idealised image of the modern industrial state. Such an idealisation of modernity has, in fact, been equally detrimental to African policy-making, owing to the disconnection between symbolic elements of this modernity (be they factories, universities, supermarkets or laptops), the absence of which has often been the focus of African policy, rather than the practical solving of immediate issues (van Donge et al., 2012: 20). This idealisation can be seen at work in, for example, the decisions to favour 'modernising' farmers in Kenya rather than undertaking interventions which have an impact on the mass of farmers (Henley, undated: 6). 'Muddling through', in terms of dealing with the issues of immediate concern in an innovative way that has a vital impact on large numbers of people, may be, in the end, more productive than trying to conform to a model.

There seems to be some consensus that, if developmental states emerge in the near future, they will look markedly different from the states originally labelled as developmental. If this is the case, we should ask how useful it is to label states as 'developmental' in contexts where they cannot be said to possess many of the attributes originally associated with that category. Indeed, perhaps tying our debates to the question of what similarities or differences can be perceived from the original developmental-state model runs the risk of blunting our analytical grasp of different patterns of social, political and economic relations, by narrowing our focus to elements which had been important elsewhere rather than searching for the most significant dynamics in contemporary African states. Indeed, some of the most significant studies on the East Asian developmental states were those which conducted detailed research and highlighted how the practices of these states could not be explained simply in relation to the 'Western model' and thus required a new way of viewing them (Johnson, 1982; Amsden, 1989; Wade, 1990; Evans, 1995).

The attention being paid to the idea of developmentalism and Africa learning from East Asia is a departure from the emphasis on 'best practice' and 'good governance', and it is not coincidental that attention to these ideas emerges alongside a shift in development thinking in some quarters – 'From best practice to 'best fit' (Booth, 2011: 1). The interest in the concept in some senses can be seen to come from a search for an alternative; indeed, the adoption of the term by some was part of a rejection of previous neo-liberal orthodoxies (Meles Zenawi, 2012) or as an alternative to the free market (Edigheji, 2006: 5). Interest in the term for the alternative it offers without engagement with the real content of what it describes is frustrating for academics and others who are committed to the value of the model (see Edigheji's comments (ibid: 6) on the lack of elaboration of the concept and concrete engagement with what he views as the essential institutional elements of the developmental state in South Africa). Interest in developmental states for African leaders and policy-makers can thus be seen in some contexts to arise from conversations with donors and other Western actors. Alemayehu (2009: 11) highlights, for instance, that Meles Zenawi's writings on the developmental state are in English and the paper was first presented in Britain and remained largely un-discussed in Ethiopia. On the other hand, the discussion of the South African developmental state is often more directly aimed at a domestic audience, with different political organisations offering their own 'spin' (Edigheji, 2006). In both the discussions of African leaders with allies and internal political debates what emerges is a broad-based hope and desire for learning from East Asia, and the developmental-state model will offer solid alternatives but a plethora of different interpretations as to what the lessons for African leaders might be.

The variety of the lessons that can be drawn from the East Asian experience is perhaps also part of their allure. As Fourie (2011) highlights in her examination of Ethiopia and Kenya, the experiences that African countries look to are influenced by the historical and ideological context of the country (and the leaders) searching for lessons. This can also be observed in Edigheji's analysis of different actors' usage of the term in South Africa being driven by their broader vision of the political realm and their position within it. So, for example, the Communist Party sees the most productive implementation of the developmental state to involve embeddedness not with capital but with a progressive workers movement (Edigheji, 2006: 3). In this sense then, the term 'developmental state' can be understood as a 'buzzword' in line with Cornwall and Brock's exploration of such terms which give a generalised sense of direction and legitimisation outside their semantic meaning (2005). Buzzwords come to be important in part because of the broad range of meanings (perhaps even conflicting ones) that they connote. They therefore come to be signifiers of values rather than technical descriptors. The developmental state as 'buzzword' encompasses a range of attributes, such as prosperity, wellbeing, efficiency and growth. Despite or maybe because of this conceptual blurring, the adoption of the developmental-state concept by politicians can be seen as highly positive in terms of the possibilities it enables. The pursuit of a developmental state can thus imply the pursuit of a novel mode for achieving development, and this can contribute towards a future-oriented rhetoric which, in turn, can be productive of the commitment identified as necessary within the developmental-state literature. The term developmental state is, then, indefinite and often used in a manner described by one journalist as a mantra:

As with all such highly general prescriptions, the implementation of this call for 'developmental states' is both complex and problematic. And reading this report one feels that repetition of the 'developmental state' mantra is likely overdone, as compared with relatively little attention given to the obstacles to the emergence of such states, of which the authors are undoubtedly well aware. (Africa Focus, 2011)

This ephemeral, buzzword, nature of the concept of developmental states is not necessarily negative, but it does highlight how the concept could become utilised in ways that are unexpected and come to mean different things in different contexts. This is not an observation specific to developmental states. In addition to Cornwall and Brock's work on 'poverty reduction', 'participation' and 'empowerment' (2005), other scholars have discussed divergent understandings of human rights (Englund, 2006) and democracy (Abrahamsen, 2000). There is nothing unique about the notion of the developmental state which would mean that its utilisation would not be equally divergent.⁶ This does not mean that discussion of developmental states by African leaders is completely disingenuous; there is an understandable desire amongst some in Africa to imitate the successes they have observed in East Asia.

Policymakers have seen, in their own lifetimes, how countries such as China and Singapore were able to 'come of age' in a hostile international environment. So why shouldn't they, too, be able to turn things around? (Fourie 2011).

This does not necessarily require following the developmental-state model *per se*. Many are trying to follow China's lead which follows a slightly different pattern from the 'typical' developmental-state model (Fourie 2011).⁷

It is acknowledged by African policy-makers as well as academics (Fourie, 2011) that there are multifarious difficulties surrounding the question of how translatable the experiences of East Asian states and indeed China in the latter half of the twentieth century are into lessons for countries on the African continent in the first half of the twenty-first. However, the attempt of a number of African states to follow East Asia's lead in their development policy is itself a trend worth studying – whether we think that states in line enough with the 'proper' developmental-state model are being reproduced or not. In drawing our discussions perennially back to definitions of the model, deviations from an ideal type, or indeed the creation of new models, maybe we miss out on looking at what the idea of the developmental states does within debates, policies and politics.

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6. Others have already cautioned that the term 'developmental state' could become appropriated for ends that may not seem developmental to everyone and/or which raise other moral and political concerns (Evans, 2010b: 51; Pempel, 1999: 146).
 7. Although there is some literature discussing China as a developmental state - see for example Howell (2006) and Jian-xing and De-jin (2010).

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