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Sources of developmental ambition in Southeast Asia:
Political interests and collective assumptions

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Political leaders in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have conceived the challenge of development in decisively different ways, with the former placing much more emphasis on mass poverty reduction as an index of success. This paper explores the political and historical roots of the divergence in developmental ambitions between the two regions, with particular reference to the cases of Indonesia and Nigeria. It begins by outlining the currently influential explanation in terms of the existence in the successful Southeast Asian countries at the beginning of their development trajectories, but not in Africa, of a comprehensive threat to existing political elites from communist-led, rural-based revolutionary movements. Some limitations of this model are then discussed, and a complementary explanation is proposed which focuses on collective assumptions rooted in the cultural history of the two regions' encounters with modernity, the world economy, and the West. A concluding section on the prospects for an end to the divergence notes that collective assumptions, however deeply rooted in history, may nevertheless be easier to change than political systems.

1   Introduction

Elsewhere I have argued that the divergence in development performance between Africa and Southeast Asia usually boils down to a question of intent (Henley, 2010, 2011; Henley, Tirtosudarmo and Fuady, 2012). If African countries have failed to develop in ways that combine rapid economic growth with mass poverty reduction, this has been in the first place because African leaders have not seriously intended to bring about this kind of pro-poor development. Southeast Asian politicians and planners, at least in their best moments, have seen the elimination of poverty as the fundamental aim and essence of development, to be pursued on the largest possible scale, with the greatest urgency, and by all available means. Their African counterparts, even when committed to bringing about development, have been much less directly concerned the problem of poverty. Their development models, implicitly or explicitly, have focused not on mass outreach and rapid impact in the battle against poverty, but on ideas of technological and cultural modernity based on conditions obtaining in already rich countries. These models have led them to adopt elitist policies based on education, industry, and urbanization, rather than on raising the productivity and profitability of smallholder agriculture, the economic activity on which most of the population of their countries inevitably depends. Table 1, overleaf, summarizes very schematically the divergence in prevailing visions of the development process between Southeast Asian and African political elites.

The present paper explores the political and historical roots of this divergence in developmental vision and intent, with particular reference to the cases of Indonesia and Nigeria. It begins by outlining the currently influential explanation in terms of the existence in the successful Southeast Asian countries at the beginning of their development trajectories,

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Table 1: Prevailing elite visions contrasted

Southeast Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa
Incremental (but potentially rapid)	Transformative
Poor people become richer	Poor countries acquire things rich ones have (technologies, industries, goods, rights, institutions)
Growth	Modernization
Productivity	Knowledge
Inclusive	Elitist
Oriented toward the undesired starting point of development: mass poverty	Oriented toward the desired end point of development: industrial or post-industrial modernity
Concerned with establishing immediate priorities	Concerned with making comprehensive plans

but not in Africa, of a comprehensive threat to existing political elites from communist-led, rural-based revolutionary movements. Some limitations of this model are then also discussed, and a complementary explanation is suggested which focuses on some deeper historical reasons, connected with the differential impact of colonialism in the two regions, why Southeast Asians have been more inclined than Africans toward inclusive, pro-poor development strategies. A concluding section on the prospects for an end to the divergence notes that collective assumptions, however deeply rooted in history, may nevertheless be easier to change than political systems. The practical value of comparing Asian and African development trajectories lies in the potential contribution of that endeavour to the task of changing those aspects of African leaders' world-views which are obstacles to development.

2 Political interests and developmental intent

The idea that the origins of the successful Asian developmental states lay in their 'systemic vulnerability' (Doner, Ritchie and Slater, 2005) to comprehensive destruction as a result of impending peasant revolution (and/or foreign invasion) is an influential one in recent literature (Campos and Root, 1996; Slater, 2010; Veen, 2010). More effectively than electoral vulnerability or the danger of an intra-elite coup, it is argued, such systemic threats to the interests of existing elites forced the regimes which faced them to take the interests of the non-elite masses seriously. They also encouraged habitually fractious elements of the national political establishment to transcend their divisions and unite in support of an (often military-led) regime which could protect their common counter-revolutionary interests.

Some writers have extended this line of explanation in a geographical and structural direction by linking the comparative lack of mass political mobilization of the rural poor in Africa with the generally greater ethnic fragmentation of African countries, or with their lower rural population densities (Bezemer and Headey, 2008:1348; Birner and Resnick, 2010:1446). Another obvious factor is the proximity of Southeast Asia to communist China, and the fact that compared to Africa, it was more directly involved in the superpower confrontations of the mid-twentieth century. Southeast Asia was in fact the hottest and bloodiest theatre, after Korea, of the so-called Cold War, a conflict which had direct consequences for the science as well as the politics of development. The Green Revolution in rice farming, for example, was made possible by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) established in the Philippines in 1960 by the American Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, and the term 'Green Revolution' itself was coined by USAID director William Gaud in 1968 to contrast capitalist Asia's reliance on peaceful progress with the violent 'Red Revolution' of the Soviets.

In their origins, the most successful developmental states of Southeast Asia were either counter-revolutionary states facing, or recently having faced, a serious communist threat (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia), or liberalizing post-revolutionary states concerned to avoid alienating their mass support base (Vietnam). In Thailand, the communist challenge was an explicit part of the rationale for the intensive, partly American-funded, rural development effort of the 1950s and 60s. 'If stomachs are full people to not turn to communism', as a Thai deputy prime minister straightforwardly put it in 1966 (Dixon, 1999: 85). In Malaysia the fight against rural poverty, effectively launched with the establishment of a Ministry for Rural Development (under deputy prime minister Abdul Razak) in 1959, was portrayed as a continuation of the (at that stage almost concluded) anti-communist struggle known as the Malayan Emergency.

> 'It is the declared policy of the Alliance Government to work for the prosperity and general well-being of the country and its people living both in the urban and the rural areas. With the progressive improvement of the Emergency situation, however, the Alliance Government decided to give top priority to the task of improving the lot of the rural inhabitants ... to provide a sound economic foundation for peasant agriculture, to ensure that the man on the land receives the full reward for his work and enjoys the amenities of Malayan life in the same measure as his brother in the town. ... In order that the aim may be achieved in the shortest possible time, it is the intention of the Government to marshall all available resources, and to deploy them with such determination and energy as were used to free the country from the menace of Communist terrorism.' (Abdul Razak, 1975 [1959]: 5-6)

In Indonesia, Suharto's New Order was born in the violent destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in 1965, and its pro-rural, pro-poor development strategy has often been attributed to its concern to prevent a resurgence of agrarian radicalism and its awareness that the PKI had its power base among the rural poor. In a sense, the New Order continued to compete with the ghost of communism long after the PKI was dead. It is no coincidence that the emblem of the New Order state party Golkar incorporated symbols of basic material welfare, in the form of rice and cotton panicles, which recall communist banners. Some authors have even seen a connection here with an older tradition of millenarian peasant revolt stretching back to the Java War (1825-30) and beyond.

> 'Millenarianism, in the guise of Communism, may be what the Soeharto government is really afraid of or perhaps the official attitude toward the countryside is based on the fear of the proletarianization of the peasants if they moved to the cities. In any case, regardless of whether it is communism or millenarianism or proletarianization, the correct *political* response is to raise the standard of living in the rural areas.' (Wing, 1988: 340-41)

In Vietnam, where the communists succeeded in coming to power, they ultimately felt obliged to deliver some of the benefits they had promised to the poor, even if this meant abandoning a large part of their original anti-capitalist ideology.

> 'More important to the Communist Party than economic dogma is self-preservation. ... To survive, the Party knows it has to match a simple, but terrifying, figure: one million jobs a year. Every year Vietnam's schools produce a million new peasants and proletarians, the product of a huge post-war baby boom which is showing little sign of slowing down despite an intense "two-child" policy. Growth is vital, but not at the expense of creating too much inequality. ... The beneficiaries have been the peasants and proletarians.' (Hayton, 2010: 3)

It is, then, tempting to conclude that in Southeast Asia there are just two species of successful developmental state: the counter-revolutionary state, and the liberalizing post-revolutionary state. On this analysis, the key to the emergence of a successful developmental state appears to be a history of revolutionary socialism.

In most African countries socialism been either completely absent, as in Nigeria, or present only in elite rhetoric, as in the case of Kenya with its vaguely conceived, market-conforming 'African socialism'. Accordingly, in neither Nigeria nor Kenya does there ever seem to have been a perceived political *imperative* to reduce rural poverty. With the political scene fragmented along regional lines and no significant party representing rural or peasant interests, most of the rural population was considered to 'operate outside the public realm' (Osaghae, Isumonah and Albert, 1998: 25). This is in line with a general African pattern whereby the primary threat to the power of any government is perceived to come from urban unrest and intra-elite rivalry, typically culminating in a military coup. In Tanzania, by way of exception, socialism has been present and important, but only in a state-led, bureaucratic form. Tanzanian socialism never took the form of a revolutionary threat to an existing regime, as it did in Malaysia or Indonesia, still less the form of a successful popular revolution held ultimately to account, as it arguably was in Vietnam, by the expectations that it had created among millions of people who had suffered for the sake of its success.

Before concluding that communism and anti-communism are the whole story behind the contrast between African and Southeast Asian views of development, however, it is important to investigate whether political imperatives really were the sole driving forces behind the strong pro-poor intent in Southeast Asia. Thailand, which in its developmental heyday faced both an armed communist insurgency within its borders (1959-1983) and a perceived external military threat from communist Vietnam (Warr, 1993: 29), certainly seems a good fit with the 'systemic vulnerability' model. The Malaysian and Indonesian cases, however, turn out on close inspection to be rather more complex.

It is striking that communism in Malaysia was almost entirely an affair of the ethnic Chinese minority in that country. Both the intended and the actual beneficiaries of the rural development effort of the 1960s and 70s, on the other hand, were ethnic Malays, who showed very little sign of being attracted to communism anyway. It has been argued that one factor here was the existence of a tacit *quid pro quo* by which economic progress for poor Malays was to be the price of their consent to (non-communist) Chinese participation in the Alliance government (Rudner, 1994: 101). But this hardly seems enough to explain why rural development was pursued, to repeat the words of Abdul Razak (1975: 6), 'with such determination and energy as were used to free the country from the menace of Communist terrorism'. Even without the rural development effort, after all, the Alliance would already have been able to take credit for defeating the Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party, and thereby averting a much greater threat to Malay political dominance.

In his 2010 book *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*, Dan Slater, a leading proponent of the systemic vulnerability argument, attempts to solve this puzzle by attributing the elite 'protection pact' underpinning Malaysia's developmental state less to the threat posed by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in the 1950s, than to the danger of radical Chinese and Malay communalism in the 1960s and 70s (Slater, 2010: 92-3, 116-24). Again, however, this is not entirely convincing. The inter-communal crisis which came to a head in the race riots of 1969 was certainly the trigger for the adoption in 1970 of a draconian 'New Economic Policy', featuring institutionalized ethnic discrimination in education and public employment, together with radical inter-ethnic

redistribution of business ownership. But it surely cannot explain the country's earlier and equally wholehearted drive for rural development. This was conceived as a continuation of the anti-communist struggle and couched in a military language of 'Operations Rooms' and 'Red Books' (Ness, 1967: 142-55), yet it targeted a rural Malay population whose distrust of the Chinese already made them all but immune to communist propaganda, and indeed by whom 'the MCP was generally considered a mortal enemy' (Slater, 2010: 84).

Similar reservations arise regarding the allegedly decisive role of the communist challenge as a source of developmental intent in Indonesia. By the time New Order adopted its pro-poor, pro-rural development strategy in the late 1960s, the PKI had already been comprehensively and bloodily annihilated during Suharto's rise to power in 1965. Broadly speaking, the political calculus of the early New Order in Indonesia did undoubtedly favour rural bias: in the 1960s and 70s, Suharto's closest political advisors were reportedly in 'unanimous agreement' on 'the need to give priority to agricultural development' (Salim, 1997: 58). But it is far from clear that the same calculus was prominent in the minds of Suharto's very influential *economic* advisors, who were equally in agreement with the strategy. In recent interviews key technocrats of the period have strenuously denied this, insisting that the communist threat was already eliminated in 1965 and that their subsequent decision to focus on agriculture was simply a matter of economic rationality, and indeed common sense, given that most Indonesians lived in the countryside and depended, directly or indirectly, on the agricultural sector (Ali Wardhana, 28-12-2008; Subroto, 21-8-2008). Here they echo more or less exactly the words of their *de facto* leader, planning minister Widjojo Nitisastro, in the text of the New Order's first Five-Year Plan (1969-74):

> 'Above all, agriculture has been selected because the greater part of the Indonesian people lives in this sector, working either as farmer producers or as farm laborers. Agricultural development increases the earnings of the majority of the Indonesian people and thus increases national income.' (*First Five-Year Development Plan,* 1969: 13.)

Former Nigerian technocrats, conversely, deny that their own neglect of rural development had to do with the demands of urban political constituencies. Their typical reaction to this suggestion, indeed, is first to deny any such neglect; then, confronted by evidence from plans and budgets, to assert (for the most part incorrectly) that primary responsibility for agricultural development lay with the constituent states rather than the federal government; and finally to express doubt as to whether a greater policy emphasis on agriculture at any level of government would have made any difference anyway.

It is important to emphasize here that the great divergence in development strategy between the two oil giants – priority to agriculture in Indonesia, and to industry in Nigeria – took place during the 1970s at the high point of technocratic autonomy in both countries. Nigeria's industrialization drive, in fact, has been described as one of the few instances in post-colonial Africa in which 'public spending was driven by a (technocratic) economic vision, rather than by the self-interest of the regime' (Collier and Gunning, 2008: 211). Neither the Nigerian nor the Indonesian technocrats, of course, were blind to political exigencies. But if their fundamental preferences regarding sectoral priorities and levels of regulation were influenced by political interests, it was probably only in an indirect, even subconscious, way.

In the case of Vietnam, finally, we must ask whether, given the almost total absence of organized political opposition in Vietnam, it really make sense to see 'self-preservation' as the communist party's sole incentive to deliver inclusive development, as proposed by Hayton (2010: 3). Is it not more likely that Vietnamese leaders are holding *themselves* to account for

their country's development performance, than that they are being forced to do so by any sense of 'systemic vulnerability'? If the interpretation in terms of self-accountability is even partly correct, then clearly we need to look beyond political incentives, at least as narrowly understood, if we are fully to understand the Asia-Africa development divergence.

3   Biographical perspectives on developmental intent

One way to obtain a closer view of the wellsprings of developmental intent is by studying the life stories and personal testimonies of key decision-makers. If the Indonesian technocrats deny that their insistence on the primacy of agriculture was politically motivated, they do stress that Suharto gave it very strong personal support, and that this had to do with the president's rural origins and sensibilities. They themselves were mostly born and raised in towns, albeit small towns in the hinterland of Java, as sons of teachers and civil servants. Only one prominent technocrat, J.B. Sumarlin, had peasant origins – he was literally born in a paddy field – and ironically Sumarlin was more closely associated with the market liberalization of the 1980s than with the rural development of the 1970s. But Suharto, born into a farming family in a village outside Yogyakarta in 1921, was very consciously a man of the people. The closing sentence of his semi-official biography from 1969 describes him as 'the son of a landless Javanese peasant, who became a General and the Head of State of a proud nation' (Roeder, 1969: 189). His later autobiography opens with an emotional account of the ceremony in 1985 at which he was honoured by the international community in recognition of Indonesia's achievement in doubling its rice production since 1969. A footnote describes this as 'one of the most important events of Soeharto's life, in which his early upbringing had an influence on his achievements' (Soeharto, 1991: 1).

> 'You can imagine this moment for a man who, more than 60 years before was only a small boy, playing in the fields among the farmers of the village of Kemusuk, when he walked up to the dais and spoke to a hall filled with experts and world dignitaries, as the leader of a nation that had just solved this enormous problem that concerned the fate of more than 160 million souls.' (Soeharto, 1991: 4.)

Suharto's account of the humbleness of his origins may be somewhat exaggerated: his official father was in fact a minor irrigation official provided with a plot of 'salary land' in lieu of payment for organizing and maintaining the village's system of water distribution, and it has been suggested that the future president was actually the illegitimate child of a trader or civil servant who could better afford to pay for his education (Elson, 2001: 4). Nevertheless he undeniably had a rural upbringing, and this contributed to his later interest in farming and the fate of farmers (Hill, 2000: 133).

> 'My life among the farmers of Kemusuk during the difficult times of the nineteen-twenties had aroused in me a distinct feeling of sympathy for them. This feeling was nourished not only by my constant contacts with the farmers, but also by the knowledge and experience that I'd gained from the guidance of Pak Prawirowiharjo, the agricultural officer. I often went with my uncle on his inspection rounds and learned from him not only about the theory of agriculture but also about the practical aspects of farming.' (Soeharto, 1991: 10)

In Malaysia, comparably, Abdul Razak, the driving force behind rural development efforts in the 1960s and 70s, was the son of a civil servant but had been raised largely by his farming grandparents, whose water buffalo he rode and tended just as Suharto had tended his own grandfather's (Elson, 2001: 2; Shaw, 1976: 13-14). Razak's biography attributes his concern

for the welfare of the rural masses to the fact that 'his early years had been spent working with the ordinary village people in the rice fields' (Shaw, 1976: 73).

A comparative glance at Nigeria, on the other hand, reveals that policy preferences do not follow automatically from the geographical or social origins of policy-makers. Nigeria's modern political elite, ironically, may well be more rural in its origins than Indonesia's. A regional study from western Nigeria in the 1970s indicated that 56 percent of politicians, and 59 percent of civil servants, were the children of farmers (Imoagene, 1976: 77, 88). Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's head of state from 1976 to 1979 and again as elected president from 1999 to 2007, was himself a farmer's son, and just as much a village boy as Suharto. Obasanjo's biography, nevertheless, reveals an attitude to rural life palpably different from Suharto's self-conscious nostalgia.

> 'As the stocky Olusegun grew up, his parents became increasingly concerned about his future. His father wanted his children to escape the drudgery that was peasant farming in Africa. Many Egbas had long realized the increasing relevance of Western education ... With it, the toil was less, the financial rewards were more, and opportunities were at the beck and call ... On their way home from the farm one day, Obasanjo said to his son: "Olu, is it this toilsome farming you would want to continue with in life?" ... "Would you like to learn a trade?" ... "Yes." "What trade?" "Motor mechanic." ... "You would not want to go to school?," his father asked.' (Ojo, 1997: 35-6.)

It is striking that Obasanjo senior held this view despite being by local standards a 'prosperous farmer' with a materially 'contented' family, and that his son, while not entirely devoid of sadness at leaving 'a village he had grown so fond of', appears to concur in viewing his transition from rural to urban life essentially as a successful escape from poverty and drudgery (Ojo, 1997: 35, 40). Small wonder, perhaps, that such a man should seek to improve his nation's future, as well as his own, by trying to create avenues for escape from the village, rather than by trying to make village life better and more attractive. Africa, as Wing Thye Woo (1988: 350) points out, offers 'many examples of authoritarian presidents of peasant origin (e.g. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Idi Amin of Uganda and Sekou Touré of Guinea) who did not pursue agriculture-oriented policies'. What matters here, evidently, is not rural or urban origins as such, but rather the interpretation and evaluation of those origins.

In Southeast Asia, urban elites have seldom perceived a radical divide, whether political, social, or cultural, between themselves and the rural masses. The technocrats of the Indonesian New Order have been described by one of their number as 'having the interest of the whole country at heart' (Sadli, 1997: 243), and in a tribute to Widjojo a former Dutch ambassador to Indonesia has expressed this benevolent aspect of the regime and its leadership in even stronger terms.

> 'Both President Soeharto and Prof. Widjojo are compassionate men: the welfare of the people comes first in their mind. I cannot recall meeting with the President or Prof. Widjojo without the conversation at one point turning to the Javanese farmer or the urban poor and the need for grass-root development.' (Gorkom 2007: 182.)

Fear of a possible future revolt of the masses does not quite seem enough to account for this paradox of 'compassionate' dictatorship. Suharto's pro-poor policies also bear the stamp of a society united, at least in theory, by an inclusive sense of nationhood forged in a violent anti-colonial struggle in which part of the national elite, including Suharto himself, retreated to the countryside and lived alongside a peasantry on which it depended for support and survival.

Widjojo too was among those for whom this was a formative experience. In 1945, when the future Nigerian technocrats were enjoying dances, debates, and 'elite cultural activities' in Lagos (Fuady, 2012: 119), Widjojo, at the age of 18, joined a student militia that participated in the guerrilla war against the Dutch in rural East Java (Harun Zain, 2008: 169). Fifteen years later at the University of California in Berkeley, he and his colleagues of the future 'Berkeley mafia' were to impress their teachers with their quiet determination to use the knowledge they were acquiring not just for their personal advancement, but for the good of their country.

> 'I often had the feeling that our Indonesian friends ... yearned to return to the tropics and sometimes suffered from homesickness – not unusual emotions among foreign students. But this group was more mature than our average graduate students: many were veterans of Indonesia's War of Liberation; some were married; all had a strong sense of duty. For them the study of economics and especially economic development were not matters of theoretical niceties.' (Rosovsky, 2007: 41).

The Indonesian army which came to power in 1965, as Bevan, Collier and Gunning (1999: 419) point out, had its origins in the struggle for independence and was originally a mass, people's army with a political as well as a military function. While the Sukarno regime which preceded the New Order was hamstrung by its regulatory impulses and not strong on rural public spending, its populist, quasi-socialist ideology and its incorporation of the Indonesian Communist Party did give it at least the serious aspiration to include the poor in the development process. Many of the New Order's key institutions, including the Bimas or 'mass guidance' agricultural extension programme (Rieffel, 1969), were in fact inherited directly from Sukarno's 'guided democracy'. Even to the extent that the Suharto regime's rural development effort was simply a pragmatic, self-interested counter-revolutionary strategy, it still reflected a history in which the ideal of social justice, and indeed socialism, had played a powerful role. In Africa, as noted, this has seldom been the case. More broadly, it may be said that whereas African nationalisms have tended to take 'bourgeois' forms which focus defensively on issues involving the relationship between national elites and the outside world (foreign ownership, currency exchange rates, etc.), Southeast Asian nationalisms have taken inclusive forms which focus more on the challenge of improving domestic conditions.

4   Cultural and historical roots of developmental intent

Beyond political ideology and experience, however, there are also deeper reasons, rooted in divergent historical and personal experiences of colonialism and modernity, why development strategies in Africa have tended to be persistently elitist, transformational, and technological, whereas in Southeast Asia they have often been inclusive, incremental, and economic. We have seen that even when African leaders have been of rural origin, they have tended to evaluate the countryside and its ways of life differently from, and less positively than, their Southeast Asian counterparts. The perceived social and cultural divide between town and countryside appears wider in Africa, and there is a lesser tendency to admire or idealize village life.

The first point to note when attempting to explain this difference is that historically speaking, the contrast between city and countryside really has been sharper in Africa than in Asia. In Southeast Asia there is a long tradition of indigenous urbanism, and colonial rule did not wipe out the old political and cultural links between the towns and their hinterlands. In Africa, by contrast, many of today's cities are colonial foundations which for a long time retained their original character as alien, European enclaves. For Africans of the early twentieth century, to move from the countryside to the city was not just to come closer to the centre of power and wealth; it was to cross a cultural and civilizational divide. For the later Nigerian technocrat

Allison Ayida the city of Lagos, where he attended boarding school in the 1940s, was 'the land just next door to England' and the place any Nigerian first had to visit if he wished to go 'to the white man's land, to learn the white man's ways, and to be completely transformed into an educated and civilized man' (Kayode and Otobo, 2004: 16).

In East Africa, where colonization by Europeans came later than in Nigeria, the antithesis between urban and rural, modern and traditional, and European and African was sharper still. It also coincided with a dramatic religious divide. In colonial Kenya, education for Africans was offered almost exclusively by Christian missionary groups at residential schools where children were fully encapsulated in an alien cultural environment. Kenya's first and second presidents, Kenyatta and Moi, were both first-generation Christian converts who, as boys, had deliberately rejected their parents' way of life in favour of the faith and civilization of their European teachers. What the missionaries required of their young converts, as Kenyatta's biographer notes, was nothing less than a 'total break with the past' (Murray-Brown, 1972: 47).

> 'For the Kikuyu boys and girls to stand up in church and make their professions of faith was a great leap in the dark. The scowling faces of their fathers and mothers, perhaps framed for an instant in the window or the door, reminded them of the curses of their ancestors. Every day they remained in the dormitory or in the households of the missionaries cut them off from their tribe. Each vow they made committed them more deeply to the missionary view of life and so in the short term – which was all they could envisage – to the colonial system.' (Murray-Brown, 1972: 50.)

For Moi, too, conversion to Christianity meant that he 'no longer mixed with other villagers as freely or as easily as before'. 'We were not really liked', recalled one of his classmates. 'All of us, including Moi, had abandoned the traditional life and there was no turning back' (Morton, 1998: 37, 39). A frequent concomitant of this alienation from rural society was migration to the new city of Nairobi, founded by the British as a European (and Indian) enclave in a country without an indigenous urban tradition. Kenyatta, notes Murray-Brown (1972: 79), 'had no intention of taking up farming life', having 'left home to escape all that'.

This is not of course to suggest that there was no subsequent attempt, by the first generation of African nationalists, to reappraise their indigenous cultural heritage. But when they did this, they often did so more as outsiders than as insiders. Kenyatta's classic anthropological study of his own (Kikuyu) people, *Facing Mount Kenya*, was ironically criticized by his teacher Malinowski (1938: xi) for showing 'perhaps a little too much in some passages of European bias'. Nor do I want to suggest that the alienation of African political elites from their rural roots has ever been complete or permanent: anthropologists have noted the continuing tendency of elite Africans who live most of their lives in cities to maintain close ties with rural kin and rural political constituencies (Geschiere and Gugler, 1998). But the journey back to the village remains essentially a retrogressive one, a return to roots and origins. The countryside represents Africa's past; few African politicians have ever seriously seen it as the logical place to start building a better future – whether for themselves, or for their nation.

More broadly, it is true to say that African attitudes to development have been shaped by experiences, both historical and personal, in which the encounter with the advanced economies of Europe was bound up with a dramatic and comprehensive *transformation*. All areas of life were affected: society and communication, knowledge and belief, material culture, even eating habits, as urban elites switched from a diet based on indigenous African food crops and maize to one based imported wheat and rice. One legacy of this transformation has been a collective assumption of what may be called developmental

dualism: a pervasive conviction that progress can only be achieved by means of a quantum leap from backwardness into modernity.

In Southeast Asia, by comparison, the colonial experience was less radically transformative than in Africa, and involved less of a rupture with the past. One major country, Thailand, was not colonized at all, and elsewhere it was only in the Philippines that the religion and language of the colonizing power were widely adopted by its subjects. In Indonesia the leading technocrats were Indonesian-speaking Muslims who, despite their Western education, remained culturally close to the rural masses and were not dismissive, or at least not by African standards, of the abilities of their uneducated compatriots. Widjojo, it has been noted, not only trusted in the wisdom of peasant farmers, but also possessed 'deep faith in the culture and history of his country' (Gorkom, 2007: 184). An important factor here was a widespread perception, even among urban elites, that land, agriculture, and rice – the staple and preferred food of both rich and poor – were core elements of national identity.

> 'The soul of Indonesia is its land. Indonesians have been cultivating these lands for millennia. The country's farm communities have not only provided the nation with food and a host of export crops, they have been caretakers of many of the nation's traditions and customs. Above all, however, Indonesia's farms have supplied the people with rice, which since time immemorial, has been the country's prime staple, its "staff of life". There have been many periods in Indonesian history when rice harvests were poor. When this happened, the resulting hunger could be calamitous to the hardest hit and destabilizing to the society as a whole. That is why, in 1968, ... Indonesia's economic policymakers made one of the most important decisions in Indonesia's modern history: to follow a route to economic development based above all on agricultural development. At that time, the typical approach to economic development for a less developed country emphasized exploiting agriculture to make a fast transition to industrialization. For most countries, development planning was essentially synonymous with industrial planning. Of course the government understood that the nation needed to industrialize. However, what was unusual in Indonesia's strategy was that the country gave first priority to agricultural development for its own sake.' (Prawiro, 1998: 127.)

In this way a culturally ingrained association between agriculture and nationalism, combined in the Indonesian case with fear of the political consequences of rice shortages, predisposed Southeast Asian elites to believe in development strategies based on the improvement of peasant farming. African elites, meanwhile, looked forward impatiently to a structural transformation of the economy whereby peasant farming would disappear to make way for more modern ways of life.

5 Implications for development cooperation in Africa

Today as in the past, even African leaders who are themselves of rural origin find it difficult to believe in a strategy that focuses on improving rural life *in situ*, by means of agricultural development, rather than on accelerating the transition to urban modernity of which their own lives have been a microcosm. Yet it remains a fact that in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, development of a type which ultimately benefits all sections of the population, including elites and city-dwellers, has demonstrably been based on precisely such a pro-poor, pro-rural strategy. Much is potentially to be gained for Africa's poor by drawing this fact emphatically to the attention of Africa's present and future leaders.

How, then, can African policy-makers most effectively be encouraged to give high priority to agricultural and rural development, in accordance with Declaration 7 of the 2003 Maputo assembly of the African Union, and to ensure that the main and immediate beneficiaries of the resulting public investments are poor peasant farmers rather than large landowners? Clearly international actors cannot create the kind of revolutionary threat which helped to inspire such policies in many Asian cases, and neither is there much evidence that electoral democracy can generate the same kind of salutary political pressure on African (or indeed Asian) governments (Poulton, 2012). Nor is it possible to alter colonial history or the other social factors that have shaped the current attitudes of African leaders and intellectuals to rural and agricultural development. However, the success – however partial – of international actors and institutions in promoting market reforms and sound macroeconomic policy in Africa over the last two decades gives grounds for hope that those same actors and institutions can achieve something similar with respect to pro-poor, pro-rural public spending too.

Some encouraging preliminary evidence that this may be possible comes from recent experience in Rwanda. The political economy of Rwanda, where the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) came to power through civil war and following the massacre in 1994 of several hundred thousand members of the Tutsi minority in the country, is unusual in the African context and in some ways resembles that of Southeast Asia's counter-revolutionary developmental states (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2011). The Tutsi were the social and political elite (after Europeans) of colonial Rwanda. The current regime, born in a Tutsi counter-revolution, has strong reasons to prove its legitimacy by showing that despite its still largely Tutsi leadership, it can rule for the benefit of all Rwandans – including those many members of the Hutu majority whose poverty and resentment, combined with ethnic hatred fomented ideologically by the RPF's rivals in the civil war, led to the 1994 genocide.

Despite this promising background, the power of the dualistic assumptions outlined above was such that for many years RPF development policy remained a classic example of urban-industrial bias, and of Africa's elitist obsession with education and technological modernization. Until quite recently, president Paul Kagame talked of pioneering a 'short cut' to development, based on information technology, which would bypass peasant agriculture entirely (Luyten, 2009: 6). A high-ranking official in Rwanda's ministry of agriculture, meanwhile, declared that the priority was not to raise the productivity of small farms, but rather 'to get more people off the land' (Ansoms, 2009: 300). While Kagame was interested in Asia's development achievements, his preferred Asian model was not Indonesia – where, ironically, the island of Java offers credible parallels with the fertile but overpopulated agrarian landscape of Rwanda (Diamond, 2006: 311-28) – but rather Singapore, for almost two centuries one of the world's great seaports, and an icon of hypermodernity rather than a practical model of how to develop a poor, landlocked, war-ravaged agrarian country in Africa.

In the last few years, however, there has been a marked change in the Rwandan state's attitude to agricultural and rural development (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2012). The Ministry of Agriculture's share of public expenditure rose from 3.5 percent in 2007 to seven percent in 2011, and in 2012 was already expected to reach the Maputo target of 10 percent. Rapidly increasing emphasis has been given not only to export-oriented horticulture, the potential of which had been recognized at an early stage, but also to peasant food-crop production (input subsidies, extension services, irrigation) and rural transport infrastructure. The test of a true commitment to pro-poor development, Widjojo (1995: 180) once wrote, 'arrives when the availability of resources is rapidly declining: whether to forgo other claims or to yield to pressures and sacrifice the poverty-reduction programs'. Today, Rwanda seems determined to pass that test: when several major foreign donors suspended aid to the country in late 2012 due to its alleged military interventions in the Congo, minister of finance and economic

planning John Rwangombwa announced that all development projects in the agricultural and infrastructure sectors would be protected from the resulting budget cuts (Republic of Rwanda, 2013).

In part, this reorientation of official development thinking was an instance of learning from experience. It was triggered by a serious national food crisis in 2003 and 2004, which in turn served to draw attention to the failure of early growth in the aggregate economy to make a rapid impact on rural income poverty. Another factor, however, was the influence of expert advisors (both foreign and local) who, impressed by a mounting volume of recent academic and professional literature on the importance of agriculture for poverty reduction in Asia and elsewhere (Breisinger and Diao, 2008; Cervantes-Godoy and Dewbre, 2010; Dorward et al., 2004; Fan, 2008; Losch, 2012; Mosely, 2002; World Bank, 2007), had begun to revise their own views of what it would take to transform Rwanda in accordance with the ambitions of its rulers.

This kind of guided redirection of policy and spending priorities need not be (and was not in Rwanda) a matter of attaching restrictive conditions to foreign aid and loans. Such leverage is in any case is less powerful than in the past, now that more and more African governments are no longer in persistent budgetary crisis and the appearance of new sources of finance and investment, notably in Asia itself, has made Africa less dependent on Western aid and international financial institutions. What can perhaps be done instead is to change the mindset of African elites by persistently drawing to their attention the fact that successful development elsewhere in the developing world has been achieved very largely by means of inclusive, pro-poor, pro-rural strategies. This ideological effort – if it can be called ideological, given that it is based on historical observations rather than arguments from principle – should take preference over historically less well founded admonitions regarding the importance of good governance, democracy, or even free trade.

The crucial lesson that has not yet been widely understood in Africa is that the pro-poor strategies really are the historically proven way not only to relieve rural poverty, but also to initiate processes that can bring prosperity to whole countries, setting them on the surest known path to the kind of industrial and urban modernity that African elites have always admired. It is hard to believe that there are many Africans who, having taken full cognizance of this lesson from developing Asia, will not draw from it some practical conclusions regarding what their own governments should do in order to restore the dignity of their countries and their continent.

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