

Comment on Nation Rebuilding and Democratic Developmental State Model for Ethiopia

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Allow me to comment on the message of the documentary film Endegena and on the succinct article by Asayehgn Desta on Democratic Developmental State. These two inputs are timely in the discussion on vision and ways of building future Ethiopia. The documentary film underlines the need to open our eyes and uncover our potential to build the future. This film constantly refers to the monumental works of the obelisks of Aksum, churches of Lalibela, palaces of Gonder, Harar, etc. as sources of inspiration and periods of technological superiority. The article written by Asayehgn discusses a state power model which can be used for rapid technological development in the country. Since the issues raised by the documentary film and article are close to my ideas, I would like to add complementary reflections.

The obelisks of Aksum, churches of Lalibela, Gonder palace, etc represent not only architectural achievement. They are an impressive testimony of an advanced building and construction technology which we lost or failed to develop. Speaking about past technology, the knowledge was not limited only to building and construction. Ethiopia was also the first African country to domesticate agriculture. The first food plant to be cultivated in Ethiopia by the indigenous people was Enset (false banana), which now forms the staple diet of the southern peoples of Ethiopia. The cultivation of Enset began some 7000 years ago (Simoons 1965). Slightly later we see in northern Ethiopia cultivation of Teff and around 4000 or 3000 BC cultivation of barley and wheat was introduced. Simultaneously plough made its appearance, thus marking a move from hoe agriculture to plough culture. The significance of

plough agriculture is its capacity to support a strong state, wider members of the military and the clergy, than that of hoe cultivation. Much later, irrigation was practiced in many areas. Agriculture technology had therefore a very old history in Ethiopia. However, it remained static or stagnated.

Metallurgy and cloth-making technology had once flourished in the country. In the past all craftsmen of the country worked for the emperors and regional governors. Smiths (jewelers and iron workers) were organized into workshops known by name as royal jewelers under the supervision of Iqabet Bejironde (treasurer). Weavers were also organized under the same office to make different types of cloth, both for the purpose of decoration and payment to palace soldiers. But the products of craftsmen, particularly of smiths remained crude and undeveloped.

When we say we Ethiopians have slept for a thousand years I understand it to mean that we had a period of technological stagnation or reversal. The term technology refers to skills and methods related to the production and organization of goods and services in a society. The generations of Aksum, Lalibela, Gonder, Harar, etc sited in the film had technical capability in construction, metallurgy, textile and agricultural. For various reasons these technological capacities were not developed and diffused in the country (for the reasons see Merid W. Aregay 1984, Pankhurst 1961/68, Tsegaye T. 1996). As depicted in the film, because of lack of technological development we came to be exposed to the ravages of nature and poverty. The film discusses the opening of the eyes of the current generation after thousand years of sleeping: promising to embark on the path of technological development as conceived in the Growth and Transformation Plan and renaissance dam. The question is how are we going to recover and achieve technological change as it has been for past generations.

Coming into this picture is the article written by Asayehgn Dest on Democratic Developmental State. This type of state is essential to embark and advance on technological

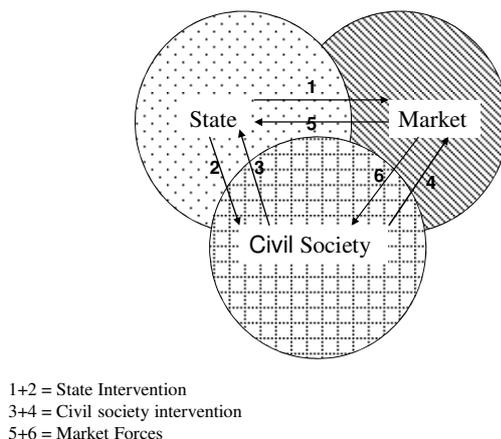
development. The author has extensively mentioned the characteristic of this state and the main instrument to achieve the goals of developmental state. I wanted to add further on the need for democracy by making a further conceptual distinction between a political regime and government. I consider developmental state as a political regime not as a form of government.

A regime is that part of the political system which determines how and under what conditions and limitations the power of the state is exercised. Regimes embody the norms and principles of the political organization of the state, which are set out in the rules and procedures within which governments operate. A regime is different from a government, which may come and go. There may appear different governments depending on the value and ideology of the incumbent party. "A regime may be thought of as the formal and informal organization of the centre of political power and of its relations with the broader society. A regime determines who has access to political power, and how those who are in power deal with those who are not." For differences in the definition of regime and government see Lawson (1993).

Democracy is an essential instrument to bring about conditions for the making of developmental state (a political regime). In Ethiopia there is lack of initial conditions to build developmental state. First and foremost the initial distribution of the social class is not equilibrium across the country. The business class is not well developed. Most of the existing business elite are engaged in surplus extraction rather than in production and some of them have become part of the rent seeking system. Secondly, the working class is not well developed to co-opt and be co-opted with the state. Introduction of the East Asians developmental state model in the absence of its condition, means implementing the authoritarian aspect of the model. In the absence such conditions, it is necessary at first to bring about balanced distribution of roles and functions between the state, market and civil society (see Figure). Democracy is an essential instrument to build the developmental state.

Developmental state is a means to bring about needed structural transformation and technological progress whose processes can extend for many decades. Structural transformation requires actors who are strategic, seeking to realize complex, contingent and often changing goals. We find not one transition, but many, occurring in different domains—political, economic, and social—and these processes are often asynchronous and their articulation seldom harmonious. Democracy is suitable for a structural transformation process. It provides flexibility to have both social and market goals. What intervention type dominates (state and/or market) at a given point in time depends on the ideology of the incumbent government.

Figure : Balanced distribution of roles and functions between state, market and civil society



Some writers consider democracy as power sharing arrangements among political elites or opposition groups. Ignoring the differences in political ideology, what really makes the opposition culturally different from others? As far as I am concerned with the exception of the second generation immigrants living in Europe and America, we all Ethiopians have same socio-cultural origins which define our collective behavior and disposition to democracy. If I am to speak about Ethiopians in terms of values (family priority, group loyalty), belief system

(charismatic authority), working principles (patrimony), and cognitive processes (suspicion on claims and zero-sum game), one is not different from the other. In fact, sharing power with nobles de l'éducation (opposition groups who have aleqa-chifra mentality) or with know-it-all arrogant elite group, means subscribing to another thousand years sleeping period. In the given Ethiopian context, democracy is needed to shape the values, principles, norms, rules and decision making procedure of a regime and legitimizing power. If there are some people who want to forward "out of the box" suggestions, the first step is to admit that all Ethiopians share the same behavior in the design and implementation of public policy reforms. Building a democratic developmental state means changing our habitual behavior.

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