FAR-FETCHED FACTS

A Parable of Development Aid

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Prologue

The end of colonialism marked the advent of a new kind of expert and a new kind of global network of organizations. The ongoing concern of this new field of expertise and this new epistemic community has been to initiate economic and social development in the poorer countries of the southern hemisphere. The key problem in this endeavor lies in establishing objectivity between different frames of reference. Scholars studying the field of development cooperation can either collaborate with the development experts in order to construct more objective representations of one particular development problem or another, or they can mingle with these experts in order to examine their representational practices and the consequences of these practices. In this book I have attempted to do the latter and only the latter.

The Object of Study

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a process that had begun approximately four hundred years earlier came to an end. A few nations located primarily along the northern Atlantic coast divided up almost the entire non-European world into empires. These empires then collapsed in the two decades following the Second World War. Although the particular dynamic that triggered the colonization of the non-European world did change with the end of colonialism, it could no longer simply be undone. The postcolonial version of this dynamic is called *development*. As prescribed by capitalist and (until 1989) socialist industrialism, that is, by economic and technical-scientific progress, development was supposed to result in improved standards of living.

This model defined progress through *modernization* as the sole proper path and in doing so denounced local ways of living as backward. Accord-

ing to this distinction, approximately two-thirds of the world's population remains underdeveloped. The most outrageous thing about this distinction is its universal acceptance, often even by those classified as underdeveloped. People who view themselves in these terms are ashamed of their language, their dress, and their customs and convictions—or at least those of their ancestors. And if they want to make something of themselves, they believe that they can do so only through a belated socialization at one of the elaborate educational institutions set up in the developing countries. The knowledge they acquire at these institutions will have little or nothing to do with their specific social and cultural environment, for the simple reason that this world is regarded as an impediment that is best left behind. Instead, the development model is taught, and this has significant consequences for the perspective of elites in these countries.[1]

What we call development is by no means a uniform process. Although it is possible and even necessary to determine the dynamics of development according to phases, continents, and countries, a uniform pattern of actions and interpretations can nevertheless be identified in ideal-typical terms. This pattern includes the following elements: a *society* that is labeled "underdeveloped" and thus by definition has been unable to achieve the goal of development on its own as a kind of involuntary social transformation; a class of *elites* who believe they have been called upon to modernize their own society; a *model* that promises to overcome underdevelopment; international *experts* who assist local elites in implementing this model; and a global network of formal organizations that engage in and finance the process of development. Here we can distinguish between donor and recipient organizations as well as between national and multinational organizations; all of these organizations, however, populate what is called an *organizational field* characterized by distributed agency. Last but not least, the discourse of this development arena is supported by the global *hegemony of the Western worldview*.[2]

If we locate the beginnings of development policy in the 1960s, efforts to promote development have now entered their sixth decade. The term "development aid" has not been used in official discourse for many years, having been replaced by the term "development cooperation," as it is called in international jargon. This new term implies that one party (which has more and is farther along) transfers something to another party (which has less and has not come so far). The objective of this transfer is that the poorer party will at some point in time no longer be dependent on this assistance

because it has made up the difference. That is the simple quintessence of this process.

Over the course of decades, however, the hopes and the certainties of development discourse have steadily been deflated. This is especially true in sub-Saharan Africa, which constitutes the focus of this book. Parallel to the continuous failures of this kind of belated modernization and in part independent of them, there has also been a steadily increasing uncertainty within the so-called donor countries, which has culminated in the slogan "learning from other cultures." Although this kind of self-doubt has been more evident among interpretive elites in the West than among their decision-making counterparts, it has nevertheless become so prevalent and powerful that the US–European development model is now articulated in public discourse only in code and with a sense of shame. In 1951, it was still possible to assume the following tone:

> There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate, bonds of caste, creed, and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress. (United Nations, Department of Social and Economic Affairs, Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries, 1951)[3]

In 1996 the language employed is rather different: "[W]e in the West cannot tell people how they should develop. They are intelligent enough to be able to decide this for themselves and for their children" (Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank).[4]

The collapse of socialism, which is usually dated with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, left the Western market model as the sole remaining societal form. This lack of alternatives and competition meant that earlier considerations about the prospects of the development model could now be thought through more rigorously than had seemed possible during the era of the cold war. It was recalled that the model in fact undermines its own natural basis. From this vantage point, a belated modernization outside of the US–European world is something to be prevented by all means possible. The older insight that the Western market model systematically renders human beings superfluous also became increasingly evident. Today the integration of the entire Third World population into an unaltered capitalist system of production can no longer be seriously regarded as a desirable alternative.

The development model, however, has lost its luster primarily because—with some exceptions in Asia and South America—poverty has increased rather than decreased since the beginning of development cooperation. The end of colonialism and fifty years of development aid have not resulted in greater security, dignity, or prosperity for the majority of the population in sub-Saharan Africa. On the contrary, the description of the Congo in a local newspaper article from 2000 could also be applied to many other locations: "Independence has turned out to be a nightmare."[5] Although the sites of postcolonial nightmares should not be turned into symbols for all of sub-Saharan Africa, it is also essential that we not shy away from placing these nightmares in the proper context for fear of making false generalizations. The overarching questions that arise here are: Why has this happened and why does it always seem to repeat itself? It will certainly be necessary to continue looking for answers to these questions on different levels and from diverse perspectives.

In the present book, however, I have limited my analysis the role of technologies of inscription and representation in development cooperation as an organizational process. In doing so, my focus will be neither the actual development at a particular location nor the construction of a theoretical conceptualization of development. I concentrate instead on the practices of organizing development cooperation that occur in *interstitial spaces*—neither entirely where the model ostensibly originated nor entirely where it is supposed to be implemented.

The Organizational Field of Development Cooperation

The global organizational field of development cooperation is populated by a plethora of organizations possessing a diversity of legal forms. Large international organizations were established to deal with the cataclysms and consequences of the Second World War; later, in the 1960s, these organizations gradually began to assume primary functions in the domain of international cooperation and development work. The two most important and highly complex organizational clusters here are (1) the World Bank Group (with five suborganizations) and the International Monetary Fund, which together are also known as the Bretton Woods Organizations, and (2) the United Nations with its diverse special organizations, of which the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is centrally concerned with issues of development. All industrial nations of the northern hemisphere also have national organizations dedicated to the work of development cooperation.

In 1960, under the leadership of the United States, several member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) founded within the OECD the so-called Development Assistance Group, which was renamed shortly thereafter the Development Assistance Committee and which has served as an arena for negotiations on international agreements regarding bilateral development cooperation.

Outside the realm of official development assistance, a variety of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and foundations have sprouted from the ground of the organizational field of development, in particular since the last globalization wave in the early 1980s. These organizations and foundations frequently claim to deal with the real problems of people living in the poor countries of the South more effectively than state development institutions can. In many cases there is a complementary relationship between the large programs of official development assistance and small NGO projects, which are in part commissioned and financed by these larger programs.

At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, most nations of the world voted to adopt the Agenda 21 program. According to this program, wealthy industrialized nations should strive to allocate 0.7 percent of their gross national income (GNI) to development cooperation (only the Scandinavian countries have to date actually done so). The United States never agreed to adopt this goal and in fact allocates only 0.17 percent of its GNI to development, placing it twenty-first among the industrialized nations. Measured in absolute terms, however, the United States remains the largest provider of official development assistance, followed by the United Kingdom, Japan, France, and Germany.[6] Donor nations have made an increasing portion of these funds available to international organizations, while the remainder is used to implement bilateral cooperation. Development cooperation involves enormous sums of money—for example, in 2006 the twenty-three OECD nations that belong to the Development Assistance Committee allocated 104.4 billion dollars in official development assistance, which corresponded to 0.31 percent of the combined gross national income of these countries; even more overwhelming, the West spent $2.3 trillion on foreign aid over the first five decades of development cooperation. However, the issue looks rather different if these figures are compared with the significantly greater sums that OECD countries spend to protect their own markets and workplaces from products produced in precisely those nations receiving development monies, as well as the sums that these nations could earn if trade barriers were removed.[7]

Since the 1990s there has been a shift from systematic efforts at establishing structures for belated and sustainable development to selective "humanitarian interventions" triggered by crises and catastrophes. This shift appears to be tied to a rather opaque combination of the following tendencies: The post-cold-war era has been marked by a reconfiguration of the world order and a universal implementation of neoliberal markets and neoliberal regimes of governance under the leadership of the sole remaining superpower, the United States. At the same time, the discourse of human rights has gained in political significance and been linked to a health discourse that seeks to place the demand for health care on a par with universal human rights. This appears to have given rise to a historically new form of dominance, one that establishes its legitimacy through the presupposition of catastrophes and states of emergency, which then allow it to engage in humanitarian interventions addressed at endangered bodies. A new constellation of military, private enterprise, civil society organizations, and health care has emerged as a result, which calls into question the structural principles of modernity.[8]

The present study focuses on the decade of the 1990s, that is, the last years of the "developmentalist era," when the paradigm of sustainable development as a project that sovereign nation-states undertook with international assistance came to an end. While the organizational field of development cooperation as such is thematized in this book, I have chosen to focus on a project that was financed by the development bank of a European country and implemented by a private consulting firm under the supervision of African project-executing agencies. This approach has allowed for a detailed investigation of only a particular section of the organizational field; however, my primary interest and focus are elementary questions that necessarily play a key role in all national variants of development cooperation.

In several donor countries, the responsibility for development cooperation is relatively closely tied to the respective governmental authorities and their political parameters. In the UK, for example, development cooperation is steered to a large extent by the Department for International Development (DFID, formerly Overseas Development Agency, ODA). In the United States, the National Security Council (NSC) coordinates all activities in the realm of official development cooperation, although the actual work is done by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which is in principle independent yet closely affiliated with the State Department. In other countries, especially Germany, governmental authorities for develop-

ment cooperation exist, but they define only general guidelines, leaving the implementation largely to independent organizations that engage in this work on a commission basis.

All the different organizational variants of the development enterprise are concerned with a simple but extremely tricky problem. If I lend money to someone who then uses it legally to earn more money and I in turn am paid interest, then this interest is sufficient proof that it was a good investment. If, however, I lend money belonging to a third party to someone who proves unable to make a profit with it, then I need a different kind of proof to demonstrate that this was nonetheless a good investment. In this case it is necessary to show in detail how the money was actually used. In the global organizational field of development cooperation, participants thus have to document the activities of projects that have been initiated by development investments. This book investigates the techniques and technologies of these representational practices of documentation.

Locations, Times, and Actors

The material for this study—like the material for any ethnographic study—could be collected only at specific points in time, at concrete locations, and on the basis of real events. Between 1978 and 1983, I spent more than three years doing field research in the Nuba Mountains (Sudan). During this time I became acquainted with various development projects from the perspective of the local farmers—projects which, for example, sought to convince these farmers to adopt the oxen plow. It was only later, between 1990 and 1998, that I investigated development projects from an internal standpoint. Initially I worked during semester breaks at my university as an organizational analyst for a development bank. My work in this capacity was centered on five development projects in four different African countries (Gambia, Ghana, Tanzania, and Lesotho). The pattern was always the same: The projects had been impeded by problems that from the perspective of those responsible could be classified as neither technical nor economic. My task consisted in identifying the "sociocultural reasons" why project objectives had not been achieved. All of these projects were already in advanced stages or had been completed, and all of them involved the organizational embedding of large technical systems that were intended to provide a public infrastructure (transport and water supply). This role acquainted me primarily with the work of project-executing agencies and consultants from the perspective of the financier.

In 1992 I worked for six months as a trainee at the same development bank and became well acquainted with this institution from the inside as well. The bank expressly requested that I observe its work and report on my observations, which I did. In the meantime I also worked for a consulting firm, evaluating its work in the port of Maputo (Mozambique). Finally, for more than two years (1996 to 1998), during free periods at my university I worked as a freelance staff member for a consulting firm that implemented an Organizational Improvement Project (OIP) at the waterworks of three Tanzanian cities (Arusha, Moshi, and Tanga) on commission of this same development bank. The development bank had requested that this project employ an anthropologist to better incorporate the "sociocultural aspects" of the undertaking. In this role I learned the perspective of both consultant and project-executing agency in detail. In order to supplement this ethnographic material, I conducted interviews in January 1998 at the ministry responsible for development cooperation. This book, in other words, is based on nineteen months of multisited field research at nine organizations located in five African countries and at one European development bank. I participated in all of the conversations, meetings, and negotiations investigated in detail in the present text and kept a meticulous diary on them in written form and on audio tape.

Although the book draws upon my entire experience with development cooperation and the cumulative results of that work, my explicit argumentation here refers solely to material from the final development project in Tanzania and thus corresponds to a classical ethnographic case study. Nevertheless, the case depicted in this book has been fictionalized. I decided to do this for several reasons. In contrast to an anthropological study of laboratory practices focusing on the analysis of protein communication, for example, the issues addressed here inevitably raise pressing evaluative questions—questions that can ostensibly be navigated by means of common sense, that appear to be primarily political and moral in nature, and about which everybody feels called upon and entitled to offer critical comments. Readers are almost instinctively drawn to ask the following questions: "Why does this nonsense continue?"; "Who is in charge here?"; and "How can it be done better?" Identifying real actors would only encourage readers to latch onto questions of individual responsibility. The fictionalization of my account was intended to counter this. I wanted to direct attention away from the strengths and weaknesses of specific real actors and toward the significance of general structural principles and the contingencies of the mundane practices of the development world.

After composing an initial text draft that included the names of real persons, institutions, and locations, I became convinced that the fictionalization of the report was also a question of decency. It seemed to me intrusive and offensive to publish a text in which real human beings were so ruthlessly exposed, even if they had previously given their approval for the study. One alternative would have been to reduce the vitality of the final text so that the people involved appeared in a paler, more muted light. This, however, was incompatible with my intention of composing an ethnographically thick and vibrant text, in which contingencies and personal idiosyncrasies played a significant role. For this reason I decided to fictionalize my account. In my depiction I have consistently sought to impute only good intentions to all of the figures involved and to place them in the best possible light—so as not to induce readers to wander onto the side stage of individual responsibility, which has little or no direct relevance to the issues investigated here. Nevertheless I cannot be certain that no one will feel insulted by what I have written. While this does remain an inevitable possibility even with fictionalizations, I contend that it makes an enormous difference over the course of the years both to the people concerned and to those who know them whether real names have been included or not.

My decision to fictionalize was also based on a psychological consideration. I knew that a substantial number of readers of this book would be actors in the global field of development cooperation. When these readers got hold of a report that prominently identified a particular development bank by name, they would be confronted with one of two problems. They might be affiliated with this bank and thus feel violated in terms of loyalty or their own self-esteem. They would also be unable to simply leave the book on their desks and discuss it with their colleagues during their lunch break. Or they might be affiliated with a different development bank and be misled through the identification of this particular bank into attributing the problems analyzed in the book to the identified competitor, which could prevent them from gaining any additional insight that my analysis might offer. In the years since the book was published in Germany, I have received dozens of emails from actors in the field who have thanked me for the accurate analysis and have affirmed my decision to fictionalize the account.

Finally—and perhaps decisively—this book is also intended as a contribution to what could be called experimental ethnographic writing. In the era after the end of critique, grand narratives, and utopias, scholars must nevertheless continue "to speak truth to power" and to seek a new language with which to do this. Those who conduct ethnographic studies of powerful

organizations must, on the one hand, engage the practices and conceptions of those organizations with the respectful affection of an anthropologist. On the other hand, they must not conceal or gloss over things that might have negative consequences. In my experimental writing I have attempted to achieve this balance through fictionalization.

All of the characters in the present text have been given fictional names and are literally figures in a play. They do not depict any real, existing people but are constructed from the cumulative characteristics originally belonging to the various people I met during my tenure in the field of development cooperation. They wear the masks and play the roles prescribed by the script, and yet at the same time they perform with the maneuvering room that I found typical of the development arena. At issue are not their individual capabilities, honesty, or good intentions; rather, it is presumed that all figures possess the normal competency required for the roles they play. If their interactions do not bring about the desired results, this cannot be traced back to the failing of one or another of the actors.

The events of my narrative are set between July and December 1997. The retrospective accounts provided therein expand this time frame to encompass all of the 1990s. The main institutional actors and settings of the narrative are: (1) the Normesian Development Bank (NDB), the development bank of a fictional European country called Normland with its seat in the fictive city of Urbania; (2) Shilling & Partner (S&P), a small consulting firm located in Mercatoria, Normland; and (3) the waterworks of three mid-sized regional capitals in Ruritania, a fictional country located in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Key Issue

Anthropology usually enters the terrain of development cooperation within the scope of projects that are "close to the target group." These are measures that seek to establish as direct a collaboration as possible with those benefiting from the project and generally involve the transfer to farmers and breeders of information on, for instance, new cultivation methods, seed improvements, methods of livestock breeding, or loan systems. Impoverished city dwellers are sometimes integrated if the project deals with, for instance, preventive health measures, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, family planning, or environmental protection measures. Although all of these areas require some formal organization, the primary focus here is on altering cultural practices.

The lion's share of financial assistance in development cooperation, however, flows into the public infrastructure of developing countries. This includes formally organized systems—most of which were set up by the colonial powers—which aim primarily at securing education, health, communications, transportation, and administration. In most cases this involves large technological systems such as railroads, power supply systems, telecommunications networks, systems for drinking water, computer networks, systems of epidemiological prediction, and the like. The high priority allotted to this domain is evident in the list of measures that is generally drawn up after major political upheavals. Whenever a region is struggling for autonomy, such as Southern Sudan, leaders of the movement call for external support in a number of areas as soon as they sense the prospects of victory. Initially they try to secure the food supply. This requires that streets be made passable, bridges repaired, and markets created. Then they attempt to reestablish health care, which requires setting up a comprehensive organization, training staff, and obtaining medicine and equipment. Later they try to reopen the school system. In order to do all this, a system of administration, a tax agency, and judicial and police apparatuses also have to be reestablished. Development aid thus becomes a matter of governmentality.[9]

The leaders and their supporters stress that these measures will serve to maintain the newly gained self-determination. This claim is true to the extent that the new rulers mean political independence from a hated state apparatus, which they are in the process of overturning. They are not, however, referring to self-determination with regard to the rehabilitation of the basic infrastructure that was destroyed during the war of liberation. Potential outside supporters of this struggle for autonomy must first be convinced that the efforts are correct and proper according to their own expectations and norms. If the envisioned self-determination involves child labor, discrimination against women, intolerance of various religious faiths, or environmental destruction, then support will be difficult to find. For this reason, as a rule demands are adapted to the expectations of potential supporters, which triggers a problem of implementation at the local level. As soon as support gets underway, organizational structures and appropriate procedures must be set up to enable the transfer of funds, ideas, models, and artifacts. This poses a second and more fundamental problem. Insofar as the key internal issue requiring external support is the weakness of organizational structures and the unreliability of bureaucratic procedures, the entire process is caught in a vicious circle. The new, independent, and

sovereign state apparatus has here reached the point at which the old oppressive state apparatus failed. Liberation movements generally emerge precisely in response to the nonfunctioning or perversion of what could be called the modern state apparatus and the institutions of civil society. Now, after the battle, an organizational structure has to be established *ex nihilo* for the importation of expertise and resources necessary to build up a functional and legitimate infrastructure. Needing an infrastructure in order to be able to establish an infrastructure, however, is a typical "Catch-22" situation.

From the perspective of anthropology, this problem can better be examined on a smaller scale and in calmer waters. One curious key term employed in the realm of development cooperation pertaining to the organizational forms enumerated above is "rehabilitation." The term refers to an organization or its technological system—such as a municipal drinking water system or a railroad company—which might still exist and have even been subject at one time to reform measures, but which has become so rundown after a period of time that it needs to be rehabilitated.

In practice, the issue looks something like this: A development bank reviews the application for a rehabilitation measure and then commissions a private contractor, a so-called consultant, to design the measure in detail and to implement it. After studying a mountain of documents regarding the state of affairs in the ailing organization as well as the most recent reform measure, the consultant generally comes to the conclusion that this past reform was not effective because it misconstrued the actual situation of the organization. Usually this is attributed to the fact that the previous consultant conceived the reform poorly. Consequently, the new consultant sets out to prepare a better plan for rehabilitation, but is confronted with the difficult problem of determining the actual situation within the ailing organization. This difficulty stems from the fact that the organization is unable to provide any reliable information, which was precisely the problem in the first place. Nevertheless, the consultant has to draw up a description of the situation and a plan for intervention as best as possible before the rehabilitation commences. A few years later it turns out that the organization has again failed to function properly and the next application for rehabilitation is submitted to a development bank. This is generally not even noticed because the organization has now been transformed into another organization, the subject of the current rehabilitation is worded somewhat differently, the application is submitted to a different development bank, different development methods have since become applicable, or simply because different people

are responsible who are not familiar with the preceding events. Then a new consultant is sought because the previous one evidently did not do a very good job. This leads to the next round, which frequently proceeds according to the same pattern.

It is entirely possible that positive changes emerge as side effects of such rounds. However, in most cases these changes are not substantial enough for the game to be brought to a successful conclusion. One might even suspect that the continuation of this particular game prevents the emergence of another, presumably better game. If this is the case, then the most significant consequence of development cooperation is that it prevents better options from emerging. And this in turn gives rise to the next suspicion: that this obstruction in fact arises within the arena of development cooperation itself. In other words, it can be traced neither to mechanisms anchored exclusively in the society receiving the aid nor to mechanisms located solely in the so-called donor countries or donor organizations. The mechanism responsible for the fact that the game continues unchanged despite substantive doubts is in all likelihood connected to a problem of *representation*. It is precisely this assumption that I pursue in this book.

At this point attention is usually focused on the value of political programs and the legitimacy of political representation within the general context of the state order and within the specific context of development cooperation. Without questioning the significance and correctness of this kind of research, I have assumed in this study the perspective of the sociology of knowledge and, more precisely, have followed a science and technology studies approach. In doing so, I have concentrated on a different dimension of the problem than those usually selected in scholarly literature on development. Both development cooperation itself and the organizational structures it is supposed to set up aim to establish reliable technologies for remote sensing, monitoring, and control, which enable organized action from a distance that is independent of local loyalties and priorities. This is in essence an issue of representing reality through technologies of inscription and organizational procedures that have been detached from other subsystems of society in such a way that they cannot be subjected, for instance, to social, political, or economic criteria. The kind of thematic focus I have adopted here is anchored of course not only in the object of investigation itself but also in theoretical reflections. It is my hope that this study will contribute to three ongoing discussions, detailed in the following section.

The Ongoing Debates

(1) During the final third of the twentieth century, skepticism regarding issues of representation spread and became so radicalized, even beyond the discipline of philosophy, that a new situation emerged. The difference between a phenomenological-hermeneutic understanding of this situation and a newer (de)constructionist one can be easily identified in at least one respect. The Thomas theorem, made famous by Robert Merton, reads as follows: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." In accordance with this theorem, the social sciences and the humanities have been concerned less with the world itself than with what humans regard as the world. This distinction remains unproblematic as long as the Thomas theorem is not applied to scholarly definitions of reality. At some point between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, the inevitable self-application of the Thomas theorem finally occurred in the social sciences and the humanities, and quickly became one of the most prominent issues of contention within these academic disciplines.[10] Whatever insights might have been gained, a certain price has also been exacted for this shift in focus from the relationship between text and reality to the relationship between different texts, that is, the shift to discourse and intertextuality. Many of the newer metatexts are characterized by a lack of existential meaning, a fact that has disappointed numerous readers. Questions of "what" and "why" have been translated into questions of "how," without the authors of these works ever returning to the inevitable attempt to explain things.

For the limited purposes of my argument here, we can divide anthropological works into two camps. In one camp we detect sardonic elation among its members because they believe that others will soon arrive back at the point where they themselves have always been. Here positivists, phenomenologists, and hermeneuticists of the old school form an unholy alliance against "philosophical anxiety" and "too much" reflection. They contend that they have avoided the unnecessary detour of deconstructionism simply by remaining on the proper path (for positivists, that of Karl Popper, and for hermeneuticists, that of Hans-Georg Gadamer). The other camp insists that the perspectives arising from this detour have in fact provided essential insights into the nature of things. (Both "camps" are in fact highly heterogeneous and antagonistic assemblages; the only thing that ties the members of each camp together is the homogenizing ascriptions of the opposing camp). In the present study, however, I do not engage in a theoretical discussion about the consequences of deconstruction for anthropol-

ogy. Instead, in my treatment of development cooperation I have sought to demonstrate how I think anthropology should approach the problem of representation after the writing culture debate.[11]

(2) With few exceptions, anthropologists have exhibited a stubborn avoidance behavior in regard to modernity, in particular to its *canonic institutions and citadels*. After returning from the tropics to the metropolis, anthropology—or whatever it should be called now that it no longer limits its scope to the periphery—regards itself as primarily responsible for the investigation of oral narratives and polycentric knowledge on the margins, in niches, behind the scenes, and in the underground. Mainstream anthropology has an affinity for marginalized life-worlds that perceive themselves as alternatives to the hegemonic assault of modernity, and it regards itself as an advocate of these tendencies. At the same time, anthropology fulfills this advocacy role from the perspective of written, scientific logocentric knowledge, which is itself the decisive trait of a modernity that hegemonically incorporates all forms of resistance. As a result, anthropology has a particular blind spot with respect to modern knowledge and the institutions that produce this knowledge.

It is in this blind spot, however, that everything that constitutes (post) modern society takes place: science, technology, law, and formal organization. This is where the daily struggle for access to and control over social development occurs through the creation of objective representations. The omission of these domains in anthropology means no more and no less than the claim that the constitution of worldviews—that which anthropology is responsible for investigating—does not occur here. The implication is that worldviews are something that other people have, people who don't know better, who still believe in honor and the nation, in devils, angels, and deities, in alternative medicine and flying saucers, people who believe in grand narratives and who adhere to diverse ideologies. Worldviews, according to this position, are illusions that always require the same kind of anthropological explanation: Worldviews correspond less to reality than to the social conditions of their constitution. In contrast, people who deal in or analyze financial markets, who fly around the Earth in satellites, who split atoms, analyze DNA chains, and clone plants and animals, but also people who engage in development cooperation and anthropology, apparently do not have (and do not construct) any kind of comparable worldviews. Anthropologists would otherwise feel compelled to investigate them. The implicit claim here is that such people see the world as it "really" is. In this way, the responsibility that anthropology assumes for "mistakes" that it

seeks to rehabilitate as antagonistic and yet equally valid worldviews results in an implicit—and therefore even more merciless—denunciation.[12]
(3) Insofar as modern transformational processes are closely tied to delocalization and translocality, the traditional localism of anthropology proves to be an impediment in understanding such processes. Although anthropologists as a rule seek to establish transitions between cultures, I have chosen instead to observe and investigate the translation practices of others. I focus on development experts as actors in interstitial spaces and on the boundary objects and traveling ideas of those actors:

> The planning and implementation of development projects is a focus for massive cosmopolitan activity. In the night telexes chatter, linking clients in Kenya and Indonesia to consultants in California or the Cotswolds. Aid agency staff pick over policies on freeway and commuter lines bound for Washington and London. Contractors check their sums over breakfast. As the day closes on the other half of the globe, bureaucrats mark off the dusty minutes to their journey home, while the putative beneficiaries of these concerns cash the day's wages to buy maize or rice for the family meal. All are linked by the networks that projects weave. With a cast numbered and funded in billions this is one of the world's fastest growing, yet least analyzed, forms of collaborative behaviour.[13]

In keeping with the sense of this quotation, it would be misleading to suggest that this study deals with a Ruritanian development project or a Normesian development agency, with a consultant or an anthropologist in development cooperation. Although these actors do appear throughout the study, the book is not really about any of them. The focus is instead on the organization of what occurs between them, and this organization again raises the issue of representation. The players involved have to agree on representations that can be considered valid in all contexts.

At the same time, the focus on *interstitial spaces* raises the issue of agency. The development project chosen for this study has been examined as an archetypal case of *distributed agency*, in which several actors, dispersed over distant locations and social worlds and possessing differing webs of belief and conceptual schemas, have to collaborate in order to achieve something. On closer inspection, yet another category of agency—a nonhuman agent—is also involved. The practice of development is, as I attempt to demonstrate in this study, primarily a matter of selecting one of the existing globally circulating and highly esteemed models for development and adapting it to a local context. These models—for instance a particular form of commercial accounting or financing public infrastructures such as urban water sys-

tems—are attached for the most part to specific technologies. These models and technologies acquire an agency of their own precisely because they are disseminated and duplicated and in this process come to be endowed with an authority to define the best solution to a particular problem. At times the causality is even completely reversed, with traveling models searching for problems they might be able to solve.[14]

The Thesis

Let me begin with three exemplary propositions. Two of them are uttered on a daily basis in the arena of development cooperation. Proposition A reads: "Since the introduction of the structural adjustment program, things have been progressing in sub-Saharan Africa." Proposition B reads: "Since the introduction of the structural adjustment program, things have been getting worse in sub-Saharan Africa." Both propositions relate to the same ontological order and agree that denotative propositions of this type are possible and can be verified against reality. Propositions A and B only disagree on the particular facts, not on the possibility or accessibility of these facts—which are taken in this case to be indicators of prosperity and poverty.

A third type of proposition is uttered less frequently and appears to be radically different. Proposition C reads: "You can only affirm proposition A or B if you trust the procedures that generate the required indicators; however, there is no good reason for such trust because these procedures cannot overcome their own indeterminacy and are inherently interested." Although proposition C clearly has a different logical status—it refers to sentences, theories, and methods rather than states of affairs in the "real" world—it nevertheless shares a common epistemological problem with the other two propositions. In order to refute Propositions A and B, proposition C necessarily relies on similar ontological presuppositions in order to assert the inadequacy and indeterminacy of "development indicators." Furthermore, it must presuppose at the very least the existence of these theoretical entities and claim itself to represent them adequately. In other words, objectivism (A and B) and antiobjectivism (C) belong to the same class of propositions; they merely relate to different levels of reality. Their circular relationship makes apparent the paradox of providing an ultimate grounding for propositions that claim to be true.

Hence proposition C does not resolve this paradox, although it may provide an important addition to the dispute between proposition A and B by introducing a dimension of reflexivity. Nevertheless, if taking a position is

a necessary and unavoidable prerequisite for making a decision and assuming liability for that decision, then objectivism is ultimately an indispensable rhetoric. It is something we should seek to improve upon, even if it ultimately remains an unattainable horizon for humans as finite beings. This kind of self-reflective objectivism also protects political systems from ideological blindness, insofar as they are neither able to invoke an ultimate truth—whether religious or ostensibly scientific—which may prove to be erroneous in twenty years, nor are they condemned to hold all positions to be equally plausible. If this is the case, then the following is also true: Before one can claim that a proposition is correct, one must first concede as a condition of possibility that propositions never simply depict realities but always already order that reality conceptually (to borrow from Max Weber). According to this position, every representation inevitably has its own blind spot: It is specifically situated and cannot stand outside its own position and its own distinctions and is for this reason unable to ground itself independently. Although blind spots can never be entirely eliminated, they can nevertheless be "repositioned" as needed (as Niklas Luhmann would put it). "Need" in this sense is a pragmatically evident purpose that cannot be simultaneously reflected upon. "To reposition" means to seek out an observation point with a blind spot that can be tolerated for the time being. If this paradoxical repositioning succeeds, the newly attained perspective allows existing possibilities to be unblocked—but this always occurs at the expense of blocking other possibilities in the process.[15]

The consequences of proposition C for propositions A and B are as follows: Whether one believes that things are "progressing" or "regressing" in sub-Saharan Africa is certainly largely dependent on the metanarrative that one subscribes to, especially given the fact that without such a narrative it would be extremely difficult to distinguish between progress and regress at all. One also requires technologies of representation and calculation in order to prove whether it is A or B, but one cannot at the same time prevent these technologies from exerting a performative effect on the object of enquiry. This deconstructive conclusion, however, leaves untouched questions of meaning and existence. In terms of practical life, humans have to try to resolve the point of contention between propositions A and B and to seek better solutions for moral, juridical, and political reasons. In doing so, they must continuously distinguish between correct and incorrect propositions in order to select the proper path. They will have to do this even when the doubt implicit in proposition C has expanded into a general suspicion toward all forms of objectivism. However—and this is what counts—they

will be able to do this successfully only if they bear in mind that they are necessarily standing on thin ice here.

According to the thesis of this book, the epistemic community of development experts generally believes that they are standing on firm ground. They attempt to drive their own constructions of reality into this ground like tent stakes in order to securely bind development projects to them. Because they are actually operating on thin ice, however, their actions give rise to problematic consequences. Beyond this critique, I also attempt to demonstrate that the objectivism of development discourse should not be traced back to Western universalism and its hegemonic claims. It is instead the transcultural processes of negotiation and decision making that produce objectivistic definitions of reality.

From this vantage point, the only remaining way to avoid getting hopelessly entangled in inappropriate definitions of reality would be (borrowing from Luhmann) "to shift the observer perspective" (or "to reposition the paradox"), what Goffman would call a "frame change": What we are compelled to regard as real within the framework of a particular negotiating or decision-making situation can, within the framework of reflecting on that situation, be traced back to the conditions set by the initial framework.[16] For the purpose of my argument and in particular for my ethnographic presentation, the term *code switch* seems more appropriate. In phenomenological terms, only code uses and code switches can be observed, whereas frameworks and perspectives remain the explanatory models on which they are based. In order even to participate in a mutual game, players in an arena must agree on a universal code that appears to be comprehensible in all frames of reference. I will call this a *metacode*. The same players, however, shift facilely to a *cultural code* when they comment on the moves of other players before and after the game and attribute these moves to other players' models of cultural orientation. The arena of development cooperation is characterized by a precarious situational alternation between metacode and cultural code.

The Vocabulary

If the validity of a representation cannot be determined in terms of correspondence theory—even if fidelity to reality remains an indispensable criterion—then the conception of representations needs to be defined differently. Representations are elaborately fabricated in both development discourse and anthropological discourse. To the extent that they are imple-

mented and thus institutionalized as valid versions of the world, these representations play a constitutive role in defining the world and the practices thereby legitimated. In order to understand the phenomenon called development, it is therefore essential to investigate the transitions between the representations and the practices with respect to how they are institutionalized and deinstitutionalized.

To represent means "to imagine," "to depict," "to act as a proxy," and "to bring to mind," but also "to provide an impressive example of something" (as in "representative architecture"), as well as "to be typical" in the sense of being "statistically representative." In all of these meanings the same figure shines through: In place of an absent or unattainable reality, a surrogate, a copy, or an advocate is presented. This inevitably raises the question of the proxy's authorization (i.e., its legitimacy or validity). Does the advocate of the speechless correctly represent those who do not have a voice? Does that which is present adequately depict that which is absent? How can distortion and deception be avoided in the process? This question points to the basic paradox that easily leaves the initially undaunted observer petrified, as Luhmann has ironically noted: In order to become reality, reality has to be objectivized in a representation. Conversely, however, the objectivity of a representation is never exhausted in the represented reality. What role then do representations play in the construction of represented reality? What role do fictions play as depictions that do not represent any reality? And what role do undepicted realities play?

Only when observers are dealing with something directly observable ("she turned on the faucet and water came out"), that is, when they share a common frame of reference and stand in direct communication with each other, can they agree immediately about its reality. However, in those cases in which people communicate over distances (both spatial and temporal) and in which the objects in question are complex, the matter is no longer so simple. Because individuals do not have the external referents directly in front of them, they become aware of the significance of representational practices. Representational practices produce transitions between realities and depictions of those realities.

However, it is not only because of the spatiotemporal distance from an external referent or the complexity of that referent that a direct test of the correspondence between representation and reality necessarily fails. Another decisive factor is that something regarded as an external referent in one frame of reference can be regarded as a socioculturally conditioned construct in a different frame of reference. Nevertheless, it is sometimes

necessary for people to bridge these gaps in order to reach an understanding and act jointly. A typical example of this is development cooperation. When the representation of something can be transferred from one frame of reference to another without that representation losing its validity—although the validity might and indeed usually does change—we can speak of the corresponding representational practice as *translating*.

Translation occurs when an idea or a thing is carried over from one idiom to another, from one culture to another; or when an idea or a thing is connected to another idea or thing in such a way that its effect is intensified as a result (as is the case, for example, with a pulley system or a bicycle chain); or when an idea is manifested in a practice or a thing and vice versa. All of these different meanings have a common denominator: Translation brings together things that are separate; it establishes a relation and mediates between multiple elements and makes them compatible and comparable. In this sense, translation also produces commensurability by establishing gauges and metacodes. A form emerges that did not previously exist. The act of translating generally raises the following question: Is this an accurate translation or has the meaning been altered?

This generalized suspicion is not entirely unjustified since translation is a procedure necessarily tied to the power that emerges in the process of representation and thus opens up diverse potential for manipulation. Viewed in this light, political representation is itself a process of translation: In order for many voices to become one, they must be translated, and, not surprisingly, politicians speaking in the name of their constituency are habitually suspected of manipulation. It is not possible, however, to avoid this manipulation entirely. In order for ideas (usually inscribed into models and artifacts) to circulate from one social world to another, from one frame of reference to another, they must be adopted, appropriated, and altered. Ideas are evidently unable to go very far on their initial impulses, with only the energy from their original frame of reference. To be transferred they have to be transformed, that is, translated. Every act of translation is inevitably also an act of performative omission and addition; otherwise the translation chain would break. Every act of translation is thus also an act of creation, producing something that did not previously exist.

An important example of translation in this sense is the construction of representations in order to grasp a complex issue. Observers who want a bigger picture of reality than they can see with their own eyes and from their own particular vantage point are compelled to construct a series of mediations and proxies between themselves and reality. The first step is

to decide which tangible substitutes of the whole should be gathered. One person might begin by selecting an interesting location; another might go to a library or an archive; and a third might seek out and interview relevant experts. No matter how this selecting and gathering occurs, the next step will invariably consist of viewing and ordering the various substitutes. The selected and classified representations are ultimately combined into a bigger picture, which was the reason for engaging in this laborious process in the first place.

But what happens when skeptics come along and contest the validity of this picture (which will inevitably occur at some point)? Specific to this bigger picture is that there is no single vantage point from which all of the external referents can be seen. It was precisely for this reason that the picture, as a representation of something whose actual existence remains debatable, was introduced. Has anyone really ever seen "society," "the economy," "justice," "power," "progress," or even "development"? Thus it is impossible to take this bigger picture or text and measure it against "development" to verify the correspondence between reality and representation. Skeptics would instead have to retrace the steps back along the entire path. And in doing so, they would inevitably discover that the individual substitutes that were used to compose the bigger picture were only substitutes for other substitutes. Skeptics will move from one document to another, and when they finally believe they see the light at the end of the tunnel, they will encounter substitutes there as well. Perhaps they will ultimately reach a point at which nothing is concealed, but the exposed reality will offer no immediate answer to the larger question. The skeptics will discover not "development," but at best a tangible artifact, in our case, for instance, a new water meter.

For this reason, the objectivity of a representation cannot be resolved according to the model *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, the equation of thought and thing. The issue is instead the clarity and the methodological validity of the aggregation used to compose the bigger picture from the individual pieces. Because these individual pieces are not direct substitutes for an external reality but instead bring forth a cascade of further substitutes, one is never dealing with a single referent but rather with a diversity of internal or *transversal referents* that have been organized into a chain such that they support themselves as they proceed along it. From this perspective, a representation is always a cascade of re-re-. . .representations. Because the practice of representation is best understood as a translation, I will call this a *translation chain*.

The thematic focus and the structure of the present study are based on the assumption that the production of transversal referents is the key technique for both development cooperation and anthropology. When I say that I am writing about the making of development, I am therefore addressing precisely this point. Hence this study will report not about what actually happens "on the ground" (for instance, in the waterworks of Baridi, Mlimani, and Jamala), but rather about what actually happens in the interstices and the translation chains. In examining this problematic, I focus on technologies of inscription and representation.

Empirical Considerations

(1) The locus classicus for the emergence of *methodological agnosticism* in anthropology has been the analysis of magic, witchcraft, and the belief in all kinds of spirits. While locals usually make the substantialist claim that their belief in spirits is caused by the evident existence of spirits, incredulous anthropologists are compelled to seek more circuitous answers because this evidence does not make much sense to them. As long as evidence of the existence of spirits remains the issue, few inhabitants of the US–European world would regard it either as mistaken or presumptuous to replace the answers offered by believers with what they consider to be more plausible ones. They usually find it more convincing to derive the belief in spirits from the social order in which it arises. This is because in their view it simply makes more sense to assume that there is no such thing as spirits. As I will argue throughout the present study, I think that this skepticism toward propositions based on occult, irreproducible claims makes sense primarily for legal and moral reasons rather than epistemological ones.

With more familiar representations, however, the matter appears in a rather different light. If, for example, an anthropologist were to set out to investigate why some people believe that the Earth is round, most inhabitants of the US–European world would regard this as a bizarre enterprise because they know that the Earth is in fact round. Nevertheless, if anthropology is concerned with questions about how worldviews arise and how they change, even in cases such as the shape of the Earth, it can only fulfill this responsibility adequately if it proceeds consistently and elevates the agnosticism that it brought home from the tropics into a methodology. This proves to be a particularly fruitful approach wherever scientific knowledge is produced. Competing bodies of knowledge develop for all controversial topics, which means that decisions about such issues are ultimately made

under conditions of uncertain expertise. For this reason, the key question for an anthropology of science, technology, law, and organizations should be just as agnostic as the key question for an anthropology of occult practices: How can people know what they believe they know?

(2) In the domain of development cooperation, anthropologists deal with locals who have the same level of education, who often earn considerably more money than they do, and some of whom occupy high-ranking positions. These people are able to effectively defend their terrain against unwelcome intrusions. They regard anthropologists not as representatives of a superior culture, but as members of the insignificant genus "social scientists." For anthropologists, this situation is called *studying up*. The important point here is that if anthropologists follow the principle of methodological agnosticism, their view of the locals inevitably annoys the latter. While locals—in this case, development experts—labor to increase their certainties in order to be able to act responsibly, the anthropologist hovers around them, peering over their shoulders with an interested but skeptical eye. The underlying assumption is "You may be the expert here, but I see something that you cannot see, and that is the way in which your ideas are dependent on your frame of reference." In the context of studying up, this annoyance can become acute at any moment and result in the anthropologist's exclusion from the terrain of study. In order to overcome this seemingly insurmountable barrier I opted for true participant observation and worked as consultant for several years. In doing so I shared with the other players the same responsibilities and the same risks of making mistakes and of losing face and money as well. This meant that I had the same access to information that other development players had. It also meant that I did not have the privilege of an outsider, whom insiders sometimes entrust with confidential knowledge that they would never share with each other. However, it is less difficult to overcome this internal barrier than to gain access to the field—at least if you happen to be an anthropology professor and have enough time on your hands.[17]

The Textual Strategy

The genre of the ethnographic report generally operates according to two authorities or perspectives. There is, on the one hand, the authority of the locals concerned with their own "native point of view" (for example, the Trobriand Islanders). Usually, they appear in the ethnographic report as integrated believers who see the world as it should be seen according to

their culture's notions of reality. On the other hand, there is the first-person narrator who plays the role of both observer and skeptic (in the case of the Trobriand Islands, Bronislaw Malinowski). This narrator wanders through the mental topography of the local environment and reports his impressions to readers: "I was there, I saw it myself, and consequently I am authorized to report truthfully about the things that exist there."

Literary narratives, in contrast, generally operate according to three authorities. A first-person narrator represents the empirical author in the text, playing the unobserved observer of events described in the narrative (the first authority in *Madame Bovary*, for example, is Flaubert). This observer follows a skeptic who traverses the mental topography of an epoch or a milieu (in the selected novel the figure of Emma Bovary is the second authority). By following the skeptic, the first-person narrator encounters representatives of normality (the third authority, Charles Bovary and many other figures of the novel), who can now be observed through the lens of the skeptic. Because the skeptic often scandalizes and violates the accepted norms and conditions of society, the observer renders visible to readers the resilience and internal logic of those relations (and thereby depicts the *moeurs de province* or "provincial mores," the subtitle of Flaubert's novel). In addition, the text can be refined self-referentially through the introduction of a fourth authority: The empirical author (the first authority, for example, Vladimir Nabokov) delegates the role of the first-person narrator and the author in the novel *Pnin* to a figure located in the text (the second authority, N.), while the rest of the triangular constellation remains unchanged. This directs the reader's attention to the fact that the text is fabricated. The internal rules of fabrication become observable, thereby thematizing the reciprocally constitutive transitions between representations and reality.[18]

Because I am concerned in this study with representational practices that I not only describe but also perform in my writing, I have constructed a narrative with four voices. As the empirical author, I am inevitably the first voice. However, following this introduction I assume the role of the first-person narrator again only in the fourth part of the book entitled "Trying Again" (except for the endnotes, which throughout the book are my own authorial insertions). The second voice in the narrative, a fictional anthropologist named Edward B. Drotlevski—who is my first replacement in the text—guides readers through the sites and the mental topographies of the locals in question. Drotlevski appears as the author of the first three parts of the book entitled "Belief," "Doubt," and "Searching." On his odyssey through the world of development cooperation, Drotlevski encounters

locals who mistrust the representations of their world (the third authority) as well as those who trust in them (the fourth authority). As the putative author in the text, Drotlevski lets the latter speak for themselves in part one ("Belief"), while the former are given the same opportunity in part two ("Doubt"). In this narrative, doubt is represented by science in the character of the anthropologist Samuel A. Martonosi—my second *locum tenens* in the text—whereas belief is embodied by diverse figures who make decisions, assume responsibility for the development cooperation, and are paid accordingly. The most important protagonist on the side of belief is the consultant Julius C. Shilling.

Instead of imitating—or borrowing—the voices of the Tanzanian (alias Ruritanian) managers of the water utilities, as classical ethnography would have done, I invented the anthropologist Martonosi, who observes the local actors and practices and is himself observed by another textual figure, the second anthropologist Drotlevski. In doing so I experiment with the core business of anthropology—that of "giving a voice to the voiceless"—in a way that is intended to demonstrate to readers the pitfalls of such an endeavor.[19] At the same time, this textual strategy seemed to me appropriate for two additional reasons.

First, the local managers do their best to avoid explicitly articulating their own views and interests. They tend instead to inconspicuously submit themselves to the globally circulating models that have the aura of cutting-edge solutions drawn from the most technologically advanced countries of the North. This is not the whole story, and there are certainly other things that occur behind the scenes. The crux, however, is that precisely these things are never directly represented in the official interactions and negotiations of development cooperation, and it was my main intention to examine how development functions at this level. It is usually assumed that this willing submission is the only possible tactic in the face of the overwhelmingly powerful and salient strategies of Western development experts.[20] While my investigation does in principle confirm this assumption, it also indicates that there is significantly more room for maneuvering even at this level. In other words, I believe that the hegemonic dominance of the Western experts and Western models do not provide a sufficient explanation for the tactics of the Southern partners. However, because this is virtually impossible to prove empirically, I have concentrated instead on examining how the tactics of Southern actors contribute to the incontestability of Western models.

Second, and perhaps a bit provocatively, I wanted to insist that the voices missing in the social science literature on development and technology are

not necessarily the "native" ones. It is, on the contrary, the voices of technical experts from the North—such as that of Shilling—that are rarely heard. Although we do know a lot about development policies and the people who vociferously present them to the public, the technical experts and their complex organizational arrangements, procedures, and technologies remain in the shadows. This is not unlike many other fields: Architects, for instance, are visible whereas engineers remain anonymous; musicians are celebrated stars while the makers of their instruments and the engineers of their recording studios are unknown. It is this problem of voicelessness in the interstitial spaces that I wanted to examine in the case of technologies in development cooperation.[21]

In order for a story to run its course, it needs a plot.[22] As preparation for a research trip, Drotlevski conducts several interviews. In chapter 1, von Moltke, as the representative of the development bank, explains the significance and purpose of this particular development project. In chapter 2, Shilling, the consultant, describes its practical implementation. In chapter 3, Martonosi, the organizational anthropologist, explains why things cannot proceed as intended. In chapters 4 and 5, Drotlevski then reassumes the reins. After concluding his preparations in Europe, he travels to Ruritania to inspect the project and form his own view of the conflict between belief and doubt. Finally, in chapter 6, I bring together all the reports and review what actually takes place in the interstices.