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## THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO BROKERAGE AND TRANSLATION IN DEVELOPMENT

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A change is under way in the relationship between anthropology and development, marking the end of a long period of mutual marginalization. This book brings together anthropologists of development who are part of this change. They show why the world of international development needs to embrace contemporary anthropological theory and methods, and at the same time why development must be central to both empirical and theoretical concerns of anthropology.<sup>1</sup> The starting point for this book is the premise that ethnographic research can provide policymakers and aid managers with valuable reflective insights into the operations and effectiveness of international development as a complex set of local, national, and cross-cultural social interactions; and it is no longer possible to isolate interactions in the realm of development from those related to state apparatus, civil society, or wider national or international political, economic, and administrative practices. In other words, an anthropology of development is inextricably an anthropology of contemporary Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

This perspective is shared in important recent work by French anthropologists, published under the title *Courtiers en Développement* (Brokers in Development) (Bierschenk et al. 2000), for whom the study of development draws attention to actor practices and concepts, strategies, and contextual constraints that illuminate broader national and international political economy. Development, of course, involves a great number of interactions between actors of different statuses, with varying resources and dissimilar goals, “for whom development constitutes a resource, a profession, a market, a stake or a strategy” (Olivier de

Sardan 2004: 11). Neoliberal trends to denationalize and decentralize aid serves to diversify further sources of power and influence, via a proliferation of organizations and intermediary networks (Bierschenk et al. 2000). The multiplicity of interactions in development gives this field of anthropology a “privileged empirical pathway” into social reality, since it forces attention to the social processes and negotiations of meaning and identity in heterogeneous social arenas in a way that challenges narrow culturalist approaches (Olivier de Sardan 2004).<sup>2</sup>

For Bierschenk and others (2000), this social reality is best illuminated through attention to the roles of “brokers,” who assume a growing importance and capture significant resources in the mediated cultures of development. *Brokers and Translators* seeks to build on this empirical work, rooted in the interactionalist tradition of British anthropology, but also to bring new insights into the social production of meaning in development from the sociology of science, using Bruno Latour’s notion of “translation,” which is explored in detail later. By expanding beyond the study of brokers at the interfaces of the development apparatus to include “translation” in the making of development worlds, this book seeks to broaden Bierschenk and others’ original scope of analysis. It does this by making a contribution to an anthropology of “the global” that is concerned with new forms of transnational connection between “people, information and ideas,” within what Burawoy and colleagues (2000: 34) term the “stretching of organizations” beyond the nation-state, a realm that has never been more important in international development and “global governance” (see Mosse 2005b).

### **Anthropological engagements with development: instrumental, populist, and deconstructivist**

The contributors to this book seek to draw development into mainstream anthropology by taking a nonnormative, empirical, and ethnographic approach that stands apart from the instrumental and ideological positions that have dominated the interface between anthropology and development for well over a decade. These can be grouped under three broad headings.

First, anthropologists have engaged with development *instrumentally*. They have been enrolled (or have enrolled themselves) as “applied” researchers, consultants, managers, or bureaucrats. These different roles have been accompanied by varied personal and institutional

motivations for direct involvement in development—such as a commitment to social progress or institutional reform, an interest in action research perspectives, or even a response to the resource pressures of academic life. Of course, the mode of “application” has changed. Anthropologists recruited for their specialist regional expertise later found themselves the source of generalizable knowledge about “social variables” or working as bureaucratic entrepreneurs, consenting to the instrumentalization of their interest in social relations and power through concepts such as “social capital” or “empowerment,” to be used within large development bureaucracies such as the World Bank (Mosse 2004b).<sup>3</sup> Such anthropologists have been compelled to adopt the instrumental “means-ends” rationality that characterizes these policy worlds, paying their way with knowledge products that are normative/prescriptive, predictive, and usable in enhancing development effectiveness. Against this tradition, the chapters of this volume reaffirm the value of a noninstrumental, nonnormative research perspective. They refuse to frame the relationship between development intentions and outcomes, policy and practice in simple instrumental terms (as “better implementation”)<sup>4</sup> and instead pay equal attention to the social processes of policy and the informal relationships and real-life situations of development workers.

A second mode of anthropological engagement with development has been ideological and *populist* rather than instrumental. This includes various participatory, “bottom-up” approaches to development or “alternative development,” which celebrate “indigenous” knowledge and “local” capabilities while denigrating global science and top-down technology transfer. This perspective advocates participative forms of research and learning while rejecting “extractive” ones. By no means confined to anthropologists, and most strongly associated with the work of Robert Chambers (1997, Chambers et al. 1989), this approach was initially more typical of NGO workers and activists outside the development mainstream. However, by the late 1990s “alternative” vocabularies (if not practices) were also found in agencies such as the World Bank, where they became reframed into instrumental forms. Olivier de Sardan (2004) characterizes the naïve simplification of some of these alternative approaches—for example, participatory rural appraisal (PRA)—as *ideological* populism, the unqualified valuation of indigenous knowledge and community tradition. His point is that this has to be distinguished from *methodological* populism, which is the essentially anthropological stance of taking a local point of view to discover the rationale of actions. The empirical studies in this volume seek

to recover the important distinction between ideological and methodological populism, while still questioning the valuation attached to participative versus extractive types of research. This allows exploration of actor strategies, social relations, and the contradictions that are concealed by participatory methods.

A third anthropological orientation to development has been critical and *deconstructive*. Informed primarily by the work of Foucault, it analyzes development as “discourse”—a system of knowledge, practices, technologies, and power relationships that orders and limits description and action within its field. Development is seen as a historically specific discourse of power of the West over the “developing” world. This approach is illustrated at its most basic by Escobar (1995), who charted the rise of development discourse and practices as instruments for Western capitalist countries to maintain domination over what became constructed as the “Third World.” It emerges in a more carefully ethnographic form in Ferguson (1994), who analyzed a project case in Lesotho to show the ways in which development discourse has produced depoliticized knowledge about, and offered technical solutions to, development problems.<sup>5</sup> The intellectual fashion to which these writers contributed did not argue for “alternative development” but rather advocated “alternatives to development.”

These deconstructive approaches are no less ideological than populist ones. Indeed, Olivier de Sardan (2004) describes this form of post-structuralist analysis as *ideological* deconstructivism while pointing out that by privileging the local and denigrating scientific and “world ordering knowledge” (Hobart 1993) they are also dangerously infused with populism. Ideological deconstructivism offers a “diabolic image of the development world [that] pays little attention to incoherences, uncertainties and contradictions” or describes every diversion or sidetracking of development as a popular resistance arising from the presumed autonomy of the subaltern (2004: 5). Such a view overlooks the collaboration and complicity (or duplicity) of marginal actors/institutions in development, such as the “consumer practices” (de Certeau 1984) of “beneficiaries” who understand and manipulate the rhetorics, rules, and rewards of aid delivery; or the “recipient strategies” of locally powerful state actors who entrench their authority behind subservience to neoliberal donor paradigms (see Rossi, Chapter 2, this volume).

Moreover, deconstructivist approaches adopting a Foucauldian approach effectively demote agency and view development effects not as political strategy, but as occurring “behind the backs or against the wills of even the most powerful actors” (Ferguson 1994: 18). The problem

is that this “merely replaces the instrumental rationality of policy with the anonymous automaticity of the machine” (Mosse 2004a: 644). In other words, ideological deconstructivism, no less than instrumental policy prescription, fails to examine the relationship between the rhetoric and “mobilizing simplifications of policy and politics” and the world as understood and experienced within the lives of development actors. Both approaches “divert attention away from the complexity of policy as institutional practice, from the social life of projects, organizations and professionals and the diversity of interests behind policy models and the perspective of actors themselves” (Mosse 2004a: 644). The researchers in this book do not abandon these deconstructivist perspectives, but endeavor to make them *methodological* rather than ideological; this is a means to analyze the interaction of ideas and relationships in development arenas (Olivier de Sardan 2004; Apthorpe and Gasper 1996; Mosse 2005a).

### **The contemporary context**

To contextualize further the contributions to this volume, we have characterized anthropological involvement with development as instrumental, populist, or deconstructivist. Running alongside are other distinctions, such as between the applied and the pure, the normative and the descriptive, optimists and pessimists, and the ideological and the methodological. These are useful, but not categorical, distinctions that need to be set in the context of recent intellectual trends in international development itself.<sup>6</sup>

First, more reflexive and critical currents are already emerging among policy and populist thinkers (for example, Wallace and Kaplan 2003). However, these may still be constrained by institutional knowledge systems that emphasize the universal over the contextual (King and McGrath 2004: 107) and “constantly organize attention away from the contingencies of practice and the plurality of perspectives (and which therefore marginalize anthropology as a critical and ethnographic discipline)” (Mosse 2004b: 80).

Second, advocates of participatory alternatives are no longer confined to the grass roots, but promote participation at the macro level. They do this, for example, in the form of civic engagement and citizen consultation for national planning, through secondary stakeholder participation and partnership as a mode of donor-recipient relations, or by contributing to networks of global civic activism on human

rights or justice in which “local” actors “jump scale” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 996, citing John Ruggie).

Third, critical analysis of development has moved on from its earlier, intensely value-laden deconstruction of policy narratives. It now directs closer attention to development’s routines, practices, and subjectivities and is increasingly informed by Foucault’s later work on the state and his concept of “governmentality.” This work combines the ideas of “governing” and “modes of thought” to express the idea that “it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them” and extends the meaning of government to include both governing others and governing the self (Lemke 2000: 2–3). The idea of governmentality links “technologies of the self” with “technologies of domination” and makes possible analysis of the ways in which, between the extremes of coercion and consensus, it is also possible to conceptualize power as acting more subtly through the production of subjectivity within individuals. Although skeptical about the way in which such an analysis may close off “the very possibility of people being more or less free from others’ power to live as their own nature and judgment dictate,” Lukes (2005: 107) nevertheless acknowledges the important empirical implications of asking “just *how* and to *what extent* the governed are rendered governable” (98). In Chapter 2 Rossi reminds us how participatory approaches in development have also been understood in these terms (for example, Cooke and Kothari 2001). Development policy, then, can function to regulate social life not by overt control or repression, but by a productive form of power that enrolls and empowers supporters, and that operates in multiple and unpredictable ways to build its “orders.”<sup>7</sup>

A fourth development is that there is today more direct engagement and contestation between policymakers (instrumental or populist) and their deconstructivist critics, who no longer occupy separate universes. Consider, for example, a recent exchange in *Third World Quarterly*. Crawford (2003) provides a “deconstructive” account of the limitations and inequalities of the Partnership for Governance Reform initiative that was launched in Indonesia in 2000 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank. This program has the stated aims of improving the coordination of donors and lenders in Indonesia and providing a higher level of Indonesian government control over the process of “governance reform.” Drawing on Lukes’s (2005) “radical” view (in his three-dimensional view of power), Crawford argues that partnership is “permeated by relations of power” (2003: 145) that not only generate an observable

clash of interests between different actors as the outcome of control exercised by direct agency, but also involve the exertion of power through the control of agenda setting and decisions about what gets discussed and what does not. The author goes on to show, through a detailed study of donor documents, that the partnership remained “externally shaped, driven and influenced by international agencies” (155) and closed to anyone who did not represent “local support for a governance reform program that provides the institutional framework for economic liberalization and the opening up of the Indonesian economy to market interests” (156). Issues such as government and military reform, which Crawford argues were important priorities for many segments of the population and were widely documented as such, were simply excluded from discussion in the partnership agenda. The result, argues Crawford, is a “myth of partnership” that perpetuates the “ongoing exercise of power” (156).

Crawford’s critical article quickly provoked a rejoinder by Mal-larangeng and Van Tuijl (2004), who provide an alternative account of the same process from their positions within Indonesia’s National Democratic Unity Party and the Partnership for Governance Reform, respectively. With equal passion, these authors take issue with what they term Crawford’s “selective inclusion of information,” which, they argue, obscures the fact that “power relationships and processes of opinion making and decision making are increasingly located in complex and transnational settings.” The article accuses Crawford of portraying Indonesians as overly passive in their relations with international donors, ignoring evidence that “makes a mockery of his case study,” and as being unable “to see beyond what he wants to find” (932). In particular, their account brings a greater level of historical detail and depth, and points to illuminating counter-examples of power being exercised within the partnership by Indonesian members of the board, as in the rejection of the “good governance” label in favor of a farther-reaching and locally rooted “governance reform” concept. Detailed information from meeting minutes is invoked to refute many of the generalized claims made in the first account.

To situate the Partnership in a one-dimensional North-South, donor-recipient dichotomy is too narrow. It assumes a single antithesis between the international and the Indonesian side, as well as homogeneity within each side, respectively, which is over simplistic. (927)

Thus, in countering Crawford's allegation that popular representation was heavily restricted within the partnership structures in Indonesia, Mallarangeng and Van Tuijl draw attention to the social reality that people "wear multiple hats and have multiple institutional affiliations," (924) which undermines any simple institutional classification of government, business, and civil society.

The relevance of this argument to our discussion is not that one or the other of these accounts is in the end more "correct," but that the dispute highlights in stark terms how different frames of reference are used to analyze the "same" events, reflecting the different positions of the actors involved in the events themselves *and* in their documentation. To follow Latour (1996), there is not just a relativity of points of view on a given object (a question of perspective); rather, objects appear or disappear depending upon the interpretations given them by people of different standing. "The war of interpretations" continues; perspectives are "not brought to bear on anything stable, since no perspective has been able to stabilize the state of things to its own profit" (79). In other words, "actors create both their society and their sociology, their language and their metalanguage. . . . There are as many theories of action as there are actors" (167). This challenges anthropologists to reflect on their own positionality and the fields of power within which their knowledge production becomes (or fails to become) authoritative (see also Mosse 2005a, 2005c). "Does there exist, after all," Latour asks, "a theory in which all these actors and all their theories can be summed up, one that would enable the sociologist-king to speak with some authority?" (1996: 167).

At the same time, the need for critical analytical description of the processes of international development has never been of more practical importance. Current development policy continues to be characterized by a striking incongruence between, on the one hand, what Cornwall and Brock (forthcoming: 1) refer to as a ubiquitous "seductive mix" of development "buzzwords" such as "poverty reduction," "empowerment," "partnership," "participation," and "civil society," which combine a "no-nonsense pragmatism with almost unimpeachable moral authority," and, on the other, a striking lack of progress in relation to a wide range of development indicators—whether the more specific Millennium Development Goals or the more diffuse, but no less developmentally important, goals of securing peace in the Middle East. Within the dominant paradigm of neoliberalism, official narratives of development institutions are concerned with attempts to "square the circle" so that poverty reduction can be combined with



securing institutional buy-in to market-based patterns of liberal capitalism and governance structures. Anthropology has a significant contribution to make to the intellectual challenge of better conceptualizing the relationship between international development policy models—an increasingly virtual world of sophisticated global ambitions—and the practices, events, and material outcomes they are expected to generate or legitimize. At the same time, it allows us to trace links to the broader political economy of international inequality that frames the world of development agencies and institutions themselves.

### **Framing development ethnography theoretically**

#### *Actor-oriented approaches*

What theoretical models can inform such enquiry? The authors in this volume draw on a range of approaches from English and French literatures in support of their analyses of the social processes of development. From the Manchester school of anthropology comes the actor-oriented approach, which in the words of Norman Long, one of its best-known advocates, seeks to build

an ethnographic understanding of the “social life” of development projects—from conception to realization—as well as the responses and lived experiences of the variously located and affected social actors. (2001: 14–15)

This approach emphasizes the ways in which development meanings are produced and negotiated in practice and how development processes and interactions have different significance for the various actors involved (Long and Long 1992; Arce and Long 2000). For example, it facilitates understanding of the ways government bureaucracies and development organizations operate and the differences between their formal objectives and goals and those that emerge through the practices and strategies pursued by actors at different organizational levels (Lewis 1998; Lewis et al. 2003). It considers the relation of policy and practice not as an instrumental or scripted translation of ideas into reality, but as a messy free-for-all in which processes are often uncontrollable and results uncertain:

The concept of intervention thus needs *deconstructing* so that it is seen for what it is—an ongoing, socially constructed and negotiated process, not simply the execution of an already-specified plan of action with expected outcomes. (Long and Long, 1992: 35)

The actor-oriented approach also opens up the study of intermediary actors or brokers operating at the “interfaces” of different world-views and knowledge systems, and reveals their importance in negotiating roles, relationships, and representations. By managing both strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973) in these negotiations, social actors “steer or muddle their ways through difficult scenarios, turning ‘bad’ into ‘less bad’ circumstances” (Long 2001: 14). Long and others’ field-based method of rich description and case-focused dynamic analysis is hard to disagree with, but is not without its critics. Olivier de Sardan suggests that the approach has itself become narrow and repetitive in character, its primary concepts unchanged since the mid-1980s:

This very abstract system of interpretation gradually evolves into self-sufficiency, into a closed circuit, while its empirical studies sometimes give the impression of being tailored to illustrate or justify its “guiding concepts” instead of producing innovative local or regional interpretations, or opening up new perspectives. (2004: 12)

The key concept of “interface” (between different social or life worlds, knowledge, and power) itself involves an unhelpful compartmentalization of identities and may be an increasingly inadequate metaphor for the various types of exchanges, strategic adaptations, or translations contained within development interventions (Rossi and Heaton, Chapters 2 and 9, this volume). Similarly, “negotiation” is a poor descriptor of phenomena that may range from “strategic stances” to “unconscious dispositions” behind the compliance or compromise that either reproduces or erases social and institutional boundaries—for instance, between extensionists and farmers, donors and recipients, or policymakers and project planners (see Rossi and Heaton, Chapters 2 and 9, this volume).

Actor-oriented approaches have also been criticized for a tendency to neglect broader issues of power and structure. As Gledhill (1994: 134) puts it, “actor-orientated approaches [of this kind] may help us break

out of the structuralist-functionalist strait-jacket, but they also imprison us in a new one" if they make actor strategies the center of their analysis at the expense of broader causal factors. Since Long and others were originally motivated by a desire to overcome the limitations of what they saw as monolithic claims of structural dependency and generalized commoditization theory (Harriss 2000), they were sometimes accused of playing down structural issues of wider politics and economics.

To be fair, as Olivier de Sardan points out, actor-focused and interactionalist approaches (barring those schools of ethno-methodology that insist on restricting analysis to the situations of interaction) do not imply reductionist assumptions and draw attention to contextual constraints, "pinpointing conjunctural and structural phenomena" (2004: 11). Moreover, the issue for Long (2001: 13) was not to separate actor and structure but rather to confront the challenge of explaining "differential responses to similar structural circumstances." Indeed, much of this type of work has led to convincing attempts at locating transactionalist approaches within broader political and economic analysis, as Harriss (2000) shows in his discussion of Long and van der Ploeg's (1994) analysis of the "multiple and variable forms" of interactions and outcomes between Friesland farmers and their institutional and economic environment, which "brings together the significance of commoditization, and the agency of actors in strategizing and negotiating responses, in a field of power which involves the state and agribusinesses" (5).

#### *Brokerage and brokers in development*

The actor-oriented approach makes a useful entry point to the issue of brokerage, which is a central theme of this collection. Brokerage is, of course, a long-standing theme in political anthropology, in which structural-functionalist models have been challenged by work—such as that of the Manchester school—highlighting the ways in which social actors operate as active agents building social, political, and economic roles rather than simply following normative scripts (Bierschenk et al. 2002). In this approach—exemplified by the work of Bailey in India and Boissevain in the Mediterranean—brokerage is viewed as an outcome of a weak state unable to impose its rationality on local areas, and enlisting patron-client relationships to reduce the unpredictability of the state's efforts at intervention and control. At the same time, Eric Wolf's (1956) work on the role of brokerage between community and state in Mexico presented the broker as a powerful yet

marginal and vulnerable figure located between fault lines and connection points within complex systems and relationships. By “maintaining the tensions which provide the dynamic of their actions” such brokers are put in the position of facing “in two directions at once,” and their study can “provide unusual insight into the functions of a complex system through a study of its dysfunctions” (66).

It is within the Francophone Africanist literature that brokers in the development context have received most careful attention. Bierschenk and others (2000, 2002) examine the role of development brokers at both national and international levels in Africa as an important, and often understudied, mode of political action within the context of international aid. Focusing on a specific group of social actors who specialize in the acquisition, control, and redistribution of development “revenue,” they mark out a new ethnography of the social spaces that exist between aid funders and recipients:

They are supposed to represent *the* local populations, express its [sic] “needs” to the structures in charge of aid and to [the] external financiers. In fact, far from being passive operators of logic[s] of dependence, development brokers are *the* key actors in the irresistible hunt for projects carried out in and around African villages. (2002: 4, emphasis in original)

In their ethnography, Bierschenk and colleagues (2002) go beyond the heavily normative presentation of such people that is common in development discourses, where they are depicted either as “‘parasites’ preying on mismanaged aid” or more positively “as emanations of ‘civil society’ confronting adversity,” to reconstruct the “social and historical reality” of the phenomenon itself. They locate brokerage within the fragmented politics of the postcolonial state, where power is exercised both through formal bureaucratic logics and through a diverse range of “supra-local” associations and networks, in which there is a flourishing of intermediate actors and organizations.<sup>8</sup>

These studies are part of a French theoretical tradition in the ethnography of development—much of it forged through the work of APAD (*Association euro-Africaine pour l’anthropologie du changement sociale et du développement*, or the Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development)—that shared the influence of the Manchester school, although it was also linked to Marxist structuralism

and populism (Olivier de Sardan 2004). Such approaches do not imply a closed theoretical system and are characterized by “a common distrust of ideologies (be they scientific or developmentalist).” Rather, this is an “empirical quest” to “apprehend[ing] development facts in all their—remarkable—complexity” and a shared methodological position “which allows [the authors concerned] to produce new interpretations ‘close to the field’” (Bierschenk et al. 2002: 13), promising “a corpus of concrete analyses on the embeddedness of various social logics.” Moreover, collaborative and comparative work suggests links to more macro-level analysis, while interpretive innovation ensures the relevance of the anthropology of development as a serious contribution to regional ethnography, for instance, that of local power or the modern state (Bierschenk et al. 2002: 13).

#### *Translation and networks*

Despite its empirical open-endedness, studies of development brokers have tended to impose a particular kind of social analysis in which brokers are seen as intermediaries between development institutions and peasant society. Brokers are, as it were, by-products of the situation, entrepreneurial agents of the “developmentalist configuration” (Bierschenk et al. 2002: 13), having key institutional positions, albeit unscripted, informal, personalized, and highly unstable ones. Although they may not recognize them as such, brokers are seen as having particular competencies, strategies, and “careers.” Bruno Latour’s work challenges the sociological certainty implied here and suggests that we should be far less confident about the a priori existence of social and institutional realms. All actors (and not just sociologists) produce interpretations, and powerful actors offer scripts into which others can be recruited for a period. In this sense their interpretations are performative: “They prove themselves by transforming the world in conformity with their perspective on the world” (1996: 194–195). Our concern becomes, then, not how actors operate and strategize *within* existing arrangements of development (or between its institutions and society), but how development projects—always unforeseeable—become real through the work of generating and translating interests, creating context by tying in supporters and so sustaining interpretations (Latour 1996; Mosse 2005a). The concept of “translation” here refers to mutual enrollment and the interlocking of interests that produces project realities.

Moreover, where an interactionist approach emphasizes the brokering of an almost endless multiplicity of actor perspectives, strategies, and arenas, the metaphor of “translation” examines the production and protection of unified fields of development. Indeed, it is the appearance of congruence between problems and interventions, the coherence of policy logic, and the authority of expertise (Mitchell 2002) that is really surprising and requires explanation—without recourse to earlier forms of “discursive determinism” (Moore 2000: 657). The ethnographic task is thus to show how, despite fragmentation and dissent, heterogeneous actors in development are constantly engaged in creating order through political acts of *composition* (Latour 2000). As one of us has put it,

It involves examining the way in which heterogeneous entities—people, ideas, interests, events and objects (seeds, engineered structures, pumps, vehicles, computers, fax machines or databases)—are tied together by *translation* of one kind or another into the material and conceptual order of a successful project (Latour 2000). So, the coherence attributed to a successful development project is never *a priori*; never a matter of *design* or of policy. (Mosse 2005a: 9)

It is in this way that “actor network theory” (ANT) has enriched earlier actor-oriented approaches. ANT is an analytical tradition closely associated with Latour’s work in the field of science studies that is concerned with the ways in which scientists are continually engaged in the construction and management of the social contexts of which they form a part, through enrolling and juxtaposing a diverse range of elements—such as laboratory equipment, colleagues, scientific papers, and research grants—in ways that link the natural and the social worlds. Within these networks of practice, both human actors and nonhuman actants (such as artifacts and devices) are related through a series of negotiations and defined in terms of the ways in which they act and are acted upon. Actors assume identities in relation to their strategies of interaction, and political representations inform the negotiations that take place between these actors. The overall system can be stabilized only when actors are able to reconstruct the network of interactions through the creation of coherent representations, which they do through a process of “translation” that permits the negotiation of common meanings and definitions and the mutual enrollment and co-optation into individual and collective objectives and activities.

Latour (1999: 311) argues that rigid oppositions such as that between context and content or the social and natural worlds are challenged by “chains of translation” that “refer to the work through which actors modify, displace, and translate their various and contradictory interests.” Likewise, there is no reason to privilege particular “interfaces” or broker roles (men with networks), since the work of producing and protecting representations occurs through diffused agency *in* networks, and through chains of translation. In Latour’s thinking, the term “black-boxing” refers to the tendency for scientific and technical work—and, by extension, development work—to be made invisible by its own success; for example, when a machine runs efficiently, there is an increasing focus only on “its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity.” When Latour (1999: 304) states, “paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become,” one is reminded of the disjuncture between the increasingly grandiose vision of international development and the relatively low levels of transparency and clarity about how development institutions work. The strength of this approach is that it makes possible a deeper analysis of the way in which actors operate to stabilize interpretations and produce meaning, social networks, and development success at every level—within donor policymaking circles, consultancy teams, and project staff as well as among the consumers of development. In Chapter 8 Desai explains and illustrates the relevance of this sociology of science to development in the context of agricultural extension in India.

These nonnormative ethnographies of aid and development agencies return to questions of agency beyond “development as concealed power” in order to “throw light on the complexity of practice” (Kothari and Minogue 2002: 13). But does this amount to anything more than a new set of clichés—socially embedded, negotiated, complex, situated practices, systems of representation? What can the ethnography of development *explain*? What does it tell us that we need to know?

First, ethnography can explore the multiple rationalities of development. Since it is not constrained to privilege authorized (instrumental) interpretations, it can throw light on areas of development practice that are hidden or silenced by policy, but that are critical to understanding how events actually unfold in particular settings and why interventions do or do not work. Second, it can bring fresh insights into the social processes of policy, offering a “methodological deconstructionism” that draws attention to the nature of policy language (or discourse) that reveals *how* particular policy ideas—governance, participation, civil society, fair trade, or gender equality—work to enroll supporters (officials

and beneficiaries, researchers and subjects),<sup>9</sup> forge political connections, and create common realities from heterogeneous networks. Furthermore, it shows how policy models become transformed as those who *do* buy into them (such as government officials, aid staff, field-workers, or community members) make them part of their own social and political trajectories. It makes clear that “policy models and program designs have to be transformed in practice. They have to be translated into the different logic of the intentions, goals, and ambitions of the many people and institutions they bring together” and who lend them solidity and the appearance of consensus (Mosse 2005a: 232).<sup>10</sup> The authors in this volume show that the social processes of development also ensure that all actors—perhaps through strategic representations—invariably defer to dominant or official narratives of agency and history that work to reinstate policy ambitions and to conceal divergent and contradictory logics of practice.

Third, these processes give prominence to the unscripted interinstitutional, intercultural brokerage roles that exist at many different levels. The work presented here seeks to take forward the approach of Bierschenk and co-workers (2002), who show that brokerage is required by the co-existence of different rationalities, interests, and meanings, so as to produce order, legitimacy, and “success” and to maintain fund flows. These are “skilled brokers (managers, consultants, fieldworkers, community leaders . . .) who read the meaning of a project into the different institutional languages of its stakeholder supporters, constantly creating interest and making real” (Mosse 2005a: 9) against the ever-present threat of fragmentation. Brokers deal in people and information not only for profit in the narrow sense of immediate reward, but also more broadly in the maintenance of coherent representations of social realities and in the shaping of their own social identities. The contributors here speak of a range of competencies required by brokers—organizational, linguistic, presentational, and relational—as part of a career trajectory that may either lead to “a step upwards leading ultimately to social promotion” or, in the unstable marginal worlds in which these brokers operate, to “a loss of confidence” and status (Bierschenk et al. 2002: 24).

Fourth, these ethnographies examine a complex set of largely concealed personal, community, and institutional “system goals” that co-exist as “hidden transcripts” with official goals, or “public transcripts” (Scott 1990). They throw light on the ways narratives and procedures serve ends “which [revolve] around the preservation of rules, administrative order and relationships of patronage” (Mosse 2005a: 17) and that



help construct and maintain social and professional identities and structures of power and authority. Ethnography that focuses on the lifeworlds of staff (such as the chapters by Heaton and Desai in this volume) brings out the performative aspect of development action and knowledge, and shows the work needed to keep official representations and professional (as well as beneficiary) identities in place while maintaining a degree of ambiguity and room for maneuvering in the world of development.<sup>11</sup>

### Structure of the book

In Chapter 2 Benedetta Rossi sets the ethnographic agenda for the volume as a whole by characterizing the relationship between development policy and local interests not as an “interface” between opposed rationalities operating at different scales, but as a series of shifting positions available to actors depending on circumstances. Providing an ethnographic account of an aid-funded rural development project in Niger, she examines the ways in which development as a neoliberal system of governance is “consumed” and transformed by people acting locally, and turned toward their ends. Through the cumulative effects of many small acts of reinterpretation, rather than via overt acts of resistance, the dominant orders of governance are exploited from below.

Chapter 3 and 4 further explore the modes and instruments of governance involved in development. Amity Doolittle (Chapter 3) frames national development interventions in Malaysia as a mechanism for the extension of state power. Going beyond Ferguson’s (1994) Lesotho study, she suggests that the effects of development programs are not unintended, but are a means to increase federal power at the state level and to underscore the political, economic, and cultural dominance of the Malay-Muslim minority in Sabah. However, Doolittle’s ethnographic account also shows the fragility of the legitimacy of development interventions. In the theater of development and citizenship, local officials need to create the illusion of villager support and to demonstrate social transformations to senior federal visitors. As brokers, these officials need “dramatic competence” (Bierschenk et al. 2000) as well as a capacity to translate interests into their interpretations. In Chapter 4, Pierre-Yves Le Meur pursues a similar intellectual agenda in his analysis of the “rural land plan” (*Plan Foncier Rural*, or PFR) in Benin, which is intended as a neutral and participatory mechanism to give legal status

to customary land rights. However, like Rossi in analyzing “sensitization” in Niger, Le Meur shows how the PFR is best viewed as a tool for producing and ordering a certain kind of reality within a natural resource management project that involves selective appropriation, strategic interpretation, and the “translation” (in Latour’s and Callon’s sense) of customary land use and rights. The chapter provides a clear ethnographic exploration of the crafting of governable spaces (Rose 1999) by acting on social reality, creating authorized knowledge, and erasing complexity and diversity through a chain of “translations” linked to different actors and interests.

The next three chapters examine the contradictions and disjunctures that are created and manipulated by modes of upward accountability within development’s policy regimes. In Chapter 5 Oscar Salemink explores contradictions associated with the “good governance” agenda of development donors and the resultant attempt to translate international development discourse on “civil society” into a Vietnamese context. His ethnography shows that while the Vietnamese state was willing to accept the presence and activities of international NGOs as a benign proxy for political civil society in the country, these NGOs were willing to fund Vietnamese government-owned NGOs—in the absence of recognizable liberal civil society organizations—as a convenient form of substitute NGO in their efforts to “build” civil society. Decentering the instrumental view, Salemink shows that international “civil society” objectives simply could not be translated linguistically, conceptually, or operationally in the context of Vietnam, but at the same time NGOs were required to portray their work in terms of objectives mandated by their constituencies in Holland. This is a pertinent illustration of a development program that proved “successful” while contradicting its core principles, illustrating the contingent and contentious ways in which external governance relations are increasingly extended through structures of civil society.

In Chapter 6 Peter Luetchford explores a similar bridging of different normative worlds, this time in the context of the markets surrounding ideas and practices of “fair trade.” The core dilemma is as follows: Coffee producers in Costa Rica benefit from access to fair trade markets that protect against drastic price fluctuations, but to do so they have to translate commercial and business success into the language of donorship and the gift, and willingly be the object of patronage. Luetchford shows how skilled brokerage is required to mediate the hiatus between the “commercial and the ethical” in fair trade. Costa Rican producers deny the implied ideology of the gift with themselves as beneficiaries, but are

still required to translate commercial success into marginality, poverty, and need. The disjuncture in meanings generates tensions and threatens relationships.

Returning to NGOs and civil society, in Chapter 7 Wiebe Nauta shows how disjunctures are produced as a South African NGO develops its program in order to forge political connections and secure legitimacy in a changing context. This process involves “strategic translations” between community needs, government programs, and the NGO’s goals. The chapter shows how disjunctures between policy goals and practices are not simply the result of externally imposed donor agendas, but emerge out of the strategic actions and agency of local NGO actors.

The following two chapters direct detailed attention to the agency of the frontline workers who mediate these disjunctures, showing, at another level, how the work of securing legitimacy and winning beneficiaries and supporters is not a matter of reducing the gap between official policy and actual practice. In Chapter 8, Bina Desai explores the theme of identity maintenance among frontline workers in state agencies and NGOs, focusing on the function and social effects of knowledge. Specifically, she examines the significance of scientific knowledge in the construction of identity among agricultural extension workers in India. But the chapter also has a broader theoretical purpose. It applies to agricultural extension (the transfer of knowledge) the concern of science with the relationship between the *performative* dimension of scientific knowledge in agriculture and the *representation* of scientific knowledge as a discrete entity. Desai shows how closely entwined are the social processes of making scientific knowledge and those of reproducing identity, authority, and hierarchy within an extension service and between experts and farmers.

The insight of Celayne Heaton Shrestha’s ethnography of NGO workers in Nepal (Chapter 9) is that development work involves the strategic production of disjunctures that are not so much bridged by brokers, as maintained and reproduced. Heaton reaches this conclusion from looking at the way in which development discourse and organizations provide a setting for identity formation. She is concerned with the lifeworlds of frontline workers and with the performative aspect of development work, and focuses on impression management and the fronts that have to be maintained. She writes about the professional identities of development workers called to “embody *bikas*” (development) as people without history, gender, ethnicity, or class, and she shows how these aspects of identity are “bracketed” in the everyday

world of Nepali NGO workers. Through a nuanced analytical account, Heaton highlights a core dilemma for field-workers trying to build relationships across the boundaries of organization and community, who are subject to constant appraisal by managers *and* villagers. To be progressive, they have to transcend social difference; but to be moral, they have to respect difference. Heaton argues that “bracketing”—the assertion that “difference makes no difference”—is a way of dealing with this dilemma.

Chapter 10 returns to the perspective and reinterpretations of development by the “beneficiaries.” Timothy Bending and Sergio Rosendo focus on the perspective and agency of local populations affected by development. The authors show how regimes of development are in fact perpetuated by the people who are the “objects” of these regimes but who are far from passive victims of development. Drawing comparatively on material from Malaysia and Brazil, Bending and Rosendo show how people articulate what are clearly external agendas in order to build alliances and win supporters (as well as to get jobs and access to resources; see Rossi, Chapter 2). The Penan in Malaysia can thus be seen as co-producers of environmentalism, who strategically deploy—and find themselves compelled to speak in terms of—the more potent “noble savage”-style objectifications of foreigners. Bending and Rosendo draw on Homi Bhabha’s ideas to conclude that “colonization is not the unidirectional exercise of power by the colonizer but is something that the colonized often co-produces.” Correspondingly, the expressions of social movements are best read, in this analysis, critically as “strategic responses to certain discursive, geo-political situations.”

## Conclusion

The actor-oriented perspectives of the anthropology of brokerage, combined with recent work on policy and projects inspired by science studies and Latour’s use of the idea of translation, form a fruitful analytical perspective through which to examine the work of development agencies ethnographically. Such a perspective highlights the textures and tensions within micro-level processes. A new anthropology of brokerage can be identified from within the workings of development and projects where the brokers described by many of the authors here are concerned as much with building and maintaining coherent meanings and representations as with the more traditional “functional” roles highlighted in previous anthropological accounts.

More generally, a key advantage of the ethnographic approach is that it invites us to question the fallible claims to order and logic made more widely in academic and policy circles in relation to globalization and development. As Edelman and Haugerud (2005) point out, there is much that anthropological work can reveal through further empirical scrutiny of the widespread variations in the forms and consequences of neoliberal policies and the limitations of both positive and negative stereotypes found in much unnuanced globalization theory. Ethnography refuses, as Burawoy (1998) suggests, to concede a *global* logic to capitalist change, and it questions the coherence of the representations and world-ordering narratives produced by the public discourses of development organizations and policymakers on which much development debate depends (see Mitchell 2002). While ethnography returns again and again to the interactions and interpretations of actors showing how they produce policy and its effects, the realm of development offers new challenges to anthropology as a discipline concerned with the always uncertain relationship between thought and action in human society.

## Notes

1. We are very grateful to Benedetta Rossi for commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter.
2. The study of mission perhaps provides parallel opportunities for intercultural research.
3. See Mosse (1998) and Gardner and Lewis (1996) for a brief overview of the changing nature of applied anthropology. More specifically, Bebbington and others (2005) bring together recent perspectives on research at the World Bank.
4. The prevailing view of "development as practice" has been critiqued by Thomas (2000), who argues that it impoverishes both the theory and practice of development to restrict definitions in this way.
5. Others working in this frame include Roe (1991, 1994), Hobart (1993), Crush (1995), and Sachs (1992), whose title Grillo used to label this "the Development Dictionary perspective" (1997: 20).
6. Edelman and Haugerud (2005: 2) write, "Mostly gone are musty oppositions between 'applied' and 'mainstream' or 'academic' anthropology. The topic of development is no less theory-worthy or theory-laden than any other in anthropology."

7. See Anders (2005), Ferguson and Gupta (2002), Gould (2005), Li (2002), Mosse (2005b), Shore and Wright (1997), and Watts (2003) on the idea of “governmentality” in relation to development.
8. These include village associations, cooperatives, religious groups, migrant organizations, and, at the individual level, local public service holders, regional intellectuals, customary leaders, and unemployed college graduates. All are drawn to the building of livelihoods within the realm of decentralized aid.
9. Of course, these are not neat dichotomies. Crewe and Harrison (1998: 181) dissolve the language of the “developers” and the “developed” throughout their ethnographic account of development agencies and show how, for example, “Colombo-based NGO staff are dominant in some contexts (in relation to potters) [and] subordinated in others (when dealing with donor representatives).”
10. For example, although the “sustainable livelihoods framework” has been used by agencies as a means of analyzing the livelihoods of beneficiaries, including the consideration of social and symbolic asset accumulation alongside financial and material capitals, it has not to our knowledge been used to explore those of field-workers, NGO managers, and project staff.
11. For example, the personal dimensions of development work are frequently rendered invisible. Crewe and Harrison (1998:184–185) write, “The prevalence of marriage, sexual relationships, and friendship between ‘developers’ and ‘recipients’ is widely acknowledged (at least informally) amongst practitioners, but they rarely appear in development studies literature.”

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