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## PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Schwerpunktredaktion: Karin Fischer, Gerald Hödl

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### HENRY BERNSTEIN The Antinomies of Development Studies

This commentary suggests some antinomies of Development Studies that generate various tensions: those intrinsic to it as a field rather than a discipline and as a field constituted, or at least justified, by moral purpose; tensions between the demands of and for theoretical knowledge on one hand, applied and useful knowledge on the other; and tensions generated by the pressures to adhere to 'win-win' solutions in a world of savage contradictions, and to devise the means to deliver them in ways that are 'politically supportable'.

## 1. Introducing Development Studies

Development Studies is a strange academic creation. We who work in it may forget this as we go about our routines: designing and teaching courses; conducting independent or contracted research; lobbying our universities for resources, and government and aid agencies for consultancy contracts and research funding; cultivating connections with aid donors and perhaps NGOs; writing policy-oriented reports, and articles and books for academic audiences; participating in conferences, and the like. At the same time, as we know, much development research is not done in Development Studies departments or institutes but in the main social science disciplines in universities – economics, sociology, anthropology, politics, international relations, and also in history and law, for example – and outside universities by consultancy companies (the heavy hitters of contract research).

This means that our activities can be permeated, with greater or lesser intensity and insecurity, by a protective stance towards Development Studies as an academic specialism of recent provenance and uncertain intellectual identity. In addition to the porousness of its boundaries, it is a field of almost infinite scope that includes everything from international economic relations and the politics of global governance to, say, micro-credit schemes for urban women or new cash crops – in short, everything that can affect the livelihoods and prospects of poorer people in poorer countries. This can generate great intellectual challenges, and with them a sense of excitement, but in practice it might not be conducive to intellectual coherence or innovation, nor necessarily to a clear sense of political purpose or, indeed, a clear conscience.

#### 2. Introducing Myself (Sort of)

I was flattered to be invited by the *Austrian Journal of Development Studies* to reflect on my experiences in Development Studies. I replied that I am not comfortable with the (auto)biographical or 'confessional' mode of expression, and also noted that 'it was my friend Uma Kothari who persuaded me to write about Development Studies for publication for the first time ever' – an essay on 'Development Studies and the Marxists' that I contributed to her collection, *A Radical History of Development Studies* (Bernstein 2005). This was followed by a piece in a *Festschrift* for Bill Freund, in which I contrasted what I called the 'great tradition' of studying development – beginning with the political economy of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and exemplified in Freund's work as a historian of modern Africa – and the much more recent academic creature known as Development Studies (Bernstein 2006).

At least, I thought that I had only recently, and belatedly, committed to print some reflections on Development Studies. Subsequently, I was searching for the text of a speech by Martin Nicolaus (the translator into English of Marx's *Grundrisse*), which I tracked down in *Counter Course*, a 'handbook for course criticism' published as a Penguin Education Special in 1972. When I dusted off and opened the book, there – between Ernest Mandel on *The Changing Role of the Bourgeois University* and Nicolaus's *Sociology Liberation Movement* – I uncovered a piece I had written, and forgotten, entitled *The Institute, the Ministry and the State Corporation* (Bernstein 1972). This is an account of an incident of government pressure on the recently established Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex (IDS) where I was employed briefly in 1969-1970, which also served as a vehicle for some reflections on the nature of Development Studies. So, memory restored, that account provides an early marker of the course of one individual's academic career in (and out of) Development Studies, during which I benefited greatly from formative periods as teacher and researcher in Turkey and Tanzania in the 1970s and in South Africa since 1990.

#### 3. That Was Then, This Is Now...

Rather more significantly, the decades between then and now, so lightly flagged, saw massive changes that included the demise of development as a state-led project supported, if sometimes uneasily, by Western aid agencies in the context of superpower rivalry between the USA and the USSR for allies in the Third World; the advent of contemporary 'globalisation', by which I mean the restructuring of capital on a world scale, arising from a general crisis of accumulation and generating new forms of concentration, centralisation, organisation and mobility (and 'financialisation') of capital; the rise to dominance of neo-liberalism, which I distinguish from globalisation (a new phase of capitalist world economy) as a political and ideological project to promote the freedoms of capital and restrict those of labour; and, of course, the end of state socialism registered in both the implosion of the economies of the former Soviet Union and the extraordinary dynamism of the 'capitalist road' in China and Vietnam.

The consequences of such massive historical changes affect the conditions and agendas of intellectual production in development research as in the social sciences more generally, not least for those on the political left, where I locate myself. To recall the debates about the Soviet Union and once socialist China, to recall Mandel's major contributions and Nicolaus's *enragé* address at the 1968 convention of the American Sociological Association, and even to talk of the Third World, feels like evoking memories of a distant rather than recent past. So too does the suggestion of a "labour-friendly" (for rich countries) and "development-friendly" (for poor countries) international regime established under US hegemony' during the 1950s and 1960s (Silver/Arrighi 2000: 55) – at least 'friendly' relative to what followed.

#### 4. Development Studies: Some Pre-history

Development Studies, as we know it, was established in the context of independence from colonial rule in most of Asia and Africa and the associated aspirations to 'national' development (shared with Latin America). Its trajectory can be traced, if schematically, through two principal moments of its career to date. The first is the more heroic moment of its founding: 'heroic' because of the formative experiences of its intellectual founding figures, including the great depression of the 1930s, the defeat of fascism and the end of colonial imperialism, and their sense of world-historical possibilities presented by a range of capitalist and socialist options and reforms. The second is the subsequent turn to neo-liberalism that gathered from the 1980s, the powerful political and ideological forces that generated it and its effects for intellectual production, not least in areas of policy-relevant research.

Evidently, the founding moment of Development Studies can not be understood outside an adequate 'pre-history', so to speak, which encompasses the dramatic and contradictory formation of the modern world. That includes how people located in the different times and places of its world-historical processes sought to make sense of them, and the effects of their attempts to do so for political projects that generated many variants of the overarching ideologies of modernity and 'development': liberalism and populism, nationalism and socialism. They also include the intellectual paradigms constructed to explain the formation of the modern world from classical political economy onwards, and to address its disorders and dangers, from the preoccupation with social regulation at the core of classical sociology to understanding 'non-Western' cultures and governing colonial peoples, which stimulated the development of anthropology.

In a work of notably subversive intent and effect, Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton (1996) argued that the provenance of today's 'doctrines of development' was in the social upheavals of the heartlands of early industrial capitalism, whence they were rapidly extended and applied to the tasks of governing/'civilising' the peoples of vast colonial empires. A fundamental element of their argument, and one strategic to now as then, is that 'Development was the means by which progress would be subsumed by order' (Cowen/Shenton 1995: 34).

#### 5. Field vs Discipline

The justification of Development Studies as an academic field is that it is dedicated *and* equipped to generate *applied* knowledge in the design and implementation of policies and interventions to stimulate economic growth and overcome poverty and deprivation. The intellectual resources and historical experiences it could draw on to define and meet the challenges of this charter in its founding moment came from very different places, intellectually and ideologically, and hence made for a very mixed bag.

There was a strong strain of Keynesian ideas that fed into a characteristically structuralist development economics and a widely acknowledged need for macroeconomic planning and management to achieve economic growth in poor countries. There were models of political modernisation, centred on the problematic of progress 'subsumed by order' in a now hegemonic US imperialism (mostly) without colonies, confronting revolutionary upheavals in the Third World and the threat of communism. There were elements inherited from social policy in European capitalism and from the administration of late colonial development regimes, with numbers of former colonial officials recruited for Development Studies, notably in Britain, France and the Netherlands. The skills they were deemed to bring to this new field provide an early illustration of the tension between 'practicality' and intellectual vision and rigour (and perhaps in this specific instance between continuity and change too). There were also various traditions of anthropology and other colonial science, like that of the dynamics and management of tropical environments.

Despite aspirations to 'interdisciplinarity', all this could not amount to any coherent intellectual approach although, as so often, some of its ideas might serve different ideological agendas more or less effectively: for example, modernisation theories or W.W. Rostow's 'non-communist manifesto' for economic growth, or models of land use management in the tropics (with their demographic calculus), of 'community development' or 'responsible' trade unionism. If there was a more plausible paradigm in this *mélange*, it was structuralist development economics with its typically social democratic (and nationalist?) inspiration. However, this remained a disciplinary approach, albeit intellectually more expansive than conventional neo-classical economics. Structuralist development economics was, in some respects, an 'institutional' economics – at its best open to issues of class and power and of the historical formation of economic structures (for Latin America, see Kay 1989; and for India, see Byres 1998) – but in a radically different sense to today's 'new institutionalism', a branch of neo-classical economics that, more generally, has displaced development economics in the moment of neo-liberalism.

My colleague Ben Fine argues that the 'new' neo-classical development economics 'is silent over the social relations, structures, power, conflicts and meanings that have traditionally been the preoccupation of the social sciences. This is especially important for development studies' (2002: 2066). '[D]evelopment as a process as well as a field of study is reduced to market and nonmarket imperfections' (Fine 2002: 2065), with 'noneconomic or nonmarket behavior [...] now understood as the rational, i.e. individual optimizing behavior, response to market imperfections' (Fine 2002: 2059). In short, '[t]he social is the nonmarket response to market imperfections', a construction of 'the social' that marks a new frontier and phase in the intellectual 'imperialism' of neo-classical economics (Fine 2002: 2060).

Here are some tricky questions that bear on the tensions of field vs discipline. Can courses in Development Studies substitute for a rigorous training in an established social science discipline? How many development thinkers and researchers of note had their formation in Development Studies rather than a discipline? Is it not the social science disciplines that generate theoretical innovations which might then be absorbed into Development Studies (for example, ideas concerning globalisation, state failure, gender relations and patriarchy, social capital), as well as some of the most trenchant critiques of development doctrine in theory and practice? Otherwise, the objects of development research and policy are often constituted through practical rather than theoretical concepts, especially at the 'soft' end, which I will come back to.

#### 6. Moral Currency

If 'field vs discipline' is a source of tension specific (albeit not unique) to Development Studies, and one that underlies its tenuous intellectual identity, another source of tension is its claims to moral purpose. Its charter centres on objectives which all people of good will are obliged to support. However, when virtually every government and international agency constantly proclaims its humanitarian commitment to ending poverty and extreme deprivation, and to extending freedom, the moral currency of 'development talk' is easily debased and for a simple and familiar reason: those powerful institutions that 'do' development may be considered part of the problem rather than the solution, especially in the current moment of globalisation and neo-liberalism.

Neo-liberal ideology strives both to establish itself as the unchallenged common sense of the epoch and to subsume the development of poorer countries and people in a grandiose project of social engineering that amounts to establishing bourgeois civilisation on a global scale. Its prescription of comprehensive market reform requires similarly comprehensive state reform; in turn, the pursuit of 'good governance' quickly extends to, and embraces, notions of the construction and management of 'civil society' – in short, the reshaping, or transformation, of political and social (and, by implication, cultural) as well as economic institutions and practices.

By way of illustration, here are several effects of this dynamic. Neoliberal analysis replaces an earlier 'public interest' view of the state, assumed by the former commitment to development planning, with a 'private interest' view centred on the rent-seeking behaviour of politicians and bureaucrats (Mackintosh 1992). However, it exempts from any such scrutiny the aid and other foreign policies of 'Northern' governments, and the practices of international donor agencies (preeminently the World Bank), which are held to manifest a disinterested humanitarian intent (or, in slightly more sophisticated terms, enlightened self-interest). The credo of development aid remains that 'we are doing this to help you' (because you can not help yourselves).

Second, and linked, is that the substance (rather than the rhetoric) of development purpose and design becomes ever more 'depoliticised' and technified when it assumes a consensus of all those of good heart and sound mind. The declarations that economic growth will be assured, poverty overcome, 'civil society' and social capital strengthened, and sound democracies established, if only the right reforms are implemented and the right policies pursued – in short, that all is possible here and now in the best of all potential worlds – represent a regression from the earlier moment of development discourse noted above. Then, it was not unusual for a reactionary realism to be explicit about its 'non-' (or anti-) communist intent; to recommend 'modernising elites', including military ones, to oversee a necessary transitional phase of progress with (authoritarian) order; and to deploy other notions of historical sequence, in however attenuated a manner, as in Rostow's 'stages of economic growth'.

Third, I would suggest that the hegemonic reach of neo-liberalism as 'a high modernism of the right' (Therborn 2007: 76) partly explains the articulation and appeal of 'anti-' (or 'post-') development ideas. This is an example of the familiar mirror image effect of ideological confrontation: the ('high modernist') fantasy of a global bourgeois civilisation open to all is countered by the rejection of modernity *tout court* in an equally encompassing vision, similarly dialectically challenged, that pits a golden 'indigenous' past against an iniquitous global present, and hence advocates going 'back to the future'.

Finally, any moral currency based on intent requires its opposite, of course. The project of 'development', driven by the best of purposes, constructs its antagonistic others, driven by the worst. In a probably ascending register of criminality, the enemies of 'development', liberal peace and freedom comprise demagogic politicians, rent-seeking officials, and others who exemplify 'cronyism' (the corrupt), opponents of free trade and the unfettered mobility of capital (protectionists, anti-globalisation 'anarchists'), barbarous warlords ('theirs', not 'ours'), and international terrorists (of a certain religious complexion).

#### 7. Theory and Practice

Michael Burawoy (2004) has written about the tensions between theoretical and practical knowledge in relation to the profession and practice of sociology – where they take the form of the reflexive and the instrumental, the critical and the policy oriented –and suggested that these are tensions generic to social science, hence relevant to any of its disciplines. This is also the case with Development Studies, and perhaps in exaggerated fashion as they further compound the tensions of field vs discipline; a field, moreover, justified by its commitment to making a difference and its capacity to do so.

This is illustrated in entertaining fashion by two items that appeared in the same issue of *The Times Higher Education Supplement* – the 'trade paper' of the UK academy – of 24 November 2006. One was an advertisement for Research Fellows at the University of Manchester's new Brooks World Poverty Institute of which Joseph Stiglitz is Chair. The advertisement specified that 'Successful applicants will have a demonstrated capacity to conduct innovative and rigorous research that refines and extends our understanding of poverty, while also identifying *plausible and politically supportable* options for what might be done to reduce it' (my emphasis).

The other item was a review of a new book by Stiglitz (2006), that concluded 'In business jargon, he (Stiglitz) is great at talking the talk, less good at walking the walk. He is clearly a good man, and his heart is in the right place. Most of us sympathise with his objectives...so it seems churlish not to support his ideas for achieving them. But *his ideas are so so airy-fairy they cannot be taken seriously*' (my emphasis). In effect, this particular reviewer (Winston Fletcher, chairman of The Royal Institution) disqualifies Professor Stiglitz from holding a research position in the Institute that he adorns!

There are several, connected, issues at stake in this. The broadest, that extends beyond the boundaries of Development Studies, concerns the scope for positive (progressive) change within today's global capitalism, how to identify it, and the means of achieving it. This is where the demands of analysis, the design of policies and practical interventions, and the conditions of political possibility meet in various ways with various consequences. They may clash, converge or compromise, depending on the intellectual and political positions which inform them, and which in turn provide the substance of what are defined as practicable ('realistic') means to desirable ends – where Mr Fletcher disagrees so vehemently with Professor Stiglitz's proposals for 'the next steps to global justice'. This is also the terrain on which the art of the possible in development research and prescription meets the exercise of power, both material and symbolic, hence where calculations are made of what are 'politically supportable options' for reducing poverty.

This is too large a theme to explore adequately here, but I note several aspects of its overarching problem(atic), which is at the heart of Development Studies. A fundamental question is: what produces and reproduces the poverty which development aims to overcome? One approach is relational: poverty is produced by social inequality, by the divisions of class, gender, ethnicity, nation, and so on, that make up the actually existing worlds of capitalism, large and small. The relational approach goes back to the origins of social science but, as so often in Development Studies, it apparently requires a 'new' concept, or at least name, to stake a discursive claim: in this instance, that of 'adverse incorporation' (in markets) – as if the uneven history of capitalism on a world scale is not inscribed in the 'adverse incorporation' of many, perhaps most, who experienced it and continue to experience it.

Another approach is residual: poverty is an effect of the 'exclusion' of certain types of people from the benefits of (capitalist) development: small farmers, women, 'minority' groups, the 'informally' self-employed, those with insufficient human and social capital. The residual approach to poverty prevails in the official discourses and agendas of the big agencies that 'do' development, with two key policy aspects: to promote the conditions of economic growth and to 'empower' those otherwise excluded to share in its labours and rewards. These two aspects manifest the places and character of theoretical and applied knowledge in development in a rather different fashion than their parallel tensions in sociology traced by Burawoy, and one that expresses a particular pathos of Development Studies today. On one hand, the dominant paradigm is that of (neo-classical) economics (not usually known for its critical or reflexive qualities). It is regarded as both the only theoretical paradigm of any rigour and the exclusive intellectual instrument for dealing with issues of economic growth: the irreducibly 'hard' side of development policy, hence the business of politically powerful agencies and highly trained technical cadres.

On the other hand, dealing with the poor is the 'soft' side of development intervention: ameliorative, makeshift, faddish, experiential, outsourced to NGOs and 'community' organisations, with few theoretical credentials (if any) although some formation in 'people'-centred disciplines – anthropology, sociology, social psychology – may be deemed useful. In a typically provocative essay, Pablo Idahosa and Bob Shenton (2006) suggest affinities between this and the history of social work. They note the disproportionate numbers of women taking university courses in Development Studies (in Canada), the 'soft' side of which – helping the poor – assimilates it to more established and similarly gendered 'caring professions'.

The asymmetries of these hierarchical divisions of labour in development work are, in part, explicable by the logic of residual approaches, for which poverty can only be caused by obstacles to the proper functioning of markets, the (entrepreneurial?) inadequacies of some categories of market actors, or 'exclusion' from markets due to negative ('irrational'?) non-market social and cultural 'institutions'. They are also partly explicable by the fact that any (radical) redistribution is no more a 'politically supportable' option today than a central role for the state in stimulating and managing accumulation (both of which were central tenets of much structuralist development economics). Asymmetry is compounded for another reason: while anthropologists or sociologists are not called on to design macroeconomic policy, contemporary 'economics imperialism' (as above) extends its ambitions to the explanation of social phenomena once regarded as the province of other disciplines and approaches. This can create a new and perverse sense of 'interdisciplinarity' in development research when sociologists and political scientists adopt the theoretical framework of neo-classical economics, including its fundamental methodological individualism, and seek to apply its techniques, for example, in modelling 'institutions' and 'social capital'.

#### 8. Win-win Solutions

The various antinomies suggested converge in the commitment to 'winwin' policy solutions that envisage a world where poverty can be ended without threatening existing sources and forms of wealth, and similarly deprivation without threatening privilege and social inequality. Or, in somewhat different terms, the interests of classes of labour are advanced without significantly regulating, let alone threatening, those of capital. The effect is that such constrained notions of what is 'politically supportable' marginalise or displace investigation and understanding of the sources, dynamics and effects of typically savage social inequality in 'the South', and of no less savage relations of power and inequality in the circuits of the world economy. It elides consideration of the often violent social upheavals and struggles that characterise the processes *and* outcomes of the uneven development of capitalism.

In short, the drive for 'win-win solutions' is a route to intellectual restriction (and possibly self-censorship) in a world of such contradictions. Its inevitable frustration in part explains the continuous succession of new development concepts, targets, and programmes, the 'novelty' of which is more to do with political expedience than the progress of ideas of any substance, theoretical or practical. 'Win-win solutions' impose an impossible burden on those charged with delivering on them, which connects with the current proliferation of schemes and interventions on the 'soft' side of development work. Frustration can lead to another type of pathos, illustrated in the conclusion of the IFAD Rural Poverty Report 2001. There it notes what it terms the 'paradox' of 'an ambitious target for (rural) poverty alleviation with fewer resources to achieve it' (IFAD 2001: 232). The Report claims that the conditions of a win-win solution exist, namely that the knowledge of how to overcome rural poverty (through market-friendly reform) is available and recognised by governments and aid donors which, however, remain reluctant to act on it. Alas, no explanation of this 'paradox' is forthcoming.

#### 9. Critique and Its Limits

Readers may feel that these broad observations present too uniform, as well as gloomy, a picture that denies the diversity of what goes on in Development Studies. It is impossible to present a complete description and assessment of that diversity nor, I presume, was the intention of inviting me to contribute some thoughts to make Development Studies academics feel good about ourselves. Diversity of research agendas, interests and approaches is healthy in itself, but less so when 'diversity' serves as a euphemism that covers disconnection and intellectual shapelessness. In any case, the specific coordinates of diversity, in both its positive and negative (euphemistic) senses, in different Development Studies departments and institutes are produced by many proximate, sometimes idiosyncratic, factors. There are some departments in which a reflexive and critical stance on the business of development thrives; there are others (increasingly so?) where success is defined, and perhaps enforced, as the ability to secure contract research and consultancies from the agencies that 'do' development, hence to 'talk their talk' and play by their rules. Many are happy to do so, and indeed it is a vital ingredient of their professional identity.

What my observations have largely by-passed is the key political (and existential) issue of the 'room for manoeuvre', that is, of the positioning and practices, collective and individual, of those critical of the dominant ideological tendencies of development doctrine and of the powerful forces that promote them. This is a matter of the spaces available, or that can be 'captured' or created, *within* the discursive and practical fields of dominant development agencies (and not least their funding practices) to articulate alternative ideas and courses of action – in effect to push against, and try to shift, the limits of the 'politically supportable'. And those who pursue 'room for manoeuvre' may do so from a very different politics – of identification, actual or vicarious, with various currents and movements of opposition to the development 'project' (or projects) of global capitalism like, say, *Via Campesina* or the World Social Forum or a host of other less high-profile organisations and struggles.

If dominant notions of the 'politically supportable' constitute one kind of limit, the work of critique runs into another. Such critique can be found within Development Studies today as well as (more significantly) outside it. As might be expected, it embraces a wide range of currents – including various strands and combinations of nationalist, populist and deconstructionist elements – on various sites of contestation, and with different degrees of intellectual coherence and depth. In a sense, the vitality of critique is assured but this is no ground for intellectual complacency that assumes, in Manichaean fashion, its virtue and innocence by contrast with neoliberal vice and guilt. Not only is such critique so diverse (again!) and often confused, but the strength of its fervour can manifest an underlying sense of impotence in the face of an apparently rampant global capitalism.

Furthermore, to the extent that it focuses on discourse, it can divert energies from the formidable analytical and empirical demands of investigating and explaining patterns of change within the uneven development of global capitalism and how they affect different social classes and groups, as well as understanding and assessing the highly varied struggles their contradictions generate. If these demands can be pursued within the boundaries of Development Studies, then so much to the good: that is a far healthier indicator of its pluralism than an endeavour focussed solely on 'solutions' to poverty and extreme deprivation that are acceptable to the powers of this world.

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#### Abstracts

Development Studies in universities continues to flourish – and paradoxically so in a period of hegemonic neo-liberalism which seems to subvert key assumptions and commitments on which Development Studies was established as a field of academic attention, not long ago. The paper will examine this and other paradoxes in terms of the underlying tensions that generate them. On one hand, those tensions manifest different kinds of boundary issues: intellectually between Development Studies and the established disciplines (and traditions) on which it draws; practically and politically between the conventions (and conditions) of scholarly inquiry and the demands of agencies that 'do' development (governments, aid donors, various international organisations). On the other hand are issues of how tensions between instrumental and reflexive knowledge (as formulated by Michael Burawoy) are internalised within Development Studies, and with what effects.

Die Entwicklungsforschung an den Universitäten steht nach wie vor hoch im Kurs – und das in Zeiten neoliberaler Hegemonie. Dies ist umso paradoxer, als der Neoliberalismus zentrale Annahmen und Zielsetzungen zu untergraben scheint, mit denen die Entwicklungsforschung auf universitärem Terrain angetreten war. Der Aufsatz widmet sich diesem und anderen Paradoxa und beschäftigt sich dabei mit den zugrundeliegenden Widersprüchen. Einerseits äußern sich diese in Fragen der Abgrenzung: intellektuell zwischen der Entwicklungsforschung und den etablierten Disziplinen (und Traditionen), auf die sie sich stützt; praktisch und politisch zwischen den Konventionen (und Bedingungen) wissenschaftlicher Forschung und den Ansprüchen jener AkteurInnen, die Entwicklung "machen" (Regierungen, Entwicklungshilfegeber, verschiedene internationale Organisationen). Andererseits geht es darum, wie und mit welchen Folgen sich das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen instrumentellem und reflexivem Wissen (wie Michael Burawoy es nannte) innerhalb der Entwicklungsforschung manifestiert.

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