

THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF POVERTY:
THE TALE OF THREE WORLDS
AND DEVELOPMENT

The word “poverty” is, no doubt, a key word of our times, extensively used and abused by everyone. Huge amounts of money are spent in the name of the poor. Thousands of books and expert advice continue to offer solutions to their problems. Strangely enough, however, nobody, including the proposed “beneficiaries” of these activities, seems to have a clear, and commonly shared, view of poverty. For one reason, almost all the definitions given to the word are woven around the concept of “lack” or “deficiency.” This notion reflects only the basic relativity of the concept.

What is necessary and to whom? And who is qualified to define all that?”

—Majid Rahnema, *Global Poverty:
A Pauperizing Myth*, 1991

ONE OF THE many changes that occurred in the early post–World War II period was the “discovery” of mass poverty in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Relatively inconspicuous and seemingly logical, this discovery was to provide the anchor for an important restructuring of global culture and political economy. The discourse of war was displaced onto the social domain and to a new geographical terrain: the Third World. Left behind was the struggle against fascism. In the rapid globalization of U.S. domination as a world power, the “war on poverty” in the Third World began to occupy a prominent place. Eloquent facts were adduced to justify this new war: “Over 1,500,000 million people, something like two-thirds of the world population, are living in conditions of acute hunger, defined in terms of identifiable nutritional disease. This hunger is at the same time the cause and effect of poverty, squalor, and misery in which they live” (Wilson 1953, 11).

Statements of this nature were uttered profusely throughout the late 1940s and 1950s (Orr 1953; Shonfield 1950; United Nations 1951). The new emphasis was spurred by the recognition of the chronic conditions of poverty and social unrest existing in poor countries and the threat they posed for

more developed countries. The problems of the poor areas irrupted into the international arena. The United Nations estimated that per capita income in the United States was \$1,453 in 1949, whereas in Indonesia it barely reached \$25. This led to the realization that something had to be done before the levels of instability in the world as a whole became intolerable. The destinies of the rich and poor parts of the world were seen to be closely linked. "Genuine world prosperity is indivisible," stated a panel of experts in 1948. "It cannot last in one part of the world if the other parts live under conditions of poverty and ill health" (Milbank Memorial Fund 1948, 7; see also Lasswell 1945).

Poverty on a global scale was a discovery of the post-World War II period. As Sachs (1990) and Rahnema (1991) have maintained, the conceptions and treatment of poverty were quite different before 1940. In colonial times the concern with poverty was conditioned by the belief that even if the "natives" could be somewhat enlightened by the presence of the colonizer, not much could be done about their poverty because their economic development was pointless. The natives' capacity for science and technology, the basis for economic progress, was seen as nil (Adas 1989). As the same authors point out, however, within Asian, African, and Latin or Native American societies—as well as throughout most of European history—vernacular societies had developed ways of defining and treating poverty that accommodated visions of community, frugality, and sufficiency. Whatever these traditional ways might have been, and without idealizing them, it is true that massive poverty in the modern sense appeared only when the spread of the market economy broke down community ties and deprived millions of people from access to land, water, and other resources. With the consolidation of capitalism, systemic pauperization became inevitable.

Without attempting to undertake an archaeology of poverty, as Rahnema (1991) proposes, it is important to emphasize the break that occurred in the conceptions and management of poverty first with the emergence of capitalism in Europe and subsequently with the advent of development in the Third World. Rahnema describes the first break in terms of the advent in the nineteenth century of systems for dealing with the poor based on assistance provided by impersonal institutions. Philanthropy occupied an important place in this transition (Donzelot 1979). The transformation of the poor into the assisted had profound consequences. This "modernization" of poverty signified not only the rupture of vernacular relations but also the setting in place of new mechanisms of control. The poor increasingly appeared as a social problem requiring new ways of intervention in society. It was, indeed, in relation to poverty that the modern ways of thinking about the meaning of life, the economy, rights, and social management came into place. "Pauperism, political economy, and the discovery of society were closely interwoven" (Polanyi 1957a, 84).

The treatment of poverty allowed society to conquer new domains. More perhaps than on industrial and technological might, the nascent order of capitalism and modernity relied on a politics of poverty the aim of which was not only to create consumers but to transform society by turning the poor into objects of knowledge and management. What was involved in this operation was “a techno-discursive instrument that made possible the conquest of pauperism and the invention of a politics of poverty” (Procacci 1991, 157). Pauperism, Procacci explains, was associated, rightly or wrongly, with features such as mobility, vagrancy, independence, frugality, promiscuity, ignorance, and the refusal to accept social duties, to work, and to submit to the logic of the expansion of “needs.” Concomitantly, the management of poverty called for interventions in education, health, hygiene, morality, and employment and the instilling of good habits of association, savings, child rearing, and so on. The result was a panoply of interventions that accounted for the creation of a domain that several researchers have termed “the social” (Donzelot 1979, 1988, 1991; Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991).

As a domain of knowledge and intervention, the social became prominent in the nineteenth century, culminating in the twentieth century in the consolidation of the welfare state and the ensemble of techniques encompassed under the rubric of social work. Not only poverty but health, education, hygiene, employment, and the poor quality of life in towns and cities were constructed as social problems, requiring extensive knowledge about the population and appropriate modes of social planning (Escobar 1992a). The “government of the social” took on a status that, as the conceptualization of the economy, was soon taken for granted. A “separate class of the ‘poor’” (Williams 1973, 104) was created. Yet the most significant aspect of this phenomenon was the setting into place of apparatuses of knowledge and power that took it upon themselves to optimize life by producing it under modern, “scientific” conditions. The history of modernity, in this way, is not only the history of knowledge and the economy, it is also, more revealingly, the history of the social.¹

As we will see, the history of development implies the continuation in other places of this history of the social. This is the second break in the archaeology of poverty proposed by Rahnema: the globalization of poverty entailed by the construction of two-thirds of the world as poor after 1945. If within market societies the poor were defined as lacking what the rich had in terms of money and material possessions, poor countries came to be similarly defined in relation to the standards of wealth of the more economically advantaged nations. This economic conception of poverty found an ideal yardstick in the annual per capita income. The perception of poverty on a global scale “was nothing more than the result of a comparative statistical operation, the first of which was carried out only in 1940” (Sachs 1990, 9). Almost by fiat, two-thirds of the world’s peoples were transformed into poor

subjects in 1948 when the World Bank defined as poor those countries with an annual per capita income below \$100. And if the problem was one of insufficient income, the solution was clearly economic growth.

Thus poverty became an organizing concept and the object of a new problematization. As in the case of any problematization (Foucault 1986), that of poverty brought into existence new discourses and practices that shaped the reality to which they referred. That the essential trait of the Third World was its poverty and that the solution was economic growth and development became self-evident, necessary, and universal truths. This chapter analyzes the multiple processes that made possible this particular historical event. It accounts for the ‘developmentalization’ of the Third World, its progressive insertion into a regime of thought and practice in which certain interventions for the eradication of poverty became central to the world order. This chapter can also be seen as an account of the production of the tale of three worlds and the contest over the development of the third. The tale of three worlds was, and continues to be despite the demise of the second, a way of bringing about a political order “that works by the negotiation of boundaries achieved through ordering differences” (Haraway 1989a, 10). It was and is a narrative in which culture, race, gender, nation, and class are deeply and inextricably intertwined. The political and economic order coded by the tale of three worlds and development rests on a traffic of meanings that mapped new domains of being and understanding, the same domains that are increasingly being challenged and displaced by people in the Third World today.

THE INVENTION OF DEVELOPMENT

The Emergence of the New Strategy

From July 11 to November 5, 1949, an economic mission, organized by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, visited Colombia with the purpose of formulating a general development program for the country. It was the first mission of this kind sent out by the International Bank to an underdeveloped country. The mission included fourteen international advisers in the following fields: foreign exchange; transportation; industry, fuel, and power; highways and waterways; community facilities; agriculture; health and welfare; financing and banking; economics; national accounts; railroads; and petroleum refineries. Working closely with the mission was a similar group of Colombian advisers and experts.

Here is how the mission saw its task and, consequently, the character of the program proposed:

We have interpreted our terms of reference as calling for a comprehensive and internally consistent program. . . . The relationships among various sectors of

Colombian economy are very complex, and intensive analysis of these relationships has been necessary to develop a consistent picture. . . . This, then, is the reason and justification for an overall program of development. Piecemeal and sporadic efforts are apt to make little impression on the general picture. Only through a generalized attack throughout the whole economy on education, health, housing, food and productivity can the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance, ill health and low productivity be decisively broken. But once the break is made, the process of economic development can become self-generating. (International Bank 1950, xv)

The program called for a “multitude of improvements and reforms” covering all important areas of the economy. It constituted a radically new representation of, and approach to, a country’s social and economic reality. One of the features most emphasized in the approach was its comprehensive and integrated character. Its comprehensive nature demanded programs in all social and economic aspects of importance, whereas careful planning, organization, and allocation of resources ensured the integrated character of the programs and their successful implementation. The report also furnished a detailed set of prescriptions, including goals and quantifiable targets, investment needs, design criteria, methodologies, and time sequences.

It is instructive to quote at length the last paragraph of the report, because it reveals several key features of the approach that was then emerging:

One cannot escape the conclusion that reliance on natural forces has not produced the most happy results. Equally inescapable is the conclusion that with knowledge of the underlying facts and economic processes, good planning in setting objectives and allocating resources, and determination in carrying out a program for improvements and reforms, a great deal can be done to improve the economic environment by shaping economic policies to meet scientifically ascertained social requirements. . . . Colombia is presented with an opportunity unique in its long history. Its rich natural resources can be made tremendously productive through the application of modern techniques and efficient practices. Its favorable international debt and trade position enables it to obtain modern equipment and techniques from abroad. International and foreign national organizations have been established to aid underdeveloped areas technically and financially. All that is needed to usher a period of rapid and widespread development is a determined effort by the Colombian people themselves. In making such an effort, Colombia would not only accomplish its own salvation but would at the same time furnish an inspiring example to all other underdeveloped areas of the world. (International Bank 1950, 615)

The messianic feeling and the quasi-religious fervor expressed in the notion of salvation are noticeable. In this representation, “salvation” entails the conviction that there is one right way, namely, development; only through

development will Colombia become an “inspiring example” for the rest of the underdeveloped world. Nevertheless, the task of salvation/development is complex. Fortunately, adequate tools (science, technology, planning, and international organizations) have already been created for such a task, the value of which has already been proved by their successful application in the West. Moreover, these tools are neutral, desirable, and universally applicable. Before development, there was nothing: only “reliance on natural forces,” which did not produce “the most happy results.” Development brings the light, that is, the possibility to meet “scientifically ascertained social requirements.” The country must thus awaken from its lethargic past and follow the one way to salvation, which is, undoubtedly, “an opportunity unique in its long history” (of darkness, one might add).

This is the system of representation that the report upholds. Yet, although couched in terms of humanitarian goals and the preservation of freedom, the new strategy sought to provide a new hold on countries and their resources. A type of development was promoted which conformed to the ideas and expectations of the affluent West, to what the Western countries judged to be a normal course of evolution and progress. As we will see, by conceptualizing progress in such terms, this development strategy became a powerful instrument for normalizing the world. The 1949 World Bank mission to Colombia was one of the first concrete expressions of this new state of affairs.

Precursors and Antecedents of the Development Discourse

As we will see in the next section, the development discourse exemplified by the 1949 World Bank mission to Colombia emerged in the context of a complex historical conjunction. Its invention signaled a significant shift in the historical relations between Europe and the United States, on the one hand, and most countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, on the other. It also brought into existence a new regime of representation of these latter parts of the world in Euramerican culture. But “the birth” of the discourse must be briefly qualified; there were, indeed, important precursors that presaged its appearance in full regalia after World War II.

The slow preparation for the launching of development was perhaps most clear in Africa, where, a number of recent studies suggest (Cooper 1991; Page 1991), there was an important connection between the decline of the colonial order and the rise of development. In the interwar period, the ground was prepared for the institution of development as a strategy to remake the colonial world and restructure the relations between colonies and metropolises. As Cooper (1991) has pointed out, the British Development Act of the 1940s—the first great materialization of the development idea—was a response to challenges to imperial power in the 1930s and must thus be seen as an attempt to reinvigorate the empire. This was particularly clear in

the settler states in southern Africa, where preoccupations with questions of labor and food supplies led to strategies for the modernization of segments of the African population, often, as Page (1991) argues, at the expense of Afrocentric views of food and community defended by women. These early attempts were to crystallize in community development schemes in the 1950s. The role of the League of Nations in negotiating decolonization through the system of mandates was also important in many cases in Asia and Africa. After the Second World War, this system was extended to a generalized decolonization and the promotion of development by the new system of international organizations (Murphy and Augelli 1993).

Generally speaking, the period between 1920 and 1950 is still ill understood from the vantage point of the overlap of colonial and developmentalist regimes of representation. Some aspects that have received attention in the context of north and/or sub-Saharan Africa include the constitution of a labor force and a modernized class of farmers marked by class, gender, and race, including the displacement of African self-sufficient systems of food and cultural production; the role of the state as architect, for instance, in the “detrribalization” of wage labor; the escalation of gender competition, and the struggle over education; the ways in which discourses and practices of agricultural experts, health professionals, urban planners, and educators were deployed in the colonial context, their relation to metropolitan discourses and interests, and the metaphors furnished by them for the reorganization of the colonies; the modification of these discourses and practices in the context of the colonial encounter; their imbrication with local forms of knowledge, and their effect on the latter; and the manifold forms of resistance to the colonial power/knowledge apparatuses (see, for instance, Cooper and Stoler 1989; Stoler 1989; Packard 1989; Page 1991; Rabinow 1989; Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Rau 1991).

The Latin American case is quite different from the African, although the question of precursors of development must also be investigated there. As is well known, most Latin American countries achieved political independence in the early decades of the nineteenth century, even if on many levels they continued to be under the sway of European economies and cultures. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the ascendancy of the United States was felt in the entire region. United States–Latin American relations took on a double-edged significance early in the century. If on the one hand those in power perceived that opportunities for fair exchange existed, on the other hand the United States felt increasingly justified in intervening in Latin American affairs. From the interventionist big stick policy of the early part of the century to the good neighbor principle of the 1930s, these two tendencies coexisted in U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America, the latter having much more important repercussions than the former.

Robert Bacon, former U.S. secretary of state, exemplified the “fair ex-

change” position. “The day has gone,” he stated in his 1916 report of a trip to South America, “when the majority of these countries, laboriously building up a governmental structure under tremendous difficulties, were unstable, tottering and likely to fall from one month to another. . . . They ‘have passed,’ to use the words of Mr. Root, ‘out of the condition of militarism, out of the condition of revolution, into the condition of industrialism, into the path of successful commerce, and are becoming great and powerful nations’” (Bacon 1916, 20). Elihu Root, whom Bacon mentioned in a positive light, actually represented the side of active interventionism. A prominent statesman and an expert in international law, Root was a major force in shaping U.S. foreign policy and took active part in the interventionist policy of the earlier part of the century, when the U.S. military occupied most Central American countries. Root, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1912, played a very active role in the separation of Colombia from Panama. “With or without the consent of Colombia,” he wrote on that occasion, “we will dig the canal, not for selfish reasons, not for greed or gain, but for the world’s commerce, benefiting Colombia most of all. . . . We shall unite our Atlantic and Pacific coasts, we shall render inestimable service to mankind, and we shall grow in greatness and honor and in the strength that comes from difficult tasks accomplished and from the exercise of the power that strives in the nature of a great constructive people” (Root 1916, 190).

Root’s position embodied the conception of international relations then prevailing in the United States.² The readiness for military intervention in the pursuit of U.S. strategic self-interest was tempered from Wilson to Hoover. With Wilson, intervention was accompanied by the goal of promoting “republican” democracies, meaning elite, aristocratic regimes. Often these attempts were fueled by ethnocentric and racist positions. Attitudes of superiority “convinced the United States it had the right and ability to intervene politically in weaker, darker, poorer countries” (Drake 1991, 7). For Wilson, the promotion of democracy was the moral duty of the U.S. and of “good men” in Latin America. “I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men,” he summed up (quoted in Drake 1991, 13). As Latin American nationalism mounted after World War I, the United States reduced open interventionism and proclaimed instead the principles of the open door and the good neighbor, especially after the mid-twenties. Attempts were made to provide some assistance, particularly regarding financial institutions, the infrastructure, and sanitation. During this period the Rockefeller Foundation became active for the first time in the region (Brown 1976). On the whole, however, the 1912–1932 period was ruled by a desire on the part of the United States to achieve “ideological as well as military and economic hegemony and conformity, without having to pay the price of permanent conquest” (Drake 1991, 34).

Although this state of relations revealed an increasing U.S. interest in Latin America, it did not constitute an explicit, overall strategy for dealing with Latin American countries. This situation was profoundly altered during the subsequent decades and especially after the Second World War. Three inter-American conferences—held at Chapultepec in Mexico (February 21–March 8, 1945), Rio de Janeiro (August 1947), and Bogotá (March 30–April 30, 1948)—were crucial in articulating new rules of the game. As the terrain for the cold war was being fertilized, however, these conferences made evident the serious divergence of interests between Latin America and the United States, marking the demise of the good neighbor policy. For while the United States insisted on its military and security objectives, Latin American countries emphasized more than ever economic and social goals (López Maya 1993).³

At Chapultepec, several Latin American presidents made clear the importance of industrialization in the consolidation of democracy and asked the United States to help with a program of economic transition from war production of raw materials to industrial production. The United States, however, insisted on questions of hemispheric defense, reducing economic policy to a warning to Latin American countries to abandon “economic nationalism.” These disagreements grew at the Rio Conference on Peace and Security. Like the Bogotá conference of 1948—which marked the birth of the Organization of American States—the Rio conference was dominated by the growing anti-Communist crusade. As U.S. foreign policy became more militarized, the need for appropriate economic policies, including the protection of the nascent industries, became more and more central to the Latin American agenda. The United States to some extent finally acknowledged this agenda in Bogotá. Yet then secretary of state General Marshall also made clear that Latin America could in no way expect something similar to the Marshall Plan for Europe (López Maya 1993).

In contrast, the United States insisted on its open door policy of free access of resources to all countries and on the encouragement of private enterprise and the “fair” treatment of foreign capital. U.S. experts on the area completely misread the Latin American situation. A student of U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America during the late 1940s put it thus:

Latin America was closest to the United States and of far greater economic importance than any other Third World region, but senior U.S. officials increasingly dismissed it as an aberrant, benighted area inhabited by helpless, essentially childish peoples. When George Kennan [head of State Department policy planning] was sent to review what he described as the “unhappy and hopeless” background there, he penned the most acerbic dispatch of his entire career. Not even the Communists seem viable “because their Latin American character inclines them to individualism [and] to undiscipline.” . . . Pursuing the motif of

the “childish” nature of the area, he condescendingly argued that if the United States treated the Latin Americans like adults, then perhaps they would have to behave like them (Kolko 1988, 39, 40).⁴

Like Currie’s image of “salvation,” the representation of the Third World as a child in need of adult guidance was not an uncommon metaphor and lent itself perfectly to the development discourse. The infantilization of the Third World was integral to development as a “secular theory of salvation” (Nandy 1987).

It must be pointed out that the economic demands Latin American countries made were the reflection of changes that had been taking place for several decades and that also prepared the ground for development—for instance, the beginning of industrialization in some countries and the perceived need to expand domestic markets; urbanization and the rise of professional classes; the secularization of political institutions and the modernization of the state; the growth of organized labor and social movements, which disputed and shared the industrialization process; increased attention to positivist sciences; and various types of modernist movements. Some of these factors were becoming salient in the 1920s and accelerated after 1930.⁵ But it was not until the World War II years that they began to coalesce into a clearer momentum for national economic models. In Colombia, talk of industrial development and, occasionally, the economic development of the country appeared in the early to mid-1940s, linked to a perceived threat by the popular classes. State interventionism became more noticeable, even if within a general model of economic liberalism, as an increase in production began to be seen as the necessary route to social progress. This awareness was accompanied by a medicalization of the political gaze, to the extent that the popular classes began to be perceived not in racial terms, as until recently, but as diseased, underfed, uneducated, and physiologically weak masses, thus calling for unprecedented social action (Pécaut 1987, 273–352).⁶

Despite the importance of these historical processes, it is possible to speak of the invention of development in the early post-World War II period. In the climate of the great postwar transformations, and in scarcely one decade, relations between rich and poor countries underwent a drastic change. The conceptualization of these relations, the form they took, the scope they acquired, the mechanisms by which they operated, all of these were subject to a substantial mutation. Within the span of a few years, an entirely new strategy for dealing with the problems of the poorer countries emerged and took definite shape. All that was important in the cultural, social, economic, and political life of these countries—their population, the cultural character of their people, their processes of capital accumulation, their agriculture and trade, and so on—entered into this new strategy. In the

next section, we look in detail at the set of historical conditions that made the creation of development possible, and then I undertake an analysis of the discourse itself, that is, of the nexus of power, knowledge, and domination which defines it.

HISTORICAL CONDITIONS, 1945–1955

If during World War II the dominant image of what was to become the Third World was shaped by strategic considerations and access to its raw materials, the integration of these parts of the world into the economic and political structure that emerged at the end of the war grew more complicated. From the founding conference of the United Nations held in San Francisco in 1945 and throughout the late 1940s, the fate of the nonindustrialized world was the subject of intense negotiations. Moreover, the notions of underdevelopment and Third World were the discursive products of the post–World War II climate. These concepts did not exist before 1945. They emerged as working principles within the process by which the West—and, in different ways, the East—redefined itself and the rest of the world. By the early 1950s, the notion of three worlds—the free industrialized nations, the Communist industrialized nations, and the poor, nonindustrialized nations, constituting the First, Second, and Third World respectively—was firmly in place. Even after the demise of the Second, the notions of First and Third worlds (and North and South) continue to articulate a regime of geopolitical representation.⁷

For the United States, the dominant concern was the reconstruction of Europe. This entailed the defense of the colonial systems, because the continued access by European powers to the raw materials of their colonies was seen as crucial to their recovery. Struggles for national independence in Asia and Africa were on the increase; these struggles led to the leftist nationalism of the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the strategy of nonalignment. During the late 1940s, in other words, the United States supported European efforts to maintain control of the colonies, although with an eye to increasing its influence over the resources of the colonial areas, most clearly perhaps in the case of Middle East oil.⁸

As far as Latin America was concerned, the major force to contend with for the United States was growing nationalism. Since the Great Depression a number of Latin American countries had begun efforts to build their national economies in a more autonomous fashion than ever before, through state-sponsored industrialization. Middle-class participation in social and political life was on the rise, organized labor was also entering political life, and even the Communist Left had made important gains. In general terms, democracy was emerging as a fundamental component of national life in the sense of a recognized need for the wider participation of popular classes,

particularly the working class, and a growing sense of the importance of social justice and the strengthening of the domestic economies. In fact, in the period 1945–1947 many democracies seemed to be in the process of consolidation, and previously dictatorial regimes were undergoing transitions to democracy (Bethell 1991). As already mentioned, the United States completely misread this situation.

Besides the anticolonial struggles in Asia and Africa and growing nationalism in Latin America, other factors shaped the development discourse; these included the cold war, the need to find new markets, the fear of communism and overpopulation, and faith in science and technology.

Finding New Markets and Safe Battlefields

In the fall of 1939, the Inter-American Conference of Foreign Ministers, which met in Panama, proclaimed the neutrality of the American republics. The U.S. government recognized, however, that if this continental unity was to endure, it would have to apply special economic measures to help Latin American nations face the period of distress that was expected to follow the loss of peacetime markets. The first step in this direction was the establishment of the Inter-American Development Commission, set up in January 1940 to encourage Latin American production geared toward the U.S. market. Although financial assistance to Latin America was relatively modest during the war period, nevertheless it was of some significance. The two main sources of assistance, the Export-Import Bank and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, funded programs for the production and procurement of strategic materials. These activities often involved large-scale technical aid and the mobilization of capital resources to Latin America. The character of these relations also served to focus attention on the need to help the Latin American economies in a more systematic manner.⁹

The year 1945 marked a profound transformation in world affairs. It brought the United States to an undisputable position of economic and military preeminence, placing under its tutelage the whole Western system. This privileged position did not go unchallenged. There was the rising influence of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the successful march of Chinese Communists to power. Old colonies in Asia and Africa were claiming independence. The old colonial systems of exploitation and control were no longer tenable. In sum, a reorganization of the structure of world power was taking place.

The period 1945–1955, then, saw the consolidation of U.S. hegemony in the world capitalist system. The need to expand and deepen the market for U.S. products abroad, as well as the need to find new sites for the investment of U.S. surplus capital, became pressing during these years. The expansion

of the U.S. economy also required access to cheap raw materials to support the growing capacity of its industries, especially of the nascent multinational corporations. One economic factor that became more noticeable during the period was the change in the relation of industrial production to the production of foods and raw materials, to the detriment of the latter, which pointed toward the need for an effective program to foster primary production in underdeveloped areas. Yet the fundamental preoccupation of the period was the revitalization of the European economy. A massive program of economic aid to Western Europe was established, which culminated in the formulation of the Marshall Plan in 1948.¹⁰

The Marshall Plan can be seen as “an exceptional event of historical importance” (Bataille 1991, 173). As Georges Bataille, following French economist François Perroux’s 1948 analysis of the plan argued, with the Marshall Plan, and for the first time in the history of capitalism, the general interest of society seemed to have taken primacy over the interest of particular investors or nations. It was, Bataille writes borrowing Perroux’s expression, “an investment in the [Western?] world’s interest” (177). The mobilization of capital that accompanied the plan (\$19 billion in U.S. foreign assistance to Western Europe in the period 1945–1950) was exempt from the law of profit, in what constituted, according to Bataille, a clear reversal of the principles of classical economics. It was “the only way to transfer to Europe the products without which the world’s fever would rise” (175). For a short time at least, the United States gave up “the rule on which the capitalist world was based. It was necessary to deliver the goods without payment. It was necessary to *give away* the product of labor” (175).¹¹

The Third World was not deserving of the same treatment. Compared with the \$19 billion received by Europe, less than 2 percent of total U.S. aid, for instance, went to Latin America during the same period (Bethell 1991, 58); only \$150 million for the Third World as a whole were spent in 1953 under the Point Four Program (Kolko 1988, 42). The Third World was instructed to look at private capital, both domestic and foreign, which meant that the “right climate” had to be created, including a commitment to capitalist development; the curbing of nationalism; and the control of the Left, the working class, and the peasantry. The creation of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (most commonly known as the World Bank) and the International Monetary Fund did not represent a departure from this law. To this extent, “the inadequacy of the International Bank and the Monetary Fund presented a negative version of the Marshall Plan’s positive initiative” (Bataille 1991, 177). Development, in this way, fell short from the outset. The fate of the Third World was seen as part of the “general interest” of humankind only in a very a limited manner.¹²

The cold war was undoubtedly one of the single most important factors at

play in the conformation of the strategy of development. The historical roots of development and those of East-West politics lie in one and the same process: the political rearrangements that occurred after World War II. In the late 1940s, the real struggle between East and West had already moved to the Third World, and development became the grand strategy for advancing such rivalry and, at the same time, the designs of industrial civilization. The confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union thus lent legitimacy to the enterprise of modernization and development; to extend the sphere of political and cultural influence became an end in itself.

The relationship between military concerns and the origins of development has scarcely been studied. Pacts of military assistance, for example, were signed at the Rio conference of 1947 between the United States and all Latin American countries (Varas 1985). In time, they would give way to doctrines of national security intimately linked to development strategies. It is no coincidence that the vast majority of the approximately 150 wars of the last four decades were fought in the Third World, many of them with the direct or indirect participation of powers external to the Third World (Soedjatmoko 1985). The Third World, far from being peripheral, was central to superpower rivalry and the possibility of nuclear confrontation. The system that generates conflict and instability and the system that generates underdevelopment are inextricably bound. Although the end of the cold war and the rise of the New World Order have changed the configuration of power, the Third World is still the most important arena of confrontation (as the Gulf War, the bombing of Libya, and the invasions of Grenada and Panama indicate). Although increasingly differentiated, the South is still, perhaps more clearly than ever, the opposite camp to a growingly unified North, despite the latter's localized ethnic wars.

Anti-Fascist sentiment easily gave way to anti-Communist crusades after the war. The fear of communism became one of the most compelling arguments for development. It was commonly accepted in the early 1950s that if poor countries were not rescued from their poverty, they would succumb to communism. To a greater or lesser extent, most early writings on development reflect this preoccupation. The espousal of economic development as a means of combating communism was not confined to military or academic circles. It found an even more welcoming niche in the offices of the U.S. government, in numerous smaller organizations, and among the American public. The control of communism, the ambivalent acceptance of the independence of former European colonies as a concession to preventing their falling into the Soviet camp, and the continued access to crucial Third World raw materials, on which the U.S. economy was growing increasingly dependent, were part of the United States's reassessment of the Third World in the period that ended with the Korean War.

Poor and Ignorant Masses

The war on poverty was justified on additional grounds, particularly the urgency believed to characterize the “population problem.” Statements and positions regarding population began to proliferate. In many instances, a crude form of empiricism was followed, making Malthusian views and prescriptions inevitable, although economists and demographers made serious attempts to conceptualize the effect of demographic factors on development.¹³ Models and theories were formulated seeking to relate the various variables and to provide a basis for policy and program formulation. As the experience of the West suggested, it was hoped that growth rates would begin to fall as the countries developed; but, as many warned, countries could not wait for this process to occur and should speed up the reduction of fertility by more direct means.¹⁴

To be sure, this preoccupation with population had existed for several decades, especially in relation to Asia.¹⁵ It was a central topic in discussions on race and racism. But the scale and form that the discussion took were new. As one author stated, “It is probable that in the last five years more copies have been published of discussions related to population than in all the previous centuries” (Pendell 1951, 377). The discussions held in academic circles or in the ambit of the nascent international organizations also had a new tone; they focused on topics such as the relationship between economic growth and population growth; between population, resources, and output; between cultural factors and birth control. They also took on topics such as the demographic experience of the rich countries and its possible extrapolation to the poor ones; the factors affecting human fertility and mortality; population trends and projections for the future; the conditions necessary for successful population control programs; and so on. In other words, in much the same way that was happening with race and racism during the same period¹⁶—and in spite of the persistence of blatant racist views—the discourses on population were being redeployed within the “scientific” realm provided by demography, public health, and population biology. A new view of population, and of scientific and technological instruments to manage it, was taking shape.¹⁷

The Promise of Science and Technology

The faith in science and technology, invigorated by the new sciences arising from the war effort, such as nuclear physics and operations research, played an important role in the elaboration and justification of the new discourse of development. In 1948, a well-known UN official expressed this faith in the following way: “I still think that human progress depends on the develop-

ment and application of the greatest possible extent of scientific research. . . . The development of a country depends primarily on a material factor: first, the knowledge, and then the exploitation of all its natural resources” (Laugier 1948, 256).

Science and technology had been the markers of civilization par excellence since the nineteenth century, when machines became the index of civilization, “the measure of men” (Adas 1989). This modern trait was rekindled with the advent of the development age. By 1949, the Marshall Plan was showing great success in the restoration of the European economy, and increasingly attention was shifted to the longer-range problems of assistance for economic development in underdeveloped areas. Out of this shift of attention came the famous Point Four Program of President Truman, with which I opened this book. The Point Four Program involved the application to the poor areas of the world what were considered to be two vital forces: modern technology and capital. However, it relied much more heavily on technical assistance than on capital, in the belief that the former would provide progress at a lower price. An Act for International Development was approved by Congress in May 1950, which provided authority to finance and carry out a variety of international technical cooperation activities. In October of the same year, the Technical Cooperation Administration (TCA) was established within the Department of State with the task of implementing the new policies. By 1952, these agencies were conducting operations in nearly every country in Latin America, as well as in several countries in Asia and Africa (Brown and Opie 1953).

Technology, it was believed, would not only amplify material progress, it would also confer upon it a sense of direction and significance. In the vast literature on the sociology of modernization, technology was theorized as a sort of moral force that would operate by creating an ethics of innovation, yield, and result. Technology thus contributed to the planetary extension of modernist ideals. The concept of the transfer of technology in time would become an important component of development projects. It was never realized that such a transfer would depend not merely on technical elements but on social and cultural factors as well. Technology was seen as neutral and inevitably beneficial, not as an instrument for the creation of cultural and social orders (Morandé 1984; García de la Huerta 1992).

The new awareness of the importance of the Third World in global economy and politics, coupled with the beginning of field activities in the Third World, brought with it a recognition of the need to obtain more accurate knowledge about the Third World. Nowhere was this need perceived more acutely than in the case of Latin America. As a prominent Latin Americanist put it, “The war years witnessed a remarkable growth of interest in Latin America. What once had been an area which only diplomats and pioneering scholars ventured to explore, became almost overnight the center of attrac-

tion to government officials, as well as to scholars and teachers” (Burgin [1947] 1967, 466). This called for “detailed knowledge of the economic potential of Latin America as well as of the geographic, social and political environment in which that potential was to be realized” (466). Only in “history, literature and ethnology” was the status of knowledge considered adequate. What was needed now was the kind of precise knowledge that could be obtained through the application of the new “scientific” social sciences that were experiencing remarkable growth on U.S. campuses (such as Parsonian sociology, Keynesian macroeconomics, systems analysis and operations research, demography, and statistics). In 1949, an illustrious Peruvian scholar described the “mission of Latin American Studies” as, “through study and research, [to] provide a background which will assist in interpreting and evaluating objectively the problems and events of the day from the perspective of history, geography, economics, sociology, anthropology, social psychology and political science” (Basadre [1949] 1967, 434).

Basadre’s was a progressive call for social change as well, even if it became captive to the development mode. The earlier model for the generation of knowledge, organized around the classical professions according to nineteenth-century usage, was replaced by the North American model. Sociology and economics were the disciplines most affected by this change, which involved most natural and social sciences. Development had to rely on the production of knowledge that could provide a scientific picture of a country’s social and economic problems and resources. This entailed the establishment of institutions capable of generating such a knowledge. The “tree of research” of the North was transplanted to the South, and Latin America thus became part of a transnational system of research. As some maintain, although this transformation created new knowledge capabilities, it also implied a further loss of autonomy and the blocking of different modes of knowing (Fuenzalida 1983; Morandé 1984; Escobar 1989).

Gone were the days, so most scholars thought in the wake of empirical social science, when science was contaminated by prejudice and error. The new objectivity ensured accuracy and fairness of representation. Little by little, older ways of thinking would yield to the new spirit. Economists were quick to join this wave of enthusiasm. Latin America was suddenly discovered to be “a *tabula rasa* to the economic historian” (Burgin [1947] 1967, 474), and economic thinking in Latin America was found to be devoid of any connection with local conditions, a mere appendage of European classical economics. The new scholars realized that “the starting point of research must be the area itself, for it is only in terms of its historical development and objectives that the organization and functioning of the economy can be fully understood” (469). The terrain was prepared for the emergence of economic development as a legitimate theoretical endeavor.

The better and more widespread understanding of the workings of the

economic system strengthened the hope of bringing material prosperity to the rest of the world. The unquestioned desirability of economic growth was, in this way, closely linked to the revitalized faith in science and technology. Economic growth presupposed the existence of a continuum stretching from poor to rich countries, which would allow for the replication in the poor countries of those conditions characteristic of mature capitalist ones (including industrialization, urbanization, agricultural modernization, infrastructure, increased provision of social services, and high levels of literacy). Development was seen as the process of transition from one situation to the other. This notion conferred upon the processes of accumulation and development a progressive, orderly, and stable character that would culminate, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in modernization and “stages of economic growth” theories (Rostow 1960).¹⁸

Finally, there was another factor that influenced the formation of the new strategy of development: the increased experience with public intervention in the economy. Although the desirability of this intervention, as opposed to a more *laissez-faire* approach, was still a matter of controversy,¹⁹ the recognition of the need for some sort of planning or government action was becoming generalized. The experience of social planning during the New Deal, legitimized by Keynesianism, as well as the “planned communities” envisaged and partly implemented in Native American communities and Japanese American internment camps in the United States (James 1984), represented significant approaches to social intervention in this regard; so were the statutory corporations and public utility companies established in industrialized countries by government enterprise—for instance, the British Broadcasting Commission (BBC) and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Following the TVA model, a number of regional development corporations were set up in Latin America and other parts of the Third World.²⁰ Models for national, regional, and sectoral planning became essential for the spread and functioning of development.

These, very broadly stated, were the most important conditions that made possible and shaped the new discourse of development. There was a reorganization of power at the world level, the final result of which was still far from clear; important changes had occurred in the structure of production, which had to be brought to fit the requirements of expansion of a capitalist system in which the underdeveloped countries played an increasingly important role, if yet not thoroughly defined. These countries could forge alliances with any pole of power. In the light of expanding communism, the steady deterioration of living conditions, and the alarming increase in their populations, the direction in which they would decide to go would largely depend on a type of action of an urgent nature and unprecedented level.

Rich countries, however, were believed to have the financial and technological capacity to secure progress the world over. A look at their own past instilled in them the firm conviction that this was not only possible—let alone desirable—but perhaps even inevitable. Sooner or later the poor countries would become rich, and the underdeveloped world would be developed. A new type of economic knowledge and an enriched experience with the design and management of social systems made this goal look even more plausible. Now it was a matter of an appropriate strategy to do it, of setting in motion the right forces to ensure progress and world happiness.

Behind the humanitarian concern and the positive outlook of the new strategy, new forms of power and control, more subtle and refined, were put in operation. Poor people's ability to define and take care of their own lives was eroded in a deeper manner than perhaps ever before. The poor became the target of more sophisticated practices, of a variety of programs that seemed inescapable. From the new institutions of power in the United States and Europe; from the offices of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the United Nations; from North American and European campuses, research centers, and foundations; and from the new planning offices in the big capitals of the underdeveloped world, this was the type of development that was actively promoted and that in a few years was to extend its reach to all aspects of society. Let us now see how this set of historical factors resulted in the new discourse of development.

THE DISCOURSE OF DEVELOPMENT

The Space of Development

What does it mean to say that development started to function as a discourse, that is, that it created a space in which only certain things could be said and even imagined? If discourse is the process through which social reality comes into being—if it is the articulation of knowledge and power, of the visible and the expressible—how can the development discourse be individualized and related to ongoing technical, political, and economic events? How did development become a space for the systematic creation of concepts, theories, and practices?

An entry point for this inquiry on the nature of development as discourse is its basic premises as they were formulated in the 1940s and 1950s. The organizing premise was the belief in the role of modernization as the only force capable of destroying archaic superstitions and relations, at whatever social, cultural, and political cost. Industrialization and urbanization were seen as the inevitable and necessarily progressive routes to modernization. Only through material advancement could social, cultural, and political

progress be achieved. This view determined the belief that capital investment was the most important ingredient in economic growth and development. The advance of poor countries was thus seen from the outset as depending on ample supplies of capital to provide for infrastructure, industrialization, and the overall modernization of society. Where was this capital to come from? One possible answer was domestic savings. But these countries were seen as trapped in a “vicious circle” of poverty and lack of capital, so that a good part of the “badly needed” capital would have to come from abroad (see chapter 3). Moreover, it was absolutely necessary that governments and international organizations take an active role in promoting and orchestrating the necessary efforts to overcome general backwardness and economic underdevelopment.

What, then, were the most important elements that went into the formulation of development theory, as gleaned from the earlier description? There was the process of capital formation, and the various factors associated with it: technology, population and resources, monetary and fiscal policies, industrialization and agricultural development, commerce and trade. There were also a series of factors linked to cultural considerations, such as education and the need to foster modern cultural values. Finally, there was the need to create adequate institutions for carrying out the complex task ahead: international organizations (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, created in 1944, and most of the United Nations technical agencies, also a product of the mid- 1940s); national planning agencies (which proliferated in Latin America, especially after the inauguration of the Alliance for Progress in the early 1960s); and technical agencies of various kinds.

Development was not merely the result of the combination, study, or gradual elaboration of these elements (some of these topics had existed for some time); nor the product of the introduction of new ideas (some of which were already appearing or perhaps were bound to appear); nor the effect of the new international organizations or financial institutions (which had some predecessors, such as the League of Nations). It was rather the result of the establishment of a set of relations among these elements, institutions, and practices and of the systematization of these relations to form a whole. The development discourse was constituted not by the array of possible objects under its domain but by the way in which, thanks to this set of relations, it was able to form systematically the objects of which it spoke, to group them and arrange them in certain ways, and to give them a unity of their own.²¹

To understand development as a discourse, one must look not at the elements themselves but at the system of relations established among them. It is this system that allows the systematic creation of objects, concepts, and strategies; it determines what can be thought and said. These relations—established between institutions, socioeconomic processes, forms of knowl-

edge, technological factors, and so on—define the conditions under which objects, concepts, theories, and strategies can be incorporated into the discourse. In sum, the system of relations establishes a discursive practice that sets the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it sets the rules that must be followed for this or that problem, theory, or object to emerge and be named, analyzed, and eventually transformed into a policy or a plan.

The objects with which development began to deal after 1945 were numerous and varied. Some of them stood out clearly (poverty, insufficient technology and capital, rapid population growth, inadequate public services, archaic agricultural practices, and so on), whereas others were introduced with more caution or even in surreptitious ways (such as cultural attitudes and values and the existence of racial, religious, geographic, or ethnic factors believed to be associated with backwardness). These elements emerged from a multiplicity of points: the newly formed international organizations, government offices in distant capitals, old and new institutions, universities and research centers in developed countries, and, increasingly with the passing of time, institutions in the Third World. Everything was subjected to the eye of the new experts: the poor dwellings of the rural masses, the vast agricultural fields, cities, households, factories, hospitals, schools, public offices, towns and regions, and, in the last instance, the world as a whole. The vast surface over which the discourse moved at ease practically covered the entire cultural, economic, and political geography of the Third World.

However, not all the actors distributed throughout this surface could identify objects to be studied and have their problems considered. Some clear principles of authority were in operation. They concerned the role of experts, from whom certain criteria of knowledge and competence were asked; institutions such as the United Nations, which had the moral, professional, and legal authority to name subjects and define strategies; and the international lending organizations, which carried the symbols of capital and power. These principles of authority also concerned the governments of poor countries, which commanded the legal political authority over the lives of their subjects, and the position of leadership of the rich countries, who had the power, knowledge, and experience to decide on what was to be done.

Economists, demographers, educators, and experts in agriculture, public health, and nutrition elaborated their theories, made their assessments and observations, and designed their programs from these institutional sites. Problems were continually identified, and client categories brought into existence. Development proceeded by creating “abnormalities” (such as the “illiterate,” the “underdeveloped,” the “malnourished,” “small farmers,” or “landless peasants”), which it would later treat and reform. Approaches that could have had positive effects in terms of easing material constraints be-

came, linked to this type of rationality, instruments of power and control. As time went by, new problems were progressively and selectively incorporated; once a problem was incorporated into the discourse, it had to be categorized and further specified. Some problems were specified at a given level (such as local or regional), or at various of these levels (for instance, a nutritional deficiency identified at the level of the household could be further specified as a regional production shortage or as affecting a given population group), or in relation to a particular institution. But these refined specifications did not seek so much to illuminate possible solutions as to give “problems” a visible reality amenable to particular treatments.

This seemingly endless specification of problems required detailed observations in villages, regions, and countries in the Third World. Complete dossiers of countries were elaborated, and techniques of information were designed and constantly refined. This feature of the discourse allowed for the mapping of the economic and social life of countries, constituting a true political anatomy of the Third World.²² The end result was the creation of a space of thought and action the expansion of which was dictated in advance by the very same rules introduced during its formative stages. The development discourse defined a perceptual field structured by grids of observation, modes of inquiry and registration of problems, and forms of intervention; in short, it brought into existence a space defined not so much by the ensemble of objects with which it dealt but by a set of relations and a discursive practice that systematically produced interrelated objects, concepts, theories, strategies, and the like.

To be sure, new objects have been included, new modes of operation introduced, and a number of variables modified (for instance, in relation to strategies to combat hunger, knowledge about nutritional requirements, the types of crops given priority, and the choices of technology have changed); yet the same set of relations among these elements continues to be established by the discursive practices of the institutions involved. Moreover, seemingly opposed options can easily coexist within the same discursive field (for instance, in development economics, the structuralist school and the monetarist school seem to be in open contradiction; yet they belong to the same discursive formation and originate in the same set of relations, as will be shown in the next chapter; it can also be shown that agrarian reform, green revolution, and integrated rural development are strategies through which the same unity, “hunger,” is constructed, as I will do in chapter 4). In other words, although the discourse has gone through a series of structural changes, the architecture of the discursive formation laid down in the period 1945–1955 has remained unchanged, allowing the discourse to adapt to new conditions. The result has been the succession of development strategies and substrategies up to the present, always within the confines of the same discursive space.

It is also clear that other historical discourses influenced particular representations of development. The discourse of communism, for instance, influenced the promotion of those choices which emphasized the role of the individual in society and, in particular, those approaches which relied on private initiative and private property. So much emphasis on this issue in the context of development, so strong a moralizing attitude probably would not have existed without the persistent anti-Communist preaching that originated in the cold war. Similarly, the fact that economic development relied so much on the need for foreign exchange influenced the promotion of cash crops for export, to the detriment of food crops for domestic consumption. Yet the ways in which the discourse organized these elements cannot be reduced to causal relations, as I will show in later chapters.

In a similar vein, patriarchy and ethnocentrism influenced the form development took. Indigenous populations had to be “modernized,” where modernization meant the adoption of the “right” values, namely, those held by the white minority or a mestizo majority and, in general, those embodied in the ideal of the cultivated European; programs for industrialization and agricultural development, however, not only have made women invisible in their role as producers but also have tended to perpetuate their subordination (see chapter 5). Forms of power in terms of class, gender, race, and nationality thus found their way into development theory and practice. The former do not determine the latter in a direct causal relation; rather they are the development discourse’s formative elements.

The examination of any given object should be done within the context of the discourse as a whole. The emphasis on capital accumulation, for instance, emerged as part of a complex set of relations in which technology, new financial institutions, systems of classification (GNP per capita), decision-making systems (such as new mechanisms for national accounting and the allocation of public resources), modes of knowledge, and international factors all played a role. What made development economists privileged figures was their position in this complex system. Options privileged or excluded must also be seen in light of the dynamics of the entire discourse—why, for instance, the discourse privileged the promotion of cash crops (to secure foreign exchange, according to capital and technological imperatives) and not food crops; centralized planning (to satisfy economic and knowledge requirements) but not participatory and decentralized approaches; agricultural development based on large mechanized farms and the use of chemical inputs but not alternative agricultural systems, based on smaller farms, ecological considerations, and integrated cropping and pest management; rapid economic growth but not the articulation of internal markets to satisfy the needs of the majority of the people; and capital-intensive but not labor-intensive solutions. With the deepening of the crisis, some of the previously excluded choices are being considered, although most often within a devel-

opmentalist perspective, as in the case of the sustainable development strategy, to be discussed in later chapters.

Finally, what is included as legitimate development issues may depend on specific relations established in the midst of the discourse; relations, for instance, between what experts say and what international politics allows as feasible (this may determine, for instance, what an international organization may prescribe out of the recommendation of a group of experts); between one power segment and another (say, industry versus agriculture); or between two or more forms of authority (for instance, the balance between nutritionists and public health specialists, on the one hand, and the medical profession, on the other, which may determine the adoption of particular approaches to rural health care). Other types of relations to be considered are those between sites from which objects appear (for instance, between rural and urban areas); between procedures of assessment of needs (such as the use of “empirical data” by World Bank missions) and the position of authority of those carrying the assessment (this may determine the proposals made and the possibility of their implementation).

Relations of this type regulate development practice. Although this practice is not static, it continues to reproduce the same relations between the elements with which it deals. It was this systematization of relations that conferred upon development its great dynamic quality: its immanent adaptability to changing conditions, which allowed it to survive, indeed to thrive, up to the present. By 1955 a discourse had emerged which was characterized not by a unified object but by the formation of a vast number of objects and strategies; not by new knowledge but by the systematic inclusion of new objects under its domain. The most important exclusion, however, was and continues to be what development was supposed to be all about: people. Development was—and continues to be for the most part—a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of “progress.” Development was conceived not as a cultural process (culture was a residual variable, to disappear with the advance of modernization) but instead as a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some “badly needed” goods to a “target” population. It comes as no surprise that development became a force so destructive to Third World cultures, ironically in the name of people’s interests.

The Professionalization and Institutionalization of Development

Development was a response to the problematization of poverty that took place in the years following World War II and not a natural process of knowledge that gradually uncovered problems and dealt with them; as such,

it must be seen as a historical construct that provides a space in which poor countries are known, specified, and intervened upon. To speak of development as a historical construct requires an analysis of the mechanisms through which it becomes an active, real force. These mechanisms are structured by forms of knowledge and power and can be studied in terms of processes of institutionalization and professionalization.

The concept of professionalization refers mainly to the process that brings the Third World into the politics of expert knowledge and Western science in general. This is accomplished through a set of techniques, strategies, and disciplinary practices that organize the generation, validation, and diffusion of development knowledge, including the academic disciplines, methods of research and teaching, criteria of expertise, and manifold professional practices; in other words, those mechanisms through which a politics of truth is created and maintained, through which certain forms of knowledge are given the status of truth. This professionalization was effected through the proliferation of development sciences and subdisciplines. It made possible the progressive incorporation of problems into the space of development, bringing problems to light in ways congruent with the established system of knowledge and power.

The professionalization of development also made it possible to remove all problems from the political and cultural realms and to recast them in terms of the apparently more neutral realm of science. It resulted in the establishment of development studies programs in most major universities in the developed world and conditioned the creation or restructuring of Third World universities to suit the needs of development. The empirical social sciences, on the rise since the late 1940s, especially in the United States and England, were instrumental in this regard. So were the area studies programs, which became fashionable after the war in academic and policy-making circles. As already mentioned, the increasingly professionalized character of development caused a radical reorganization of knowledge institutions in Latin America and other parts of the Third World. Professionalized development required the production of knowledge that could allow experts and planners "scientifically [to] ascertain social requirements," to recall Currie's words (Fuenzalida 1983, 1987).²³

An unprecedented will to know everything about the Third World flourished unhindered, growing like a virus. Like the landing of the Allies in Normandy, the Third World witnessed a massive landing of experts, each in charge of investigating, measuring, and theorizing about this or that little aspect of Third World societies.²⁴ The policies and programs that originated from this vast field of knowledge inevitably carried with them strong normalizing components. At stake was a politics of knowledge that allowed experts to classify problems and formulate policies, to pass judgment on entire

social groups and forecast their future—to produce, in short, a regime of truth and norms about them. The consequences for these groups and countries cannot be emphasized enough.

Another important consequence of the professionalization of development was the inevitable translation of Third World people and their interests into research data within Western capitalist paradigms. There is a further paradox in this situation. As an African scholar put it, “Our own history, culture and practices, good or bad, are discovered and translated in the journals of the North and come back to us re-conceptualized, couched in languages and paradigms which make it all sound new and novel” (Namuddu 1989, 28; quoted in Mueller 1991, 5). The magnitude and consequences of this apparently neutral but profoundly ideological operation is fully explored in subsequent chapters.

The invention of development necessarily involved the creation of an institutional field from which discourses are produced, recorded, stabilized, modified, and put into circulation. This field is intimately imbricated with processes of professionalization; together they constitute an apparatus that organizes the production of forms of knowledge and the deployment of forms of power, relating one to the other. The institutionalization of development took place at all levels, from the international organizations and national planning agencies in the Third World to local development agencies, community development committees, private voluntary agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Starting in the mid-1940s with the creation of the great international organizations, this process has not ceased to spread, resulting in the consolidation of an effective network of power. It is through the action of this network that people and communities are bound to specific cycles of cultural and economic production and through which certain behaviors and rationalities are promoted. This field of intervention relies on myriad local centers of power, in turn supported by forms of knowledge that circulate at the local level.

The knowledge produced about the Third World is utilized and circulated by these institutions through applied programs, conferences, international consultant services, local extension practices, and so on. A corollary of this process is the establishment of an ever-expanding development business; as John Kenneth Galbraith wrote, referring to the climate in U.S. universities in the early 1950s, “No economic subject more quickly captured the attention of so many as the rescue of the people of the poor countries from their poverty” (1979, 29). Poverty, illiteracy, and even hunger became the basis of a lucrative industry for planners, experts, and civil servants (Rahnema 1986). This is not to deny that the work of these institutions might have benefited people at times. It is to emphasize that the work of development institutions has not been an innocent effort on behalf of the poor. Rather, development

has been successful to the extent that it has been able to integrate, manage, and control countries and populations in increasingly detailed and encompassing ways. If it has failed to solve the basic problems of underdevelopment, it can be said—perhaps with greater pertinence—that it has succeeded well in creating a type of underdevelopment that has been, for the most part, politically and technically manageable. The discord between institutionalized development and the situation of popular groups in the Third World has only grown with each development decade, as popular groups themselves are becoming apt at demonstrating.

THE INVENTION OF “THE VILLAGE”:
DEVELOPMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

James Ferguson (1990) has shown that the construction in development literature of Third World societies as less developed countries—similar to the World Bank mission’s construction of Colombia as underdeveloped in 1949—is an essential feature of the development apparatus. In the case of Lesotho, for instance, this construction relied on three main features: portraying the country as an aboriginal economy, cut off from world markets; picturing its population as peasant and its agricultural production as traditional; and assuming that the country is a national economy and that it is the task of the national government to develop the country. Tropes such as “less developed country” repeat themselves in an endless number of situations and with many variations. Mitchell’s (1991) analysis of the portrayal of Egypt in terms of the trope “the overcrowded Nile River valley” is another case in point. As he points out, development reports on Egypt invariably start with a description of 98 percent of the population crammed onto 4 percent of the land along the Nile River. The result of this description is an understanding of “the problem” in terms of natural limits, topography, physical space, and social reproduction, calling for solutions such as improved management, new technologies, and population control.

Mitchell’s deconstruction of this simple but powerful trope starts by recognizing that “objects of analysis do not occur as natural phenomena, but are partly constructed by the discourse that describes them. The more natural the object appears, the less obvious this discursive construction is. . . . The naturalness of the topographic image sets up the object of development as just that—an object, out there, not a part of the study but external to it” (1991, 19). Moreover, a more subtle ideological operation is at play:

Development discourse wishes to present itself as a detached center of rationality and intelligence. The relationship between West and non-West will be constructed in these terms. The West possesses the expertise, technology and management skills that the non-West is lacking. This lack is what has caused the

problems of the non-West. Questions of power and inequality . . . will nowhere be discussed. To remain silent on such questions, in which its own existence is involved, development discourse needs an object that appears to stand outside itself. What more natural object could there be, for such a purpose, than the image of a narrow river valley, hemmed in by the desert, crowded with rapidly multiplying millions of inhabitants? (1991, 33)

The tropes of the discourse repeat themselves at all levels, even if few studies exist to date of the effect and modes of operation of development discourses at the local level. There are already indications, however, of how development images and languages circulate at the local level, for instance, in Malaysian villages where educated villagers and party officials have become adept at using the language of development promoted by the national and regional governments (Ong 1987). A rich texture of resistance to the practices and symbols of development technologies, such as the green revolution, has also been highlighted (Taussig 1980; Fals Borda 1984; Scott 1985). Yet local-level ethnographic studies that focus on development discourses and practices—how they are introduced in community settings, their modes of operation, the ways in which they are transformed or utilized, their effects on community identity formation and structures, and so on—are just beginning to be conducted.

Stacy Leigh Pigg's excellent study of the introduction of images of development in communities in Nepal is perhaps the first study of this kind. Pigg (1992) centers her analysis on the construction of another trope, "the village," as an effect of the introduction of the development discourse. Her interest is to show how ideologies of modernization and development become effective in local culture, even if, as she warns, the process cannot be reduced to simple assimilation or appropriation of Western models. On the contrary, a complex Nepalization of development concepts occurs, peculiar to Nepal's history and culture. The Nepalized concept of development (*bikas*) becomes an important social organizing force through a variety of means, including its participation in scales of social progress structured according to place of residence (rural versus urban), mode of livelihood (from nomadic herding to office work), religion (Buddhist to more orthodox Hindu), and race (Central Asian to Aryan). In these scales, *bikas* pertains more to one pole than to the other, as villagers incorporate the ideology of modernization into local social identity to become *bikasi*.

Bikas thus transforms what it means to be a villager. This effect is a result of how the village is constructed by the *bikas* discourse. As in the case of the trope of the "less developed country," a generic village is produced by the discourse:

It follows that the generic village should be inhabited by generic villagers. . . . People in development planning "know" that villagers have certain habits, goals, motivations and beliefs. . . . The "ignorance" of villagers is not an absence

of knowledge. Quite the contrary. It is the presence of too much locally-instilled belief. . . . The problem, people working in development will tell each other and a foreign visitor, is that villagers “don’t understand things.” To speak of “people who don’t understand” is a way of identifying people as “villagers.” As long as development aims to transform people’s thinking, the villager must be someone who doesn’t understand. (Pigg 1992, 17, 20)

More often than not, Nepalese development workers understand the discord between the attitudes and habits they are supposed to promote and those that exist in the villages; they are aware of the diversity of local situations in opposition to the homogenized village. Yet because what they know about real villages cannot be translated upward into the language of development, they fall back into the construct of “villagers” who “don’t understand things.” Pigg, however, states that social categories of development are not simply imposed; they circulate at the village level in complex ways, changing the way villagers orient themselves in local and national society. Places are arranged according to how much *bikas* they have achieved (water pipes, electricity, new breeds of goats, health posts, roads, videos, bus stops); and although people know that *bikas* comes from the outside, they endorse *bikas* thinking as a way to become *bikasi*. People thus move between two systems for framing local identity: one marked by local distinctions in terms of age, caste/ethnicity, gender, patronage, and the like; and the other the national society, with its centers, peripheries, and degrees of development.

As the *bikas* apparatus becomes more important in terms of providing jobs and other means of social wealth and power, more and more people want a piece of the *bikas* pie. Indeed, it is not so much to be a beneficiary of development programs that people want—they know they do not get much out of these programs—but to become a salaried worker in the implementation of *bikas*. Pigg, in sum, shows how the culture of development works within and through local cultures. The development encounter, she adds, should be seen not so much as the clash of two cultural systems but as an intersection that creates situations in which people come to see each other in certain ways. In the process, social differences come to be represented in new ways, even if the prevailing forms (in terms of caste, class, and gender, for instance) do not disappear; they are given new meaning, and new forms of social positioning appear.

The general question this case study raises is the circulation and effects of languages of development and modernity in different parts of the Third World. The answer to this question is specific to each locality—its history of immersion in the world economy, colonial heritage, patterns of insertion into development, and the like. Three additional brief examples will bring this point home. What is *bikas* in Nepalese villages is *kamap* (“coming up”) in Gapun, a small village in Papua New Guinea in which the quest for development has become a way of life. In Gapun, the reservoir of images of

development comes from the village's history, marked by the steady influence of Catholic missionaries, Australian colonial administrators, and Japanese and American soldiers. It is also shaped by cargo cults, particularly the villagers' belief that their ancestors will return from the dead, bringing with them all the cargo that white people had. With the advent of cash crops, the symbols of development have multiplied as people's economic activities diversified. Today, prestige foods like packaged white rice and Nescafé top the list as signs of development. As in Nepal, lack of development is identified with features such as the persistence of traditional ways and carrying heavy loads. Children now go to school to learn about white people and their ways.

Yet this does not mean that Gapun is just becoming "modernized." In fact, much of the cash obtained is spent in traditional ways such as feasts, although to the customary yams and pigs are added rice and Nescafé for festive occasions. And although *kamap* signifies a transformation of the Gapuners' ways of existence into those beyond their shores, "coming up" "is not envisaged so much as a process, but rather as a sudden metamorphosis, a miraculous transformation—of their houses into corrugated iron, of their swampy land into a tarred web of highways, or their food into rice and *tinpis* [canned mackerel] and Nescafé, and of their skins, most significantly, into white" (Kulick 1992, 23). This metamorphosis is religious in nature rather than a scientific or economic enterprise. Development in Gapun is, in fact, a sort of sophisticated cargo cult; literacy, schooling, and politics are evaluated in terms of cargo, even as the vernacular language is displaced by the introduction of schooling in the 1960s. Gapuners, in short, have a clear idea about what development means and where it leads, even if couched in a strikingly different language and different cultural practices.

Another study of the nature of development at the local level concerns women's notions of development and modernity in the town of Lamu, Kenya. In this community, the models of development are even more diversified; besides the Western sources, they include Islamic movements (revivalist or revisionist), cultural productions brought by migrants returning from affluent Arab states, and Indian music, films, and soap operas transmitted through videocassettes and the mass media. The crux of the matter is women's evolving understanding of what it means to be developed and modern while retaining their identity as Muslim. Female identity is at the center of this process, including questions such as whether to use the veil, schooling for girls, access to modern commodities, greater mobility, and the like. As young women wish to achieve *maisha mazuri* (the good life), they look to European and other foreign products for sources of change and seek to take distance from traditional practices such as veiling, which they nevertheless see not as a sign of inferior status or of control but as impractical or unmodern (Fuglesang 1992).

Fashion, Indian popular films, and access to modern appliances constitute some of the most important indicators of modernity and the avenues toward crafting new identities and conceptions of womanhood. Again, the process is not a simple modernization, although this is clearly happening as well. Pictures of Indian film stars might appear on the walls of women's rooms together with pictures of Michael Jackson and Khomeini. The call of the *muezzin* frequently means freezing the image in the latest video brought from Saudi Arabia or Dubai by returning migrant workers so that five or ten minutes of prayer can take place. Life and gender relations are definitely changing—women no longer want to be “ghosts”; yet what they mean by modern womanhood does not equate with the language of liberation of the West.

Technical knowledge often becomes an important marker of development, as the recent introduction of rural development schemes in the Pacific Coast region of Colombia indicates. Afro-Colombian peasants of this rainforest region, recently introduced by government extension agents into the world of accounting, farm planning methodologies, commercialization cooperatives, and the use of modern inputs such as pesticides, almost invariably list the acquisition of *conocimiento técnico* (technical knowledge) as an important transformation in the quality of their lives. Technical knowledge is imparted to most farmers on location, although a handful of them are regularly flown to cities of the interior to be *capacitados* (trained) in new farming and planning practices. The chosen farmers tend to become ardent advocates of development.

These farmers, moreover, begin to interpret their lives before the program as filled with ignorance and apathy. Before the program, they say, they knew nothing about why their crops died; now they know that the coconut trees are killed by a particular pest that can be combated with chemicals. They also learned that it is better to dedicate the family labor to one plot and plan well the activities to be performed on it day by day and month by month, instead of simultaneously working two or three plots that are often several hours' walking distance from each other, as they used to do. That was not really work, they now say. They have adapted, in sum, the vocabulary of “efficiency.” Yet, as in the other examples already discussed, the farmers retain many of the beliefs and practices from former times. Next to the language of efficiency, for instance, one hears them say that the land needs to be “caressed” and “spoken to,” and they still devote some time to the distant, “untechnified” plots. In short, they have developed a hybrid model of sorts, ruled neither by the logic of modern farming nor by traditional practices. I will return to the notion of hybrid models in the concluding chapter.²⁵

The impact of development representations is thus profound at the local level. At this level, the concepts of development and modernity are resisted, hybridized with local forms, transformed, or what have you; they have, in short, a cultural productivity that needs to be better understood. More re-

search on the languages of development at the local level needs to be done if our understanding of the discourse's modes of operation is to be satisfactory. This project requires in-depth ethnographies of development situations such as those exemplified earlier. For the anthropologists, Pigg concludes, the task is to trace the contours and cultural effects of development without endorsing or replicating its terms. I will come back to this principle in my discussion of Third World cultures as hybrid products of modern and traditional cultural practices and the many forms in between.

CONCLUSION

The crucial threshold and transformation that took place in the early post-World War II period discussed in this chapter were the result not of a radical epistemological or political breakthrough but of the reorganization of a number of factors that allowed the Third World to display a new visibility and to irrupt into a new realm of language. This new space was carved out of the vast and dense surface of the Third World, placing it in a field of power. Underdevelopment became the subject of political technologies that sought to erase it from the face of the Earth but that ended up, instead, multiplying it to infinity.

Development fostered a way of conceiving of social life as a technical problem, as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people—the development professionals—whose specialized knowledge allegedly qualified them for the task. Instead of seeing change as a process rooted in the interpretation of each society's history and cultural tradition—as a number of intellectuals in various parts of the Third World had attempted to do in the 1920s and 1930s (Gandhi being the best known of them)—these professionals sought to devise mechanisms and procedures to make societies fit a preexisting model that embodied the structures and functions of modernity. Like sorcerers' apprentices, the development professionals awakened once again the dream of reason that, in their hands, as in earlier instances, produced a troubling reality.

At times, development grew to be so important for Third World countries that it became acceptable for their rulers to subject their populations to an infinite variety of interventions, to more encompassing forms of power and systems of control; so important that First and Third World elites accepted the price of massive impoverishment, of selling Third World resources to the most convenient bidder, of degrading their physical and human ecologies, of killing and torturing, of condemning their indigenous populations to near extinction; so important that many in the Third World began to think of themselves as inferior, underdeveloped, and ignorant and to doubt the value of their own culture, deciding instead to pledge allegiance to the banners of reason and progress; so important, finally, that the achievement of

development clouded the awareness of the impossibility of fulfilling the promises that development seemed to be making.

After four decades of this discourse, most forms of understanding and representing the Third World are still dictated by the same basic tenets. The forms of power that have appeared act not so much by repression but by normalization; not by ignorance but by controlled knowledge; not by humanitarian concern but by the bureaucratization of social action. As the conditions that gave rise to development became more pressing, it could only increase its hold, refine its methods, and extend its reach even further. That the materiality of these conditions is not conjured up by an "objective" body of knowledge but is charted out by the rational discourses of economists, politicians, and development experts of all types should already be clear. What has been achieved is a specific configuration of factors and forces in which the new language of development finds support. As a discourse, development is thus a very real historical formation, albeit articulated around an artificial construct (underdevelopment) and upon a certain materiality (the conditions baptized as underdevelopment), which must be conceptualized in different ways if the power of the development discourse is to be challenged or displaced.

To be sure, there is a situation of economic exploitation that must be recognized and dealt with. Power is too cynical at the level of exploitation and should be resisted on its own terms. There is also a certain materiality of life conditions that is extremely preoccupying and that requires great effort and attention. But those seeking to understand the Third World through development have long lost sight of this materiality by building upon it a reality that like a castle in the air has haunted us for decades. Understanding the history of the investment of the Third World by Western forms of knowledge and power is a way to shift the ground somewhat so that we can start to look at that materiality with different eyes and in different categories.

The coherence of effects that the development discourse achieved is the key to its success as a hegemonic form of representation: the construction of the poor and underdeveloped as universal, preconstituted subjects, based on the privilege of the representers; the exercise of power over the Third World made possible by this discursive homogenization (which entails the erasure of the complexity and diversity of Third World peoples, so that a squatter in Mexico City, a Nepalese peasant, and a Tuareg nomad become equivalent to each other as poor and underdeveloped); and the colonization and domination of the natural and human ecologies and economies of the Third World.²⁶

Development assumes a teleology to the extent that it proposes that the "natives" will sooner or later be reformed; at the same time, however, it reproduces endlessly the separation between reformers and those to be re-

formed by keeping alive the premise of the Third World as different and inferior, as having a limited humanity in relation to the accomplished European. Development relies on this perpetual recognition and disavowal of difference, a feature identified by Bhabha (1990) as inherent to discrimination. The signifiers of “poverty,” “illiteracy,” “hunger,” and so forth have already achieved a fixity as signifieds of “underdevelopment” which seems impossible to sunder. Perhaps no other factor has contributed to cementing the association of “poverty” with “underdevelopment” as the discourse of economists. To them I dedicate the coming chapter.