



Far-Fetched Facts: A Parable of Development Aid (Inside Technology)

Richard Rottenburg, Allison Brown, Tom Lampert

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In 1996, the sub-Saharan African country of Ruritania launched a massive waterworks improvement project, funded by the Normesian Development Bank, headquartered in Urbania, Normland, and with the guidance of Shilling & Partner, a consulting firm in Mercatoria, Normland. *Far-Fetched Facts* tells the story of this project, as narrated by anthropologists Edward B. Drotlevski and Samuel A. Martonosi. Their account of the Ruritanian waterworks project views the problems of development from a new perspective, focusing on technologies of inscription in the interactions of development bank, international experts, and local managers. This development project is fictionalized, of course, although based closely on author Richard Rottenburg's experiences working on and observing different development projects in the 1990s. Rottenburg uses the case of the Ruritanian waterworks project to examine issues of standardization, database building, documentation, calculation, and territory mapping. The techniques and technologies of the representational practices of documentation are crucial, Rottenburg argues, both to day-to-day management of the project and to the demonstration of the project's legitimacy. Five decades of development aid (or "development cooperation," as it is now sometimes known) have yielded disappointing results. Rottenburg looks in particular at the role of the development consultant (often called upon to act as mediator between the other actors) and at the interstitial spaces where developmental cooperation actually occurs. He argues that both critics and practitioners of development often misconstrue the grounds of cooperation -- which, he claims, are moral, legal, and political rather than techno-scientific or epistemological.

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