Coupled Arenas: Why state-building is so difficult

Klaus Schlichte

Alex Veit

Abstract:

Interventions seem to regularly result in unintended outcomes that no one has planned or anticipated. Many of these outcomes can be associated with organizational problems and connected ways of perceiving reality within the interventionists' camps. These processes of knowledge production and implementation will be explained by the model of "coupled arenas". Interactions between different arenas lead to a contradictory indirect administration of the Global South.

Most of the problems of interventions aiming at "state-building" can be better understood when conceived as results of the interactions between actors in three different arenas, namely Western headquarters, national base camps, and local offices "in the bush". Normally, NGOs and international agencies, likewise, are facing problems stemming from the fact that their activities take place in different places simultaneously. While in the Western headquarter bureaucratic logics and moral politics prevail, the national base camp obeys to the logic of intermediary rule. Finally, in the bush office, decisions and plans taken elsewhere face the logic of social contexts which follow often entirely different patterns of organization.

Instead of only blaming the target societies and "corrupt officials" as so many studies on the problems of "state-building" do, we want to redirect scholarly attention to the built-in organizational problems interventions create by themselves.

On the Research Group 'Micropolitics of Armed Groups'

Interdisciplinary in character and funded since August 2001 by the Volkswagen-Foundation, the research group investigates the social origins and modes of recruitment of armed groups, their organizational forms as well as the problems of their transformation in post-war situations.

The research group is located in the Department of Social Sciences at Humboldt-University, Berlin and this series of working papers presents provisional results from the group's research. All comments and hints therefore are greatly welcomed. For more information please refer to our website: http://www2.rz.hu-berlin.de/mikropolitik

On the authors

Klaus Schlichte holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Hamburg (1996) and qualified as a university lecturer at the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe-University, Frankfurt am Main (2003). He is currently leading the younger scholar group on Micropolitics of Armed Groups at Humboldt University Berlin, and will from October 2007 onwards be a professor for international relations at the Otto-von-Guericke-University, Magdeburg. Klaus Schlichte conducted field research on violent conflicts and state rule in Mali, Senegal, Uganda and Serbia.

He published *Kriege in der Weltgesellschaft* (co-author, Wiesbaden 2003), *Strukturwandel internationaler Beziehungen* (co-editor,Wiesbaden 2000), *Krieg und Vergesellschaftung in Afrika* (Münster 1996), and is editor of *The Dynamics of States. Political domination outside the OECD* (Aldershot 2005).

Alex Veit graduated from Humboldt University Berlin (2004). He is currently a member of the younger scholar group on Micropolitics of Armed Groups at Humboldt University Berlin. His current PhD project investigates the effects of the United Nations intervention in Ituri (DR Congo) where he conducted field research in 2005.

Contents

Introduction[1]

When casually reading newspapers or current issues of journals of international relations, one might conclude that failed and failing states, armed conflicts, terrorism, and disregard for human rights and liberal-democratic procedure are the contribution of the Third World to current international politics. States and societies in the Global South appear to represent sources of regression and destruction, a threat to their internal order as well as a security risk to developed countries. The "International Community", dominated by Western states,[2] feels obliged to help overcome this "failure of modernity" (Duffield 2002).

Whether intervention goals have been narrowly defined or involved grand international visions, such as 'peace' and 'development', they have provided an endless source of motivation for international actors to continue participating in local fields of power. There is always something for international actors to fix, always a plan to which the International Community should contribute, and always situations that go wrong and require amelioration through further intervention and programs. In post-war situations, the main contemporary project of external interventionists can be summarized as "state-building". The (re)-construction of institutions that fulfill the same functions as those in their home states seems to be an almost natural step in the solution of a violent conflict. Accompanying these efforts is a vaguely defined ideology that some term "global governance" (Bradford & Lynn 2007; Zürn 1998; Roth & Senghaas 2006), others "the liberal peace" (Richmond 2005; Chandler 2006).

In this article, our focus is neither on the identification of problems and solutions regarding the "Third World", nor on the actors in those countries as such. Rather, we inquire on the organizational level of international organizations active in the field of peace and state-building. Our question pertains to the ways in which the knowledge of interventionists is established in international organiza-

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[1] A first version of this paper was presented at the seminar, "Conflict Management in Africa" at the European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 7 April, 2006. We are grateful for the participants' comments. We also thank Ahmed Badawi and Stefan Malthaner for comments on later versions.

[2] Meaning here Western and Central Europe, North America, Japan and Australia.

tions and, in concert with their interlocutors, implemented accordingly. Our central premise is that neither the identified problems of the Third World nor the prescribed solutions as presented in global discourse on state-building are self-evident. Our central argument regarding the problems of externally directed state-building is that contradictions in the production process of knowledge and the varying nature of power structures in coupled arenas lead to unintended outcomes of intervention efforts.

In arguments against attempts to duplicate an imagined Western state-building experience by building analogous political institutions in post-conflict societies (Fukuyama 2004), many critics have objected that local contexts differ too significantly to allow for the implementation of blueprint institutional models (cf. for example Jung 2006; Hibou 2005). Other authors have argued that some unintended outcomes are a result of inconsistencies in the interventionists' policies (Paris 2004). Our investigation tries to come to terms with the difficulties of externally led state-building from a different angle. Instead of complaining about local residents' steadfast refusal to adapt to what is asked for or accusing international agencies and Western states of being blind to local prerequisites, we argue that the majority of difficulties derive from the clash of differing social and political logics[3] at work in interventions. These logics intersect in different forms in three distinguishable arenas.

Our argument runs as follows. Interventions seem to regularly result in unintended outcomes that no one has planned or anticipated. Many of these outcomes can be associated with organizational problems and connected ways of perceiving reality within the interventionists' camps. These processes of knowledge production and implementation will be explained by the model of "coupled arenas". Interactions between different arenas lead to a contradictory indi-

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[3] The term "social logic" here encompasses individuals' and groups' interest-driven strategies, ways of perceiving reality, and patterns of interaction and exchange between actors. As we will show, the actors involved in the practices of intervention follow differing social logics, depending on their habitus and their positionality in arenas and power figurations.

rect administration of the Global South.

1. Coupled arenas

Most of the problems of interventions can be better understood when conceived as results of the interactions between actors in three different arenas, namely Western headquarters, national base camps, and local offices "in the bush". Normally, NGOs and international agencies, likewise, are facing problems stemming from the fact that their activities take place in different places simultaneously. They need to coordinate their actions, implement decisions in different places, and promote their agendas and achievements to different publics. Also, they must achieve some success in competition with other agencies and should deal with visible outcomes in uncertain environments. These are problems that any management board is probably well aware of. But there are other imperatives that are more implicit and less pronounced.

The concept of arena used in this paper needs to be briefly clarified. The metaphor refers to the ancient theatres of fighting, a place where conflicts between social actors are put on stage and settled by violent means. The metaphor sharpens the image of conflicting agendas and social logics these actors and agencies follow. The concept of arena has many similarities with Bourdieu's notion of "champ" or field (Bourdieu 1980: 85-86; 1996: 45), in that it is a social structure "with its own institutions, its specialized agents, its hierarchy of positions and its language", all of which is interiorized by the actors through a "habitus" (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 189-190). However, other than a field that transcends space and time, the arena is bound to a locality, in which real persons physically meet and interact. It is in these interactions that particular local social logics develop.

The arena is also distinct from the "champ" as it is not an "autonomized social structure", but rather coupled to other arenas in other places, which influence one another. Coupled arenas interchange resources. This concerns personnel that

are sent from one arena to the other. Financial resources obviously have to be transferred, as arenas on a lower level are usually materially dependent on those above. With those financial resources, decisions and orders come in pairs.

While those transfers seem to be only top-down, the lower level arenas also have something to offer. They possess information and knowledge that is and can only be acquired locally. Finally, all three levels are mutually dependent as they serve as producers of legitimacy, of symbolic capital for each other. Successes count as sources of legitimacy, be it that the organization of elections can be sold in Western capitals as indicative of a successful mission, or that the building of infrastructure, schools, and hospitals creates legitimacy in the eyes of a local population.

In the following, we are analyzing three different arenas that seem typical for many types of intervention. We call them "the metropolitan headquarter", "the local capital", and "the bush office". With these names, we do not refer to dependency theory or world system analysis. Rather, these names suggest that a both material and discursive hierarchy exists between those arenas which influences how actors in one arena think of themselves and their counterparts in other arenas. At the same time, we are trying to show that the balance of power between coupled arenas is less clear-cut than it might at first appear. In each of these arenas, we look at the specific social logic guiding the actors. In another step, we look at how the arena is coupled with its counterparts and how the interdependencies between them influence their respective social logics.

For a handy analysis, our focal point of interrogation is a typical international agency involved in an intervention in a post-conflict context, such as UN subunits (Peacekeeping Missions, UNHCR, WFP, and others). We, however, believe that our description is in major parts applicable to other actors in development or humanitarian aid in general, such as governmental agencies, for example the American USAID or the European Union's Echo, as well as internationally operating NGOs.

2. The metropolitan headquarters – moral production

Most if not all large international agencies and NGOs have their headquarters in major cities in the Western World, often in the capital of their home country or, as in the case of the UN, a metropolis considered by many as the capital of the world.[4] These headquarters normally function like any other political bureaucratic organization. They have staffs hired according to procedures and they have functionaries and officials who make decisions, conduct meetings, study files, and place phone calls.

But how are policy papers, guidelines, and objectives formulated which direct the bureaucratic work? How are the problems identified and solutions formulated, given that they are not directly visible in officials' offices? We argue that beyond the coupling effects with the organization's local branches, the social logic of the metropolitan arena has a major impact on a headquarters' intervention policies. The headquarters bases its operations in a metropolitan arena in which two other major groups of actors wield influence. One group consists of other political actors. These are governments and other organizations that operate on an international level. The second is "the public", as discussed below.

Governments normally are not homogenous actors, but in international arenas, each government supposedly speaks with one voice.[5] Taken together, however,

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[4] Even the Aga Khan Foundation, whose main constituency resides in Muslim countries and that spends about US$ 160 million annually, has its main office in Geneva; cf. Aga Khan Foundation, Annual Report 2005 (http://www.akdn.org, March 27, 2007).

[5] While we are here describing a "metropolis", where international governments and agencies meet,, on a national level similar processes can be observed. In many Western governments, constant quarrelling between different departments and ministries about competencies and assignments can be observed. Ministries and departments in France, for example, argue over the question of whether or not "international development cooperation" should be subordinated to Ministries of Foreign Affairs (cf. Bayart 1984; Schlichte 1998). Defense ministries have also taken an interest in "development", as shown by their efforts to assume control over compe-

the "concert of powers" very often is a chaotic clamor of voices. Many issues are not addressed in the same manner. Due to different historical experiences and internal problems, governments often disagree on an interpretation of a given situation. Only when major powers agree on the interpretation of a development is the UN, for example, able to react and implement an action plan. How to bring opinions and interpretations together, to cut deals, and to allow log-rolling, is a major part of the games in this arena.

These processes seem to be structured by two different aspects. Most importantly, it is necessary to establish a common interpretation of the "realities on the ground". Whether a war or a famine is considered an emergency that needs to be managed from the outside is not self-evident. Misery and want in many societies remain largely unnoticed and unmanaged by external forces. Some conflicts are simply not on the agenda, because hardly anybody is paying attention. This often becomes apparent when dire social emergencies are suddenly placed on the agenda despite having been local realities for years.[6] Apart from being alarming in nature, a particular case must also be considered a field of responsibility for the metropolitan arena. If a civil war occurs in a state whose sovereignty remains intact, or where major and regional forces protect their zone of influence and refuse other states entry, no large-scale international humanitarian intervention takes place.[7] Usually, such cases do not remain a topic for an extended period.

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tences, budgets and reputation. Other intra-governmental disputes concern the kinds of institutional order that should preferably be used in development programs (for French examples cf. Marchal 1995). In Germany, a similar competition exists between the parastatals *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ) and *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau* (KfW).

[6] For example, beginning in 1999 the civil war in Ituri, a district in the Democratic Republic of the Congo led to large-scale massacres of civilians. Only in 2003, however, the International Community" became alerted and invested massive military and humanitarian resources.

[7] The first case applies in India where, according to the London-based Institute for Strategic Studies, 49 armed groups were active in 2005 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006), or

A second aspect is the mode of competition and compromise between governments in the metropolitan arena. These are governed not only by *Realpolitik* as has been discussed elsewhere (cf. Krasner 1999: 32). The issue of humanitarianism and development aid is strongly influenced by normative questions as well. In the moral economy of aid, donors strive for symbolic capital. To give means to acquire honor, while miserliness may translate into being "named and shamed" by the metropolitan public, which is discussed in further detail below. A major feature of conflict in metropolitan arenas is a mechanism of guilt, honor, and shame. The competition between "donors" often resembles the ritual of *potlatch* among Native Americans in the northwestern area of the USA, as described by Marcel Mauss. The potlatch is a ritual feast in which the host freely distributes the deliberate destruction of riches is serving to outbid fellow actors in matters of generosity. Mauss writes that the art of wasteful spending helps to acquire status, as it is an "aristocratic" form of trade governed by etiquette, largesse, and apparent selflessness (Mauss 1990: 6).

The potlatch of the metropolitan arena is not a gesture of waste and extravagance but of generosity towards needy beneficiaries. Aid spending, on the one hand, creates hierarchical bonds with the recipients (Radtke & Schlichte 2004: 189-190). On the other hand, and more importantly, the act of giving is actually staged among and in competition with other donors. This can often be witnessed at international conferences, in which governments go to great length to demonstrate that they are prepared to give at least as much as their counterparts. As a result, the amount of aid is often not so much a reflection of real needs in local arenas, but a result of the moral competition in the metropolitan arena.[8]

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to the war in the Russian province of Chechnya. Zones of influence prevailed in Latin America, traditionally the backwater of the US.

[8] This could best be seen after the Tsunami-catastrophe in South-East Asia 2004, when the amount of financial aid far exceeded actual capabilities of implementation (BBC, 6 Jan 2005: Delivering the promise: aid problems, http://news.bbc.co.uk; BBC, 11 May 2005: "Charity redirects

Another field of competition is the question of the appropriateness of models, approaches, and practices. All governments (and societies) have their history. One of the most remarkable observations in this arena is that governments favor institutional solutions in post-war settings that resemble their own institutional landscape. Federal states recommend federal constitutions for war-ridden societies; centralized states prefer to export their model.

Likewise, liberal capitalist states opt to install highly liberalized economies in post-war developing countries. During the Soviet era, the USSR supported policies in Angola and Mozambique that mimicked its own practice of enforced collectivization of farms (cf. Geffray 1990). Market-based development approaches have become a consensus among Western governments and most international organizations, as no alternative model has survived the end of the Cold War. Nonetheless, while the "one size fits all" approach of economic liberalization is questioned even in regard to developing countries (cf. Hibou 1998), in political spaces emerging from violent conflict the liberal market approach may actually be detrimental to state-building (Paris 2004: 151-178).

The same tendency can be observed in practical approaches. The German debate on the humanitarian military intervention in Afghanistan endorses the German approach of peaceful construction of schools, hospitals, and roads as especially helpful, while the American approach, said to be focused solely on the military destruction of Taliban forces, is seen as counter-productive. Both approaches are understood to be derived from historical experiences, or even cultural differences.

At the same time, the focus on illegalized opium production in Afghanistan may well be a re-enactment of the US "war on drugs" in Latin America. In any case, the damage from heroin seems much larger in Western inner-cities than in rural

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tsunami money", http://news.bbc.co.uk). In the majority of cases it seems, however, that financial contributions are smaller than the need estimated in national and local arenas.

Afghanistan. Astri Suhrke has suggested liberalizing poppy production, as illegalization, and not the cultivation itself, plays into the hands of the Taliban rebellion and undermines state-building (Suhrke 2006: 32-33; also Koehler 2005). The point here is that reasoning about appropriate solutions, and even about what constitutes a problem, is strongly determined by a metropolitan arena's discourse that is often strangely detached or totally disconnected from local experiences in the targeted regions.

Part of the metropolitan arena's discourse is what may be broadly termed "the public", a group of actors connected to governments and international organizations. Regarding intervention practices, the public sphere is divided into two groups. There are "the professionals", a group of "experts" particularly interested in issues of state-building, development, and peace. These persons are academics, journalists, and officials working for NGOs and other aid agencies. They are interested in these issues because they are also working on them and are rewarded for being "policy relevant".

Secondly, the general public sometimes discusses media reports.[9] Both groups are of course connected, as experts and professionals are to some extent able to shape the general public's discourse. In the metropolitan arena, the United Nations, but in principle any other agency working in the field of intervention is

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[9] This group could be further divided into a "constituency public" with strong political convictions and interests in interventions, for example. the peace movement, which is of importance for political parties such as the Greens in Germany or the Labour Party in the UK. This "constituency public" is surrounded by a "mainstream" that only takes notice of intervention efforts when media reporting is exceptionally widespread, such as on Iraq since 2002. Both "mainstream" and "constituency" may gain influence on governments and international organizations. For reasons of brevity, however, we restrict ourselves here to some general remarks.

It should also be noted that "the general public" transcends the concept of the metropolitan arena, as it is not bound to a locality such as a city.

observed by journalists from a host of countries, each with slightly different matrixes of perception and evaluation. Journalists, if they do their job properly, do research, ask questions, and condense the information when they report on current events. Furthermore, journalists can decide which expert from the development community or academia is given a voice in their media outlet. Their reporting in turn influences the attitude of single governments, as the public in each country might focus on the issue, or the respective opposition party might employ the issue as a tool for weakening the government's standing.

Among officials in governments, international and non-governmental organizations, development lobbyists (usually employed by churches, trade unions, or NGOs), journalists, think-tank employees, and academics a particular social logic develops. These persons meet each other during official hearings, at conferences, in consultations in each other's offices, at parties, receptions and so on. A community develops, in which cooperation, mutual influence, and competition are corresponding tasks. Who is heard by the minister or other important persons, whose new book or article is cited in conversations, who is invited into advisory boards, and who appears on TV is of importance in this particular social logic. The quest in the metropolitan arena is one for "voice" in the debate.

The discourse in the metropolitan arena, resulting from these interactions, influences the policies of intervention, as international organizations and governments not only listen to it, but are actually part of it. The metropolitan arena's discourse determines the perspective on the other arenas. What is regarded as a problem and what is regarded as a solution is discussed here. Weak statehood or authoritarianism? State-driven development or market liberalization? Power-sharing or elections? Mediation or peace enforcement?

When the metropolitan arena is regarded without taking into account the coupling effects with the subordinated branches of international organizations, the game in and between headquarters is thus largely following the rules of potlatch and voice by which symbolic capital can be generated. This ritual is not steered

by the real needs in concrete cases of emergencies. Much more important are the moral politics between headquarters and the inner bureaucratic logic of these agencies. Rather, out of competition emerges a consensus about problems and solutions. This may be called established knowledge of interventions. The social logic of the metropolitan arena encompasses the bureaucrats in headquarters; they share the established knowledge about interventions. However, their agenda is coupled to two other arenas we will sketch in the following. From the headquarters comes a flow of resources, of money, expertise, and personnel that is deployed abroad. As a centralizing bureaucracy, the headquarters upholds a "principled rejection of doing business 'from case to case" (Weber 1978: 983), and needs to streamline its dealings with local branches into general routines.

Seen from the metropolitan arena, local contexts in remote places cannot be catered to on an individual basis. What is required are budgets, implementation strategies, and objectives applicable in any area of intervention, in a "one size fits all" manner. Even if the officials are aware of the difficulties this may cause and sensitive to the requirements communicated from the local arenas, bureaucratic regulations determine what is possible and what is not. One of the reasons for this may be that officials can be held individually responsible for violating laws, but not for the failure of a project. The demand of many to cater on a case by case basis runs counter to the efficiency requirement. At the same time, there is a flow of information, stories about failures and successes coming back from the next arena, the capital as a base camp, to which we turn now.

3. The capital as the base camp – envoys and intermediaries

In post-war settings major international agencies have offices or base camps in the capital of the respective Third World country. These representatives serve as pivots for the implementation and communication between local branches of projects in post-war arenas and metropolitan headquarters. As such, the capital arena stands in an in-between position.

Here we find two types of intermediaries and intermediary institutions: the envoy, who is (usually) a Western official and his agency that connects metropolitan programs with local realities. Due to a lack of integration into the local context, the envoy in turn depends on a "native" intermediary, a person or institution brokering between the envoy and the local population. First, we focus on the position of the envoy, while in the second part of this paragraph some thoughts on the local intermediary are developed.

The base camp in the capital needs to transform the problems which local branches experience "in the bush" into requests to headquarters and into plans for the future. The "selling" of activities as successes already stands in a certain contradiction with the ambition to continue or to enlarge activities. Being too successful is dangerous because it could translate as "mission accomplished" and lead to withdrawal of resources. Lack of success could also mean the end of activities, as metropolitan headquarters might try to use their funds and personnel for other, more promising purposes. A fine line between minutes on (partial) successes and the description of problems is thus often found in reports transmitted to the metropolitan headquarters.

In these reports, two aspects are covered. The activities of the agency are presented, and knowledge about local realities is produced. The description of projects in the local and capital arenas cabled to the metropolitan headquarters serves as a bureaucratic control measure. Contrary to administrations wielding

direct and proximate control of their subordinates, the metropolitan headquarters has little means to verify the "truthfulness" of the report, because there is only one source of information, the field subordinates themselves. The result is a degree of independence and influence of the base camp on the superior institution.[10]

In the case of the *UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Monuc), as in other UN missions, the UN Secretary General is required to report periodically to the Security Council on progress and problems of the mission, and give proposals for a refining of the mandate. Although these reports are signed by the Secretary General, they are actually written by the mission's staff in Congo's capital Kinshasa.[11] Knowledge about realities of the peace process and the mission's successes and failures can thus be controlled in the base camp. Both the Secretary General and the Security Council, who make decisions on mandate, endowment, and troop strength, can be influenced to some extent. However, as we have discussed above, the extent to which local requests are taken into consideration is often questionable.

In the capital arena, the problem of opaqueness of local situations plays a much larger role than on headquarters levels. Lack of knowledge about local circumstances matters much more than it does in the metropolitan arena. While in Berlin, Paris, or New York few people might know anything about what is going on, this is not the case in Kinshasa, Kabul, or Baghdad. In the base camps, broad and often very abstract objectives - from "peacekeeping" and "state-building" to "food security" - must be transformed into concrete projects. Here, decisions must be made as to where the intervention should actually take place, and exactly what measures are to be taken.

The base camp thus needs information about what is going on outside the camp

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[10] cf. Trotha (1994: 164-66, 342-353) on German colonial rule in Togo.

[11] Author's interview with Monuc official, Kinshasa, 12 December 2005.

and beyond the capital. A newly arriving institution sends scouts into "the bush", exploring teams that report on how local realities and the intervention's objectives and means may form a fruitful connection. Once the bush office in the local arena is opened, these duties are fulfilled by the people employed there. A certain dependence on the local arena can thus be observed here, very much like the dependence of the metropolitan headquarters on the base camp.

In the base camp, concrete information from the local arena needs to be transformed into two categories. First, it must be translated into an overall plan, harmonizing activities in different parts of the country with the orders issued by the superior institution in the metropolitan arena. Secondly, two sorts of information, on local and national realities, must be condensed into reports that can be understood in the metropolitan arena. Of importance then is a wise balancing of subordinate arenas' reports with the objectives fixed in the metropolitan headquarters. These are the double tasks of the base camp as a coupled arena.

However, the base camp does not exist in a local social void. The capital is also the base camp for other agencies, and an area of activity for the government and other political agents. Furthermore, international agencies employ local personnel. All these actors and agencies are part of a social arena in which the personnel in the base camp live and thus take part in the production of knowledge about the local reality that influences the course of the intervention project.

Cooperation, mutual influence, and competition are again characteristics of relations between international agencies in the local capital, very similar to the metropolitan arena. In an ideal world, these agencies would seek to arrange who is doing what, where, and when. Indeed, in most cases institutions exist to provide a forum for this task, the *Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* (Ocha) in the UN system being one of the best known. However, as many practitioners confirm, this is usually not a process without friction. One reason for this seems to be that many NGOs, but also UN and government agencies, compete for the

same budgets, allocated by a very small number of donors. Competition gives rise to silence about plans for the future and important information about the present.

Another characteristic may be termed a moral competition about insidership. The talk between international personnel who interact in business meetings, but also in restaurants and leisure sites often revolves around the question of who has the better insight on the "real" situation, of power relations between national politicians and social environments. While this is a competition, knowledge that influences decisions is produced during informal exchanges. These social encounters between the expatriates give rise to a communal identity. The boundary between strangers and locals here is constructed around the question of how "the other" functions. "The Africans", "the Afghanis" are often described as different from the rational, non-corrupt, and hard-working Westerner. A paternalistic attitude of the supposedly objective stranger (cf. Simmel 1908: 509-512), perhaps inherent in intervention projects, is reinforced here. Without doubt, the knowledge produced in these encounters influences the definitions of problems and solutions the intervention project deals with.

In the capital arena, much intervention policy is also shaped by local, "native" actors. They have enormous leverage on the foreigners' perceptions and evaluations of the national political situation. These intermediaries participate to a large extent in the coding of organizations, factions, men, or families as either good or evil in a given context.

The intermediary is a figure known since Lord Frederick Lugard, the British Governer-General of Nigeria between 1914 and 1919, described his ideas in "The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa" (1922). While in colonial times the local ruler was the principal intermediary, in our paper three categories are defined: local employees of the international organization, civil society members, and officials in governments and the state administration. Before describing their

specific role in the capital arena, some general elements of their position have to be noted.

The intermediary is the inevitable interface between an intervention and those whom the intervention addresses (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 166-167). It is the spatial, cultural, and social distance between these two groups that necessitates someone who brokers and mediates the relationship (Trotha 1994: 444). Without intermediaries, any form of structured interaction between international agents and a local society remains impossible. But the intermediary is not just a technical element, a transmission belt. The intermediary is dependent and independent at the same time. Dependent, because he receives social, symbolic, and economic resources from both outsiders and local society, independent, because he can use those resources to strengthen his societal position and pursue his personal agenda. His is a game of ties and autonomy. Corruption, abuse of office, and cronyism are never far-removed where the intermediary is involved (Trotha 1994: 448-449). To some extent, these unethical practices are inherent to the position (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 168). The intermediary constantly thwarts bureaucratic principles, because he shows the importance of local social context and history, the type and nature of the conflicts he mediates, and finally the prevalence of his personality (Trotha 1994: 277-279).

The intermediaries' primary assignment is the translation of knowledge. To the addressees, he communicates the will of the agents of the intervention. To those same agents, he provides intelligence about the local situation (Trotha 1994: 282; Olivier de Sardan 2004: 166-169). As a go-between, one who knows about both spheres, he risks suspicion as a traitor or a spy by both sides (cf. Pouligny 2005: 130).

In the capital arena of intervention projects, local employees are probably the most important source of information. They range from drivers and cooks, often privately employed by expatriates, to secretaries and translators, but also mem-

bers of the local formally educated elite who hold positions of responsibility in the organization. As social encounters with this group are most frequent and often informal, and the intervention officials have the opportunity to learn about their social background, their influence is probably the biggest. Intervention officials can assess their counterparts' perspective on the social environment and judge the given information and opinion. Thus drivers and cooks often embody the "vox populi" otherwise distant from an official's life circumscribed by office, restaurant, and home.

The local civil society in their form of local NGOs, churches, media, or other institutions is another favorite conversation partner of intervention officials, because it seems to embody a solution to many problems. Furthermore, cultural differences with these formally educated individuals are minimized. Conversation is possible because both sides are capable of communicating in the same abstract language about human rights or democracy. Civil society representatives are often familiar with Western countries, and mutual appreciation becomes possible.

Government officials are paradoxical counterparts. Especially in state-building projects, the government is identified as the problem and the solution, the enemy and the partner at the same time. Much of the discourse on corruption and transparency, good governance, failing and failed states, centers on governments as the most problematic actors. At the same time, the state-centric view of much international discourse holds that a "good" government is key for improvement. As international agencies can't simply choose one that pleases them, they are obliged to work with these actors.[12]

In relations with government officials, the strongest elements found in encoun-

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[12] Even when international leverage on government composition is particularly big, as in cases like Afghanistan, Iraq or Sierra Leone after international military intervention, the chosen "westernized" ministers often turned out to behave quite similar to any other "indigenous" government.

ters with local actors are mistrust and suspicion. With Third World governments, it seems there are always behind the scenes dealings. The expression "shadow state", coined by William Reno, perhaps describes the problem best (Reno 1995). International actors suffer from a lack of comprehension about what is going on behind the scenes. Because local political relationships are difficult to discern, every unexpected action by their counterparts is considered part of a hidden agenda.

Mistrust is a feature of the relationship with all intermediaries. The loyalty of local employees may be doubted, because their social relationships beyond the workplace are out of the internationals' sight (Pouligny 2004: 121-130). Civil society members may have altruistic motives, but their need to earn a living can be interpreted as corruption, and as elite members, they are often considered too close to powerful locals. Mistrust of the societies they are sent to transform features prominently in the minds of international actors.

The base camp in the capital arena depends on a local social logic. Knowledge construction is characterized by high levels of uncertainty. Communication between expatriates is constrained by competition and the difficulty of deciphering local politics. Interaction with local intermediaries does not necessarily make it easier to understand what is happening around the base camp, as mistrust towards local actors is an inherent contradiction of intervention.

Nonetheless, base camp officials succeed in giving meaning to their work. This is mainly done in the community of expatriates, where the uncertain individual may recover into the objective stranger. In the context of this paper, it is of importance that the base camp is not a simple transmission belt connecting metropolitan headquarters with the bush office. Rather, intervention objectives from the metropolitan arena are here enriched and transformed with the knowledge developed in the capital arena's particular social logic. The difficulties of reconciling all three coupled arenas' types of knowledge often results in omissions,

policy slippage, and policy bending (cf. Clapham 1996: 813). These techniques of intervention can also be discerned in the bush office.

4. The bush office - meeting the locals

The local branch of any international organization serves numerous functions. First, it is the locale of the actual implementation of actions donors and interventionists want to take. This agenda might range from driving out militias to computerizing law courts' files or assessing micro-loans to small-scale farmers. Doing this, the bush branch is the interface between the bureaucratic logic of intervention and local social life, and many of the problems within the policies of international organizations stem from this gap – the gap between the bureaucratic requirements of big organizations and their political framing on the one hand, and the local social world that is structured quite differently on the other.

The social world inhabited by the envoys in the bush office is in many aspects similar to that experienced by their colleagues in the capital, only much smaller and less luxurious. The bush office, to be found in provincial capitals and small towns, is often neighboring others' international organizations' bush offices, while there may also be missionaries, expatriate businessmen, and the occasional Western dropout who owns the best restaurant on the spot, where they all meet. Similar to the capital arena, the social interaction between the expatriates revolves around competition, coordination, and mutual influence in the quest for meaning and knowledge. Furthermore, administration and NGO members, and locally recruited employees serve as intermediaries. The same social logic as described for the capital arena abounds. The international organization is dependent on these interfaces with the society for implementation and comprehension, but the intermediaries develop their own agendas and interests and are thus dif-

ficult partners.

What renders the local arena different are the short- and midterm time horizons inherent in the present "project culture". While intervention efforts are meant to be sustainable in the long run, metropolitan headquarters hesitate to engage for more than a few years. Often, intervention projects are budgeted for only a few months.

As local actors are well aware of the project character of intervention, they often opt to selectively accept the offerings of the intervention. The short time horizon leads them to abscond with as many resources as possible, without regard for the risk of dismissal. This is one reason for the petty corruption bush offices encounter with their local employees. Another characteristic practice, side-tracking, means the use of project resources for purposes other than those planned, while the monopolization of aid opportunities by certain local social groups is a form of "ownership" different from the one envisaged in metropolitan policy circles (cf. Olivier de Sardan 2004: 144-149).

In short, requirements from the center clash with what is possible locally. Planners do not take into account what is lacking locally, either because they simply do not know better or due to budget constraints. The personnel in the metropolitan headquarters or in the base camp do not possess knowledge of local power structures and as a result perceive the space of the intervention as being void of any power structures. Soon they learn that this is not the case, but they often need considerable time to learn where the power resides.

The personnel of bush branches have the most stressful position in the game of intervention as they experience the clashes of these two worlds and are often torn between the requests of their organizations and the links to this local arena that develop so quickly. The normal reaction is policy-bending and policy-slippage. Officials in the bush branch do things they are not supposed to do.

They enter informal agreements with other local representatives of international organizations and try to muddle through. The intents of policy directives are followed only in theory, but not in the implementation process. Achievements are exaggerated; failures remain unreported.

This is not to say that staff members in bush branches try to trick others. But very often their perceptions and experiences run counter to the expectations of capital base camps and metropolitan headquarters. When the policy does not fit the circumstances, they are the first to remark this. Then they experience how long it takes and how difficult it is to turn the ship around. Very often it is easier to bend the policy and to do things differently than envisaged.

As development aid already has a history of more than 50 years, many problems described here have become common knowledge. Accordingly, measures have been taken to counterbalance the gap between metropolitan expectations and local realities. One is that project proposals usually are no longer written in headquarters, but in the bush branch instead. This sounds sensible, as it is here that functional knowledge about problems and needs is produced, and solutions can be designed accordingly. While practitioners in the field, who often develop a habitus of pragmatists as opposed to desk-workers, tend to moan about the burden of the resulting paperwork, this strengthens their relative independence from the metropolitan and capital arena. Now only abstract guidelines and allocated budgets and time horizons constrain their ability to decide the best way to proceed.

However, abstract directives influenced by the social logic of the metropolitan arena and local realities must still be brought into harmony. As it is the metropolitan and capital arena that decides about project proposals, bush office workers have to include their superiors' key ideas prominently, if they want their projects to be accepted. In the conflict between what the bush office worker thinks about the local reality and the ideas of the donors, the latter prevail. The art of omission thus features prominently in the design of project proposals, while

bending and slippage are normal reactions to the clash between policy directives and social realities.

Rarely does anyone donate money and resources without control of its use. As a consequence, to counterbalance the relative independence of subordinated branches, evaluation and monitoring techniques have been developed in recent years. "Independent" experts have been dispatched to crosscheck reports in base camps and bush offices on site. Officials from the capital and metropolitan headquarters are regularly visiting the bush branch.

However, these efforts face a dilemma. Complex local realities are difficult to portray in quantifiable data and facts, especially when essential knowledge is lacking or incomplete. In Third World countries, rough estimates often replace reliable statistics, making bureaucratic control an illusion.

More importantly, questions regarding change, success, or sustainability of projects are only answerable in a subjective manner. Evaluations thus usually also contain a narrative part, to tell the human side of the story. It therefore seems impossible to produce the objectivity required in bureaucracies. The techniques of evaluation and monitoring are not overcoming the practice of "simulation" in intervention projects.[13] As in colonial times, the compliance with bureaucratic rules becomes a ritual (cf. Trotha 1994: 342-343; Heathershaw 2007: 27).

The relatively new technique of evaluation shows aspects of the exchange between coupled arenas of intervention. Human and material resources have been dispatched into the bush by the metropolitan and capital offices. Now independent reports confirm the initial usefulness of the intervention effort, further problems to be resolved, and most importantly, the successes achieved. Knowledge concerning problems and solutions of the locale, constructed in different localities around the world, is finally and in a supposedly objective manner verified.

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[13] cf. Heathershaw (2007: 18-29) for an account of a peacebuilding evaluation project. See also Debrix (1999).

The material and social capital invested is returned to the capital and metropolitan arena as symbolic capital, that is, legitimacy for further intervention.

In the local arena, knowledge is constructed and established in communication with other envoys, intermediaries, and through practical experiences. The latter is the only occasion when intervention officials actually leave their desks and interact directly with the society they are seeking to transform. It is here that the clash between Western expectations and local realities is most clearly observed. This does not mean, however, that the bush office practitioners are always "right" about the way forward. Rather, they often redefine the "truth" about why the intervention takes place and what the solution to the problem, as they interpret it, could be. The envoy in the bush office influences the course of the intervention most by the strength of his individual personality. Policy slippage and bending are logical reactions to the winding and detached metropolitan and capital discourses on intervention. In so doing, however, the bush branch undermines bureaucratic coherence and contributes to the uneven outcomes of interventions.

Conclusion

In the foregoing analysis we intended to demonstrate that a fair share of the problems that current externally-led state-building experiences might not have their origins altogether in the complexities and recalcitrance of the targeted societies. One aspect that has been overlooked, we argued, is the strange complexity that results from the coupling of policy arenas which operate by different political and social logics.

In the first arena, the metropolitan headquarters in a Western capital, the competition between institutions and the moral agenda of the Western public create the most important constraints and incentives for policy formulation. Its bureaucratic mode of operation adds to the difficulties of being more attentive to complexities and differences on the local level that are neglected for reasons of efficiency.

In the second arena, the capital as a base camp, intermediaries and envoys dominate the situation. Caught between the expectations in their headquarters and the limited possibilities in the country of intervention, they are almost forced to employ manipulation and polishing as techniques of their own legitimization. Centrifugal forces eroding cohesive policy plans need to be held to a minimum, while at the same time agencies compete for funds and status.

In the third arena, the bush office, employees suffer from short and uncertain time horizons, unanticipated circumstances, and unknown power structures. Simultaneously, employees and project directors in the bush office must observe the changes of development discourse in order to present themselves as part of necessary policies so that they ensure their job security while continuing what is usually never completed: economic development, state-building, peace, and democratization.

Our sketchy analysis is not meant as a denunciation of developmental aid or ex-

ternal engagement altogether. Instead, we are interested in using this field as a showcase for political and social processes that have been discussed in academia in at least three different interpretations: as empires, governance, and *étatisation*. While the first claims that military interventions particularly must be seen as consequences of imperial designs, adherents of the idea of global governance see interventions as a necessary step in order to establish Western-like structures in areas that have fallen into social and political chaos.

The third position asserts that beyond the question of whether interventions really create textbook-like states, other elements of "statization" are taking place in the course of interventions writ large (Bayart 2004). Our inclination is to see what has been presented in this paper rather as a confirmation of the last inte-pretation – further research notwithstanding.[14]

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[14] Recent publications on the organization of missionary societies suggest, that the processes and constellations described in this paper have old historical forerunners, cf. Bogner et al. (2004).

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