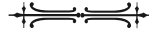


INTRODUCTION



Development Projects: Persistence Despite Evident Failure

“Development” and “Development Projects”: Neocolonialism and the Discourse of Social Change

Gender development programs should be discussed against the wider background of development projects in developing countries.¹ Much of the criticism concerning development discourse and practices in developing countries applies to projects that aspire to effect social change in gendered power relations. Thus, the discussion of a women’s development project in Nepal will be linked in this opening chapter to the critical literature about development at large and gendered development in particular.

Various studies draw a parallel between development or aid projects and neocolonialism. Thus, for instance, Chilisa Bagele (2005) argues that “neocolonialism” signifies the dependence of many formerly colonized countries that have gained geographical and political independence, although in practice their “cultural and economic independence was never really, if at all, won. The colonial systems of domination continue ... as the former colonizers continue to economically, culturally, financially, militarily and ideologically dominate what constitutes the so-called developing world” (ibid.: 660). Some scholars claim that development is a form of structural violence (Cowen and Shenton 1995; Des Chene 1996; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997). These studies argue that one of the more conspicuous instruments of neocolonialism is the aid industry, which structures hierarchal relationships and power gaps between countries and communities. These unbalanced relations are anchored in binary categories that differentiate between “givers” and “receivers,” development “professionals” and populations “in need of development,” between the poor and underdeveloped South and the rich, modern, developed North. Critical research reveals the implied paternalism in these projects and points to development as enhancing economic exploitation in and of developing countries and regions. They expose the hidden agendas behind aid and development discourses and projects. Rather than helping the “weak” and “developing” countries, these studies contend that development programs promote the interests of international aid organizations.

Several salient studies exemplifying this critical trend have been published in the past four decades by Teresa Hayter (1971), Vandana Shiva (1986, 1993), Arturo Escobar (1988, 1995), Graham Hancock (1989), Wolfgang Sachs (1992), Gustavo Esteva (1992), and others. Based on her research on the World Bank, Hayter found that the “purpose of aid is, and cannot be other than, to serve the economic interests of the major capitalist powers, especially the USA, and of the big corporations and banks ... [who] give priority to the interests of their major funders” (Hayter 1971: 88).² Arturo Escobar describes “development” as a dream “progressively turned into a nightmare” and defines it as the ideological apparatus at play in global power relations. He maintains that development discourse is governed by the same principles as colonial discourse. Moreover, development has “successfully deployed a regime of government over the Third World, a space for ‘subject peoples’ that ensures certain control over it” (Escobar 1995: 9). He states that: “Instead of the kingdom of abundance promised by theorists and politicians in the 1950s the discourse and strategy of development produced its opposite, underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression. The debt crisis, the Sahelian famine, increasing poverty, malnutrition, and violence are only the most pathetic signs of the failure of forty years of development” (ibid.: 4). Wolfgang Sachs writes that: “Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. Moreover ... development has become outdated” (Sachs 1992: 1). Gustavo Esteva argues that two centuries after the social construction of development, it is a reminder, for two-thirds of the people on earth, “of what they are not ... of an undesirable, undignified condition. To escape from it, they need to be enslaved to others’ experiences and dreams” (Esteva 1992: 10).³ Esteva criticizes the conceptual acceptance, by many scholars, of the concept “underdevelopment” as self-evidently “real, concrete, quantifiable and identifiable”. Moreover, he argues, “No one seems to doubt that the concept does not allude to real phenomena. They do not realize that it is a comparative adjective whose base of support is the assumption, very Western but unacceptable and undemonstrable, of the oneness, homogeneity and linear evolution of the world” (ibid.: 11–12). For Vandana Shiva, “Development, as a culturally biased project, destroys wholesome and sustainable lifestyles and instead creates real material poverty, or misery, by denying the means of survival through the diversion of resources to resource-intensive commodity production” (Shiva 1989: 72–73). Katy Gardner and David Lewis propose that “development” is “dead,” “a non-word, to be used only with the inverted commas of the deconstructed 1990s” (Gardner and Lewis 1996: 1). As far as the practical realities of development are concerned, they assert that by the mid 1990s it became clear that the anticipated benefits of modernization, the assumed outcome of development, were “largely an illusion: over much of the globe the progressive benefits of economic growth, technological change and scientific rationality have failed to materialise” (ibid.: 1).

Following these critiques, I view “development” as well as its derivatives—such as “developing” and “underdeveloped” (countries) and their opposite, “developed”—as representing an obsolete concept, a “non-word,” and will refer to it as a term that calls for the use of inverted commas.⁴ Therefore, as a contested term, “development” and its above mentioned derivatives are to be read hereafter as if they had inverted commas around them.⁵

Economic and Gendered Critiques of Development and the World Bank

Incisive critiques of development and of the World Bank’s policies (which play a major role in the development industry) from the economic perspective have been offered by Graham Hancock (1989), a journalist; Muhammad Yunus (1998), an academic economist and founder of the Grameen Bank, for which he was awarded with the Nobel Prize in 2007; Joseph Stiglitz (2002), who was Chief Economist at the World Bank until 2000; and William Easterly (2006), who was also an economist at the World Bank.⁶ These works discuss development mainly in economic and organizational terms, such as the financial assistance (aid) extended by developed countries to developing countries; the economic and political interventions of the former in the management of the latter; the economic dependence, exploitation, and corruption that are embedded in this neocolonialist intervention; the growing and corrupted control of the bureaucratic machinery over budgets intended for the provision of public services; and the one-sided imposition of economic globalization.

Graham Hancock (1989) offers an extensive critique of development aid for poor countries. He provides ample examples of the disastrous impact that development and the aid industry has had on most developing countries that have been engaged in development projects.⁷ Hancock analyzes the outcomes of international aid programs in most of the countries that were offered financial assistance by foreign agencies (the most prominent of which is the World Bank) comparing them to countries that either did not receive or stopped receiving aid. Thus, he shows how Africa lost the self-sufficiency in food production that it enjoyed before becoming a chronic recipient of development assistance,⁸ whereas countries like Nicaragua have done much better in the spheres of the economy, welfare, and education without development assistance.⁹ Consequently, Hancock condemns aid as:

often profoundly dangerous to the poor and inimical to their interests; financing the creation of monstrous projects that, at vast expense, have devastated the environment and ruined lives; it has supported and legitimized brutal tyrannies; it has facilitated the emergence of fantastical and Byzantine bureaucracies staffed by legions of self-serving hypocrites; it has sapped the initiative, creativity and enterprise of ordinary people and substituted [these with] the superficial and irrelevant glitz of imported advice. (ibid.: 189)

Hancock blames the United Nations, the World Bank, and bilateral agencies for using aid to create and entrench “a powerful new class of rich and privileged people” in the name of the “destitute and vulnerable.” “It is aid—and nothing else,” he claims, “that has provided hundreds of thousands of ‘jobs for the boys’ and that has permitted record-breaking standards to be set in self-serving behavior, arrogance, paternalism, moral cowardice and mendacity” (ibid.: 192–93). His uncompromising conclusion is that “to continue with the charade seems to me to be absurd.” Thus, he explicitly recommends that the aid industry be wiped out: “the time has come for the lords of poverty to depart. Their ouster can only be achieved, however, by stopping development assistance” (ibid.: 193).

Hancock’s extensive study does not relate in any way to a gender perspective on the aid industry. No development projects are mentioned in his book that concern women in the Third World, developing countries, or the “poor countries of the South,” nor are they included in the numerous examples he uses to substantiate his claims. Indeed, this drawback can be attributed to the fact that gender was barely recognized or incorporated into development projects before the 1990s. Moreover, even at the beginning of that decade, when women and gender in developing countries gained the attention of international institutions (e.g., World Bank 1990, Murphy 1995) and the absence of development projects intended for women was acknowledged, these were subsequently financed with “small money” in terms of the overall resources available to the aid industry. Indeed, the absence of women’s perspectives from Hancock’s analysis might imply that, paradoxically, women have probably gained from being excluded from aid projects, avoiding the various harmful effects that could have befallen them. Nevertheless, ignoring women’s perspectives in any sociopolitical and economic analysis may be said to entail a basic bias. Overlooking women in his analysis of aid projects, despite the significant role that they play in the economy, at both private and public levels, and their (at least) equal share in worldwide poverty, weakens Hancock’s analysis.

A comparison with Muhammad Yunus’s “feminist” book (Yunus 1998), in which he describes women’s economic participation in South Asia’s economy and recounts his own profound engagement with poverty reduction, accentuates this point further. The book tells the story of how Yunus established the Grameen Bank as “a bank for the poor,” first in 1976, in Bangladesh, his country of origin, and later in other countries in the region. For reasons of both social ideology and economic rationale, Yunus’s initiative targeted women, with the purpose of benefiting and empowering women and their families. Within two decades his enterprise became widely acknowledged and financially successful. From \$27 lent by the Bank to forty-two people in 1976, by 1998 microloans had soared to \$2.3 billion administered to 2.3 million families.

Like Hancock, Yunus expresses extreme criticism of the aid industry in general and of World Bank policies in developing countries in particular. He

argues that the money does not reach those who are meant to be its recipients. Rather, development projects are cynically used as a pretext to benefit more affluent groups in developing countries.¹⁰ He argues that foreign aid becomes “a kind of charity for the powerful, while the poor get poorer” (ibid.: 17).¹¹ Yunus also confirms Hancock’s claim that pressure is put on developing countries to take the loans offered by the World Bank and IMF.¹² He, too, places the blame on the extravagant conduct and corrupt structures of the World Bank and aid agencies; the large number of staff they employ (50,000 altogether in the “aid industry,” according to Hancock, and 5,000 World Bank employees, according to Yunus, in Bangladesh alone);¹³ their luxurious working conditions; and the squandering of most of the money on needless experts who treat the local people arrogantly. Yunus charges that in all of the projects financed by the World Bank, “their experts and consultants end up virtually taking over. They do not rest until they mould it their way” (ibid.: 14). This external meddling and imposition of policies, he insists, should be resisted, so that local solutions can be cultivated. Moreover, Yunus argues that instead of wasting the money on huge bureaucracies it should be given outright to the neediest: “Just \$100 put in the hands of each of the poorest ten million families in Bangladesh would amount to \$1 billion that would then either be invested in capital income-earning goods, or, at worst, spent locally on goods and services” (ibid.: 17). Yunus recommends further shutting out the “middle men of the aid industry,” so that people can rediscover the human and personal “help” that is tailored to their own needs and aspirations “in line with priorities that they themselves have set, and guided by their own agendas” (ibid.: 193).

Although Yunus shares most of Hancock’s criticisms about the aid industry, his book differs in its approach to the role of women in economic policies and socioeconomic change. He perceives women as the main actors in poverty and its eradication. Yunus believes that working for women as borrowers of money, and with women as the Grameen Bank’s employees, serves the interests of women, their families’ and of the whole society’s wellbeing, no less than it serves the Bank’s profits. The Grameen Bank, based on microcredit programs, is portrayed as a means for changing gender power relations and promoting general egalitarianism. Thus, Yunus describes his female-centered banking policy and philosophy, which raised his female clientele to 94 per cent—prior to Grameen, women constituted less than 1 per cent of all the borrowers in Bangladesh—as a social revolution (ibid.: 90). In great detail, he describes how he approached potential clients, employing social work strategies to overcome traditional barriers to communicating with women, while convincing them and dissolving their husbands’ resistance. Profoundly motivated by his belief in gender equality he confronted the banks’ discrimination against women years before he himself became a banker, and later stood up against government officials who objected to the Bank’s female-oriented policy. Yunus prides himself for the Grameen Bank’s impact on reducing violence by husbands against their wives, by chal-

lenging traditional constraints on men, and by communicating directly with village women. He explains the Bank's pro-women policy as follows:

if the goals of economic development include improved standards of living, removal of poverty, access to dignified employment, and reduction in inequality, then it is quite natural to start with women. They constitute the majority of the poor, the under-employed and the economically and socially disadvantaged. And since they were closer to the children, women were also our key to the future of Bangladesh. (ibid.: 93)

Yunus's conviction of the significance of working with women is embedded in a feminist rhetoric:

Relatively speaking, hunger and poverty are more women's issues than male issues ... being a poor woman is toughest of all ... When she is given the smallest opportunity, she struggles extra hard to get out of poverty. A poor woman in our society is totally insecure: she is insecure in her husband's house because he can throw her out any time he wishes. He can divorce her by merely saying three times 'I divorce you' ... She cannot read and write, and generally she has never been allowed out of her house to earn money, even if she has wanted to. (ibid.: 92)

Indeed, this representation of Bangladeshi poor women is rather generalizing and stigmatic. However, it is not unlike the way they are sometimes described in feminist publications as well.¹⁴

Do Microfinance Schemes Help the Poor and Women in Developing Countries?

Against the background of Yunus's enthusiastic feminist-socialist presentation of his pragmatic banking approach, it is relevant to reflect on a few studies of the Grameen Bank and its microfinance schemes. This will give us some insight into the role of local economic enterprises in developing countries, and especially into women's inclusion and exclusion practices, in the contexts of both economic development projects and microfinance schemes.

In his study of microfinance in the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, Mahabub Hossain (1988) demonstrates that by providing credit for self-employed activities the Bank has raised the income, employment, asset base, and working capital of borrowers—improving thereby the living standard of more than 90 per cent of borrowers. In addition, the Bank has also been able to reach its target group, the poorest of the poor, who do not have access to formal credit institutions, and has still maintained an excellent repayment record. Shahidur Khandker and Osman Chowdhury (1996) found, similarly, that microfinance programs have helped raise the asset base of poor borrowers, which enables

many of them to escape poverty over time. They also suggest that credit programs have enabled beneficiaries to invest more in non-farm activities rather than in traditional farm activities, thus helping to bring about a structural shift in rural Bangladesh.

Focusing primarily on the impact of microfinance on employment generation and return from employment, Rushidan Rahman and Khandker (1996) found enhanced participation rates and employment among credit-program participants. Based on their findings they suggest that credit-financed self-employment can provide good prospects for alleviating the poverty of landless workers.

The question of whether credit programs designed for the poor are likely to be viable over the long term was examined by Khandker, Baqui Khalily, and Zahed Khan (1996). They suggest that it is possible to develop sustainable group-based credit programs in order to alleviate poverty. However, since reaching the poor involves high operational costs for these institutions, there may be a need for an initial subsidy. Khandker Khalily, and Khan found that it took five to six years for the branches of Grameen Bank to break even, and ten years for the Bank as a whole to attain self-sufficiency.

While early studies evaluating microfinance schemes found them to be an excellent strategy for poverty reduction, several recent studies highlight doubts about these optimistic conclusions. One example is a cross-country study in seven developing countries by David Hulme and Paul Mosley (1996), which concludes that the use of microfinance as a strategy for poverty reduction may involve a trade-off between poverty reduction, on the one hand, and overall income growth on the other. Saurabh Sinha and Imran Matin (1998) indicated that microfinance has increased the poor villagers' dependence on traditional village moneylenders. They found that due to the increase in the volume of credit given by the Grameen Bank, contrary to its own claims, microfinance turned out to be an even more expensive alternative to the high-cost loans offered by village moneylenders. In order to keep up with large loan repayments every week, poor households were forced to seek help from moneylenders. Consequently their burden of debt increased, and evolved risky implications for their long-term economic viability.

Aminur Rahman (1999) found that higher debt burden increases tension and frustration among household members, and creates a new form of dominance over women leading to increased violence within the family. Shelley Feldman (1997) and Lamia Karim (2001) report similar findings in Bangladesh. Imran Matin (1998) has noted yet another consequence of greater credit availability. He found that as the amount of credit increased, the Grameen Bank became more interested in the better-off households, who joined the Bank for the first time, as a result of the lure of larger loans.

Most early studies of the impact of microfinance were concerned with its impact at the household level. However, they did not examine its specific impact on women, who happened to be the majority of borrowers in most programs.

Later studies have tried to redress this omission. For example, Ruth Schuler, Syed Hashemi, and Ann Riley (1997) and Lutfun Khan Osmani (1998) found that credit had a positive effect on women's autonomy over reproductive decisions. In her study of the impact of the Grameen Bank's microfinance programs on women, Osmani found that women's bargaining power and their well-being improved, but not in every dimension. She suggests that the reason for this partial improvement probably lies in the disparity between the large increase in the volume of credit and the absence of adequate investment opportunities for women. Women are obliged to enter into a kind of joint venture with their husbands, whereby women secure credit and men utilize it. Since this implies that women have less than complete control over credit, they fail to gain bargaining power to the extent that they otherwise might have. Similar findings regarding women's incomplete control over credit were reported by Anne-Marie Goetz and Rina Sen Gupta (1996). Women's loss of control over credit is attributed by Hulme and Mosley (1996) primarily to the increase in loan size (credit deepening).

It appears, therefore, that since the mid 1990s studies have raised considerable doubts over Yunus's self-congratulatory assessment of the social and feminist success of microcredit. Both poverty alleviation and women's economic empowerment through microfinance programs were found disappointing. That this is the case is not so much due to wrong practices but probably can be explained by shifts in the motivation driving Yunus and the heads of the Grameen Bank. The Bank managed to build up an economic empire based on a social ideology, and survived the first ten hard years of breaking even and attaining self-sufficiency. As years passed, interest in better-off clients, who were attracted by the larger loans, increased, and subsequently the composition of the Bank's clientele gradually changed. In other words, the profit motive has probably overtaken the initial ideological motivation.¹⁵ The shift from targeting the "poorest" clients to the "not so poor" has entailed a trade-off between the goal of poverty reduction, in particular women's poverty, and the Bank's income-generating objectives. Yunus's original aim was to open up economic opportunities for women, especially poor women, by providing them preferential access to credit in comparison with men, and offering them soft lending conditions. However, it seems that over the years, the Grameen Bank lost much of its social and feminist sensitivity. It continuously increased the size of loans and insisted on fixed weekly repayment. Consequently, the moneylenders returned to the front stage of microfinance for the poorest, something that initially Yunus had hoped to change.

Last but not least, one may point to a cynical outcome of this saga. It appears that even the violence of men against their wives was not wiped out by this enterprise. Rather, having lost control over money to their husbands and relatives, who used them to receive loans from the Grameen Bank, and once the pressures of the deepening burden increased, women again became an easy target for violent, frustrated husbands.

It can be concluded, then, that women were used, albeit inadvertently, by Yunus and the Grameen Bank for the Bank's own benefit, no less than other developing agencies and the World Bank that Yunus criticized. It appears that for some twenty years the Bank did indeed help the poor, as Hossain (1988) and others suggest. It is the studies published since 1996 that point to policy changes which have had a negative impact on the poor—and on poor women in particular.

I suggest that Yunus's enterprise, like any new economic enterprise, necessitated reaching out to new groups that had not been previously tapped. Once the new clientele was absorbed into the system, the old rules and terminology of profit, growth, and so on were restored, to facilitate the conventional money-making game. Seen from this perspective women were discovered and exploited as an important potential group of borrowers that had never before been courted by the banks. In fact, they were cheaply bought off, though with passionate idealistic rhetoric. As soon as poor women became captive clients, indirectly serving as access points to their husbands, and had helped increase the Bank's capital and contributed to its credibility, due to their viable payment norms, the women were not really needed any more. More affluent clients were then preferred.

Thus, feminist rhetoric and the terminology of social justice were used to gain public recognition of the social commitment of the Bank. A more sober consideration of the ways in which Yunus conveyed his commitment to changing the situation of poor women in the family and in society at large shows how feminist rhetoric concerning women's collective vulnerability, victimization, oppression, and discrimination can be manipulated. I conclude, therefore, that feminist discourse may be employed in a process in which help offered to women, based on their collective stereotyped weakness, serves to benefit resourceful businessmen like Yunus, as well as various organizations, including non-profit organizations, or even women's NGOs.

The examples and arguments presented above clarify the point that development projects and policies achieve, in practice, the opposite of what they aim to. Instead of social change, progress, improvement, and growth, to which development is supposed to lead, in reality it often signifies degradation, destruction, and regression (of people, communities, and the environment). Similarly, the term "modernization," which is rooted in the discourse of development and planning, and which implies self-evident progress, advancement, innovative thinking and practices, appears to be a misleading term in this development context.

However, despite the growing body of critical studies, certain scholars appear to cling, indirectly and somewhat apologetically, to the notion of "development." The pursuit of an alternative approach to development reintroduces this concept into socioeconomic analyses of neocolonialism and accords it a continued presence. Thus, Escobar, for instance, who maintains that discussing alternatives to

development means “remain[ing] within the same model of thought that produced development and kept it in place” (Escobar 1995: 222), suggests introducing an alternative “research strategy.” Such an approach would involve ethnographies that investigate “the circulation of discourses and practices of modernity and development” which provide us with a view of where specific communities “are culturally in relation to development” (ibid.: 223).

Gardner and Lewis offer another example for this contradictory argumentation, which is also connected to dilemmas confronting anthropological research. They suggest that development is capable of sustaining all criticisms and undoubted failures because of its conceptual eloquence as a “working tool” for “people discussing global poverty ... even if deriding it philosophically” (Gardner and Lewis 1996: 2). Moreover, they state that, in practice, development agencies impact the world with outputs of billions of dollars a year and that therefore development plans, workers, and policies cannot be simply willed “into non-existence by insisting that they are constructs, however questionable the premises on which they rest may be” (ibid.: 2). These scholars point to a potential collaboration between anthropology and development projects and encourage anthropologists to engage with development. They claim that anthropology and development should cooperate, and that “rather than throwing up our hands in horror ... we suggest that both have much to offer each other ... Anthropological insights can provide a dynamic critique of development and help push thought and practice away from over-systematic models and dualities” (ibid.: 2).

The Comeback of Development Theories

In an eloquent analysis of a “cattle developing project” in Samoa, Susan Maiava (2001) proposes an alternative perspective, which considers development positively at both the theoretical and pragmatic levels. Describing the project in terms of a “clash of paradigms” between traditional and modern Western cultures, her own paradigm, she ventures, would possess “a moral force that could not be disputed.” She outlines a theory which “explains development as a creative, dynamic process of interaction, negotiation and response between cultures ... This results in a diversity of manifestations of the development process in variable cultural and historical contexts” (ibid.: 226).

Maiava argues that although the cattle project in Samoa was successful in economic and social terms, its planners and practitioners considered it a failure. Moreover, they attributed this alleged failure to the negative influence of the villagers’ traditional customs on the project’s potential success. Maiava explains that while the project managers expected the cattle farmers to passively comply with the conventional Western farming practices they were taught, the Samoans, instead, partook selectively in the new knowledge and adapted these practices to suit their own cultural patterns and requirements (ibid.: 215). Thus, Samoan farmers “changed what they wanted to change and retained what they wanted to

retain” (ibid.: 213). Maiava indicates that a similar misperception of development-project outcomes as failures is documented by various studies relating to the Pacific region (see, e.g., McKillop 1989), and, hence, a generalization concerning the success of development projects in the Pacific, regardless of the assessments of failure, can be made.

However, as much as Maiava tries to present development projects in the Third World as justifiable and successful, her approach fails to avoid the very same pitfalls of modernization theory and practice which she criticizes. Despite her criticism of modernization theory, she appears to rely heavily on the binary opposition of modern versus traditional. Although she admits that “the practice of development continues to be strongly influenced by modernization” (Maiava 2001: 223), which was based on ethnocentric belief in the superiority of Western culture, values, and technology, she nevertheless advocates the use of development.

Although sophisticatedly expounded, Maiava’s analysis seems to rely profoundly on a binary and hierarchal Western conceptualization to which she purportedly objects. This self-contradictory thesis might be attributed to Maiava’s unconscious adherence to Western patriarchal thinking, as it emerges from the fact that her whole study ignores gender perspectives or women’s place in the Samoan context. This omission is particularly glaring when she writes that “it is the household and not the village which is the unit of production for income in Samoa” (ibid.: 142), an observation that merely lumps women’s contribution in a general way under “household production.”

Maiava recommends that researchers and project planners approach development projects with the aim of adjusting them to people, in order to avoid misunderstanding and ethnocentrism, to “simply ask the people ... and listen intelligently to their answers” (ibid.: 225). In the course of my fieldwork in rural Nepal, I noted that village women were approached by project planners and asked about their needs and expectations. The women openly (and repeatedly) expressed their preferences, which were included in the reports that were distributed to all those in charge of the project, at local, national and World Bank levels. Yet, all this had nothing to do with the final recommendations and even less with the implementation of the project, a point that will be illustrated later on.

The perceived failure of the “cattle developing” project by practitioners and planners is explained by Maiava as being to do with mistaken conclusions, the lack of a time perspective, the need for a different attitude on the part of planners and practitioners, and so on. However, I would argue that it is the project practitioners’ interests which should be explored, as these are likely to account for at least some of the apparent gap between their views of the project’s success or failure, versus those of the farmers themselves. Robert Chambers (1983), who is cited by Maiava, highlights this issue. He conceives of political economy, or vested interests, as one of the main contributory factors in perpetuating false views about the success or failure of development projects. However, Maiava de-

clines to accept this explanation in the context of her study, where “intentions were good, even if misdirected” (Maiava 2001: 211).

Nevertheless, if the Samoan cattle project (and other similar projects) succeeded, this happened, so it emerges from Maiava’s study, contrary to the project staff’s understandings, planning, and implementation. In fact, the farmers’ efficient and manipulative use of the project in disregard of the original plans and imposed practices turned the project into something that could serve their divergent needs. This occurred, I suggest, because resources were distributed among farmers, and, apparently the less the project staff interfered the better the farmers could incorporate the additional resources into their economic and social life.¹⁶

My Nepali experience lends support to this line of argumentation. The irrigation project, in which the women’s development program was embedded, was designed to enrich the water reservoir which supplied people’s rice fields during the dry season. The project was expected to significantly improve the irrigation system as well as rice-growing conditions. However, the villagers were severely criticized for underestimating the value of the project, for not cooperating sufficiently with the project staff, and for complaining about the need to pay for the water. In 1997, some fifteen years after its initiation—by which time the transfer of responsibility over the project to the farmers was assumed to have been completed—it seemed that utilization of the deep wells’ water was far from optimal, as only a partial use of this water had been made. The villagers’ response to the ambitious, costly, irrigation project can be also understood as their way of protesting about the processes of privatizing water resources. This explication is indebted to Vandana Shiva’s analysis of policies favoring privatization of essential services (Shiva 2002) promoted by the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and giant corporations. Shiva argues that this capitalist process creates corporate states that:

Usurps resources from people for meeting vital needs and puts them in the hands of private corporations for making profits ... Giant water projects have always benefited the powerful and dispossessed the weak ... the beneficiaries have been construction companies, industry, and large commercial farming interests. Donald Worster has called this the “contrived market of the state”—the capitalist state working to facilitate the unlimited accumulation of private wealth. (Shiva 2001)

Shiva blames the World Bank for “Having created scarcity and pollution through the promotion of non-sustainable water use,” and adds that, “the World Bank is now transforming the scarcity it has created into a market opportunity for water corporations” (ibid.).¹⁷ The potential water market is estimated by the World Bank “at \$800 billion.” Thus, Shiva accuses the World Bank of making water a “big business for global corporations that see limitless markets in the growing scarcity and growing demand for water” (ibid.).

However, an indirect, unintended, and unforeseen by-product—an example of what Ferguson refers to as “side effects” (Ferguson 1990: 252)—was noticed (although unacknowledged by the project staff), which profited the population in the villages. The large electricity system and roads that were constructed in order to enable the deep-digging and operation of the wells turned out to be the most outstanding benefit for the villagers in the project area. It follows, then, that the infrastructures that were incidentally provided for the villages in the region contributed significantly to facilitating the life conditions of the population, as well as improving accessibility and communication between villages and throughout the whole region, by enhancing agricultural and social activities. Hence, I argue that investing in basic economic and social infrastructures—such as roads, electricity, cattle, education, and so on—entails (albeit inadvertently) the direct distribution of public resources to large populations. This understanding supports Ferguson’s conclusions from his study of development projects and bureaucratic power in Lesotho. Ferguson concludes: “even if the project was in some sense a ‘failure’ as an agricultural development project, it is indisputable that many of its ‘side effects’ had a powerful and far-reaching impact on the Thaba-Tseka region”. Among these “side effects” he mentions a road “to link Thaba-Tseka more strongly with the capital ... establishing a new district administration” (ibid.: 252). In a similar vein in the Nepali context, Martin Hoftun, William Raeper, and John Whelpton (1999) point to the conspicuous contribution of infrastructures installed by foreign aid agencies to Nepal between 1991 and 1995, as compared to their meager success in terms of a “self-sustaining rise in living standards.” Among the most visible results of these large infrastructure projects were “roads and dams” (ibid.: 259 n.3).

Nevertheless, I suggest that while a focus on “side effects” of development reveals a picture of achieved benefits, it also conceals the state’s responsibility for providing basic services in poor regions and for handling economic gaps. It blurs people’s basic need for direct—rather than mediated (through “instruction” by professionals, for instance)—access to and control over needed resources. It appears, therefore, that “side effects” contribute to preserving power structures, as they provide temporary, negligible solutions for inherent structured inequality and, as a result, they silence protest.

In the following chapters I shall continue the line of critical analysis concerning development and reject the possibility of “alternatives” through an analysis of women’s development projects. The discussion will describe and examine the power relations and dynamics involved in a specific case study; namely, a World Bank’s initiative to promote the development of women in rural Nepal. The gender development discourse concerning help for illiterate, poor, village women extensively used in the documents and declarations, will be shown to play a major role in constructing the image of caring for the women, while in practice development agencies employed manipulative tactics to serve their various interests.

Development and Women's Empowerment Projects

The Construction of Third World Women's Underdevelopment and Subordinated Femininity

An examination of a women's perspective in relation to development and aid projects cannot be separated from a consideration of policy and practices in the general development context. Most feminist writings on this issue strive to accommodate "women" or "gender" within the theoretical and practical sphere of development. However, I suggest that critical analysis concerning the aid industry applies to women's or gender development projects as well. Thus, it is not a matter of applying the "right" discourse, theory, or alternative approach to all variants of modernization theory that are embedded implicitly or explicitly in development projects. Rather, power relations and domination, under various and changing guises, are central to the development context, whether a general or a gendered one. Therefore, development projects and rhetoric, whatever form they take, are part of the strategies used by powerful organizations to dominate weaker countries, communities, and social categories. Hence, they are constructed to preserve dependence and weakness, which in turn "call for" intervention.

In light of my field research, I suggest that both the terminology of "development," "Third World Countries," and "Third World Women," and the aid industry that uses it to establish its own self-evident indispensability, should be unveiled as being manipulated to serve those in power and not those who they claim to be serving and consequently abandoned. Women cannot be helped by development projects, certainly not in terms of changing gendered power structures.

Much of the literature demonstrates that development projects do not change anything basic about women's marginality because they do not break through the barriers of access to credit and other essential resources. At most, some women, either as individuals or as organized groups (mostly NGOs), become part of the hegemonic order. They are co-opted by it and serve it, mainly by complying with women's traditional caring roles and by supporting the gendered, segregated social and economic order. Ranjani Murthy, for instance, points to the tendency of women's NGOs to "strike bargains with patriarchal structures to ensure their day-to-day survival" (Murthy 1999: 177). Similarly, Don Chatty and Annika Rabo suggest that, in the context of the Middle East, many formal women's groups are politically controlled and are: "state run, or owned by political parties or religious organizations ... In general, such organizations are felt to be too dependent on the male controlled power structure" (Chatty and Rabo 1997: 12–13). Reflecting on my experience in the context of Israeli women's organizations, I contend that this claim also applies to the Israeli (and Western) context. Thus, women's NGOs are controlled by governments and manipulated to support and strengthen male dominated regimes.

Nearly four decades of struggle for the recognition of the right of women to be included in development projects and to alter the male bias inherent in de-

velopment projects have elapsed. Yet it appears that gendered power structures have not undergone any significant change or improvement through the interventions of the development industry.

The recognition of a women's perspective in Third World development discourse and projects emerged with Esther Boserup's work, which was the first to note that development projects deprived women and excluded them (Boserup 1970). Her work was followed and enhanced by demands of feminist development groups to integrate women in development projects. It was against this background that the Women in Development (WID) approach evolved. Embedded in the liberal tradition, it demanded that development projects should aim at and work for greater equality between women and men. Since that time, feminist discourse and the struggle for Third World women has changed the terminology and theoretical focus of these debates, in a dialectic process. The conceptualization of development from a women's perspective was defined and redefined in response to ongoing critiques, focusing mainly on the inherently Western ethnocentric thinking implied in the concept of modernization that drove development projects.

The discourse concerning "Third World women" portrayed "Western," "modern," "developed," and "educated" women as the opposite social constructs of "poor," "non-Western," "non-modern," "undeveloped," and "uneducated" women. The construction of "Western" and "non-Western" homogenized categories of women, which formulated binary relations between two groups, and established the weakness, inferiority, victimization, and vulnerability of women in the Third World. As several studies argue, this stigmatizing generalization fostered an image of backwardness that called for the intervention of more affluent, developed countries (e.g., Kabbani 1986; Enloe 1989; Mohanty 1991; Chowdhury 1995). Cynthia Enloe (1989), for instance, suggests that the concept *zenana*¹⁸ plays a major role in the discourse on Third World women. This representation, of veiled women who are "mindless members of a harem" (ibid.: 53), entails a correspondence between images of motherhood and women's "primitiveness."

Geeta Chowdhury (1995) points to the role of the *zenana* representation in constructing the image of traditionalist women in the Third World. Thus, "Third World women are relegated to the *zenana* as housewives, cloistered within the confines of a patriarchal male-dominated environment" (ibid.: 27). She contends that all representations of Third World women portray them as either inferior, subjugated sex objects, or as victims. These images have become inseparable from aid policies and development projects. The implied message of all these images is that Third World women are backward, non-liberated, and need to be civilized, educated, and modernized to conform to the ideal of Western woman.¹⁹ According to Chowdhury, the "welfare approach" that best fits the *zenana* representation is most dominant in World Bank WID policies. This approach conceives of women primarily in their reproductive roles,

viewing them as mothers, whose central occupation is child rearing. Such a welfare approach typically focuses on family-planning programs, child nutrition, and pregnant and lactating women.

World Bank documents corroborate Chowdhury's claims. One of the Bank's progress reports advises: "Not all operations in all sectors are equally important for actions related to women. Operations in the area of human resources—education and population, health and nutrition are of prime importance" (World Bank 1990: 14). Moreover: "Six of the eight projects approved in fiscal 1988 and ten of eleven in fiscal 1989 do address such basic matters as family planning, nutrition for mothers and children, and maternal and child health care" (ibid.: 15).

The same document stresses the significant role of women as educators, which necessitates educational projects: "The influence of the mother's education on family health and family size is great—greater than that of the father's education. Maternal education may also have a greater effect on children's learning" (ibid.: 5). A striking statement from a Bank document remarks upon women's "lack of self-confidence, education and basic skills, even for feeding children" (McGuire and Popkin 1990: 13). This characterization clearly emphasizes the Bank's ethnocentric attitude toward Third World women, denying them even the skill of "feeding children."

An observation made by Stacey Leigh Pigg suggests that the World Bank's "welfare approach" is not really concerned with Third World women's welfare but rather in controlling their reproduction. She writes:

Naively, I hadn't realized that health in Nepal's development mostly means family planning. I was rather shocked, in fact, to see how much money goes into trying to get these folks not to reproduce. And all this seems so incongruous in relation to the joy and delight Nepalese find in children ... Which goes only to show how pathetically narrow the World Bank's vision is ... Thus I learned something very important about the World Bank in Nepal.²⁰

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach that succeeded WID focused on the social construction of gender roles and relations, rather than focusing exclusively on women. This approach introduced the concept of "mainstreaming," which involved the "systematic application of a gender-aware vision to corporate activities, government and agency policies" and the "introduction of routine management procedures to ensure implementation" (Rowan-Campbell 1999: 21). According to Dorienne Rowan-Campbell, GAD "poses a challenge to the operation of patriarchy, its intent being that women's perspectives, knowledge, capacity, and difference become part of the mainstream of development options and national life, thus changing both" (ibid.: 21). Subsequent critiques of GAD suggest that this approach, too, reinforced negative stereotypes of women in the South by emphasizing their homogenized poverty and backwardness. Thus, for example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues:

This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “third world” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions. (Mohanty 1991: 56)

DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) was another proposed perspective for looking at women and development (see, e.g., Sen and Grown 1987). This approach was also criticized (e.g., Hirschman 1995) for casting these women as victims of the development process and continuing to objectify them as “Third World” women. Similarly, Geeta Chowdhury argues that, “despite this critical stance, and the involvement of progressive feminist groups in the South, such as DAWN, international feminists have neither challenged the issue of modernity nor one of its expressions, colonial discourse on Third World women” (Chowdhury 1995: 35).

Postmodern Feminist Theory Trapped in Development Discourse

While postmodern feminist theory has criticized the concept of “modernity” with respect to the South/North divide, it was also caught up in the paradigm of development, as well as in the illusion of the promise of gender development projects. Postmodern feminists do not reject the concept of development as such. One example of this self-contradictory argumentation can be found in Janet Henshall Momsen’s study, which clearly illustrates the failure of development projects in promoting women’s equality in the “Third World,” and points to the destructive outcomes of modernization, from the point of view of women (Momsen 1991). With reference to the agricultural sphere, she contends that Western experts and the modernization of agriculture have: “altered the division of labor between the sexes, increasing women’s dependent status as well as their workload. Women often lose control over resources such as land and are generally excluded from access to new technology” (ibid.: 1). Momsen maintains that even when women are included in development projects, they have scant chances of benefiting from new technological inputs because “local political and legislative attitudes make women less credit worthy than men” (ibid.: 51). Moreover, Momsen argues that there is no such thing as a “Third World Women’s” collectivity or identity. She views the concept of *zenana* and the image of women’s utter dependence on men as an absurd stereotype and offers numerous examples of divergent situations, places, and contexts in which women are not collectively passive and in which they cannot be described as a homogeneous social category. Momsen highlights Indian women working in paddy fields and making bricks, Brazilian women picking black pepper and processing nuts, Aborigine women hunting and gathering in Australia, and women loading

bananas for export in the West Indies. She shows the impact of development on women's roles in agriculture, and on their employment status, which changes "from independent cultivators to unpaid family workers with the expansion of cash cropping in Africa, from independent cultivator to wage laborer in India as landlessness increases, and from permanent hacienda worker to wage-earning rural proletariat in Latin America with the rise of agri-business" (ibid.: 47).

Nevertheless, her analysis notwithstanding, Momsen does concede that correct thinking and planning based on the understanding that "women are central to development" (ibid.: 93) may engender anticipated results. She argues, for instance, that, "despite the apparent lack of change, the United Nations Decade for Women achieved a new awareness of the need to consider women when planning for development" (ibid.: 3). Thus, "awareness" is championed as a substitute for actual, socioeconomic change. Jane Parpart and Marianne Marchand's work offers another example (Parpart and Marchand 1995). They suggest that development cannot be other than what it is: an ethnocentric approach for reinforcing the existing power structure. They argue that: "the discourse of development has often disempowered poor women. This comes as no surprise to those who are critical of the dualistic, patriarchal language and assumptions embedded in Western development thinking." Yet, they pursue a new mode of thinking about women, gender, and development, which "welcomes diversity, acknowledges previously subjugated voices and knowledge(s) and encourages dialogue between development practitioners and their 'clients'" (ibid.: 17). Thus, instead of rejecting development completely, Parpart and Marchand prefer to adhere to the notion of development as it is refracted through post-modern feminist thinking, which addresses development issues in "an increasingly complex, interrelated and unequal world, with its skepticism towards Western hegemony, particularly the assumption of a hierarchical North/South divide" (ibid.: 17).

It follows, then, that postmodern feminism reifies, in essence, the dualistic approach it criticizes, reinforcing it, for instance, with the binary oppositions of "South" and "North," and "development practitioners" and their "clients" (who need to be developed). I suggest that this approach entails, unavoidably, homogenizing "Third World women." Moreover, postmodern feminists emphasize the need to focus on difference and to listen to the silenced and ignored voices of "Third World women." Jane Parpart phrased this approach as follows: "the goals and aspirations of Third World women would be discovered rather than assumed, and strategies for improving women's lives could be constructed on the basis of actual experiences and aspirations rather than modern fantasies imposed by the West" (Parpart 1993: 454).

I suggest that this view not only homogenizes "Third World women," albeit with well-intentioned, idealized rhetoric, it also assumes that these women's goals and aspirations are not known. "They" are so very different from "us," this view implies, that their aspirations and goals distinctively differ from those of

women in other parts of the world. The important point is, rather, that women's voices, like those of minorities or disadvantaged groups, are often overlooked, whether they are heard or not. Furthermore, my field data indicate clearly that those "aspirations and goals" in developing countries or in the Third World are indeed being strongly and clearly expressed by women. Their needs, unsurprisingly, are similar to those of people all over the world: to have decent living conditions and fair economic opportunities, to be able to provide for their families, obtain health services, and so on.

A similar point is made by Lauren Leve (2007), who criticizes empowerment theories which "track consciousness verses unconsciousness, agency verses alienation, 'subjectivity' verses 'subalternity', and choice verses constraint." Based on her interviews with rural Nepali women in Chorigaon, she argues that women evaluate their lives in more prosaic terms.²¹ They "ask for ease, security, equality of opportunity (including access to education and employment), good food and clothing, some degree of respect for their personal desires—and, as much as possible, some fun" (ibid.: 151). She adds that development, according to their testimonies, "would include water taps, electricity, bridges and roads, and peace" (ibid.: 165 n.43).

The women in the Nepali villages that I visited were asked about their needs and aspirations time and again, by representatives of women's and other NGOs. However, their responses were simply ignored, either by being rephrased in "expert" language, "asking questions in closed or fixed categories," interpreting responses "in ways that fit development's own agendas" (Hausner 2006: 319), or, more importantly and in practice, by inserting them into reports but not considering them as a driver for social change or the allocation of resources.

Although later feminist approaches criticized earlier ones, still they did not reject the validity of development itself, as a sociogeographic concept that presupposes binary hierarchical situations and relationships. Nor did they reject the legitimacy of development projects, women's development projects included. Thus, the various approaches reviewed here accept the need for development as a self-evident truth. Consequently, they provide arguments about how women's perspectives should be addressed in development projects, and to which terminology is more appropriate for overcoming the modernization loop and binary conceptualization criticized by Edward Said (1979), and other post-modernist theorists, feminists among them.

Ambivalence in Discussing the Futility of Gender Development Projects

"Development projects" for women are gradually being recognized as irrelevant and disappointing at best, or as strengthening the patriarchal social order at worst. Recent feminist publications have expressed a growing disappointment and lack of belief in the promise of change through women's development projects. They suggest that these projects, while paying lip service to gender equality, fail to contribute to the eradication of poverty at large and of women's

poverty in particular; nor have they contributed to setting in motion any meaningful change in male-dominated structures. Some of these studies imply the futility of theoretical discussions about development programs that encourage women to either work together or separately from men, whichever the case might be. In general, they demonstrate that gender development projects account for no significant change in women's socioeconomic opportunities.

In a tone of despair resulting from the insignificant, disappointing achievements gained in the twentieth century, Dorianne Rowan-Campbell turns her hopes, or rather her prayers, to the new era: "Perhaps the millennium is the moment to begin actively to subvert some of the strategies used against women's empowerment to turn these in on themselves" (Rowan-Campbell 1999: 25). These hopes turned out to be illusions, something which emerges from Janet Momsen's more recent work (Momsen 2004). She claims that although some three decades of gender development policies (mainly WID and GAD) have elapsed, patriarchy is still blocking any significant change in gender power relations, and that, "the work of redressing gender inequalities has only just begun. Gender balance in human rights is hard to deliver. States may pass laws providing equal access to women and men to property rights but these laws may not be enforced at the grass-roots level" (*ibid.*: 241).

Naila Kabeer (1999) points to the failure of women-specific projects, in particular those aimed at income generation. A decade of experience has shown, she says, that projects intended for women cannot challenge "the marginal place assigned to women within development as long as the norms, practices, and procedures which guide the overall development effort remain fundamentally unchanged" (*ibid.*: 34). She emphasizes, in contrast, the vital importance of a political agenda, which would focus on the participation of women in decision-making at the policy level and challenge the existing status quo in society.

Fiona Leach (1999) expresses deep disappointment in relation to non-formal education (NFE) and training programs for women, which, instead of compensating them for the failure of the formal system to provide them with marketable skills, have "continued to reflect the same disparities and biases that prevail in formal education." She writes: "IGPs [Income Generating Projects] for women have largely concentrated on support for the provision of goods and services which are an extension of traditional female activity in the home, such as handicrafts or food production" (*ibid.*: 51).

Reflecting on my own field experience, it appears that informal-education and vocational-training programs funded and set up by NGOs—which, as Leach remarks, "have mushroomed in developing countries" (*ibid.*: 50)—did not, in reality, achieve much in terms of reducing women's illiteracy or of widening their employment opportunities (be they "traditional" or not). Rather, they served to silence local and international feminist organizations' claims about discrimination. Moreover, these programs were easy to organize on a large scale and, therefore, were a cheap means for buying off the more-educated women

in local communities in Nepal. The funds allocated for these programs enabled them to employ some of the women heading local NGOs and to account for the organizations' activities at the same time.

The lack of progress since the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women, notwithstanding the institution of development projects and the acknowledgement of women's marginalization, is criticized sharply by Hlupekile Sara Longwe, who states, "Gender policies have a strange tendency to 'evaporate' within international development agencies" (Longwe 1999: 63). She claims that the "patriarchal cooking pot" is "filled with patriarchal bias, implicit in the agency's values, ideology, development theory, organizational systems, and procedures" (ibid.: 75), and concludes that these agencies produce little of value in terms of results. Jo Rowlands (1999) also discusses the growing awareness of the hidden agendas embedded in development projects. These, she claims, are manipulated through extensive use of appealing terms such as "empowerment," "participation," "capacity-building," "sustainability," or "institutional development." She complains that it is tempting to use these terms in such a way that "takes the troublesome notions of power, and the distribution of power, out of the picture. For in spite of their appeal, these terms can easily become one more way to ignore or hide the realities of power, inequality, and oppression" (ibid.: 149).

However, in spite of the extensive critique directed at development projects and development agencies, both at the theoretical and practical level, it appears that they are assumed to be a self-evident reality that must be endured. Rather than suggest, as the critical analysis implies, the need to categorically reject gender development projects (or any other development project, for that matter), most scholars come up with new names for much of the same mechanisms and practices. Deborah Eade's analysis provides one such example: "Given that development agencies exist, and show no signs of being about to self-destruct, it is essential that they should seek constantly to improve the quality of their partnerships. That the whole mission of development may be misguided is not a reason for development agencies to adopt less than the highest achievable standards of integrity" (Eade 1997: 5).

Nevertheless, I suggest that development projects, whether defined generally or as specifically gender oriented, cannot achieve their formally claimed goals. More than anything else, the development discourse serves to construct the self-evident image of a dichotomized, hierarchal social reality of First versus Third World, North versus South, developed versus underdeveloped countries, and modern versus traditional societies, which then calls for international intervention in the "needy," "Third World," "South," or "developing countries." Terms such as "modernization," "development," and "Third World" are used both in the context of gender-specific and general programs to convey an ideological commitment to universal social values. However, in reality they are used to conceal the vested interests of the agencies and organizations involved in the development industry. This dichotomized discourse is a central compo-

nent in the construction of hierarchal and patronizing relationships. It offers undisputed justification, an “objective” and convincing explanation for discriminating policies, masked by a rhetoric of helping, improving, and developing the lesser, needy others.

Similarly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s attempt to “move away from misleading geographical and ideological binarisms” by adopting the language of “One-Third World versus Two-Thirds World” in relation to terms like “Western/Third World and North/South” (Mohanty 2003: 506), is an illusion. As much as Mohanty tries to get rid of binary oppositions, it appears that her terminology introduces new ones, such as “social majority/minority,” “One Third/Two Thirds,” “marginalized, colonized/privileged,” “nations/indigenous communities,” “haves/have-nots.” Despite her efforts, these terms are “seen as oppositional and incommensurate categories” (ibid.: 522). Apparently, these preferred categorizations do not permit the ascription of “ideas about experience, agency, and struggle” to women (ibid.: 527), which feminist scholars like Parpart and Marchand, Eade, and Mohanty eagerly aspire to.

I suggest that gender rhetoric in development discourses serves as lip service for the purpose of appeasing vocal feminists’ demands or for concealing ulterior commitments to more powerful partners. Since, for instance, allocated funds for women’s projects are easy to manipulate, they can be conveniently transferred to “more important” purposes when negotiating with politicians, powerful corporations, and so forth.

Therefore, the rhetoric concerning development should be examined as an inseparable part of concrete contexts and explored through ethnographic studies. The descriptions and analysis presented in this book offer an example of this crucial nexus, between the concrete context and the role of rhetoric. The case study, describing a project aimed at women’s empowerment in rural Nepal, can serve to illustrate the instrumentalization of widely respected terminologies in the realization of extrinsic hidden interests. I suggest that men’s interests in preserving power and control, in both the “West” and in the “Third World,” leads them to employ the gender discourse while in practice excluding women from vital resources.

Gender, Development and Literacy in Nepal

The “Third World” Image of Nepali Women

Against the background of Nepal’s poverty, male-dominated structures and religious practices, it seems almost inevitable that Nepali women are portrayed through the image of the “Third World” woman as poor, vulnerable, oppressed, exploited, and victimized. One example of this image of Nepali women as collectively deprived, passive, illiterate, and so on can be found in a book written by a Nepali feminist, Prativa Subedi. In her book, Subedi paints a portrait of Nepali women’s extreme dependency and oppression:

From her very birth the girl child is discriminated against, often seen as an unwanted addition that somehow must be tolerated until she can be married off. Her emotional growth is suppressed by values imposed by family and society until she is emptied of her most natural human qualities, a girl without a personality or the capacity to think independently ... so she is dependent on her father as a child, on her husband after marriage, and on her son in her old age ... From the very beginning the qualities of shame, fear, passivity and dependence on others are instilled in girls. (Subedi 1993: 1–3)

Moreover, Subedi's book establishes a stereotyped image by over-emphasizing the connection between Nepali women and multiple stigmatic and deviant phenomena associated with weakness, vulnerability, and victimization. These include: violence against women, trafficking in women, women and AIDS, alcoholism, and more. This construction of the miserable Nepali woman's identity offers an inventory that highlights the extremely problematic position of women in Nepal. For instance, the chapter on women and violence (ibid.: 13–22) includes the following subheadings which accentuate the “many forms” of violence against women: child marriage; polygamy; sexual abuse; trafficking of girls and women; dowry-related violence; alcohol and drug-related violence; abuse within the media; caste-related violence; violations of reproductive rights; unequal pay for equal work; wife battering (ibid.: 14). The list of discriminations relating to women and society include: restrictions on educational opportunities; misrepresentation in the media; family control over women's reproductive power; control over women's mobility; control over parental property; discriminatory religious practices; the discriminatory legal system; economic restrictions (ibid.: 7).

Women are indeed extensively discriminated against in almost all countries, including Nepal, to different extents and in multiple ways. However, portraying women as collectively and homogeneously miserable human beings is unconvincing, misleading and even manipulative.²²

The validity of data concerning poverty rates has been questioned for some time. A skeptical view of women's poverty rates is suggested, for instance, by Diane Elson (2000) and Janet Henshall Momsen (2002). They argue that although women are often presented as constituting most of the world's poorest, “there is no empirical evidence for this statement” (Momsen 2004: 241). A World Bank research report suggests similarly that: “estimating the number of men and women living in poverty is difficult” because “there is no adequate summary measure of individual welfare that can be compared for males and females. The most commonly used indicator of poverty (or current welfare) is consumption. But most household-based surveys collect consumption data for households, not individuals” (World Bank 2001: 64).

Women's collective image as poor, weak, and exploited is diligently (though legitimately) used to develop a feminist awareness and political agenda.

However, in the context of gendered power structures in developing countries, this image is conveniently employed by agencies that profit from women's alleged collective backwardness. The development and aid industry that is oriented to gender issues provides a conspicuous example of the instrumental use of women's collective underdevelopment for establishing the need for intervention and of the need for so-called help, instruction, and development to be provided by "helpers" and "developers." Marianne Gronemeyer's definition of "helping" is relevant in this context: "It is a means of keeping the bit in the mouths of subordinates without letting them feel the power that is guiding them ... elegant power does not force, it does not resort either to the cudgel or to chains; it helps" (Gronemeyer 1992: 53).

The fact that (some) native feminists adopt the image of women's collective victimization and helplessness legitimizes further foreign researchers', consultants', and practitioners' stereotyped images of local women. Thus, they become part of the process which substantiates the need for organized help from the outside. Reports from the "gender development programme" in the groundwater project by Tovi Fenster (1996) and myself (Hertzog 1997) illustrate the point. For example, Fenster enumerates the "social needs" of women (which, allegedly, call for experts' intervention) in the villages she visited as: "literacy needs; discouraging marriage at a young age; preventing women trafficking; preventing polygamy; preventing male drinking and violence in the family; women's financial dependency; etc." (Fenster 1996: 19).

Moreover, the stigmatized image that emerges from describing Nepali women collectively as weak and as victims erases their individual narratives and turns them into human components of an abstract social collective. Also, presenting marginal phenomenon (although truly horrific) as a dominant characteristic of social life may result in losing sight of the complexity of the overall picture as well as the individual nature of women's (and men's) lives. Sarah Cramer makes a similar point: "Nepali women, like other 'third world women' have been homogenized and stereotyped in order to form a single, manageable idea of female oppression for development to attack ... The 'Nepali woman', as constructed by development discourse, is 'ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, and sexually constrained' because she is a 'third world woman'" (Cramer 2007: 7).

The stigmatic, homogenized image of Nepali women veils the complex and divergent situations of women in Nepal (at any period). It also diminishes Nepali women's active participation and crucial contribution to social and economic life in Nepal. Thus, Subedi's stereotyped descriptions of Nepali women as vulnerable and powerless are undermined when she discusses women and agriculture (Subedi 1993: 75–86). There she incorporates into the picture the positive, active, and significant role of women in their families and society at large. In this context she maintains that "Nepali women make an important contribution to the agricultural activities of the country" (*ibid.*: 75), contribut-

ing 50 per cent of household income. Moreover, she notes that women are overwhelmingly in charge of the production and utilization of food-grains, and that, “Except for plowing the fields almost every agricultural activity—like preparing the land for cultivation, carrying fertilizer, seed sowing and planting, weeding, harvesting, sorting grains, selecting and drying seeds—are particularly the responsibility of women” (ibid.: 76).

The significant role of women in agricultural activity and their essential contribution to household income cannot be underestimated (see, e.g., Dahl 1987).²³ Clearly this activity entails the dependence of other family members (males included) on women for their sustenance and economic provision. It follows, therefore, that Nepali women, in urban and rural regions, are not (and were not) passive, vulnerable, and powerless individuals.

This conclusion gains support in the light of Shtrii Shakti’s (a women’s organization) study of the socioeconomic changes in the status of Nepali women between 1981 to 1993 (Shtrii Shakti 1995). This study offers statistical data which indicates both the diversity of women’s conditions (in rural compared to urban sites, and in relation to specific economic activities), and the significant role of women in agriculture and the labor market. The significant participation of rural women in economic life in Nepal is revealed, for instance, by the fact that their contribution accounts for 67 per cent of the family farm economy and 41 per cent of the local market economy (ibid.: 62). Women’s extensive economic involvement includes self-employment enterprises, especially in the field of tourism, and “income-generating activities that are home-based, such as wool and cotton spinning, carding, twining, embroidery and knitting” (ibid.: 137). Although men predominate in most household expenditure decisions, women are far from being passive participants in their households, as some stereotyped images imply. The findings indicate that “women initiated 44.1% of the time, were consulted 32.1% of the time and made the final decisions 28.8% of the time regarding ... gifts, loans, travel, religious and social obligations.” Similarly, in selling vegetables and fruit, “women act the role of initiator in 45.3% of the cases, and make the decision on 43.2% of sales alone” (ibid.: 91). Even in capital transactions—such as land, buildings, and large animals—women have an input, albeit to a lesser extent. In all rural sites women are the decision-makers in 31.6 per cent of transactions (ibid.: 93).

However, women’s crucial contribution to their households, communities, and the larger society is almost ignored by the male establishment and they are often excluded from development projects. Moreover, my ethnography suggests that foreign development agencies cooperate with the Nepali government in excluding women, in practice, from development projects. Thus, while development projects do not bring about social change or poverty reduction in Nepal, they do foster women’s marginalization in public life and in economic activities.

Seira Tamang also points to the embedded cooperation between development agencies and Hindu patriarchal domination. She argues:

The creation of “the Nepali woman” was as much the work of development agencies in search of “the Nepali woman” to develop as it was the result of the active dissemination of state-sponsored ideology. The patriarchally oppressed, uniformly disadvantaged, Hindu “Nepali woman” as a category did not pre-exist the development project. She had to be constructed by ignoring the heterogeneous forms of community, social relations, and gendered realities of the various peoples inhabiting Nepal. (Tamang 2002: 163)

Shtrii Shakti’s study makes clear that development, from the point of view of Nepali women, implied a considerable reduction of control over their lives. The increase in cash cropping made them depend more heavily on men, as men more usually appropriate cash. Male migration for waged or service employment has increased women’s workload, and female migration for low-wage employment in export-led markets exposed women to social exploitation. Similar arguments, in the wider context, have been advanced by Clare Oxby (1983), Maria Mies (1986), Vandana Shiva (1986), Janet Momsen (1991), and Sumitra Gurung (1994). They all contend that despite the significant role of women in agriculture, forestry, livestock, and maintaining a balance in land and household labor, development has diminished their position. Mies, Shiva, Momsen, and Gurung also blame development for having harmed local ecologies through soil erosion, landslides, floods, deforestation, and wasting water supplies.

The proceedings of an international anthropological conference, which took place in Kathmandu in 1992, further contradict the stereotyped depiction of Nepali women as passive and backward (see Allen 1994). A section in the book on women and power highlights the richness of Nepali women’s lives, their resourcefulness, social networks, and the significant roles they play in various aspects of the economy, as well as in the environmental and cultural spheres, and in the political struggle for democracy. Thus, women in Nepal are described as having complex lives, diverse interests, activities, and skills; some are depicted as outstanding leaders and many others as involved in action for social change, as one might expect to find in any human society.

Essays by Sumitra Gurung (1994) and Julia Thompson (1994) can serve to demonstrate this line of analysis. Gurung’s anthropological research on Nepali women from a hill region of Nepal reveals that, in contrast to the stigmatic images of development planners and practitioners, these women are resourceful, knowledgeable, and capable of sustainable cultivation of mountain areas (Gurung 1994: 336–37). Moreover, Gurung points to the fact that it is the formal political systems and “the established male-biased model of development” that have “basically neglected women’s work, knowledge and potential capacities in sustaining mountain areas” (ibid.: 337). She blames the government for being responsible for reinforcing the gender discrimination which has detrimentally affected the region’s ecology.

In her article on resistance among high-caste Hindu women in Kathmandu, Thompson reveals the ways in which these women resist and “actively con-

struct their relationships with others in reference to existing power relations and social structures” (Thompson 1994: 367) despite religious and traditional constraints on their behavior. As a result of their resistance, Parbatya traditions are beginning to be questioned and even challenged.

Indeed, as we will see presently, the conspicuous role played by women in Nepal’s Maoist insurgency (Gautam, Banskota, and Manchanda 2001; Leve 2007) offers further evidence of Nepali women’s important role in the country’s society, culture, politics, economy, and history.

Nepali Women and the Maoist Insurgency

The second half of the 1990s, the period of my stay in Nepal, coincided with the country’s Maoist insurgency. This “people’s war,” which was launched in February 1996, evolved out of Nepal’s incessant poverty, its dependence on foreign aid, and the pervasive corruption of its regime (De Sales 2003; Karki and Seddon 2003; Sharma and Prasain 2004). Continuing poverty and a widening gap between the rural and urban sectors (Justice 1989; Thapa and Sijapati 2004; Whelpton 2005), despite four decades of intensive development (Whelpton 2005),²⁴ were the background to a growing disillusionment with development interventions, and a resentment of the Nepali government and its extensive dependence on foreign aid (Gellner 2003; Thapa 2003; Hutt 2004; Onesto 2005).

The conspicuous participation of Nepali rural women in the rebellion has been discussed extensively.²⁵ About one-third of all foot soldiers in Maoist strongholds were women. They occupied positions of leadership throughout the Maoist hierarchy, participated actively in village defense groups, and worked as couriers and guides (Leve 2007). According to Gautam, Banskota, and Manchanda (2001), groups of women were involved in guerilla activities. This phenomenon offers an opportunity to examine one of the main issues that this book discusses: the impact of gender development projects, literacy programs in particular, on women’s empowerment and on changing gendered power relations.

Some studies suggest that rural women’s intense involvement in the dramatic events of the insurgency, contrary to the “traditional” image of their passivity, emerged from their participation in literacy projects. These contributed, whether directly or indirectly, to rural women’s motivation to rebel and to set out to change the gendered power division. Gautam, Banskota, and Manchanda (2001) argue, for instance, that development projects, literacy programs in particular, affected women’s awareness of their exploitation and discrimination, and served to develop their solidarity.

Defying the growing body of critique that perceives development (in its general and gender-specific forms) as a failure, destructive, violent, and so on, Manchanda (1999) maintains that development has succeeded in rural Nepal. She elaborates on the enormous impact of literacy programs, which have stimulated social networking and collaboration, and suggests that the active support of women in the Gorkha district—a Maoist stronghold—reflects the success of

two decades of development work. Gautam, Banskota, and Manchanda further argue that adult women's literacy programs, such as the ones run by an American INGO, had a far-reaching impact on women's presence among the rebels:

Ironically, it is the success of the adult literacy campaign which has paved the way for women to become active in the public life of the community, for girls to go to schools and for girls politicized in school to be drawn into the armed struggle ... Literacy campaigns ... designed to promote the empowerment of women inadvertently encouraged many conscientised young women to choose subsequent empowerment through armed struggle. (Gautam, Banskota, and Manchanda 2001, cited in Leve 2007: 130)

This argument gains support from various studies that describe the significant influence of literacy programs on nurturing networking, gender consciousness, and so forth, despite the fact that literacy programs have had very limited achievements in terms of their original aims.²⁶ Thus, Anna Robinson-Pant found that participants have succeeded in transforming the literacy intervention “in spite of, rather than in support of ... project objectives” (Robinson-Pant 2004a: 5).

The implications of literacy courses in terms of unintended social success have been reported by Nelly Stromquist (1994) and Ila Patel and Anita Dighe (1997). Stromquist's study showed that literacy classes in the slums of São Paulo unintentionally offered women participants an opportunity to meet together as a group who were subjected to similar constraints and experiences of poverty and subordination. Following Stromquist, Patel and Dighe suggest that “literacy classes provide an opportunity to a large number of women learners and volunteers to meet, to talk and to share, and break their isolation which is socially structured into their lives” (Patel and Dighe 2003: 223). Dighe's study of a literacy campaign in south Delhi showed that women's literacy classes “provided women learners with a social space, away from home and offered them an opportunity to meet in a group to share their common experiences about work, family, and illness” (Dighe 1995). Gillian Attwood, Jane Castle and Suzanne Smythe (2004), Sujata Khandekar (2004), and Juliet Millican (2004) also stress the social gains, defined as “new spaces,” embedded in women's literacy gatherings. This sanctuary provides women with a protected and supportive framework to discuss issues that normally are not addressed in public. Lauren Leve, who interviewed women in Chorigaon in the mid 1990s, and then five and ten years after the conclusion of a literacy program, suggests that, similar to many other literacy courses in Nepal, the effects on the graduates were to encourage “greater confidence and increased self-esteem, less shyness interacting with people outside of the family, and an expanded experience of women's ability to succeed in traditionally male public and intellectual domains. Overall, participants testified to a profound sense of individual and collective transformation” (Leve 2007: 143).

These findings correspond with my observations during meetings with women in Nepali villages. The participants clearly enjoyed the meetings (as described in Chapter 4). They attended them despite the distrust they often expressed in relation to our proposed project. Yet, the empowerment which the women derived from the meetings was clearly revealed even before any of the literacy classes (or vocational training) started. Thus, I contend that the social outcomes of the interactions which took place in the villages were not those intended by the engineers of our development project, but emerged rather as “side effects” (Ferguson 1990: 252), similar to the familiar impact of women’s or other organized group activities. The social interactions that evolved from the groups’ meetings in the irrigation project’s area, which I visited, provided women with a sort of substitute for men’s organized economic and political activity— meetings concerning deep tube wells, for instance—through which they produced a form of women’s “clubs”—or “social sanction,” as defined by Patel and Dighe (1997).²⁷

However, this outcome had very little to do with the original aim of advancing women’s literacy and economic power and it certainly cannot be considered as the gender development project’s success but rather as a coincidental, unintentional outcome (cf. Pigg 1992; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Leve 2007). Furthermore, developing women’s separate frameworks and activities is typically encouraged by dominant patriarchal agencies that ensure women’s cooperation and compliance by compensating them with non-formal (inferior) power, at a distance from formal power centers. This understanding corresponds with studies like that of Chatty and Rabbo (1997). Elaborating on women’s formal and informal organized groups in the Middle East, they suggest that “where the individual voice is insignificant, where associations that cut across kin groups and tribes are feared” (ibid.: 18), independent women’s groups pose a threat to existing institutions. Thus, the strict control over (male and female) organized groups permits only those activities that fit traditional gender roles. Patel and Dighe (2003) argue more generally that as the patriarchal state represents the interests of dominant groups it does not tolerate any collectivization of women’s strength.

Thus, I suggest that the massive participation of Nepali women in the Maoist insurgency is better explained by the Nepali government’s neglect of rural women’s needs and by the Maoists’ commitment to support women’s equality. I argue, therefore, that although literacy programs could have contributed to women’s empowerment and, indirectly, to their massive participation in the Maoist insurgency, they cannot provide an unequivocal nor a major explanation for this phenomenon.

Power, Poverty and Women’s Illiteracy in Nepal

Literacy is widely perceived and described by development theoreticians and practitioners as a crucial means for setting in motion social change, and erad-

icating poverty in particular. The embedded connection between power, poverty, and education has been thoroughly discussed by scholars like Paulo Freire (1971), Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976, 2001), and Arnold Louis (1979). In a World Bank position paper, Helen Abadzi (1996) recounts that between 1963 and 1985 many countries introduced literacy campaigns with the help of international organizations and the World Bank. This evolved from the widely accepted belief that “if the illiterate poor learned to read they would have access to information that would improve their lives” (ibid.: 1). Ila Patel and Anita Dighe similarly argued in the late 1990s that: “Illiteracy is typically the plight of poor and powerless people. Illiteracy is essentially a manifestation of social inequality, the unequal distribution of power and resources in society” (Patel and Dighe 2003: 221). Elaborating on the gaps of literacy rates between men and women, they argue that poor women, rural women in particular, face physical and patriarchal constraints in terms of the time and space allocated for, and societal expectations from, education.

Hence, the discourse concerning illiteracy plays a conspicuous role in development projects aiming at social, economic, and political change. Women’s basic education—including writing, reading, and numeracy—acquires an additional emphasis. In their “feminine” roles, women are perceived as playing a dominant role in bottom-up processes and as having a great deal of influence on their family members, their communities, and consequently on society as a whole. Therefore, women’s education (namely their literacy) is conceived of as a key factor in development projects.

Often presented in international aid organizations’ documents as one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in the world (in terms of income, health, education, and so on), Nepal seems to exhibit a correlation between poverty, the need to develop its population, the need to advance and empower women, and literacy provided by aid agencies.

The literature on literacy in developing countries often focuses on the necessary and suitable concepts, methods, and training devices that will guarantee wished-for changes (see Patel 1991; Dighe 1995; Misra, Ghose, and Bhog 1994; Rogers, Patkar, and Saraswathi 2004).²⁸ It is also engaged in discussions about the success and/or failure of literacy campaigns (Manchanda 1999; Ahearn 2004; Leve 2007). Yet another perspective, brought up by some studies, discusses literacy programs as part of neocolonialist interventions in developing countries (e.g., Luke 2003; Lankshear and Knobel 2006; Wickens and Sandlin 2007).

I follow the latter orientation, and Frank Youngman’s argument that literacy programs and the aid that sustains them serve to reproduce the class, gender, and ethnic inequalities within society and to legitimate capitalist development (Youngman 2000).²⁹

Drawing on examples from a gender development project in rural Nepal, I will point to everyday gendered power encounters, in which the rhetoric concerning the significance of literacy serves high-ranking male officials as a means

of concealing the seizure of resources intended for women's purposes. Thus, I will expand on how the documented discourse (on the importance of women's literacy) served the World Bank and Nepali governmental agencies as a smoke-screen while taking control over budgets intended for the benefit of women, which eventually served both organizations in various ways. That is to say, an organizational political game was played in which the social, idealistic rhetoric served powerful players to materialize their interests while presenting themselves as virtuous agents who supported women's empowerment, and who served society as a whole through women.

The role of literacy in development projects aimed at women's empowerment and, through them, at the advancement of wider social goals, was revealed in the Nepali context in a large-scale development project, named USAID-Nepal, which was implemented in the mid 1990s. This program enrolled over 100,000 women in six- or nine-month-long literacy courses in one year alone (see Leve 2007: 140). The project document explained that: "the promotion of democracy through women's empowerment is a USAID objective in Nepal. For democracy to be effective at the local level, women must meet their basic needs and the needs of their families ... To organize the family through women's empowerment is to organize society, and to democratize the family is to democratize society" (cited in *ibid.*: 140). USAID-Nepal explained that literacy programs constitute the starting point for providing women with access to productive resources which will improve their choices. Thus, literacy programs were said to facilitate women's chances to "take jobs which they could not get while illiterate, thereby bringing more income into the household to support their families; they feel more confident to participate in community advocacy and user groups" (*ibid.*: 140).

However, my ethnography adds weight to doubts that have been raised with regard to the alleged "efficiency" and necessity of literacy projects (sometimes called "adult education"). For instance, even a World Bank position paper (Abadzi 1996) supports these doubts. Its author, claims that, "adult literacy programs have yielded disappointing results worldwide. They generally fail to teach stable literacy skills to the intended beneficiaries" (*ibid.*: 1). Similar misgivings have been raised by Anna Robinson-Pant, who asks the provocative question: "Are literate women healthier, wealthier and even wiser than illiterate women?" (Robinson-Pant 2004a: 1). She points to the high drop-out rates from these programs, which imply that the assumed link between women's literacy and development can be disputed. Drawing on her ethnography, Robinson-Pant suggests that poor village women have developed the confidence and strategies necessary to survive without literacy, and that those who attended literacy classes, "challenged the assumptions of planners and trainers" (*ibid.*: 4). Moreover, she argues that the evidence contained in her volume counters the "conventional passive stereotype—a woman who lacks the necessary skills to avoid being cheated or dominated by men, educated or otherwise" (*ibid.*: 12). Thus, for instance, Brian Street's article on three

active, respected, and powerful women from Morocco, Mexico, and South Africa, illustrates how various literacy programs perceive and treat them as “illiterate” and consequently marginalize and deny their local experience (Street 2004). Many of the women from developing countries, depicted in Robinson-Pant’s book, are “confident” and “empowered”, women who had become active “in public and community activities without ‘literacy’” (Robinson-Pant 2004a: 12). Nelly Stromquist (1990) further argues that the gendered, stereotyped messages that are embedded in most literacy programs reinforce values and attitudes that cause women to accept prevailing gender relations rather than question them.

The women in the villages that I visited did not seem to require literacy courses. They were assertive, vital, and socially involved, and they contributed significantly to their families’ and communities’ economy. Some of them had participated in literacy courses in the past but nothing that was said by these women could support any claim concerning the contribution of these courses to improving their own or their families’ lives.

The fact that the development project was ultimately perceived and treated mainly as a literacy program (from which economic activities would proceed), and that eventually even this shrunken format of the gender development project was not implemented (except for a few classes that were used as a showcase for the World Bank, in which all parties cooperated), clearly demonstrates the arguments presented above. It shows that projects aimed at women’s empowerment and development do not stand a real chance when stemming from, initiated by, or imposed by a male dominated, patriarchal agent or regime. Rather, they are channeled into the prevailing gendered power structure, to the point of being fully incorporated into it. As the gender rhetoric is so widely embedded in organizational documents—those of the World Bank and Unesco are the most conspicuous examples—and in public discourse, the claim about women’s need for literacy skills is easy to “sell” to donating agencies; in Jenny Horsman’s words, it is “easier to advocate than other solutions” (Horsman 1996: 65). Moreover, literacy can be portrayed as being moral and just; it is convenient to present (because it is quantifiable); cheap to organize (using volunteers or grassroots trainers); as well as easy to cancel (women do not have the political power to protest).

Being comprised mainly of women, literacy classes can contribute to networking and to gaining other advantages embedded in group formations (as suggested above), but at the same time they can also serve agents and agencies searching for personal and organizational benefits. Women’s predominance in literacy classes creates an appeal for organizations that seek to get hold of organized, controlled groups. Due to their collective accessibility and obedient upbringing, women inadvertently provide a convenient target for realizing various interests—among which are “field-banks” offering credit, and NGOs offering training in literacy skills.

Claiming that women, poor village women in particular, collectively require literacy, constructs them in a common generalized image as “uneducated,” “un-

derdeveloped,” “backward,” and “primitive” people in need of help, instruction, and education. Associating the need for women’s literacy with their feminine roles, a connection that underpins all “literacy” approaches, serves to justify further the claim of the self-evident need for literacy interventions. Nelly Stromquist (1990) argues in this vein, pointing out that most literacy programs are designed along sexually stereotyped lines that emphasize women’s roles as mothers, wives, and household managers. The unequivocal link made between women’s literacy and women’s roles as a central axis in social change processes is determined in a Unesco document as follows: “The priority attention given to women’s literacy is justified not only by the gravity and extent of their inferior position, but also by recognition of the responsibilities they have for the survival and well-being of their children and the key role they play in transmitting knowledge to upcoming generations” (Unesco 1988: 2). My data suggests that the 1970s approach to women’s literacy, which perceived their reproductive role as the basis of literacy programs, and thus focused on child health, family planning, hygiene, and nutrition, did not change much, in practice, by the mid 1990s.

Thus, the claim about women’s illiteracy is employed to establish and justify the need for development agencies’ involvement with women, allegedly for their own and their children’s sake. In practice, the access gained through women to their families, communities, and country, serves the agencies’ interests rather than the women’s and their families’.

Patel and Dighe (2003) argue that literacy classes that aim at empowering women pose a threat to those who benefit from women’s unpaid work and docility. My analysis suggests that the men who headed the gender activities program in rural Nepal were not worried about women’s empowerment, but were rather interested in taking control of the budgets intended for them. The organizations’ control over the budget was solid and stable and no women’s program could threaten it.

The women’s development project in rural Nepal, namely the literacy program, did not materialize, and within three years of its inception it became a “phantom” project from the village women’s perspective, a fulfillment of a dream to travel overseas for Nepali officials, a temporary nuisance for the Israeli irrigation company (and a source of small profit), an opportunity to display its commitment to women’s empowerment for the World Bank, and a frustrating but exciting experience (traveling overseas) for me.

In this book I shall describe and discuss the inconsistency between the rhetoric and reality of gender development programs in rural Nepal. I shall suggest that although women’s contribution to economic growth at the national level, and to the sustenance of their households at a local one, is formally recognized, in practice it is ignored and underestimated by the men who hold most of the planning and executive positions. I shall examine what happens in reality when development projects are planned and resources allocated for the benefit of women. Drawing on my field data I shall argue that as the situation at all deci-

sion-making and implementation levels is controlled by men, the gender programs are transformed and absorbed into the male structure to serve men in positions of power (and a few women, like myself—a “gender consultant” to those men). I shall attempt to show that even projects, which are couched in the most articulate feminist rhetoric stand little chance of benefiting women.

Programs like the one I worked for do not promote women’s literacy, do not serve to improve their economic resources and their means of income generation, nor do they develop women’s access to credit and other economic resources. The resources that are meant to be allocated to women’s activities are eventually turned by Western agencies into resources for bargaining, “buying off” the male heads of the regime, and promoting their own interests. Therefore, those resources contribute to strengthening the ruling elite, fomenting corruption, and expanding Western male patronization.

Methodology

This book was born out of my experience as both a gender consultant on, and critical observer of, a gender development scheme in rural Nepal in the summer of 1997. This scheme was planned to run from 1996 till 1998, as part of an irrigation project in the Lumbini region of Nepal, which had been in operation since the beginning of the 1980s. I was hired by Tahal Consulting Engineers Company, Israeli irrigation specialists, which worked for the Nepali government. The book is based mainly on ethnographic work, most of which was documented in my fieldnotes following encounters with women in the villages, meetings with officials in offices, and socializing with many people of divergent rank and affiliations. I also used documents, especially my Israeli predecessors’ and my own reports and project proposals. The analysis developed gradually over some ten years, affected by family and work commitments,

During my stay in Nepal I lived in Bhairahawa (also known as Sidhartha Nagar), where the irrigation project’s offices were located. Being located near the far western border with India, about 260 km west of Kathmandu, the city plays an important role in the import and export business.³⁰ Leon, Tahal’s representative, and I shared a two-story house, the bachelors’ house. Leon was in charge of the irrigation project in its last phase, shortly before transferring full responsibility over the project to local experts and managers. Spending a great deal of time with Leon, more than with any other person in the field, my relationship with him was extremely complex. Our conversations went on during common meals at the bachelors’ house, while walking or being driven together to the project center, at his office at the center, and in various social events. These conversations related to any possible subject: the project’s difficulties, the Nepali partners, Nepal’s situation, feminism, personal histories, family stories, and so on. Our encounters offered me invaluable food for thought about issues like patronizing conduct, gendered discrimination, corruption, friendship and loyalty, and many other things, in down to earth terms.

While staying in Bhairahawa, I worked closely with Anita, the local gender consultant, who was also hired by Tahal. Pursuing a professional career, Anita left her husband and two small children behind in Kathmandu, where they were taken care of by her in-laws. She visited them every second or third weekend. The two of us travelled to the villages together, discussed the plans and the budget down to their details, including their wording. Anita and I met together with senior officials in the irrigation project's offices and in other offices in town. The two of us travelled to the capital, where we met with the Minister of Informal Education in Kathmandu and with a few heads of women's and international NGOs. We also visited Anita's in-laws' home and met with her husband and children. Sometimes we would go to local restaurants, chatting and enjoying ourselves over local food. Thus, my friendship with Anita grew deeper over time and her company provided me with comfort, amusement, and many refreshing insights.

Although I was the expatriate expert, had a degree and a richer and longer experience in feminist and academic work, Anita was, naturally, much more familiar with the relevant aspects of Nepali culture, language, and life in general. Moreover, Anita was a postgraduate economist who was familiar with development projects and women's NGOs. This situation made clear to me, in a very personal and bothersome way, that in the context of development projects, the not very relevant skills of expatriate experts (like myself) are preferred to those of the local professionals.

Together with several female fieldworkers (called Women's Groups Organizers, WGOs), Anita and I visited dozens of villages in the irrigation project area, talking to the women, listening to them, and suggesting that they join the women's program of literacy classes and vocational training. These meetings with village women took place in the nearby fields. At each meeting, some thirty to forty women and some children would sit on the ground around us, the project people. Much of my field data was collected during these visits to rural villages, and was written down sometimes during the meetings, while Anita and the WGOs were talking with the women, or more often at nights in my room at the bachelors' house. As Anita was fluent in English, and I did not speak Nepali, she acted as interpreter between myself and the village women and WGOs. The WGOs were recruited from villages in the project region and did not speak English. Some of the male officials involved in the project joined us occasionally. The project's jeep, with which we travelled to the villages, turned out to be a tiny crowded space in which we all sweated and socialized. Often, we used to stop on the way back to the office for refreshments, discussing our experiences of the day's meetings and enjoying small talk.

Becoming part of the office staff afforded me countless opportunities of interacting with people who worked on the project premises. Among these were the senior officials: the Nepali project manager and the local consultant on farmers' participation, heads of departments (engineering, agriculture, the farmers' or-

ganization), and the junior staff of secretaries and maintenance people. All of the staff members, except for the group who worked for the women's project, were men. The project's building was a two-story house, yellowish on the outside and grey on the inside. It was fitted out with some old furniture and decorated with faded posters. The building's roof was used for social events, such as farewell parties. One of the most conspicuous aspects of daily life in the project's premises was frequent power cuts. This was an irritating experience as the air conditioning stopped working, and the heat and humidity were unbearable. Soon after a power cut began, the noisy generator would start up.

Anita and I organized a training workshop ("seminar") for some ten village teachers, which took place, on nine consecutive days, at the project's center. The daily encounters in and around the seminar added stimulating material to the accumulating data. Our ongoing bargaining with the Israeli and Nepali officials of the project, with the director of the local branch of the Ministry of Education, and others, along with interviews with the seminar teachers, and many interactions with candidates for teaching posts in the villages, were documented and contributed many episodes that enriched the ethnography.

I also became familiar with the ex-pat development community in Nepal during my visit to Kathmandu, where I was hosted by Hanna, Leon's wife, in their home. Hanna took me to a typical "colonial tea party," organized by and for European development workers' wives. This experience provided me with the opportunity of observing the foreign women's style of life and their socializing habits.

In the process of analyzing my data I made extensive use of documents, especially the reports and project proposals prepared by my Israeli predecessor and myself, and which were submitted to Tahal (our Israeli employer), the Nepali government (the Ministry of Agriculture), and the World Bank. I also looked at correspondence between officials, such as Leon's letters to his superiors in Israel, to the Nepali director of the project and his superiors in government, and his letters to World Bank officials and their letters to him.

Photographs taken during my stay—of visits to the villages and interactions with the women; of events I attended; of the streets of Bhairahawa and other places I visited with Anita, the WGOs, and Leon; of offices and meetings with officials—served me as another unintended source for reflection. While in the field I did not realize the impact of this activity on people who attended the situation. It was only much later, when I elaborated on my fieldnotes, that I was able to notice the latent impact of watching people through the camera lenses.

I started my study of the women's empowerment project in rural Nepal in almost total ignorance of development and women in the country. The only information I had when Tahal hired me to work for them as a gender consultant was a report that my predecessor had prepared (Fenster 1996). However, although I took this mission upon myself knowing nearly nothing about the place and the professional assignment, as a feminist activist who had studied and taught fem-

inism for many years I was familiar with the feminist literature and with gender development projects. Moreover, having conducted fieldwork in a bureaucratic setting, focused on immigrants from Ethiopia who were treated as Third World migrants, I considered this as a relevant experience for working on a development project. Thus, I was both open to new landscapes and social realities, and at the same time biased with regard to the country and its people, and particularly with regard to women of the Third World and to the supposedly dangerous and poor place Nepal was. I set out as a deeply motivated and idealist feminist, albeit one unaware of the literature concerning the relevant issues, and indeed unfamiliar with any critical studies of development and gender and development.

Although an unintended outcome, this mission offered me a profound lesson of how one becomes a part of organizational life. The compelling and ongoing necessity of making rational compromises between personal, human inclinations and organizational dictates, between adhering to idealistic values and pursuing personal desires, is unavoidable for any person involved in an organization, even a very socially aware researcher. Being absorbed into organizational webs and becoming part of a system, the researcher, like any employee in an organization, adopts willingly or unwillingly its norms, exchanges, and networking techniques. Hence, while in the field, the researcher plays a “dual role of investigator and instrument” of “research tools,” as C.W. Watson (1999: 4) suggests. Watson contends that “we rarely step outside ourselves in order to reflect on how our own life-histories are contributing to the perspectives we are accumulating; the reflexivity, if it comes, usually comes later when, self-consciously practicing our profession, we write our ethnographies” (ibid.: 4). Fieldwork is, so it seems, “a work of human engagement” (Ferrell and Hamm 1998: xvii). Thus, my personal involvement as a participant developer offered me an opportunity to observe and reflect on personal and social processes from the “inside” of the organization.

Whereas documenting my daily experiences in my notebook began as a kind of anthropologist’s common practice, entering the phase of analyzing the material turned out to be a very slow and complex process. Leaving behind the approach of the adventurer, tourist, and/or fieldworker and assuming routine life entailed engaging again with family commitments, teaching, feminist and social activity, and the like. This transition made it too difficult to proceed with the analysis of the ethnography. Thus, the analysis developed gradually over the course of over ten years, away from home and during academic vacations. Cris Shore’s argument (Shore 1999: 26), followed by Eyal Ben-Ari (n.d.), is relevant to this kind of developing analysis. As Ben-Ari points out, “understanding fieldwork implies a range of issues spanning a much longer period than the one actually spent in the field” (ibid.). In a similar vein I suggest that the distance of time and place allows the “interpretative dialogue which goes on within each anthropologist” (ibid.) to create the emotional distance needed for reflection and the re-examination of arguments.

As a visiting researcher at Oxford in the summer of 2000, in a most stimulating intellectual environment, I was able not only to work comfortably on my ethnography but also to acquaint myself with the rich literature that was easily accessible in Oxford's libraries, exposing me to some exciting critical studies of development in the "Third World". World Bank documents I found there provided me with evidence for the critique expressed in neocolonialist and feminist literature. In the summer of 2002, I continued working on the analysis in Manchester, where I came across some further literature on development. The next time I was able to devote myself to reflection was in Brussels, in summer 2005. There I elaborated further on some feminist literature relating to development discourse. I was privileged in obtaining access to Vienna University's libraries in the summer of 2007, where I discovered numerous academic resources on development, gender and literacy, and on Nepal's recent history. Visiting the sociology department of Delhi University in 2008, I came across further literature on development, gender and literacy, in South Asia.

Realizing that my analysis was going to involve me looking at bureaucracy and power structures, I eventually discovered a most significant resource in the library of Beit Berl Academic College in Israel, my professional home. In this final phase of writing I found myself returning to the theme of bureaucracy, with which I had dealt in my study on the treatment of Ethiopian immigrants in Israel during the 1980s. I rediscovered some older literature on bureaucracy from the mid 1950s, such as that of Max Weber and C. Wright Mills, and from the 1980s and 1990s, such as that of Emanuel Marx, Robert Chambers, and James Ferguson. While developing my arguments concerning the gendered components of the development industry I returned to Kathy Ferguson's work on gender and bureaucracy from the beginning of the 1990s and found it inspiring and still relevant.

The basic dilemmas of fieldwork concerning the objectivity and subjectivity of the field researcher, their proximity to or essential distance from their research subjects, the extent of their involvement in the studied society, and the implications of personal exposure, have been pertinent to anthropological research since its inception. Max Weber's approach is most instructive in this context. Weber (1978) used the term *verstehen* ("understanding") to denote a process of subjective interpretation on the part of the social researcher. He argued that, "for a science which is concerned with the subjective meaning of action, explanation requires a grasp of the complex of meaning in which an actual course of understandable action thus interpreted belongs" (ibid.: 9). Moreover, "the interpretive understanding of social action ... empathic or appreciative accuracy is attained when, through sympathetic participation, we can adequately grasp the emotional context in which the action took place" (ibid.: 5).

Over the years this approach has gained much support from anthropologists, such as Max Gluckman (1967) and Emanuel Marx (1985), who insisted on the full involvement of the researcher within the social context being studied. Marx stated

categorically that “there are no limitations on researcher’s and studied people’s closeness,” and claimed unequivocally that “the closer the researcher gets to the people he studies the more he will learn about them ... the anthropologist lives a full life in the field of his study ... In this manner he studies himself as part of the wider social context” (ibid.: 139–40). The advantages of researchers’ closeness to their researched subjects is well illustrated by studies like that of Marie-Benedicte Dembour (2000). The intimacy that emerged while talking with retired officers who served in the Belgian Congo, but who had left it many years earlier (in 1960), affected her profoundly; so much so, that she was able to question her preconceived beliefs about their evilness and colonialism at large. Eyal Ben-Ari’s account of his own conduct as an Israeli soldier in the occupied territories, contrary to his political beliefs, provides another example in the context of militaristic settings (Ben-Ari 1989).

Similarly, being part of a bureaucratic system, playing the roles of a bureaucrat and a consultant myself and reflecting on it from a researcher’s position, opened up for me a unique opportunity to question some self-evident beliefs, such as understanding how easily we employ expressions about corrupting power and domineering manners, considering ourselves unattached from and untainted by such negative conduct. This personal involvement enabled me to reveal the powerful sweeping impact of the settings I was part of. I realized how the bureaucratic machine absorbs us and forces us to comply with moral norms that we conveniently denounce when uninvolved with and estranged from the situation.

Ruth Behar’s approach to anthropology, which rejects the separation between forms of knowing, between ethnography and autobiography, takes Weber’s concept even further. She challenges “reigning paradigms” in scholarly fields that “have traditionally called for distance, objectivity and abstraction” and for which “the worst sin was to be ‘too personal’” (Behar 1996: 12–13). Defending³¹ “the kind of anthropology that matters” to her from the “surprisingly ruthless criticism of the humanists” Behar claims that “anthropology that doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing anymore” (ibid: 164). Moved by Renato Rosaldo’s (“Grief and A Headhunter’s Rage”, 1989) “classical work of vulnerable writing” (ibid: 167), Behar urges anthropologists to write vulnerably. That is, to make one’s emotions part of one’s ethnography and distrust one’s own ethnographic authority, as “being constantly in question, constantly on the point of breaking down” (ibid: 21). In short, she advocates “mixing the personal and the ethnographic” (ibid: 22). Writing vulnerably is to “open a Pandora’s box” (ibid.: 19), and consequently “new stories” will rush “to be told ... stories that tell truths we once hid, truths we didn’t dare acknowledge, truths that shamed us” (ibid.: 33).

This challenging of methodological philosophy gains much support from volume edited by Ferrell and Hamm (1998). Taking the personal involvement of the researcher in their subjects’ lives even further, the volume’s contributors

advocate a radical approach to doing fieldwork in the context of crime and deviance. In their introduction, Ferrell and Hamm demand that the researcher should “be willing to abandon in part the security of pre-existing personal and professional identities” (ibid.: 8). Drawing on Michel Foucault’s description of confession as “one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth” (Foucault 1990: 58), they argue that “‘true confessions’ of field workers’ identities and involvements serve more than academic self-indulgence; they serve as essential components in any full accounting of field research knowledge” (Ferrell and Hamm 1998: 12). Field researchers’ confessions are, according to Ferrell and Hamm “an emerging ritual designed to flesh out the fieldwork experience and to produce situated understandings of ... field research findings previously submerged under mythologies of researcher objectivity and distance” (ibid.: 12). There is indeed the risk that these “confessional ethnographies’ and ‘ethnographies of ethnography’ which are as attentive to researchers’ identities, experiences, and emotions as they are to others’ ... become accounts of little but ourselves” (ibid.: 12). Thus, Ferrell and Hamm propose that if we balance “reflexivity with scholarly responsibility” we may find that, “in paying attention to ourselves, we are better able to pay attention to others as well” (ibid.: 12). Field research, they argue, should be dismantled “of dualistic epistemic hierarchies which position the researcher over and apart from research subjects, abstract analysis over and beyond situated knowledge, sanitary intellect over and outside human emotion and experience” (ibid.: 14).

The analysis of my ethnography follows the research approach discussed above and derives support from it. I assumed “no limits” with regard to being involved and “merged” in the “field” and no “conceptual barriers” between myself and any “studied subjects.” I was one of the officials in the development project, a tourist, a friend, a feminist, as well as many other identities while in Nepal. I tried and hope that I succeeded in examining my own conduct with as much rigor as I used for any other “informant.” Thus, I concur with Laura Nader, that “pushing the boundaries is what anthropologists do if they are not trapped in ... hegemonic paradigms” (Nader 2002: 22), and I follow Ruth Behar’s recommendation that “what happens within the observer must be made known” (Behar 1996: 6).

Analyzing the fieldnotes, documents, pictures, and the rest of my data brought up several intriguing theoretical themes and personal understandings. One central theme relates to patronizing conduct, which emerged from numerous incidents documented in my fieldnotes, especially with regard to Leon’s patronizing and even humiliating attitude to the house and office staff, and to me as well. While analyzing the ethnography I came to realize that patronizing conduct emerges from the situation and position one is embedded in rather than from one’s “personality.” I realized that once one is positioned in an organizational hierarchy one adopts or complies with its conventions, expectations, dictates, and privileges. Even a skilled and experienced ethnographer would find that “in the

field the professional and the personal are fused and we unconsciously engage in the process of making sense by assimilating” (Watson 1999: 4).

The bureaucratic phenomenon was another theme that gained some intriguing insights from reflecting on my documented daily encounters with the irrigation project’s personnel. These opened up to me numerous occasions for observing and experiencing hierarchical relationships, the gendered line of command, and the organization’s culture, constraints, norms, and so on. I followed and sometimes was involved in producing hidden and overt tensions, in social rituals of regaining human closeness and mutual support. The encounters depicted in my notebooks provided me with numerous illustrations of the nature and development of structured social distance and power relations between local people and foreigners, men and women, people of stratified ranks and so forth, in the bureaucratic context. These encounters also enabled me to reflect on situations and actions that seemed temporarily to crack social barriers, and to dwell on social mechanisms which serve to compensate for compliance, obedience, humiliation, discrimination, subordination, and the like, embedded in structured power gaps, which typically characterize bureaucratic structures. Consequently I learned how people strive and partially succeed in retaining some personal dignity and human solidarity, overcoming the destructive impact of Weber’s dehumanizing “bureaucratic machine” (Weber 1978: liii).

Delving into the ethnography brought up the multifaceted subject of development with regard to neocolonialism, gender, social stratification, and education. My documented encounters with officials at most levels of local and international agencies’ hierarchies, and in governmental and non-governmental organizations, contributed to my understanding of the specifics and the more general implications of development. They highlighted the subtle mechanisms and manipulative strategies of foreign agencies’ intervention in Nepal’s economic, educational, and cultural systems. Episodes that I described after they took place, such as the “tea party” and the “seminar,” contributed illuminating illustrations of the intersection between gendered conduct and roles, and social stratification and neocolonialism. It is the uncountable accumulated details that were observed in daily encounters, written down in my fieldnotes and later intertwined in the analysis, that tell the concrete story of why development does not and cannot help developing countries and does not empower women there.

Examining the gender development project’s documents—the reports and the project proposals—led to many intriguing insights with regard to the “real” picture behind the formal façade of the irrigation project and the women’s program in particular. Among these are: the manipulative use of the gender and development jargon; the deceptive use of the budget (included in the women’s program proposal); the tricky interchange between “social” and “economic” allocations of budgets; the invisible evaporation of budgets formally intended for women’s empowerment; the illusive techniques of cheating women

villagers, and the female employees and trainees of the gender activities project; and the channeling of gender consultants into full compliance with the maneuvers of the irrigation project's senior officials with regard to the women's program's budget. All these and more were exposed by digging into the numbers and wording of the documents. Thus, I follow Harold Garfinkel's argument, with regard to the latent value of documents: "the manner in which they [documents] report their consequences and the use to which they are put are all inseparable characteristics of the social order which they describe" (Garfinkel 1967: 201).

It was only at a much later stage of the analysis that I came to realize the meaning of "taking photos" in the context of "exotic" Nepali villages and daily life. Looking at and reflecting on the hundreds of pictures I took brought into focus, sometimes painfully, the banality and ethnocentrism of my view of things as a foreigner and tourist.³² However, the pictures I took served me unintentionally in several ways. They refreshed my memory regarding forgotten experiences, conversations, situations, sights, and smells. They provided me with many visual illustrations (such as sitting arrangements) of the power gaps embedded in the contexts which I was involved in. Jay Ruby claims that "photographs are always concerned with two things—the culture of those filmed and the culture of those who film" (Ruby 1996: 1345). The photographs I took say as much, if not more, about my own cultural assumptions and the latent stereotypical ideas I held about the places I visited and people I met, than they do about Nepali culture and ways of life.

Indeed, this book does not offer an inclusive discussion of women, gender, and development projects. It is an attempt "to make a contribution to 'the ethnographic record' as 'the central shared heritage of anthropology'" (Adam Kuper, cited in Hirsch and Gellner 2001: 10). The book offers one more example of the pursuit of understanding human conduct in the context of development and bureaucratic organizations. It attempts to contribute to the study of what Nader calls "the culture of power" (Nader 1972, 1997); that is, how the distancing and manipulative mechanisms of hierarchies operate, how they remain invisible, and how cultural constraints are experienced by individuals in organizations. It is also an attempt to contribute to organizational ethnography in relation to women's experience in bureaucratic settings. Hence, the book focuses on officials, organizational processes, power structures, and gendered power relations in the context of an irrigation project in rural Nepal and its sociopolitical surroundings.

Notes

1. The concept of "development" is widely associated with terms such as evolution and socioeconomic change. However, scholars identify Harry S. Truman's presidential inauguration speech of 20 January 1949, in which he referred to the southern hemisphere as "underdeveloped areas," as the historical moment at which the concept was first used to signify gaps between rich, Western countries and poor, non-Western countries—later opposed as

North and South—as well as the efforts to bridge these gaps. Wolfgang Sachs argues that this declaration inaugurated “the age of development,” in which the label “provided the cognitive base for both arrogant interventionism from the North and pathetic self-pity in the South” (Sachs 1992: 2). Moreover, he argues that following the breakdown of the European colonial powers, the United States has led relations between North and South, based on the concept of “development” as “that mixture of generosity, bribery and oppression which has characterized the policies toward the South” (ibid.: 1). Arturo Escobar (1995) attributes the emergence of “development” to the “discovery” of “poverty” in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the era after the Second World War.

2. Hayter has studied the World Bank since the 1960s and published a critique of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Hayter 1971). Hayter writes that initially she believed that “the real purpose of foreign aid was to improve the situation of poor people in developing countries” (ibid.: 88). Hayter’s report on the World Bank in Latin America was censored by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), which previously employed her. The ODI’s council consists largely of representatives of the British companies providing money. According to Hayter, although the ODI “claims to be ‘an independent non-government body aiming to ensure wise action in the field of overseas development’” (ibid: 7), its council is mainly motivated by its members’ strong commitment to the preservation of capitalism. It is financed by “British companies with interests in the Third World, and, intermittently, by institutions such as the Ford Foundation, Nuffield Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and the World Bank” (ibid: 8).
3. Esteva discusses the historical emergence, implications, and changes in “development” as a metaphor. He notes the process by which the biological metaphor of development was transferred to the social sphere. Esteva suggests that between 1759 and 1859, “development” evolved from: “a conception of transformation that moves toward the appropriate form of being to a conception of transformation that moves towards an ever more perfect form. During this period, evolution and development began to be used as interchangeable terms by scientists” (Esteva 1992: 8). The historical background of the term “development” is also discussed by Joseph Stiglitz, who points to the connection between development and colonialism. He points out that the World Bank added “development” to its name (becoming the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) after the Second World War, when most of the countries in the developing world were still colonies. The economic development efforts of one-time colonizers (meager as they were) on behalf of the previously dominated colonies expressed the responsibility of “their European masters” (Stiglitz 2002: 11).
4. This approach derives support from Gustavo Esteva, who criticizes the false conception of “development” and “underdevelopment” held by scholars who perceive them as real. He opposes research which “displays a falsification of reality produced through dismembering the totality of interconnected processes that make up the world’s reality and, in its place, it substitutes one of its fragments, isolated from the rest, as a general point of reference” (Esteva 1992: 12).
5. This holds for other contested terms, like modernization and Third World. I shall place inverted commas round these terms only on their first use.
6. Easterly had to leave his job at the World Bank after publishing his book (Easterly 2002).
7. William Easterly’s more recent work (Easterly 2006) offers a similar analysis. He blames the “Rich West” for intruding on developing countries through “bloated aid bureaucracies,” the IMF, and World Bank in particular. Echoing Hancock’s claims he contends that international efforts to stimulate Third World development failed, describing how billions of dollars, pumped into development budgets, nurture byzantine bureaucracies and the development industry.
8. Hancock blames international aid for its disastrous impact on Africa during the past few decades, suggesting that it has become “a continent-sized beggar hopelessly dependent on the largesse of outsiders”; thus its food production “has fallen in every single year since 1962 ... with the result that the continent has the highest infant mortality rates in the world, the lowest average life-expectancies in the world, the lowest literacy rates, the fewest doctors per

- head of population, and the fewest children in school. Tellingly, during the period 1980 to 1986 when Africa became ... the world's most 'aided' continent, GDP per capita fell by an average of 3.4 per cent per annum" (Hancock 1989: 191–92).
9. According to Hancock, since all its aid was cut off when the Somoza regime collapsed in 1979, conditions in Nicaragua have improved noticeably during the 1980s. Hancock claims that without "so-called 'help,'" the government has succeeded in significantly reducing infant mortality and illiteracy among adult Nicaraguans, and in considerably improving agricultural production and access to medical services. He also notes that the funds "allocated by the Government to both education and health care have more than tripled" (Hancock 1989: 192).
 10. Elaborating on development in South-Asia, Sondra Hausner claims, in a similar vein, that, "The glamour, wealth, and elitism of multilateral development institutions in South Asia cannot help but exacerbate the problems of social hierarchy that are responsible for a great deal of the poverty and inequity that development programs seek to alleviate" (Hausner 2006: 320).
 11. An Oxfam policy paper makes a similar criticism in relation to a World Bank report produced by the Bank's Development Research Group (Dollar and Kraay 2000). Whereas the World Bank document claims that existing patterns of globalization are inherently good for poverty reduction, the Oxfam report states that the Bank's "current patterns of growth are reinforcing, rather than reducing, existing inequalities in income" (cited in Lechner and Boli 2004: 186). Interestingly, in a World Bank annual development report, the Bank admits the criticism, suggesting that, "Economic growth is crucial but often not sufficient to create conditions in which the world's poorest people can improve their lives" (World Bank 2001: 6). However, the report does not imply the Bank's responsibility for this grave situation. It adopts Oxfam's recommendations and rhetoric as its own. Moreover, it recommends the cooperation of all parties, "developing country governments at all levels, donor countries, international agencies, NGOs, civil society, and local communities" in three priority areas: opportunity, empowerment and security (*ibid.*: 6). Thus, the responsibility for the failure in reducing poverty is turned away from the Bank's policies to anonymous others.
 12. This claim is widely substantiated by Joseph Stiglitz, whose position as Chief Economist at the World Bank lends crucial support for this allegation. He recounts: "The imbalance of power between the IMF and the 'client' countries inevitably creates tension between the two, but the IMF's own behavior in negotiations exacerbates an already difficult situation. In dictating the terms of the agreements, the IMF effectively stifles any discussions within a client government—let alone more broadly within the country—about alternative economic policies" (Stiglitz 2002: 43).
 13. Hancock (1989: 50) and Yunus (1998: 14).
 14. One example, in the Nepali context, is Subedi (1993), who will be referred to in detail later in this chapter.
 15. In his critical study of research on the Israeli kibbutz, Reuven Shapira (2008) demonstrates a similar process in which a conspicuous success of this social framework, which was based on values of solidarity and social equality, declined over the years when capitalist trends took over and financial success brought about the centralization of power, bureaucratization, hierarchization, and autocratic leadership.
 16. This argument gains support from an examination of the different absorption policies employed by the Israeli government towards immigrants from Ethiopia and those from the former Soviet Union. The integration of the latter was deemed to be much more successful in economic, cultural, and political terms (see Marx 1996; Siegel 1998). This group of immigrants was offered generous financial aid, put at their disposal with no mediating bureaucratic procedures, whereas the resources allocated for the Ethiopians' integration were distributed through a bureaucratic apparatus that consumed most of the resources and involved daily interventions in the immigrants' lives. Thus, resources intended to accelerate the immigrants' integration into Israeli society were distributed without relinquishing bureaucratic control over them, and at the same time reinforced the immigrants' dependence on the officials because of their need for the resources (see Hertzog 1999).

17. Shiva (2001) also notes that “The water privatization policy of the World Bank was articulated in a 1992 paper entitled ‘Improving Water Resources Management.’ The Bank believes that water availability at low or no cost is uneconomic and inefficient. Even the poor should pay.
18. *Zenana* is a Persian term originating from *zan*, “woman.” The *zenana* designates “woman’s space” and implies a dichotomy between domesticity, which entails the confining of women, and the public sphere. Laura Ring, for instance, discusses stereotypical images of women as subjugated and victimized, and associated with the concept of *zenana* in traditional societies, such as those of the Middle East and India. Ring follows the approach of anticolonial movements, who perceive the home (*ghar*) or *zenana* as “sites of cultural authenticity, untouched by the emasculating and corrupt influence of colonial power” (Ring 2006: 3).
19. The private/public dichotomy has been criticized in the Western context as well. Thus, for instance, Lidia Sciama (1981, 1984) questions the perceived opposition of right and left—“private” being associated with the left (sinister, weak, etc.), and “public” with the right (good, strong, intelligent, etc.). She depicts Oxbridge colleges as an example of social milieus in which private and public overlap. Colleges are viewed as male, domestic, yet highly privileged, spheres. They are “private” and exclusive, in as far as women are not welcome. Sciama also criticizes the idea that greater value is attached to public than to private spheres. For example, among Sarakatsani, a group of competitive and often violent Greek shepherds, it is private domestic spheres that are viewed as good and gentle, while the male worlds of the café and the open fields are always charged with hostility and competition.
20. Pigg’s remarks are taken from an e-mail dated August 1992, quoted in Escobar (1995: 164).
21. Anna Robinson-Pant’s edited volume (Robinson-Pant 2004b) offers a similar approach. Sewells’s (1992) concept of “the universality of human agency” fits this approach as well.
22. Collective poverty is often attributed to women in developing countries. It has, for example, been suggested that 70 per cent of the world’s poor are women (UNDP 1995: iii). Muhammad Yunus suggests similarly that women “constitute the majority of the poor, the under-employed and the economically and socially disadvantaged” (Yunus 1998: 7).
23. Women’s crucial role in agriculture is a well documented phenomenon. To take one example, Dahl (1987) highlights the significant roles played by women in various pastoralist economies and elaborates on the ways in which women contribute to subsistence production. Women here are also represented as a heterogeneous social category with divergent interests and backgrounds.
24. Whelpton suggests that by 1987 aid programs in Nepal, provided by foreign funds, “regularly made up more than half of government’s ‘development budget’ ... This dependence peaked in the late 1980s, when the aid component reached around 80 per cent (equivalent to ... 14 per cent of annual GNP) ... Debt service as a percentage of GDP increased from less than 0.1 per cent in 1974–5 to almost 1 per cent in 1987–8” (Whelpton 2005: 128). Moreover, Nepal’s dependency on outside assistance is a long-term one, and thus “in 2000–1 it was still providing around one-third of the government’s total budget” (ibid.: 228).
25. Among the many scholars who have dealt with this phenomenon are: Parvati (1999), Gautam, Banskota, and Manchanda (2001), Shakya (2003), Maycock (2003), Pettigrew (2003), Manchanda (2004), Sharma and Prasain (2004), and Onesto (2005).
26. Anita Dighe (1995) found in her study of a group of 100 women living in South Delhi, India, that only 16 per cent of the participants in a Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) were able to reach the National Literacy Mission norm when tested, and that the respondents did not use their reading, writing, and numeracy skills in their everyday lives.
27. Ila Patel and Anita Dighe explain that patriarchal constraints “become at least temporarily inoperative as women come out of their homes and take part in the literacy campaigns with great enthusiasm” (Patel and Dighe 2003: 224).
28. For an overview of the approaches to researching women’s literacy, see Robinson-Pant (2004b).
29. Youngman studied the National Literacy Program in Botswana, 1978–1987.
30. Bhairahawa is also known as “the gateway to the birth place of Lord Buddha, the Lumbini Zone” (quoted from: <http://www.nepalvista.com/travel/bhairahawa.html>. Retrieved 30 July 2010).

31. In her book, Behar (1996) elaborates in detail on the paper she presented in the meeting of the American Ethnological Society in Austin Texas, where “for the first time in the history of this society, border anthropologies and border anthropologists, Latinos and Latinas, will be at the top of the agenda” (136).
32. The development worker’s touristic tendency has been highlighted by Robert Chambers (1983).