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# Feminist Tigers and Patriarchal Lions: Rhetorical Strategies and Instrument Effects in the Struggle for Definition and Control over Development in Nepal

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**Feminist Tigers and Patriarchal Lions:**

**Rhetorical Strategies and Instrument Effects in the Struggle for Definition and Control over  
Development in Nepal**

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## **Feminist Tigers and Patriarchal Lions:**

### **Rhetorical Strategies and Instrument Effects in the Struggle for Definition and Control over Development in Nepal**

For the women of this project the Lions' involvement has appeared more like meddling in affairs the women know more about. (Danielle Marston<sup>1</sup>, excerpted from a Project Report to UNIFEM for the Lakshmi Women's Art Project, 1992)

[Danielle Marston is] striving to ruin the Nepali families with her so called feministic efforts to bolster up the morale of the gullible women [to] stand against husbands and other respectable members (like inlaws) in the family. (H.R.Jha, Chairman of the Lakshmi Women's Art Project, representative of the Janakpur Lions Club, excerpted from a letter to Jon Weber, United Nations Development Program Representative for Nepal, 1992)

The Lakshmi Women's Development Center (LWDC) is a domestic non-governmental organization (NGO) first registered with the Nepali government's Social Services National Coordination Council in 1992. In the following analysis of the events leading to the establishment of LWDC, I aim to unravel some of the powerful discourses, threads of interest, and unintended effects inevitable under a regime of development aid.<sup>2</sup> The conflict introduced by the two quotations at the start of this essay and described below involves individual and yet historically informed wills, and illustrates one axis of the field in which women's development takes place. This altercation was essentially over two factors: definition and control. Was the project alluded to in the opening quotations centrally about community development or women's empowerment? Are the two mutually exclusive? And who should make decisions about the project's organizational structure and use of funds? The twin concepts of definition and control together provide a lens through which some of the fundamental cultural and political tensions at the Lakshmi project can be understood. Following some historical and theoretical contextualization of women and development in Nepal, the remaining sections of this article entail an analysis of the rhetorical and actual battle for control of the organization's funds, activities and goals. This analysis is drawn primarily from written records representing the conflicting perspectives and strategies of Danielle Marston, the young

Western feminist who originated the idea of paying Maithil women to paint on paper, and particular members of the Janakpur's Lions Club, whose ranks include some of the town's leading men. As we will see, the resulting rhetorics leave out the standpoints of Maithil women; I have therefore attempted to reconstruct their views from interviews and participant-observation with women, some of whom had joined the project previous to the dispute and some of whom had come into the project subsequently.

The story of the circumstances that brought LWDC to seek NGO status bears telling, for it is rife with the gender politics and neo-colonial history that underscore much of what goes on in contemporary Nepal. Nepal was never formally colonized. Yet it came under heavy influence of the British during Britain's colonization of Nepal's much larger neighbor to the south and east, India. Although Nepal experienced no nationalist struggle to oust colonizers, it shares the experiences of economic and social intervention and dependency made possible by colonial histories and to which Alexander and Mohanty have referred as "processes of recolonization (1997, xvii). As Stacy Leigh Pigg (1993) has noted, the last half-century of political reforms in Nepal, which have been directed at modernizing the country, has coincided with a new era in international relations. In this era, Western industrialized countries have consolidated an apparatus of foreign aid created to help in the modernization projects of former colonies. Generally, through these relations, donor countries have reconsolidated positions of economic, political, and cultural dominance *vis-à-vis* debtor countries. In Nepal, development has been aptly described as "Nepal's largest industry...a transnational capitalist enterprise, and Nepal's main gateway to both the riches and the ruthlessness of global capitalism" (Des Chene 1996). Des Chene suggests that development represents the third ideological and organizational state-unifying principle (and period) in Nepali history. This "Third *Ekīkaran*," as Des Chene calls it, followed the military unification of the nation by Prithvi Narayan Shah in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the promotion of the valor of the Nepali language and the idea of the nation as Hindu in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through in the figure of Bhanubhakta Acharya, who first translated the Hindu epic *Ramayana* into simple Nepali.<sup>3</sup>

Politically and administratively, the Third *Ekīkaran* required new, modern forms (parliamentary structure, civil service bureaucracy, UN membership, etc.), but as a means of state unification—a means for a few to control the country from the center and to manage its relations with the rest of the world—its goals remained consonant with...past rulers. (Des Chene 1996, 263-4)

Thus, although Nepal was never directly colonized, as an agriculturally-based, cultural tourism-promoting, debtor nation with a large bureaucracy assertive in legitimating itself by promoting “development” and responsive to external inputs of financial and technological aid and “expertise,” it is appropriate to refer to Nepal’s global situatedness as neo-colonial.<sup>4</sup>

The insertion of women into development rhetoric and practice represents a proliferation of development discourse that contributes to the discourse’s “self-creation and autoreferentiality” (Escobar 1995, 210), with an attendant extension of control over knowledge and bodies. At the same time, developers’ increased interest in women constitutes a reform. The initial feminist critique of development in the 1970s was economic and pro-development. This critique pointed to both male bias and (elite) Western bias in development practice. Feminists objected to development agencies’ neglect of women and to the fact that when they were not altogether neglected, they were being treated as if their only traditional social roles were those related to reproduction. Thus, developers were accused of misunderstanding women’s roles in newly developing countries. By the early 1980s, the UN Decade for Women had provided new openings for women in developing countries to organize and pursue some of their goals. Women-in-development posts and organizations promoted research on women, funded projects, linked First and Third World activists and channeled First World feminist ideas to Third World women. (It is not that these ideas were uncritically received by activists and others in the Third World, but that First World feminists could operationalize their ideas in the lives of Third World women, whereas the reverse was generally not true.) The governments of developing countries were pushed by international organizations and donor governments to formulate official policies on women as a deprived class, and such governments have thereby sought legitimacy both internally and externally. In Nepal, as elsewhere, the governmental and non-governmental agencies created in response to foreign aid for “women’s development” have provided certain kinds of education, employment, health care and other services and opportunities to many women. Even so, they have functioned, in part, to consolidate class-based interests (Tamang 1997) and limit agendas to the level of reform, as opposed to more radical transformation or liberation (Phnuyal 1997).<sup>5</sup> Institutional emphases regarding women and development have shifted from the enhancement of women’s domestic skills and technologies, to the integration of women into “mainstream” development schemes, to “empowerment” perspectives (including by the mid-1990s an emphasis on micro-credit). Yet,

even across this range of orientations, development efforts aimed at women have remained hegemonically within an economically deterministic, capitalist logic.<sup>6</sup>

Just as scholarly critics in the last decade have pointed to the ways that international development has operated as a discourse sanctioning or prescribing oppressive economic, political and epistemological relations on international and sub-international scales (Des Chene 1996, Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994, Mueller 1987), transnational feminist scholars have examined how these relations have often been mirrored unreflectively in the discourses of some Western-centered international or global feminist orientations (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 1988; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991). For instance, Chandra Mohanty has argued that Western feminist scholars have constructed a “Third World woman” Other to a Western white woman “norm,” whereby ideas of backwardness and tradition (underdevelopment, oppression...) are mapped onto the former, and progressiveness and modernity onto the latter (Mohanty 1988). Such discursive dichotomizations, as Grewal and Kaplan point out, render deeply problematic any effort to do feminist work across cultural divides (1994, 2). In contrast, transnational feminist efforts require serious attention to historical trajectories, as well as local manifestations of and resistances to global forces (Alexander and Mohanty 1997).

An extensive literature exists regarding Western feminist engagement in South Asia (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Burton 1991; Enloe 1989; Ghose 1998; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 1988; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991; Ramusack 1992; Strobel and Chaudhuri 1992). In contrast to other South Asian countries, no pattern of Western women’s travel to Nepal occurred until the 1960s, when U.S. and Western European women came as part of the “hippie invasion.” To my knowledge, no substantive record remains of Western women’s travels to and reflections on Nepal from that period. The first extensive, feminist-inflected, written studies of Nepali women by Western and Nepali women came from anthropologists and development consultants beginning in the late 1970s.<sup>7</sup> In 1979, the Centre for Economic Development and Administration at Tribhuvan University published *The Status of Women in Nepal* (1979), a multi-volume, multi-ethnic study done through the prism of development to create baseline knowledge on Nepali women’s lives meant to inform and assess future governmental development initiatives. Much of the Western feminist scholarship on gender in Nepal has been anthropological and has mirrored historical shifts in emphasis in Western feminist scholarship generally. It has ranged from a

descriptive focus on women's roles in particular ethnic groups in Nepal, to a relational focus on gender (again by ethnic group), to an analysis of women as active subjects in a range of hegemonized economic, political, cultural, and social fields that are translocal and transcultural in scope.<sup>8</sup> Popular Western discursive constructions of Nepali women influence some scholarly and development discursive constructions and tend to be split between representations of such women as repositories of pure and welcoming Nepali culture (an image used and propagated by the tourism industry) and emblems of women's oppression and cultural backwardness.<sup>9</sup> Much of the Western writing on women in Nepal prior to the 1990s shows a tendency toward what Alexander and Mohanty designate as a "liberal-pluralist understanding of feminism" (1997, xvi), which prioritizes gender over other axes of identity and power. This writing emphasizes "status" comparisons between genders based on notions of individualism and citizenship. Western feminist anthropology in Nepal in the 1990s (Adams 1996; Ahearn 1994, 1998, 1999, 2001; Des Chene 1997; Enslin 1990, 1992; Fricke 1995; Gilbert 1992; Liechty 1996; Ortner 1996; Watkins 1996) has shown greater sensitivity to and theoretical sophistication concerning supra-local contexts, issues of agency, and intersecting discourses. In contemporary Nepal, a diversifying cadre of Nepali activists, lawyers and journalists are now engaged in questions of women and development, women's rights and gender justice.<sup>10</sup>

Before going on to discuss the conflict over women's development in Janakpur, and especially since my analysis pivots on rhetorical strategies employed by actors with strong and conflicting investments in the project in question, I must pause here to identify the sources of my data. In 1993 I received permission from Danielle Marston to undertake an ethnographic study of the Lakshmi Women's Development Center; while I was in pursuit of a doctoral degree in anthropology, Marston hoped that my research might prove useful to the success of the development project. The research was conducted over several months in 1994 and 1995, three to four years after the height of the conflict that is the subject of this essay. At LWDC, I conducted semi-formal interviews with all of the women participating in the project, from Marston herself to the ethnically non-Maithil Nepali managers, to the approximately 50 craft-producers considered to be the beneficiaries of the project. I accumulated fieldnotes from months spent at the Center informally engaged in conversation, observation, and assistance.<sup>11</sup> I was given access to all of the project's files and documents. I also spent several weeks living and conducting socially stratified

interviews in one of the villages near Janakpur, a village that is the home of a number of the Maithil women participants. During my 15-month stay in Nepal, I also spent a few months in city of Kathmandu, interviewing development functionaries and volunteering at a national level Nepali women's organization.

For six years, Marston worked with great passion at the helm of the project in Janakpur. Her energy and devotion astounded me, and I deeply respect the wisdom she gained in attempting to help Maithil women improve their lives, an effort that paid off for the project participants in a number of important ways. Marston made many friendships in the Janakpur community as a result of community members' positive assessments of her work with and commitment to them. The small amount of time I spent with Marston and my extensive observations of the results of her efforts have convinced me that she approached her work with subtlety and care rather than utopianism. The documents she left behind, some of which I scrutinize critically here, bespeak of her position in the vast system of international development, rather than a simplicity of thinking.<sup>12</sup> Due to growing commitments elsewhere, Marston was absent from Janakpur for the much of my time there. I am indebted to the generosity and patience of all of those persons at the Lakshmi Women's Development Center and in the surrounding communities who extended their kindnesses, shared their space, and spent their time with me.

My primary sources of information for the present analysis are, on the one hand, interviews and discussions with several of LWDC's craft-producers, with Marston, and with a representative of UNIFEM (the United Nations Development Fund for Women); and, on the other hand, letters, project reports, and other written materials housed at the Center and documenting the course of events from the points of view of particular Lions Club members, of Marston, and of the project funders. I did not speak directly on this issue with any members of the Lions Club (although I have spoken with a few of them on other matters). What I offer here, then, more than "the facts," is an interpretation of representations, identifications and interests. My goal in this discussion is not to set the record straight. It is, rather, to demonstrate through this case the transnational and transcultural nature of women's development in Nepal. I aim to identify sources of the variance in definitions of and plans for development and women's empowerment, and to reveal the multiplicity, situatedness, and situationalness of claims to and about power.

I begin the story by providing background information on women's roles in Maithil society and on the impression Marston and her fledgling project made on Janakpur area communities. In this section,



“Gendered Beginnings: *Niman Kaaj?*,” I offer explanations as to why--given that Marston’s plans so seriously collided with the gender norms of Maithil society--her project came to be understood by many local people as “good work.” In the next section, “The Struggle Over UNIFEM Funds,” I present the core conflict over development project funds provided by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Here I focus primarily on written correspondence among Danielle Marston, the Lions Club’s H.R. Jha, and UNDP representatives. A third section, “Managing Conflict the Development Way,” describes how the conflict was resolved by the UNDP and goes on to consider possible reasons for this particular resolution. Since the Maithil women who paint at the project are otherwise rather silence(d) in the conflict as represented in the written correspondences and in my own representation of them, at the end of the third section, I consider their interests as project participants. In the forth and final section of the essay, “Gender and Power in the Borderland of Women’s Development,” I move to two sets of theoretical considerations. I contend that the trans-discursive or “borderland” nature of development in general and women’s development in particular result in different construals of “development” goals, means, and actors based not only on divergent cultural categories but on peculiar cultural politics. I argue, further, that the apolitical discourse of development serves to cloak its inherently political project of social and economic transformation, making conflicts such as the one that occurred in Janakpur not only likely to occur but likely to be misunderstood. Finally, I conclude that analysis of feminism in the context of women’s development requires a transnational feminist framework that can locate the rhetoric and practice of feminism with global economic processes, cultural asymmetries, and political histories.

### **Gendered Beginnings: *Niman Kaaj?***

Janakpur is a trade and pilgrimage town in the eastern Tarai region of Nepal, just a few kilometers from the border with the Indian state of Bihar. Janakpur figures as the birthplace of Rama’s wife Sita (also called Janaki) in the Hindu epic, *Ramayana*, and is one of the mythologized cultural, spiritual and political centers of the ancient kingdom of Mithila. The land in this region is only about one hundred meters above sea level and is contiguous with the Gangetic basin. Until the 1950s, Janakpur was composed of a few rural hamlets whose occupants were farmers, artisans, priests, and clerks employed by the three main Hindu associations that controlled the land. After independence in India, Janakpur expanded rapidly as a

commercial center in the import-export trade. In the 1960s, when Nepal was administratively reorganized, Janakpur became the capital of the Dhanusa district. By the late 1980s, Janakpur was Nepal's second fastest growing town (Burghart 1988, 186). According to Richard Burghart, Maithil people have occupied the area for more than one thousand years, and the majority of the population is Maithili-speaking. Since the control of malaria in the 1950s, the district has been increasingly settled by Nepali speakers from the hills, who come to take advantage of the greater supply of fertile land (Burghart 1988, 187). Other non-Maithil Nepalis have transferred to Janakpur to take up government posts there.<sup>13</sup>

The original impulse for a Maithil women's art project in the Janakpur area came from Danielle Marston, a woman who had first come to Nepal in the mid 1980s, in pursuit of inspiration for her writing.<sup>14</sup> By the time Marston, the daughter of an artist/art professor, encountered Maithil women's wall painting around Janakpur, she had already completed an advanced degree and had been working in the development field in Nepal for a year. Maithil women paint on the walls and floors of their homes for ceremonial occasions, employing a style and using pictorial themes passed from generation to generation. In so doing, they situate their lives and those of their families in cosmological context and also seek to win the favor and succor of various deities.<sup>15</sup> The paintings she saw during her visits to surrounding villages caught Marston's interest, and she arranged for a professor from the Janakpur college campus to take her on a tour of local villages to have a closer look at the painting. This was likely to have been late in the fall, when the painting from the *Diwaali* (*Deepawaali*) festival were still relatively fresh.

On her second foray to these village households, Marston brought drawing utensils, paper and a proposition. She offered to leave the materials for the women whose artwork she felt was particularly good or interesting, and would come back some days later to collect their work and pay them a sum in local currency (about 15 Nepali rupees per painting). In the long-time mixed cash and agrarian subsistence economy of rural Mithila, the import of and dependence on cash for basic goods has been exponentially increasing in the past decade. Cash is in very short supply in most Maithil village households around Janakpur, even if those households have no shortage of food. In this context, the offering of cash for labor being made by Marston would be seen as an important household opportunity.

Maithil society is strongly patrilineal and patrilocal. Lineages are traced through men, and upon marriage, women (girls) are transferred to the homes of their grooms, who often and ideally live in

extended family households organized multi-generationally around brothers, their wives and children (and those male children's wives, children, etc.).<sup>16</sup> Non-patrilineal and patrilocal elements are also deeply embedded in Maithil society but operate in the relation to the overall hegemony of patrilineal and patrilocal patterns (Davis 1999a). Maithil society has been exposed to and has selectively taken up such “modern” ideas as “love” marriage and non-dowry marriage, but these ideas have been put into practice very infrequently and primarily (and necessarily) by those who have left their home communities.<sup>17</sup>

In Maithil patrilineal and patrilocal ideology and practice, a family's in-married women are not meant to be at the service of those outside of the household except as agricultural laborers in the fields owned by better-off and generally higher-caste households in their husbands' villages; indeed female household members' domestic and farming labor is crucial to the functioning and survival of rural households, except in the most elite of families. In addition, social sanction through negative commentary about others that passes verbally across households regarding women's contact with (let alone participation in) the extra-household, non-agricultural sector keeps most household decision-makers from requiring or permitting their women from participating in that sector. Such talk is bad enough, and can lead to social conflict, but beyond that is the possibility that rumors of this sort will harm the honor (*ijjat*) of a household and thus put at risk the marriageability of the sons and daughters of that household. Marriageability, in turn, is essential to the social, economic and cosmological well being of family groups.

When Marston went beyond her home-work, piecemeal approach to commercializing the painting of Maithil women and invited some of these women to go with her on a trip to Chitwan National Park to use their painting skills in the decoration of an eco-tourist resort there, and eventually to paint together at a rented space in Janakpur and as an enduring job, many households balked. Some suspected Marston of nefarious motives and plans. A few reported that they thought she would literally steal the women. In the South Asian rural context, there is some basis for this concern. Foundational Hindu stories such as the *Ramayana* include the theme of theft of women (and the heroics of their retrieval). A more contemporary narrative (and actual practice) involves the “theft” or seduction of girls and women by outsiders offering factory or domestic jobs in urban India. The Nepali media not infrequently describe how such girls and women taken under false pretenses are actually destined for the red-light districts of Bombay, Bangkok, or the like, where they are forced to work as sex slaves. (There are now efforts to repatriate such women and

provide social services for them). For the families Marston approached, short of the possibility of theft and enslavement was fear of the loss of control over women's chastity and therefore the possible "ruination" of women and by extension their families for marriage purposes. In fact, women's "ruination" does not necessitate actual sociosexual impropriety but merely the suspicion, appearance, rumor, or intimation of such. As little as a *report* that a woman or girl was *rumored* to speak unnecessarily to a shopkeeper or *rumored* to have traveled somewhere unchaperoned can be enough to "ruin" her, i.e., label her "unchaste," in certain circumstances. As I have stated, this can have severe social and economic consequences for families. In any case, it was reported to me by residents of villages from which Marston's painters were selected that many feared that Marston was offering *nainiman kaaj* (literally "bad work," and figuratively unrespectable, illegal, or unsavory work).

Given these sanctions and suspicions, what might have led the first handful of Maithil women to participate in what came to be called the Lakshmi Women's Art Project and the resulting understanding, among a significant portion of the area population, that the project was, in fact, *niman kaaj* (good, respectable work), respectable for women and worthwhile for households? In 1989, with the support of a small grant from a private trust in the United States, Marston was able to acquire the requisite materials, work with the women on transferring their skills onto paper, and eventually rent space in Janakpur in order to bring several Maithil women together to work in the absence of household duties and interruptions. In order to attenuate the appearance of impropriety, and in order to secure their safety, in the early days of the project the painters were escorted to their place of work by their husbands or other male members of their households. (It had been agreed that chaperones would also accompany the painters on the earlier trip to Chitwan.) This also allowed family members to survey the work environment and determine, for instance, that the workspace was women's space, untainted by inappropriate males. This assessment was important not just in assuaging family members but also in that these members could then return to their villages to spread the word that the project was *niman kaaj* and their household, therefore, still upstanding.

It is likely that the fact that the work the women were engaged in, i.e., the painting, was already considered a women's activity also helped define it as *niman kaaj*. Moreover, the setting afforded to the painters for work was sex-segregated, in that all of the participants were women. Further, in the beginning the daily work area was located in the inner rooms of a house--space culturally appropriate to women.<sup>18</sup>

The feminine quality of this space, however, remained ambiguous: this space--albeit inner space of a house--did not, in contrast to women's own household domestic space, link the women in it to (encompass them spatially within) their respective husbands' patriline. The association between a conservation of women's sphere of activity and space, on the one hand, and modern employment, on the other -- each strongly valued on the part of many local people -- made for a potent mixture of desire and fear, acceptability and suspicion on the part of local people.<sup>19</sup> Within two years of the start of the project, few community members expressed concern about it in a cultural idiom, and many were actively seeking income opportunities related to what was coming to be known as "Janakpur Art."

Beyond the issue of gendered space, another attractive aspect of the project to the families of potential participants was its connection with powerful local individuals. The space initially rented to Marston for the project was owned by an engineer, whose neighbor, H.R. Jha, was a member of Janakpur's Lions Club, and a man Marston befriended in those beginning months of the project. The Lions Club is a registered NGO whose membership consists of a good number of the relatively wealthy, important, and generally high caste (Maithil) townsmen, and whose mission involves the organization and sponsorship of cultural programming and other good works (broadly speaking) in the Janakpur community. Membership in the Lions Club implies high social standing for one's self and one's family, a status of being (or seeking to be) networked with others of such high standing, and therefore the capacity to make things happen through access to resources and resource people. Their sponsorship of cultural and religious events, as well as the status of many of them as high caste<sup>20</sup>, literate Maithils positions them as cultural authorities, as maintainers and judges of what is deemed authentically (purely and anciently) Maithil.<sup>21</sup> In political terms, however, their high standing is primarily local in scope; while some of the Lions Club members may have had extended family in more elite circles on the national level, my impression is that most of them were big fish in a small (Janakpur) pond. The association of the painting project with the Lions Club--an association whose development I describe below--would certainly add legitimacy to the project by providing tacit approval by a most important social set in town. Beyond social approval, such association could provide more tangible, instrumental advantages for the project. Formal patron-client relationships are structurally and culturally important in the South Asian context. Among Maithils and many other groups in the region, it is understood that those who are relatively *paaigh lok* (literally "big person," and metaphorically rich and

influential person) will materially and socially assist those (*choT lok*—literally “small people” and figuratively unimportant people with few resources) who recognize the formers’ superiority in exchange for accepting (and often ritualizing) their own relative inferiority. Those in the inferior position can beseech those superior to them, and those in the superior position gain further status by favoring them. Although patron-client relationships are quite formal in some contexts, it is more generally the case that placing oneself in association with powerful people is thought to be useful to those of lesser social status and means.

In the past few decades, the expansion of the Nepali state, with its largely non-Maithil operators, has intensified in Janakpur. Traditional patron-client relationships—earlier determined primarily in relation to access to/ownership of land—have more and more been redirected through agents and agencies of development. The Maithil *paaigh lok* of Janakpur have sought to implicate themselves in these agencies, and many of them hold development-related and/or local (Nepali) government office positions. In this way, as Stacy Leigh Pigg has pointed out for Nepal generally, development has become meaningful as “an extension and transformation of existing forms of social difference” (Pigg 1993, 54). Access to *development* inputs and channels is now perhaps *the* critical form of symbolic capital in Nepal. Local elites like the members of the Lions Club have become mediators between development objectives and operators in planning centers such as Geneva or Kathmandu and people in rural areas of Nepal. They occupy an ambivalent and therefore constantly negotiated midway position in the discursively layered dichotomies between developed and un(der)developed, knowledgeability and ignorance, wealth and poverty, authority and subordination (Pigg 1993, 51).

A connection with the Lions Club, in part through the person of Marston’s neighbor, was significant, and turned out in the beginning to be an important resource in enabling the project to expand through the acquisition of development aid from UNIFEM. And yet eventually, the incorporation of the Lakshmi Women’s Art Project into the international apparatus of development challenged the legitimacy of the Lions Club’s claim to be an authoritative mediator of culture and development in Janakpur.

### **The Struggle over UNIFEM Funds**

From the beginning, Marston's dual mission was to reinvigorate an apparently waning local artistic tradition<sup>22</sup> and to empower Maithil women whom she saw as suffering from both gender-based oppression and household-based poverty. (She knew that a similar project across the border in the Indian state of Bihar, begun over 20 years earlier, had proven very successful.) In 1992, Marston was able to secure a three-year grant from UNIFEM, whose South Asian Regional Office is located in Patan (near Kathmandu), Nepal. Preliminary community studies were undertaken and determined, as Marston recalls, that locals preferred an income-generating project offering centrally located, rather than home-based, production (Marston, personal communication, September 2001). Under the new grant, the goals of the project, then called the Lakshmi Women's Art Project (LWAP), were expanded. Women were selected to receive training in the production of handicrafts using a variety of techniques such as silkscreen, ceramics, and weaving. In addition, they were provided training in management, literacy, gender awareness, record keeping, planning, leadership, and teambuilding--all from Nepali and international NGOs, and all under the ultimate administration of the UNDP. (It was not until a few years later that the UNDP in Nepal installed a UNIFEM staff person. But it did already at this time administer UNIFEM grants.)

Nepali law stipulates that grants in aid from outside organizations can only be received by registered domestic NGOs. Marston herself was not, therefore, eligible to receive the funds, so she made arrangements with the UNDP and the Janakpur Lions Club for the moneys to be transferred to the Lions Club's accounts. At that point, Lions Club member H.R. Jha became the project's "Chairman." Following this, tensions arose between Marston and particular members of the Lions regarding control over the project and its assets.<sup>23</sup>

In his correspondence with the UNDP<sup>24</sup> and in response to a progress report filed by Marston<sup>25</sup> in which she accused the Lions Club of misbehavior (see below), H.R. Jha<sup>26</sup> portrayed the Club's members as "hert and baffled."<sup>27</sup> He reported that the Club felt excluded and disenfranchised by Marston's behavior--that she expected them to be "happy with their imposed status of slaves to act at [her] becks and calls." Jha represented Lions Club members, in contrast to Marston, as intimately acquainted with community life and with local norms, ethos, traditions and socio-economic conditions--and therefore as the more appropriate party for the coordination of the project. Jha portrayed the project painters as illiterate, poor, "simple

mindful," and "gullible" enough to fall under the spell of Marston's designs. These designs resulted at once, he wrote, in the exclusion of many "deserving artists" from project participation (due to inconvenient working hours and location) and therefore also in the disturbance of the lives of the family members of those who did participate.

Marston was portrayed by Jha as monopolizing control over the project and then lying about the Lions Club's alleged diversion of UNIFEM funds to other projects. Rather, he asserted, Marston had "confined all the economic activities of the project to herself (virtually) and to the illiterate, simple-minded and poor artists (on paper)." Through this usurpation, according to Jha, Marston had impeded the creation of an "atmosphere of understanding, participation, belonging and enthusiastic involvement on the part of Lions."

Further, Jha wrote that Marston was damaging Nepali (Janakpur) culture by presenting untraditional and even "shocking" scenes in the paintings she had the women made. Jha does not, in his letter, explain in just what way he found the paintings so troubling. But according to Marston, he verbally cited as examples scenes of childbirth and paintings of tigers. Among early project participants were a few of lower caste statuses, whose painting differs somewhat in style and content from that of the higher castes: higher caste images tend more toward the godly and spiritually abstract, whereas lower caste images are more likely to center on local flora and fauna. I noted earlier that the Lions Club members were positioned as gatekeepers of Maithil authenticity. Caste bias could explain their objection to the tiger imagery in the painting, as it would be representative to them of a lower caste aesthetic and practice they themselves devalue.<sup>28</sup> The childbirth motif is not traditional to any caste; according to Marston it was introduced by a development consultant involved in the promotion of safe childbirth practices. Around this time, the painters were being encouraged more generally to depict scenes from their own life experiences. Childbirth is associated among Maithils with the spiritual defilement of fluids emanating from the female body and with enclosed female spaces. Its use as a public representation of Maithil culture must indeed have been "shocking" to the Lions Club members' aesthetic as well as caste sensibilities and political interests.

It is in part the culturally questionable painting practice that led Jha, he implied, to accuse Marston of a "commercial motive" that was "killing the traditional glorious culture of Mithila." Jha



complained further that Marston's limitation of painting styles favored certain artists over others, thereby limiting the reach of the project. According to Jha, in addition to disagreeing over artistic merit and participant selection, he and Marston disagreed about the use of funding, a conflict that led Jha to conclude in his letter that Marston was not sincere in her proclamations of interest in the preservation and celebration of Maithil women's art.

In his letter, Jha bridled at Marston's complaint that the Lions had used project funds for purposes not directly related to the project. In addition to being the chairman of LWAP, Jha was also president of the *Mithila Sanskritik Kendra* (Mithila Cultural Center). He explained that he had approved some money as a loan from the LWAP in order to finance an exhibition of Janakpur women's art arranged by the Kendra. Not only did he insist that the money had been refunded to the LWAP account, but he was exasperated that Marston did not recognize that the Mithila Cultural Center exhibition represented an advancement of Janakpur women's art, "the very mission of the LWAP." Jha claimed that Marston monopolized the project, refusing to follow Nepal government regulations and starting trainings (workshops) against the consensus of Lions Club members. She was "striving to ruin the Nepali families with her so called feministic efforts to bolster up the morale of the gullible women stand against husbands and other respectable members (like inlaws) in the family." Jha characterized Marston further as "irresponsible" and "unappreciative," a woman whose "nerve-wracking whims and emotions" were "tarnishing the Lions Club image."

In her 1992 Progress Report to UNIFEM, Marston had positioned herself as an ally of the painters and as someone intimate enough with them that she could unproblematically understand and represent their point of view. Marston implied that the painters were unified in their view of the situation (writing of the women's "point," not "points" of view). In fact, in our initial correspondences regarding the possibility of my making a study of the project, Marston sent me a copy of an excerpt of the 1992 Progress Report document that described the conflict with the Lions Club. In the original, the excerpt was headed, "Problems encountered in implementation of this year's UNIFEM grant." As a note to me on the side, Marston wrote in free-hand, "This barely describes our problems with the Lions Club"--through her language demonstrating that she viewed the Club as a party *outside of* the ("our," i.e., hers and the

painters') project. (This communication took place subsequent to UNIFEM's removal of the Lions Club from the project, as described below.)

Marston wrote that the painters ("the women") believed that the board (on which both Lions members and painters sat) should be purely advisory, and that "For the women of this project the Lions' involvement has appeared more like meddling in affairs the women know more about." (The just-previous sentence is quoted in the original. Its author is unspecified but implied to be one or more of the painters.)

In the UNIFEM progress report, Marston asserted that

although two Lions attend board meetings (at least five LWAP women attend meetings), these two Lions representatives maintain that only two LWAP members are empowered to vote (on an official board of 7 Lions members.) Although it was voted in July to make the board half women, half Lions, the two Lions representatives claim they have not received official approval to conduct meetings with fifty-percent female representation. The two Lions maintain the right, without representation of a full board, to approve and veto funding requests and to make alterations in the LWAP's process of daily management.

Due to dissatisfaction with their lack of self-representation, Marston states, the LWAP painters had expressed their wish to operate independently of the Lions Club.

Thus Marston portrayed the Lions Club as uniformly against the project goal of self-management and against the painters' representation on the board. She described the Lions as usurpers of decision-making control on matters of funding and daily management. She also claimed they were too busy with other affairs to be sufficiently informed, despite possible good intentions, to be able to understand the whole process of running the project or the goals of the UNIFEM grant. (In a personal communication in August of 2001, Marston indicated that the Lions also refused to let the women see the accounts.)

In sum, H.R. Jha offered a view of Marston as a culturally ignorant outsider, reckless with power, armed with guile to which ignorant women were susceptible, and set on importing foreign ideas (feminism), to the ruination of local people and their culturally valuable, family-centered way of life. Marston, and by extension feminism, was portrayed by Jha as non-Nepali (let alone Maithil), anti-culture (read high caste culture), anti-male, and anti-family. Like the tiger in the painting, Marston was an interloper. And like tigresses of local lore<sup>29</sup>, Marston had slunk into the Maithil community, snatching up, carrying away and devouring the defenseless and innocent. Jha's portrayal of the painters as illiterate, simple-minded, and gullible is part and parcel of a general Maithil discourse of gender that upholds the

relation of dependency of women on and vulnerability of women to men and their patriline. (It is also a common portrayal of rural Nepalis by urban--or less rural--ones.)

On the other side, Marston portrays the painters as thinkers who are competent to make decisions on their own behalf. And yet, in her text and in her role, Marston positions herself as the spokesperson for the painters, whom she represents as unified in opinion.<sup>30</sup> She also consistently refers to them as “the women” (not, for instance as the painters or the participants). She thereby emphasizes the *gendered* nature of the conflict, one effect of which is to naturalize her allegiance to them--being that she is herself a woman.

In contrast, the Lions are portrayed by Marston as community patriarchs bent on maintaining power through assuming a stance of paternalistic protection over their (alleged) vulnerable, dependent women and a position of guardianship over Maithil (hegemonic) culture against (allegedly) foreign incursion. In Marston's depiction, the Lions Club (and their commitment, ironically, to "traditional" art) stands in for hegemonic Maithil culture as an impediment to local women's empowerment. That is, the patriarchs' commitment to the perpetuation of their rule supersedes their (therefore false) commitment to the uplift of their women.<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, in their communications both parties use language that coincides with the modish development rhetoric of "participation" in order to support their stance; at the same time they both mirror a discursive move whereby development projects are portrayed as intervening (positively) in the lives on agency-less subjects. From the point of view of Jha, the Lions, as aid recipients, have been excluded from participation in decision-making and daily control of their project. From Marston's point of view, such a stance represents a displacement of the intended recipients of this aid, the female painters, whose participatory rights she is out to protect. In their rhetorics, each party takes a protective stance toward Maithil women and sees the other party as a threat to their well-being. And each portrays itself as an important and appropriate link between Maithil women and international development agencies. Marston depicts an opposition between "the Lions" and "the women" (with herself a non-influential—*vis-à-vis* the painters' viewpoints--spokesperson). Jha portrays an opposition between Marston as a foreign interloper and themselves as the guardians of the painters and their shared culture. The images created resonate with contemporary feminist and post-colonial debates and stereotypes. On the one hand, nationalistic,

patronizing and sexist men of color/Third World men attempt to preserve their power by saving their women from the First World, white and/or feminist menace. And on the other hand, imperialist (colonialist) white feminist women presume to speak for women of color/Third World women by placing themselves in the role of "big sister" and under the rubric of women's solidarity and global sisterhood. I do not mean to imply that Marston or Jha actually are these straw figures or even actually view one another in this way, only that their texts reproduce these rhetorical positionings.

### **Managing Conflict the Development Way**

So, who really holds the strings of the development enterprise? The short answer is, of course, everyone involved. Development and women's development are multi-functional discourses concerning dispersed practices and encompassing, enforcing and necessitating multiple roles and mutual dependencies. But not all roles are equal. Does one party hold the upper hand? Must certain parties compromise their interests to a greater degree than others? And, if compromise cannot be reached, are some parties more easily replaced than others?

In response to Marston's report and Jha's letter, the UN Development Program sent an officer to Janakpur to study the situation. Members of the Lions Club and the development project were interviewed. And on 27 March 1992, the UNDP Resident Representative responded to Jha's letter. He wrote, "keeping in mind the two reports, and your conclusion that you have come to an impasse where you would find it difficult to continue working with Miss Danielle Marston, the project consultant, we consider that the project should not be extended beyond its present termination date of 31 March 1992." The Lions were thereby requested to send to the UNDP stipulated progress reports and financial reports, and to cease all project transactions by the aforementioned date.<sup>32</sup> From the letter alone, one might surmise that UNIFEM had cancelled the project altogether because of these management problems, but what happened was really quite different.

Under the coordination of Marston, the painters formed a member-ruled, collectively owned NGO called the Lakshmi Women's Development Center (LWDC). LWDC registered with the Social Services National Coordination Council (since renamed the Social Welfare Council) and the Community Development Office (CDO) in Janakpur in the spring of 1992. An entity called the Lakshmi Women's Art

Project continued to exist but as an *advisory* body to LWDC whose purpose was to assist LWDC in becoming self-sustaining and self-managing. Marston continued as a Coordinator of that advisory body and hired a Project Manager -- a young Muslim woman originally from far western Nepal. UNIFEM continued to support LWDC and also paid salaries for Marston and the Project Manager under LWAP.<sup>33</sup> Marston understood the UNIFEM decision as an acknowledgement of the skills and income she had brought to the women and as a recognition of her support of those women, their families and the community.

But the conflict between the Lions Club and UNIFEM did not end there. Despite an official request from UNIFEM (at a point when LWAP was about to be audited) the Lions Club still had not, two full years later, turned over the bank accounts and the money therein to LWAP. In this request, UNDP Resident Representative Kate Hardwick noted that "we wish to clarify that all purchases made during the project period must remain with the beneficiaries of the project, in other words, the members of the Lakshmi Women's Development Center."<sup>34</sup> Hardwick thereby made clear that it was the painters, not the Lions, whom they had all along viewed as the targets (potential beneficiaries) of development. In this light, Hardwick requested that a bicycle and a phone line, in addition to signature status on the bank accounts and the remaining money itself, be transferred to LWDC.

In the fall of 1995 I spoke with Anila Pradhan, the newly posted UNIFEM Representative at the UNDP in Patan, Nepal. As Pradhan saw it, the Lions Club had thought they could do anything they wanted with the women painters. She characterized the Lions as resentful of Marston and resistant to her desire to direct all the resources to the women. Moreover, she said, the Lions were angry that a *bideshi* (foreigner, used most commonly for First World foreigners) was getting control over all the money.

On her first visit to the project a short while previous to our conversation, Pradhan told me, she had undertaken to do some of this public relations work with Marston. Subsequently, Janakpur community leaders were to be invited as honored guests to the opening of the newly built LWDC Center. Further, a proposed childcare project at LWDC was to incorporate the services of the Janakpur office of the Family Planning Association of Nepal and the (government) District Health Office; and Marston drew up a proposal for a papermaking facility for LWDC that intended to employ people from the village in which LWDC was located just outside of Janakpur. By these and other means, Pradhan worked with Marston to

find ways to include community members (beyond the painters themselves) in the project in meaningful and symbolic ways. (For a number of reasons, most of these plans never came to fruition.) Pradhan, as a person familiar with the practices and ideologies of community patronage in Nepal, may have been better positioned than Marston to understand the necessity and logistics of these efforts to negotiate local politics (not that Marston was completely naïve to this). Yet, even Pradhan's orientation was toward patching up what was constructed as an *unfortunate* altercation, so that the project could flow as intended, i.e., apolitically. Pradhan helped Marston mollify the local powers-that-be (rather than to challenge their legitimacy) such that the project could operate effectively.

Marston's success in separating from the Lions Club also raises important questions about the politics of access in the development world. The issue of access to development is not a simple one, as is illustrated by this case. Development aid in Nepal, as elsewhere, is a matter often not of rights but of competition. Individuals, businesses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies all compete for grants, facilities, technological inputs, and the time of expert development personnel. And the type and amount of development aid for any particular sort of project varies over time with shifts in development models and emphases, as well as in domestic and international politics and economics. Therefore, it behooves potential recipients to know which kind of development aid for what sort of project is currently most available.

In Nepal in the early and mid-1990s, aid for the development of women through the creation of women-run enterprises was in particular abundance. This corresponded at once with the expansion in large development agencies or departments that specialized in women's and gender issues, as well as with the banners of privatization and structural adjustment currently in ascendency among financially controlling agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, US Agency for International Development and the UNDP. The past two or three decades in Nepal have also seen a boom in cultural preservation efforts. (Perhaps most well-known in Nepal has been the support by multiple INGOs and IGOs of the preservation and rehabilitation of Newar architecture and wood carving in the Kathmandu Valley.) This support of cultural preservation is part of a global trend corresponding at once to the destruction of cultures through modernization and development and also to the development of international tourism as a major national income-generating activity. It is no wonder, then, that a project bent on empowering women,

generating income through tourist market activity, *and* preserving cultural material and practice excited the imaginations of primary and secondary development aid institutions, not to mention international tourists.

In fact, Marston herself (not just the type of project she helped create) was better positioned to gain favor with the UNDP in Nepal than were her Lions Club counterparts, and this is likely to have affected the outcome of the conflict, which was in her favor.<sup>35</sup> As I have alluded to above, Marston was certainly linguistically advantaged in her correspondences with the UNDP Residence Representative. But beyond that, in a country whose women are characterized as having low-status by standard development industry measures, and in a 1990s women's development environment that was rife with stories of women's exclusion by design from development projects and of local male usurpation of the benefits of development, a feminist-identified Westerner such as Marston was likely better positioned to get the ear of international development officers than a locally powerful Nepali male. One other advantage Marston definitely had was her mobility between Janakpur and Kathmandu and her membership in social circles and clubs, like the (official) American Recreational Complex at Phora Durbar in Kathmandu, where First World expatriates and development functionaries regularly meet, socialize and professionally network.

Beyond having a credible idea for a project, getting development support would be a matter, for someone in Marston's position, of learning about the bureaucracy and discourse of development from peers and from her own professional experience, and of presenting a good argument in the right form to people rather like herself and in structures similar in many ways to those at home. In many ways the Lions Club members had a more difficult rhetorical and negotiational road to walk. In positioning themselves as the preservers of Maithil culture and protectors of women, for instance, they risked portraying themselves as "backwards," and therefore in need of development themselves. Moreover, to members of the Janakpur Lions Club, who were comparatively less cosmopolitan, the "culture" of international development agencies was inevitably more opaque than was the case for Marston. In my assessment of Lions Club members I am extrapolating from my casual familiarity with Janakpur's elite families. A few are traveled and/or educated outside of South Asia, but most are not. Their lives are centered within their households and elite social circles in Janakpur itself. And it seems to me that they are more familiar with non-Nepali popular culture and literature than with non-Nepali institutional culture. The funds they and their institutions generally receive are from local commercial and government sources. Discussions with other

Janakpur residents of similar and lower statuses made clear that they viewed the purse strings of development to be held elsewhere and at the whim of forces over which they have little control.<sup>36</sup> This impression would have been confirmed for them by the Lions Club's experience with Marston and the UNDP. As leaders and patrons of the Janakpur community, however, the Lions Club members no doubt saw themselves as the appropriate recipients of development aid targeting the Janakpur community, the dispersal of which aid they would expect to oversee. It stands to reason that they would *not* see themselves as usurping the Maithil women's art project; they would view themselves, rather, as its obvious and rightful administrators.

The "straw person" picture painted by each party of the other is not a pure conjuring of the individual imagination. Those images are fueled by discursively powerful interpretations of patriarchy, on the one hand, and of imperialism, on the other. Neither view is without a certain degree of merit, given Maithil patriarchal relations, on the one hand, and neo-colonial consolidations of power by the so-called First (and Second<sup>37</sup>) Worlds over the Third, on the other. First World currency and clout backed the solutions sought by Marston. The solutions sought by Jha and his allies in the Lions Club demonstrated a keen awareness of such currency and clout; they were in line with Maithil practices of patronage and underlying social hierarchies. In fact, in positioning their organization as recipient of development aid for further distribution, the Lions Club members became at once client and patron, situated in an ambivalent midway position between the developed (or developers) and the undeveloped (or target of development).

In the conflict described above two protagonists butt heads: Danielle Marston and H.R. Jha. Depending on perspective, Marston stands in rhetorically for the interests of women's development, poverty alleviation and cultural preservation, *or* for Western (imperialist) feminist intrusion; and Jha represents the interests of the local culture and community *or* that of self-serving Janakpur patriarchs. Although each party expresses a concern for the women painters involved in the project, and although each party positions her/himself as the spokesperson for those women, the points of view and particular dilemmas of those women in fact get lost in the paper trail shuffle. In order to remain focussed on this struggle over UNIFEM funds, as it played itself out, the present essay, as well, has thus far silenced the Maithil women who were painters in the project at that time.



This is not to imply that the desires of the painters were not expressed, nor that their interests could not be established (nor even that Marston, Jha or the UN representatives were oblivious to those interests). I have elsewhere considered in more depth points of view held by project participants and the activities they undertook in pursuit of their own perceived interests (Davis 1999a).<sup>38</sup> My observations and conversations with women participating in LWDC have convinced me that the primary goal for most of those participants was neither the empowerment (or development) of women as a group nor the preservation of their cultural traditions. The reason for participation most frequently mentioned to me by project participants, most of whom were members of resource-poor farming families, was the acquisition of cash to contribute to their households. Indeed, a number of financially related hardships brought women to the project.<sup>39</sup> For instance, one woman I got to know, Nila, had been completely neglected by her husband (and his family) since he had taken a second wife. Although she and her two sons had, in desperation, moved back to her natal family and village, they expected her to support her sons and herself (as it is shameful for the natal family of a married woman to be her primary support, and as this particular family had few extra resources to go around). Not all of the women working in the project were in as dire straits as Nila, though some were worse off socio-economically, and some had different kinds of personal dilemmas. But the primary place the project had in most of their lives, at least at the outset, was as a source of income, for themselves as people in predicaments related to their gender and/or as members of struggling households.<sup>40</sup>

And yet, in addition to the money, participants I interviewed in 1994 and 1995 commonly cited several other benefits to working at LWDC. (These were articulated not as motivations for seeking work there, but as benefits that had accrued to them since their employment began.) Among these were getting away from more arduous work or conflicts at home, as well as meeting people of many different types (*rang*, literally colors, and *jaat*, caste or race)--referring both to their coworkers from nearby villages and also to people from other regions and countries. It is evident from my research that the Lakshmi Women's Development Center project has served the Maithil women who work there in a number of ways. They have expanded their social networks, forging supportive (and sometimes not so supportive) relations with women from different households and different villages.<sup>41</sup> Also, LWDC has proved an emboldening instrument for some of the women, particularly for those who have worked there the longest. With one

another's encouragement and modeling, the women at LWDC have spoken out and spoken up in reaction to old and new injustices. Thus, it would certainly be a mistake to think of these women as actors with purely economic motives or as passive cogs in their households' economic wheels.<sup>42</sup>

Initially, the project painters would have been able to make rather small, but still significant monetary contributions to their households from their earnings from painting. Over the years, the amount the most senior project painters were making, first by piecemeal and eventually by salary, increased to the point that some of these women became the primary "bread-winners" for their families. This amount of money could mean the difference, for instance, between subordinate members of the household going hungry or not, the capacity to pay children's school fees or not, or the ability to construct a new room in one's home or not. It was never enough, however, to alter the social class status of households, which would take exponential increases in income and/or arable land ownership, as well as other, symbolic, forms of capital. Still the money project participants were making was significant enough that, by the time of my research some five years after the project's beginning, individuals from the area were requesting employment at LWDC--either for themselves or for another family member--on a nearly everyday basis.

Those I spoke to the length of whose tenure at the project enabled them to remember the UNIFEM funds dispute told me that the Lions Club had inappropriately attempted to use the funds for other things. These senior project members intimated that at the time of the dispute their primary interest was in making sure the UNIFEM money actually found its way to themselves in payment for their work. Insofar as they understood the Lions Club to be diverting the funds to other uses, such as the Mithila Sanskritik Kendra, they supported Marston's attempts at intervention. Because they did not construct themselves as part of an underserved or underprivileged group, "Maithil women," they did not view the Lions' redirection of funds to another women's group in a positive light (i.e., as part and parcel of Maithil women's empowerment). Yet neither did they see themselves exactly as "owners" or self-managers of the art project. Thus, their criticism of the Lions took the form of a complaint of mis-management rather than a complaint that the Lions were usurping control of the project.

In order to understand why the Maithil women in this project would not be likely to imagine themselves as self-managers, one must be familiar with the norms of patronage and gendered authority in Maithil society, as well as with locally hegemonic discourses of development. First, as I have already

noted, patronage such as that provided by the *paaigh lok* in the Lions Club would normally be seen as a boon to efforts to secure the success of any large undertaking. But in the last few decades, foreign-funded development has also entered into that patronage system in complex ways, sometimes increasing the power of local *paaigh lok* as patrons and sometimes threatening the hegemony of such privileged persons. In any case, among the Maithil people in the Janakpur area with whom I spoke, I found consensus around the understanding that some form of solid patronage – foreign and/or local -- was considered necessary for development projects to function. As clients of such patronage, the women working as painters at the project in Janakpur might voice their view that the behavior of their patrons toward them was just or not just, but they would not have been likely to suggest that they themselves ought to replace the Lions as direct managers over the distribution of foreign development funds. Second, women in rural Maithil communities rarely hold supra-household positions of authority (although they may garner quite a bit of authority in their own households); nor do they independently operate as patrons. Third, when local Maithil people (men and women) speak of development for women (*mahila bikaas* or *nari bikaas*), they refer overwhelmingly to externally provided educational and employment opportunities targeting women.<sup>43</sup> This discourse of women in development coincides with liberal feminist critiques that argued that women were being excluded from development, since development efforts were directed exclusively at men. In this critique, the goals are poverty alleviation and economic growth rather than a shift in gender politics.<sup>44</sup> These three factors go a long way in explaining why the Maithil women painters' criticism of the Lions took the form of an accusation of mis-management rather than a complaint that the Lions were usurping control of the project or were inappropriately attempting to act as patrons. In this, the painters' assessment of the conflict matches *neither* that of H.R. Jha *nor* that of Marston, as those assessments are represented in the records I examined.

### **Gender and Power in the Borderland of Women's Development**

Women's development projects like the one in Janakpur are enacted (and disputed) in cultural borderlands and in political fields whose scope is ultimately global. Cultural critics have employed the metaphor of "borderlands" to theorize culturally intersectional zones.<sup>45</sup> Renato Rosaldo, for example, asserts that cultural borderlands "should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites

for creative cultural production that require investigation” (Rosaldo 1989, 208). He argues that borderlands should move from a marginal to a central place in social analysis, and he implies that this need is at once a sign of changing world relations and of changed philosophical orientations. Likewise, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have developed synthetic accounts of how the international political economy works to peripheralize zones of cultural intersection in neo-colonial contexts. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) describe the borderlands as places of “incommensurable contradictions” not subject to resolution but crucial to our understanding of post-modernity.<sup>46</sup> For these theorists, borderland social and cultural dynamics are rather the norm in the contemporary world, and might be examined not as interesting exceptions but as sites ripe for the building of generalizable (if also specific) knowledge of that world. Such theoretical developments are congruent with a transnational feminist orientation that takes full account of the historical contexts in which women live and seek to improve their lives.

Portraying development projects like LWDC as places of dislocation and contradiction is not customary practice for developers. It is no coincidence, I would argue, that the kinds of information that would point to the borderland qualities of LWDC--information about manager-producer relations and market influences on the pictorial content of paintings, for instance--are omitted from most development documents and promotional texts regarding the project.<sup>47</sup> LWDC is most literally a borderland in that people of different ethnicities, classes, castes and nationalities come face-to-face there on such a regular basis that routinized behavioral patterns have emerged in their dealings with one another. Less literally but equally importantly, the Center is a nexus of transnational forces. LWDC is an intersectional site for: Maithil lived culture and discourse with all its internal contradictions; development discourse<sup>48</sup> originating in Western thought and promulgated through transnational media and advertisement, foreign aid packages and their managers, and through the Nepali nation-state (rulers and managers); and tourism, evident in promotional materials, consumer demand for LWDC paintings and crafts, and actual touristic visits of foreigners and (occasionally) elite Nepalis to LWDC. In the present inquiry, I have analyzed how the intersection of the first two of these discourses played out in a particular conflict in the early days of the project.

To the extent that gender is a central principle in any cultural discourse or practice, it comes into play in complex and important ways in borderland encounters. Sherry Ortner provides an excellent

illustration of this principle in her essay, “Gender and Sexuality in Himalayan Mountaineering” (Ortner 1996). Ortner points out that the entry of Western women onto the Himalayan mountaineering scene coincided with the growth in the popularity of feminist ideology in those women’s societies. Among the results of the growth of tourism (including mountaineering) in Sherpa regions of Nepal has been an array of economic and social changes that have provided new possibilities for (as well as new restraints on) Sherpa women.<sup>49</sup> Ortner’s understanding of these historical trajectories and their intersection leads her to assert that people come to such borderland encounters as this one,

not only with their own prior and ongoing cultures and histories, but with their own prior and ongoing politics...Encounters between Western women and Sherpa men are shaped not only by Western and Sherpa gender *categories* (although those are very important), but by Western and Sherpa gender *politics*, that is politics between Western women and men, and between Sherpa women and men. It is these distinct politics...that give the whole process an extraordinary dynamism and complexity. (Ortner 1996, 184)

It would be a mistake to imagine borderlands as spaces in which two or more static and internally unified cultures come into contact. As the case of Sherpas and Western mountain climbers illustrates, it is more theoretically useful to understand such encounters to entail the intersection of already politicized domains and discourses of gender, culture and economic access. The politics of borderlands cannot, therefore, be fully understood if one assumes the political to develop only at the point of cultural or discursive contact. Cultures and discourses bring their own political histories and struggles for hegemony with them in such engagements. This is as true for feminisms and other “gender radicalisms” (the term employed by Ortner to describe Sherpa women’s efforts to challenge their gendered subordination in the mountaineering industry), as for other domains of contention.

The multiply politicized quality of borderland encounters renders them particularly charged in nature and complicated to analyze, as a close examination of the struggle involving UNIFEM funds in Janakpur reveals. In this development context, Marston, a woman who grew up in an American, white, middle-class family, and who entered college at the apex of the second wave of the U.S. women’s movement, articulated her interpretation of the Lions Club behavior as purely patriarchal, leaving aside the neo-colonial and national political context in which these behaviors take place. She positioned herself rhetorically as an advocate for women by insisting that “the women” themselves be accorded real decision-making power on the project board and that they exercise a freedom of movement and speech in public

space not generally accorded them as female gendered subjects in Maithil society. Western feminist ideology regarding women's "voice" and the importance of women's autonomy from men, as well as economic self-reliance, permeate her rhetorical stance, revealing the legacy of gender politics of her society (and their hegemonic articulations within racialized and classed contexts). As has been pointed out, these rhetorics mask the significance of family, community, caste and class relations to Maithil women's well-being and goals.<sup>50</sup>

For his part, as we have seen, Jha, purporting to speak for the Lions Club, portrayed Marston in imperialist terms. While he did not actually use the term, "imperialist," he *did* use the term "feminist," which in this context *means* imperialist -- in a particular way. That is, in South Asia, and in fact in many neo-colonial contexts, feminism is most often understood as a sort of First World plague, at best inappropriate to Third World contexts and at worst imported and imposed by (First World) feminists in those contexts with destructive and ultimately dis-empowering effects for Third World communities and cultures.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Jha accuses the feminist, outsider Marston of disrespecting Maithil values, destroying Maithil culture, and breaking up Maithil families.<sup>52</sup> For the Lions Club members, the threat to their patriarchal and patronage power must appear not to be coming "internally" from their own women<sup>53</sup> but from outside forces: feminists, international development agencies, and the developmentalist, Nepali state (and perhaps the popular media). This perception--that challenges to the gender order are externally motivated--is a critical aspect of gender politics in Janakpur at the turn of the millenium.

Simultaneous to this nascent struggle concerning the axis of gender are other politics that serve to threaten the power of the Maithil *paaigh lok* of Janakpur. Stacy Pigg, among others, has identified an intensifying resentment of foreign aid among elite Nepalis connected to the development apparatus. This resentment stems from a frustration that "builds as skilled, highly educated Nepali experts find themselves having to accommodate high-status expatriate experts who may spend most of their tour in Nepal simply learning the ropes" (1993, 55).<sup>54</sup> As an outsider, a Westerner, a procurer of development grants, and as a woman bent on "empowering" Maithil women, Danielle Marston embodied several levels of threat to the traditional and local channels of patronage and forms of knowledge represented by the Lions Club.<sup>55</sup> These interdigitating and historically situated political struggles collectively point to the unsettled nature of

hegemonic discourses. And these politics could not help but shape the rhetoric in and trajectory of the struggle over UNIFEM funds.

As a number of researchers have pointed out, agencies that fund development programs and projects not only underwrite others' proposals for change, but they participate powerfully in the creation of a discourse whereby Third World societies are understood as a number of more-or-less distinct problems with technical solutions based on planning, funding, intervention and documentation (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994, Justice 1986, Mueller 1986). And the potential targets of these interventions respond in that same discourse--learning how, for instance, to construct their goals as development problems, so as to access those resources. A fundamental contradiction exists in the role development agencies and projects are intended to play in the "developing" world. They are meant to bring about social and economic change, on the one hand, and yet are supposed to eschew politics, on the other. That is, the discourse of development is one of "growth" and "progress" benefiting the national collectivity. It entails a discursive downplaying of conflicting interests, social costs, and differential distribution of benefits. Development projects, while rhetorically de-politicizing what is inherently political (issues such as poverty, land distribution, and in this case gender systems and questions of cultural continuity), unavoidably enter into and alter relationships of power, channeling them more and more through the structures of development themselves (Ferguson 1994). Thus, the more individuals, communities or nations attempt to solve their problems through the rubric of development (rather than, say, through social movements), the less political and more technical those problems *seem* to be to those most distanced from the everyday lives of those affected, and the greater extent to which development channels become a nexus for what in fact is political struggle.<sup>56</sup>

More, perhaps, than other sub-areas of development, women's development considers the notion that development is indeed political (in this case entailing a shift in power toward women). Yet, despite more radical influences on the field of women's development historically, within mainstream development agencies women's development is ideologically framed in terms of technical interventions providing opportunities and resources for women in a manner beneficial to all. Overwhelmingly, the idea of gender *politics* is avoided. Also, the development apparatus primarily targets poor women whose *gender* empowerment is not perceived as a threat to the power of the state or to the status quo of international

relations.<sup>57</sup> While UNIFEM (and later USAID) set out to address the technical problems of poverty and dependency among Maithil women, simultaneously preserving those women's art form, what it ended up doing in addition was stepping on the toes of a set of local (male) elite who already perceived their position to be threatened by foreign (Western development) and Nepali (national ruling class) outsiders. UNIFEM and Marston effectively usurped community control from Janakpur's *paaigh lok* by circumventing these local elites through the direct extension of resources to others in the community. And they did so in a manner that threatened one of those elites' very central modes of identity and control – dominance over women structurally subordinate to them on the basis of gender, class and (for some) caste.

To use Foucaultian terms, the creation of the newer organization, LWDC, by UNIFEM had two critical and linked “instrument-effects” (Foucault 1979), 1) to wrest control over patronage of their community from the Lions Club, i.e., from the collectivity of Janakpur's highest status males; and also 2) to redefine relations of development in gendered terms. By the latter I mean that the Lions Club members, whose social hegemony required an understanding of themselves as community patrons and therefore as the providers of development, were repositioned not as patrons but as *barriers* in the development process for the women of their community.

Marston appears initially to have comprehended the absence of a holding entity for project funds as a technical problem rather than a concern with transnational political implications. It was only after the unforeseen problem of control over and definition of the project arose that Marston represented the issue in gendered and local political terms. Marston constructed herself rhetorically as outside of these politics, which she then treated as a stumbling block to her (agentless) aim of facilitating the will of Maithil women. Perhaps inevitably, in her efforts to empower Maithil women and support their artistic expression, Marston participated in the expansion of the largely foreign-controlled development apparatus, a process bound to disempower certain parties and provoke resistance on their part. This apparatus ideologically defines women's development and cultural preservation as problems of welfare, access and opportunity, rather than as issues of oppression and injustice of transnational as well as national and local scope. In the Janakpur case, when the particular male elites whose source of power was threatened resisted the political shift using rhetoric that drew attention to the international scope of the conflict, the international funding agency swept



in, securely relocated the funds, and ultimately reframed the conflict as a local public relations issue. The response was indeed political but was framed so as to make the arbitrariness of its own power invisible.

While I have sketched here a case of conflict over the definition, control and direction of only one--albeit one handsomely funded--project in a corner of South Asia, this case is illustrative of several more general and critical points. The first point is the recognition that development projects are inherently “borderland” in nature. Such projects represent a nexus of culturally informed discourses, each of which is emergent from complex histories only partially known to those whose lives intersect in the projects. Second, despite the apolitical ideology of development and rhetoric of development agents, development projects are fundamentally political and bound to cause struggles over competing interests, insofar as and reflecting the ways in which they challenge the status quo. As in this case, such “status quo” may already be in flux or may not be subject to previous consensus. Third, such struggles will be articulated largely in extant discourses--in this case competing discourses regarding feminism, Maithil cultural authenticity, and development, which (given the borderland context) will not be mutually intelligible nor equally effective. And some interests will be hardly articulable at all within particular discursive contexts--in this case, the voices of the painters themselves are drowned out. Finally, due to the discursive saturation of neo-colonial contexts, such conflicts will have political effects (instrument effects) beyond the scope of the conscious intent--in this case the displacement and alienation of particular community elites.

Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan have argued in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* that since “the world is currently structured by transnational economic links and cultural asymmetries, locating feminist practices within these structures becomes imperative” (1994, 3). Similarly, Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty point out in the introduction to their anthology *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, that discussions of feminist praxis in the context of global flows of capital and discourse require a change in analytical frame (1997). In my own study, I have aimed to be analytically congruent with a transnational feminist approach that shifts “the unit of analysis from local, regional, and national culture to relations and processes across cultures” (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xix). Such an approach must include an analysis of the particular historical manifestations of “feminist” and “anti-feminist” rhetoric in the pursuit of political and social goals. Only then can we understand the links between accusations of “feministic efforts” and attempts to

defend local autonomy and authority and to preserve one's culture against perceived national and international threats. And only thusly can we make sense of efforts like Marston's to keep men from "meddling in affairs the women know more about" in the context of an internationally funded women's development project. With such contextual knowledge one might begin to perceive (and support) the desires and strategic interests of multiply marginalized women whose painterly skills have drawn them into new kinds of local, national and international relations.

Danielle Marston worked hard to extract herself from the Lakshmi Women's Development Center in 1995, and it carried on in the subsequent years in her virtual absence (but not without her interest or advisement) and with the expectation of absence of major development grants. In a follow-up study to the present one I aim to understand the effects of these and other changes on community politics in Janakpur, on the internal dynamics of the project, on the perception of the project by various publics, and on the lives and views of the women who produce "Janakpur Art."

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#### NOTES

I am grateful to Julie Vandivere and Susan Reed for their help in drafting of this article. I would also like to thank Tom Fricke for suggesting that this story was more analytically important than I had originally noticed.

<sup>1</sup>This and all subsequent names of persons involved in this conflict are pseudonyms. The name of the development project is also a pseudonym.

<sup>2</sup>This case is part of a larger study that tells a multi-stranded and multi-sited story of women's development in Nepal. In the larger project, I seek to identify the array of discourses, as well as the historical and cultural specificity of practices, that underlie the Lakshmi Women's Development Center and inform the events that have unfolded there. In this larger study, I attempt especially to understand an

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emergent touristic element in women's development. I question how and why the Lakshmi Women's Development Center and its members have become objects of tourism, and what the effects of such objectification have been for the project and the women who participate in it (Davis 1998, 1999a, 1999b).

<sup>3</sup> On this "Second *Ekikaran*" (Des Chene's term), see Onta (1996).

<sup>4</sup> Mary Des Chene has used the term "indirect colonialism" to describe Nepal's past relation with Britain, as well as its present position in the global "aid regime" (1996, 269).

<sup>5</sup> For an early criticism by Nepali women of foreign aid approaches to women and development, see Pradhan and Shrestha (1983).

<sup>6</sup> The trajectory I have far too briefly sketched here is rough and overlapping, as well as geographically and institutionally specific. I have barely scratched the surface of a much deeper and conflictual history of feminist critiques of development. At times the line between critique from within the development paradigm and critique from without are fuzzy. For varied takes on the history of women and development, see, for instance, Beneria and Feldman (1992), Charlton (1984), Escobar (1995), Marchand and Parpart (1995), Moser (1993), Mueller (1987), Scott (1995), Sen and Grown (1987).

<sup>7</sup> Women's organizations were established in Nepal in the 1940s, at a time when many Nepali intellectuals and activists, inspired by political events in India, were calling for political and social change in Nepal. Although historically important, these organizations did not lead to nation-wide dissemination of ideas and projects on women and development, as did the work that emerged in the 1970s.

<sup>8</sup> I outlined these scholarly shifts in Davis 1999a.

<sup>9</sup> I have analyzed these discourses in Davis 1998 and 1999a. For an example of the deployment of both discourses in a Western feminist text written by a former Peace Corps volunteer to Nepal, see Scot (1993).

<sup>10</sup> As one example of this engagement, ASMITA Women's Publishing House, Media and Resource Organization, a Nepali feminist journalism organization, has been promoting feminist conversations in the Nepali context since 1988. As another example, in 1997 the journal *Studies in Nepali History and Society* (Volume 2, Number 2) highlighted a number of commentaries by Nepali advocates of women's issues in and outside of the rubric of development.

<sup>11</sup> Whenever the opportunity arose, I attempted to help out informally at the Center, by providing verbal and written English translations, by packing items for shipping to Kathmandu, and by undertaking myriad other small tasks. I was not, of course, employed by the Center; and I am quite sure that I have benefited personally and professionally to a much great extent that the Center gained from my presence there.

<sup>12</sup> I communicated with Marston regarding the current essay, an exchange that benefited my analysis considerably, given the fact that Marston lived through the events described, whereas I did not. Marston was able to provide additional factual information as well as interpretation. It bears noting that our interpretations and analyses do not completely coincide.

<sup>13</sup> Maithils in Nepal and other Nepali peoples are connected not only politically through the structure of the Nepali state but through the long-term diffusion of culture and the contrastive politics of identity. Maithils are related to many other Nepali groups, including national elites, in the outlines of their Hindu cosmologies and ritual cycles, patrilineal kinship structures and marital exchanges, caste system, and patterns of patronage. Yet, whereas Maithil identity is generally understood to have entailed these cultural elements for as long as can be traced, for some other Nepali groups, one points to a history of "sanskritization," whereby many of these elements were introduced over time through cultural contact (trade and migration) and through Nepali state imposition. (And some ethnic groups in Nepal are neither Hindu, nor caste-based, nor strictly patrilineal, and speak languages unrelated to Nepali or Maithili.) To a greater extent than other Nepali groups, Maithils practice *pardah*, or seclusion of women – and here they are more culturally similar to geographically adjacent Indian groups. Due in part to this practice of *pardah* and connected issues related to "public access" such as lack of formal education, in development measures of "women's status" in Nepal, Maithil women are usually considered to hold particularly low status (see, for instance, Acharya and Bennett [1981]). Educated, high caste Maithils consider their form of Hinduism to be more pure than that of other Nepalis (whose religious practices they view as tainted by Buddhism and animism, or simply as *bigral*, broken). Identity distinctions are made on both sides between *pahaari* (hill/mountain people) and *madeshi* (Tarai people). Nepali people from outside of the the Tarai stereotype *madeshi* folks as thieving outsiders who are not Nepali but Indian. And in some contexts Maithils use the word Nepali to refer to other people in Nepal, excluding themselves.

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<sup>14</sup> Actually, a study of Maithil women's status completed a decade earlier suggested the possibility of the commercial development of their painting (Acharya 1979); however, this suggestion had yet to be operationalized.

<sup>15</sup> For an extended description and analysis of Maithil painting, see Brown (1996).

<sup>16</sup> Some Maithil girls are wedded before puberty. In these cases, girls sometimes remain at their natal homes until they reach puberty.

<sup>17</sup> Compare Ahearn (1999a and 2001).

<sup>18</sup> In 1994, a few years into the project, development funds were secured to build a large complex to house its expanded production and development functions. The complex mimicked a traditional Maithil home in form (with courtyard and surrounding rooms), thus reinforcing its interpretation of feminine space. For a fuller analysis, see Davis (1999a, 295-6).

<sup>19</sup> This assertion/insertion of women's space into non-household space demonstrates interesting parallels with the local women's movement described by Elizabeth Enslin in the 1980s in an adjacent region of Nepal. It should be clear from the present study, however, that this creation of a space for women, in contrast to the case in Enslin's study, did not take the form of a grassroots challenge for power, nor was it a response to a perceived encroachment on women's formerly greater access to or control over common spaces (Enslin 1990, 1992). The motives and means were singularly different, as described below.

<sup>20</sup> Actually, the caste status of some members of the Lions Club was lower than that of some of the painters in the project, a few of whom, in turn, had influential relatives in Kathmandu (Marston, personal communication, October 2001). On balance, however, combinations of caste, class and gender status differential privileged the Lions Club as a social entity in Janakpur.

<sup>21</sup> For more insights on Maithil identity politics, see Brown (1996), Burghart (1993), and Burkert (1997).

<sup>22</sup> The only sense in which the painting tradition appeared to me to be waning related to my impression that an increasing but still small percentage of village houses were being constructed of concrete and brick rather than mud and thatch. (The former materials are much more costly.) Traditionally Maithil women's painting is done on mud walls and floors. It is meant to be ephemeral, a quality ensured by the fact that mud homes are periodically "cleansed" by the application of a new layer of mud (mixed with cow dung for its purifying qualities). This cleansing eliminates the painting, which, in turn, is periodically renewed. The materials of concrete and brick do not readily lend themselves to this same sort of cleansing necessitated by the ritual and cyclical nature of Maithil painting.

<sup>23</sup> Marston reports a split within the Lions Club over this issue (personal communication, September and October 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Letter from H.R. Jha, Chairman of the Lakshmi Women's Art Project, to Jon Weber, UNDP Representative, dated 24 February 1992. Jha used letterhead upon which was written at the top center: "Lakshmi Women's Art Project (A Project of the Lions Club, Janakpur)."

<sup>25</sup> 1992 Progress Report of the Lakshmi Women's Art Project to UNIFEM.

<sup>26</sup> It is fairly common for elite men in this region to use initials as a "first name" before their caste- and lineage-based family name (in this case Jha). Marston has indicated that Jha was a relative upstart among Janakpur's male elite and one with political aspirations. He had changed the spelling of his name from one indicating his lower caste origins in order to gain status (Marston, personal communication, September 2001). Such name-changing for status purposes is not uncommon in caste-stratified Nepal.

<sup>27</sup> I have decided not to alter or "correct"--by use of "[sic]"--non-standard uses of written English on the part of Nepalis whose first language is not English. My correction of these "errors" would erase evidence of the difficulty Nepalis must often face in learning the norms and displays of competence in and therefore gaining access to the (so-called) First World development communities, a point at issue in this particular case.

<sup>28</sup> In a personal communication (October 2001), Marston indicated that Jha only objected to the childbirth paintings, which had begun to be painted significantly earlier in the project's history, at the point where his authority to take more exclusive control of the project himself was being challenged. (One remembers, too, that Jha is not actually high caste by birth.)

<sup>29</sup> Actually, several times a year new tiger attacks upon villagers in this region are reported in Nepali newspapers.

<sup>30</sup> In another instance the following year, using a reversed representational strategy in regard to Maithil women's voice, but with a similar effect, LWDC sent a letter written in English and approximating formal business style (and therefore probably composed by a member of the Center's management team) under the



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signatures of Indu Karna, Board Secretary, and Bina Jha, Board Chairwoman, neither of whom speaks English or knows how to write a business letter. The letter was a request to UNIFEM for a two-year extension of Marston's resident visa, in order that she might continue to act as a coordinator, trainer and product designer for the project, which, the letter attested, she had thus far done with "great help and devotion." (Letter from LWDC to UNIFEM dated 16 March 1993.) I am not questioning the truth of these sentiments nor their "actual" authorship; I only raise this as an example of a contrasting representational strategy.

<sup>31</sup> Although not evident in these documents, Marston has indicated that Jha, a political party contender, diverted funds to exhibitions taking place in conjunction with party-related events (personal communication, August 2001). It is clear that the social and political context and ramifications of this conflict is significantly more complex than its representation in these correspondences.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Jon Weber, Resident Representative of the UNDP, to H.R. Jha, chairman of the Lakshmi Women's Art Project, dated 27 March 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Marston's and the Project Manager's salaries were enormous by local standards but low by international development standards. The distribution of salaries at the development project became an issue of conflict among the project participants in subsequent years, an issue I have addressed elsewhere (Davis 1999a). But at this point, the dispute regarded not so much the question of administrators' share in the funds per se, but of decision-making control and *programmatic* uses of funds.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from UNDP Resident Representative Kate Hardwick to The Lions Club of Janakpur, dated 31 May 1994.

<sup>35</sup> This is not the least to imply that her complaints against the Lions Club were invalid.

<sup>36</sup> This impression is confirmed by Pigg (1990, 1993) for Nepal more generally.

<sup>37</sup> Although it is customary now in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union to speak only of "First" and "Third" worlds, I mention the "Second" as a nod to the recent history of competition for influence (through development aid) in Nepal between socialist and capitalist countries. In fact, perhaps the most obvious icon of development (and largest employer) in Janakpur is the Janakpur Cigarette Factory, built in the 1950s by the Soviet Union.

<sup>38</sup> A number of studies have attempted to assess South Asian women's particularly gendered and subordinate or "subaltern" standpoints through analyses of women's expressive traditions such as Tiji festivals in Nepal (Ahearn 1998), occasions of song in India (Raheja and Gold 1994); and Maithil (Mithila) painting (Brown 1996). Compare also Tsing's analysis of a Meratus woman shaman's narrative constructions of power in the transnational and transcultural context of Kalimantan (Tsing 1993).

<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that the women who worked at the project acted autonomously in making the decision to work there. Such decisions occur through household negotiations in which household members held different degrees of authority (and even different normative expectations regarding the propriety of speaking with one another or in front of one another). Many of the project painters were relatively junior wives in their husbands' households, and as such would have had limited (but some) capacity to influence the decision as to whether or not they would work at the project.

<sup>40</sup> While making a significant financial difference to those employed at LWDC and their families, I do not believe that the project has had a large impact on the economy of Janakpur or its surrounding villages. Although the project has attracted small numbers of tourists to town and has provided additional income to approximately 60 people and their families, this must be weighed against a local population in the tens of thousands and a large agricultural and commercial economy. (Janakpur is a trade and pilgrimage spot near the Indian border that is encompassed by rice fields and fish ponds.) The project employs no systematic mechanism to ensure reinvestment of its income beyond individuals and into the local community.

<sup>41</sup> In her discussion of women's use of common spaces in Chitwan, Elizabeth Enslin also notes that such spaces are used to find solace for domestic conflicts, seek companionship, share stories and produce political expressions (Enslin 1992).

<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere (Davis 1999a), I have explored the relationship between household dynamics and employment at LWDC. I also analyze at length the politics of solidarity that developed among LWDC painters and managers in the mid-1990s.

<sup>43</sup> In Nepal, development has been understood by its "targets" primarily in the form of inputs into local communities from the national government or international donors (Pigg 1993). Local politicians promise such inputs in their campaigns. In local discourse, development appears as something one hopes to receive,

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rather than to create. This interpretation of development generally holds hegemony also over the interpretation of women's development.

<sup>44</sup> This kind of discourse on women's development invokes notions neither of solidarity building, nor of self-determination, nor of social movement. It contrasts with the clear charter of the Lakshmi Women's Development Center to build solidarity and a sense of co-ownership among its members, and to practice democratic decision-making and education for empowerment. My ethnographic work at the project made evident to me that the efforts by Marston and the project managers to promote these values and practices among the membership constituted an uphill battle, which they found at once important and incredibly frustrating. Here we see a disjunction between local expectations of development and currently produced (especially women's) development discourse. Despite the current discourse and localized efforts to actualize it "on the ground," development in Nepal is still something many Nepalis are waiting for others to bring to them.

<sup>45</sup> This theoretical tool was first elaborated by Chicana writer/scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1987).

<sup>46</sup> A second useful metaphor for examining intersectional zones and one developed by Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1996) is "translocality."

<sup>47</sup> For an analysis of such relations and influences, and of their omission from promotional texts, see Davis (1999a).

<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere I have called this "developmentalism" (Davis 1999a), and Ferguson has called it "devthink" (Ferguson 1994, 259).

<sup>49</sup> In some ways Sherpas and Maithils represent opposite ends of the cultural and geographical spectrum in Nepal. Sherpas have lived in the higher inhabitable Himalayan mountain areas of Nepal for hundreds of years and their cosmologies reflect deep Buddhist and shamanistic influences, while Maithils, who are Hindus, have lived primarily in the very lowest flatlands to the south. (Both Maithils and Sherpas have migrated to the Kathmandu Valley in significant numbers in the past few decades.) Their means of livelihood reflect very different political and ecological niches, although both have been subject, in different ways, to the hierarchical forces of national unification and the intensified globalization of Nepal. Outside of Nepal, Sherpas are most well known as porters and guides for foreign mountain climbers and trekkers; compared to Maithil communities generally, Sherpa communities have been much more directly and intensely impacted by the international tourism industry. For historicized anthropological analyses of Sherpas, see Adams (1996), Fisher (1990), and Ortner (1989, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> They also mask the fact that Marston was well aware of the relevance of many of these other aspects of social relations to the project.

<sup>51</sup> Many scholars have commented on the discourse of feminism in Third World and neo-colonial contexts and on the difficulty of articulating nationalist feminist standpoints. See, for example, Alexander and Mohanty (1997), Burton (1991), Grewal and Caplan (1994), Jayawardena (1986), and Mohanty, Russo and Torres (1991). Burton examines imperial feminism in the context of early 20<sup>th</sup> century British imperialism in India, wherein, she argues, Indian women became instruments in some British feminists' attempts to attain suffrage through an appeal to a "global sisterhood" in which British women would take the lead in lifting up their Indian "sisters" through their (British women's) more enlightened example.

<sup>52</sup> Just as in this context Marston fails to mention the positive patronage qualities of the Lions Club, Jha draws no notice to Marston's capacity to secure international grants or "read" the market for tourist art.

<sup>53</sup> No sustained popular women's movement existed in Nepal in the early 1990s. For a locally and temporally situated account of a women's movement in Nepal, see Enslin (1990, 1992).

<sup>54</sup> In the case of the Lions Club in Janakpur, this is in some part a displacement of blame, since the somewhat more structurally proximate "outsider" is the Nepali woman (Anila Pradhan) in the UNIFEM post in Kathmandu.

<sup>55</sup> Yet Marston is not the type of career development agent whose job entails short country tours.

<sup>56</sup> For the case of Lesotho that he studied, Ferguson identified the structures of development as those of the state (government) bureaucracy. It has also been the case for Nepal that development has propagated itself in part through the extension of state bureaucracy. In Janakpur, for instance, agricultural extension, fishery projects and schools (all of which fall under the rubric of development) have been critical institutions through which state bureaucracy from Kathmandu has implicated itself locally. Yet, while the Nepali state bureaucracy, and the power circulating with it, has certainly grown significantly under the development paradigm in the last half century, much of the structure of development now occurs outside of official state agencies in Nepal (as elsewhere), especially through national and local offices of international development

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agencies (like UNDP and USAID) and through Nepali non-governmental organizations, including so-called “women’s organizations.” The growth of NGOs in the past two decades, and their partial replacement of Third World governments as the channels of development have been widely documented (Clark 1990, Diehl 1997, Weiss and Gordenker 1996). Debate continues regarding whether NGOs are inherently or potentially more liberatory or justice-oriented than governmental bodies. The discussion is complicated by the fact that NGOs are of diverse natures; they are, therefore, a mystifying unit for debate. In Nepal, in order to receive aid from international sources, NGOs must register with the government and are thereby subject to government oversight and dependent on the government for legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the outside world.

<sup>57</sup> Some NGOs operating under the rubric of development do name and promote the political aspects of their interventions. For a discussion of frameworks used to affect and assess the impact of development projects on gender dynamics, see March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay (1999).