

GENDER AND THE PHANTOM BUDGET



A Women's Budget in a Male-dominated Context

An examination of the “budget affair” exposes the essential features and the symbolic implications of the budget within the narrative of the women’s development project. The budget affair began with Tovi Fenster’s stay in Nepal during the summer of 1996 and continued during my stay one year later. In discussing Fenster’s and my own cost estimation earlier (see Chapter 3) I indicated how the two budgets exposed our preference for literacy classes, for gender awareness workshops, and similar projects, while pushing aside economic activities. Another impact of the budget, described earlier, was the vibrant round of social engagements that evolved once word got around that generous funds were available, to which the near and more distant organizational environment (NGOs in particular) reacted excitedly. The women’s program’s budget also disclosed, while intending to conceal, the wide wage disparities between different categories of employees, which affected social relationships in many ways. Moreover, the budget reflected the complex relationships that existed between the Nepali officials and representatives of foreign agencies, the World Bank and Tahal in particular, in relation to spheres of administrative and professional responsibility. Indeed, the changes I made to the budget as a result of verbal and written interactions clearly reflected underlying power struggles as I sought to balance the women’s project’s budgetary needs against competing interests. The gendered power conflicts were probably the most significant social engagements that emerged as part of the budget drama.

In this chapter I will describe the conflicts and power struggles that ensued over the budget and argue that it did not and was not meant to represent a plan of action. I will elaborate on the social relationships and interactions at large and on gender relations in particular, which the budget affair revealed and set in train. I will also describe the futile effort invested in preparing and discussing the proposed budget with those in charge of the irrigation project. The irrigation project heads opposed in various ways the implementation of the women’s project budget, and consequently ensured that the project had a negligible chance of being implemented.

Dealing with the budget of the women's project was an integral and significant part of my daily activities throughout my stay in Nepal. Some of my labor-intensive activities were: writing up the cost estimation for the implementation of the women's project; discussing and negotiating this over and over again with high ranking officials; continuously pressuring Thapa, the Nepali director of the irrigation project, to send the budget proposal to his superiors in the Ministry of Agriculture and to the World Bank for approval; interacting daily with heads of professional divisions within the irrigation project regarding their responsibility for implementing various parts of the program; negotiating with governmental officials and NGOs' representatives outside the irrigation project over their proposals, and more.

The fact that I was asked to produce a budget and report, though one had been submitted a year earlier (see Fenster 1996), implied, by definition, its needlessness. Evidently, I was expected to provide a new version of the budget (and report), since naturally I could not submit my predecessor's budget proposal. Nevertheless, none of the basic data concerning the target population, the time frame, or the general purposes of the women's project (as vaguely stated by the various parties) had changed during the year that had elapsed. Indeed, the process of producing a budget entailed ongoing bargaining over the preferred activities, their extent and their expense, the number of groups and total population to be included in the project, as well as the total sum, and so forth. To me the process seemed like a game played between parties of unequal power; the stronger player was allowed to invent new rules as they pleased while the weaker party was obliged to comply with these changing rules. Moreover, as power relations within this game were defined by gender, the budget indirectly reflected the way in which male players—whether working for the Nepali government, the World Bank, or Tahal—underestimated women's issues and interests. In this game women could be easily manipulated, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Thus, the budget portrayed the women's development project as a fictitious, simulated social affair within a male dominated context, characterized by “radically unequal power relations” (Ferguson 1990: 121–22).

A Flexible Budget and Feminine Compliance

My practical involvement with the budget began a few days after I arrived in Bhairahawa, and I started to prepare my own cost estimate for the women's development and economic activities program—a document that was attached as an annex to my report (see Hertzog 1997). I had first seen a budget for the project some time before I left for Nepal, when I read Tovi Fenster's report, which was handed to me by Tahal during a visit to their offices in Tel Aviv. While reading her report I was completely unaware of the centrality of the budget issue, its latent implications and the conflicting interests that lay hidden behind it. Thus, I concentrated on the descriptive part of her report. The fact that the cost estimate appeared as an annex to her main report further encouraged me to ignore its implications.

The point I wish to make about preparing a new cost estimate is that I was expected to produce something that was unnecessary and redundant. Nevertheless, I found out at a later stage that my cost estimate and final report were the only products that were actually expected from me by Tahal. In practice, all my other initiatives were, from Tahal's point of view (and even more so the point of view of the local irrigation project staff), clearly undesired and even irksome. The reports demonstrate, inadvertently, "the instrumental value of paper products" (Mosse 2005: 134).¹ I suggest that they were used to provide evidence of Tahal's suitability as an implementer of women's empowerment projects, presenting itself as professionally capable and committed to women's affairs. Tahal's presentation of itself as a competent executor of the World Bank's declared purposes with regard to empowering women (see, e.g., World Bank 1990, Murphy 1995),² offers an example of the way development agencies and practitioners adjust themselves to funders' and employers' "changing fads—environment one year, gender the next; decentralization today, impact-assessment tomorrow" (Eade 1997: 5). Judith Justice noticed in the early 1970s (in India) that "the priorities of international funding agencies shifted frequently, changing trends in international assistance" (Justice 1989: xi) with regard to health care. She suggests that the "competition for AID contracts is intense," and the "immediate focus of the consulting groups is often on obtaining the contract and meeting AID's requirements, while the realities of the recipient country's health needs may fall into the background" (ibid.: 28). Graham Hancock describes this tendency as "a genetic trait" (Hancock 1989: 72) of developers to present their expertise according to the prevailing fashions of the funders—the World Bank being a particularly conspicuous one. Sondra Hausner (2006), however, argues that this conduct of development institutions and donor agencies emerges from the inherent needs of organizations, rather than from a vague, irrational "fad" or "trait." She argues that development agencies will "continue to cast human rights, reproductive health, sexuality, empowerment, poverty, subjecthood, citizenship, identity, forests, water, and education (to name a few domains through which development processes affect people's lives) within certain heuristic frames. They must do so, in order to function as institutions" (ibid.: 318).

When Leon suggested, on one of my first days in Bhairahawa, that I prepare a cost estimate and final report, I did not express any reservations but obediently accepted his demand and started working on it. Moreover, I never questioned the fact that I had to prepare a cost estimate when there was one available already. Furthermore, while analyzing the ethnography, I found out that the first version of the women's project and budget was submitted by Fenster as early as February 1992. For a long time I assumed that her involvement in the women's project had begun in summer 1996. However, I noticed that a letter sent to me by Leon, some two months after I returned home, noted that her engagement with the women's project began some four years earlier. Recounting

a visit of the World Bank delegation to the irrigation project, Leon wrote that he tried to convince the head of the delegation to support the women's project's implementation:

I reminded Mr Mint that the issue of women's advancement in the [irrigation] project area was the Bank's "baby" and that Tovi Fenster had prepared, as early as February 1992, a program that included, in addition to the "literacy" constituent, [the recommendations concerning] developing and encouraging other skills with the purpose of creating income-generating sources for women, and that until now the Bank has not renounced its interest in these programs. The budget Tovi has prepared amounted to over \$400,000.³

Thus, while I could have anticipated that my employers and their Nepali partners would expect a report concerning my visit, including proposed recommendations, this was not the case with regard to the women's project's budget. Surprisingly enough I did not mention this unexpected demand in my fieldnotes. It appears, therefore, that I accepted the demand of preparing a cost estimate as a taken-for-granted assignment, or as an assignment that I had no choice but to carry out. Although I was facing an unreasonable demand, I could not or would not dare refuse to comply with it, as I yearned to be professionally respected. Anxious upon my arrival in Bhairahawa, and throughout my stay, to "demonstrate professional competence" (Mosse 2005: 26)⁴ and to be acknowledged as a professional gender consultant, I may have thought that writing a report and budget estimate were part of what was expected of me in my professional capacity. The fact that my fieldnotes do not mention any reluctance on my part concerning the unexpected demand can be explained as a denial, and as a means of maintaining my self-esteem. This understanding follows Herta Nöbauer's (2002) claim that self-denial strategies serve as a means to retain self-esteem in professionally structured power relations between men and women.⁵ Moreover, following Beate Kraus (1993: 172–73), Nöbauer (studying the academic sphere) argues that denial emerges from the "structural violence and symbolic violence women are confronted with in their working-relationships (Nöbauer 2002: 121).

The point to be stressed here is that potential violent behavior is embedded in all bureaucratic frameworks (Marx 1976). However, power differentials and the violent potential within organizations are closely connected to their gendered structure, as Kathy Ferguson (1984) suggests. The power structures of "bureaucratic capitalist society" are the "primary source of the oppression of women and men" (*ibid.*: ix) and "a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised" (Foucault 1972: 156). Nevertheless, the prominence of gender perspectives in power structures, which are revealed in my case study, demonstrates the role of "femininity as subordi-

nation” (Ferguson 1984: 92–99) in bureaucratic settings. It follows, as Ferguson argues, that “as long as there are groups of people who hold institutionalized undemocratic power over others, femininity will continue to be a trait that characterizes the subordinate populations” (ibid.: 122). Thus, my silent compliance with unreasonable demands imposed on me by Tahal through its representative—such as providing a report that was not needed—serve as an example of the “feminine” component of subordination in organizations.

Gender Consultants Accommodating to the Power of Men

Working on the budget entailed a process of deconstructing Fenster’s categories and emphases, dividing activities into sub-sections, and calculating them in local money. Anita, who was a very practical and knowledgeable person, and familiar with the value of money and other essential information about alternative options, was very helpful in the process. My personal input into the revised cost estimate mainly concerned emphasizing vocational training such as agricultural training, small enterprises such as handicraft production, and a suggestion that economic activities be allocated similar sums to those given to the literacy classes.

However, the most significant change that I introduced into the budget was a substantial reduction in the total cost when compared to Fenster’s own budget. Fenster’s total proposed budget was about \$440,000, and was calculated on the basis of 300 groups of women (about 9,000 women altogether) taking literacy classes. In my own cost estimate I reduced the budget to approximately \$290,000, for the same 300 groups. Fenster allocated \$300,000 for what she labelled vaguely as “development packages.” As indicated earlier (see Chapter 3), this vagueness was instrumental in blurring the fact that literacy classes were the core of the whole program and budget. Thus, Fenster allocated the sum of about \$300,000 out of the total \$440,000 to literacy classes. Fenster’s other major allocations were \$15,000 for wages (for thirty WGOs and two WOs), \$18,000 for gender workshops, and \$60,000 for animal husbandry training (which was the only economic activity included in her budget). Fenster did not include village teachers’ wages in her budget, while in mine \$58,000 were allocated for the wages of thirty WGOs, two WOs, and 300 village teachers.

In my budget, I allocated the sum of \$131,000 to economic activities; that is, nearly half of the total amount. Thus, \$80,000 were allocated for sewing training, \$34,000 for the economic activities fund, and \$17,000 for the handicraft project. I indicated earlier that Fenster effectively disregarded women villagers’ demands regarding economic resources, and suggested that this might betray her inadvertent compliance with her employers’ expectations that the women’s program should concentrate on literacy training (see Chapter 3).

The way in which the budget shrank in the process of revising Fenster’s proposal offers further evidence of compliance with employees’ expectations. Unknowingly, I became an accomplice, cooperating with the explicit and implicit expectations of

Tahal, my employer, on whom I depended heavily for my professional acknowledgement. I was unaware of the compelling control behind “innocent” casual comments (mainly expressed by Leon) and of my vulnerable situation (Nöbauer 2002: 119).⁶ It appears that I inadvertently served Tahal’s interests (and those of the local irrigation project heads) by significantly reducing the original budget, which the World Bank allocated for women’s benefit. Thus, in practice, I served to legitimize the devaluation of women’s expectations and to deprive them of potential economic resources. Hence, I was a “reluctant accomplice” (ibid.: 119), cautiously criticizing male patterns. Nevertheless, I adapted to them. In doing so, I “not only continue[d] to update traditional sex roles, but also, contribute[d] to a male dominated [academic] culture based on paternalism” (ibid.: 121).

My cooptation into the male dominated irrigation company provides what is for me an irritating example for Vilfredo Pareto’s explication of “co-optation” (Pareto 1991) in the gender sphere.⁷ Pareto argued that absorbing leaders of excluded groups into the ruling elite serves to perpetuate the existing power structure. In the gender context, feminist scholars have discussed co-optation as a patriarchal strategy, which enables a few women to be integrated into leadership positions of mainstream institutions, while excluding and discriminating women collectively (e.g., Ferguson 1984; Acker 1992; Chatty and Rabo 1997; Murthy 1999; Nöbauer 2002). Kathy Ferguson argues that individual women’s success in “mov[ing] up in the organizational world often provides both material and social rewards for individual women ... but there is nothing particularly feminist and certainly nothing radical about them” (Ferguson 1984: ix). Murthy points to the tendency of women’s NGOs to “strike bargains with patriarchal structures” (Murthy 1999: 177). Organizations do not change as a result of few women’s entrance into leading positions, neither can it promote women’s equal opportunities, as liberal feminism has advocated (Ferguson 1984: 4).

Enjoying economic and social benefits while adhering to my employers’ expectations to provide useless reports in my capacity as gender consultant, I clearly embodied the co-opted feminist professional.⁸ Ferguson argues that people often resist the demands of an organization and “their resistance is either penalized or coopted, and they face real suppression if they lose” (ibid.: 19). Moreover, compliance is not based on “habit or the routinization of choice. Obedience is enforced” (ibid.: 19). Citing Gray and Roberts-Gray’s study of bureaucratic compliance (Gray and Roberts-Gray 1979), Ferguson concludes that “enforcing agents plus sanctions for compliance are major contributors to the power of bureaucratic rules” (Ferguson 1984: 218 n.43).

Although I adapted reluctantly to the dictates of the project’s males staff, I became the accomplice who cooperates with hegemonic power in order to prevent sanctions, to ensure personal benefits, and to avoid hassle.

Stimulating Hopes, Providing Vague Promises

I began to be aware of problems regarding the budget one week after my arrival at the irrigation project site, when I showed a draft cost estimate to Pandit. He made a few comments regarding aspects he thought were missing from the budget. Following a short discussion about hiring another coordinator (Anita was the only coordinator employed at that time), Pandit unwillingly approved the additional coordinator in the proposed budget. I explained that introducing 300 groups of village women to the project, within a short time span, made it crucial that another coordinator be employed. Pandit concluded: “It is up to Thapa to decide.” At the time I did not pay much attention to this comment. I continued to discuss with him the cost estimate, and urged his cooperation in facilitating the implementation of the women’s project. In retrospect it seems that Pandit was gently, but nevertheless firmly, suggesting, that he had no power to make significant decisions and that the right person to turn to was Thapa. Assuming that because he was the person in charge of the village group organizers and coordinators Pandit, had the power to make things work in the field, I failed to register his message.

Thapa played his part, convincingly reassuring me that the women’s project had realistic prospects. This was revealed in a meeting with the representatives of a health NGO. Thapa told the visitors, who were eager to obtain a substantial part of the budget for health training included in the women’s project, that the president of the World Bank was interested in projects for women and, therefore, there should be no problem of money. He mentioned the World Bank’s financial commitment to women’s advancement so as to reassure the health professionals that their efforts in “adjusting” (that is, reducing) their proposed training cost estimate to our demands would pay off eventually. At that point, apparently, Thapa needed to present the women’s project as imminent and viable. Pandit, who attended the meeting, translated Thapa’s reassuring sentences (which were spoken in Nepali) to me, probably with the intention of softening the impression made by his evasive response at our meeting the day before.

The pragmatic approach presented at the meeting by Lama, head of the irrigation project’s agricultural division, was further cause for optimism in relation to the project. Lama suggested improving the village women’s skills in growing garden vegetables, thus contributing to the improvement of nutritional standards. He said, “Women do 70 per cent of all agricultural work, except for the ploughing. We can also train women how to store seeds. A short training course can solve the problem. Varieties of trees, such as eucalyptus, and skills such as planting, are other topics suitable for women’s training.” Lama went on with other practical suggestions for women’s training which could be incorporated into the village groups’ activities. He also elaborated on facilitating sewage collection for the purpose of household gas production. Lama explained that such enterprises necessitated setting up groups in order to obtain a 75 per cent subsidy from the Agricultural Development Bank of Nepal. He stated that his department did not have enough workers to provide agricultural training for 300 groups of women.

However, specifying this number of women's groups implied a formal acknowledgement of the project's scope and targeted population. Consequently, the budget prospects were made to sound more realistic and tangible.

Indeed Thapa's negotiations with the health people clearly suggested that he took the women's project most seriously. This meeting, therefore, encouraged me to think that the irrigation project's heads were serious about their stated intentions and that the budget, even if modified, would serve as a solid basis for the implementation of the women's project.

Disillusionment Sets In: The Gradual Revealing of Real Intentions

The slim hope I tried to hold on to turned out to be an illusion. Three days later, on the day I travelled to Kathmandu, I was intensely occupied with improving the final version of the cost estimate. I was extremely anxious to submit it to Thapa for approval, after which the budget was to be sent to his superiors in the Ministry of Agriculture for review. Only then could the budget be sent on to the World Bank for its directors' final approval. As I depended on Raju, Leon's secretary, to type up the cost estimate for me, I became nervous when I found out that he was preoccupied with preparing Leon's monthly report for Tahal. Raju started to work on my revised budget proposal only at midday, just about the time when I had to get ready to leave for the airport. By that time, I realized that there was no chance that the budget proposal would be ready before I left. Nevertheless, I asked Raju to fax the revised version to me at Leon's home in Kathmandu. As soon as I arrived in the city, I went to Leon's house, hoping to find the budget proposal waiting for me there. To my disappointment, the revised budget had not arrived. I phoned Leon in his Bhairahawa office to find out why the budget had not been sent out. He explained that it was too late to do any more work, and that, "in any case, Thapa is about to leave Bhairahawa tomorrow and, therefore, he will have no time to go over the budget proposal. Moreover, it is important that the two of us go over the budget very carefully. Besides, Raju is very busy at the moment with my monthly report." I did not give up and insisted that it was most important that Raju finish working on my budget that day. I explained that I had to receive the corrected text, in order that I send it out for final alterations the next morning, just in time to hand the completed version to Thapa before he left Nepal. Leon acceded to my demand reluctantly. At 7 P.M., when Hanna and I returned from the garden party at the Shangri-La Hotel, the retyped, corrected budget was slowly coming out of the fax machine.

The following day, beginning early in the morning, I made several revisions to the budget, which I faxed at different intervals to the office in Bhairahawa in an attempt to persuade Leon to forward the budget to Thapa before his departure. Yet I was constantly met with criticisms of the budget and delaying tactics, until finally Leon reluctantly agreed to transmit the revised budget to Thapa. Returning to the office in Bhairahawa on Sunday afternoon, I continued to work

with Raju on correcting the budget draft. The next day I worked with Anita on translating the costings into Nepali rupees and incorporating additional minor articles. She suggested changing the budget proposal's title to include women's development, which I willingly accepted. Leon was sitting nearby, studying the budget vigilantly and succeeded in finding a spelling mistake.

The next phase of the budget negotiating process began a short while after copies of it were distributed to Thapa, Gupta, and Pandit. Gupta entered our office a couple of hours after receiving my budget proposal. He made a few marginal comments to start with, and then presented his main concern over the proposed budget: "The project you suggest is not applicable. Its scope is too extensive for implementation. I told Tovi the same thing. In her project plan she related only to the dimension of the targeted population and much less to the operational capacity of the irrigation project people." He went on, pointing out to me that the 300 groups of women referred to in my budget did not exist in the irrigation project area. He added:

Originally the total number of the project irrigation locales was 182 tube wells. As ten project locales were shut down, because the farmers were not interested in irrigation services from the wells, only 172 organized groups of farmers remained active around the tube well irrigation services. Thus, in fact only about half the amount of active farmers' groups, which Tovi Fenster and you refer to, exist. It would be very nice if we could generate half of the number of women's groups you propose.

Gupta was guilty of manipulating the numbers, since even if the "correct" number of groups was 172, this was still over half of the 300 groups in both Fenster's and my own cost estimates. He was clearly suggesting that the proposed budget was incorrect. In an attempt to convince him that the budget was reasonable, I replied:

Implementing an ambitious project such as ours necessitates substantial funding. We need to take into account that some adjustments and changes will take place. We may, for example, decide that some of the groups will not receive literacy training but will rather be offered sewing training [which was supposed to take place only after the first phase of literacy training ended]; money will be needed for such changes.

This kind of response clearly reflects the self-justifying approach I assumed, facing the officials' decisive reservations. At this point in time I was almost begging Gupta and the other senior officials to take the women's program seriously.

The most dramatic event in the chronology of budget negotiations occurred that same night at the bachelor house, when Leon and I were chatting over dinner. Leon said:

I am not the worst of sceptics, yet I am a sceptical person, and I cannot foresee the project being realized. They [officials at both local and national levels] all count on this budget for traveling overseas. Tovi's budget was huge and I let my superiors know what I thought of it at the time. Your budget and program for action are more serious and thorough, but I do not see how I can sign on a budget proposal of \$300,000, which does not have any chance from Tahal's point of view. You should know that Tahal's plans are based on a project estimation of \$400,000, half of which must be allocated for paying consultants and the maintenance of the tube wells.

You see, everything [in the irrigation project] will fail or succeed on two things, marketing and maintenance of wells. Moreover, the planning of the irrigation project involved a serious fault. It did not take into account the limited extent of farmers' demand for the wells' water. If we had known from the beginning that the utilization of the wells' water would be so low, the depth of digging could have been reduced to a quarter [of what was dug] because the smaller amount of land [drawing water from the wells] would need a much smaller supply of water for adequate coverage. Consequently, the construction of roads, to facilitate the access of trucks to the well sites, would not be required and would not have been wasted on farmers, who are used to walking in the mud all their lives. There would also be no need to set up the electricity system, which was planned with the purpose of facilitating the full-scale irrigation plan of the whole project area.

As Leon was talking about the problems of the irrigation project—and inadvertently admitting to its failure⁹—I finally realized that neither he nor Tahal were genuinely interested in the ambitions of the women's program. I was stunned to find out that sending me to Nepal had little to do with actual aspirations for advancing women, whether in the spheres of vocational, agricultural, economic, or literacy training. At best, so I realized, the irrigation project's partners might accept the implementation of small bits and pieces of the women's development project, which would require only a small portion of its (allegedly) intended budget.

I was reflecting on this revelation when Leon said suddenly: "You look shocked." I quietly replied:

I am only contemplating. My working assumption, which followed Fenster's budget proposal, was that the women's development project was allocated some \$400,000. Tahal gave me Fenster's report and no one hinted that there was any other working assumption. Had I been told that it was a \$50,000 project I would have dealt with the budget proposal accordingly. I think that this can even be described as deceit.

Leon said, "But I told you several times that the budget must cover the expenses of all the projects, not only the women's project." I replied, "You said at Thapa's

office that the World Bank allocated the money for the sake of benefiting the women and that all we need to do is to send the budget proposal to the Bank.” Leon replied: “Perhaps I was not concentrating at that time and was thinking about other things that were bothering me. It is also possible that I vaguely mentioned things that made you understand me wrongly. Consider your plan as a drawer project.”¹⁰

Leon’s reply infuriated me and I responded instinctively: “I am not one for working papers and I am not ready to become part of a bluff. If I find out that this is the situation I shall go back home.” He looked anxious and intimidated, replying: “You should talk first to Tahal, before taking such a step. They might even demand that you repay them the money. You should know that if you go back before the term of your employment ends it might be considered a breach of contract.” Although no such sanction was mentioned in the contract which I signed with Tahal, Leon succeeded in making me nervous, and I replied, “I certainly do not want to pay back any money but I do not want to be a part of a bluff.” At the same time my threat to quit upset Leon very much. He threatened me, probably because he panicked, as a result of the trouble I might create. Leon tried then to soften the tone, and said:

You see for yourself that people here [in Bhairahawa] are interested in implementing the project, you said that Anita and Pandit are interested. The World Bank is also interested in the project, as you said. So there are at least two positive parties, and perhaps a third one [i.e., Sonderman, Thapa’s superior, head of the development department in the Ministry of Agriculture] would also approve the project. I can openly tell you that I could possibly approve a budget of \$150,000. I simply know people around here so well; it takes them months to do things. Sometimes you have to sleep things over. I always discuss problematic situations with Hanna [Leon’s wife], and she tells me that I have not come to save Nepal.

Leon then changed the subject and we talked about Gupta’s claim concerning the number of groups involved in the irrigation project area. Leon said that Gupta’s evaluation of the number of existing farmers’ groups scattered around the tube wells was wrong. In any case, there was no direct connection between the 182 (or 172) wells in the project area and the potential number of organized women’s groups.

It became clear that I, like my predecessor, unknowingly served as “a cog” (Weber 1978: 105) in the money-spinning machine that rolled budgets between the World Bank, Tahal, and the Nepali government. The irrigation project’s parties concealed from me their intentions for as long as it was possible to avoid telling me the truth. Thus, I discovered bits of information gradually, only when Leon had no choice but to reveal some of the facts behind the contradictory and inconsistent messages I was receiving. It slowly became clear that the women’s project budget was the subject of the rival claims of both the Israeli and Nepali partners in the irrigation project. The first hoped to use some \$200,000 of the

budget for remunerating their “more important” irrigation consultants and for paying for “the maintenance of the tube wells.” The latter counted on the budget for traveling overseas.

Thus, it appeared that both parties were actively attempting to divert most of the budget to finance their preferred options; they may even have possibly intended to leave a small sum of money for the women’s activities, to keep up an appearance of really implementing the women’s project. Leon was well aware of the immorality of this conduct, as his quoting of Hanna implied. Hanna told him, so he said, that he did not “come to save Nepal,” meaning that he did not have responsibility for changing the situation (of the country, of corrupt politicians, and so on). Her words implied he should rather look after his own interests and mind his own business. Suggesting that I adopt this attitude made it easier for him to ignore the moral ramifications of his part in the subterfuge regarding the women’s budget. It follows that waiving responsibility serves in personal contexts, no less than it does in the public sphere, to accommodate organizational failures and deceitful conduct to ongoing activity and to one’s peace of mind.¹¹

Men’s Games: Power, Aggression, and Devaluing Women’s Issues

Shocked, hurt, and suddenly aware that I had been misled, I exposed my vulnerability and humiliation in a spontaneous, childish, feminine way, declaring that if I could not have what I had been promised I would break the rules of the game and leave. This, indeed, was the reaction of a weak, vulnerable person who felt powerless and cheated. Leon clearly provoked this immature, unbusinesslike reaction—my refusal to comply with my role in the game as a well-paid report producer. He reprimanded me for forgetting “facts,” for not remembering things he had told me “a few times”. He used evasive excuses for his contradictory messages (saying that he was preoccupied by things that were “bothering” him) and even threatened me by hinting at the possible implications of breaking my contract with Tahal. Leon also devalued my work, suggesting that I should consider it a “drawer project.” By saying that I was not the kind of person who delivered “working papers,” I was responding to Leon’s implied lack of respect for my professionalism. My reply also reflects the realization that I was being used by Tahal.

This game has another angle: the irrigation project officials preferred to distance themselves from responsibility for problematic situations by transferring that responsibility to others. Avoiding responsibility for unsolvable difficulties that their clients or employers present, by involving others in sharing responsibility for those problematic situations, is a feature of bureaucratic settings (Handelman 1980).¹² Yet, the avoidance of personal responsibility also takes place inside organizations, by involving officials from varying positions and ranks. Thus, officials tend to ensure that when they take risky or problematic

decisions they are supported by more senior colleagues. (Hertzog 2004).¹³ This tactic was mentioned earlier in relation to Pandit and Gupta, who used to end discussions with me by remarking: “Thapa is the one who makes decisions.” Similarly, Leon blamed the Nepali officials, “the people here,” as responsible for delays and the dwindling chances of carrying out the women’s project. However, when forced to do so by my emotional explosion, he revealed his active role in undermining my attempts to finalize the budget.

The power struggles surrounding the budget reflected the embedded gendered power relations within the context of the irrigation project. This was apparent in the relative importance attributed to the “women’s project,” as compared to the “men’s” irrigation project. Leon’s remark that the irrigation project’s failure or success depended on the “marketing and maintenance of wells,” and Gupta’s comment that “this is an irrigation project” that has nothing to do with women’s issues, as well as other comments, implied clearly that the women’s project was not perceived by them as “really” important.

Gendered power differentials were also apparent in informal, personal encounters. Leon treated me as a weaker, harmless partner whom he could manipulate. He was not impressed by my “feminine” emotional explosion (cynically suggesting I consider my proposal a “drawer project”), and only when I appeared to be able to exercise some form of resistance (by threatening to quit) did he change his attitude. At that point, when he realized my determination to assert my power, Leon brought up some new (misleading) information. Whereas he initially suggested that the women’s project could have a maximum budget of \$50,000, following my ultimatum he raised the figure to \$150,000, an amount which he “might approve.”

The gendered power game, played out against the backdrop of the irrigation project, suggests that the budget was bargaining chip; the more one succeeded in presenting oneself as powerful, the better were one’s chances of promoting one’s interests. As a male-dominated site, the power game that took place within and around the irrigation project meant that men’s rules dictated the social dynamic. In this ongoing game, actors were constantly trying to strengthen their positions and acquire benefits. They would use cynicism, lies, promises, devaluation, bribery, and avoiding taking responsibility in problematic situations to improve their chances.

Reliance on contracts is an institutionally formalized means used by those in power to exercise control and impose obedience. Marta Callas and Linda Smircich (1992) argue that the power of contracts to establish control over employees emerges from male dominance in organizations. They contend that the concept of commitment in the organizational context implies that individuals are subordinated to the organization. This conception of commitment is “tied to a concept of domination and control—culture over nature—associated with male rationality since the philosophies of the Enlightenment” (ibid.: 230). The role of the contract in my Nepali experience demonstrates the instrumental use of con-

tracts at points of crisis, when a serious conflict between employer and employee rises. Failing to perform loyally and comply with my employers' expectations, even if justified by professional or moral commitments, was used as a means to threaten me. In fact, Leon used my contract to threaten me with possible sanctions (paying back money), to impose obedient cooperation, and to silence my criticism. My contract contained only one short article that related to the anticipated outcomes of my consultancy. An article setting out "general commitments" stated that "the worker is committed to perform loyally and with her best professional knowledge and experience her services to Tami (Tahal Engineers Consultants) within the spheres of the subject." Although no specific sanction was mentioned in my contract it appears that the vague term "loyalty" can be instrumentally used against "disloyal" employees. I assume that Leon was hinting at this when he warned me against breaking the terms of my contract.

"Drawer projects" is another term that illustrates the power of organizations in this power-constructed complex. To store a project in a drawer implies its uselessness, but it also implies that the project can be cancelled and its failure concealed, thus enabling those who initiated it not to be held accountable for its failure or redundancy.

Reacting emotionally to Leon's insult, feeling humiliated, and retreating from the power game can be perceived as my idiosyncratic reaction to the situation. However, it is reasonable to attribute this behavior to gendered socialization and prevailing power structures. This argument gains support from a number of studies that point to the extensive role played by political, economic, and cultural forces in fostering gendered power relations, which are revealed at personal, community, and state levels (e.g., MacCormack and Strathern 1980; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Moore 1988; Hodgson 2001). Until the 1970s, organizational theories related mainly to the study of male society (Acker and Van Houten 1992: 16). Organization theory presented a gender-blind picture of organizations, and was "constructed as non-gendered. Written through a male perspective, culture and discourse, [organization theory] has espoused theories of empiricism, rationality, hierarchy and other masculinized concepts. In this way organization theory has been implicitly gendered" (Hearn and Parkin 1983: 149). Moreover, it appears that gender blindness has not vanished in up-to-date studies of organizations. Thus, for example, in his recent study of kibbutz leadership, Reuven Shapira (2008) offers a critical and comprehensive analysis of kibbutz research while completely ignoring any gender perspective.

Feminist studies on organizations since the 1970s have revealed the gendered elements of organizations. Joan Acker argues that "hierarchies are gendered and that gender and sexuality have a central role in the reproduction of hierarchies" (Acker 1992: 253). Ralf Lange argues further that, "structures, processes, practices and actors in organizations are always connected with hegemonic forms of masculinity" (Lange 1997: 114).¹⁴ Similarly, Mats Alvesson and Yvonne Billing (1997) argue that masculinity is an inherent constant of organizations.

Becoming Part of the System: A Co-opted Feminist

My emotional reaction to Leon's remarks demonstrates Acker's claim that the "emotionality of women [is] outside organizational boundaries" (Acker 1992: 259).¹⁵ It follows that resisting the implications of the objections to implementing the women's project by emotionally expressing my anger and humiliation could have no impact on my superiors and on the women's project's prospects. Therefore, I could either conform or retreat (Ferguson 1990: 19). I preferred to adjust myself to the compelling dictates that were forcefully unveiled.

In the dramatic encounter, Leon played the part of the "instrumental" (ibid.: 93) male in control and I assumed the part of the vulnerable, subordinate female. As I did not return to Israel, despite my threats, I adopted an idealist's stance, while complying, in practice, with the men's expectations and their perception of the situation. I argued continuously with Thapa and other irrigation project officials, trying to convince them of the potential advantages of the women's project. I put continual pressure on Thapa, in particular, urging him to facilitate the completion of the draft budget, although he was obviously stalling and causing repeated delays. Gupta was another person whose objections to the budget I tried to overcome and whose cooperation I desperately tried to gain. As Tahal's employee, Gupta seemed to associate himself with the company's interests more than other high-ranking officials who, except for Anita, were directly subordinate to Thapa. It was evident that Gupta was respected by both Thapa and Leon. My efforts, therefore, were directed at inspiring Gupta to support the budget.

The day after Gupta remarked that the number of women's groups outlined in my budget was unrealistic, I entered his room and tried to shift him from his antagonistic position. He calmly repeated his arguments and I, similarly, repeated my own. I said, "If the money is spent, more money will come in because the gender issue is 'in' now in the World Bank and in Nepal as well, if we are to infer from politicians' statements and from the numerous projects for women implemented by NGOs."¹⁶ To convince Gupta further I referred to the context of Israeli local government, where "those mayors who spend beyond their approved budgets are rewarded with bigger budgets, whereas those who stick to their approved budgets are punished by cutting down their subsequent annual budget." Gupta was not impressed and did not change his mind. He patiently explained that the money was not a gift but rather a loan that must be repaid, "therefore those in charge are not keen on spending the money which they will need to repay." I asked what the rate of interest was and he said, "There is no interest to be paid, but the loan has to be repaid and that is why the heads of the irrigation project hesitate to spend it." When I asked why the Nepali government had not told the World Bank that they did not want the loan, he replied carefully: "No one would tell you this but the government is interested in the loan for other purposes, mainly for developing infrastructure."¹⁷ But the Bank demands that they use the loan for women's advancement projects too. If it were for free they would take the money and spend it without hesitation."

Gupta also mentioned the pressure the World Bank applied, which he (like Leon) conceived as effective in getting things done. He also showed me the Bank's report on its delegation's visit to Ekala, pointing to the Bank's explicit satisfaction with the progress made in the women's project. Gupta was convinced that hiring Anita was a result of the Bank's pressures, but seemed to point to the issue of the World Bank's pressure in order to divert attention from his own and other local officials' responsibility, and from their objections to the women's project. In a way, he was suggesting that the World Bank was the right party to turn to, since only if the Bank demanded the implementation of the project firmly enough could things work. Indeed, as I have argued in previous chapters, the Ekala story did not demonstrate any substantial achievement in implementing the project, and, therefore, the Bank's pressures could hardly be seen as highly effective. Moreover, the pressure applied by the Bank to hire a new local gender consultant (Anita) and foreign gender consultants (Fenster and myself) worked out only because Tahal was deeply interested in hiring the local and expatriate gender consultants, as employing consultants provided Tahal with its main profits. Therefore, Tahal acceded to the World Bank's demands and itself put pressure on the Nepali officials.

Thus, I conclude that becoming part of the system was unavoidable. Despite the humiliation I was subjected to, and my awareness of the deceitful manner in which the women's project was viewed by those working for the irrigation project, I did not dare return home nor attempt any practical measures against Tahal. The shame of being marked a failure, the possible loss of money, and more besides, prevented me from taking a radical step. Consequently, I adopted "masculinized" (Hearn and Parkin 1983: 149) strategies like manipulative bargaining and instrumentally collaborating with officials to help me return home with my peace of mind and professional esteem relatively intact.

Manipulating Facts and Figures

The information Gupta unintentionally disclosed in our encounter revealed the extent of manipulation by project officials. According to the World Bank's report (issued following the Bank's delegation's visit to the irrigation project in 1996), which he showed me, the potential number of women's groups in the irrigation project area was 900. This number would mean some 27,000 women of working age attending the planned literacy classes. The target population of the irrigation project is well established in Fenster's report (Fenster 1996). Drawing on the 1990 district profile of Rupandehi, she reported that: "in 1992, the population in the Project area consisted some 86,000 people. Women consisted 49% of the total population i.e., 42,500 out of which some 27,000 are at the age between 10–65. This is the target population of this plan. This number consists of some 770 women groups (taken 35 women per group)" (ibid.: 17).

This information indicates that Gupta, like other heads of the irrigation project, was well aware of the basic facts, such as the number of women and of

women's groups that could be considered as potential participants in the women's project. It follows that when Gupta criticized my budget, arguing that my calculations concerning the number of potential groups to be included in the women's project were unrealistic and did not correspond with the precincts of the tube wells, he deliberately misled me.

However, it appears that Gupta was not the only one to twist the facts to suit his argument and his employer's needs, for so too did other heads of the irrigation project. Thapa and Leon in particular also ignored the demographic data and stuck to the figure of 300 women's groups as the relevant figure in our discussions. Evidently the smaller the number of groups, the smaller was the required budget. Indeed, funding 900 groups instead of 300 would have meant multiplying the sums of money for the women's project. Hence, negotiating with me over the number of women's groups to be included in the women's project was the main tactic Leon and Gupta employed in order to reduce the sum allocated for women's activities in my budget. This maneuver was unveiled in a discussion with Leon, a short while after speaking with Gupta.

Entering his office, Leon said, with evident satisfaction, that he had heard from Gupta that I had agreed to reduce the number of women's groups to be included in my program. I replied spontaneously and decisively: "No way. I definitely have not agreed to any such thing. In fact I even noticed in the World Bank's report, which Gupta showed me, that there is the potential for 900 groups in the irrigation project area." Leon panicked and said: "There are not 900 groups. They [the Bank's people] relied on Tovi [Fenster]'s proposal, which mentions the figure of 27,000." I insisted that, "Nevertheless, they [the Bank people] speak of 900 groups and I cannot see how any other figure can be substituted as a basic assumption for the budget proposal."

Thus, two main figures were discussed and negotiated: 300 and 900. It should be noted that by this time my budget proposal was based on 300 groups (as I mentioned earlier), which I either took for granted, following Fenster's budget, when I began working on the budget, or adopted because I was not in a position to voice my objection.

This vagueness concerning the elementary data necessary for producing a budget is rather striking. No less surprising is the fact that I had not noticed the conspicuously different figures until my irritating encounters with Gupta and Leon, which took place at a rather late stage of my stay. Moreover, there appears to be an inconsistency in Fenster's proposal between her budget and her report in respect to these two figures. The number of women's groups she took into account in her budget was only 300, whereas the data she presented in her report indicated a "target population" potentially three times larger. Fenster explains this discrepancy with reference to the time constraints imposed on the women project's implementation schedule. She writes:

The Project ends in December 1998. This is a very limited time for incorporating all women in this program, and thus we suggest to

incorporate at least half of the target population, that is, 10,000 women farmers in 300 groups, until the end of 1998, and to enable local women already trained to disseminate the knowledge obtained in the project training to other women in the area. (ibid.: 17)

However, it seems that Fenster's basic target population was reduced by two thirds—from 27,000 to 10,000—and not by half, as she suggests. Moreover, Fenster's idea of disseminating knowledge to women through the mediation of other trained women who would had not enrolled in the program, while initially intriguing, is vague and unrealistic when seriously examined. How can women who took one literacy class disseminate their knowledge to others?

The fact that my proposal suggested training the same number of groups the following year (by the end of 1998) meant that by then some 600 groups could already have completed literacy training (the first 300 would have finished their training by the end of 1997). In other words, the time limitation was not necessarily the real explanation for not including many more women's groups in the women's project. It is probable that the final figures proposed in Fenster's budget (300 groups) were the outcome of pressures put on her to modify her plan of action (770), just like the pressures that were exerted on me. In fact, while discussing with me the alleged need to reduce the number of groups, Gupta mentioned discussions he had had with Fenster. Modifying Fenster's scope of the women's project was crucial because, as suggested above, it facilitated a dramatic reduction in the size of the budget. It also established a better starting point for future negotiations with me. Thus, by taking Fenster's budget for granted, and determining the figure of 300 groups as a self-evident baseline for my budget, I unwittingly contributed to a further reduction of the budget in later negotiations.

Another point of interest is the World Bank's role in the bargaining over the number of groups to be included in the project. The women's project was scheduled to end in December 1998, whereas Fenster's proposal was submitted in October 1996. As the Bank leadership must have been aware of the large scope of the women's project (as revealed in the report that Gupta showed me), it is surprising that the project's termination date was so tightly fixed. However, this might indicate that the Bank was only superficially interested in the women's project, mainly in order to convey the impression of doing things for the benefit of women. Project proposals and reports about the "successful" women's project were, apparently, sufficient to satisfy the Bank.

Once I became aware of the diminishing likelihood of either the approval of the budgetary or the implementation of the women's project, and after confronting Leon's and Gupta's growing antagonism to my budget, as well as realizing that Thapa had resisted the women's project from the start, I adopted a denial strategy. Ignoring the negative implications of Leon's and Gupta's excuses and fabrications, and Thapa's forestalling, I behaved as though business was

proceeding “as usual.” This strategy helped me not only to endure the humiliating and depressing situation I was trapped in, but also to resolve the moral conflict entailed in my continued stay in Nepal. It also encouraged me to believe that if I went on talking about the women’s project with those in charge, I could somehow make things happen and convince them to change their attitude and allow the project to materialize.

My pragmatic adaptation to the frustrating situation, when I became fully aware of how those in charge of the irrigation project viewed the women’s project, offers an example of the personal adaptation experienced by individuals who are trapped by organizational practices which they oppose. Complying with organizational goals and policies that contradict an individual’s own moral standpoint is a familiar phenomenon in bureaucratic settings, as Max Weber (1948) noted long ago, and has more recently been discussed by Herbert Kelman (1973), Raoul Hilberg (1983), Zygmunt Bauman (1989), and Ariella Azulai (2000).

In my interaction with Leon, on the morning after we had our row concerning the budget, I adopted a business-as-usual attitude. While Leon was going over the budget in the office, he checked every figure very thoroughly and managed to find two minor errors. He found out that I had calculated the wage of the two coordinators at a higher rate of pay than it appeared in the budget part of Tahal’s contract, and I changed the figures accordingly. Then Leon said: “Now we shall submit the budget and see if they [the Nepali partners] approve it and how much they approve. I think that they will approve around \$150,000 at the most.” I asked, “Is this your assumption or your position?” He replied, “I wish they would approve \$500,000 but I assume they will approve only around \$100,000 to \$150,000.”

These figures seemed to correspond with the one Leon had previously mentioned, when he revealed the fact that it was unlikely that the women’s project would take off. Thus, it seemed that he was ready to compromise, and agreed that a sum of between \$100,000 and \$150,000 might be approved for the women’s project. These figures could have reflected Leon’s evaluation of what his Nepali partners in the irrigation project had in mind regarding the women’s project, and more importantly in relation to the project’s budget. Thus, if \$150,000 out of the \$400,000 budget, originally earmarked for the women’s project would be used for implementing the women’s program, the sum of \$250,000 will be left for the irrigation project’s purposes. Furthermore, if the whole \$400,000 women project’s budget would not be used for implementing the women’s program, then the irrigation project’s head will be able to use all of the money according to their priorities and needs. On the other hand, the figures could mean that Leon was taking good care of Tahal’s interests, which were more likely to be served by employing experts and ensuring Tahal’s high profits, rather than with underwriting a women’s project which would yield a much smaller profit. I suggest that the latter explanation is the most likely. The

interests of both Tahal and their Nepali partners were clearly not women-oriented, and from this perspective their preferred use (or rather misuse) of the budget were in accord.

Additional evidence for Leon's real motivation includes his manipulative attempts to reduce the budget to the minimum amount possible. This was apparent when he introduced a new minimal figure for the budget. In fact, the sum of \$100,000 was mentioned here for the first time. When Leon uttered it in a casual manner—saying, “they will approve only around \$100,000 to \$150,000”—I failed to notice how he had managed to establish a newly reduced figure as the baseline for negotiating further reductions in the budget.

Leon made it clear on various occasions that Tahal's profits from the women's project were derived from employing Anita and myself, with extra profit derived from our per-diem expenses. This explains why Leon insisted that I seek Thapa's approval for an extra day in Kathmandu on my way home, “for the purpose of work meetings.” Leon explained very clearly that it was very important, for my own sake, that I ask for the extra day in Kathmandu. “Tahal does not do anything for the sake of our beautiful eyes,” he said. “You see, for every day that I stay in Kathmandu, Tahal collects its per-diem.” Leon's insistence on my making two additional visits during the upcoming six months (as suggested in the project proposal and budget) also shows that hiring consultants was the most desirable activity from Tahal's point of view. This explains why, at the moment Leon realized that these visits would not be approved by Thapa, his willingness to support the women's project, or rather its budget, diminished. Thapa refused to approve both an extra day in Kathmandu on my way home and my two “working visits” to the capital in the middle of my stay. As my flight and hotel expenses, as well as Tahal's corresponding overheads, were billed to the irrigation project, it is clear why Thapa opposed agreeing to expenses that he perceived to be a squandering of “his” budget.

Interestingly, I only became aware of the existence of an earlier budget, which was part of the contract between Tahal and the World Bank, at a late stage of analyzing my fieldnotes. Noticing Leon's comment, that the coordinators' wages in the budget were “too costly,” I realized that an earlier budget must have existed, one which preceded Fenster's and my own cost estimate. This earlier version of the budget—perhaps the “original” one, from Fenster's visit in 1992, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter—seemed to have specified details such as coordinators' salaries. Since a budget existed prior to both Fenster's visit in 1996 and my own in 1997, it follows that our “expertise” in preparing a budget, and even drawing up a plan for the whole women's project, was clearly not needed. We were hired by Tahal, it appears, in order to “professionalize” Tahal's entrance into the gender-activities field, and thus to establish its status as a provider of gender-expertise services, vis-à-vis the World Bank's formal commitment to, and funding of, this sphere. Graham Hancock, who discusses the manipulative and opportunistic characteristics of the develop-

ment industry thoroughly, argues that it “uncannily adapts to the changing modes” of donor agencies and countries (Hancock 1989: 72). This conduct, he argues, is common to all institutions of development, as they have “a genetic trait that programs each and every one of them for survival” (ibid.: 72).¹⁸

Hiring Anita and myself improved Tahal’s profit-making capacity by extending their ability to claim against the irrigation project for overheads and per-diem allowances. That is to say, Tahal took advantage of the commitment (genuine or not) of the World Bank to improve the lot of women in developing countries by providing gender consultants, who enabled them to obtain some extra profit at a point close to the termination of Tahal’s involvement in the irrigation project.

The “real” total sum of the budget was an obscure figure. Its vague and flexible character served the negotiations over it and efforts to minimize it. Yet, the budget sometimes seemed to be much higher than the amounts previously discussed. One encounter with Leon in the office illustrates this. Leon seemed to feel uncomfortable about my dawning awareness of the facts behind the budget, and one day I watched him nervously searching through his files. Eventually he found a letter that he had sent to Tahal in response to Fenster’s budget. In the letter Leon claimed that he had found a conspicuous inconsistency between her budget and a proposal submitted by an NGO (probably geared to carrying out “development packages”). According to his calculations, as detailed in the letter, incorporating the NGO’s budget proposal into Fenster’s “cost estimation” should have resulted in a total budget twice that of the one she submitted. Adding Tahal’s overheads (10 per cent), the total sum of her budget should have been nearly \$800,000! In his letter, Leon claimed that this wrongly calculated budget involved “big money,” and he demanded that Fenster account for this. He said in frustration that he had never received a reply to this letter from his superiors.

Despite the confusing messages, and the discrepant figures of budget negotiations, this episode further reveals that Tahal’s interests lay with the hiring of local and foreign consultants. Quite clearly, as Tahal could make more profit from a project with a bigger budget, it would have been in its interest to make sure that it materialized.

The confusion over the budget affair caused me to overlook the information Leon had revealed. While I was completely occupied with my struggle to get approval for at least part of the budget and to see it put to work, I missed the implications of what Leon had said. I could not resist the temptation of using the opportunity to point out the advantage of my own budget, indicating that it was reasonable and moderate, and saying that, “my budget is the lowest, to the extent that it undermines the women’s project’s goals.” Unsurprisingly, Leon was not impressed by my remark. Caught up in his own worries, he repeated his line from the previous day: “This money must ensure experts’ remuneration and the tube wells’ maintenance.” Hence, mesmerized by the belief that I could “save” the women’s project by agreeing to a reduced budget, I missed the significance of what Leon had said.

The budget for the women's project did not involve, it seems, a closed, finalized, and agreed-upon figure. The funds could have come out of the irrigation project's budget, or extra funds could have been negotiated with the World Bank. Support for the first possibility comes from Leon's claim that the budget had to cover several projects, and not just the gender activities project. This implies that no definite budget had been earmarked for women's activities. Consequently, all options were open for negotiation and for ongoing efforts to advance competing interests. Thus, the vagueness of the women's project's budget enabled the Nepali and Tahal's officials to negotiate over the budget for the women's project in the light of their own competing interests. Meanwhile, the World Bank could play the role of an innocent party, passing the ball into the Nepali court, suggesting that they were the ones who should be responsible for decisions about the use of the budget for the sake of "their" women.

In light of these exchanges concerning the size of the budget, Leon's insistence on the accuracy and consistency of the budget as a whole and of every minor detail within it seemed to be confusing, not to say banal. Moreover, he inadvertently revealed the hidden agenda behind the budget negotiations, while relating to the budget as a highly important and "real" document (a concrete "work plan"). This contradictory attitude could reflect Leon's need to convince me that the women's project was genuine and that my efforts were not in vain, thus ensuring that I would cause no trouble. Another possibility is that the contradiction emerged from Leon's need to ease his conscience, as he was, in some way, aware of his participation in a deceitful project. A simple and trivial explanation might also be posited, namely that Leon did not have much work on his hands, and that scrutinizing the budget's smallest details provided him with a seemingly serious activity. This explanation suits my general impression of his daily routine in the office, and it also accords with his eagerness to join us on our visits to the villages.

Coping with Confusing Messages and Stalling Tactics

The confusing and contradictory messages concerning the approval of the budget, and consequently the implementation of the women's project, continued until the end of my stay in Bhairahawa. Thapa's attitude, in particular, was puzzling. After many days of stalling and avoiding my appeals, suddenly he responded eagerly to the budget proposal, making decisions and encouraging me to finish work on the final revisions. Depressed and anxious about the fading chances of the budget's approval, Thapa's positive attitude was warmly accepted by me and inspired new hopes.

Eight days before I left Nepal, Thapa invited Leon and I into his office to discuss the budget proposal. He stated that the Nepali party to the women's project would not pay for Anita's professional training, traveling, or other expenses, because she was Tahal's employee. He added, cynically, that he did not care if Tahal decided to hire more local consultants at their own expense. Thapa

instructed us to add the health NGO's proposal to the budget. He explained that the option of training the WGOs as health instructors made the NGO's proposal appealing, even though it meant that the WGOs would be paid more for their services. More money should be allocated for books, he said, and for the village teachers' additional training. He then announced that should I revise the budget by the following day he would send it to his superiors in Kathmandu.

The health NGO came later on that day to Leon's office, submitting another revised version of the health program and budget. I told them that we were awaiting the approval of our budget by the World Bank. They wanted to know when would it be approved, and I replied that the first round of the health training would start, hopefully, two weeks later, in October. Leon commented in response to their question: "If it depended on me I would approve it by tomorrow. But I have been in Nepal only a year and a half, so you should know things better than me." He was sarcastically implying that Nepali officials were inefficient, and that the chances that the budget would be approved quickly and made available for paying for their services were very slim.

Later on, when Anita, Leon and I went back to Thapa's room to finalize our discussion of the budget, I asked Thapa if it would be possible to purchase bicycles for the WGOs, who had to walk long distances to the villages and to the irrigation project site. Thapa replied: "I would like to do that but I cannot, as long as the budget has not been approved. Anyway, I suggested purchasing the bicycles for the WGOs and taking the cost off their monthly salaries, but they refused." I also asked him about purchasing the 900 books for the women in the literacy classes, and he promised to deal with the issue the next morning. That night I worked until late, adjusting the budget to meet Thapa's specifications.

The next morning, Raju diligently incorporated Thapa's modifications into the budget, and struggled with my handwriting. Thapa came into our room to discuss some problematic points in the proposed budget regarding the health training. He claimed that the number of monitoring visits to the villages included in the health NGO's proposal was too large and too costly. I suggested that the budget should first be approved and that later on we could negotiate further with the health NGO. Thapa eventually agreed, and a little later I handed him the completed budget.

When Anita and I returned from our visit to the villages that day, we entered Thapa's room and found that he had approved the budget. I took advantage of the optimistic atmosphere and asked Thapa about the books (which he had promised he would deal with that morning). Thapa turned to Anita and asked her why she did not remind him of that in the morning, and then said:

In the morning there were so many things to do. Well, tomorrow morning I shall see that the check for the books be sent out. The budget proposal will also be delivered only tomorrow morning. We will send it first to the World Bank and only then to the government [i.e., to his superiors in the Ministry of Agriculture].

The World Bank should approve it instantly but the government will take its time, because the budget must finance other things [besides the women's project].

Feeling optimistic and grateful I said: "Only a few days ago I discovered that the women's project is supposed to be financed by the World Bank's loan and not through a grant. I can sympathize with the government's reservations." Thapa then said that he had asked that the money for the women's project be allocated as a grant—and thus not repayable—but that he had not succeeded. He added: "Tovi Fenster put pressure on me to start implementing the women's project, but it was impossible, because politicians' vision is shortsighted and they do not understand the significance of the women's project for the future. I succeeded in obtaining my superiors' approval for only the first ten classes."

The overall impression that emerged in these encounters was that Thapa genuinely intended to go ahead with the women's project but his superiors prevented him from doing so. Thapa had convincingly negotiated with the health NGO over details in their proposal, insisted on cutting down trivial costs, and encouraged them to invest much time and energy in adapting and readapting their proposal to his demands. He also rejected the idea of purchasing bicycles for the WGOs, for what he defined as ethical norms in public management. Moreover, he showed his concern for grassroots people by demanding allocation of more money for the village women's books and for the ongoing training of the WGOs.

Nevertheless, Thapa was, in fact, a shrewd operator. He avoided me for a long time and then, when I had lost all hope, he pretended to be serious just a short time before I left, making me believe that things were going to progress smoothly. He blamed others, his superiors and certain anonymous politicians, for not understanding the women's project's importance and for preventing its implementation. Thapa's success in obtaining his superiors' approval for opening ten classes implied that his endeavors to implement the women's project went only that far. This limited achievement and the efforts invested in it can be better described as a manipulative means for preserving appearances rather than as making real progress toward implementation. Moreover, although he proudly claimed that the approval of the ten classes was the outcome of his own rather than Fenster's efforts, they did not begin until after I left Nepal. Thus, Thapa presented himself as sincerely willing to facilitate the women's project and even struggle for it, while he delivered almost nothing in actual fact. Thapa's performance was so convincing that I felt the need to show sympathy for his own and his superiors' situation, being offered loans instead of grants by the World Bank. This provided Thapa with another opportunity to present his efforts on behalf of the women's project in a good light, telling me that he had unsuccessfully tried to turn the loan into a grant. My sympathy might also have helped ease Thapa's discomfort in the face of my pressures, and possibly camouflaged his insincerity. Several events further support this interpretation.

My sympathetic response to Thapa's difficulties can be understood as an instance of feminine conduct. Ferguson contends that women's role in organizations is assumed to be in contrast to that of men's. While the latter are seen as "analytic, independent, rational, competitive, and 'instrumental,'" the roles "traditionally associated with the female [are] ... supportive, nonassertive, dependent, attentive to others, and 'expressive'" (Ferguson 1984: 93). However, it is the occupation of the subordinate position, rather than the state of being a woman per se, that explains the appealing, appeasing, and flattering gestures women employ. It is the marginalized place of women in organizations, and their meager formal power as a collective, that means that they employ supportive and attentive behavior as a means of being accepted by those who dominate. From this point of view, feminization "refers to the spread of ... feminine traits to bureaucratically defined subordinates" (ibid.: 93). Women possess the skills "necessary to cope with the[ir] subordinate status" (ibid.: 93)—that is, to "please men," who are their superiors (ibid.: 94).

Peanuts: Unveiling the Truth about the Budget and its Intended Use

Six days before I left Nepal the women's project proposal with its budget had yet to be sent out. Upon my return from a village visit I went into Thapa's room to ask him if he had sent out the budget proposal and the check for the books. As he was in a meeting, I left. Thapa came by later and informed me that he had sent the order for the books that morning, and that the budget proposal would be sent out the following morning. Thapa added that he told the World Bank's representative in Kathmandu that the budget proposal was about to be submitted.

I then went to Lama's room to ask for his opinion of the budget, and indirectly to gain his support for it. Lama replied that the women's project budget was "peanuts" considering the World Bank's overall budget for the irrigation project. The budget submitted for the overseas study tours, he said, was considerably larger than that for the women's project. Peanuts—Lama's turn of phrase blatantly exposed and symbolized the attitude and hidden intentions of the heads of the irrigation project. Lama disclosed the fact that the delay in approving the budget and implementing the women's project, as well as the officials' reservations concerning the implementation of the women's project, had nothing to do with lack of money.

The simple explanation of the persistent and manipulative delays that had been employed regarding the budget was the desire of the heads of the irrigation project in both Kathmandu and Bhairahawa to use the money allocated for the women's project—little as it was—themselves, to finance their overseas study tours. Thus, the delaying tactics and the rationale behind the ongoing negotiations reflected the attitude that women's activities were not really important, and therefore the budget allocated for them could be used by male project staff for their own purposes. In other words, the negotiations served as

an organizational ritual for legitimizing the diversion of the budget away from its intended purpose, wiping out any moral implications and, eventually, for gaining full, open control over the entire budget. Such a process could take place only if all parties—the World Bank, Tahal, and the Nepali government—combined forces and supported it (implicitly or explicitly).

Indeed, as women who might observe and protest about this were absent from positions of power in these male-dominated organizations, it was easier to exclude women from projects and to prevent them gaining access to even meager economic resources. This might explain why Thapa and Leon did their best to hide the facts from me. If I had realized what was going on I might have posed a threat to the smooth process of gaining control of the budget, something in which they collaborated. Moreover, Thapa's surprising change of heart and sudden efforts toward ensuring the approval of the budget a short while before my departure were also the outcome of the need to have the budget approved by the World Bank. In order that the money be made available for the study tours, the project budget had to be approved. Diverting most of the money could take place safely when there was no one to notice and criticize this action. Therefore, Thapa needed my cooperation as I was the one who prepared and submitted the budget proposal and provided a professional and formal backing for the diversion of the budget.

Thapa himself confirmed the information revealed by Lama at a later stage when I visited him at home. I asked Thapa about the study tours, and he explained that there were three groups going overseas: the first was due to leave soon for China and India, the second would go to a few other places, and the third, consisting of the three highest officials in the development department of the Ministry of Agriculture, were to go to Brazil and Mexico. "Our superiors in Kathmandu," he said, "want to go to South America and we will have to let them go there." I asked whether women were included in those groups, and he replied, "No, as there are no women hired by the irrigation project on a permanent basis." That evening, when I spoke with Leon over dinner, I mentioned the study tours and Lama's use of the expression "peanuts" to describe the women's project budget. Leon did not like the expression but admitted that senior project officials were going overseas. "We are trying to reduce the number from twenty-two to fourteen," he said, and hinted at corruption among the senior officials, conveying his objection and contempt. Needless to say, Leon did not criticize Tahal's part nor the World Bank's in going-along with the "study-tours" (or with the whisky-presents for the senior officials in the Ministry of Agriculture, as described in chapter 2) to the officials, nor consider them to be accomplices in the Nepali officials' siphoning off funds. Neither would he admit to Tahal being responsible for benefiting a few men with overseas trips at the expense of resources promised to a large population of women. Indeed, he would not acknowledge his own part in this: laying obstacles in my path during the approval of the budget and the implementation of the women's project; panicking in response to my

budget proposal; warning his superiors that my budget did not entail any profit for Tahal; continuously reducing the sums specified in my budget.

More than resenting the study tours themselves, Leon resented the fact that they would not produce any profit for Tahal. This became apparent during our chat, as we walked all the way from the bachelors' house to the office through the main street. I asked Leon what Tahal would gain from the study tours. He replied:

Tahal will make no profit because they [the trips] have nothing to do with Tahal. At first, the senior officials were supposed to go to Israel but the Nepali officials demanded that Tahal absorb the overhead expenses and Tahal refused. Then the Nepalese brought up another plan: to travel to countries that have nothing to do with Tahal's projects. I said to Thapa: "When you were in Israel [in 1979] the Israeli government owned Tahal, and it paid for everything. Tahal is now a private company, and you know what that means." Before the privatization of the company, the state covered all the expenses, even the pocket money, which was more than their salaries in Nepal.

The study tours offered by the Israeli government in the 1970s were probably a means of rewarding Nepali senior government officials for doing business with Israel mediated by the World Bank loans. The study tours at the end of 1990s were probably imposed on the Israeli partner, as, according to Leon, Tahal would not make any profit from them. In any case, the study tours signified bargains, in which the politicians and senior officials took for granted their privilege to be personally rewarded for their involvement in overseas projects.

I discussed the phenomenon of corruption earlier (see Chapter 2). However, the study-tour episode offers some further insights into this phenomenon from a gendered perspective. It exposes a hidden but nevertheless fundamental implication of hierarchy: it constructs the basis for the gendered allocation of benefits. Senior positions in organizations such as those described here are constructed so that they provide social and economic benefits for the few at the expense of the many. Moreover, this state of affairs is not recognized by those who benefit from it, and who provide "rational" and "patriotic" justifications for their conduct (see, e.g., Nordstrom 2007: 80).¹⁹ The gendered structure of organizational hierarchies conveniently works to marginalize half of the potential competitors over senior positions and privileges, through informal gendered division of roles, supported by social and cultural constraints. A budget allegedly intended for thousands of women could be easily transferred to a small group of senior male officials. Invisible as a result of the senior officials' structured distance from them, the women could be easily ignored. Moreover, women like Anita and myself were available to provide them, sometimes but not always unwittingly, with support for their actions, and so contribute to the pretence of advancing rural Nepali women's well-being.

No Budget for Women's Activities

I learned almost incidentally three days before I left Nepal that the budget had been sent to the World Bank's representative in Kathmandu, by which time I had stopped chasing Thapa and urging him to send it out. On that morning, Thapa entered our office and was very friendly. He pulled up a chair and sat next to Anita and me, looking at pictures that I had taken during my visits to the villages, and suggested that I should enlarge one of them for Anita to hang on the wall. On his way out, he mentioned somewhat nonchalantly that he would ask Leon to bring the books he had ordered from Kathmandu, and that he had sent out the budget. I was so surprised that I spontaneously apologized for suspecting his intentions, saying that I had given up hope that the budget would ever be sent out.

My surprise and confusion at Thapa's casual announcement can be easily understood against the background of the ongoing delays. Moreover, just three days earlier, Thapa admitted that the budget has not yet been sent out. I found this out when I went to give Thapa an invitation to my farewell party and used the opportunity to ask him if the budget had been submitted. Thapa said: "It has not been sent out yet because I am waiting for a letter from Pandit. I will send it probably tomorrow or the day after, because of the strike." I asked why it could not be sent by fax, and he replied, "It has to be sent from Kathmandu, and also there are too many pages for a fax, and they might come out unclear." I felt angry and upset, as it seemed that the prospect of the budget and the women's project were evaporating. My frustration was such that, as I came out of Thapa's room, I said to Anita, "Had I known a week ago that it was all just a game, in which I have taken part, I would have left then to go back home." Regretting the demoralizing impact my statement had on Anita, who was the one staying on, I added right away that I hoped things were not so bad. Although it should have been completely clear to me, when speaking with Thapa a couple of days earlier, that the women's project was doomed, Thapa's announcement about sending out the budget filled me with new hopes.

The fact that I did not give up hope even at this point, although all facts by then indicated clearly that the women's project would not materialize, contrasts with Mosse's experience when he states that, "gender consultants, being especially skeptical of management intentions to address gender, were unwilling to prepare materials that 'would not be speaking any truth and more of falsehoods'" (Mosse 2005: 152).²⁰ I went on pretending to myself and to Anita that there was a chance of things materializing, and I clung to my professional integrity by stating that I would leave "if I knew" that things would not.

Nevertheless, it appears that it was not easy to find out the real facts. I remained confused by things for a very long time after leaving Nepal, and I did not begin to understand things until I began analyzing my field data. Only then, far away from the irrigation project's premises, did I realize that Thapa and the other Nepali officials were deeply interested in the World Bank approving the

women's project budget, but for reasons other than those that would benefit village women. The reason was to enable them to utilize the budget for their study tours. The approval had to be achieved in such a way that I would not become aware of the fact that most of the budget was diverted away from its intended purpose. Were I to become aware of this, I might of course criticize this, or even publicize it. Furthermore, Thapa's charming and friendly attitude was effective in gaining our cooperation. Thus, it appears that he was manipulatively using "feminine interaction skills," such as being "attentive to others" (Ferguson 1984: 93, 94), breaking hierarchical distance, expressing appreciation, and encouraging employees' initiatives.

Thapa's social proficiency worked well with local people no less. This was apparent in many engagements which I attended with irrigation project staff, NGO representatives, and even with Leon. One meeting with the health NGO's representatives can serve to illustrate Thapa's skills in dissembling by acting as if certain things were going to happen when he knew full well they would not. One afternoon, a few hours after Thapa admitted that he had not yet sent in the budget, Leon joined Anita and me in negotiating with the health NGO's representatives. The meeting assumed the form of a play, in which we conveyed the impression that the women's project was about to start shortly, while the only problem remaining before the health project could be incorporated was the finalization of certain trivial technical details.

Anita and I raised some practical questions concerning the hourly rate of pay for the lecturers, the number of monitoring visits needed for the WGOs, and the cost of overheads. We discussed various details for over half an hour and eventually told the two men that we were waiting for the approval of the budget proposal by the World Bank. One of them stated firmly that they would rather go to Thapa and conclude things with him. So the five of us went to see Thapa, who greeted us warmly, and the negotiations started all over again. Thapa discussed the number of monitoring visits and the cost of overheads, the exchanges being conducted in Nepali. The NGO representatives agreed to receive a 15 per cent overhead rather than 20 per cent, and to reduce the number of visits they had originally proposed. Thapa also proposed making the irrigation project's vehicle available for driving the NGO's lecturers to the villages, provided that the organization covered the cost of fuel. The discussions proceeded in a positive atmosphere, and when we were about to finalize things I asked Thapa when the project would start, as this was something the NGO representatives had already asked me. Thapa smiled and said, "As soon as the Bank approves the budget." Not content with this, I said, "I'm not referring to the budget but rather to when the first training course on health instruction for the WGOs can start." He repeated his answer: "When the Bank approves the budget in a week or so, there will be no problem to start things." On the way out I told Anita that it seemed that Thapa was sincere in his intentions to go ahead with the women's project.

It follows that we all convincingly played our parts in this play, negotiating, bargaining, compromising over a budget and project that were not going to take place. In their negotiations with Anita, Leon, and myself, the NGO people were just about to give up in their effort to participate in the women's project. Thapa's attitude not only convinced them to continue in their efforts, but also to reduce further their demands. Even though I asked Thapa exactly when the health training would start, he maintained the pretense that things were about to happen, and this convinced the NGO people to continue in their efforts.

However, despite my ambivalence about the real chances of the women's project being implemented, I felt that I needed to reassure Anita, who depended on the project for her living. This was not easy. Anita's mood shifted between hope and despair, and she often lost confidence in the project's future. Thus, she cautiously told me one day that Pandit had told her that it was not clear if the women's project would be implemented. When I said it seemed there was only meager chance that the project would materialize, she asked why had all the WGOs been hired? Thus, while we both felt profoundly frustrated we also continued to hold on to our hopes, and I would give Anita some practical advice that I believed might help make the project happen. I said, for instance, "You can initiate activities that would contribute to establishing the existence of the project *de facto*." It appears that when my departure was close, and I began to realize that there was nothing in my power to make Thapa or anyone else in charge of the irrigation project realize the women's project, I continued to hope and act as if there was still a chance of remedying the situation.

Thapa's manipulative maneuvers in relation to approving the women's project budget can be contrasted with his completely different attitude toward obtaining a marketing expert. His determination to have this expert start work immediately for the irrigation project actively engaged him in achieving this goal promptly. One morning, Thapa entered our office in a fury that I had never witnessed before. He demanded Leon come to his office, thus avoiding my witnessing the expected clash. When Leon returned after seeing Thapa he was very upset. He composed a letter, which Raju typed instantly. Then Leon said:

when they want something it must be done on the spot. He [Thapa] wants to hire the marketing expert *now*. The file was sent back from Kathmandu after lying there for half a year, and now he wants us to provide his [the marketing expert's] CV and hire that expert from this minute to the next, but later this can lie dormant for another year without doing anything about it.

Leon explained that the expert was needed for a large-scale marketing project. The evident conclusion is that the budget affair had nothing to do with the Nepali officials' incompetence, or with objective constraints that prevented the smooth approval of the budget and the subsequent implementation of the women's project. Rather, the Nepali officials had their priorities, which did not

include women's activities. Leon's rejection of my idea, that a marketing expert could help marketing women's enterprises as part of the women's project, illustrates a similar underestimation of the women's project on the part of the Israeli party. He said, "We are talking about a large-scale project [the marketing of agricultural products] and not just about small things." That is to say, neither the Israeli nor the Nepali party was willing to use the money for the purpose of village women's activities, which were considered "small things." Hence, it was not a question of unbearable costs, nor the fact that the money was provided as a loan which needed to be repaid. The women's budget was tempting prey for the male officials' desires.

I was confirmed in this understanding on my last day in Bhairahawa, at the small, informal farewell party for me in Acharya's office. On the morning of my last day, Leon announced that a row was imminent over the women's project budget for the sake of agricultural instruction. He said that the Nepali senior officials wanted \$250,000 for agricultural instruction. In the afternoon, at the farewell party, the budget and the women's project were discussed again. Acharya explained that the project might get underway but that it would have to suffer major budget cuts and that only a small part of it would get off the ground. I was pleased with his positive attitude and the chance that the project might, in some form, be implemented, and said: "Well, the most important thing is to start. When the World Bank realizes that something like seventy groups have been launched by the end of this year it will probably offer more resources, and then other financial resources could be made available."

Leon objected to my claim, and seemed to stand up for the women's project instead of me, and said, "The project is important and no part of it can be cut." I praised Leon for standing up for the project better than I had. Then Anita said quietly, "It is basically referring to a meager sum of money for each woman." Leon then compared the sums of money allocated for the study tours and the women's project. He said, "We are speaking about \$260,000 for twenty-three senior officials compared to \$290,000 for 9,000 women." Acharya said, "This is really peanuts, but what can we do? Our superiors are the ones who decide. They want the money."

Apparently, the budget had been divided in two: a sum of \$240,000 had been earmarked for agricultural instruction, some \$260,000 for study tours for high-ranking officials, and virtually nothing for the women's activities. Amazingly enough, I expressed my appreciation for both Acharya, who informed me about the need for significant cuts in the budget and in the scope of the women's project, and for Leon, whose resistance to the women's project I knew so well, and who was now comfortable enough to please me, shortly before I left Nepal. I suppose that by this time I preferred to leave without revealing my bitter disappointment, and to depart while on friendly terms. It also appears that until the final hours of my stay in Nepal I eagerly wanted to believe in the women project's prospects. In any case, until the last minute I continued to try and con-

vince the local heads of the irrigation project of the women project's importance, and of their ability and responsibility to make it happen.

The deceptive management of the budget, and the women's project more generally, went on for some time after I left Nepal. This became apparent from Leon's letters, which I received a couple of months after my return to Israel. Examination of these letters suggests that the gender discourse was kept alive within the context of the irrigation project's premises, by those involved in the women's project, for as long as this project lasted, namely the ten literacy classes that were opened after I left. In a letter, Leon wrote:

On the last day of the Bank delegation's visit I spoke with Mr Mint one-on-one, and asked him what was his personal position and the Bank's position concerning the programs you have prepared, which have been submitted to him. He thought that the report and the programs were very good, but too grandiose and pretentious for Nepal's conditions generally and for the Tarai, in particular. The Bank has approved only \$110,000 for 160 classes, specifically for literacy classes, including some agricultural training (vegetable horticulture) and basic concepts in personal hygiene and health. If we demonstrate, by March 1998, that 160 classes were really opened up and successfully carried out he will be ready to "reconsider" the approval of an additional budget.²¹

According to Leon, Mr Mint was not particularly interested in the women's project's prospects, and Leon had to remind him that the project was the Banks' "baby." Moreover, Leon told him that Tovi Fenster's budget, which had been submitted to the Bank previously, amounted to some \$400,000. Mr Mint replied, so Leon wrote, that "although the facts I mentioned were correct, yet the Bank never approved Tovi Fenster's budget." However, Leon did not give up and urged Mr Mint to influence the Nepalese to approve the \$110,000 budget as soon as possible, and to see that they release the money needed for the programs, most urgently for the seminar for the twenty village teachers as well as for the additional twenty literacy classes that were ready to begin.

A subsequent letter from Leon suggests that by the end of 1997 the women's project's prospects had dwindled even further. Thus, he wrote to me:

Concerning the advancement of women's status in the project region, no concrete progress has been made. The partial budget of \$110,000 has not been formally approved yet [by the Nepali officials] and I do not expect its approval in the near future. This may take at least three more months, if it is approved at all ... [W]ithout an approved budget which should facilitate the money flowing into the project area, the plan of opening 160 classes by the end of March 1998 is an impossible mission, and therefore we will not be able to prove to Mint that we have done a good job. Thus it will prevent the approval of additional budget, beyond the \$110,000.²²

Well aware of the fact that after two years only 10 classes out of the 300 planned had been started—the latter figure itself having been pared down from 900—Mint must have known that there was no chance that the other 290 classes would commence by March 1998. Indeed, if we accept the accuracy of Leon's reported conversation with him, Mint did not really care whether the classes commenced or not. Similar to the preceding one, this budget was also a fiction. Indeed, the constraints and conditions that were stipulated as necessary for obtaining additional monies are proof that the prospects of the nonexistent budget's realization were nil. Moreover, as much as the original budget was flexibly changed, it still existed, although it was used for other purposes than women's activities.

To conclude, there was no definite budget earmarked for the women's project. The various figures that were mentioned at various points in the process of budget negotiation were not ones to which the involved parties were obliged to commit themselves. Eventually some \$500,000 was spent in two areas—agricultural instruction and study tours—activities which excluded women almost completely.

Notes

1. Mosse suggests that paper products such as the "huge number of visit reports, progress reports, annual reports," serve consultants' purposes (Mosse 2005: 134).
2. In response to the growing demands of the feminist movement to include women in development projects, at the beginning of the 1990s the World Bank demanded that its partners (governments and development agencies) should relate to women's needs and ensure the allocation of resources to them.
3. Letter from Leon, 10 November 1997.
4. The embedded and practical need of the foreign consultant to satisfy their employer is described by Mosse as follows: "Beyond personal commitment to particular development goals and to the new project as their vehicle, our broad ambition was to demonstrate professional competence and so secure an enduring relationship with the donor and project agency/area" (Mosse 2005: 26). Mosse was himself a member of a British foreign consultancy team.
5. Herta Nöbauer discusses the self-denial strategy in the context of academia. Based on her ethnographic research on social practices of the (re)production of academic knowledge at Austrian universities, she argues that women, who depend on male senior academics for their academic promotion and recognition, disclosed their efforts "to hide their wounds resulting from discrimination, disappointment, and violation, and repress these wounds even from themselves." She further suggests that, "These women were trying to maintain their dignity by evading a question" (Nöbauer 2002: 113).
6. Similarly, Nöbauer suggests that hopes and expectations of being "afforded respect and recognition as scholars... is a central issue for all women," and therefore they are "highly vulnerable in that aspect" (Nöbauer 2002: 119).
7. Co-optation as a means of preserving power in the hands of controlling groups and blocking the participation of peripheral sectors in sharing power has been recognized for some time. One of the earliest writers on this was Vilfredo Pareto (1991). He suggested that the dominating elite either eliminate threatening leaders of excluded groups or absorb their representatives into the ruling elite. The absorbed leaders accommodate themselves to the elite's demands and norms, and thus serve to perpetuate the power structure.
8. Consultants' compliance with the requirement of submitting needless reports is mentioned by Justice, who writes that, "Most agencies expect their staff to write their own reports, even if

- another agency has already provided good coverage on the same topic” (Justice 1989: 114). However, she perceives this expectation as a taken-for-granted requirement (which often is wrongly implemented) and does not consider the possibility that these reports serve as other than “sources of information” (ibid.: 112).
9. It is interesting to note that, apart from the ethnocentric views Leon had of the Nepali villagers, in some ways what he described as “faults” or “problems” could be considered as Tahal’s major, if not only, success in its engagement in Nepal. Such a view was expressed by Sam, a British consultant (see the Introduction and Chapter 4 for a discussion of this and other related issues).
 10. A “drawer project” is a Hebrew expression meaning a plan, sometimes a hypothetical exercise, with no immediate practical use, intended for envisaging future scenarios. In common parlance it can also refer to disturbing or undesired initiatives that the organization prefers to bury.
 11. This tendency of organizations to ignore responsibility when facing problematic situations or when failing to fulfill their commitments is discussed in Chapter 3, with regard to, for instance, the failure of government agencies to provide educational and health services (see Thapa and Sijapati 2004; Whelpton 2005).
 12. Don Handelman (1980) describes this bureaucratic conduct with reference to social workers at a welfare agency and shows how they tend to involve other agencies in sharing responsibility over problematic situations.
 13. In an examination of tens of cases in which “children at risk” were taken away from their homes and put in youth institutions by the welfare authorities in Israel, I found that the welfare officials who recommended taking the children away cooperated intensively with other social workers within their departments as well as with officials from other departments, and with senior social work officials. This procedure enabled them to justify their decisions by saying that they “consulted” with other colleagues and reached a responsible and professional decision (see Hertzog 2004).
 14. For a more detailed review of the literature on organizational theory and how to read it through gendered lenses, see Bendl (source: http://www.wu.ac.at/gender/mitarbeiter/bendl/bendl_2/genderlogic_bendl.pdf (retrieved 8 October 2010).
 15. Joan Acker argues that, “Gender, sexuality, reproduction, and emotionality of women are outside organizational boundaries, continually and actively consigned to that social space by ongoing organizational practices” (Acker 1992: 259).
 16. During my stay in Nepal I noticed that the English-language daily the *Rising Nepal* regularly reported on projects for “women’s empowerment,” and quoted politicians’ statements on women’s affairs.
 17. See the discussion of this issue in the Introduction.
 18. In his comprehensive study of the development industry and of the central role the World Bank plays in it, Graham Hancock speaks of the opportunistic conduct of development agencies as follows: “if humanitarianism is in the air, then they will make humanitarian statements; if environmental movements seem to be gaining political support, then the agencies will inject some ecology into their rhetoric ... Meanwhile, if welfare-statism is on the ascendant in the donor countries, the aid agencies will highlight their own role in the international redistribution of wealth ... If conservative values are enjoying resurgence on the other hand, then notions like ‘structural adjustment’ will be promulgated, the virtues of private enterprise will be extolled and ‘market forces’ will be assigned a god-like omnipotence. The variations and possibilities are virtually infinite” (Hancock 1989: 72).
 19. Nordstrom uses interviews with three elite people to show how corrupt conduct is justified as being for the good of their nation and society. A commander who used his position to run mining concessions, says “what I do, I do for the good of this country.” The politician who replies to Nordstrom’s question about diverting most of Angola’s education budget to “scholarships for a few elite children to study at leading private schools and universities in the world,” says “This nation desperately needs the best of minds.” And the businessman who

tries to “gain a foothold in the difficult flux of transitional development and political turmoil” says “I am helping my country” (Nordstrom 2007: 80–81).

20. Indeed, the difference between our respective contexts—Mosse’s, as opposed to Anita’s and my own—accounts for our different evaluations.
21. Letter from Leon, 10 November 1997.
22. Letter from Leon, 19 December 1997.