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Hope, agency, and the 'side effects' of development in India and Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study of exceptional women organising for social change through grassroots-level development initiatives in education and income-generation in urban poor areas of Howrah and Kolkata (West Bengal, India) and Lae (Papua New Guinea). It explores the relationship between hope, agency, and development by investigating the historically specific circumstances and practices of women organising collectively as they struggle to create more meaningful lives for themselves, their families, and the larger communities in which they live.

Research for this study is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with four grassroots organisations: two led by Muslim women in Howrah and Kolkata, and two led by Christian women in Lae. Data was gathered using a diverse portfolio of qualitative methods and analysed with a common conceptual framework that draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice.

This study combines analyses of historical processes, habitat, and structured social space with in-depth, place-based ethnography to show that as socially embedded beings, the culturally constructed ways in which we hope and act for development are lodged in social relations. It illustrates the dialectic relationship between structure and agency by showing how these active, articulate, intelligent women living in poverty sometimes reproduce the structural inequalities they are working to transform. This thesis identifies a number of 'side effects' of development, including collective hope and collective agency, which serve to sustain collective action in the face of adversity, hardship, and failure to achieve social change. It increases our understanding of development by offering a critical, comparative mode of scholarship that focuses on people's hopes and agency and allows for a reading in terms of possibilities as well as success and failure.

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Glossary

The following is a selection of key *tok Pisin*, Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu terms used in this thesis.

Terms in *tok Pisin*:

bilum – string bag; also womb

buai – betel nut

driman – dream

elites – a socioeconomic group of highly educated people in PNG, often urban-based professionals and public servants

grassroots – a socioeconomic group of people in PNG, usually low-income earners in urban areas and the majority of the rural population

hausmeri – female housekeeper

kago – cargo; material goods

kanaka – an archaic term for villager; sometimes used in a derogatory manner to refer to illiterate or ‘backward’ people

kastom – custom

kaunsil – council

kina – the basic unit of currency in Papua New Guinea

liklik stori – short or little story

mama – mother

meri – woman

meri blouse – long, loose fitting dress worn by women over a *laplap* or sarong

morata haus – building made from bush materials

ol grassroots mama – grassroots mothers, usually barely literate women from settlements and rural villages

ol save meri – women who know / are educated, usually young aspiring professional women in urban areas

raskol – anyone regularly engaged in criminal activities

rot bilong bisnis – the business way

rot bilong lotu – the religious way

rot bilong raskol – the criminal way

senisim basket – basket exchange

tok ples – local language

wantok – one who speaks the same language (one talk); a member of one’s family, clan, tribal group, or other associational group

wok meri – women’s work

yumi mama meri – us women mothers

yumi ol mama – us mothers

Terms in Bengali, Hindi, or Urdu:

asalam wa alaikum – an Islamic spoken greeting often translated as ‘peace be upon you’

aazaan – the Islamic call to prayer

basti – settlement; also used to refer to areas of low quality housing and urban degradation (slums) in West Bengal

Bhadralok – respectable folk; a Bengali term used to designate the social elite

bhadramahila – a woman of this elite class

bhai – elder brother

bhaji – elder sister

bidi – hand-rolled cigarettes

biryani – a dish made of basmati rice and spices with meat, potatoes, eggs, or vegetables

boodhi – intelligence or wisdom

ghat – a broad set of stairs leading to a landing on a river

Hadith – narrations concerning the words, deeds, and things approved by Prophet Muhammad

Inshallah – God willing

ijtihad – independent reasoning

kachori – fried spicy snacks

kabutar – pigeon

kabutar-khana – pigeon coop

khadi – homespun cloth

lakh – one hundred thousand units

madrasah – Muslim learning institution

masala – a varying blend of spices

maulvi – Islamic religious scholar

nihariyas – people who work with gold and silver

paan – spices and other fillings wrapped in betel leaves

pani – water

pundit – Hindu religious cleric / scholar

purdah – veiling, seclusion

rupee – the basic unit of currency in India

salwar kameez – a three-piece outfit consisting of a *kameez* (a long tunic) worn over a pair of matching *salwar* (loose pants), and a *dupatta* (long scarf) draped across the shoulders

sati – widow immolation

shariat – Islamic laws

talaq – oral and unilateral divorce

zamindar – landlord

zari or *zardozi* – a type of embroidery using gold and silver thread

Acronyms

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
ANGAU	The Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit
AusAID	Australian Government Overseas Aid Programme
BPL	Below the Poverty Line
CDS	Community Development Scheme
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEMSAP	Calcutta Environmental Management Strategy and Action Plan
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
ELC-PNG	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
GAD	Gender and Development
HDI	Human Development Index
HPP	Howrah Pilot Project
IOS	Institute of Objective Studies
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LCA	Lae City Authority
LDCW	Lae District Council of Women
MBBS	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
Momase	Momase is an acronym for the Morobe, Madang and Sepik Provinces, Papua New Guinea
NARI	National Agricultural Research Institute
NCW	National Council of Women
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NZAID	New Zealand Aid Programme
NZBMS	New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society
PM Basti	Priya Manna Basti
PMV	Public Motor Vehicle
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGFRI	Papua New Guinea Forest Research Institute
PNGWiADF	Papua New Guinea Women in Agriculture Development Foundation
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association of India
SPC	The Secretariat of the Pacific Community
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
US	United States
VDT	Village Development Trust
VGIF	The Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund
WAD	Women and Development
WBMDFC	West Bengal Minorities Development and Finance Corporation
WCD	Women, Culture, Development
WID	Women in Development
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

INTRODUCTION

A theory of hope

I cannot change society into what I want. I cannot change it, but at least I can give (these girls) some ideas. I can change their ideas. So this is my goal, this is my aim. I want to give them dreams so they can achieve their goals.

(Tabassum, personal communication)

Hope is the difference between *probability* and *possibility*.

(Isabelle Stengers, as cited in Zournazi, 2002:245)

This thesis is about exceptional women organising for social change in urban poor areas where they live. It describes their efforts to create meaningful lives for themselves and their families through grassroots-level development initiatives in the context of urban poverty. My goal is to explore the relationship between hope, agency, and development in order to gain a richer appreciation of what sustains collective action in the face of adversity and an alternative reading of what constitutes success and failure in development. This in turn might lead to a better understanding of the ‘side effects’ of development, which can be just as important as intentional goals, and greater support for grassroots-led social change.

I became interested in the relationship between hope and development in 2001, when I spent six weeks in Lae, Papua New Guinea’s second largest city and the capital of Morobe Province. I went to Lae with my father, who had been invited by a friend to look after his saw-sharpening and timber mill business while he and his wife travelled overseas. My father runs a small business sharpening saws with my mother who was not keen on travelling to PNG (at that time my younger brother and sister were still living at home) so I offered to go in her place, and before we knew it we were climbing out of a tiny aeroplane into the humid night at Nadzab airport, 40km from Lae.

I was familiar with the concept of international development before I went to PNG. Development is ultimately about a belief in human progress that can be achieved through directed social change. Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton (1995:28) make a distinction between development as an immanent and objective process, which has been practised in various forms throughout the world for centuries (such as the development of capitalism), and development as an intentional activity, or the actions and practices of various actors (e.g., policies and projects implemented by aid agencies). In his book *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen argues that development is an activity

that should expand people's freedoms and explains that "Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states" (1999:3). Ideas about who should be responsible for directing such social change, how it should be achieved, and what, precisely, constitutes 'development' in different contexts, have been the subject of much debate since the 1950s, which Gilbert Rist has described as the start of the "age of development" (1997:4). According to Rist, development came to offer "a new way of conceiving international relations" (1997:72) after World War II when decolonisation processes commenced, formerly colonised countries gained independence, and a new world order was sought. Rist shows how the speech delivered on 20 January 1949 by incoming United States President Harry Truman changed the meaning of 'development' and revolutionised the way countries viewed their position in the world (two billion people suddenly found themselves classified by others as "underdeveloped", for example) and positioned the West, and the United States in particular, as "developed" and almost morally obliged to help develop those countries not meeting US standards of adequate living conditions (1997:70-79). A number of scholars critique the way development has been conceptualised, arguing that it involves deliberate activities that serve to create and sustain the "sources of unfreedom" Sen wants to remove (see Escobar, 1997; Esteva, 1992; Ferguson, 1990/1994; Sachs, 1992). Today, development is intimately connected with conflict, security, climate change, economic change, and many other diverse and multifaceted elements of social change in the world.

Going to PNG was my first visit to a 'developing' country.¹ PNG receives significant amounts of international aid and development is a key concern of the government and the many civil society organisations working there. The importance of development can also be identified in other discourses – in letters to the editors of local newspapers, in the desires of unemployed men living in settlements for access to

¹ I use the terms 'developing' and 'developed' to distinguish between different societies rather than 'Third World' and 'First World'. These terms, and others in use (such as 'North' and 'South') are all problematic insofar as they do not adequately reflect social and cultural divisions within societies or cross-cultural similarities between societies, let alone geographic location (New Zealand and Australia, although positioned in the southern hemisphere, would be classified as 'North'). Nevertheless they are useful from a policy perspective because, as Kirsty Wild points out, "they provide the vocabulary necessary to establish debate and consensus around mechanisms for addressing vast global inequalities in income, health, education, etc" (2007:1). For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ranks countries according to the human development index (HDI), a composite index used to measure "the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life; access to knowledge; and a decent standard of living" (United Nations Development Programme, 2009a). In 2009 the HDI for PNG (which refers to 2007 data) was 0.541, ranking it 148th out of 182 countries with data and giving it a "medium human development" status (United Nations Development Programme, 2009c). This makes PNG a 'developing' country. By way of contrast, New Zealand's HDI ranking of 0.950 places it in the "very high human development" list and 20th out of 182 countries – a 'developed' country, in other words – with Norway, Australia and Iceland ranking 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively.

international markets to sell their goods. I remember leafing through the local phone book and seeing a several-page advertisement where the PNG government outlined its policy for improving the country's literacy rates. I met missionaries from the United States who had come to "help", as well as volunteers and technical advisors from Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and heard many stories of failed or "corrupted" development projects. Our hostess, Verity, who knew I was interested in learning about development, introduced me to a friend of hers: Bing Sawanga.² It was this meeting that first sparked my interest in hope and development.

Bing was involved with a women's literacy group at Gapsongkeg village as part of her work for Village Development Trust, an indigenous non-governmental organisation (NGO) involved in conservation, environmental projects and the sustainable development of village resources. She invited me to accompany her on her next trip to the village. Bing, Maria (her niece)³ and I visited members of the Gapsongkeg Women's Group, saw the schoolhouse they had recently built, heard their excitement about their forthcoming graduation from literacy classes, and listened to their plans to open a handicraft store at nearby Nadzab airport (which, by my next visit in 2005, they had succeeded in doing).

During my six weeks in Lae I observed how difficult life is for women for a variety of reasons. According to Orovu Sepoe (2000), post-colonial PNG is a patriarchal society where women occupy a low social status, are excluded from the political and socio-economic realms of society and are basically restricted to their gendered roles as wives and mothers. Domestic violence is commonplace and women have limited access to education, health services, and employment. I thought about the women at Gapsongkeg and what they had achieved in the face of what to me seemed quite dire circumstances. I wondered at their continued motivation – was hope something that sustained them in their efforts to organise collectively to improve their education and income-generating opportunities?

In 2004 I spent six weeks in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta⁴) with Sita Venkateswar, my doctoral supervisor. Sita was conducting participatory research into the activities of

² I have not disguised the locations of the organisations I worked with and, with permission, have used the real names of the people and groups involved in this study. Researchers are required to protect their participants, often by concealing their identities and locations, and had I been investigating a different topic (say, experiences of domestic violence) I am sure I would have had different conversations about ethical considerations with participants. Some took up my offer of anonymity and chose pseudonyms but most were happy for me to use their real names. I make no distinction between real names and pseudonyms in the text.

³ Maria came as our interpreter. Although Bing is from a nearby village, the villagers at Gapsongkeg speak a different *tok ples* (local language), which is common in PNG (Romaine, 1992). PNG is home to over 800 languages, 171 of which are spoken in Morobe Province.

⁴ Calcutta was the anglicised version of the name of the fishing village around which the city grew during the period of British colonial rule. In 2001 the West Bengal Government changed the city's official name to Kolkata to better reflect Bengali pronunciation. I use Kolkata to conform with the official designation and Calcutta to refer to the city before its name change. Where I quote other sources I retain the original spelling.

grassroots women's organisations working in neglected slum areas of Kolkata and Howrah, and she invited me to join her with a view to developing a tangential topic that would become part of her bigger research project. Before the trip I consulted the *Lonely Planet Guide* to India and read with interest the information about how to 'help out' at various charity organisations, such as Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. Kolkata is famous for its poverty⁵ and squalor; Rudyard Kipling labelled it the City of Dreadful Night (1891), and Dominique Lapierre based his novel *The City of Joy* (1985) on one of Kolkata's many slums. Like many foreign visitors I struggled with the city's extreme poverty, severe pollution (an affront to all senses) and physical congestion, particularly when contrasted with the beauty I saw in its buildings, its thriving arts sector, and its long history as the cultural capital of India. Many of the foreigners I met were voluntourists, tourists who combine travel with volunteer work for local development projects.

Sita introduced me to extraordinary women involved with small-scale, grassroots organisations working for social change. Their stories of determination amid negative attitudes towards women's rights to education and employment, and of the hardships associated with life in urban poor areas, put me in mind of the women from Gapsongkeg. I saw other similarities with Lae too, such as deep gender-based inequalities entrenched in both societies and the low social status of women that is reinforced (sometimes violently) through social norms and institutionalised in laws relating to inheritance, property and divorce (Go *et al.*, 2003; Jensen & Thornton, 2003). Again I wondered at their continued motivation to run educational and income-generating initiatives in spite (or was it because?) of adversity.

During my postgraduate year in Development Studies, which I completed just before my trip to India in 2004, I formed the impression that past and current models of development do not work and that development projects rarely achieve their objectives. It seemed to me that the kind of development most likely to succeed was that initiated, facilitated, and controlled by the people it was intended to benefit – exactly like the initiatives of the women in Kolkata, Howrah, and Lae. I wanted to provide hopeful stories that would counter the litany of failure and despair I read about during my studies. With that in mind I designed my doctoral research to look at the activities of women organising for education and income-generation at the grassroots level in some of the poorest urban areas of Kolkata and Lae.

I worked with four organisations; two led by Muslim women in *bastis*⁶ in Kolkata and Howrah, and two led by Christian women in urban areas around Lae. I

⁵ The 2009 HDI for India was 0.612, ranking it 134th out of 182 countries with data and giving it a "medium human development" status (United Nations Development Programme, 2009b).

⁶ *Basti*, which means settlement in Bengali and Hindi, is a word currently used to refer to areas of low quality housing and urban degradation (slums).

found that despite operating in very different social, cultural, economic and geographic contexts, these women share similar hopes for development and social change, experience similar setbacks and structural disadvantages, and often fail to achieve their goals for similar reasons. I also found that *they did not give up*; these women continue to organise collectively despite evidence that their efforts are not always effective. My research questions became:

1. Is hope something that explains these women's continued action, or something in need of explanation?
2. What else do these women's collective efforts do besides fail to achieve social change?

In the remainder of this Introduction I address these questions. First I take a closer look at hope and development, showing how I used the conceptual tools developed by Pierre Bourdieu in devising an anthropology of hope. Then I explain my approach to the 'side effects' of development. I conclude with an outline of the thesis.

Toward an anthropology of hope

Hope is directed to a future good which is hard but not impossible to attain.

(Thomas Aquinas, as cited in Cartwright, 2004:169)

Hope is constituted of imagining and believing in the possibility that some state of affairs in the future will come to pass.

(Drahos, 2004:19)

It is no easy task to define hope. We use the concept in such a wide variety of ways that concise definitions, such as the ones provided above, are difficult to find; for example, one can hope for things ranging from good weather to religious salvation, feel hopeful (momentarily or permanently), and be a source of hope for others. As Victoria McGeer (2004:101) points out, hope can be expressed as an emotion, a disposition or capacity, a behaviour or activity, or some combination of all these things. Hope is also frequently discussed alongside similar concepts, and the following list includes associations I regularly encountered in my research: anticipation, belief, capability, care, desire, doubt, dreams, expectation, faith, fear, flexibility, imagination, improvisation, joy, patience, perseverance, possibility, prayer, reason, and reflection.⁷ I should point out that this list is drawn from works in English; an added dimension is

⁷ Hope, along with faith and charity/love, is one of the three Christian virtues, and I could easily have added 'salvation' to this list; however Christian hope is not the focus of my research. Many of my Papua New Guinean participants are Christian but when I asked about their hopes they replied in terms of aspirations for a better life in the present or near future rather than the Christian hope of salvation. Stephen Plant (2009) provides an interesting discussion of the relationship between faith, development, and a Christian account of hope.

the different ways in which hope is conceptualised across different religious and cultural traditions.

Hope is commonly understood to be directed toward some future 'good' as the above quotation from Aquinas suggests. This is certainly the case in development discourses, where hope is a prominent theme.⁸ In 2010 a Google search using the keywords "international development" and "hope" returned over 6 million results, primarily in the names and activities of international development organisations. Tearfund, for example, tells us we can "bring hope to poor communities through water and sanitation" (Tearfund, 2009). World Vision offers "HopeChild Sponsorship" whereby a child living in a community affected by AIDS is sponsored (World Vision, 2009). Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) – the international governing body of football – has a strategic alliance with the streetfootballworld network connecting sport with development through the "Football for Hope Movement," which works with children and youth in developing nations (Fédération Internationale de Football Association & streetfootballworld, 2010; Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2010). Hope here is viewed positively and is linked to 'goods' such as social justice, gender equality, poverty alleviation, health, income generation, economic growth, and human flourishing in general. However, ideas about 'goodness' always involve value judgements and what some view as good, ethical, or moral is not necessarily seen in the same light by others. An example can be found in contrasting perceptions of Monsanto, one of the world's largest agricultural corporations. Monsanto sells herbicides, seeds and biotechnology traits worldwide, runs a "Food, Health, Hope Foundation" for disadvantaged people interested in farming in South Africa, and sees itself as a responsible corporation that helps farmers produce better yields while at the same time conserving the environment (Monsanto, 2009), leading Peter Drahos to describe it as a "merchant of hope" (2004:18). Monsanto's many critics have a decidedly different view of its operations: physicist and environmental activist Vandana Shiva (2009), for instance, connects the introduction of crops and seeds from companies such as Monsanto to rising levels of farmer suicides in India.

Hope is a fascinating concept to think about as an anthropologist. Philosophers and theologians have long been concerned with hope, and it is also of interest to

⁸ Surprisingly, however, the relationship between hope and development has not received much scholarly attention. There are some who engage with hope, including the aforementioned Stephen Plant (2009); Light Carruyo (2003), who argues that we need to understand people's hopes, dreams and visions in order to understand development; Sasha Courville and Nicola Piper (2004), who discuss the role of NGOs and social movements in mobilising hope into action for social change; Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson (writing under the penname J.K. Gibson-Graham), whose work on a politics of possibility offers alternative and hopeful readings of economic development (Gibson-Graham, 2006); and Katharine McKinnon, whose work on postdevelopment reflects a recent trend towards more hopeful critical analyses of development (2006, 2007). McKinnon and Gibson, with Linda Malam, recently edited a special issue of *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* which continues this critical and hopeful mode of scholarship (2008:275).

medical practitioners and psychologists, but until recently hope has received relatively little attention in the social sciences. John Law suggests that this is because social science methods of inquiry can hardly catch “complex, diffuse and messy” phenomena such as hope (2004:2). Those who do engage with hope indicate that the lack of attention might be a reflection of our times: “We live in a world where our belief, faith and trust in political or individual actions are increasingly being threatened, leading to despair and uncertainty,” writes Mary Zournazi. “It is easy to be pessimistic with wars, ecological disasters and increasing social inequalities all around us” (Zournazi, 2002:14). Another reason could be the analytical challenges posed by the diverse ways in which we use the term ‘hope’. “Nevertheless, despite the plurality of meanings, attitudes and practices that constitute the discourse of hope, there is still something important that unifies them,” notes Ghassan Hage, one of a growing number of anthropologists writing about hope⁹: they all “express in one way or another modes in which human beings relate to their future” (2003a:10). To that I would add that discourses of hope also engage with the question of agency. An anthropology of hope might begin, then, by exploring the relationships between hope, agency, and the future. In the next section I use Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to discuss the relationship between hope and agency, after which I turn to hope and the future.

Hope, agency, and habitus

In general terms, agency refers to our intention to act and our capacity to take action. Our intentions are culturally constructed and our capacity to act is also influenced by cultural, historical and social conditions. Agency in the sense of strong intentionality is different from the routine actions we take as part of our everyday practices in that it is directed towards what Sherry Ortner calls “projects”, which are people’s “culturally constituted intentions, desires, and goals” (2006:135, 151). These actions are not necessarily directed toward future goals; Jarret Zigon discusses how some recent writers describe agency as maintaining things in the present, “as an aim toward continuity, stability, or living sanely” (2009:257).

Although ideas about what constitutes hope might differ, the question of agency is a key feature in almost all discussions of it. In particular, hope tends to be discussed in terms of the agency it contains or lacks. While there are many different

⁹ Others include Hirokazu Miyazaki, who uses hope as a method of understanding the social reality of the Suvavou people in Fiji (2004), is interested in the links between hope, economics and global capitalism (2005) and has established an international collaborative research project on hope with the University of Tokyo’s Institute of Social Science. Vincent Crapanzano writes about hope as category of experience and analysis, particularly in relation to cargo cults (2003, 2004a, 2004b). Gaila Lindquist (2006) uses hope to understand the relationship between magic and agency in Russia; Jennifer Infanti (2008) explores how children use hope in coping with domestic violence in Aotearoa / New Zealand; and Jarrett Zigon (2009) also uses hope as a method of understanding the central temporal motivation in the social lives of his research participants in Moscow.

modes of hope – such as religious hope; collective hope (Braithwaite, 2004); individual, private and public hope (Drahos, 2004); wishful, wilful and scaffolding hope (McGeer, 2004); superficial and substantive hope (Pettit, 2004); patient, critical and goal-directed hope (Webb, 2007) – most can be loosely categorised into what Zigon calls “the active/passive dichotomy” (2009:256) based on the notion of agency.

A passive mode of hope would involve imagining and believing in the possibility that some state of affairs in the future will come to pass, or that a desirable present state of affairs is maintained, but not actively doing anything to realise that hope. Sasha Courville and Nicola Piper argue that hope without agency leaves us with “nothing more than an illusion” (2004:49), citing Drahos’s (2004:33) *public hope* (whereby the responsibility for agency lies with governments rather than individual agents) as a worst-case scenario. Philip Pettit uses the phrase *superficial hope* to describe the type of hope where one imagines, believes in and desires something but takes no action. As an example, I might hope that the rain holds off or the queue at the water pump is short, but in Pettit’s words, “I do not despair about it, nor am I complacent about it” (2004:154). There is little intentional agency here. Similarly, McGeer describes *wishful hope* as “a failure to take on the full responsibilities of agency and hence to remain overreliant on external powers to realize one’s hopes” (2004:110). Karl Marx, who famously described religion as the opium of the people, might have categorised religious hope as wishful hope.

Most who write about passive types of hope tend to view it negatively, as a cause of inaction and disengagement from reality. The kind of “waiting-induced paralysis” Vincent Crapanzano witnessed in his research among white South Africans hoping and waiting for a solution in the final years of apartheid illustrates why this is so. As he explains, passive hope can make people less likely to act and, in addition, “it can lead us astray through inaction (as it did among those white South Africans who preferred waiting to, for better or worse, acting) and through the distortion of our sense of reality by offering us unlikely possibilities. As such, hope bucks the activism (call it “agency”) that founds our understanding of social action and that we, most blatantly in America, value” (Crapanzano, 2003:19). Situations like this also lead to evaluations of hope’s moral and ethical worth.

Active modes of hope, on the other hand, combine the elements of passive hope (imagination, belief, desire) with strong, intentional agency. According to Paulo Freire, hope demands to be anchored in practice: “The hoped-for is not attained by dint of raw hoping. Just to hope is to hope in vain” (1994:2). This is what Pettit (2004:158) describes as *substantial hope*, whereby one forms attitudes in response to actualities and probabilities and performs actions to bring about the hoped-for state of affairs. For example, if I hope that my children’s job prospects are better than my own, and I can

see pathways to better career opportunities (such as education), I will do everything within my power to ensure those pathways are available to them.

Psychologist C R Snyder (2000) argues that agency is a central component of hope, which he views as a positive motivational force. Active modes of hope are not necessarily positive, however, as McGeer's discussion of *wilful hope* suggests. Wilful hope involves recognising the need to take action in order to realise one's hopes, but action comes at the expense of others who become "mere instruments to achieving these ends" (McGeer, 2004:110-111). Wilful hopers are insensitive to the social world and are bound to hope and act badly: "This may involve the problematic and even immoral treatment of others. But, just as likely, it will involve problematic and even destructive consequences for oneself" (McGeer, 2004:117). This points to hope's ethical and moral components. McGeer believes that hoping well involves "a capacity for *responsive* hope ... being responsive to real world constraints on formulating and pursuing our hopes" (2004:118, emphasis in original).

McGeer's point about the need for hope to be responsive to "real world constraints" is an important one. Hope, like agency, is culturally and historically constructed. Bourdieu's notion of habitus is a useful conceptual tool for understanding the relationship between hope, agency and our historical sociocultural (or "real world") circumstances. Habitus is a theory of the body; it is "embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu, 1990:56), "a set of historical relations "deposited" within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:16). Habitus (which is largely unconscious) is one of three interrelated analytical tools for thinking about human practice, the others being social spaces (what Bourdieu terms "fields," which comprise the social positions we occupy and struggle over in relation to other social agents) and capital (resources in a given social space, discussed in the next section). Habitus links the ways we perceive, appreciate, and respond to the world (our practice) with the social and physical spaces (habitat, discussed further in the introduction to Part I) we inhabit. For example, if our environment is one of poverty and limited civic amenities such as clean water or sewerage systems, then we will respond to and embody that through malnutrition, stunted growth and ill-health. If women occupy a low social status within that world, this might manifest in high rates of maternal mortality or female infanticide. This is likely to have an impact upon the way we engage with and (re)create our sociocultural and physical environments, e.g. by affecting how we perceive available opportunities or leading us to value sons over daughters. "The things to do, things to be done (*pragmata*) which are the correlate of practical knowledge, are defined in the relationship between the structure of the hopes or expectations constitutive of a habitus and the structure of probabilities which is

constitutive of a social space,” writes Bourdieu (2000:211). The ways we act, our sense of the probabilities and possibilities of life, and how we hope are all constructed through social and mental structures.

One of the criticisms levelled against Bourdieu is that the notion of habitus, as an unconscious, internalised sense of the world that serves to reproduce the world through practice, does not leave much room for free will, social change or resistance (Ahearn, 2001:118; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:132 note 185). Bourdieu himself rejects this: “Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:133). For example, habitus (which influences hope and agency) can be transformed through *conscientização*, a term coined by Freire (1996) to refer to the process by which people come to be aware of the dispositions and structures that shape their lives. *Conscientização* (translated from Portuguese into English as “conscientization” or “consciousness raising”) is considered by many to be a key component of empowerment and community development; once people are aware of oppression and other structural factors they can begin to think, hope and act to change their circumstances. In fact, Bourdieu explains that one of the major functions of habitus is to bridge the gap between two opposing theories of human action: that humans either have unfettered agency (free will) or that human action is determined and constrained by external structures (2000:138). The ways we act and hope are created by social structures, as mentioned above, but as social actors we create, reproduce and transform society at the same time. This is the basis of Bourdieu’s theory of practice.

As well as overcoming the structure versus agency debate, this theory of practice also serves to circumvent the active / passive dichotomy surrounding discussions of hope. I am not convinced that thinking about agency with such a dichotomy (does one have it, or not?) is useful in analysing hope. I agree with Zigon when he contends that “hope cannot be rendered as an either / or, but instead should be considered in its shifting aspects of both / and” (2009:258). Zigon draws on the work of Talal Asad to show how both the passive and active aspects of hope are used to “live sanely in the world”, which he describes as “a creative process of living acceptably in the social world that is already there and in which one already finds oneself” (Zigon, 2009:259). In a similar vein, I show how my participants express agency as they embody, (re)create, and transform the structures that shape their lives.

In response to what she sees as omissions in Bourdieu’s work, notably how he has not theorised agency, Sherry Ortner (2006) has sought to extend practice theory by focusing on agency, power, and inequality. As Ortner explains, agency has two related spheres of meaning: it is about intention and desire, and it is also a form of power,

“about acting within relations of social inequality, asymmetry, and force” (2006:139). Ortner’s framework is useful for its emphasis on the “social embeddedness of agents” and the relations of power that social agents must negotiate (2006:130, 131), as I discuss further in Part II.

Agency is not just the property of individuals; it is also inherently social in that agents are always embedded in webs of relations with other agents and things. I argue that when women organise collectively they have greater agency (what I call ‘collective agency’) and more potential to affect the structures that shape their lives than they do as individuals. More active modes of hope, which involve strategic agency – what Ortner (2006:136) might term “agentive acts that intervene in the world with something in mind (or in heart)” and that involve negotiating power relations – are also inherently social. I believe that women organising collectively build collective hope, which Valerie Braithwaite describes as “hope that is genuinely and critically shared by a group” (2004:7). McGeer extends this definition: “While it builds on individual or private hopes, shared hopes become collective when individuals see themselves as hoping and so acting in concert for ends that they communally endorse” (2004:125). However, relations of power need to be taken into account when considering collective agency and collective hope. Power, agency and hope are not distributed equally within societies or groups. As Courville and Piper point out, the term ‘collective hope’ can obscure minority views and the hopes of a group can sometimes impinge on the hopes of individuals within that group (2004:41). Groups within society also have competing hopes: “For example, the hopes of members of the hill tribes in northwest Thailand for recognition and enforcement by governments of their human rights are very different from the hopes of mainstream Thai society that seek to exclude the hill tribes from rights associated with citizenship” (Courville & Piper, 2004:41). Those with more power can exert their will over those with less power, for instance by campaigning against and preventing hill tribe members from obtaining Thai citizenship.

I am interested in how women organising for development sustain collective action and collective hope in the context of urban poverty. I worked with women and men who are actively involved with grassroots organisations, extraordinary people who are engaged in a vital struggle for life. The women who lead these groups stand out because of their agency, energy, and enthusiasm, and I use practice theory to understand the relationships between their hopes, collective practices, and wider cultural, social, and historical factors (such as gender discrimination, poverty and colonialism). However these women are not representative of all those living in urban poverty: as I said, they are *extraordinary*. I find them extraordinary because of who I am, how I engage with the field, and the criteria by which I gauge what they do to transform their lives, and my interest in them reflects that. Although some of my

research participants described themselves as without hope (including, to my surprise, a prominent social activist), suggesting that hope is not a necessary component of agency, they nevertheless continue to act. I did not work with the thousands of men and women living in urban poverty whose daily struggles for survival (which can involve strategic agency) do not leave room for social activism, not because they are ordinary but because as an engaged anthropologist I was looking for engaged individuals in the field. I did wonder, though, about the connections between poverty, agency, and hopelessness.

Hopelessness, like hope, is difficult to define. Some of the concepts that are regularly associated with hopelessness include alienation, depression, despair, disengagement, grief, and indifference. As Crapanzano points out, humans have an exceptional resilience to hopelessness and despair: “Think of the hope-in-hopelessness, as magical as it appear to be, of the prisoners in Auschwitz, of the millions in Africa who are being destroyed by starvation and internecine war, and of the tribal peoples of the Amazon who face extinction because of a few thousand acres of forest” (2003:15). Clearly, developing a sense of hopelessness is no easy feat.

Hopelessness represents a state of existence without intentional agency, without interest in the future, and without investment in the social world. “Without hope what is left is *death* – the death of spirit, the death of life – where there is no longer any sense of regeneration and renewal,” writes Zournazi (2002:16). The “living death” she ascribes to those without hope certainly sums up the situation of the Ik of northern Uganda as portrayed by Colin Turnbull in his harrowing ethnography, *The Mountain People* (1972/1994). Turnbull describes the rapid and devastating social disintegration experienced by the Ik, former hunter-gatherers who were forced to relocate and encouraged into farming when their traditional hunting grounds were turned into a national park. Having no skills or interest in agriculture, and faced with a drought, the Ik began slow physical and social deaths. Turnbull’s descriptions and conclusions are shocking.¹⁰ He argues that poverty and starvation led the Ik to focus purely on survival, which meant abandoning “useless appendages” such as family, love and hope, with the result that “they live on as a people without life, without passion, beyond humanity” (Turnbull, 1972/1994:289, 295). Nancy Scheper-Hughes has discussed how Turnbull’s work was “largely ignored and discredited by his peers,” suggesting that he suffered the consequences of breaking the “taboo of silence on hunger” (1992:132, 133). She provides evidence to show that acute hunger does not necessarily lead to hopelessness and “the shedding of society, culture, and all social sanctions”, including the behaviour of rural Irish during the potato famine of 1845-1849, and her own analysis of starvation

¹⁰ Contrary to Turnbull’s predictions, the Ik did not die out and have been very critical of Turnbull’s harsh representation of their society (see Abraham, 2002).

in the Alto do Cruzeiro as the “primary motivating force in social life” (Scheper-Hughes, 1992:135).

The relationship between poverty, agency and hope is complex. Poverty and the things that accompany it (such as hunger) can be the basis for agency, as it is for the women described in this thesis who actively labour to change their circumstances. In other cases poverty can lead to a sense of hopelessness, as it did for the Ik. As McGeer put it, “To live a life devoid of hope is simply not to live a human life; it is not to function – or, tragically, it is to cease to function – as a human being” (2004:101). Hope is integral to *being* and our resilience and agency in the face of hopelessness is impressive, even if the ways in which we re-engage with the social world might not be welcomed by all. Discussing the phenomenon of Palestinian suicide bombers, Hage writes that hopelessness and social death, characterised by the inability to dream a meaningful life, can both cause “the classically squashed postcolonial culture of despair, resignation, and alcoholism” and provide the conditions for martyr cultures and suicide bombing as a meaningful activity – *illusio*, discussed in the next section – to emerge (2003b:79). Sustaining motivation and hope in context of poverty (or other bleak social situations) can sometimes mean the difference between life and death.

Hope and being

“The future depends on what we do in the present.”

– Mahatma Gandhi

Hope is almost always conceptualised as future-oriented. Our relationship to the future is important and it is one that takes place *in the present*. The present is more than a fleeting moment in time; it is the space, place and way in which we think about and live in the world that is informed by the past, by current social and physical actualities, and that looks toward the future. Bourdieu describes the present as “the set of those things to which one is present, in other words, in which one is interested (as opposed to indifferent, or absent),” and suggests that it encompasses “practical anticipations and retrospections” that give it a sense of potential, of things to come (2000:210). It is not always easy for researchers to access the present, as Hirokazu Miyazaki points out in his discussion on the ways in which various philosophers and phenomenologists have approached it (2004:18-24). Miyazaki accesses the present by focusing on the prospective momentum inherent in hope and what that suggests about the self-knowledge and practices of the Suvavou people of Fiji. I share Brian Massumi and Mary Zournazi’s belief that hope is most interesting and useful when it is placed in the present (Zournazi, 2002:211). As Hage explains, the future can be detected in the “unfolding of the present,” and the nature of our hope depends upon the relationship we have with the future (2003a:10). I view hope as a historically informed way of

engaging in the present with a world that is not yet here, and argue that how we hope reveals a lot about our mode of being in the world.

My argument builds on ideas Hage has put forward in his work on Bourdieu, being and hope; primarily his assertion that hope is both a symptom and a causal element of being.¹¹ As I understand it, Bourdieu's concept of being refers to a meaningful human life, one's sense of identity, significance and purpose, and is something that we all struggle to accumulate throughout our lifetimes. However, being is not created and distributed equally: "While some people inherit 'a lot of being', others have to scrape at the bottom of the barrel to get even a bit of being," writes Hage (2003a:16). If we think of hope as a symptom of being, then focusing on how people hope (as it is shaped by *habitus*) is a useful way of understanding the nature of our being. For example, in Hage's terms the hopes of an illiterate Muslim woman living in poverty in one of Kolkata's slums indicate a different mode of being to that of an educated Hindu woman living in an affluent area of the same city with hopes of her own. More hope can lead to more being, and those with less hope can sometimes feel their lives are less meaningful.

Bourdieu's conceptual tools of *illusio* and capital are useful for understanding how people accumulate being. *Illusio* refers to our interest in the social world, "a fundamental belief in the interest of the game and the value of the stakes which is inherent in that membership" (Bourdieu, 2000:11). 'The game' is another term Bourdieu uses for 'fields', which are "the various spheres of life, art, science, religion, the economy, the law, politics and so on, [which] tend to form distinct microcosms endowed with their own rules, regularities, and forms of authority" (Wacquant, 2008:268). *Illusio*, Bourdieu tells us, "is that way of *being in* the world, of being occupied with the world, which means that an agent can be affected by something very distant, even absent, if it participates in the game in which he is engaged" (2000:135). People cultivate being through social investment, by "being occupied, projected towards goals, and feeling oneself objectively, and therefore subjectively, endowed with a social mission," says Bourdieu (2000:240).

Hage links *illusio* to hope through the concept of *societal hope*. Hage shows that hope "is the way we construct a meaningful future for ourselves", and since Bourdieu sees society primarily as a mechanism for generating meanings for life,¹² "such futures are only possible within society, because society is the distributor of social

¹¹ This was a point he made during his presentation in the panel "Hope: toward an anthropology of anticipation" at the 104th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association held in Washington, D.C. in 2005.

¹² Another mechanism for generating meanings for life is, of course, religious faith. Although Bourdieu's view that life has no intrinsic meaning obviously differs from that found in religious thought, his idea that society offers routes for generating being is not, to my mind, incompatible with it. The desire to live good Christian or Muslim lives in the present, for example, cannot be separated from the societies in which we live and the social relations we build with others.

opportunities for self-realisation. We can call this hope societal hope” (Hage, 2003a:15, 16). Societal hope refers to the societal routes available for people to pursue meaningful and dignified social lives. It is about “one’s sense of the possibilities that life can offer, [and] is not necessarily related to an income level. Its enemy is a sense of entrapment, of having nowhere to go, not a sense of poverty” (Hage, 2003a:20). As well as distributing societal hope, Hage suggests that societies also act as mechanisms for distributing *social hope*. Social hope “does not refer only to these societal routes for self-realisation,” it is also a historically acquired disposition brought about by certain social conditions that allow feelings of hopefulness to flourish (Hage, 2003a:23). Social and societal hope, like being, are generated and distributed unequally within societies.

A primary way in which people invest in the social world is by pursuing and deploying different types of capital. There are three main species of capital: economic (financial and material assets), cultural (dispositions, know-how, information, scarce symbolic goods, cultural goods, skills and titles) and social (relationships, the sum of the resources accrued by virtue of membership in a network or group) (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:119; Wacquant, 2008:268; Hage, 2009). These different forms of capital become resources in a given social space or field, and one type of capital (say, cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications) can enhance or be transformed into another (economic capital in the form of earning power). We all labour to accumulate capital – it is what gives meaning to our lives, and our hopes often direct the type of capital we pursue – but it also has to be recognised by others as being valuable and worth striving for. This is the idea of symbolic capital, the amount of social recognition we gain by accumulating different types of capital (Hage, 2009). “Each person accumulates whatever gives them a buzz in life, but what they choose is determined by their circumstances – that’s ultimately what capital is for Bourdieu,” Hage explains (in Zournazi, 2002:153). Bourdieu’s concept of capital is useful because it captures more than economic capital; it is an economistic metaphor for *being*. The more capital we accumulate, the more being we acquire, and the more hope we have. The opposite does not necessarily hold true, however. For those whose circumstances are constrained by the structural disadvantages of poverty or gender, capital can be much harder to accumulate and they find fewer social opportunities available to them, but as I discuss in Part I, less capital and being does not always lead to less hope.

To recap my argument so far, I have suggested that how people hope reveals a lot about their being, and Bourdieu’s conceptual tools are useful in understanding being because they allow us to explore what people invest in (*illusio*) and what they strive to accumulate (capital). His notion of habitus helps us understand how people go about acquiring *being*, and practice theory is useful in understanding the relationship between hope, agency, and historical sociocultural structures. The next

step in developing an anthropology of hope, as Hage suggests in his conversation with Mary Zournazi, is to find categories with which we can empirically study the pursuit of being (Zournazi, 2002:160). I believe that development is an object of study well suited to an anthropology of hope.

Approaching hope through development

With its focus on social change, development provides a way of engaging, in the present, with a hoped-for future of social justice and equality. In this section I argue that the idea of development is a hopeful one that offers alternative pathways for accumulating being. Building on work by Hage, Pieter de Vries (2007), James Ferguson (1990/1994) and Monique Nuijten (1998), I show that development is a mechanism for generating and distributing hope within societies. I call this hope *development hope*.

In societies around the world, there are those with less capital (less wealth, less education, and fewer social opportunities) than others. Hage argues that capitalist societies “are characterised by a deep inequality in their distribution of hope, and when such inequality reaches an extreme, certain groups are not offered any hope at all” (2003a:17, 20).¹³ It is not hard to think of groups offered little hope, from the homeless drug addicts of San Francisco whose stories Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg document in *Righteous Dopefiends* (2009) to the street children of Delhi, Port Moresby, Rio de Janeiro or Zambia. The historical, sociocultural, economic, and political circumstances that shape their lives provide few pathways for accumulating capital and being, and any societal options that are available can be hindered by the perceptions and attitudes of others. For instance, I met people in Kolkata who could not understand why I was interested in working with Muslim women living in *bastis*, commenting that “they will never get out of poverty.” The poor and disenfranchised have a surplus of things (poverty, hunger, suffering) that are not valued or pursued; in other words, they have no symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, “One of the most unequal of all distributions, and probably, in any case, the most cruel, is the distribution of symbolic capital, that is, of social importance and of reasons for living” (2000:240-241). He goes on to say that “Conversely, there is no worse dispossession, no worse privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being, in a word, to humanity” (Bourdieu, 2000:241). The people whose circumstances afford them the least amount of capital, and who are offered little societal or social hope, can nevertheless build meaningful lives by investing in development.

¹³ Appadurai makes a similar point in discussing how “the capacity to aspire” is not distributed evenly in any society (2004:68).

Earlier, I alluded to the fact that development is a highly contested concept. The term 'development' takes on so many different meanings in different contexts (what Ernesto Laclau might call a "floating signifier"¹⁴) that any attempt to provide a definition more precise than I already have would be fruitless. Instead, I introduce three related themes arising from my research and the literature on development that are central to my argument: the *idea of development*, *vehicles of development*, and *development hope*.

The *idea of development*¹⁵ rests on the notion that the world in which we live now is not how it ought to be – it is filled with social injustice, inequalities, suffering, and the sources of "unfreedom" described by Sen (1999) – and that directed social change will contribute to achieving a desirable state of affairs in the future. Since Truman's 1949 speech, issues such as economic growth, poverty, education, and human rights (to shelter, food, security, health, freedom) have increasingly fallen under the mantle of development, notwithstanding the fact that 'development' itself is an ambiguous and malleable concept. There are conflicts over what goals should be pursued and whose values they reflect, how development should be achieved (the multitude of categories, theories, policies and techniques devised, practised, contested, reviewed and discarded in the past 60 years is astonishing), and who or what should be directing it.¹⁶ However, as Stephen Plant points out, those arguing about development all share a basic ideological kinship: "Whether they are Marxist ideologues or capitalist economists, anti-globalisation campaigners or officers of a Bretton-Woods institution, they share a belief in the desirability and achievability of human progress" (2009:849). They also share a commitment to achieving future change through development that stems from present inequalities (Nuijten, 2005:52). Discourses of development are often infused with notions of positive, active hope, as I discussed above, and even those critical of development tend to view it in terms of hope (as a hopeless endeavour, for example, or by placing their hopes in alternatives to development). Development is, ultimately, a "project of hope" (McKinnon, 2007:772).

¹⁴ Leonard Frank's cynical description of development as "... an empty word which can be filled by any user to conceal any hidden intention, a Trojan horse of a word ... A useful word, a bland word, a wicked word, a whore of a word" (1997:263) goes some way towards illustrating Laclau's concept of a floating signifier. Monique Nuijten makes a similar point in discussing how other buzzwords in development discourse, such as 'social capital' and 'sustainable livelihoods', are "'emptied' of ... theoretical meaning and the baggage of many years of academic discussion. It is as if the concept has been 'newly discovered' and the development specialists are the ones who have to give it meaning" (2005:53).

¹⁵ My notion of the 'idea of development' differs from what Robert Potter describes as 'development thinking', "a catch-all phrase indicating the sum total of ideas about development, that is, including pertinent aspects of development theory, strategy and ideology" (2002:62). Whereas 'development thinking' refers to the sets of ideas that arise with regard to the theory and practice of development, my term centres on the hopes, beliefs and desires inherent in development thinking.

¹⁶ Some key scholarly texts I found useful in gaining an overview of the idea of development include Cooper & Packard (1997), Desai & Potter (2002), Escobar (1995), Esteva (1992), McMichael (1996), Nederveen Pieterse (2001), Parfitt (2002), Parpart, Rai, & Staudt (2002), Rist (1997), Willis (2005) and Ziai (2007).

With *vehicles of development* I refer to the processes, practices and mechanisms through which actors invest in the idea of development. This includes: international agencies such as the World Bank, Oxfam, World Vision and the United Nations; international policies such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); government commitments to aid delivery in policy and programmes at home and overseas; local NGOs such as the Village Development Trust in PNG, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, and grassroots-level initiatives of the organisations described in this thesis; and academic and other training institutions (most universities in New Zealand, for example, have Development Studies departments¹⁷). Vehicles of development all reflect a commitment (in principle, at least) to the idea of development and to maintaining those deemed to have less hope, opportunity and being, as valued members of society.

Drawing on Hage, *development hope* is the term I give to the capacity for development, as idea and vehicle, to increase the sense of possibilities that life can offer and act as a mechanism for generating and distributing hope within societies. My notion of development hope extends Hage's ideas about societal hope and capitalist society to development. Hage argues that capitalist society produces and distributes hope by hegemonising "the ideological content of hope so it becomes almost universally equated with dreams of better-paid jobs, better lifestyles, more commodities, etc" (2003a:13). Development operates in a similar manner by equating social change, and the pathways to achieving it, with hope for a better future, hence the term *development hope*.

There is a wealth of literature available to suggest not only that development often fails to work as it was intended, but that it can also serve to reproduce the very inequalities it set out to change (see de Vries, 2007; Escobar, 1997; Ferguson, 1990/1994; Sachs, 1992). However, there are always enough success stories in circulation that serve to maintain what Hage (in describing how capitalist society produces and distributes hope for upward social mobility) terms "an *experience of the possibility*" of development (2003a:13). To borrow from Hage (2003a:14), the power of development hope is such that most people will live their lives believing in the possibility of development without necessarily experiencing it. Building on James Ferguson's work (which I discuss in the next section), Nuijten describes the development industry as a "hope-generating

¹⁷ The idea of development is not restricted to Development Studies. Anthropologists are also concerned with development in theory and practice, writing about (among other things) how and whether to engage with it (see Gardner & Lewis, 1996; Gow, 2002; Hausner, 2006; Mosse, 2005; and Stewart & Strathern, 2005). Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan holds the opinion that "In the perspective of anthropology of development, development is neither an ideal nor a catastrophe, it is above all an object of study" (2005:25).

machine" (1998, 2005). Although she does not delineate hope as a concept, her discussion of its generation supports my argument:

This generation of hope is related to a bureaucratic system in which all the time the limitations and failure of past programmes are admitted, together with projects that indicate the 'new way forward'. The 'hope-generating machine' suggests that now the 'missing factor' has finally been found, that the right knowledge is being produced and that things will be different from now on. In this way, the development bureaucracy continuously creates expectations. At the same time, many promises are never fulfilled.

(Nuijten, 2005:52)

de Vries (2007) makes a similar point in his argument that development should be conceptualised as a "desiring machine". Drawing on Ferguson's work to understand why people persist in believing in and desiring development in spite of all its failures, de Vries states that "the object of development is not its actualisation but that of sustaining the capacity to desire a different kind of society that is not yet defined" (2007:27). Regardless of whether or not hopes are fulfilled, in this thesis I show that development serves to increase the sense of the possibilities of life for people who otherwise might have little societal or social hope, to generate and distribute hope within societies, and to provide alternative pathways for the pursuit of meaningful, dignified lives.

At the start of this chapter I asked whether hope explains these women's continued motivation, or whether it was something in need of explanation. My answer is that it is both. Hope is a key theme of development, and development is an activity that urban poor women can and do invest in as part of their quest to generate more being and create more meaningful lives for themselves and their families. When they organise collectively they also generate collective hope and collective agency. However, their efforts for social change are not always successful, and hope needs explanation in the face of failure. This led me to the notion of the 'side effects' of development, which I discuss next.

The 'side effects' of development

The women I worked with succeed in achieving their goals sometimes, but they experience setbacks and disappointments and seem to spend more time 'getting by' than making progress. To an outsider like me such setbacks and stasis can, at first glance, be seen as failures. Since these women keep coming together regardless, I needed a fresh approach in order to understand what else was occurring through their collective efforts. I decided to be attentive to women's agency, which led me to focus on the processes and experiences of women organising collectively. As Sepoe explains, such a focus "urges an understanding of women's groups and organisations *in their own terms*; not as they are expected to be" (2000:132, emphasis in original). To

understand women's groups in their own terms, I took my cue from James Ferguson, an anthropologist well known for his work on international development.

In his book *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Ferguson describes development as a social entity in its own right, an apparatus comprised of "the set of "development" institutions, agencies and ideologies peculiar to our own age" (1990/1994:7). This apparatus creates a structure of knowledge (what Bourdieu might term *habitus*) around development that shapes the way we think about and practice it. Using a case study of a rural development project in Lesotho, Ferguson analyses how the development apparatus operates and shows that although planned development interventions typically fail, they also interact with "unacknowledged structures and chance events to produce unintended outcomes" – the 'side effects' of development (1990/1994:20-21).¹⁸ These 'side effects' include reproducing, expanding and entrenching bureaucratic state power and depoliticising economic and social life, hence the term "the anti-politics machine" (Ferguson, 1990/1994:xiv-xv). Taking Ferguson's concept in another direction to analyse how development operates as a "desiring machine", de Vries explains that Ferguson sees the development apparatus "as a machine-like kind of entity that reproduces itself by virtue of the unintended, unplanned, yet systematic side-effects it brings about" (2007:33).

For Ferguson, focusing on why development projects fail is the wrong approach. Instead, we should look at what they do *besides* fail, especially as what they achieve through their 'side effects' might be more important than intended consequences (Ferguson, 1990/1994:254; 1997).¹⁹ Although he does describe some unintended achievements of development projects in Lesotho that were not regarded as "failures", his main focus is to analyse development as an apparatus which uses poverty as an entry point for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power (Ferguson, 1990/1994:255). "Such a result may be no part of the planners' intentions – indeed, it almost never is – but resultant systems have an intelligibility of their own," he tells us (Ferguson, 1990/1994:256). Here is where my approach extends Ferguson's in a more hopeful direction. My research focuses on what these women achieve in the process of organising collectively for social change, and I take my cue from Ferguson to look at the 'side effects' that emerge as they strive towards fulfilling their hopes and reaching their intended goals. However, rather than analyse the development apparatus and its operation, I shift the focus back to the people involved

¹⁸ These 'side effects' are different to what Olivier de Sardan has called "sidetracking". 'Sidetracking' is a result of the interaction between expectations and reality which takes development projects in a different direction than intended, and is a risk to be minimised (2005:142, 145, 206).

¹⁹ Tania Li (2007) has also studied the rationale, implementation processes and unintended consequences of improvement programmes in Indonesia, arguing that analysing what such programmes fail to do opens new possibilities for inquiry, understanding and practice.

in grassroots-led development, in particular their intentions and the processes they engage in as they struggle to create better, more meaningful lives for themselves and their families. The actions and hopes of these women are shaped by social structures, as I discussed in the previous section, and some of their actions serve to reproduce those structures. However, as social actors we create and transform society as well as reproduce it, and an approach that takes this into account is better placed to reflect the intentions and experiences of women involved in grassroots development initiatives.

In order to understand what sustains action in the face of adversity and failure, I needed to identify what else these women's collective efforts do. I found inspiration in the work of feminist economic geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006), whose commitment to being open to possibilities and rejecting the idea that social experiments are doomed to fail or reinforce dominance appealed to me as it seemed to echo the attitudes of the women I worked with. I show that investing in these groups, and in the idea of development, is an important side effect that becomes a meaningful activity in and of itself, regardless of whether the women succeed in achieving the objective of their collective organisation. Hage reminds us that Bourdieu's conception of social life encompasses the chase as well as the quarry: "... there is a happiness in activity which exceeds the visible profits – wage, prize or reward – and which consists in the fact of emerging from indifference (or depression), being occupied, projected towards goals, and feeling oneself objectively, and therefore subjectively, endowed with a social mission" (Hage, 2003a:134; see also Bourdieu, 2000:240). Bourdieu continues: "To be expected, solicited, overwhelmed with obligations and commitments is not only to be snatched from solitude or insignificance, but also to experience, in the most continuous and concrete way, the feeling of counting for others, being *important* for them, and therefore in oneself, and finding in the permanent plebiscite of testimonies of interest – requests, expectations, invitations – a kind of continuous justification for existing" (2000:240).

However, failure also plays an important role in hope and development (as I established above with the help of Ferguson, Nuijten and de Vries), and therefore I do not discard it entirely. In the words of V. Ramaswamy, social activist and founder of one of the organisations I worked with in Kolkata, "everyone should have the right to failure". The women's hopes and actions change over time in response to failure as well as success, and they need to replenish their investment in the idea of development when history and experience suggest that their efforts for social change might not work. Development is a process, not just an end point, and even when it fails the experience of organising for social change can be transformative of itself. As Samuel Beckett expressed it: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (1983:7).

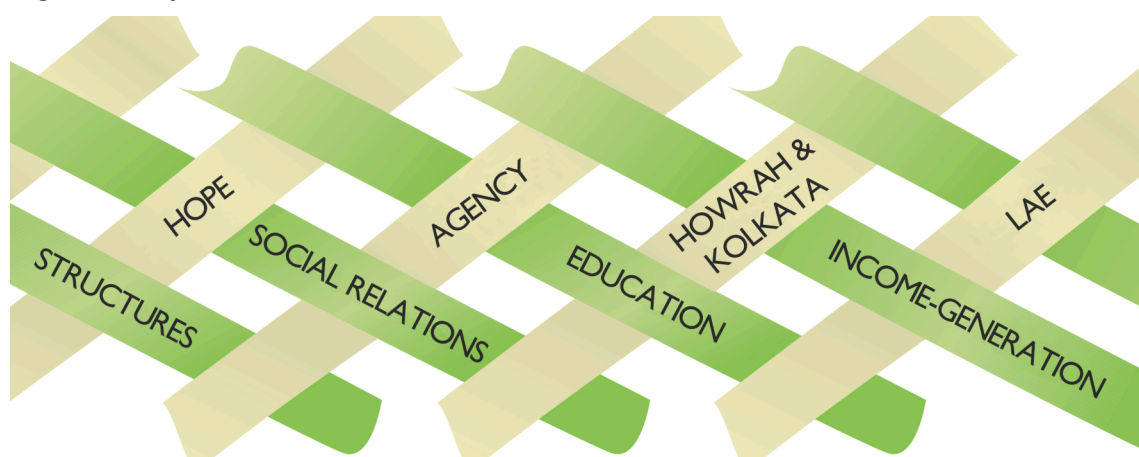
To summarise: hope, agency, empowerment, solidarity, confidence, and support (spiritual, social and emotional) in the face of failure and adversity, are all ‘side effects’ of development that play an important role in sustaining collective action. Approaches to development that are open to and value such ‘side effects’ can provide an alternative reading of success and failure in women’s efforts to organise collectively.

Thesis outline

The chapter following this Introduction, entitled ‘Étude: Variations on a Comparative Research Theme’, describes the major methodological decisions I made during this research process. I discuss why and how I focused on women organising as a unit of analysis, describe how I conducted my fieldwork, discuss the issues involved in designing a framework for comparative analysis, and explain how I present my research data and structure this thesis.

The remainder of the thesis is divided into three Parts addressing key themes (see Figure 1). Parts I and II contain an introduction, two chapters discussing key themes as they arise in each place, and conclude with a comparative analysis. Part III contains four chapters describing my case studies bracketed with an introduction and comparative discussion. I adopted this approach because it recognises complexity, accommodates competing ideas, and can lead to a greater appreciation of difference as well as commonalities.

Figure 1. Key themes within this thesis



These threads represent the central themes of this thesis. I used a weaving image to illustrate the interconnected ways in which they arise within each chapter.

Source: Lorena Gibson, graphic created by Corinne Gibson

Part I focuses on the historical conjunctures that contributed to the physical and social spaces (habitats) occupied by the women I worked with. Drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, habitat and capital, I show how urban *bastis* and settlements are products of history that affect the ways in which women organise collectively to create

meaningful lives for themselves and their families. Chapter 1 demonstrates how poverty, perhaps the most famous urban feature of Kolkata and Howrah, is not the only story these cities have to tell, and argues that we must take historical conjunctures into account in any attempt to understand and explain the present. Chapter 2 takes us to Papua New Guinea, where I discuss how colonial administration and roads shaped the social and physical landscapes of PNG and Lae. Part I concludes by comparing how different historical conjunctures have affected the ways in which hope is locally contextualised.

Part II addresses the historical and cultural work involved in distributing hope and agency within society. Utilising Ortner's (2006) concept of "serious games", I show that historically and culturally constructed relations of power and inequality are central to the ways in which my participants hope and act. Chapter 3 explores how women's groups have become positioned as the most effective vehicles of development for women in PNG and highlights the wider relations of power and inequality they must negotiate. Chapter 4 challenges the perception that Islam is the reason for the low social status of Muslim women in India and shows that structural disadvantages of poverty and gender play bigger roles in shaping their lives. Part II concludes by comparing how relations of power and inequality affect the distribution of hope and agency in PNG and India.

My participants' voices, practices and experiences are central to, but largely absent from, Parts I and II. In order to keep them in sight, I have inserted a second narrative strand in the form of "Interludes". These interludes offer short, reflexive vignettes between chapters that ground the issues discussed in my data and research experiences.

Part III discusses the four organisations I worked with during my research. Drawing on the conceptual framework outlined in this Introduction, it focuses on my participants' practices as they work to transform their lives and shows how collective hope and agency emerge as 'side effects' of their development initiatives. Chapter 5 describes how volunteer teachers at Talimi Haq School, Howrah Pilot Project's central activity, strive to create brighter futures for children from some of the poorest households in Priya Manna Basti in Howrah. Chapter 6 focuses on Rehnuma-e-Niswaan, another grassroots organisation led by a Muslim woman, discussing Tabassum's determination to provide vocational training to girls and women living in Narkeldanga *basti* in Kolkata city in the face of social and financial hardship. Moving to PNG, Chapter 7 tells the story of Tensiti Literacy Programme, which began as a women's group but has since expanded to provide nonformal education to children and men as well as women in one of Lae's peri-urban settlements. Chapter 8 describes Butibam Women's Flower Group, the newest of the four organisations, recounting the

initial activities this group of women had undertaken as they formed a collective income-generating enterprise in Lae. Part III concludes by drawing together the central themes of this thesis. It discusses the relationship between structure, agency, and hope, suggests that the 'side effects' of development are lodged in social relations, and contends that social relations are the basis for sustaining collective action.

In the Coda I review the key contributions this thesis makes to understandings of hope, agency, and the 'side effects' of development and make suggestions for further research.

ÉTUDE

Variations on a comparative research theme

Anthropology, a discipline dedicated to understanding the full range of human experience from as many perspectives as possible, has always been comparative. This comparative aspect was one of the things that initially captured my attention and imagination as an undergraduate student. I became interested in understanding how issues that affect humans everywhere – such as poverty, inequality and development – appear in different contexts. I believe that to better debate such issues, we need to understand people's processes and practices as well as context-specific structures of history, environment, society and culture. International development policies such as the Millennium Development Goals or assumptions about universal human rights can cause friction when they are embedded in, but are not responsive to, local realities. Careful comparative analysis can add to knowledge about development and social change by informing debates and contributing to better local, national and international policies and strategies. As Chandra Mohanty points out, "It is on the basis of such context-specific differentiated analysis that effective political strategies can be generated" (1988:75).

In this chapter I reflect on the major methodological decisions I made in undertaking this comparative study (*étude*). New Zealand composer John Psathas's description of his craft also expresses how I feel about recreating my research process:

Composing for me is essentially a re-travelling of a journey that begins with 'any conceivable thing is possible at this moment' and concludes with, 'it couldn't be anything but this'.

(Psathas, 2003)

First I describe the factors that led to my decision to focus on women organising, how I conceptualised the organisations as bounded case studies, and how I recruited participants in Kolkata, Howrah, and Lae. Second, I discuss how I carried out my fieldwork, including the pros and cons of repeated short-term visits. Third, I discuss the methods I used to generate material for comparison and the variations arising from fieldwork in different sites. Fourth, I describe how I designed a framework for comparative analysis. I conclude by explaining how I present my research data.

Early decisions: research focus, case studies, participants

The first decision concerned my research focus. I have long been interested in women's groups, gender relations and education. Having experienced the sense of empowerment that can come from involvement in women's groups in New Zealand, I am interested in the experiences of other women both at home and overseas. Recognising that women do not exist in a social vacuum I am also concerned with the ways in which social norms and gender relations are negotiated (see, for example, Gibson, 2003). My interest in the potentially transformative power of education developed after I had to abandon my previous career as a secretary due to repetitive strain injury. I left high school early to become a secretary so it was a challenge to reassess my goals. With the encouragement and support of friends and family I enrolled at university as an adult student, a move that has been life-changing (not least by providing me with access to new forms of cultural, social and economic capital).

In considering a topic that would sustain my interest and passion, I kept thinking of the women's literacy group I met at Gapsongkeg village in 2001. I felt that doctoral research would provide a good opportunity to revisit those women to learn more about them and the experiences of others in similar grassroots organisations. A project of this nature fit well with my desire as a feminist to produce meaningful research that would benefit women. After spending time in Papua New Guinea and India I also knew that it would be easier and more socially acceptable for me, as a lone female researcher, to interact with female rather than male participants. My research interests and these factors contributed to my decision to focus on organisations led by women and the processes involved in organising collectively.

My next task involved conceptualising women-led organisations, and women organising, as objects of study. For the purpose of analysis, I created a loose and artificial boundary around the organisations and treated them as case studies. I sought to learn all I could about the organisations, the women involved with them, and the contexts in which they operate. According to Sally Moore, choosing to treat organising practices and processes as an object of fieldwork, and taking the wider context into account, are "two major tendencies in contemporary anthropology" (2005:9). Of course, participating in these groups is not all that these women do, and the groups themselves are not bounded entities but are enmeshed in larger social relations. I was interested in all aspects of these women's lives and with events occurring in each place, but I opted to limit my attention to only those processes and activities directly related to the case studies. My aim was to keep my project manageable and to collect comparable data about each case study, and I reflect on how successful I was later in this chapter.

While my decision to focus on case studies was deliberate, approaching organisations and groups to participate in my research was a more flexible process.

During my visit to Howrah and Kolkata in 2004 my supervisor introduced me to women from Howrah Pilot Project and Rehnuma-e-Niswaan. These organisations are described in Part III, and it is worth repeating that the women leading them were not selected to represent all Muslim women in Kolkata or Howrah. Since both organisations ran initiatives involving education and income generation, and more importantly because the women coordinating them agreed to take part in my project, I designed my research to focus on these two themes.

Recruiting participants in Lae was not as straightforward. I visited Lae in 2005 with the intention of gauging local interest in my project and identifying organisations that also ran educational and income generating initiatives. I met with thirteen such organisations in 2005 and on subsequent visits in 2006 and 2007, including the women's literacy group at Gapsongkeg village. Although many of the women agreed to participate after an initial meeting with me, it often proved difficult to arrange further visits to confirm participation and gather information.¹ In 2006 I considered abandoning Lae as a site and redesigning my research to focus exclusively on the case studies in Howrah and Kolkata, but given the proliferation of women's groups in Lae I decided to persevere and adjust my comparative approach if necessary. It was not until my last visit in 2007 that I met with Tensiti Literacy Programme and Butibam Women's Flower Group, the two case studies described in Part III. In this respect selecting case studies in Lae was somewhat arbitrary in that the women were willing to work with me and I was able to work with them. However none of the groups are arbitrary in relation to my interest in women organising to improve their lives through education and income generating initiatives.

Periodic fieldwork with an “anthropological attitude”

Anthropological fieldwork can take many forms, from the hallmark research technique of participant-observation whereby the anthropologist lives with the people being studied (near or far from home) for an extended period of time, to the short-term, open ended, periodic trips to different sites that characterised my research, and even to

¹ There are many reasons for this, as the following examples show. A friend introduced me to a school that her family ran in a settlement for children from poor households. I visited in 2006, immediately saw similarities with Talimi Haq School in Howrah (see Chapter 5), and invited them to participate in my project. They agreed, but when I returned in 2007 my friend had moved to Goroka. I could not find research assistants willing to accompany me to what was reputed to be Lae's most violent and dangerous settlement so was unable to feature the school as a case study. With other groups complications arose over transport or suitable meeting times. In one instance a NGO coordinator changed her mind about participating in my research without directly telling me. After she accepted my invitation, I visited some of the women involved in her organisations' initiatives and saw many similarities with Rehnuma-e-Niswaan in Kolkata. We made plans for future meetings but she missed our appointments and did not return my calls. A mutual friend later told me that the woman said she did not see what her organisation would gain from participating in my research and she did not have time to accommodate me. I understand and respect her decision not to participate, although I am sorry that she did not feel able to tell me in person. I can only speculate, but I think it is reasonable to assume that the power relations underlying my status as a foreign researcher played a role in this encounter.

what Bruce Kapferer describes as “fieldworking” ethnographic materials rather than taking a hands-on approach (2000:188). I like how Kapferer views fieldwork as an “attitude,” a complex and in-depth exercise “that simultaneously generates doubt in taken-for-granted understandings and invites the extension towards new possibilities” and involves “a radical reorientation in perspective” (2000:189). Throughout the different phases of my research (from initial planning to fieldwork to data analysis and writing), and in all the methods I used, I remained consistent in approaching my topic with a critical and reflexive “anthropological attitude.” In this section I describe how I conducted periodic fieldwork with this attitude.

My research is based on repeated visits to Howrah, Kolkata and Lae. I made initial six week ‘politeness trips’ to each city in 2004 and 2005 to gauge whether there was any local interest in my project prior to starting the research proper, a gesture that was well received by people there. Between 2005 and 2007 I made two more trips of seven to eight weeks in length to each country to conduct fieldwork. In total, I spent five months in Howrah/Kolkata and five months in Lae. I decided this type of periodic, open ended fieldwork would be best suited to the nature of my topic, especially as I wanted to see how the groups I worked with evolved over time and what sort of changes the women experienced. My approach is in keeping with many contemporary anthropologists (e.g. Andrews, 2005; Li, 2007; Tsing, 2005) who, for a variety of reasons, no longer immerse themselves in one geographic location for a year or longer, a practice that once characterised anthropology as a discipline.

Interestingly, several anthropologists I spoke with expressed polite concern about my approach, suggesting it would sacrifice ethnographic depth and that perhaps I should drop a fieldsite in order to do “real ethnography” in one place. Their point, I believe, was that anthropology is based on ethnographic knowledge, and in order to obtain that depth of understanding one needs to spend a considerable amount of time in the field. Multi-sited researchers frequently discuss the issue of depth (see Hannerz, 2003, and Falzon, 2009a). “One of the most commonly cited scepticisms about conducting fieldwork in several sites, is that it compromises one’s ability to understand a single context in sufficient depth,” writes Cindy Horst. “This clearly leads to questions about the value of the research, and questions on whether it deserves to be called ‘ethnography’ at all” (Horst, 2009:125). Like Cordula Weißköppel, I felt uncertain about my approach and learnt to “defend the quality of my data, even if it was of a different quality” (2009:260).

While I agree that the kind of knowledge produced through ethnographic fieldwork is important, I also think that the “anthropological attitude” with which we approach our work is just as vital in constructing anthropological knowledge. My research is ethnographic in that it is based on participant-observation, building rapport,

gaining trust, developing relationships, learning the right questions to ask, and “fieldworking” not only the sites but also secondary materials and my fieldnotes and data upon my return home. Hage suggests that “thick ethnography is not a matter of choice but a function of one’s degree of immersion” (2005:465), and I fully immersed myself in the research process to make the most of each fieldwork visit. My short-term stays meant I encountered different details, and the knowledge I have produced is different from, but just as valuable as, what might have emerged from a long-term stint.

Making short, repeated visits allowed me to build relationships over time – which I attempted to continue from New Zealand via email, phone and letter – and it meant my participants could schedule me into their lives knowing that I would be making demands on their time for just a few weeks. It also allowed me to fulfil family and work commitments at home, to work on my Bengali and *tok Pisin* skills between visits, to think about and reflect on my experiences and potential lines of inquiry, and to make sure I was emotionally, physically and analytically prepared to work with people living in poor, environmentally degraded, and sometimes heartbreaking circumstances. This approach had its drawbacks, however. Airfares from New Zealand to Papua New Guinea and India are expensive and travel costs quickly consumed a large proportion of my research budget. It took months to acquire a research visa for Papua New Guinea, weeks for me to move mentally from ‘fieldwork mode’ to ‘analysis mode’ upon returning home from each country, and more time again to prepare for the next trip. I found it difficult to keep in touch with all but one of the organisations I worked with (parcels I sent never arrived; letters did arrive but I received few in return). Not keeping up with the political and economic contexts in each country is also a disadvantage. I follow online newspapers and blogs but it is not the same as seeing reactions on the ground.

For me, the biggest drawback was that my approach did not allow me to become the kind of engaged anthropologist I aspire to be. I admire the work of anthropologists such as Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992), Paul Farmer (2003) and Beatriz Manz (2004) who actively work to help communities through and alongside their research. As a feminist I am also committed to undertaking research that aims to “make a difference” and I wanted to produce knowledge that would, in some way, be of use to my participants. Margery Wolf expressed it well when she said that feminist anthropologists “search for a way to do ethnographic research that not only will not exploit other women but will have positive effects on their lives” (1992:52). Originally I wanted to involve my participants in designing my research and I had visions of carrying out an action research project similar to the ones described by Mark Nichter (2006) and J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006). However, designing such a project takes more time than I had in each visit and I found that the women were actually not that

interested in my action research ideas; they were busy enough already. Nevertheless my participants were donating time and energy to a research project that would ultimately benefit me, and they (quite rightly) wanted to know what I could give them in exchange.

The question “how can you help us?” is often put to researchers working with marginalised populations (see Abbott, 1998, and Diversi & Finley, 2010), and I expected it, but my answers felt inadequate. After explaining what researchers do I said that I would write and talk about their activities to raise awareness about the problems they face and what they had achieved, and present my findings to politicians and policymakers in the hopes of fostering financial or other kinds of support for groups like theirs. I also asked a question of my own: “What would you like help with?” While I could not fulfil many of their requests,² I was able to assist by identifying potential funding sources, completing funding applications in English, and using my status as a foreigner (which is usually associated with wealth) to help an organisation in its efforts to secure premises to rent. I donated a laptop to a social activist in Kolkata to pass on to an organisation of his choosing, made modest financial contributions to most groups I met, and installed and continue to pay for an internet connection at Talimi Haq School (Howrah Pilot Project’s central activity and the subject of Chapter 5). I am in regular email contact with Amina (who coordinates Howrah Pilot Project) and Binod (Amina’s second-in-command), and frequently share my writing with them so they can use it in speeches or funding applications. I also organised a networking excursion for Butibam Women’s Flower Group in response to a need they had identified for more training (see Chapter 8).

Fieldwork variations in India and Papua New Guinea

This section describes my methods, the data I collected, and the fieldwork variations I experienced in each site. The differences between and within Kolkata, Howrah and Lae called for flexible research methods. My main tools were participant-observation, interviews (formal, semi-structured, and informal) and focus groups. Other methods included: taking photos and giving copies to participants; attending meetings; going on school outings; visiting local libraries and resource centres; meeting with similar organisations; presenting my work at seminars in India, Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand to obtain feedback on the ideas I developed (my version of what Annette Lareau (1996:227) calls “consulting the academy”); organising

² Most requests involved money and opportunities for trade. Some groups wanted long-term funding for teacher’s salaries, and men from one settlement in Lae wanted me to start a business exporting their handicrafts to New Zealand and Australia. I felt that being a woman from a comparatively wealthy country put me in a particular frame of reference in postcolonial India and PNG, and noticed a wide gap between expectations of me and my own more limited capabilities, resources, and interests.

workshops and nursery tours in Lae; and teaching an introductory social anthropology class at Talimi Haq School (see Interlude 1 below).

In order to generate material for comparison, and to alleviate my uncertainty about studying something as complex as hope, I standardised my data collection processes as much as possible. Before and during fieldwork trips I made lists of questions to ask and themes to investigate in both countries. I developed semi-structured interviews and asked the same questions of participants. I also asked more specific questions based on local issues and ran focus groups tailored to each context. Because of my interest in processes and 'side effects', I was open to participating in and observing everything that seemed relevant to the groups' initiatives and also took other opportunities presented to me (such as attending weddings and festivals) that proved serendipitous. I learnt about the organisations' histories and the ways in which gender, faith, poverty, class, social norms, family expectations and tribal hierarchies influenced people's actions. I designed a fieldnote template with subheadings in order to take consistent fieldnotes and keep descriptions and observations separate from personal reflections. My data took the form of recorded and transcribed interviews and focus group discussions, fieldnotes (hundreds of electronic files alongside a stack of handwritten notebooks), emails and letters, photographs, newspaper clippings, notes on feedback from seminars, memories (see Andrews, 2005, Manz, 2004, or Wikan, 1996 for discussions of the role of memory, and Ottenberg, 1990 for a discussion of what he terms "headnotes" in anthropological fieldwork), and transcribed recordings of the anthropology class at Talimi Haq School.

One of my biggest fieldwork variations involved working with local research assistants, which I sought to do in each place. On my first two visits to Lae I employed Pauline Komolong and Polang Tommy, fieldworkers for the Community Development Scheme.³ On my third visit I employed Bing Sawanga and enlisted the help of Wendy Pala, who are introduced in Chapter 2. These people played an important role in shaping the direction of my research by setting up meetings, organising transport, translating when necessary, reflecting on meetings and interviews afterwards, and making suggestions about people to meet and lines of inquiry to follow. In Kolkata I was fortunate that the founder and coordinator of Rehnuma-e-Niswaan, Tabassum Siddiqi, was fluent in English. Tabassum (introduced in Chapter 6) immediately offered to assist by organising meetings and translating from Hindi and Urdu for me.

³ The Papua New Guinea Community Development Scheme (CDS) was part of AusAID's Democratic Governance Strategy in PNG. Rolled out in two phases between 1998 and 2007, the CDS aimed to reduce poverty by strengthening civil society in PNG. Other major activities of AusAID's strategy included the Media for Development Initiative, the Church Partnership Programme, the Electoral Support Programme, and the Sports for Development Initiative (Australian Agency for International Development, 2010a).

I tried twice, unsuccessfully, to work with research assistants in Howrah. Although I was learning Bengali and the two main coordinators of Howrah Pilot Project, Amina Khatoon and Binod Shaw, could hold a conversation with me in English, I worried that language and cultural barriers would prevent me from developing the depth of understanding I wanted. Unfortunately neither research assistant lasted for any length of time (I fired the first, as I discuss in Chapter 4, and the second quit after I declined to pay her for work she did not do). Amina and Binod's joy and relief at this showed me just how much of an imposition it was for me to bring a stranger into their lives. Recognising that language was a problem for us, they came up with another solution: we worked in English, Amina and Binod translated where they could, and we recorded some interviews in Hindi. I later hired a student in New Zealand to translate and transcribe those recordings (I transcribed everything else). I cannot speak highly enough of Amina, Binod, Tabassum, Pauline, Polang, Bing, and Wendy; without their interest, support and assistance, this project would look quite different.

Another major fieldwork variation involved how I interacted with organisations in each place. In Lae, I found that most organisations did not expect me to make repeated visits. Meetings were a formal affair. I was frequently welcomed to settlements or villages with singing and dancing, followed by speeches, tours of facilities, and a shared meal. Although I was able to interview some participants more than once, most did not see why I needed to talk to them again. "Didn't you get everything you needed?" asked the leader of one organisation when I tried to arrange another visit. After noticing the number of foreign women working for development organisations such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and AusAID, I started to feel that I was perceived in a particular way: as a foreign development worker who had come for a quick visit to see what was needed before recommending financial or other support. I was not expected to return again and again. I adjusted my approach accordingly and made sure to do as much as I could during each visit.

In Howrah and Kolkata, however, I was able to visit Howrah Pilot Project and Rehnuma-e-Niswaan several times per week during my fieldwork visits. I was always treated as an honoured guest, but repeated visits and time spent chatting or meeting family and friends helped overcome the formalities with which I was greeted on my first visit. On my second and third trips, once we had established good relationships, Amina, Binod and Tabassum were happy to have me spend the day with them at various locations and I interviewed each of them, and other key members, several times. These different fieldwork encounters are evident in Part III, which describes my four case studies.

Designing a framework for comparative analysis

Deciding what and how to compare was one of the most challenging aspects of this research. Given that my fieldwork involves three cities, I originally viewed it as a multi-sited ethnography and turned to the literature on this topic for ideas. George Marcus (1995), who coined the term, describes how multi-sited ethnography emerged as ethnographers moved away from studying single sites and local situations to focus on the “world system”. According to Marcus, research that focuses on the movement of people, ideas, cultural meanings, objects and identities “cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation” (1995:96). For Marcus, “Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with a explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography” (1995:105). Numerous scholars have taken up Marcus’s suggestion to follow people, connections, associations and relationships. After making a small dent in the considerable body of literature practising, reflecting on, critiquing and advancing multi-sited ethnography⁴ I came to realise that my project was not, in fact, a multi-sited one.

Comparisons are often built in to multi-sited research, as Hannerz (2003:206) notes, but the goals of multi-sited studies are not necessarily the same as those of comparative studies. Multi-sited ethnographies generally forge connections within and between sites and seek to explain local phenomena in terms of overarching systems or structures. Multi-sited research programmes aim to remove or transcend physical boundaries, investigate holistically, and follow movement, diaspora, and networks of people as well as things. I found the literature on multi-sited ethnography useful for reminding us that anthropologists have never been limited to producing thick descriptions of cultural groups or restricted to small-scale, geographically bounded fieldsites (Cook, Laidlaw, & Mair, 2009:58). It was less helpful in designing a framework for analysis, however. (The research programme proposed by “second generation” multi-sited ethnographers in Falzon (2009b) is much more amenable to my purposes, but I did not become familiar with this material until I had almost completed

⁴ James Clifford’s (1997) multi-sited ethnography on the connection between “contact zones” (museums, art shows, tourist hotels and sites, conferences) follows travel routes. Clifford Geertz penned a less than favourable (and now famous) review of Clifford’s work, criticising his approach as “non-immersive, hit-and-run ethnography” (Geertz, 1998:72 note 73). Multi-sited research is often discussed in terms of methodological and fieldwork issues. For example, Peter Wogan’s (2004) review of three multi-sited ethnographies of Andean cultures focuses on their methodological approaches. Paul Stoller (1997) and Ulf Hannerz (2003) both reflect on questions of fieldsite design, methods and research relationships. Ghassan Hage’s (2005) experiences of studying Lebanese migrants around the world led him to critique the very idea of multi-sited ethnography. Anthropological textbooks frequently contain chapters devoted to multi-sited fieldwork (e.g. Robben, 2007), and a recent collection edited by Mark-Anthony Falzon brings together a range of articles that “outline a programme for a ‘second generation’ multi-sited ethnography as a legitimate proposition for contemporary research” (2009a:3).

my dissertation.) I had research questions that could be answered by visiting multiple sites, and I am concerned with wider social, cultural and historical forces, but I was not interested in explaining local processes in terms of an overarching system (e.g. globalisation) as I felt that doing so would ignore my participant's voices and agency.

My goals in taking a comparative approach are different from multi-sited research programmes. I chose different sites so I could draw out similarities and differences in the processes by which women organise collectively to create meaningful lives for themselves and their families through grassroots initiatives that focus on education and income generation. These processes involve negotiating relationships with one another, their families and members of their wider communities, and other community groups and NGOs. It also involves them finding appropriate ways of manoeuvring within, while seeking to transform, constraining structures such as poverty and gender-based discrimination. I do not seek to provide cross-cultural comparisons between India and Papua New Guinea, or to compare Islam with Christianity. Instead, I have three aims in taking a comparative approach: (1) to discover the diversity of women's experiences in organising grassroots-level development initiatives; (2) to gain a richer appreciation of how the idea of development is put into practice in different contexts; and (3) to gain a better understanding of what sustains collective action in adverse situations.

I soon realised that the way I envisioned my comparative approach was not necessarily how others understood it. The issue of what I should, and should not, compare, was raised by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, which screened my research in its initial stages. One Committee member did not see how I could compare such different sites and was concerned that I might make unfavourable cultural comparisons (see Gibson, 2009 for a discussion of my experiences with the Committee). Her reserve was understandable; in some British colonies, anthropology was used as a tool of colonial and neo-colonial processes (helping to understand the 'native' better in order to bring about 'progress' and 'civilisation' more effectively⁵). Anthropology under colonial rule, and the studies of 19th century anthropologists who compared 'primitive' and 'advanced' societies with the aim of forming a theory of social evolution, are not among the discipline's proudest moments.

Legacies of this sort have produced biased and distorted interpretations of Indian society, as Abbott (1998:218) notes in discussing the severe criticism levelled at foreign researchers in India. Anthropologists in PNG have come under similar scrutiny. Warilea Iamo (1992) has criticised the anthropological knowledge produced by Margaret Mead and others for contributing to the "stigma of New Guinea," whereby "natives" are invented and represented as primitive Other to Western ideas of

⁵ Although this was not always the case; Olivier de Sardan notes that under colonial rule "ethnologists and civil servants were often at loggerheads" (2005:42).

civilisation. "These anthropological definitions and inventions of another people have been a subject of debate by students, administrators, policymakers and university academics," writes Iamo. "As a result, anthropologists in the 1980s have been monitored, controlled, and banned from doing social research in the Trobriand Islands, Manus, Morobe, and West Sepik" (Iamo, 1992:91). Undertaking a comparative analysis is a serious ethical issue, so it is important to clearly explain one's aims in doing so.

The idea of development lends itself to comparison and I found the anthropology of development literature most useful in thinking about how to approach my analysis. As Olivier de Sardan points out, "the processes of social change and development inevitably involve relationships between *heterogeneous* norms, cultures and sub-cultures, heterogeneous value systems, heterogeneous structures of knowledge and conceptions, heterogeneous systems of action, heterogeneous logics and heterogeneous social systems" (2005:60). The complex interactions, frictions and negotiations that characterise development and social change are central objects of study for an anthropology of development, which Olivier de Sardan argues is "therefore obliged to take interest not only in 'local communities' and 'target populations', but also in frameworks of intervention, mediators and brokers, as well as external agents" (2005:60).

A number of anthropologists writing about development adopt variations on a comparative approach, both in single locations and between multiple sites. Hugh Brody (1981), for example, describes the radically different perspectives and needs of two groups – the indigenous Beaver people and non-Indian agricultural and industrial developers – in British Columbia. Sita Venkateswar (2004) analyses how three different indigenous groups in the Andaman Islands have responded to and been affected by processes of colonisation and development. John Bodley (1999) assesses the effects of colonisation, development, social engineering, technology and "progress" on indigenous peoples around the world. Paul Farmer (2003) uses health as a framework to examine human rights violations in settings of what he calls "structural violence" (situations of extreme poverty and the social and economic conditions that give rise to it) in countries such as Haiti, Cuba, Mexico, Russia, and the USA, and he also compares different approaches to development work on health. Anna Tsing (2005) and Tania Li (2007) both focus on processes of development in Indonesia in different places and over time, discussing the frictions and contradictions that arise at the interface between social actors and structural forces. These ethnographies, along with two edited collections on comparative anthropology (Gingrich & Fox, 2002, and Gregor & Tuzin, 2001), provided ways to think about my own case studies.

I developed my research questions and analytical framework over the course of my fieldwork, refining ideas based on experiences and conversations in the field and at home. I began by practicing a form of what Gibson-Graham call “weak theory”, which requires “acting as a beginner, refusing to know too much, allowing success to inspire and failure to educate, refusing to extend diagnoses too widely or deeply” (2006:8). I used hope, history, capital, habitat, habitus, structure and agency as exploratory concepts in “fieldworking” my data to generate comparable information about each site and case study, not with the intention of creating an overarching explanation but to see how they appeared in different contexts. I paid attention to what the women said about their experiences and hopes, how they told their stories, their practices, how aware they were of the larger forces shaping their lives, their sense of actualities, possibilities and probabilities in the present and the future, their level of investment (*illusio*) in the organisations, and whether they hoped differently from one another. This was not an easy process, as hope is difficult to talk about and read for across different cultures, and midway through my project I seriously questioned my interest in hope: was I imposing an artificial concept of little relevance to local experiences? I was reassured by themes arising from my data and conversations with other anthropologists and scholars, however, and eventually developed the framework described in the Introduction. This framework, which can be used in different contexts, is designed to understand the relationship between hope, agency and development. I use it to address the questions driving my research, which is anchored in local, specific case studies.

Earlier I explained why I created bounded case studies: to keep my project manageable and to collect comparable data. As the above sections show, I collected various data and designed a framework that allows me to compare answers to the theoretical questions driving this research. I was not quite as successful in keeping my project to a manageable level, however. Even with a narrow focus I still collected too much information and consequently much has been left out. Harry Wolcott comments that “The critical task in qualitative research is not to accumulate all the data you can, but to “can” (i.e., get rid of) most of the data you accumulate” (2001:44). Much fell outside the limited scope of my research⁶ and has been shelved for future analysis and publication. In the remaining section I describe how I present the research data not “canned” from this thesis.

⁶ For example, although staff and volunteers from the Yabim District Gejamsao Office in Lae (part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of PNG) gave generously of their time in multiple meetings and interviews with me, I decided against including this organisation as a case study as it is a more of an umbrella body than a small grassroots organisation. I have also not discussed the Muslim women’s groups I met in Mumbai as I decided another fieldsite in India was not necessary.

On writing

The biggest challenge in writing this thesis stemmed from my desire to show how historical sociocultural structures shape – but do not determine – my participants' hopes and social practices, and how their practices reproduce, contradict and transform those structures. My decision to undertake a comparative study in multiple sites, combined with the word limit for doctoral dissertations, meant I struggled to balance depth (and therefore understanding) with breadth. Initially I wrote chapters based on key themes that incorporated short paragraphs describing each case study to illustrate a point. However, I was dissatisfied with this approach as I felt it was ethnographically thin and provided a poor sense of place, the women's practices, and the social relations they negotiate. Then I wrote thick descriptions of where my participants live and how they organise collectively to achieve their goals. These chapters were also unsatisfactory as they presented too much detail and too little comparative analysis. I was not discouraged; it often takes time for me to know what I want to say, and I discover how to say it through writing. I eventually achieved balance by combining approaches. Each chapter addresses key themes through an in-depth discussion of a particular place or case study. The chapters are organised into three Parts that each conclude with a comparative analysis. My interest in Bourdieu's theory of practice is reflected in the overall structure of this thesis, which moves from analyses of habitat (Part I) and structured social space (Part II) to a discussion of my participants' practices (Part III). After much trial and error it now feels like "it couldn't be anything but this" (Psathas, 2003).

Part III describes my case studies. It presents stories I have composed from my data that illustrate how my participants engage in processes that contradict, reinforce, and transform the larger structural factors discussed in Parts I and II. I draw attention to my participants' voices and agency in the spirit of critical analysis rather than as a way of "letting them speak for themselves", intertwining their stories with my analysis to show the dialectic relationship between structure and agency.

Like many qualitative researchers, I present my data in narrative form. I constructed narratives from interviews and conversations I edited, from observations and descriptions of events in my fieldnotes, from emails and memories, and other data. My editorial work involved removing repetitive words and phrases, occasionally changing words to make spoken language more amenable to readers without losing meaning, creating a single narrative from repeated renditions of the same story, choosing to focus on just a few key participants to encourage familiarity (a technique Lila Abu-Lughod, 1993:29 uses), and drawing together events and interview excerpts from different times. This allows me to present very different types of data in a more consistent manner. With a perspective similar to Abu-Lughod (1993:32), I strove to

ensure that everything I wrote was an accurate representation of actual events and conversations.

Like Bourgois (1996:18), I also worried about any political implications arising from my participants' comments and my observations and have not included anything I thought might bring them harm. I take full responsibility for converting my participants' words, actions, and in some cases "possibly fleeting opinions" (Wolf, 1992:11) into a text, and like Abu-Lughod I am aware that "I have made the words of those I quote speak to issues they could not anticipate" (1993:32). I am similarly concerned about the politics of representing people living in poverty. In Chapter 5 I discuss how Ramaswamy, who founded Howrah Pilot Project (HPP), invests much time and effort in raising the profiles of HPP and Talimi Haq School in India and overseas. Ramaswamy's efforts counter perceptions commonly held by people in developed countries that Howrah's poor are beggars or charity cases. Instead, people visiting HPP see a social movement involving people living in poverty who are articulate, intelligent, and actively striving to create meaningful lives for themselves and their families. I have sought to do the same in describing Talimi Haq School (Chapter 5), Rehnuma-e-Niswaan (Chapter 6), Tensiti Literacy Programme (Chapter 7), and Butibam Women's Flower Group (Chapter 8). The discussions in Part III are attentive to my participant's voices and agency and are framed by detailed descriptions of the historical sociocultural structures that shape their lives (Parts I and II). My representation of the people involved in these organisations challenges the kind of images sometimes portrayed by international aid agencies (I recall a television advertisement for child sponsorship from the early 2000s telling me that while I carried on with my comfortable life, a "little girl waits" passively for aid). Lister also critiques the way journalists, charities, and campaigning groups can represent those living in poverty as passive, hopeless victims, arguing for a 'politics of representation' that recognises agency and our common humanity (2004:116, 188).⁷

Finally, I briefly comment on my writing style. I enjoy reading dialogue in ethnographic work (for example, Abu-Lughod, 1991; Manz, 2004; McClusky, 2001; Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Wolf, 1992) and use this narrative technique to present my data instead of providing entire interview transcripts or blocks of verbatim quotations. Dialogue provides the reader with an engaging narrative alongside my analysis and shows my role in shaping the information I gathered. In Chapters 5 and 7 I have presented some interview excerpts as what Kirsty Wild calls "poetic narratives", a version of Laurel Richardson's 'narrative poems' that emphasises presenting interviews "in a way that captures the vitality of the spoken word, rather than on the use of

⁷ For further discussions of the politics of representation concerning people living in poverty, see Bourgois (1996), Farmer (2003), Goldstein (2003), Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin (2010), Scheper-Hughes (1992).

narrative data to create engaging poems” (Wild, 2007:117). Other than one instance where I recreate my participants’ description of a play as stage directions (inspired by Infanti, 2008), I follow conventional techniques rather than experimenting with creative writing or interpretive styles⁸ in presenting my data.

This chapter reflects my concern with methodology, a characteristic of many feminist researchers who believe it is important to situate the knowledge we produce (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1993; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Haraway, 2003; Kirsch, 1999; Wolf, 1992). Doing so helps create what Sandra Harding calls “less false stories about nature and social life” (1990:83, cited in Wolf, 1992:125). Bourdieu also shares this commitment to reflexivity in knowledge production. He describes the task of the sociologist (and, I believe, the anthropologist) as being “to tell about the things of the social world, and, as far as possible, to tell them the way they are” (Bourdieu, 2000:5). This involves being precise about how and why we collect and analyse the information we use so that readers can assess the accuracy and limitations of our work, and see that an academic perspective is one way of knowing among many. Part I presents my way of knowing Kolkata, Howrah, and Lae.

⁸ Laurel Richardson calls these “CAP (creative analytic process) ethnography” (2003:509). Some examples of CAP ethnography include autoethnography, fiction-stories, poetry, drama, performance texts, comedy and satire, and polyvocal texts (Richardson, 2003:510-511; see also Infanti, 2008:31-36 and Visweswaran, 2003).

“Here, people fight over water”

[Interlude I. Teaching anthropology at Talimi Haq School]

In January and February 2007 I designed and taught an introductory social anthropology course at Talimi Haq School in collaboration with Amina and Binod, who welcomed my proposal enthusiastically.¹ Talimi Haq School, HPP’s central activity, is the subject of Chapter 5.

I visited Talimi Haq School every year between 2004 and 2007, travelling from the various apartments I rented in Kolkata’s southern suburbs to Howrah via all available modes of transport (auto-rickshaw, metro, ferry, cycle rickshaw, bus, taxi, usually a three hour round trip). I proposed to teach a class for several reasons. Because I am not the only anthropologist the students have met, I thought it would be good for them to have a greater understanding of what social anthropology is, what kinds of things anthropologists are interested in, and how we conduct research. I also wanted students to feel able and entitled to ask me questions about my research and thought a teacher-student relationship might encourage that. Finally, I wanted to build on my previous roles as participant-observer, teacher’s aide, and very poor cricket player, and was excited about sharing my passion for anthropology with students I consider extremely intelligent and eager to learn. My course aimed to introduce eight selected older students to social anthropology. In keeping with the school’s philosophy of learning by doing we decided to have them complete two practical assignments based on research techniques the students had seen me use: interviews and a photo essay.

I thought the photo essay would be a fun learning activity for the students, who regularly have their photos taken by their teachers and visitors to the school. The walls of the classrooms are covered with photo displays made by teachers showcasing various school activities and performances, and I envisaged the students adding their own displays to the walls. Also, Amina and Binod had participated in a street photography project coordinated by Munich-based artist Baird Connell in 2006 so they were familiar with this approach. I donated four automatic cameras to the school. Working in pairs, the students chose a topic and created a photo essay to tell a story about it. Ten-year-old girls Shahana and Sabina chose *pani* and their display revealed all the ways in which water is used in the *basti*. For me, these images sharply brought home the immediate daily concerns and living conditions of the people, particularly for women (the subject of many of their photos), of PM Basti. Some of their photos are reproduced below.

¹ A version of this excerpt was first published in Ramaswamy, Gibson, & Venkateswar (2010:299-302).

Pani (water)
Photographs by Shahana and Sabina



Photograph 1. “People lock money and now a lock has been made for water too.” – Sabina



Photograph 2. “Here, people fight over water. First they will stand in line with a bucket to fill with water. Once the water comes, then everyone starts filling their buckets fast.” – Shahana



Photograph 3. “Water is used for soaking clothes, while cooking, for washing dishes, to wash rice and for drinking as well.” – Shahana



Photograph 4. “People need water and the supply of water has been cut off, (so) that is why they sleep here ... We don’t get much water here. Somebody comes on behalf of the government and supplies water, which a person has to pay money for.” – Shahana

PART I

Historical conjunctures in Kolkata and Lae

At first glance, Kolkata and Lae might appear to have little in common. Indeed, one of the questions I was most often asked during my research was why I chose such different fieldsites. I would answer with another question: what is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Kolkata or Lae? Invariably, the reply would include (among other things) a description of each city's built environment. Kolkata evoked images of *bastis*, poverty, squalor, and decay; Lae prompted discussions of potholes, crime, security, and settlements. After some discussion, people I spoke with soon saw what I see in both cities: that the built or human-made environment is a distinguishing characteristic of each place. Part I of my thesis explores the historical conjunctures that contributed to the physical and social spaces occupied by the women I worked with. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, habitat and capital, I show how urban *bastis* and settlements are products of histories that affect the ways in which women organise collectively to create meaningful lives for themselves and their families (their quest for *being*, in Bourdieu's terms). Part I contributes to my overall thesis aims by showing how history and social structure impact on the women's quest for being.

By *historical conjunctures* I mean the particular historical sociocultural moments and combinations of events that shaped the physical and social spaces we inhabit. Popular images, perceptions and discourses concerning Kolkata's *bastis* and Lae's settlements, such as those found in media reports, political propaganda and everyday conversations, sometimes overlook or forget that each area has a specific history and instead view those places, and their inhabitants, as "natural" or "just the way things are". This is what Bourdieu terms *doxa*, the taken-for-granted assumptions, received ideals and commonsense understandings about the world and ourselves. I agree with Bourdieu when he argues that we can break with such perceptions "only through a rigorous analysis of the relations between the structures of social space and those of physical space" (1999:123). Following anthropologists such as Philippe Bourgeois (1996), Paul Farmer (2003), Marshall Sahlins (1985) and Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992), I am convinced that we cannot understand the present without looking to the past, hence my focus on historical structures.

I discussed habitus and capital in the Introduction to this thesis; here I briefly elaborate on Bourdieu's notion of habitat. Habitat refers to the human environment, the

way that historical sociocultural structures materialise in the spaces we inhabit. Human beings, according to Bourdieu, occupy both physical and social spaces. Physical spaces are the sites or places we occupy with our bodies, whereas social spaces (or 'fields') comprise the sites or positions we occupy in relation to other social agents (Bourdieu, 1999:124). Habitat encompasses both social and physical spaces and provides a way of understanding how social characteristics (capital, habitus, and our position in particular fields) are geographically distributed in relation to others. "There is no space in a hierarchized society that is not itself hierarchized and that does not express hierarchies and social distances, in a form that is more or less distorted and, above all, disguised by the *naturalization effect* produced by the long-term inscription of social realities in the natural world," writes Bourdieu. "Thus historical differences can seem to have arisen from the nature of things" (Bourdieu, 1999:124). One of my aims in Part I is to destabilise any naturalisation effect by highlighting the historical conjunctures that helped shape each city.

Kolkata and Lae have very different histories, colonial experiences, and sociocultural contexts, as I noted above. Focusing on habitat contributes to another of my thesis aims, which is to approach these different sites with a common conceptual framework. The differences between each place will be immediately apparent from the content of the following two chapters. However, my focus on habitat also highlights important similarities in social practices in Kolkata, Howrah, and Lae. I draw out key insights in terms of their connections to hope in the Discussion at the end of Part I.

Chapter 1 focuses on poverty, which is perhaps the most recognisable urban feature of Kolkata and Howrah. My aim is to show that poverty is not "natural" and can be traced to specific historical conjunctures. I discuss how Bengal has a history of prosperity, not poverty, and look at the ways in which trade, colonialism, industrial growth, labour migration, and capital shaped the social and physical spaces of Howrah and Kolkata. I conclude by suggesting that bastis can be viewed as "forgotten places," habitats at once actively neglected, but deeply inhabited, by the state. Such habitats demand resourcefulness and ingenuity in the context of urban poverty, and provide fertile ground for NGOs such as those described in this thesis to fill the gap left by the state and foster development hope in the process.

Chapter 2 takes us in a different direction. Here I explore the "road to development," a common expression in PNG, and discuss how Lae's habitat has been shaped by colonialism and transportation networks. I show how roads simultaneously act as a form of development hope by increasing the sense of possibilities in life, while at the same time are blamed for contributing to growing social problems such as crime and the spread of settlements. Lae's potholes, and the poor infrastructure within the

city's settlements, serve as tangible reminders of government failure to achieve or sustain development.

Before we go to Kolkata, a brief comment on writing about Bengal's social and political history is necessary. The volume and depth of scholarship on India's history is overwhelming. Much of this literature is dense, uses concepts in ways sometimes unfamiliar to Western audiences (e.g. secularism,¹ communalism²), and requires significant prior knowledge (for instance, authors can write about "1757" or "the Mutiny" without further elaboration. I discuss the events leading up to the 1757 Battle of Plassey and the 1857 Mutiny in Chapter 1). There is also a massive amount of work critiquing colonial historiography and debating the political issues involved in accessing and writing social history.³ On top of this, my experiences in Kolkata suggested an "enthusiasm for history" (Chakrabarty, 2008:170) deeply embedded in contemporary Bengali society. To give just one example, the first *salwar kameez*⁴ I purchased, made of hand-woven cotton, prompted comments from my participants as well as other people I met about how nice it was to see me wearing it and did I know that Gandhi promoted *khadi* (homespun cloth) during his non-cooperation movement against the British in the 1920s? I do not pretend to have made use of all the literature available on the topics discussed in Chapter 1 and the account presented here is necessarily partial and selective, limited to issues of direct relevance to my thesis. Nevertheless, it provides a good introduction to some key historical conjunctures that helped make the habitats of Howrah and Kolkata what they are today.

Finally, a note on spelling: as I discussed earlier, I use 'Kolkata' to conform with the city's official designation, 'Calcutta' to refer to the city before its 2001 name change, and retain the original spelling when I quote from other sources.

¹ The Constitution of India grants every citizen the right to freedom of religion. To uphold this right, and to adhere to the principle of secularism (e.g. separating the state from any particular religion), the independent state of India created legislation on religious as well as social matters, giving each religious group the freedom to live by its own laws. In this way, religious laws (such as the personal laws discussed in Chapter 4) can take precedence over state laws. This notion of secularism differs from standard English uses of the term, as Partha Chatterjee discusses (1994:1769). Secularism in India is the subject of much debate; some texts I found useful include P. Chatterjee (1994, 1995), M. Hasan (1997), Z. Hasan (2010), Nandy (1990), Needham & Sunder Rajan (2007), Sarkar (1997), A. Sen (2005).

² Communalism is an idea that has changed over time and is not restricted to India (R. G. Fox, 1996). In India, 'communalism' has a specific history (Bose & Jalal, 1998:6-7, 142-143; Ludden, 1996:11) and has come to designate politicised community identities, usually along religious lines (e.g. Muslim, Hindu). Differences defining and dividing communal groups, such as religious practices concerning cow slaughter, often form the basis for antagonism and conflict. Like secularism, much scholarship is concerned with communalism in India; some key texts include Breckenridge & van der Veer (1993), Pandey (1990), van der Veer (1993, 1996).

³ Perhaps the most well known body of work in this vein comes from the Subaltern Studies group of scholars whose approach is one of "history from below" (i.e., theorising colonialism and Orientalism and discussing the activities and agency of non-elites rather than those in positions of power). See Chakrabarty (2010, 27 August) or Sarkar (1997) for discussions of the history and development of Subaltern Studies.

⁴ A three-piece outfit consisting of a *kameez* (a long tunic) worn over a pair of matching *salwar* (loose pants), and a *dupatta* (long scarf) draped across the shoulders.

“Every day in summer, 10 or 12 people die from diarrhoea”

[Interlude 2. On water]

“One of the biggest problems we have in the *basti* is diarrhoea,” Amina said to me during a conversation in January 2006.¹ “Every day in summer, 10 or 12 people die from diarrhoea. The main problem is *pani* (water). Unclean water carries disease. Everyone drinks unclean water. For cooking, it’s fine, but the water in the *basti* is very bad.”

Amina shuffled into a more comfortable sitting position on the floor of the Howrah Pilot Project (HPP) office, tucking her right leg underneath her petite frame and hugging her left thigh to her chest. I had less success finding comfort on the cold concrete floor despite the mats she had set out for us, and fidgeted. Amina Khatoon was born into a Muslim family in Priya Manna (PM) Basti in 1980 (according to her hospital birth certificate: the year is 1978 on her higher school certificate and 1976 on her Below the Poverty Line card). Today she is coordinator, secretary and head teacher of HPP. HPP is a small, grassroots organisation that runs several community development initiatives in PM Basti, including a *masala* (spice)-making enterprise, a women’s savings scheme, access to family planning services and cataract surgery, and Talimi Haq School. We were discussing the major problems experienced by the *basti*’s residents. Water, illness (from malnutrition, smoke from coal and cloth fires, and poor sanitation) and inadequate medical facilities were at the top of the list. These problems are as old as the *basti*.

“2003 was a really hot summer² and a lot of water was used for drinking, for cooking,” she continued. “The water was not good and people were very sick. There were no beds in the hospital. People were dying in their homes. In this *basti* between 10 and 20 people died every day. Children died, parents died, all of diarrhoea. They needed to boil water to drink it but they didn’t. The children especially got sick. Their mothers go out to work and the children stay and play at home, drinking water without boiling it. They run around and play, then get thirsty and drink without thinking about it. For three months this was a dangerous place to live. Every year diarrhoea comes to the *basti* in summer, but 2003 was the worst.”

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¹ Appadurai (2004:78-79) points out that the absence of toilets and good sewerage systems can make diarrhoea a humiliating as well as dangerous experience in urban slums. See Appadurai (2004) for a discussion of Toilet Festivals and “the politics of shit” in Mumbai’s slums.

² Severe heat waves in 2003 caused the deaths of thousands of people in India and Europe, with temperatures in West Bengal exceeding 40°C.

Chapter I

Kolkata, City of Crows

"I like crows," Ramaswamy said as we sat on the balcony of his house in a southern suburb of Kolkata city on a warm winter evening in January 2007. Crows are everywhere in Kolkata, more common than cycle rickshaws or street hawkers, and their cawing is an ever-present feature of the city. During the day their squawks merge with other noise – horns honking, dogs barking, vendors plying their wares, traffic rumbling – and their morning and dusk calls are sounds I associate with the city. I looked at the large crow that had landed near us and captured Ramaswamy's attention. The eye that searched the balcony was bright but its straggly black feathers were dull and the claws twisted on one foot.

Ramaswamy sipped his tea. "Crows have adapted well to the urban setting," he continued. V. Ramaswamy is a man of many skills – grassroots organiser, social planner, educator, writer, business executive, translator – and I had come to talk about his work as a social activist for *basti* dwellers in Howrah (or Hāora) and Kolkata cities. He is also a critical thinker who has written much on life and politics in Kolkata.¹

"I have been observing crows for some years now and have noticed how they are starting to be deformed because of all the toxic shit they ingest in the city. It's a good reflection of the poison going into the environment."

"They can certainly take a lot of punishment," I said, surveying the haze of grey that obscured buildings more than a few hundred metres distant. I find the pollution in Kolkata stifling. Unlike when in New Zealand, I have to carry an asthma-relieving inhaler with me to cope with the smoke and fumes and dust that fill my lungs.

"Yes, they are very resourceful," said Ramaswamy. "They are also scavengers, living off the city's waste. Actually, they make a good symbol for Kolkata."

¹ Ramaswamy has set up his own discourse on urban renewal, politics and poverty, much of which can be found online at one of his blogs (e.g. *Cuckoo's Call* at <http://www.cuckooscall.blogspot.com/>), at Blogbharti.com (Ramaswamy, 2007), and at websites of educational institutions such as the Asia Society (Ramaswamy, 29 April 2002). Publications in academic journals include Ramaswamy & Chakravarti, (1997b), Ramaswamy (2008) and Ramaswamy et al. (2010).

We went on to talk of other things, but in 2009 Ramaswamy returned to his thoughts on his blog, *Cuckoo's Call*:

The crow is the most commonly seen bird in Calcutta. It is a most resourceful creature, with amazing habits, remarkable persistence and awesome tenderness. But it can also be a most annoying creature. It is first and foremost a scavenger. The crow could be an apt symbol of Calcutta, of its people and its ethos. But that would only be with a touch of irony and pathos: symbolising the degraded condition that the human being has fallen to. The common man in Calcutta has been reduced to being a scavenger. There is a great resourcefulness implicit in that, but that is not what man was destined for. Poverty, apartheid and apathy have reduced the human to the scavenging crow.

(Ramaswamy, 2009)

Kolkata's poverty is world-famous. As Frederic Thomas notes in the introduction to his book *Calcutta Poor*, "Almost every book written about Calcutta begins with extravagant language describing the city's squalor and putrefaction" (1997:3). This stereotype of poverty is the subject of John Hutnyk's book *The Rumour of Calcutta* (1996), which turns its gaze on the ways in which Western tourism, charity work and development discourses have represented a particular image of the city. Kolkata's poverty and human degradation are often assumed to be "natural" or given (*doxa*, in Bourdieu's terms). Discussing how foreigners "with a taste for observing such horror" were drawn to Calcutta in the 1950s, Krishna Dutta criticises Lévi-Strauss for implying that the city had always been like this in *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), pointing out that "he shows little awareness of the city's history and complex culture" (2003:179).² My aim in this chapter is to show that Kolkata's poverty is not "natural" and can be traced to specific historical conjunctures. History notwithstanding, poverty is an important factor shaping the lives of the women whose stories appear in this thesis. Like Ananya Roy (2003:7), I faced an important question: how could I talk about poverty without reproducing negative stereotypes?

I think Ramaswamy is right; crows are a good metaphor for Kolkata, especially its urban poor. His comments about their resourcefulness and persistence put me in mind of Aesop's fables. (My connection with literature is no accident. Alongside crows, books are what I associate most with Kolkata, and I later discovered that Aesop's fables were used as reading lessons in nineteenth century elementary education in Bengal (Sarkar, 1997:14).) Although crows appear in several fables as malicious, boastful and cunning creatures, *The Crow and the Water Jar* emphasises their intelligence:

² In a similar vein, anthropologist Oscar Lewis's theory of a "culture of poverty" (1970) has been criticised for failing "to note how history, culture, and political-economic structures constrain the lives of individuals" (Bourgois, 1996:16, see also Lister, 2004).

A thirsty crow noticed a huge jar and saw at the very bottom there was a little bit of water. For a long time the crow tried to spill the water out so that it would run over the ground and allow her to satisfy her tremendous thirst. After exerting herself for some time in vain, the crow grew frustrated and applied all her cunning with unexpected ingenuity: as she tossed little stones into the jar, the water rose of its own accord until she was able to take a drink.

This fable shows us that thoughtfulness is superior to brute strength, since this is the way the crow was able to carry her task to its conclusion.

(L. Gibbs, 2002:208)

Let me be clear: I do not consider those living in urban poverty to be annoying opportunistic scavengers (as some view crows). Instead, the people I know are industrious, resourceful, and show strategic agency and a great capacity for survival in the face of disadvantage and deprivation. Such resourcefulness is a necessity for those living in bastis in the twin cities of Howrah and Kolkata (see Figure 2). However, as I discuss later, it is crucial that we do not idealise this kind of resourcefulness and ignore the historical sociocultural structures shaping people's lives, hence this chapter's focus on structural factors.

Figure 2. Howrah and Kolkata, West Bengal, India



The Hooghly (or Hugli) river separates Howrah city, which lies along its western bank, from Kolkata city on the east. Both cities are encompassed within a wider metropolis known as the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA), the area outlined in the insert.

Source: Adapted from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:India-Kolkata-locator-map.PNG>

In this chapter I discuss how trade, colonialism, industrial growth, labour migration, and capital shaped the social and physical spaces of Howrah and Kolkata. I begin by discussing Calcutta's origin as a small trading post for the British East India Company and its growth to the "second city" of the British Empire. I show how poverty and prosperity were constant companions in Bengal during the British colonial era. I also discuss how the geographical distribution of social characteristics contributed to an unequal distribution of poverty, public goods and services, and societal hope in Howrah and Kolkata. I conclude by suggesting that *bastis* within these two cities are "forgotten places", historically and politically constructed habitats that are simultaneously neglected and deeply inhabited by the state.

Calcutta: From trading post to Imperial City

Bengal has been an important international trading site for centuries due in no small part to its geographical location at the Ganges Delta, the world's largest river delta, which empties into the Bay of Bengal. Its fertile lands consistently produced surplus agricultural commodities that enabled locals to produce a variety of textiles (cottons, silks) beyond the requirements for self-sufficiency, fostering international trade (Deyell, 2010:64). Bengali merchants traded throughout Asia along the spice routes in the Indian Ocean and by the early 1500s "Bengal had become a major centre of Asian trade and manufacture" (Eaton, 1993:97). According to Madhusree Mukerjee, when physician François Bernier travelled to Bengal from Delhi in 1665 he found "the finest and most fruitful country in the world," a place where foreign merchants found it difficult to trade with native businessmen "because Bengal was in need of virtually nothing" (2010:x). Contrary to some popular perceptions, India has a history of prosperity, not poverty. "Historically, South Asia was always famous as the richest region of the globe," writes William Dalrymple. "At their heights in the 17th century, the subcontinent's fabled Mughal emperors were rivalled only by their Ming counterparts in China. For their contemporaries in distant Europe, they were potent symbols of power and wealth" (Dalrymple, 2007). After Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama discovered a sea route from Europe to India in 1498, Bengal's wealth quickly attracted European traders. In 1535 the Portuguese were the first to establish a trading post in the Bay of Bengal, followed by the Dutch in 1636, the French in 1673, and, finally, the British (Dutta, 2003; Moorhouse, 1971). This section focuses on Calcutta's growth from a small trading post of the British East India Company into the "second city" of the British Empire.

The East India Company established several factories along both sides of the Hoogly river in the late 1600s, but this was not a peaceful process and the Company often had serious disputes over trade with local Mughal rulers. In 1690 the Company

formed a treaty with Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, from whom Job Charnock, a Company employee and Governor of the Bay of Bengal, negotiated a favourable *firman* or trading license (Dutta, 2003:9; Moorhouse, 1971:30). Charnock decided to establish a British settlement along the Hoogly river after noting the area's potential as a trading harbour, and on 24 August 1690 he moored his boat near the fishing village of Kolikata,³ pitched his tents, made a large offering to the goddess Kali, and founded Calcutta (Dutta, 2003:12; Moorhouse, 1971:31).

Calcutta soon spread with Charnock's successor and son-in-law Charles Eyre purchasing three nearby fishing villages (Sutanuti, Govindpore and Dihi Kolikata) on behalf of the Company in 1698 (Dutta, 2003:12). The beginning of the 18th century heralded a period of rapid British expansion and young men with dreams of making their fortunes began "heading for the Hoogly in boatloads from the Thames" (Moorhouse, 1971:37). The Company sought to further expand Calcutta and in 1715 sent a deputation with gifts and medical attention⁴ to the Mughal Emperor in Delhi. The deputation was successful and the Company was granted the rights to 38 more villages, including Howrah across the river, marking Calcutta's "first suburban development" (Moorhouse, 1971:39). In 1717 the Mughal Emperor also granted the Company the right to trade salt, opium, and betel nut without paying customs duties (Mukerjee, 2010:xii). As it was "relatively easy to amass a personal fortune through corrupt practices uncontrolled by English law" these rights were soon abused by Company employees and the Company rapidly developed a roaring trade: "Company officials, backed up by Company soldiers, plundered local villages for spices, rice, sugar, saltpetre, opium, and other profitable goods. Boatloads of tobacco, chintz, ginger, bamboo, gunnies, and many other products were dispatched to England" (Dutta, 2003:14; see also Moorhouse, 1971:38). Mughal rulers were just as corrupt and greedy as Company employees and, as Moorhouse points out, could be "wonderfully accommodating" to the foreigners if it served their interests (1971:39).

By the middle of the 18th century Calcutta's total population was around 400,000, annual trade was worth one million pounds, and fifty European ships visited the Company's holdings on the Hoogly each year (Dutta, 2003:15). According to Dutta, the Company's air of confidence and rich treasury "attracted the attention of the young and haughty nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, successor to Mughal power" (2003:15). Siraj marched on Calcutta with his army on 19 June 1756 after his orders that the

³ Dutta (2003:2-4) discusses various theories about how the name 'Kolikata' originated, including the popular, but by no means conclusive, hypothesis that links the city's name with the goddess Kali.

⁴ British physician William Hamilton tended the Emperor's swollen groin just before his marriage (Dutta, 2003:14; Moorhouse, 1971:39). This was not the first time medical attention had eased the way for British expansion into India; Mr Gabriel Boughton successfully treated Emperor Shah Jahan's daughter for serious burns in 1636 and a year later treated a woman from the Emperor's son's harem, obtaining in return the right for Britain to trade and to establish factories in Bengal (Moorhouse, 1971:28-29).

Company cease fortifying Fort William were ignored. Instead of negotiating, the British burnt local bazaars and prepared to resist the nawab (who was a representative of the Mughal Emperor; it should be remembered that the British were traders with no sovereign rights (Dutta, 2003:19)). Siraj attacked Fort William and captured English prisoners, many of whom died of suffocation after being held in a cell overnight on 20 June, one of the hottest and most humid nights of the year⁵ (Dutta, 2003:15; Moorhouse, 1971:42-45). Known as the Black Hole of Calcutta, this infamous event led to the 1757 Battle of Plassey, which brought about major political and economic changes in Bengal.

Upon hearing of the Black Hole incident, the Company organised a punitive expedition led by General Robert Clive. Clive recaptured Calcutta in December 1756 and conspired with Siraj's uncle, Mir Jafar, to defeat Siraj, Bengal's last independent Mughal ruler (Dutta, 2003:20-21). On 23 June 1757 Clive defeated Siraj's army at the Battle of Plassey, 20 miles from Murshidabad (the seat of Bengal's Mughal administration) to the north of Calcutta, and Siraj was killed. Mir Jafar became new nawab of Bengal and, as arranged, "paid the East India Company £2.2 million and its officers and troops £1.2 million, of which Clive took a lion's share" (Mukerjee, 2010:xii). However, Moorhouse states that Clive extracted "much more than retribution for the sack of Calcutta the year before" and, not being satisfied with compensation money, also annexed nearly nine hundred square miles of land to the south of Calcutta (known as the 24 Parganas) on the Company's behalf (Moorhouse, 1971:45). Before he left for England in 1760, Clive initiated what is often described as the "drain of wealth" from Bengal, the consequences of which I discuss later in this chapter.

The aftermath of 1757 saw Calcutta transformed into the hub of the Company's trade and exports. "The British had so far secured their position with varieties of trade, quiet and violent, fair and extortionate. Now they began to rob the bank," writes Moorhouse of events following Plassey. "It was the freest trade imaginable if you happened to be born on the right side of the counter and it both ruined Bengal and took the Company to the brink of bankruptcy" (Moorhouse, 1971:46). Mir Jafar, burdened with an empty treasury after paying the Company, faced mutiny from his unpaid soldiers and the Company replaced him with a rich relative, Mir Qasim (Mukerjee, 2010:xii). Aware of the devastating effects that British merchants were having on his people, Mir Qasim rescinded customs duties for everyone, not just the British: "Affronted British merchants now demanded that the duties be restored, for all but themselves. Mir Qasim conceded – provided the East India Company remove all its troops from Bengal's soil," writes Mukerjee. "The result was war" (Mukerjee, 2010:xiii).

⁵ Just how many people went into the tiny cell at Fort William (accounts range from 146 to 64), and how many emerged the next morning (between 21 and 23), is the subject of much research and debate. The most well known version of events – told by John Holwell, one of the survivors – is now widely recognised to be greatly exaggerated (Dutta, 2003:15-20; Hutnyk, 1996:91; Moorhouse, 1971:45). See Dutta (2003:19-20) for a critical discussion of the incident.

To deal with this, and growing corruption by Company employees, the Company sent Clive back to Bengal as Governor in 1765.⁶ On 2 August 1765 the Mughal Emperor appointed Clive to the position of tax collector for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa (an administrative unit larger than France), giving the Company authority to govern in “an arrangement of mutual interest, for it ensured regular payments to both Delhi and Leadenhall Street which had been vanishing of late” (Moorhouse, 1971:47; see also Mukerjee, 2010:xiii). This revenue licence saw *zamindars* (landlords) pay their dues to the Company, which gave the Company access to taxes and the Bengal treasury and strengthened its control over Bengal. “As a result,” Mukerjee tells us, “the East India Company became de facto ruler of India’s richest province” (2010:xiv). These events laid the groundwork for colonial rule in India and positioned Calcutta as its administrative centre.

Calcutta became the capital of British India following the events of 1857, a watershed year in India’s history. 1857 saw a military mutiny and a chain of widespread civilian uprisings against the East India Company, and is known by different parties as the Sepoy Mutiny, the Revolt, the Rebellion, the Uprising, and the First Indian War of Independence. In his detailed examination of the events of 1857 (which saw Hindus and Muslims rally around their Mughal Emperor to resist colonial rule), Dalrymple explains that there were rumours, reinforced by “the crassly tactless activities of the missionaries and their supporters among the Evangelicals of the army and administration,” that the Company was planning to impose Christianity on India’s population (2006:135). These rumours – which came on top of other issues within the army⁷ – played an important role in May 1857 when Indian soldiers (known as sepoys) in the East India Company’s Meerut garrison refused to use cartridges for the new Lee Enfield rifle. The greased cartridges, which had been manufactured at the Dumdum arsenal in Calcutta, had to be bitten before use and the first few batches had been coated with a mixture of cow and pig fat, offensive to Hindus and Muslims alike. Although the grease ingredients were quickly changed, the rumour persisted and it soon became “widely seen as an insidious plot by the infidels to pollute Indians before forcing their conversion to Christianity” (Bose & Jalal, 1998:90). On 9 May 1857, the leaders of the sepoys who had refused to load the cartridges at Meerut were sentenced to ten years’ penal servitude and put in chains in front of their fellow soldiers. Mutiny broke out the next day when the XI Native Cavalry marched to Delhi to pledge allegiance to Bahadur Shah Zafar, India’s ageing Mughal Emperor.

⁶ Clive defeated Mir Qasim and regulated private trade for Company employees (Dutta, 2003:22). Mir Jafar returned to power, again paying the Company for the privilege (Mukerjee, 2010:xiii).

⁷ Dalrymple writes that “the army was already on the verge of mutiny over quite separate – and more secular – issues of pay and regulations” (2006:135). See Dalrymple (2006:136-140) for a discussion of the various factors that contributed to the mutiny.

According to Dalrymple, “Zafar’s hesitant acceptance of the nominal leadership of the revolt in due course turned it from a simple army mutiny – albeit one supported by an incoherent eruption of murder and looting by Delhi’s civilians – into the single most serious armed challenge any Western empire would face, anywhere in the world, in the entire course of the nineteenth century” (2006:192). Civilians from different religious, class and caste backgrounds with various complaints against Company rule joined the mutineers and a chain of aristocratic and agrarian protests and resistance movements spread across northern and central India (Bose & Jalal, 1998:92-95). The Company’s efforts to quell the uprisings were brutal⁸ and continued for ten months after the fall of Delhi in September 1857. In 1858, as a direct result of the mutiny, the British crown took control of the country from the East India Company (which was formally dissolved in 1874). This historical moment marked the end of Mughal power in India and had important ramifications for India’s Muslims as well as India’s physical landscape,⁹ as I discuss further in Chapter 4. The British government ruled India through viceroys from Calcutta until 1911, at which time the capital of India was transferred to the more strategically located Delhi.

The historical processes outlined above contributed to Calcutta’s growth from a small trading post founded by the East India Company to an Imperial City of the British Empire. Next I focus on the simultaneous growth of poverty and prosperity in Bengal during the British colonial era. I briefly examine some key historical conjunctures – including changes to land revenue administration, Bengal’s two biggest famines, and the Industrial Revolution – to make my point.

Poverty and prosperity in Bengal during the British colonial era

The relationship between prosperity and poverty is not necessarily zero-sum, but the activities and subsequent rise of the East India Company could be viewed in these terms. Before the Battle of Plassey the Company, which relied on overseas trade, had to ship bullion from Britain in order to purchase goods for export. The flow of wealth from Britain into Bengal was not well received in Britain. “Down to 1757, European traders had been obliged to bring bullion into India in the teeth of much criticism at home, as Indian cotton and silk goods had a flourishing market in the West while Indian demand for Western products (like British woollens) was usually

⁸ There was barbarity and vicious fighting on both sides, as happens in war. However the atrocities perpetuated by British officers – including the “great imperial psychopath” Brigadier General John Nicholson, as Dalrymple (2006:307) calls him – described by Edward Thompson in *The Other Side of the Medal* (discussed in Sarkar, 1997), seem extraordinarily cruel.

⁹ Bengal was partitioned twice on the basis of its distribution of Muslims – first in 1905 (repartitioned in 1911) and again in 1947 when British India was divided into two independent nation-states, India and Pakistan.

negligible,” Sarkar writes. “The problem was dramatically solved by Plassey” (Sarkar, 1989:24). The trading rights and the 1765 revenue licence obtained by the Company after its military conquest at Plassey provided the capital necessary for trade, meaning the Company no longer needed to import money from Britain. The Company prospered in the years following Plassey, securing large profits through duty-free inland trade and ‘surplus’ from land revenues¹⁰ which were channelled into “what the Company euphemistically went on calling its ‘investments’ in India”: namely, finished goods for export (often purchased at arbitrarily low prices) from Bengal to England and Europe (Sarkar, 1989:24-25). Bengal, however, did not prosper. The Company’s rise accompanied the “drain of wealth” from Bengal, which became India’s poorest province just five years after the Company became its de facto ruler in 1765 (Mukerjee, 2010:xiv).

One of the ways in which the Company profited from Bengal was by changing how agricultural taxes were collected. The previous Mughal system, whereby a *zamindar*’s taxes varied with the harvest and peasants were secure on their land even in hard times, was replaced with tax collectors seeking fixed rents. “No longer were taxes a portion of the harvest, to be paid in kind: the Company operated on the principle that all land belonged to the state and fixed the tax at a specific monetary level, now called rent,” explains Mukerjee. “This had to be paid in silver even when a crop failed, and farmers who could not pay lost possession of their land” (Mukerjee, 2010:xiv; see also Moorhouse, 1971:66). While peasants were losing their land, Calcutta developed a reputation as a “city of palaces” when wealthy Company employees “began to enjoy a lavish way of life in huge mansions attended by fleets of servants” (Dutta, 2003:22). Bengali merchants who prospered through trade with the Company also built grand homes (albeit in a different place from Europeans; I discuss how the city developed along lines of social segregation later in this chapter), and Calcutta’s opulence attracted increasing numbers of migrants in search of employment and fortune.

Bengal’s wealth was not infinite. By 1769 there was nothing left to extract and currency was in short supply (Mukerjee, 2010:xv). Tragedy struck that year when the rains failed and rice crops shrivelled in their fields. “Recognizing that the cost of rice would go up, British officers and their Indian agents, who enjoyed a monopoly on trading rice, bought up all that they could, often forcing peasants to part with the grain they had kept for planting” writes Mukerjee (2010:xv) in her discussion of the great Bengal famine of 1770. These events contributed to the death of approximately one-third of Bengal’s population (around 10 million people) in 1770. Mukerjee (2010:xv-xvi) describes the various ways that Company policies “aggravated the disaster,” which included: extracting rice from the countryside to feed the army; refusing to move troops

¹⁰ See Moorhouse (1971:47) or Mukerjee (2010:xiv) for a discussion of how the Company extracted surpluses from tax revenues.

that were appropriating all the grain from hard hit areas to better-provisioned regions; prohibiting rice trading among Bengal's districts unless the grain was destined for Murshidabad and Calcutta, the administrative centres of Bengal and the Company; only distributing rice for famine relief in Murshidabad and Calcutta; and by continuing to collect rent throughout the famine. "More important, during previous droughts agriculturalists would have possessed grain, stored in anticipation of a bad year, as well as jewelry, coins, or other savings they could use to purchase rice," Mukerjee comments. "By 1770, however, rural Bengal had no currency left – even as, at the height of the famine, speculators were selling their hoards of rice at six times the usual price. Virtually every employee of the Company reaped huge profits in rice speculation" (Mukerjee, 2010:xvi). Suffering and starvation accompanied this prosperity as people resorted to selling their children and eating leaves and grass to survive (Mukerjee, 2010:xv). Calcutta, with its stores of grain, "stood alone in all of Bengal as an island of wealth" and desperate people flocked to the city in search of food (Mukerjee, 2010:xviii).

Bountiful rice harvests appeared in the years following the 1770 famine "and the Company's annual earnings continued to rise as its agents forced villagers to pay the rent owed by dead neighbors" (Mukerjee, 2010:xvii). However, with a third of the population gone, there were fewer people available to tend rice crops and fewer fields to tax. Moorhouse notes that "The 1770 famine had not only killed off people; it had demolished much of the revenue, which was how they tended to see Indian famines in Leadenhall Street" (1971:51). The desire to protect and increase revenue was one of the factors underlying Governor-General Charles Cornwallis's 1793 Permanent Settlement Act. Mukerjee explains that "Cornwallis returned to the zamindars their hereditary role of collecting taxes and fixed the annual revenue owed to the state (at £2.68 million) in the hope that such a permanent settlement would inspire them to tend their fiefdoms" (2010:xix). The 1793 land revenue changes required peasants to pay a fixed rent to *zamindars* regardless of how well their crops performed; transformed *zamindars* into English-style landlords (e.g. by introducing absentee landlords); and saw moneylenders profit as peasants sought mortgages in order to meet their tax obligations (Dutta, 2003:32; Mukerjee, 2010:xx, 54). "Here was an opportunity for a new breed of native investor, the *nouveau riche* comprador of Calcutta, to buy agricultural land with sitting peasants," Dutta writes. "These men coveted the social status of calling themselves zamindars, but without subscribing to the zamindar's traditional obligations" (Dutta, 2003:32). While "compradors" in Calcutta established their fortunes, the Permanent Settlement Act resulted in dispossession for peasants and the growth of slums in Calcutta:

They could no longer find a dependable refuge in the zamindar's generosity in times of famine and flood, or seek a generous loan to pay the dowry for their daughter's marriage or the expenses involved in a parent's funeral rite. The old support network between landlord and peasant was eroded; no longer would the zamindar provide meals when a cultivator's wife was confined by childbirth. Often the only hope for the peasant was to leave the village and go to the town. And this helped to create yet another famous feature of Calcutta – its slums.

(Dutta, 2003:32)

The Industrial Revolution dramatically changed the economic relationship between Bengal and Britain. Mukerjee points out that historian Brooks Adams posits 1760 as the start of the industrial revolution, when revenues from India were used to finance British banks and trading networks, and discusses how prosperity in Bengal gave Britain a head start in the industrialisation process (2010:47-48). Post-Plassey trading patterns between Bengal and Britain reversed when British spinning machines began mass-producing textiles in the early 1800s, and in R. P. Dutt's analysis of the Indian colonial economy (summarised by Sarkar), "the years from 1813 to 1858 saw the classic age of free-trader industrial capitalist exploitation, converting India rapidly into a market for Manchester textiles and a source for raw materials, uprooting her traditional handicrafts – a period when 'the home-land of cotton was inundated with cotton'. (Marx) (sic)" (Sarkar, 1989:24). India's artisans could not compete with British imports and suffered from tariff barriers (which included internal duties on Indian goods sold in Britain, and machinery was not permitted to enter India until 1848) so turned from cottage industries to agriculture for their livelihoods. By the 1850s "half of the United Kingdom's exports came from cotton manufacturers and virtually all of India's from its fields" (Mukerjee, 2010:48-49). Faced with competition from Manchester's textile mills, the Company developed jute mills (some of which still operate in Howrah today) and indigo plantations. By the mid-1800s Bengal had become an integral component of the British Empire's capitalist economy. "In 1600, when the East India Company was founded, Britain was generating 1.8% of the world's GDP, while India was producing 22.5%," Dalrymple tells us. "By 1870, at the peak of the Raj, Britain was generating 9.1%, while India had been reduced for the first time to the epitome of a Third World nation, a symbol across the globe of famine, poverty and deprivation" (Dalrymple, 2007).

The 1943-44 Bengal Famine is the subject of Mukerjee's book, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II* (2010). In it she examines the events leading up to this famine and shows how British colonial policies caused the death of around three million Indians during those years.¹¹ The famine saw

¹¹ Mukerjee meticulously documents how British policies saw food extracted from, rather than supplied to, a starving countryside and provides a damning indictment of Winston Churchill in the process. As well as telling distressing stories of starvation, death and survival, she also discusses parallels with

thousands of people converge on Calcutta in search of food. Calcutta's *bastis* swelled and at the height of the famine around 11,000 people were dying every week in the city. However, as Dutta notes, "the harsh truth is that middle-class Calcutta life carried on pretty much as normal. There was no food shortage for government workers and professionals" (2003:164). Sarkar, observing that "war and famine also meant super profits for some," discusses how the "Indian bourgeoisie" made fantastic gains during the famine through "profiteering in food, share-market operations and the black market in general" (1989:406-407).

This Famine played an important role in bringing Calcutta's poverty into the international arena. Mukerjee discusses how Ian Stephens, chief editor of *The Statesman* newspaper, ignored the official line that "the food situation was under control" and began publishing editorials critical of the government's role in the spreading famine and photographs of the dead and dying (2010:174-175). "Until Stephens publicized it, the calamity in Bengal had been unknown to most of India and utterly unheard about in the rest of the world," she comments. "In a bid to keep the news from leaking out, the Government of India had allegedly destroyed all but one of five thousand printed copies of *Hungry Bengal*, a collection of sketches and reportage on the Midnapore famine – but it could not suppress *The Statesman*. In New Delhi, storefronts displayed the pictures of famine victims, and in Washington the State Department circulated them among policymakers" (Mukerjee, 2010:175). The world was confronted with stark images of suffering that continue to dominate in contemporary perceptions of Kolkata.

I have shown how poverty and prosperity were constant companions in Bengal during the British colonial era. Using broad brushstrokes to discuss historical conjunctures in Kolkata has meant that in these first two sections I have discussed groups of people ('peasants', 'zamindars', 'Muslims') as if they were homogenous entities. While I recognise that this is not the case, my purpose in doing so was to highlight how colonial policies and the capitalist economy affected Bengal's diverse population in similar ways. In the next section I start to delineate the more heterogenous nature of social groupings, particularly in relation to how social difference became inscribed in physical space. I also turn my attention to Howrah city, which I have not yet described.¹²

other man-made famines including *an Gorta Mór* (the Great Hunger), the Irish name for the Potato Famine of 1845-52, when around one million people died and another million emigrated from Ireland. Some of Mukerjee's connections are astonishing. For example, she discusses how Hitler drew on the British Empire as a prototype for conquest and domination and designed Nazi policies to exploit Slavic resources which "would result in the deaths of tens of millions of Slavs by famine and disease" (Mukerjee, 2010:33-34).

¹² Chronologically, Partition is the next major event affecting West Bengal, but I do not discuss it here as it adds nothing to my argument.

Capital, poverty, and societal hope in Kolkata and Howrah

Here I discuss the geographical distribution of social characteristics (class, religion, occupation) in Kolkata and Howrah. First I outline how this process began in Calcutta's early years as a Company town. I go on to show how differences in capital contributed to an unequal distribution of poverty and access to civic amenities in the two cities today. I end the section by discussing perceptions of *bastis* and the relationship between capital and societal hope in the context of urban poverty.

Calcutta city's early development into three distinct spatial habitats (the White Town, an intermediate zone of service groups, and the Black Town) provides a good example of how social space becomes physically objectified.¹³ British employees of the East India Company, who considered themselves Calcutta's elite, constructed a "home from home" for themselves in what they called the White Town (Dutta, 2003:15). This habitat, which grew around Fort William, consisted of grand mansions, impressive public buildings and administrative centres, wide tree-lined streets that were deserted at night, and numerous clubs and parks (including the Maidan, a massive green space today known as the 'lungs of Kolkata') (Dutta, 2003:23; Kaviraj, 1997:86-87; Sarkar, 1997:162). The White Town's neoclassical architecture and European-only inhabitants contrasted with the intermediate zone surrounding it and the native "Black Town" beyond.

A second habitat developed around the edges of the White Town to meet its service requirements. Urban historians describe this as "a heterogenous intermediate zone, inhabited by poor whites, Eurasians (products of marriage or liaisons of white and non-white), large numbers of Muslim service groups (preferred by Europeans as servants and cooks as presumably having less stringent pollution taboos), and small communities of Jews, Armenians and Chinese" (Sarkar, 1997:166). This space was home to migrants who had come to work in the service industry, more prosperous Muslims, and merchants, such as enterprising immigrants from Rajasthan known as Marwaris. It also included Barabazar, "the lynchpin of Calcutta's commerce" (Sarkar, 1997:167). Although Barabazar was next to the European business centre of Dalhousie Square and Clive Street, Sarkar comments that it was "utterly different visually ... a maze of bustling shops and narrow lanes crowded at night as much as in daytime" (1997:166). Sarkar notes that despite their "evident and many-sided economic importance," the people of this intermediate zone were – and are still – perceived as "immigrant birds of passage" on the edge of the dominant image of the city, which, he argues, is imagined as predominantly Bengali and implicitly Hindu (1997:167).

¹³ See Athique & Hill (2010:22-23) for a general discussion of how "the major Presidency cities (Calcutta, Bombay and Madras)" in colonial India were characterised by spatial politics.

To the north and north-east of the intermediate zone, and to the south of the White Town, grew the Black Town. This habitat was developed by *nouveau riche* Bengalis, the “compradore-rajas” who made their fortunes as agents to private European traders, intermediaries for the East India Company, moneylenders, and *zamindars* (Dutta, 2003:23; Kaviraj, 1997:87; Sarkar, 1997:168). “Their way of life was usually marked by extravagance and consumption, and most of the opulent houses of the compradore-rajas were already in various stages of decay by the early-twentieth century,” Sarkar writes of old Calcutta’s Bengali society. “Even in their great days, such palaces had lacked the spaciousness and external grace of the white residential areas, for compradore-rajas turned into urban rentiers had to encourage the peopling of space: opulent houses thus came to be surrounded by slums and brothels” (Sarkar, 1997:168). Unlike the White Town, the compradore-rajas of the Black Town “tended to draw clusters of people around them – the artisans and laborers who were needed for service” (Thomas, 1997:19). Busy marketplaces and mud-and-thatch dwellings (*bastis*) developed within walking distance of grand houses so servants could do their employers’ bidding at any time of day or night.¹⁴

Calcutta’s early habitats shared a feature that can be seen in present-day Kolkata: people congregated into self-contained areas based on social, economic, and cultural capital. For instance, people with similar occupations tended to group together and today one can still visit certain areas of the city for specific goods and services (e.g. Metiabruz for garments, Chitpur for musical instruments, College Street for books, Raja Bazaar for paper products). “The names of certain parts of Calcutta reflect their artisan origins: Kumortuli (potter’s neighborhood), Darjipara (tailors’ neighborhood), Muchipara (tanners’ and cobblers’ neighborhood), and Kolutola (oil pressers’ neighborhood)” writes Dutta (2003:24). Describing Barabazar as it was in 1918, Kenneth McPherson observes that its migrant population gravitated into areas of common settlement based on caste, religion, language, occupation and village, creating “exclusive islands in which they maintained their traditional sense of social and religious identification as far as was possible in the urban environment” (1974:6). Bengali writer Nirad C. Chaudhuri (perhaps most famous for his 1951 book *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*), who lived in Calcutta from 1910-1942, noted that Hindus and Muslims lived separately and that Muslims gathered in what he named the “Muhammadan belt,” an area between the White and the Black Town that included Zakaria Street, Mechuabazar, and Park Circus (see Dutta, 2003:140). McPherson

¹⁴ British residents of the White Town were often dismayed by the juxtaposition of rich and poor and different housing styles and materials (see Dutta, 2003:24-25; Thomas, 1997:17), which did not conform to their sensibilities (*habitus*, in Bourdieu’s terms). Today, Kolkata’s middle-class residents are also dismayed by the disruption of socio-spatial distinctions, evidenced in letters to the editors of newspapers and other public discourses. Places of reified social space have become sites of struggle in contemporary Kolkata – see Athique & Hill (2010), Kaviraj (1997), Marques (2005), and Ananya Roy (2003). Appadurai (2001) and Fernandes (2006b) discuss some of these dynamics in Mumbai.

suggests that by maintaining this sense of distinction, migrants “inhibited the growth of any form of class consciousness or identification with a supra-communal community and resisted the effect of the city as an agent of social integration” (1974:6). As a result, urban areas and *bastis* in contemporary Kolkata each have their own unique habitat.

Howrah, a centre of trade (and conflict with foreign traders) long before Charnock founded Calcutta in 1690, developed in a similar manner. Prosperous Muslim and Hindu merchant families lived in Howrah’s villages, along with migrants from other parts of Bengal seeking employment in its mercantile centres, and Armenians were the first foreigners to settle there during Charnock’s time (A. B. Chatterjee, 1967:31; O’Malley & Chakravarti, 1909:19). Company employees and other Europeans began building villages and garden parks (including the Botanical Gardens in 1786) as “urban retreats” in Howrah from the mid-eighteenth century (O’Malley & Chakravarti, 1909:22; A. B. Chatterjee, 1967:34). Transportation networks played a vital role in Howrah’s expansion, especially Grand Trunk Road,¹⁵ Howrah Railway Station (built in 1854), the original floating pontoon bridge that connected Howrah with Calcutta (constructed in 1874),¹⁶ and, across the river, Calcutta Port (established in 1870). The bridge and trams saw an increase in commuters as growing numbers of Bengalis and others employed in Calcutta’s administrative centres made their homes in Howrah (O’Malley & Chakravarti, 1909:31). Howrah became an important industrial hub following the Industrial Revolution and from the 1850s experienced a rapid growth in mills (jute, flour, cotton and sugar), iron and engineering works, dockyards, warehouses (for salt, rice and coal) and other industries (A. B. Chatterjee, 1967:34; O’Malley & Chakravarti, 1909:104-117). The rise in industrial activity attracted a large stream of migrants from other parts of India who congregated along lines of class, caste, religion, and occupation. Priya Manna Basti (PM Basti), one of my research sites (see Figure 3 overleaf), provides a good illustration of these processes.¹⁷

PM Basti is located along Grand Trunk Road in Shibpur, an old village settlement in Howrah that developed into an industrial area in the nineteenth century. Shibpur had Bengali *zamindars* and was home to Brahmin Hindu families as well as Europeans, giving it a reputation as “a centre of cultured peoples” (A. B. Chatterjee, 1967:70). An early description of PM Basti reveals that here, like Calcutta, Muslim migrants gravitated into areas of common settlement. Discussing how Muslims formed more than one-fifth of Howrah’s population by 1901, O’Malley and Chakravarti write

¹⁵ Grand Trunk Road traverses India and is one of South Asia’s oldest roads. In 1804 the British began to extend it through Shibpur and it now begins at the Botanical Gardens (O’Malley & Chakravarti, 1909:118).

¹⁶ Today, four bridges span the Hoogly: Rabindra Setu (originally named the Howrah Bridge), Vidyasagar Setu to the south (this toll bridge is also known as the Second Howrah Bridge), and northernmost bridges Vivekananda Setu (or Bally Bridge) and Nivedita Setu stand side-by-side.

¹⁷ I describe PM Basti here and not my other research site, Narkeldanga, as a way of providing a counter-narrative to dominant representations of Kolkata, which often forget, overshadow or ignore Howrah.

Figure 3. Locations of PM Basti and Narkeldanga, Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA)



Priya Manna Basti, where Howrah Pilot Project operates, is in Shibpur, Howrah city. Narkeldanga, where Rehnuma-e-Niswaan operates, is in Kolkata city. Howrah city's population is around 1 million and Kolkata city's population is around 5 million. Both cities are encompassed within the KMA (outlined here) and this larger area is often what people refer to when they use the term 'Kolkata'. The KMA is the tenth biggest metropolis in the world in terms of population size – over 13.5 million according to the 2001 Census of India – and has the highest population density in India (Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor, 2004:6).

Source: National Information Technology Promotion Unit Kolkata, 2010

that they congregated “chiefly in dirty over-crowded *bastis* like Tindalbāgān, Tikāpārā and Priya Mānnā’s *basti*” (O’Malley & Chakravarti, 1909:38). Ramaswamy, who has collected oral histories of PM Basti and its community, describes its twentieth century origins:

What is today known as PM Basti, was originally the property of two Englishmen – John Chew and James Chew. It was then known as ‘Chew’s Garden’, and there were a number of flower gardens, ponds and small structures on the site. One of the Chews was killed when he suffered a riding accident and fell from his horse into a pond. His brother then sold the property. The new owner [Jitendranath Manna] re-named it after his wife ... After Howrah Mills, Ganges Jute Mill, and Fort William Jute Mill were set up, and workers from the neighbouring states of Bihar and UP [Uttar Pradesh] came to work in these factories, there was an acute need for housing the jute mill workers. Workers took small plots of land on the former Chew garden on rent and built huts for themselves – made of earth and wattle-and-daub. In this manner, about two hundred densely packed houses came up.

(Ramaswamy, 2006c)

Amina, who lives in PM Basti and co-ordinates Howrah Pilot Project, has also narrated the area’s history (Khatoon, 2009a).¹⁸ She explains that PM Basti’s inhabitants were primarily Urdu-speaking Muslims, mostly landless, poor, illiterate young male farm workers who had been recruited from rural villages to labour in the jute mills. She describes how PM Basti’s physical environment affected its residents:

The mill authorities soon began to observe that many of their workers were dying by the age of 40-50, while in their country workers lived till they were much older. The cause was evident. As the plot had been an open garden, the settlement came up in an unplanned fashion. Huts were scattered everywhere. There were no drains or sanitation. Drinking water was scarce. The mill had installed a water tap that provided water for only a few hours a day. People would go to a distant municipal tank in Kawaipukur. They filled water in buckets and carried them home. To bathe and wash clothes, people went to the river which was near the basti.

The huts were built just three feet apart. There were no chimneys on them to let out smoke, and often the whole settlement was enveloped in smoke. Given the lack of drainage and accumulation of water everywhere, mosquitoes thrived and malaria was rife.

(Khatoon, 2009a)

The story of PM Basti’s development highlights two issues. First, it shows how industrial growth and labour migration in the colonial era contributed to the rise of different habitats based on social characteristics. Sarkar’s comment that the city of Calcutta “in many important respects was, and remains, not one but many: distinct in residential areas, languages and cultures, self-images, but interacting in everyday life in relationships of inequality – and occasional conflict” (1997:165) also applies to Howrah.

¹⁸ In 2008 Amina was awarded an Infochange Media Fellowship to research and write a series of articles providing a first-hand account of urban poverty in Priya Manna Basti.

Second, it helps explain how the geographic distribution of poverty and access to civic amenities (water, sanitation, electricity, educational facilities) emerged. These inequalities are reflected in spatial concentrations of high rates of disease, infant and maternal mortality, stunted growth, malnutrition, illiteracy, ill health (including diarrhoea, as Amina indicated in Interlude 2 above) and other human development indicators as *basti* dwellers and the urban poor¹⁹ embody historical sociocultural structures. Such negative indicators are less likely to be found in prosperous habitats, e.g., areas in south Kolkata (Ballygunge, Jodhpur Park) with new shopping complexes, multiplex cinemas, and gated apartment blocks designed for India's growing middle classes.²⁰

The Census of India collected data on slums in 2001 and found 32.55% of Kolkata city's residents live in over 5,000 registered and unregistered *bastis* (see Figure 4) (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2001b). It also found that 11.72% of Howrah city's population lives in *bastis* (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2001b), although other sources put Howrah's *basti* population at over 50% (Ramaswamy & Chakravarti, 1997b:66). The structural disadvantages of urban poverty are key issues for Muslims, India's largest minority community.²¹ 31% of India's Muslims live below the poverty line²² and on average poor Muslims only consume 75% of the poverty line expenditure (Government of India, 2006:157, 158). In urban areas, Muslims have the highest incidence of poverty (38.4%) of all socio-religious communities (Government of India, 2006:157). Several studies of Muslims in Kolkata (where they comprise 20.27% of the city's population) and Howrah (where

¹⁹ I should point out that not all of Kolkata's urban poor live in *bastis*. For example, refugees who poured into Calcutta following Partition in 1947, and again in 1971 when Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan, were not all absorbed into already-crowded *bastis*. Some were housed in formal resettlement colonies, others appropriated a range of unoccupied spaces (along railways and canals, for example) and built informal squatter settlements, and pavement dwellers also became part of the urban landscape (Dutta, 2003:171-172; Kaviraj, 1997:103-105). In recent years, rural dispossession added a new wave of migrants to the mix in what Ananya Roy describes as "distress migration," which differs from labour migration (2003:30). The poorest of the poor are more likely to be found in these appropriated spaces rather than *bastis*, which can also be home for people from the lower middle classes.

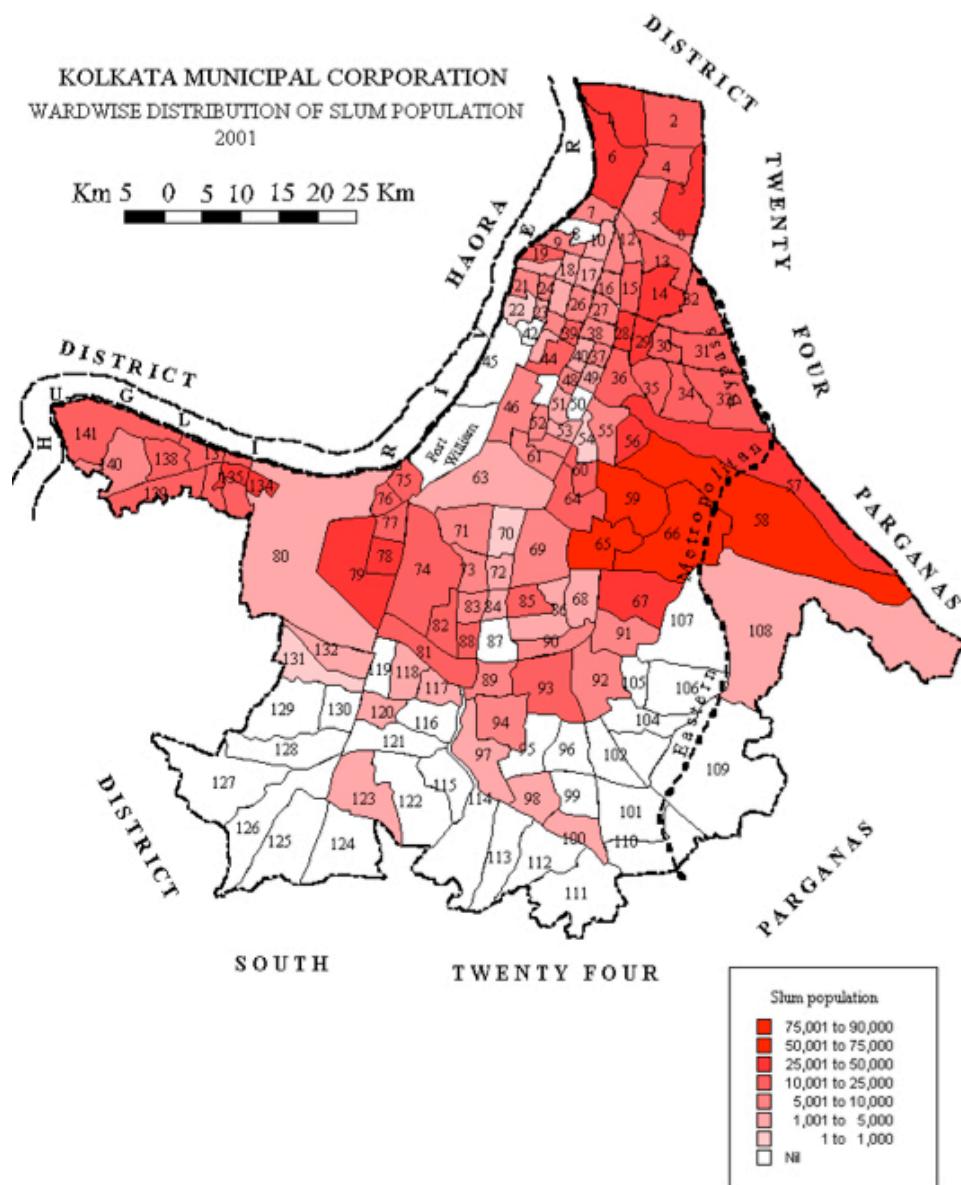
²⁰ The growing visibility of India's middle class – in physical space (multiplexes, parks, luxury apartment blocks) and political struggles over it, in rising levels of media advertisements for and consumption of consumer goods, in changing norms of dress, eating habits and gender relations – has received much attention from social scientists in recent years. Three interesting recent works include Athique & Hill (2010), Fernandes (2006a), and a doctoral dissertation by Mishra (Forthcoming).

²¹ Muslims constitute 13.4% of India's population, although West Bengal has on average a higher percentage of Muslim residents (Census of India 2001, 2001a). Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution of India protect the interests and rights of minorities, although the term 'minority' is not formally defined (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2001a).

²² In 1979 a Task Force assigned by the Government of India's Planning Commission formalised a definition of poverty based on the expenditure on food items required to meet a minimum calorie intake. These calorie norms were fixed at 2435 (rounded to 2400) kcal per capita per diem for rural areas and 2095 (rounded to 2100) kcal for urban areas (Mehta & Venkatraman, 2001:2377). In 2004-2005 the All-India value of this consumption was Rs. 356.30 per capita per month for rural areas and Rs. 538.60 per capita per month for urban areas (Government of India, 2007:3). Poverty lines are calculated separately for each state and the proportion of the population living below the poverty line is estimated annually using surveys carried out by the National Sample Survey Organisation. These calculations are problematic; Ananya Roy (2003) has discussed some of the controversy and debate surrounding poverty lines in West Bengal, for example.

they make up 24.44% of the city's population, Census of India 2001, 2001a) have shown that they live predominantly in *bastis* (see Samanta, 2004; Ramaswamy & Chakravarti, 1997b; Siddiqui, 1974/2005).

Figure 4. Distribution of slum population in Kolkata Municipal Corporation, 2001



Narkeldanga is in Ward 29 of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, the governing body of the city's 141 administrative wards. Narkeldanga is one of six wards within the city where the slum population constitutes more than 90% of the total population of the ward (Firdos, 2007, 28 May).

Source: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2001c

Sohel Firdos, research fellow in Development Studies at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta (CSSSC), carried out household surveys between 2005-2007 in wards in Kolkata where more than 90% of the population lived in *bastis*. His survey included Narkeldanga, which is largely inhabited by Muslims, and preliminary findings suggested a high correlation between these "slum wards" and deficiencies in

access to public goods and services (Firdos, 2007, 28 May). A decade earlier, Ramaswamy encountered disparities in human development indicators that made him “sit up” when he was working as a social development consultant on a government project for environmental management in Howrah. “The infant mortality rate for the majority Hindu population of Howrah ... was just under 45 per 1,000 in 1992, while that for the Muslim minority population was about 105 per 1,000” he writes. “By 1993, the figures were about 37 and 83 respectively. Trying to understand why there was such a big difference in the infant mortality rates, and more importantly wanting to and trying to do something that could make a positive impact on such a situation – took over my life” (Ramaswamy, 2007).²³ I do not suggest that poverty discriminates between Muslims and Hindus. It doesn’t. There is also considerable diversity within and between *bastis* in terms of poverty and access to civic amenities. However, historical sociocultural factors mean that different groups of people can experience poverty differently (see Lister, 2004).²⁴ This is a point I develop further in Chapter 4, when I discuss how urban poor Muslim women are triply disadvantaged due to inequalities of gender, poverty, and their status as members of a minority community.

Over time, people writing about the degraded physical environments of *bastis* in Howrah and Kolkata began to associate them with certain images. Howrah in particular has been cast in a negative light.²⁵ Discussing historical accounts of environmental management in Howrah, Chandan Sengupta observes that in 1889 a sanitary commissioner who inspected the city described it as “without exception the dirtiest, most backward and badly managed municipality I have ever seen,” sentiments echoed in 1893 by another sanitary commission which labelled Howrah “deplorable” (1999:1292). Words like “dirty,” “filthy” and “overcrowded” were in use to describe Howrah’s *bastis* by the early 1900s, primarily due to “obnoxious” ponds and poor sanitary conditions (O’Malley & Chakravarti, 1909:38, 62). Writing in the 1970s, Moorhouse notes that “some of the nastiest” *bastis* are to be found in Howrah, “which is to Calcutta what Southwark is to London, what Birkenhead is to Liverpool, what the Bronx is to Manhattan” (1971:99).

²³ Ramaswamy (2007) writes that the Hindu-Muslim infant mortality rate differential is explained by the fact that much of the Muslim population is poor, low-income, and lives in or around *bastis*, whereas the Hindu population includes a significant proportion of people from the middle classes who do not live in *bastis*. In an email to me he wrote: “In effect the infant mortality rate differential is a proxy indicator of the slum-non-slum differential in environmental health. Muslim slums also tend, for various reasons, to be old, very large; while “Hindu” slums might actually be merely a small slum cluster. And the infant mortality rate differential also suggests deeply entrenched institutional bottlenecks to improvement in Muslim slums” (personal communication).

²⁴ My research has focused on two Muslim *bastis*. An important area of further research might compare the structural disadvantages of poverty between different habitats. For example, I am interested in investigating similarities and differences between PM Basti and a neighbouring Hindu *basti* in Howrah, where Binod (another key HPP volunteer, introduced in Chapter 5) lives.

²⁵ This is partly due to the Hoogly river, which has long functioned as “a great social barrier” between the two cities according to A. B. Chatterjee (1967:viii).

“Ever discriminated against, for being merely a coolie town, Howrah’s *bastis* are beyond imagination or belief,” said Ramaswamy at the “Does Culture Matter?” conference held in Kolkata by the Goethe Institute. “The writer Shankar, a son of Howrah, once said in an interview: “Howrah is Calcutta’s service latrine (*khata paikhana*)”” (Ramaswamy, 2004). This is an evocative image given Kolkata’s reputation (in Western imaginings) as “a byword for human degradation” (Dutta, 2003:178). Such images of squalor, combined with discourses of poverty, have become world-famous.

As Ramaswamy’s comment about Howrah being a “coolie town” indicates, *basti* dwellers came to occupy a lesser position in social space in relation to those in other habitats due to values associated with various forms of capital. On more than one occasion I was told by people I met in Kolkata city that Howrah was not a place where “nice people” go. I believe this is partly due to its industrial history and the occupational clusters that developed, perceptions that also extend to certain habitats in Kolkata. Writing about Calcutta in the early 1900s, McPherson notes that Bengalis had a somewhat disdainful attitude towards factory employment: “In general they displayed a voracious appetite for education and a matching penchant for non-manual forms of employment. Such attitudes helped create a social milieu in which menial and industrial occupations ranked low on the scale of social aspirations. The end result was a disproportionate influx of Bengalis into clerical and professional occupations ...” (1974:3). In a city “obsessed” with education and learning, as Dutta (2003:195) describes Kolkata, education is an important form of distinction (a point I return to in Chapter 4). Migrant factory labourers with limited education who congregated in *bastis* along lines of class and occupation had less symbolic capital than educated, white-collar elite residents. These processes contributed to contemporary perceptions of *bastis*, and their inhabitants, as different and undesirable.

Capital also affects the distribution of hope within societies. As individuals, the more capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) we accumulate, the more *being* (sense of identity, significance and purpose) we acquire, and the more agency and power we have in relation to others. Societies also give us a sense of movement by providing societal routes for the pursuit of meaningful and dignified social lives – as I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, this is what Hage terms societal hope. While caste²⁶ plays a complex role in employment opportunities, formal education (cultural capital) has long been regarded as an important societal route for economic advancement and social status in Kolkata and Howrah. Societal hope is not distributed equally, however.

²⁶ Although not the subject of this thesis, anthropologists (and other social scientists) have long been interested in understanding and explaining caste as a system of social stratification in India. Some influential texts on caste include Bandyopadhyay (2004), Berreman (1979), Dirks (2001), Dumont (1972), Leach & Mukherjee (1970), Sharma (1998), and Srinivas (1962).

“Why do you want to work there?” asked a middle-class man I met during my stay at a guesthouse in Ballygunge upon learning about my research with Muslim women in *bastis*. His comment that “they will never get out of poverty” encapsulates a perception about the urban poor that I believe is shared by many. One aspect of this perception, which Leela Fernandes also encountered among her middle-class research participants in Mumbai, “rests on a notion that the poor choose their poverty and are essentially unwilling to work in order to gain social mobility” (2006b:132). My research participants, however, consider themselves – and demonstrate that they are – extremely hard working and I am sure would firmly reject any notion that they “choose” poverty. Another aspect of this perception concerns the social opportunities available to Muslims. As I discuss in Chapter 4, even when Muslim *basti* dwellers do obtain cultural capital in the form of education, stereotypes based on religious identity and limited employment opportunities (which sometimes result from these stereotypes) can make it difficult for a sense of hopefulness to flourish. The historical conjunctures that shape *bastis*, combined with structural disadvantages of poverty and gender, can leave few individual or societal routes for accumulating capital and being. This sense of having nowhere to go, rather than poverty, is what Hage considers the enemy of societal hope (2003a:20).

Bastis as “forgotten places” in Howrah and Kolkata

I conclude this chapter by addressing a point often made by Ramaswamy and others writing about urban poverty in the KMA, which is that *bastis* are characterised by inadequate (or even the complete absence of) state services. This is especially the case for Howrah, which Ramaswamy describes as a “historically neglected city in comparison to Kolkata,” (Ramaswamy et al., 2010:294), “the unintended Other to the intended Calcutta” (Ramaswamy, 1999:20). “The literature on Howrah’s urban life and living conditions is dominated by the view that the city has predominantly been a victim of neglect,” writes Chandan Sengupta. “Novelists, historians and administrators are unanimous in the opinion that, despite its 500-year-old history, arts and culture, Howrah was always given stepmotherly treatment by the city builders” (1999:1292). In this section I focus on a point Leela Fernandes (2010) makes in her introduction²⁷ to a recent article I co-authored with Ramaswamy and Sita (Ramaswamy et al., 2010), namely that *bastis* can be understood as “forgotten places.”

“Forgotten places” are historically and politically constructed habitats that are neglected, but nevertheless deeply inhabited, by the state. According to Yong-Sook Lee and Brenda Yeoh, “forgetting” in capitalist society is often an explicit, conscious and

²⁷ Our article was one of two field reports in the journal *Critical Asian Studies*. Fernandes’s article introduces and discusses the field reports.

strategic process whereby more powerful social agents (neo-liberal states, the middle classes) actively control and manipulate space to maintain existing power structures and marginalise other groups and places (Lee & Yeoh, 2006:4). “Forgotten places ... are both symptomatic of and intimately shaped by crisis,” explains Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who, along with Lee and Yeoh, helped develop this concept (2008:32). “Gilmore’s conception of forgotten places is not one of a passive or vacant territory that is accidentally overlooked by the state,” writes Fernandes in discussing our article. “Rather these places are actively shaped by crisis, constraint, and a sense of fracturing produced by what Gilmore characterizes as a paradox of being both “abandoned, yet intensely occupied” by the state” (Fernandes, 2010:266). In her next sentence Fernandes makes a practice theory move by reminding us that “these forgotten places are also alive with people who try to survive in the face of the insurmountable violence of poverty and the everyday obstruction of social hierarchies of caste, religion, and gender and in many instances also try to overcome, resist, and transform the conditions that produce these crises and constraints” (2010:266-267).

Bastis each have their own unique habitat, as I discussed above. However, a commonality is that while the state is conspicuously absent from physical space (in terms of providing access to civic amenities), it is overwhelmingly *present* in social space, especially social and political life. This is an example of how power is exercised over space. The state controls physical space through the distribution of civic amenities, and people living in those habitats, with less capital and power, have less possibility of controlling or appropriating civic amenities.²⁸ In this way, *bastis* in Howrah and Kolkata are “forgotten places.” Although he doesn’t use this concept, Ramaswamy has much to say on the simultaneous absence and presence of the state in *bastis*. At the “Does Culture Matter?” conference mentioned above, for example, he asked who should be responsible for the foul service latrines in Howrah’s *bastis* and the dangerous unhygienic conditions they foster:

We think of ‘government’ first. I can mention here something that I fully understood only because of privileged access I had as a govt. project functionary. If many of the citizens of Calcutta are alive, or healthy, then that is not as a result of anything that the public authorities do, or I must hasten to add anything that the private market does. It is just providence ... The real agenda of institutions and authorities – is basically enhancement of their own power and privilege. The system is simply totally bankrupt and devoid of basic capability in terms of meeting public ends. This must be seen as a state of crisis in the society.

(Ramaswamy, 2004).

²⁸ For example, in her discussion of a working paper by Firdos entitled “The Politics of Urban Service Provision in Kolkata,” Amina writes: “Firdos concludes that even though the electoral outcomes in slum-dominated wards are entirely dependent on the votes of the poor, because of their electoral strength, elected municipal representatives seem to consistently ignore the requirements of slum-dwellers for civic services” (Khatoon, 2009e).

The 'government' Ramaswamy refers to here is the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which governed West Bengal for 30 years until its displacement in the 2009 general elections. A number of his blog posts draw attention to the CPI(M)'s failure to implement effective interventions for the urban poor (especially Muslims) in West Bengal,²⁹ including posts suggesting the Howrah Municipal Corporation sabotaged a project to install toilets in selected *bastis* so that government officials and contractors could pocket the funds (Ramaswamy, 2006b, 2007). He also discusses how legislation concerning the complex *thika* tenancy system (whereby a landowner rents vacant plots to intermediate agents – *thika* tenants – who build small huts and other structures which they in turn rent to a third party) has resulted in illegal construction "through a nexus of builder-hoodlum-party cadres-police" which adversely affects *basti* dwellers (Ramaswamy, 2008:25). In our recent article, Ramaswamy notes how the "criminal activities of the Party's grassroots cadres" means that *basti* dwellers are left with no choice but to engage in criminal activities in order to access basic services like electricity, which is stolen through an illegal connection and resold to the community by party-supported people (Ramaswamy et al., 2010:296, 297 note 213). Ramaswamy is not the only one to address these issues. Firdos lists "political interference" and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation's unwillingness "to share spatial as well as attribute data with academics" as key barriers to locating, mapping, and creating a database of the city's *basti* population (2007, 28 May). Ananya Roy also describes the links between the CPI(M), social control and political patronage in Calcutta's squatter settlements to show how the state is "inevitably a site of bitter everyday and extraordinary contestations" (2003:229).

For Fernandes, the CPI(M)-led government's relationship with the urban poor in Kolkata and Howrah can be understood in terms of "forgotten places":

The fact that an NGO such as the Howrah Pilot Project³⁰ has had to step in and try to provide the services that are the responsibility of the state is symptomatic of the process of privatization that is one aspect of liberalization. In this process, as the state actively retreats from serving poorer communities, NGOs often step in and attempt to fill the vacated space. Thus, once again we see the paradox of a place that is both actively forgotten and intensely occupied by the state. On the one hand, slums are transformed into places that are actively forgotten by the state when it comes to the provision of the basic conditions of urban livability. On the other hand, these forgotten places are intensely occupied by the state through what V. Ramaswamy describes as a nexus of party-state corruption that victimizes slum inhabitants ... and through broader cross-regional patterns in which the state evicts slum-dwellers in order to

²⁹ Amina, in her work as a journalist for an Urdu-language newspaper, has also written about political corruption and tells me she has received death threats for doing so.

³⁰ I should point out that Ramaswamy makes a distinction between HPP – which he describes as a grassroots organisation or an experiment in grassroots civic action – and NGOs. He does not consider HPP to be an NGO.

engage in lucrative development and real estate deals in metropolitan cities.

(Fernandes, 2010:268)

Such “forgotten places” demand resourcefulness and ingenuity as those living in the context of urban poverty seek meaningful lives for themselves and their families. As Fernandes notes, organisations such as Howrah Pilot Project (see Chapter 5) and Rehnuma-e-Niswaan (see Chapter 6) can be viewed as a response to the process of active forgetting.³¹ These organisations provide a way of pursuing hope and *being* through grassroots development initiatives for education and economic development – in other words, they inspire development hope. However, in later chapters I also draw attention to the problems inherent in relying on grassroots organisations to fill gaps left by the state in “forgotten places”, not least because it increases the burden on people already struggling to survive.

In this chapter I have historicized Bengal’s poverty to show how specific historical conjunctures shaped Kolkata and Howrah and “reduced the human to the scavenging crow,” as Ramaswamy has expressed it (2009). I described the historical processes by which social spaces become inscribed in physical spaces, arguing that capitalist economic processes played an important role in positioning *bastis* as socially distant and undesirable habitats. I also explained how these processes contributed to an unequal distribution of poverty, civic amenities, and societal hope within *bastis* in Howrah and Kolkata. I conclude by suggesting that *bastis* can be viewed as “forgotten places,” habitats that provide fertile ground for grassroots organisations such as those described in this thesis to step in, fill the gap left by the state, and foster development hope in the process. In Chapter 2 we travel to Lae, where I use the same framework – the relationship between habitus, habitat, and capital – as a way of thinking about historical conjunctures shaping this very different fieldsite.

³¹ Crime could be viewed as another response. Although I have not focused on it in this study, people’s resourcefulness can sometimes lead to illegal occupations in the struggle for survival.

Visiting Wendy's house in Kamkumung

[Interlude 3. Fieldnote excerpts, 7 September 2006]

The following excerpts reconstruct my visit to Kamkumung settlement. Although my case studies do not operate in Kamkumung, I describe it here to give a sense of what settlement life is like in Lae.

Today I went to Wendy's house in Kamkumung settlement. Wendy and her brother-in-law, Chrison, came to pick me up at 11am and we headed into town to catch a PMV. Chrison doesn't work and is a full-time caregiver for his four children as his wife has recently found employment. Chrison's children don't go to school; they can't afford the annual K200 per child school fees.

When we arrived at Kamkumung I bought some *buai* (betel nut) and cigarettes for Wendy and Chrison at the market before we walked through the settlement to Wendy's house. The potholed dirt road was narrow in places and sometimes we had to jump across small streams of water. Apparently during rainy season the streams can flood and the water rises to mid-calf level. Overall it seemed pretty clean to me. There was some rubbish around and the usual splashes of bright red *buai* spit, and the occasional smell of urine or raw sewage. The houses were small and behind fences that were not topped with razor wire like ex-pat compound fences. A lot of the houses were pre-fabs, rectangular in shape with windows and a door, and Wendy tells me they're just one big room. Other houses have rooms you can rent for K30 per fortnight. Around sixty or seventy thousand people live in the settlement.

We met Noah, a friend of Wendy's, a 15 year old from the Sepik, and passed his very small, square, plywood house. I saw a door but no windows. The single room would have been wide enough for him to lie down in and tall enough to stand in but that's it. On the way to Wendy's she pointed out areas where people from different regions had created spaces to live together and we passed groups of people playing bingo and cards. Seems people can sit and gamble all day, especially those without work, as there's not much else to do. I saw lots of school age children who obviously don't attend school. Wendy says children prefer to go to the villages rather than stay in the city as it's better, more fun. People seemed happy to see me; everyone we passed said hello and wanted to shake my hand. Wendy told me that I was the first white person to have gone into the settlement. I didn't believe her, and said so. She was adamant about it and sought support from Chrison and Noah, but I still find it hard to believe that in the history of Kamkumung settlement (which was first settled in the early 1980s) not one white person has ever set foot inside it. More likely I'm the only white person to have visited Wendy's house.

Wendy's house is small and old, built with wood and a corrugated iron roof (the house is in the background of Photograph 5). The posts it is raised on are rotting and it's going to fall down soon. The land that she and her mother live on is beautifully landscaped, however, very different to the other houses we passed. This might be because Wendy's mother is one of the settlement's longest residents. The lawns were nicely mown and the displays of flowers and trees wouldn't have been out of place in a tropical botanical garden. Wendy and her mother don't have electricity (although the church next to their house gets electricity on Sundays) or water. They collect rainwater in large metal drums and have to buy water when that runs out.

Photograph 5. Wendy's mother outside their house in Kamkumung settlement



Wendy's mother, Pahkai Pipil, with their guard dog, Wari.

Wendy invited a few women to come and talk to me about how they live in the settlements. One woman makes money by renting rooms in her house, which is also used as a card-playing venue from 7am until late at night. Others engage in a range of

informal economies, such as selling cooked food; buying vegetables at the main market in town and selling them for a slight profit in Kamkumung (Wendy described this as the “black market” because prices are higher than town and you’re “stealing” money from people); making and selling *bilums* (string bags), baskets, mats, and *meri* blouses¹; raising chickens; collecting and selling firewood; selling *buai*, cigarettes, and candy; and some make a profit by loaning money and charging interest. Some of the women’s husbands are in waged employment but they get paid fortnightly and the wages are often not enough to support their families, so the women will do other work in the meantime to earn enough to put food on the table every day.

I tried to ask about the future and what plans they might have, but they didn’t really have an answer for me. Wendy tells me that they just live for now, for today, and don’t really think about or plan for anything beyond that. Then I asked what she would do if she were in charge of the government and could make some changes. She said that she would find employment for the young men, as the biggest problem is having nothing to do – that would help combat *raskolism*, which is rife within the settlement.

.....

¹ Long, loose fitting dresses worn over a *laplap* or sarong.

Chapter 2

Lae, City of Potholes

It is hard to miss the potholes littering roads in and around Lae, the capital of Morobe Province and Papua New Guinea's second largest city. Most (if not all) of Lae's roads have potholes, the largest of which can stretch across a street, forcing vehicles to a crawl as they attempt to navigate through or around them. As well as dominating the roads, potholes are also a ubiquitous discussion point for Lae's residents, who vent their frustrations with hazardous driving conditions and the persistent failure of provincial and national governments to maintain the roads in angry letters to the editors of national newspapers, in local newsletters ("Editorial: Lae", 2010), in online blogs and in everyday conversations. Visitors to the city also frequently comment on the city's potholes (see McLeod, 2003) and the *Lonely Planet Guide* to Papua New Guinea (PNG) notes that Lae has "the most potholed and roughest urban roads in PNG" (Lipscomb, McKinnon, & Murray, 1998:175).

In PNG, roads have long been "both a metaphor and reality of development" (Connell, 1997:229). Finding a "road to development" is a common expression in PNG, as Michael Goddard notes, and to achieve it "communities and individuals try various strategies, including *rot bilong bisnis* (Tokpisin: the business way), *rot bilong lotu* (the religious way, ie, involvement in fundraising church activities) and *rot bilong raskol* (the criminal way)" (2005:114). Roads have also featured in anthropological attempts to understand social change and development in Melanesia. Colin Filer suggests that "road theory" is a suitable term for analyses concerned with the decisions made by different actors about how best to achieve development, primarily because of the attention given to the ways in which people "talk about these decisions as choices between 'roads'," adding *kastom* (custom), *kaunsil* (council) and *kago* (cargo; material goods) to the list (1990:85 note 14).

I find roads an intriguing metaphor for development, especially given the abysmal state of many of PNG's physical roads. This fact does not often feature in discussions of the "road to development".¹ John Connell writes that in the absence of

¹ Filer's recent essay is an exception: "It could be argued that this particular metaphor has lost its political currency precisely because the physical road network has signally failed to expand in the post-

physical roads, “‘the road-to-be is a symbol of salvation, of endless economic gain, a path toward material wealth and increasingly accessible consumerism’ ...” (1997:229). Even a road scarred with potholes can inspire development hope. Many of my research participants spoke of taking various ‘roads’ in order to achieve development, indicating that is still a useful metaphor to think with. However, it is important to discuss physical as well as metaphorical routes; as Filer states, a road “is not just a prismatic concept that might somehow open the magic door to development, but also a distinctive type of public ceremony. In other words, it has to be travelled, and not just thought about” (2006:78).

In this chapter I discuss how colonial administration and roads shaped the social and physical landscapes of PNG and Lae. My aim is to describe the historical conjunctures by which roads came to represent a “metaphor and reality of development” in PNG. I begin by discussing how important transportation networks were to PNG’s various colonisers. I show how physical roads and transport networks act as a form of development hope by increasing the sense of possibilities in life, while at the same time are blamed for contributing to growing problems with crime and the spread of settlements. Later, in Part III of this thesis, I focus on two frequently travelled metaphorical ‘roads’ to development: education and income-generation. I conclude by discussing how the potholes in Lae’s roads, and the poor infrastructure within the city’s settlements, serve as tangible reminders of government failure to achieve or sustain development.

Colonial administration and roads into Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea is the largest island state in Oceania. It comprises the eastern half of the island of New Guinea (the western half, West Papua, is part of Indonesia) and more than a hundred islands to the east. PNG is largely mountainous; a chain of populous mountain ranges known as the Highlands runs from the western PNG-Indonesia border to the coastal regions in the east. With evidence of human settlement dating back as far as 50,000 years, PNG has a long history of cultural adaptation, innovation, and social change (Connell, 1997; H. Nelson, 1972/1974; Sillitoe, 2000; Waiko, 1993).

People settling in vastly different terrains across the country developed distinct languages, cultural traditions, patterns of land ownership, kinship systems and forms of political and economic organisation that resulted in the striking regional diversity found in PNG today. Differences notwithstanding, *social relations* formed an important basis for social organisation across PNG and continue to underpin the reciprocal

colonial period. On the other hand, regardless of the metaphor, the keys to development are still the subject of active political debate, both at the level of the village and at the level of the state” (2006:78).

obligations widely considered to be a distinguishing characteristic of Melanesian sociality. Sepoe explains that members of different precolonial social systems each “lived within the confines of a wider extended set of obligations and responsibilities for people of his or her lineage” and societies were built around the notion of complementary relationships between men, women, elders and youth (2000:3). Sinclair Dinnen discusses how reciprocity commonly appeared in the ritualised exchange of food and gifts and also extended to trade, dispute resolution (e.g., ‘payback’ grievances), and leadership styles (2001:12, 13, 100-103). Efforts to understand and explain social relations in PNG have had a lasting impact on the discipline of anthropology; studies of complex trading routes forged between different groups of people, gender relations, and gift economies, for example, have been instrumental in shaping anthropological theories and practices.²

Villagers living along New Guinea’s coastline had been in contact with explorers, traders, whalers, and missionaries for centuries before the country was formally annexed by colonial powers. The Dutch claimed sovereignty over the western half of New Guinea in 1828, and in 1884 the British and German governments partitioned the eastern half of New Guinea between them, declaring the north-east section of the island a German protectorate and the south-east a British protectorate. The Australian era of colonial administration began in 1906 when it took over responsibility for the British colony and renamed it the Territory of Papua.

Although the various colonial powers in Papua and New Guinea all shared a belief in their inherent superiority and did not consult the indigenous population whose lands and lives they were administering, each ruler had different imperatives and there was considerable diversity in their circumstances and political approaches (May, 2004:41). Britain, for instance, was reluctant to take on further colonies and only did so as a strategic move under pressure from Australia and New Zealand, which feared German expansion (Sepoe, 2000:4-8; Sillitoe, 2000:24-25; Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1998a:3-4). In Papua, British (1884-1906) and Australian (1906-1942) policies regarding land and native labour were paternalistic and “numerous acts were passed preventing large-scale alienation of customary land and excessive abuse of native workers” (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1998a:5). The Australian Administration sought to pacify and ‘civilise’ Papua by extending administrative control and influence through exploration and patrols (which required transportation networks), education (which was conducted primarily by Christian missions), and discriminatory legislation³ (Dinnen, 2001; Lett,

² A very short list of some influential scholars whose works are valued in the anthropological canon includes Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), Margaret Mead (1930/1954), Marcel Mauss (1954/2002), Richard Salisbury (1962), Andrew Strathern (1971), Marilyn Strathern (1972, 1988) and Annette Weiner (1976).

³ Amirah Inglis (1974) discusses the events leading up to one of the Australian administration’s harshest and most discriminatory pieces of legislation in Papua, the White Women’s Protection Ordinance of

1944; Waiko, 1993). Australian Papua was not well funded. It received money from Australian governments as the economy was “stagnant” (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1998a:5) and plantation ventures failed for a variety of reasons (including inadequate shipping and higher bounties for agricultural activities in tropical Australia – see Connell, 1997:15, 16), but overall Australian governments were “reluctant to divert capital of any kind to Papua” (Denoon, 1985:121).

German rule in New Guinea (1884-1914), in comparison, focused on economic exploitation (much like the British in Bengal) and was much harsher.⁴ The German government had economic interests in the country and added New Guinea to its empire as a way to belatedly cash in on the spoils of colonialism (Sillitoe, 2000:24-25; Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1998a:4). The German government first granted administration of its colony to the privately-owned Neuguinea Compagnie which explored and seized land, established stations and plantations, developed a road network, and recruited indigenous labour in its quest for commercial expansion (Sepoe, 2000:6; Sinclair, 1998:5). Despite the Compagnie’s efforts, it failed to adequately administer the colony and the German Reich resumed control in 1899 (Sinclair, 1998:7; I. Willis, 1974:24). The German government developed policies with five main aspects, according to Ian Willis: “taxation, road building, the establishment of village plantations, the protection of native lands and recruiting for labour service” (1974:44). Two prominent features of German rule were its punitive expeditions (*Strafexpeditionen*) and the expansion of the Lutheran Mission. The *Strafexpeditionen* contrasted with the more humanitarian and accommodating activities of missionaries, which saw the Mission have more power and influence over local populations in the early years (Sinclair, 1998:6, 15; I. Willis, 1974:41, 62).

In 1914, German New Guinea passed to Australian control when Australian military forces seized and occupied the territory, and after World War I the League of Nations mandated the Territory of New Guinea to Australia. Australia, which administered New Guinea (1914-1942) separately from Papua,⁵ sought to make New Guinea fund its own administration and focused on economic development through plantations and trade (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1998a:4). Australia ran the plantation

1926, which, paraphrasing Gayatri Spivak, could be described as a case of ‘white men saving white women from brown men’.

⁴ See H. Nelson (1972/1974, 1982), Sinclair (1998), Waiko (1993) and I. Willis (1974) for discussions of Papua New Guinean experiences and perceptions of the different styles of colonial rule, and their consequences.

⁵ This was due to “important variations between the condition of the two Territories”, such as the makeup of non-indigenous populations (in New Guinea, most foreigners were German, Chinese and Japanese, whereas in Papua they were Australian) (Sinclair, 1998:22). Separate administration continued until 1942, when Japanese troops invaded New Guinea and forced Australians out. During World War II the Australian military administered those parts of Papua and New Guinea not under Japanese control, then the former Japanese-occupied areas when Allied forces recaptured them. From this time Australia viewed the region as a single territory, Papua New Guinea, and in 1949 the Australian government legislated for a single administration by passing the Papua New Guinea Act (H. Nelson, 1972/1974:25; Waiko, 1993:125-126).

economy and recruited labour as the former German rulers had and Lutheran missionaries were allowed to continue their activities after taking oaths of neutrality (Connell, 1997:16; Sinclair, 1998:17). The plantation economy had limited success, however, and Denoon points out that the Australian administration of New Guinea was only saved from “penury as grim as Papua’s” by the discovery of gold in Morobe Province (discussed later in this chapter) (1985:121). The administration extended control inland with government patrols, and missionaries, prospectors and labour recruiters also made inroads into the populous Highlands region (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1998a:4).

After World War II, Papua New Guinea was administered as a single territory from Port Moresby and Canberra (1946-1973). Australian attitudes towards Papua New Guineans were very different as a result of the actions of the ‘Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels’ (as those who aided Australian soldiers were known – see H. Nelson, 1972/1974:85-87) and neither peoples were willing to return to former inequalities (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1998a:5). The international climate had also changed. The United Nations expected Australia to prepare PNG for political independence and Australian policies were to promote “the economic, social, and physical well-being and advancement of Papua New Guineans” (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1998a:6). During the 1950s and 1960s the Australian administration, with advice from the United Nations and the World Bank, pursued development policies informed by modernisation theory⁶ that focused on economic growth, agriculture, education and health. A review of the economy in the early 1960s, however, found “very little economic activity which was not generated directly by the state itself” (Denoon, 1985:129).

In the late 1960s steps were taken to bring PNG to self-government and independence, including establishing a House of Assembly where Papua New Guineans constituted the majority of members. In 1972 one of those members, Michael Somare, announced an Eight Point Plan (discussed further in Chapter 3) for PNG’s development which “implicitly criticized colonial settler and investor affluence; strategies of uneven development; colonial over-centralization and preference for large-scale development; economic and financial dependence on the colonial metropole; colonial sexism; and the colonial preference for capitalist economic forms” (King, Lee, & Warakai, 1985:1). The Eight Point Plan was adopted at the beginning of self-rule in 1973 and later formed the basis of the Constitution of Independent Papua New Guinea in 1975. However, according to Connell, “Independence marked no shifts of direction

⁶ Modernisation theory seeks to explain the perceived social, cultural and economic ‘backwardness’ of developing societies (Wild, 2007:49; see also Edelman & Haugerud, 2005; Hettne, 2002:7; Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). Modernisation theory, which characterised development policy and practice in the 1960s, assumed that social change was immanent, unidirectional and moved from ‘primitive’ to ‘advanced’ societies (a view encapsulated in Walt Whitman Rostow’s (1960/1990) *The Stages of Economic Growth*); that ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ were obstacles to progress; and that women would automatically benefit from development through a ‘trickle-down’ effect.

in government policy” (1997:31). Despite post-independence efforts at structural and political reform,⁷ it is generally accepted that PNG has not performed well in achieving economic growth, rural development, poverty reduction, women’s empowerment, or good governance (Connell, 1997; Fitzpatrick, 1985; May, 2009).

As the above discussion suggests, colonial administrations followed different policies for development and extending government control, and commercial enterprises and missionaries had their own agendas. Nevertheless, they all shared an important characteristic: they needed effective routes to transport equipment (including machinery and troops during wartime), crops, minerals and religious messages, so were all involved in constructing airstrips, ports, wharves and roads (see Figure 5 opposite). This prepared the way for roads to be viewed as a “metaphor and reality of development” in PNG.

Papua New Guinea’s terrain, with rugged inland mountains and valleys, dense rainforest, swamps, swift rivers, and islands connected by vast expanses of ocean, made travel challenging.⁸ Most people traditionally journeyed by foot or canoe but the quickest method of transportation was by air. Accordingly, colonial administrations, missions and business enterprises built airstrips across the country. Much of the cargo transported to and from PNG was (and is still) carried by ship, so ports and wharves, established over centuries of trade with European explorers, were also important. Administrators, explorers and missions all conducted surveys with a view to developing land routes between coastal and inland regions (Sinclair, 1998). Low-grade roads were often built to connect airstrips, ports and wharves with trading posts and more populated areas (Waiko, 1993:140). Transportation networks were just as vital for delivering social services (such as health and education), but since the emphasis was on development, it is not surprising that the indigenous population quickly associated roads with development and cargo.⁹ In this way, as well as being a physical actuality of

⁷ See Barcham (2002), Connell (1997), May (2004), Sepoe (2000), Turner & Kavanamur (2009) and Waiko (1993) for discussions of economic and political development strategies in the period leading up to and following independence, including the structural adjustment programmes suggested by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and implemented by PNG governments in the late 1980s and mid-1990s.

⁸ This was one of the reasons why early colonial expeditions did not extend far into the Highlands. Michael (‘Mick’) Leahy and his brothers were among the first foreigners to explore the Highlands in the 1930s (Leahy, 1994). Their search for gold is famous not only because they ‘discovered’ tens of thousands of people living in what was thought to be an uninhabited interior, but also because they captured that initial contact on film. *First Contact* (Connolly & Anderson, 1983) incorporates interviews with the Leahy brothers, film footage from the 1930s and interviews with local Highland people to present a compelling account of those initial encounters and experiences.

⁹ There is a significant body of anthropological work on Melanesian cargo cults. Most anthropologists view cargo cults as a culturally specific response to the rapid social changes brought about by colonisation, missions, the cash economy and development. There is less agreement about how to interpret and explain cargo cult behaviours (such as building unsolicited airstrips in anticipation of cargo), however. Sillitoe (2000) provides a general introduction to cargo cults across Melanesia. Some classic anthropological works include those by Peter Worsley (1957), Kenhelm Burridge (1960) and Peter Lawrence (1964/1967). Less well known, but no less insightful, is a collection of essays by Rolf Gerritsen, Ron May and Michael Walter (1981). Recent critical discussions and deconstructions of the concept includes work by Kaplan (1995), Leavitt (2000), Lindstrom (1993), McDowell (2000), and a

[illegible]

collection of essays edited by Jebens (2004). Not everyone shares this anthropological view of cargo cults; as Filer points out, many Papua New Guineans use 'cargo cult' as a term of abuse or ridicule (2006:81 note 10), and development extension workers have a different understanding of what they term "cargo cult mentality" (see Westerhout, 2003:449).

development, roads came to symbolise development hope – an increased sense of the possibilities that life can offer and various routes by which people could achieve their development aspirations.

However, the increased mobility facilitated by roads and other transport networks, combined with the cash economy, colonialism, development policies and Christianity, introduced a range of new social changes, not all of which were beneficial. Lae provides a good example of the processes, problems and issues surrounding increased transportation, as I discuss next.

How transportation networks shaped Lae

Lae, with an official population of 119,178 (National Statistical Office, 2002), is the core of PNG's trade and industry. Several large companies operate out of Lae, including Tablebirds poultry farms and South Pacific Brewery, and Lae Port is the country's largest and busiest port. The only road connecting the Highlands to the coast, the Highlands Highway, ends in Lae, bringing PNG's agricultural exports down to the port for shipping and taking supplies back up to the Highlands for mining and other operations. Good transport systems are fundamental to Lae's present and future growth, and a brief historical glance reveals just how much of an impact transportation networks had in shaping the city. I describe three key events to make my point: a 1925 road construction camp, the airstrip built in 1927, and the Highlands Highway constructed in 1965.

Lae was built on land owned by six Ahi clans – Butibam, Kamkumung, Labu, Wagang, Yalu, and Yanga – whose members continue to live in the traditional villages around which the city grew.¹⁰ Surveyors from the Neuguinea Compagnie and Lutheran missionaries founded the first European settlements in Lae in the early 1900s and the first permanent mission station was set up in 1911 (I. Willis, 1974). The mission established plantations in the area, employing local villagers who lived and worked within the “mission-congregation system of social control” (I. Willis, 1974:79). While missions brought about widespread and significant social changes (today, PNG is a Christian country with most of its population identifying as such), the first major transport-related event occurred between 1925-1926, when the Department of Agriculture set up a permanent agricultural station and employed labourers to construct roads linking it to the nearby Markham Valley (I. Willis, 1974:78). “The foundation of the agricultural station and road construction camp at Lae was an important event for the local villagers,” Willis explains. “Not only did it give them work, it also brought into the area for the first time large numbers of outside workers” (I. Willis, 1974:78). This outside workforce acted as a “disruptive influence on the close-

¹⁰ I. Willis (1974) describes Lae's original inhabitants before European contact.

knit village community and church congregation” when men, who were not bound by the limitations and obligations that the mission placed on local villagers, modelled new behaviours and offered “possibilities for independent action” which, ultimately, served to undermine the power of the mission and congregation (I. Willis, 1974:79).

The second major event involved the 1926 discovery of gold in Morobe Province. Lae did not begin to grow as a town until its first aerodrome was constructed in 1927, at which time it became the hub of the air-transport network.¹¹ It was too difficult and expensive to build a road from the coast to the goldfields at Wau and Bulolo so the company Guinea Gold cleared an airstrip on land it did not obtain official permission to use (I. Willis, 1974:80-81). Buildings quickly developed around the airstrip – workshops, hangars, offices, houses, barracks, and storage sheds – and because Guinea Gold built the airstrip without permission, it had no control over the surrounding land: “As a result early Lae grew as a large European squatter camp,” writes Willis. “Each new arrival simply set himself up wherever he pleased without concern for ownership ... No one was sure who owned the land, but that the local villagers may have had rightful claims does not seem to have been considered” (I. Willis, 1974:82).¹² The Australian Administration decided the matter by resuming the land in 1927 and leasing it to developers (I. Willis, 1974:82). In 1930 a jetty was constructed at nearby Voco Point to carry a self-propelled steam crane capable of lifting heavy gold dredges from boats to rail lines running to the aerodrome, where they would be carried by air to Bulolo (Sinclair, 1998:85).

Lae developed around the airstrip along lines marked by social segregation. As what was essentially a ‘company town’ spread and more Europeans arrived in the 1930s, class distinctions emerged between and within staff from the aviation and mining companies (I. Willis, 1974:92). According to Willis, “The society of the town was stratified into a strict caste system with the Europeans occupying the upper level, the New Guineans the lower, and the Chinese an uncertain position between them” (1974:93). In a process similar to Calcutta’s early habitats (discussed in Chapter 1), social stratification was inscribed in the spatial location of Lae’s housing. The elite built homes on the terrace above the airstrip, situating themselves socially and geographically above the rest of the population (I. Willis, 1974:92, 135). In contrast, “the natives-cum-laborers were banished out of sight west of the airstrip” (Kaitilla, 1994b:642). During the 1930s, internal labour migration saw people from other provinces, who came to work as “police, domestic servants, washermen,

¹¹ I. Willis (1974) and Sinclair (1998) discuss the growth of the aviation service in Morobe Province.

¹² In PNG, as happened elsewhere, colonial powers frequently appropriated land in this manner. The airstrip land originally belonged to Butibam and Kamkumung villagers, who have yet to be adequately compensated for it. This land is in dispute; in 2009 legal action taken by the Butibam Progress Association and the Ahi Landowners’ Association successfully prevented the Morobe provincial government from claiming ownership of it (Nalu, 2009).

cleaners, carriers, stevedores, builders' labourers, grass cutters, or general rouseabouts," housed in barracks and compounds around town (such as behind Guinea Airways or on the western side of the aerodrome) or in servants' quarters behind European housing (I. Willis, 1974:94). Willis writes that little is known of these early New Guinean migrants. Although they were "an essential group which most expatriates took for granted," they did not establish a permanent niche for themselves in Lae due to the assumption that they would return home at the end of their contracts (I. Willis, 1974:94-95).¹³ Chinatown was also established farther east of the European settlement when Chinese contract labourers and tradesmen arrived in the early 1930s (Kaitilla, 1994b:642).

The airstrip contributed to other dramatic social changes experienced by Lae's villagers. For example, the arrival of hundreds of mostly single, male migrant workers introduced prostitution and new patterns of marriage between village women and migrant men (including mission workers) that challenged existing traditions (I. Willis, 1974:107, 108). The airstrip¹⁴ facilitated economic growth and increased movements of people and cargo, setting Lae up as PNG's industrial centre and shaping the city's different habitats.

The third major event was the opening of the Highlands Highway in 1965. Although Lae continued to grow steadily in the post-war years, the new Highlands Highway marked the beginning of a period of rapid expansion and social change. The Highway allowed unrestricted vehicle access between the agriculturally rich Highlands and the coastal region for the first time, which had an immediate impact on Lae's industry, commerce and population. The wharf in the new industrial area of Milfordhaven, constructed by American forces during World War II, replaced Voco Point¹⁵ as Lae's main overseas terminal (Sinclair, 1998:245; I. Willis, 1974:135). Lae Port, which handled increasingly large amounts of cargo (timber, coffee), played an important role in the city's industrial development by lowering freight rates and

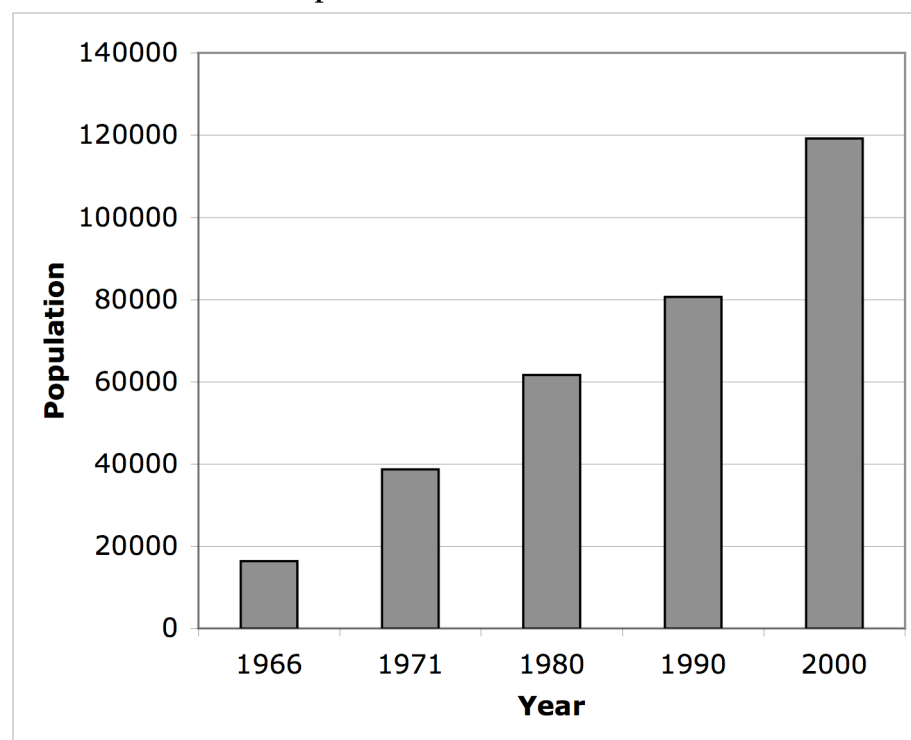
¹³ The first migrants to permanently settle in Lae did so soon after WWII, taking on similar employment as well as working as labourers for the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU). Later, planned settlements and housing estates were built for migrants belonging to what Willis calls "the growing urban middle class of Papua New Guinean white collar workers: clerks, teachers, shop assistants, professional workers and skilled tradesmen" (I. Willis, 1974:142). Many of today's settlement dwellers are third or fourth generation (like many of those living in Howrah and Kolkata's *bastis*) and are employed in a range of formal and informal occupations. Newer migrants, especially those with little skills or education, take whatever work they can find, such as selling produce at markets.

¹⁴ Japanese aircraft destroyed the original aerodrome, and much of Lae, during WWII. Allied forces developed Nadzab, originally a mission airstrip located 40km from the city centre, during WWII and it became one of PNG's busiest wartime airfields. After WWII, the Australian administration reconstructed Lae's main centre away from the original airstrip in the higher ground formerly inhabited by Europeans. Recognising the technical limitations of Lae airstrip (it could not be lengthened, for example), the Administration chose Nadzab as the location for Lae's airport (Sinclair, 1998:245). Chinatown still exists, as do the original villages, but the original airstrip was closed in 1987 and all flights servicing Lae now come through Nadzab.

¹⁵ Voco Point landing, which had to be rebuilt in 1932 after the entire wharf (including two cargo sheds and a store) disappeared into the sea following a subsidence, was adequate for small boats and local shipping but not the larger shipping required by industrial growth (Sinclair, 1998:138, 245).

drawing cargo movements between the coast and highlands away from air transport based in Madang (Sinclair, 1998:273; I. Willis, 1974:139).¹⁶ Willis explains that “The town soon became the most important centre for road transport in the country and this stimulated the growth of manufacturing industries to serve the newly opened highlands market, which contains nearly 40 per cent of the national population; this in turn led to an expansion of industries and commercial services already established in the town, particularly building construction, retailing, and finance” (1974:139). The Highway also became a condition of possibility for migration when restrictive colonial laws were relaxed in the 1960s.¹⁷ As Table 1 shows, Lae’s population doubled between 1966 and 1971 as record numbers of people travelled to live and work in Lae.

Table 1. Population Growth in Lae, 1966-2000



This table illustrates the rapid population growth in Lae following the opening of the Highlands Highway in 1965.

Sources: R. L. Andrews (1978:19), Connell (1997), G. Law (1999, 2001-2005), National Statistical Office (2002:23), Sinclair (1998:318).

¹⁶ Lae Port is currently being expanded through the Lae Port Development Project, a major undertaking partly funded by the Asian Development Bank that involves constructing a tidal basin on marsh land described as “vacant government land”; increasing roads, drainage, water, electricity and sewerage systems; and relocating people who live in the “illegal” settlements of Maus Markham, Wara Tais and Sodas on the aforementioned “vacant” land (Timmer, Opdam, & van Voorthuizen, 2007:1; Asian Development Bank, 2007). In 2008 the *Post-Courier* ran a front-page headline story reporting that this project was under threat due to a dispute initiated by the Ahi Landowners’ Association, which represents the original landowning clans (including Butibam clans) (Nebas, 2008, November 19).

¹⁷ Mike Davis notes that colonial governments often controlled urban migration with pass laws (2006:51). In PNG, the Native Labour (Wages and Conditions of Labour) Ordinance 1945 controlled rural-urban migration by limiting the length of time labourers could spend in towns (Walsh, 1987:188; see also Connell, 1997:186, 209 and Koczberski, Curry, & Connell, 2001:2019-2020).

Many who write about Lae's urban development cite the Highlands Highway as the main cause for its rapid population growth (Sinclair, 1998; Kaitilla, 1994b). From the perspective of migrants, the Highway is a symbol of hope, a metaphorical and physical road to employment, education, and new opportunities. The Highway is also credited with bringing a host of problematic social issues to Lae, including squatter settlements and crime. The following description encapsulates the causal links commonly made between the Highlands Highway, migration, settlements and crime:

Criminal activity had never been a problem in Lae ... Now the situation began to change. The opening of the Highlands Highway, which delivered enormous economic benefits to Lae, also brought with it huge social problems. Thousands of young Highlanders began to pour out of their isolated mountain valleys. Like rural youth everywhere, they were attracted to the bright lights. Most of them headed for Lae (as, of course, did many of Morobe District's young villagers). None had land rights, and so they squatted on traditionally owned land on the town's outskirts. Uneducated, or at best with a poor primary education, these Highlanders were virtually unemployable. To survive, many began to turn to crime.

(Sinclair, 1998:318).

The relationship between unemployment and crime is not nearly as straightforward as this quote suggests (see Dinnen, 2001:98-99). Goddard, for example, warns against assuming that unemployment leads to criminal activity, noting that many urban gang members progress from mundane, low-paid jobs into crime and then unemployment rather than vice versa (2005:80). Nevertheless Sinclair's comment does express a widely shared perception about migrants and settlement dwellers. Settlements, along with potholes, have become a major source of concern for Lae's residents. I discuss some of the processes that contributed to the negative perception of urban settlements as habitats of poverty, unemployment and crime in the next section. First, however, a brief comment on urban poverty in PNG is warranted.

Urban poverty in Papua New Guinea

Poverty is a complex factor in PNG. One way of approaching poverty is to measure it in economic terms. Provincial poverty lines were developed during the 1996 Papua New Guinea Household Survey "based on baskets of locally consumed foods that provide 2,200 calories per day" and non-food items (Gibson & Rozelle, 2003:162). 400 Kina (K400)¹⁸ was set as the national annual per capital expenditure required to meet the poverty line,¹⁹ and Gibson and Rozelle found that 33.5% of PNG's rural population and 11.4% of the urban population live below the poverty line (Gibson &

¹⁸ In June 2010, K1 = NZ\$0.50.

¹⁹ Using this, the Government of Papua New Guinea adopted an annual baseline figure of K399 as the lower poverty line (Government of Papua New Guinea & United Nations in Papua New Guinea, 2004:9).

Rozelle, 2003:162). Given that around 83% of Papua New Guinea's 6 million inhabitants live in rural areas, they developed a national head count index of poverty to indicate the proportion of the population living below the poverty line, being 30.2% (Gibson & Rozelle, 2003:164). However, as Gibson and Rozelle note, this measure only gives us a general idea of how many people have a cash expenditure below the poverty line and does not tell us how poor they are, whether their expenditure, while remaining below K400 per year, changes significantly, and it does not capture the kind of informal, alternative and non-market activities (such as self-provisioning through gardening or gift giving) outlined in Gibson-Graham's diverse economy framework (2006:71).

The 1996 Household Survey overseen by Gibson and Rozelle was one of several approaches to poverty assessment in PNG in the 1990s, as Maev O'Collins discusses in her review of them (1998). She explains why it is difficult to conceptualise poverty in PNG by showing how closely connected it is with other factors, such as economic, political and social isolation (those without kin or reciprocal social networks might feel poor, for example); inadequate government services (such as education and health); government regulations on the informal sector; inept regional and national governance; lack of or deteriorating infrastructure (including networks for transporting people, communications, water and electricity); access to land; gender relations; security; and vulnerability to natural disasters. It is generally accepted that poverty in PNG refers more to lack in terms of social and cultural capital, access to basic services and opportunities in life, as well as vulnerability to natural disasters, than it does the inability to meet basic needs for food and shelter (although poor diets do have important and sometimes fatal consequences, as Allen, Bourke, & Gibson, 2005:212 discuss).

A number of authors have identified ineffective transport systems – especially roads – as one of the causes of rural poverty in PNG (Allen et al., 2005; Connell, 1997:229; Gibson & Rozelle, 2003). Gibson and Rozelle found that the two most poverty-stricken areas of PNG (the Momase²⁰/North Coast region and the Highlands) had the poorest access to roads, pointing out that "If roads are poor and travel time is high, the cost of attending school or seeking health care may be prohibitively high" (2003:166). However, as Allen et al. conclude, building more roads is not a practical solution for poverty alleviation in PNG, especially since the PNG government does not maintain the ones it has now: "Over the last few years, the PNG government has spent on road maintenance only 40% of the amount required to adequately maintain the national highways, without taking into account many important rural feeder roads" (2005:213). This is one of the reasons why rural-urban migration is increasing, as people seek to be closer to roads, markets, education and health services (Allen et al.,

²⁰ Momase is an acronym for the Morobe, Madang and Sepik Provinces.

2005:214). Urban migration is a key factor in the growth of settlements and urban poverty.

Perceptions of urban settlements in Papua New Guinea

4-Mile, Bumbu, Kamkumung, Tensiti, West Taraka – these are just a few of the numerous settlements that constitute the city of Lae today. For many of Lae’s residents, these names will evoke images of danger, crime, unemployment, poverty, and unknown numbers of migrants. Lae’s official population is just under 120,000, but many of the long-term residents and NGO workers I spoke with put the figure at well over 150,000, suggesting that there are tens of thousands of people living in settlements around the city who are not counted in the national census. One commentator estimates that as much as 80% of Lae’s population lives in settlements (Schilt, 2005). Settlements are not new to Lae, as I discussed earlier, and in fact have characterised its development from station to town and city as migrants moved to the area in search of labour. What is more recent is the perception that settlements, as symbols of poorly planned urbanisation brought about by uncontrolled migration, are high-risk habitats of unemployed migrants and criminal gangs. In this section I draw on the small but valuable body of work on urban settlements in PNG to describe how this perception arose, discuss what the term ‘settlements’ came to imply, and show that although it has important consequences, this perception does not reflect the actualities of urban settlements or their inhabitants.

Settlements and their inhabitants have a particularly bad image that is reinforced by police raids, regular newspaper articles and television features on crime, and government promises to crack down on ‘law and order’ problems. Lae’s settlements have been associated with unemployment, crime, urban poverty and a range of other social issues (such as prostitution and the spread of infectious disease) since the early 1970s, when newspaper articles started calling for “something to be done” about the growing number of unemployed migrating to the city (Sinclair, 1998:318). The discursive linking of settlements with crime, poverty and unemployment, and the impact of this derogatory image on settlement dwellers, is addressed by Michael Goddard in his book *The Unseen City: Anthropological perspectives on Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea* (2005).

Although the geographical distribution of social characteristics (reflected in patterns of housing segregation and settlements) had been growing in Lae and Port Moresby since the 1940s, Goddard argues that the contemporary perception of settlements can be traced to European²¹ discourse in the late colonial era (2005:23). He

²¹ Although he does not define ‘European’, I assume Goddard refers to expatriate Australians and New Zealanders (who are often called ‘European’) in using this term.

shows how the colonial administration, which first ignored²² then attempted to accommodate migrant settlers through reactionary housing policies, contributed to a range of segregated housing areas in Port Moresby (Goddard, 2005:24-25). These socially and spatially distant habitats encompassed a wide variety of indigenous urban housing that grew in a haphazard and untidy manner, especially when settlers built houses from whatever material came to hand, creating another distinction based on appearance (Goddard, 2005:25-26). According to Goddard, by the mid-1970s 'settlements' was used in European discourse to refer to a diverse range of indigenous urban housing and implied "habitats peopled by unemployed migrants living in poverty and various degrees of squalor, socially distant from the more legitimate urban-dwellers and inclined to criminal activity" (2005:35).

Goddard also describes how indigenous Papua New Guineans appropriated and inserted their own meanings into the word, viewing 'settlements' less in terms of the informal/formal housing dichotomy and instead as areas of social segregation (2005:36). During the colonial era, Papua New Guineans resented Europeans for segregated housing areas, and after Independence resentment also developed between and within indigenous groups (Goddard, 2005:36). Traditional landowners in Port Moresby and Lae worried about their shrinking land base as settlements grew and tensions arose within landowner clans as some individuals leased land without clan approval (see Kaitilla, 1999:271). Resentments also grew as different groups negotiated the new forms of social organisation necessitated by urban settlements. For example, landowners were suspicious of new migrants from regions with whom they had no history of trade or social relationships. Early settlers from nearby coastal regions, who did have established trading relationships with landowners, viewed new migrants as competition for land and employment (Goddard, 2005:36, 37). In an example of habitat shaping habitus, new migrants needed to revisit pre-existing relationships when they found themselves neighbours with clans traditionally considered enemies.²³ All these factors contributed to the negative stereotyping of different ethnic groups²⁴ and

²² Planning consultant Neil Kennan writes that the Australian administration was apathetic towards the unplanned urban settlements springing up prior to the 1960s: "Urban authorities adopted a policy of 'benign neglect' (Stretton, 1979) in the hope that the migrants, whom they considered to be the cause of the problem, would return to rural areas where they are assumed to originate" (Kennan, 1988:284). Connell (1997), Goddard (2005) and Koczberski et al. (2001) also discuss the lingering perception – held by colonial and post-colonial administrations and which affects contemporary housing and development policies – that Melanesians should live in rural, not urban, areas.

²³ Understanding how settlement dwellers from different regions learn to become neighbours in Lae would be a valuable area of future research, especially for urban planning and policy development.

²⁴ Several authors have described the ways in which coastal Papuan and Highland New Guineans negatively stereotype one another, as well as how urban settlements (which are often socio-spatially structured along models of their home villages) contain micro-ethnic clusters (e.g. Barber, 2003; Chao, 1985; Connell, 1997:212; Gewertz & Errington, 1999:149-150 note 113; Goddard, 2001:18; Kaitilla, 1994b; Levine, 1997:46; Walsh, 1987).

perceptions of settlements as areas of micro-ethnic clusters, tension and violence,²⁵ both of which have carried over into contemporary discourses.

This kind of tension can be seen in Butibam village, one of my research sites (see Figure 6 on page 95). Butibam is an urban village, not a settlement, and I selected it as a fieldsite on Bing's recommendation (she thought I could make productive comparisons between Butibam and Tensiti, a peri-urban settlement on the outskirts of Lae). Butibam villagers belong to one of the six original Ahi clans on whose land Lae was built. In 1974 Willis observed that although Lae had flourished, traditional villages like Butibam had not: "The village houses, often built from reclaimed scraps of timber, iron and fibro-cement, seem dilapidated even by comparison with the houses in the adjacent 'squatter' camps. They stand in strong contrast to the neat bungalows of the city and to the other traditional villages to east and west where houses are still built of native materials and have a neat, post-card picturesqueness. The people are aware of this and it makes them self-conscious and defensive" (1974:145). Part of the problem stemmed from the village's status as an original site. City planners did not seem to make many provisions to develop traditional villages, focusing instead on new areas of formal housing and planned settlements. Willis also notes other contributing factors. For example, local missionaries did not teach English to older villagers, which meant they had less cultural capital and were at a disadvantage to migrants from areas where missionaries had provided an extensive English education (I. Willis, 1974:146). Also, Lae's original inhabitants resented the loss of their lands to colonial powers (and the ethnocentric attitudes of the self-proclaimed European 'masters') and began to reject and withdraw from European influence in the late 1930s (I. Willis, 1974:123). Housing materials in Butibam had not changed much by the time I visited in 2007. Those I passed on my way to meetings were on stilts, surrounded by well-kept gardens, and serviced by a range of unsealed and partly sealed (but always potholed) roads.

Land is the chief asset of Butibam villagers, a form of capital they are steadily losing as the city and settlements spread. Throughout the years, customary landowners leased their land to migrant settlers from various regions and today Butibam village is surrounded by settlements. Bumbu settlement, located on the Bumbu riverbank about 500 metres from Butibam village, is one such settlement. It began to develop in the 1940s and in the 1960s experienced a period of rapid growth following the opening of the Highlands Highway (Kaitilla, 1994b:646). Bumbu is the site of long-standing tensions between Butibam customary landowners and settlers, many of whom originally came from East Sepik as well as rural areas in Morobe province (Walsh,

²⁵ For example, on 17 May 2010 the *Post-Courier*, reporting that an elderly woman from Lae's Raicoast Compound was beheaded and her daughter raped and dismembered, noted that the alleged perpetrators were "from Markham (Valley, e.g. a different ethnic group) from the nearby Pepsi Compound", and that both settlements, along with 4-Mile, are "trouble spots" of ethnic tension in Lae (Umu, 2010, May 17).

1987:179). The bridge spanning the Bumbu river has been a focal point for conflict; anyone travelling by road from the town centre to Butibam (or the nearby Lutheran compound at Ampo) must cross this bridge, so it sees a lot of traffic. In September 1992 tensions erupted into a violent three-day “miniature war” between villagers and settlers following several armed robberies and claims that Butibam women were harassed at the Bumbu bridge (Sinclair, 1998:395). The following description of the conflict illustrates how unemployed youth, increasingly marginalised and alienated, are frequently associated with poverty and crime (O’Collins, 1998:22):

Many Butibam people demanded the immediate eviction of the Bumbu settlers. One young Bumbu man, who asked not to be identified, spoke up:

Many of us are third and fourth generation, we don’t know where else to go if we are evicted. We don’t have another home.²⁶ We have a lot of young people here who are unable to find work, that is why we are having this problem with the Butibams ...

(Sinclair, 1998:395)

Resentment also arose between different socioeconomic groups following Independence. Affluent Papua New Guineans (known as ‘elites’²⁷) moved into former European dwellings, which reconfigured the distinction between housing types according to Melanesian sociality,²⁸ but this also led to antagonisms between *elites* and *grassroots*: “Stereotyping indigenous *elites* as rich, greedy, self-serving and appropriating the economic standing and housing of departing Europeans, *grassroots* positioned themselves discursively as the underclass, the unrewarded backbone of the country. In towns, the term ‘settlements’ symbolised their putative living conditions and frustrations, but also served hyperbolically to symbolise the habitat of the ‘real’ people of urban Papua New Guinea” (Goddard, 2005:39-40). The different and

²⁶ This is an example of ‘dispossession’ among urban residents, which has happened in countries around the world. People who have migrated permanently to towns, and have not kept up kinship obligations and maintained social relationships with people in their home villages for various reasons, become dispossessed when they lack “access to the resources of the village economy, mainly because of insufficient tenure rights” (Koczberski et al., 2001:2028). An example of this process can be seen in a recent article by Zimmer-Tamakoshi, who describes how older Gende men and women from a rural village in Madang Province switched allegiance from their emigrant children to other young men and women who had stayed in the village, “helping them with brideprice support and land”, when the expected financial support from their children was not forthcoming (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997:114).

²⁷ In PNG, a popular dichotomy splits the country’s population into two broad socioeconomic groups: ‘elites’ (highly educated people, often urban-based professionals and public servants) and ‘grassroots’ (low-income earners in urban areas and the majority of the rural population) (Goddard, 2005:39; Sepoe, 2000:10 note 13; see also Gewertz & Errington, 1999 for a discussion of emerging class distinctions in PNG). These terms have been adopted into *tok Pisin*, which I represent in italics.

²⁸ Marilyn Strathern has shown that many analytical assumptions of Western social science do not fit the Melanesian context, including “the idea that persons can be less than social beings” (1988:134). One of her most influential arguments is that Melanesian persons are ‘dividually’ as well as individually conceived and that relationships are the basis of Melanesian sociality (M. Strathern, 1988:13, 172). This formulation can be applied to household organisation. The crosscutting socioeconomic relationships based on kinship (the *wantok* system) mean that the household in PNG is a fluid concept, “an organisational practice which entails the management of sets of relationships between individuals, bound by mutual obligations, to share” (Barber, 1993:26). Household composition changes as *wantoks* come and go, and people can and do frequently move between housing in settlements and *elite* residences, breaking down former segregation.

sometimes contradictory uses of the term 'settlements' have contributed to its resilience today, where, as Goddard notes, "In popular discourse, it can 'speak' of unemployment, poverty, crime, but also of urban integrity and social injustice" (2005:40).

The most powerful discourse, according to Goddard, "is that which collapses together unemployment, poverty, and crime" (2005:41). Goddard shows how this discourse legitimates the occasional destruction of settlements and is brought into play by politicians and police in public displays of crime control (2005:41; see also Koczberski et al., 2001; Davis, 2006:111-112). Like many, Sinclair traces Lae's law and order problems to unemployment migrants in settlements (1998:358-359). He describes the various efforts of the Morobe Provincial Council to deal with crime in Lae through the 1980s and 1990s, such as declaring areas 'Fighting Zones' and awarding police special powers; calls for identification cards for all employed people in Lae and boom gates on the Highlands Highway to monitor people's movements; and forcibly evicting settlers on several occasions, including in 1991 as part of an effort to "clean up" the city prior to the South Pacific Games being hosted in Lae that year,²⁹ and again in 1995 as a response to perceived criminal activity (Sinclair, 1998:358-359).

Although all those I spoke with in Lae (*elites*, *grassroots* and expatriates) want a city free from violence and crime, these forced evictions illustrate the competing interests of different groups within society. In this case, the interests of settlement dwellers for recognised access to land, housing, education and employment and improved civic amenities in settlements are very different from that of politicians, *elites* and traditional landowners who do not want to upgrade settlements (Connell, 1997:217; Kaitilla, 1994a:323), and instead seek to reduce unemployment and crime by controlling migration, and improve the city by eliminating settlements. These differences are often resolved in favour of the economically and politically powerful, suggesting that people with more capital have more agency (as a form of power or domination) within relations of social inequality. However, as Goddard discusses, eviction programmes are rarely sustained for any length of time due to contradictory representations of 'settlements' as habitats of crime and social injustice:

A surge in street crime or a threat to business interests from international media focusing on the nation's law and order problems can trigger a censorious polemic against squatter settlements. Conversely, corruption in high places and chronic rough handling of ordinary people by the police trigger the rhetoric that *grassroots* are dispossessed and unfairly consigned to life in settlements ... A continued program of eviction and destruction of 'settlements' would mean engagement with a much wider range of informal housing, with a significant proportion and

²⁹ Slums and settlements are often "beautified" in preparation for sporting events; see "Rio plans to clear slums ahead of 2016 Olympic games" (2010); Burke (2010); Davis (2006:104-108); D. Nelson (2009); Werth (2010).

socioeconomic range of the urban population and with the tortuous *wantok*³⁰ networks linking the poor to the rich and the powerless to the powerful, threatening the ideological notion of 'squatter settlements'.

(Goddard, 2005:44).

Goddard argues that the negative perception of settlements derived more from European imagination than it did actualities, stating that this image neither accurately reflects the real diversity of urban housing today nor captures the wide socioeconomic status of settlement dwellers (2005:45). As research by authors such as Barber (2003), Chao (1985), Goddard (2005) and Kaitilla (1994a) has shown, urban settlement dwellers are often engaged in some kind of employment, although employment patterns differ between settlements and areas of formal housing. "Compared to those in formal housing, households in urban settlements exhibit significantly lower levels of wage employment, a lower number of wage earners per household, and a lower level of wage-income per wage earner" writes Barber. "But this does not mean that settlements are 'haunts of the feckless unemployed'. The livelihood strategies of urban settlers involve more than just formal wage employment. They involve informal economic activities and self-provisioning to supplement wage incomes, and the reproduction of culturally significant social relationships according to which income and other resources are redistributed" (Barber, 2003:288).

Social relations and reciprocal obligations continue to underpin social organisation in urban settings. Dinnen points out that "Observers of the urban environment have noted how an individual's reputation continues to be primarily derived from that person's willingness to engage in quasi-traditional social relations with kin and *wantoks*" (2001:102). For urban settlement dwellers with waged incomes, their employment status, combined with their kinship obligations, becomes a factor which places them at risk of poverty (O'Collins, 1998:3). Those employed in low-income jobs can end up living below the poverty line as they try to stretch their earnings to pay for living expenses as well as maintain kinship obligations and assist *wantoks* with cash (Chao, 1985). Discussing how many criminals do, in fact, have jobs, Goddard identifies kin-group expectations for cash and commodities as a significant factor in the decision of employed people to supplement incomes by turning to crime (2005:80-81). Goddard is quick to note that people involved in criminal activity come from all walks of life and as likely to live in *elite* compounds as they are settlements.

³⁰ The *tok Pisin* term *wantok*, according to Dinnen, "means one who speaks the same language (literally, one talk) but is popularly used to describe relations of obligation binding relatives, members of the same clan or tribal group, and much looser forms of association" (2001:203 note 210).

Tensiti, my second research site, is a settlement in which the majority of the population is employed.³¹ I do not suggest that Tensiti is rife with criminals, but it is an area where residents in low-income employment³² are at risk of urban poverty. Tensiti is a planned, peri-urban self-help settlement on government-owned land³³ located 10-12km to the north of Lae city near the PNG University of Technology (Unitech). It was formally established in 1983 when severe floods hit Lae causing widespread damage and sweeping away hundreds of homes (including many from Bumbu settlement, at the mouth of the flooded Bumbu river (Walsh, 1987:182)). The National Disaster Committee estimated that between 200 and 2,000 families were rendered homeless (Kennan, 1988:285). Approximately one third of these families moved in with nearby relatives or returned to their villages; the remainder were temporarily housed on Portion 494 (Tensiti land, see Figure 6) in tents donated by the Australian Army, who flew in soldiers and engineers to help – hence the name ‘Tent City’ – and Portion 494 was allocated to resettle flood victims as well as settlers living in unsafe floodplain or landslip zones (Kennan, 1988:285).

Tensiti was planned according to the self-help housing approaches adopted into government policy in 1975 (Kaitilla, 1994a:312; Kennan, 1988:284).³⁴ The self-help housing concept “meant a formal recognition of people’s capability to construct their houses with their own unpaid and, most often, unskilled labour ... The NHC (National Housing Commission) was to provide surveyed and serviced sites for resettlement where owner-occupiers could construct dwellings for themselves” (Kaitilla, 1994a:313). Interestingly, in a post-occupancy evaluation of Tensiti, Kaitilla found that “the majority of the respondents preferred to hire labour rather than use their own unpaid labour” and suggests that self-help housing policies need to be revisited (1994a:323). The main principles underpinning Tensiti’s design included self-help housing, indigenous urbanisation (whereby settlers would build housing according to their needs from material of their own choosing), and integrated community development (where people would become active participants in the process and take responsibility for the area) (Kaitilla, 1994a:314; Kennan, 1988:285).

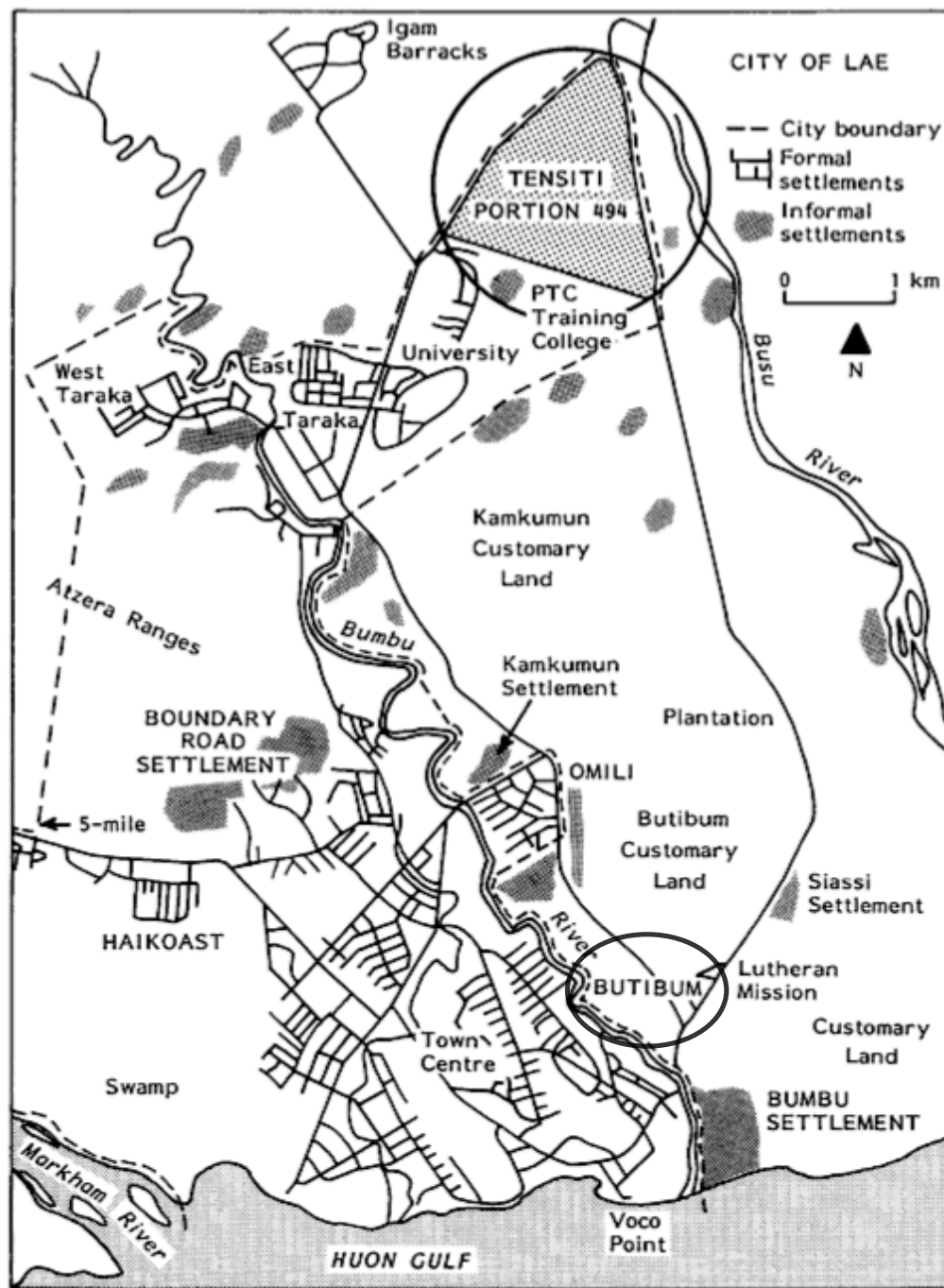
³¹ In 1994 Kaitilla found that 70% of Tensiti’s population was engaged in formal employment (Kaitilla, 1994a:317). While I did not carry out any sort of household survey during my fieldwork, my observations lead me to believe that this is still the case.

³² Kaitilla estimates that between 60-70% of Lae’s inhabitants are in the low-income bracket (1994a:314).

³³ The lack of land available for development has been a key issue for urban planners in Lae; see Kaitilla (1999:267), Kennan (1988:284), Sinclair (1998:333-334), Walsh (1987:178).

³⁴ The self-help policies adopted by the newly independent government of PNG aligned with the urban development and slum improvement strategy promoted by the World Bank from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s (Davis, 2006:70-75).

Figure 6. Locations of Tensiti Settlement and Butibam Village, Lae

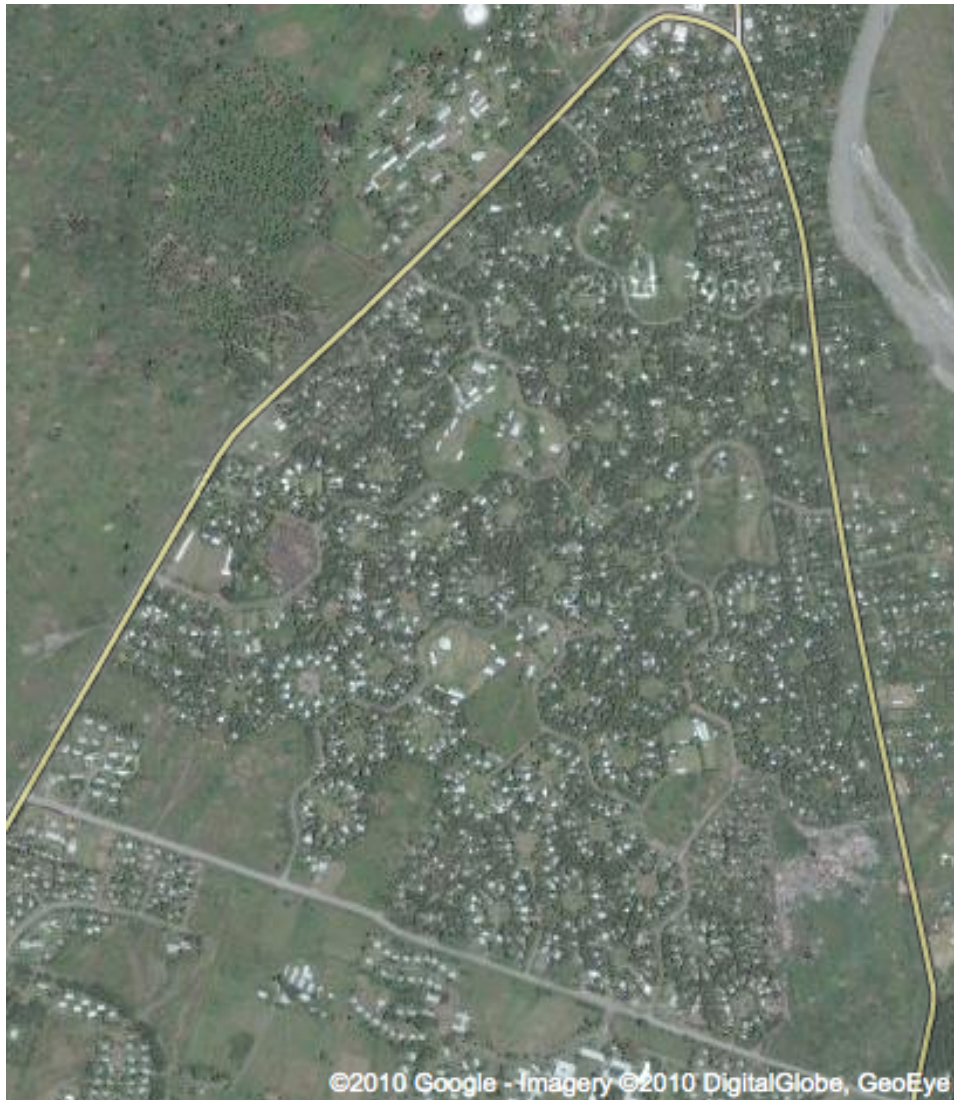


Source: Kaitilla, 1994a:316

Tensiti consists of six blocks that were designed to be self-sufficient in terms of gardens, basic education, health services and markets, and close to bus routes and areas of potential employment (including Unitech). In an example of habitus shaping habitat, the neighbourhood is laid out in a hexagonal format (see Figure 7) to accommodate traditional Melanesian forms of social organisation (Kaitilla, 1994a:318). The idea was to provide space for a traditional village lifestyle, where people are organised into small self-sufficient communities, in an urban environment. The houses I saw in Tensiti

seemed similar to those in Butibam village, although perhaps more were constructed with traditional building materials (e.g. roofing made from sago leaves sewn over timber) and the settlement's layout is different. Most houses are surrounded by bush or gardens and unsealed roads weave throughout the settlement.

Figure 7. Satellite Image of Tensiti in 2010



Attributed to: ©2010 Google – Imagery ©2010 DigitalGlobe, GeoEye

Although Tensiti is not viewed as a haven for the unemployed, it is perceived in terms of crime and security, common themes in the discursive representation of settlements. The security arrangements I made for my trips to Tensiti in 2007 were a result of the advice I received from expatriates and PNG nationals, including Bing who, like most of Lae's residents, has been the victim of criminal activity. On our trips, Bing and I were accompanied by Wendy³⁵ and two security 'boys' (friends of Wendy's from

³⁵ Wendy is a young Tari woman who lives in Kamkumung settlement with her mother and works as a *hausmeri* (housekeeper) for Jonika and Alex, the expatriate couple who share their home with me

Kamkumung settlement) who watched over our vehicle. I actually borrowed two vehicles in order to visit Tensiti. The first was a new 4-wheel drive belonging to my hosts, Alex and Jonika, but because of the risk of theft and of being carjacked by *raskols*³⁶ along the poorly maintained, pothole-laden road leading to Tensiti, I arranged to swap it for an older vehicle at Unitech before proceeding to the settlement. I did not receive the same sort of warnings, nor did I make such elaborate arrangements, when travelling to Butibam village. The security precautions I took in Tensiti highlight an important social distinction. There is a considerable amount of crime and violence in all Lae's settlements, especially towards women, but settlement dwellers, urban villagers and the poor are more likely to be the victims of crime than those who have the capital necessary to live in formal housing compounds surrounded by high fences topped with razor wire and travel in locked cars rather than by foot or public transport (Chao, 1985:169; Connell, 1997:213; Goddard, 2005:99). For me, staying with Alex and Jonika meant secure accommodation in compounds surrounded by high security fencing and patrolled at night by security guards. I was also able to borrow vehicles with automatic locking mechanisms to travel around the city. Wendy, on the other hand, travels by foot or Public Motor Vehicle (PMV) and her house, unprotected by any sort of fence, has been burgled and her dog (pictured in Interlude 3 above) poisoned with battery acid, a common fate for guard dogs in settlements.

Tensiti's residents also face other pressing problems, including limited access to basic services such as electricity, transportation networks, sanitation, and garbage collection (Kaitilla, 1994a:318-319). Although the Lae City Authority (LCA) is responsible for collecting and disposing of garbage within Lae, in 1994 Kaitilla noted that there was "no systematic and regular garbage collection service in Tensiti" (1994a:318). Kaitilla attributes this to the fact that the LCA "did not prominently feature in the design, planning and implementation of the project and consequently no maintenance programmes have been put in place" (1994a:319). Tensiti is integrated into the city's water supply system, but settlements without access to piped water (such as where Wendy lives) rely heavily on rainwater.

Tensiti is a planned, legal settlement. Lae contains numerous "illegal" settlements on customary and government owned land that, along with legal settlements, are subject to the kind of negative discursive representations outlined in this section. Settlements are growing as more migrants arrive in search of new

during my trips to Lae. She often came along for the ride to make sure I was okay, and in this way acted as a sort of 'security escort'. Wendy and I have spent a lot of time together; her interest in my project helped me develop my research questions, and she in turn became interested in starting a women's group of her own after visiting so many different groups with me.

³⁶ The *tok Pisin* word *raskol*, from the English 'rascal', refers to "anyone regularly engaged in crime, excluding white-collar crime" ranging from pickpockets to gang members to murderers (Goddard, 2005:119). Goddard notes that while the term is still used by foreign media reporting on PNG, "it has in recent times started to be replaced in popular use by more specific descriptive terms, and local media have been promoting the English term 'criminal' as a more appropriate generalisation" (2005:119).

opportunities and better lives, but many of Lae's residents view them as the cause of the city's social problems and want this "road to development" closed.

Who should maintain the "road to development"?

Ideas about who should be responsible for development have a historical legacy. As this chapter has shown, different social actors contributed to PNG's transportation networks, from colonial administrations to missionaries, private companies and post-independence governments. PNG's economic development involves an even broader range of actors; to those already listed one could add the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank, AusAID, NZAID, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, the United Nations Development Programme, various international NGOs and, of course, churches. Although these organisations have contributed to the variety of "roads to development" listed at the beginning of this chapter, they have also blurred lines of responsibility. In PNG (and other Melanesian countries), governments "develop grand plans and national programmes of poverty alleviation, with the hope that these will be funded by international aid donors" (O'Collins, 1998:21). Gibson and Rozelle note that the PNG government has an "unusually low capacity ... to provide services to the poor, so other agencies, such as churches, fill the gap" (2003:180). Discussing the role of the mining industry in PNG's development,³⁷ Connell suggests the kind of welfare activities and trusts set up by mining companies benefited locals but increased confusion over the division of responsibilities between the companies and the government (1997:160). Government policies designed around ideas of 'self-help' and community development, which featured in Tensiti's planning, also work to devolve responsibility from the state to local communities. When it comes to potholes and settlements, however, I don't think Lae's residents are in any doubt about where the responsibility lies: with the provincial and national governments.

The Morobe Provincial Government's website states that the national government is responsible for maintaining three major roads and Lae City Council maintains the remainder. It goes on to note, "Due to lack of funding, almost all the roads have deteriorated over the years. However, the National Government has recently allocated K50 Million for this purpose, which hopefully will sort out this problem" (Morobe Provincial Government, 2008a). Unfortunately, it hasn't. As noted in

³⁷ Although gold was first discovered in PNG in the late 1800s, major discoveries of copper, minerals and oil were not made until the 1960s, and the mining sector only started to make a significant contribution to PNG's economy in the 1980s and 1990s (see Connell, 1997:121-166; Filer, 1998:150-151; H. Nelson, 1972/1974:93-95). Today, PNG's economy relies on mineral resource development (especially revenue generated from corporate income tax on the mining and petroleum sector) and mining companies play a vital role in maintaining the country's roads. There is a growing body of work concerned with the social, economic, political and environmental impacts of mining in PNG, e.g. Banks (2002, 2006), Dinnen (2001), Filer (1990, 1998, 1999), Filer & Macintyre (2006), Macintyre (2003).

the section on urban poverty above, the PNG government does not spend even half the amount required to adequately maintain national highways (Allen et al., 2005:213). Money that is allocated to infrastructure is often perceived to ‘disappear’ into politician’s pockets. A recent editorial in a newsletter published by PNG’s largest private sector superannuation fund accuses the city’s political leaders of corruption: “The dreadful state of (Lae’s) roads is compounded by the recent “gone missing” of millions allocated to repair a portion of the road system” (“Editorial: Lae”, 2010). This editorial was posted on several websites and sparked much online debate about infrastructure, corruption, and incompetent governance in Lae. Comments posted online echoed the sentiments of many people I spoke with, who located the responsibility for controlling migration, illegal settlements, and crime with the state. Clearly, PNG citizens have strong expectations of state governance. However, in almost the same breath, they also expressed their lack of confidence in the ability of local or national governments to improve infrastructure, alleviate poverty, or achieve development. Lae’s potholes, and the poor infrastructure in its spreading settlements, are daily reminders of the state’s failure to maintain any “roads to development”.

Corruption and governance are interrelated, but as O’Collins points out, it is not a simple cause-and-effect relationship: “as Larmour (1997:10) concludes, corruption ‘may be embedded in a wider, but non-corrupt, framework of inept governance’” (O’Collins, 1998:21). Papua New Guinea is considered a ‘weak state’, a situation characterised by internal disorder, poor service delivery, and where states have limited capacity to “penetrate society, regulate social relationships, extract resources, and appropriate or use resources in determined ways” (Dinnen, 2001:6; May, 2004:332; see also Dauvergne, 1998; Larmour, 1998; Migdal, 1988; Standish, 1994). Rather than actively “forgetting” settlements, as *bastis* are “forgotten places” in Howrah and Kolkata (see previous chapter), I believe PNG’s governance issues mean that it simply does not have the capacity or power to bring about development. Nevertheless, after showing why the PNG government has failed to achieve development, May concludes that there are positive elements: “the country has maintained a robust democracy, there are strong redistributive elements in local cultures, and although population growth rates threaten the long-term well-being of some agrarian communities, the country is resource rich” (2004:323). I briefly comment on these “redistributive elements” to help understand why people simultaneously hold high expectations of the state and turn elsewhere when it fails to live up to those expectations.

As Dinnen and Larmour point out, the PNG state is inextricably linked with society, and traditional forms of sociality affect formal institutions of governance. PNG has a distinctive political style that “draws on features of small-scale Melanesian

polities” such as kinship ties, reciprocal relationships, and Big Man³⁸ systems of political leadership (Dinnen, 2001:174). Politicians, like everyone else, have kinship obligations to maintain; they also “seek to reward those who have voted for them and to balance central coordination and financial control against regional or local demands” (O’Collins, 1998:21). “The personalist exercise of power exemplified in the social dynamics of big-manship is an important strand of continuity running through Melanesian politics, linking the postcolonial present to the colonial and precolonial past,” writes Dinnen (2001:15). Discussing *raskol* gangs in Port Moresby, Dinnen explains that many gang members hold a highly personalised perception of “government” and expect the state to fulfil relationships and distribute goods like any other powerful leader would (2001:105). This explanation can be extended to popular expectations of the state to provide “roads to development” for its citizens, who engage with the state by voting and taxation and in turn expect it to reciprocate with infrastructure and other material opportunities. Even when the state fails to fulfil expectations, and the local population might have little faith in the state’s capabilities, it is still perceived as having the *potential* to distribute social opportunities for self-realisation (i.e., societal hope) in the form of reciprocal socioeconomic relationships.

Despite its governance issues, I argue that PNG is characterised by high development hope. The variety of “roads to development,” and their prevalence in contemporary discourses across all levels of society, shows that development acts as a mechanism for generating and distributing hope in PNG even in the absence of effective state interventions. People have not stopped demanding development and seek alternative solutions through churches, NGOs, international aid agencies, commercial industries, and their own initiatives. As Anthony Regan points out, “many individuals and groups are working to find their own solutions to problems in Papua New Guinea, and in the process are developing the beginnings of new linkages between groups in society, and between such groups and the state, that are creating increasing pressure for development of a less ‘colonial’ and more ‘Melanesianised’ state to perform in accordance with peoples’ expectations” (2005:13). In Chapter 3 I pick up on this theme and discuss how women’s groups came to be positioned as effective vehicles of development in PNG.

³⁸ The Melanesian Big Man, an achieved system of political leadership, was the subject of many early anthropological writings on Melanesia (e.g., Sahlins, 1963). The qualities of a Big Man vary between societies and can range from skills in socio-political exchange contests to oratory to war and fighting and even sorcery (Sillitoe, 2006:120). Zimmer-Tamakoshi (1997:108) discusses how modernist anthropologists in the 1960s-70s drew on the Melanesian Big Man concept to show that leaders in ‘primitive’ societies had much in common with capitalist entrepreneurs and could be used as models for economic development, an argument that was quickly challenged by other work published at the same time. As Dinnen (2001:14) and Goddard (2005:86) note, the generalised model of the Melanesian Big Man has become increasingly contentious with each new study as scholars document the wide range of leadership patterns and styles found throughout PNG. Recent studies have used the concept in new ways, for example to analyse leadership in *raskol* gangs (Harris, 1988:26-27; Dinnen, 2001:75; Goddard, 2005:77-94) and to show the negative consequences of development on Big Men (as well as “Super Big Men and Women”) and their societies (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997).

Development hope is not distributed equally, however. Although settlement dwellers travel to urban areas in hopeful pursuit of better lives and more opportunities for education and employment, those opportunities often do not materialise. Indeed, the lack of hope and social opportunities is a common refrain in Chao's (1985) description of life in a Port Moresby settlement in the 1980s. Rising levels of unemployment, urban poverty and crime in turn feeds negative discursive representations of settlements which, when combined with limited societal routes for self-realisation and increased dispossession, shape habitus and can make it difficult for feelings of hopefulness to flourish. Nevertheless, those living in urban settlements still look for "roads to development"; they just might involve travelling different routes (e.g. the *rot bilong raskol*) than those available to others.

In this chapter I have shown how important roads are to development in a place as geographically challenging as PNG, and I described how transportation networks shaped Lae. I suggested that roads and planned urban settlements have come to symbolise development hope by increasing the sense of life's possibilities and providing routes by which urban settlers can achieve their aspirations for housing, employment, and education. I also explained why different people view these same "roads to development" in a negative light, discursively linking them with a host of problematic social issues. I conclude by noting that people simultaneously expect that the state should take responsibility for development and, since it is 'weak' and fails to reciprocate, bypass it in favour of other institutions of development. Next I conclude Part I by drawing together insights from my discussions of Kolkata, Howrah, and Lae.

Discussion

These first two chapters point to a number of parallels between India and PNG. Colonialism, for example, was an important vehicle for change in both countries. In the early years of colonial contact, privately owned companies (the British East India Company and the German Neuguinea Compagnie) were in charge of administering and extracting resources from Bengal and New Guinea, and Calcutta and Lae developed along lines of socio-spatial segregation based on colonial politics. However, Chapters 1 and 2 also show that colonialism and other global processes (e.g. industrialisation, capitalist expansion) did not lead to the same structural conditions in each place. Colonial processes occurred in different moments in time in Bengal and PNG, stemmed from different imperatives, encountered different histories and forms of social organisation, and resulted in very different experiences. Clearly, any sort of comparison needs to be carefully made and grounded in specifics of culture, society and place. In this discussion I compare the ways in which different historical conjunctures have affected how hope is locally contextualised. I argue that hope is a concept “transactable between societies in order to elicit comparison, yet also retaining an intrinsic connection with social realities as they are differently lived” (M. Strathern, 1987:5). In particular, I draw attention to three themes arising from Chapters 1 and 2: the relationship between capital, habitat and habitus; the political construction of space; and resourcefulness, NGOs and development hope.

Capital, habitat, and habitus

The first theme concerns the relationship between capital, habitat, and habitus. Capital plays a vital role in the way that social space is inscribed in physical space. Bourdieu states that the translation from social into physical space is “always more or less *blurred*: the power over space that comes from possessing various kinds of capital takes the form in appropriated physical space of a certain relation between the spatial structure of the distribution of agents and the spatial structure of the distribution of goods and services, private or public” (Bourdieu, 1999:124, emphasis in original). This

relation is often expressed in distance between social spaces and social agents and is evident in both fieldsites. Calcutta's early development into distinct habitats illustrates how social spaces are spatially distributed. As I discussed in Chapter 1, British colonisers in eighteenth century Calcutta built mansions in White Town, "a place of neoclassical grandeur" (Dutta, 2003:22-23) and a segregated site of physical space that contrasted sharply in population, layout and housing style with Black Town, where indigenous Bengalis lived. Lae developed along similar lines of socio-spatial segregation, as I explained in Chapter 2.

Relations between social agents are also expressed in physical space. This can be seen in the grassroots-elite dichotomy popular in Papua New Guinea. The difference between two agents with different economic, cultural and social capital – say, an *elite*, highly educated, urban-based male politician and a *grassroots*, illiterate, rural female villager – can be seen in their homes (physical location and size, housing materials, furnishings), proximity to civic amenities (schools, hospitals, roads, potable water), the time it takes to get to work (which might be at a government business address or in a garden), the means of transport used, and by how each agent is positioned in temporary locations (e.g. seating at church or public meetings). In Howrah and Kolkata, this relationship is expressed in the unequal spatial distribution of poverty, access to civic amenities, and other human development indicators (such as high rates of disease, infant and maternal mortality, malnutrition and illiteracy). "In this way," Bourdieu explains, "reified social space (that is, physically realized or objectified) appears as the distribution in physical space of different types of goods and services and also of individual agents and of physically situated groups (as units linked to a permanent site) that are endowed with greater or lesser possibilities for appropriating these goods and services (as a function of both their capital and the physical distance from these goods, which also depends on their capital). The value of different regions of reified social space is defined in this relation between the distribution of agents and the distribution of goods in social space" (1999:124-125).

Over time, habitat shapes habitus by gradually converting structured social spaces into mental structures, and we attribute certain meanings and distinctions (or symbolic capital) to physical spaces based on social difference (Bourdieu, 1999:126). Habitus also shapes habitat by disposing us to perceive, appreciate and respond to different habitats in certain ways. I discussed the values assigned to different habitats, in particular the way that *bastis* and settlements came to be perceived as socially and spatially distant and undesirable areas, in Chapters 1 and 2. In the next section I discuss the struggles over space in Kolkata, Howrah and Lae and the political construction of space that occurred in each place.

The political construction of space

A second theme arising in these chapters concerns the struggle over space that occurs in both places. People are socially embedded agents, and as social agents must negotiate relations of power with others. These chapters show that habitats of urban poverty have histories characterised by unequal relations of power between different social agents. The underlying structural disadvantages of urban poverty lie in wider social relations as those with more power and agency exercise more control over space and the goods and services found therein.

The political construction of space occurs when struggles over space take collective forms and involve political actors (e.g. state officials, government policies) (Bourdieu, 1999:129). Bourdieu writes that the political construction of space “favors the *construction of homogenous groups on a spatial basis*” (1999:129, emphasis in original), processes I have alluded to Chapters 1 and 2. For example, I described how *bastis* in Kolkata and Howrah each have their own unique habitat as a result of the way that people gathered together based on shared social characteristics. Although there is a considerable amount of diversity within each *basti*, they are viewed as homogenous spatial units (e.g. a ‘Muslim *basti*’ or ‘butchers’ neighbourhood’). I noted that *bastis* (along with squatter colonies and pavement dwellers) disrupt the socio-spatial distinctions favoured by politicians and middle-class residents and have become sites of struggle in contemporary Kolkata (Athique & Hill, 2010; Kaviraj, 1997; Marques, 2005; Ananya Roy, 2003). I also argued that they are “forgotten places,” historically and politically constructed habitats that are neglected, but nevertheless deeply inhabited, by the state.

In Lae, the political construction of space takes on a slightly different form. Due to Melanesian sociality and the *wantok* system, the ease of movement between physical places means that it is more difficult to construct homogenous groups on a spatial basis in urban areas. As I discussed in Chapter 2, settlements are perceived in contradictory ways: as habitats of crime and other problematic social issues, and also as areas of social injustice, home to ordinary people who have been unfairly consigned to life there. Nevertheless, like *bastis* in Howrah and Kolkata, settlements disrupt an imagined urban landscape and become sites of struggle during times of police “crackdowns” on criminal activity, forced evictions, and during efforts to “clean up” the city. I also suggested that they are habitats characterised by state absence, not because they are “forgotten places” but instead due to the limited capacity of local and national governments to improve infrastructure, alleviate poverty, provide civic amenities, or achieve development.

People living in *bastis* and settlements in Howrah, Kolkata and Lae, who have less capital and power in relation to other social agents, can perceive fewer individual

or societal routes for the pursuit of meaningful and dignified social lives – in other words, they have less societal hope. However, societal hope manifests differently based on the specific historical sociocultural contexts of each place. For example, urban poor Muslim women living in *bastis* in Howrah and Kolkata can find it difficult for feelings of hopefulness to flourish due to the structural disadvantages of poverty and gender, their status as members of a minority community, and negative perceptions of their habitats (which they sometimes internalise). In addition, because *bastis* are actively neglected yet deeply inhabited by the state, my impression is that social opportunities for self-realisation are not distributed equally within society. A conversation I had with Ramaswamy is illustrative.

“People seem to gain a lot of hope from being associated with you,” I said to him during a visit towards the end of my last fieldwork trip. With over 25 years’ experience in social activism in Howrah and Kolkata, Ramaswamy has been involved with a number of successful initiatives and is well known, by reputation if not in person, by many of the people I met in various *bastis* in both cities. As later chapters show, he is a great source of inspiration and hope for Amina and Tabassum, who co-ordinate Howrah Pilot Project and Rehnuma-e-Niswaan. However, from our conversations I also knew that the political neglect and corruption he has witnessed have left him with little faith in the ability (or political will) of the state, grassroots-level initiatives, or any other social agent for that matter, to achieve widespread social change.

“I see this as something of a contradiction,” I continued. “A paradox. I see you as someone who inspires hope in a lot of people...”

“And yet I am without hope,” he interrupted with a wry laugh.

We sat for a while, considering this, and later continued our conversation about hope via email.¹ The social conditions he has experienced have stifled any feelings of hopefulness he might have had as a young social activist in 1984. As noted earlier, this sense of having nowhere to go, not poverty, is what Hage considers the enemy of societal hope (2003a:20).

¹ Ramaswamy also discusses hope on his blog, quoting Samuel Beckett: “Where I am, I don’t know, I’ll never know, in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on (*L’Innommable*, or *The Unnamable*)” (Ramaswamy, 2006d). Ramaswamy’s thoughts about hope are encapsulated in a recent email to me, where explained that he started Howrah Pilot Project (see Chapter 5) “with a huge fund of vision, conviction and yes, hope. Yet, very soon, harsh reality reared its ugly head, and over the next five years hope was all but absent. However the effort continued, without question. So commitment is a larger social, ethical, collective matter, while hope or its absence may be merely an individual matter ... There is also another, stoic dimension to this hope/no hope matter. The existing reality itself is such that there is a perpetual, innate longing for a better situation. That may be called hope. Yet, the very nature of that reality, and its immutability or ever-worsening aspect means that one has accepted that and become used to it. One is able to live with it, despite that, and go on hoping, implicitly” (personal communication).

I suggest that Ramaswamy embodies low social hope for any improvement to the lives of the urban poor in Howrah or Kolkata, and that he is not unusual in this regard. Thomas, for instance, expresses a pessimistic view of the “intractability of urban poverty” in his discussion of what should be done about poverty in Calcutta (1997:153-166). As I explained in the Introduction, social hope encompasses societal hope and is also a historically acquired disposition brought about by certain social conditions that allow feelings of hopefulness to flourish (Hage, 2003a). I believe many outside observers of *bastis* hold the opinion that their inhabitants “will never get out of poverty”. However, it is important to remember that people create and transform as well as reproduce historical sociocultural structures. As Bourdieu explains, habitus is an open system of dispositions that produces discourses or actions in reference to a definite situation, and in relation to certain historical sociocultural structures: “We must think of it as a sort of spring that needs a trigger and, depending on the stimuli and structure of the field, the very same habitus will generate different, even opposite, outcomes” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:135). In Part III I show how structures of poverty and inequality can form the basis for hope and agency.

In contrast, PNG is characterised by high societal hope, partly due to the social relations that have underpinned Melanesian sociality since precolonial times. This is an important thread of historical sociocultural continuity, although I am not suggesting that social relations have remained unchanged by historical events. As I explained in Chapter 2, the strong redistributive elements found within PNG society, and the highly personalised perceptions people have of politicians and ‘government’, mean that even though citizens might have little faith in the state’s capabilities it is still perceived as having the *potential* to distribute social opportunities for self-realisation in the form of reciprocal socioeconomic relationships. There is a discernable sense of possibility and movement within society in PNG. Given the prevalence of finding a “road to development” in contemporary discourses in PNG, I also argued that PNG has high development hope (whereby development acts as a mechanism for generating and distributing hope within societies). Development hope is the third theme arising from Part I, and I address it next.

Resourcefulness, NGOs, and development hope

A commonality between Kolkata, Howrah and Lae is that they all have urban habitats (*bastis*, squatter colonies, pavement dwellers, settlements) that are inadequately serviced in terms of civic amenities such as access to water, sanitation, electricity or educational facilities. While the reasons for this neglect differ (e.g. through a strategic process of “forgetting” or due to issues of ineffectual governance), I argue that they

result in two similar outcomes: they encourage individual and community resourcefulness, and they provide the conditions for NGOs and grassroots organisations to step in and fill the gap left by the state. I address each of these points in turn.

In her analysis of poverty, Ruth Lister observes: “Two words are used over and over again in the poverty literature – in both South and North – to describe the *personal* resources that are drawn on in the struggle to survive: resilience and resourcefulness” (2004:135). She points out that resourcefulness is also used in discussions of the *social* resources people derive from strong social networks. I discuss networking and social capital in Chapter 8; here I focus on the idea of personal resourcefulness.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, I like Ramaswamy’s idea that crows are an apt symbol for Kolkata’s urban poor, and I think the fable *The Crow and the Water Jar* is a good metaphor for the resourcefulness of *basti*-dwellers who face deprivation and disadvantage on a daily basis. The term arises in a range of different contexts. For example, in discussing the experiences of refugees from East Bengal who were housed in overcrowded and squalid “colonies” between 1948-1949, Dutta writes that an original resident of one such colony “told me stories of remarkable human resilience, resourcefulness, good neighborliness, and compassion in those early days” (2003:171). Thomas warns NGOs and other civic groups working with the urban poor in Calcutta against “discouraging resourcefulness or smothering individual autonomy and initiative” (1997:163). Resourcefulness also appears in reference to Papua New Guineans. Although Philip Gibbs admits that his perspective of electoral politics and political processes in Papua New Guinea is “particularly jaundiced,” he finds a reason to temper gloom by noting that “People in Papua New Guinea are not fools and have proved time and time again that they are amazingly resourceful” (2004:8). Discussing the “benign neglect” of housing policies in Papua New Guinea, Connell and Lea comment that the “institutional paralysis” affecting bureaucrats has in turn stimulated collaboration among settlement dwellers, stating: “A testimony to the resourcefulness of the poor in the cities of Melanesia is that they have found ways to house themselves that are appropriate, flexible, and of a higher standard than in some other parts of the world” (1994:293).

Resourcefulness is also often discussed in terms of how people respond to natural disasters, such as the devastating 2010 floods in Pakistan, considered to be the worst the world has seen in the past century. For example, a reporter for the Guardian newspaper described Pakistan as a “weak state” unable to cope with the floods, writing that “Many will survive only because their poverty has rendered them extraordinarily tough and resourceful” (Bennet Jones, 2010, August 13). Fayyaz Baqir (Director of the

Akhter Hameed Khan Resource Centre in Islamabad) made a similar point about the Government of Pakistan's inability to provide assistance, commenting that "the media are underestimating the resilience, resourcefulness, and capacity of the people to cope with the disaster due to the presence of hundreds of formal and informal institutions and mechanisms that help people on a day-to-day basis" (Ronkin, 2010). Baqir also made a connection between hopelessness and militancy: "If they do not receive assistance soon, they may reach the point where they think that there is "no hope". Such a situation will add another dimension to the crisis because desperate minds are fertile ground for militants" (Ronkin, 2010).

Baqir's point is an important one: personal resourcefulness has limits, and it relies upon people having knowledge and the capacity for intentional agency, as well as the availability of certain resources for use. This leads me to my second point, which is that people often turn to NGOs for resources and services in the absence of effective state interventions. This was clearly articulated by Fernandes (as discussed in Chapter 1), who described NGOs having to step in and attempt to fill spaces left by an actively retreating state as symptomatic of privatisation and liberalisation (2010:268). Although the process of state absence is different in PNG, the result is similar, and people have not stopped demanding development and seek alternative pathways to it through NGOs, other social actors, and their own initiatives when the state fails to provide. This supports my argument that development serves to increase the sense of the possibilities of life for people who might otherwise have little societal or social hope, to generate and distribute hope within societies, and to provide alternative pathways for the pursuit of meaningful and dignified social lives. Part III focuses on how women organising educational and economic development initiatives at the grassroots level seek to transform habitats, inspiring development hope in the process by working to create a sense of movement within society. These women, whose circumstances afford them the least amount of capital, can nevertheless pursue *being* by investing in development.

I have provided an analysis of structural factors in Part I in order to describe key historical conjunctures that have shaped the lives of the women whose stories appear later in this thesis. I believe that their practices as social agents cannot be understood in a historical vacuum, and my purpose was to provide a "historically deep" (Farmer, 2003:42) analysis of the structural factors that affect their quest for being, focusing in particular on their habitats. The structural constraints outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, and the actions (agency) the women take to create, reproduce and transform them, is ultimately what this thesis is about. Following on from this, in Part II I turn my attention to the social spaces within which the women operate, and the

conditions of possibility in which hope and agency are formed. The women's stories are missing from Parts I and II but I do not suggest that they are passive victims of structure. Their stories, and the development initiatives they invest in to create more meaningful lives for themselves and their families, are described in Part III.

PART II

The politics of hope and agency

Part II elaborates on the premise outlined in the Introduction: hope and agency are historically and culturally constructed. They are both considered universal in that we all have the capacity for each, but the forms they take change over time and according to the habitats we find ourselves in, and are grounded in the relations we negotiate with other social agents. As I pointed out earlier, hope and agency are not distributed equally and are affected by power differentials within society. Part II shows that historically and culturally constructed relations of power and inequality are central to the ways in which my participants hope and act to create better lives for themselves, their families, and the wider communities in which they live.

Sherry Ortner uses the phrase “the politics of agency” to denote “the cultural work involved in constructing and distributing agency as part of the process of creating appropriately gendered, and thus among other things differentially empowered, persons” (2006:139). I use *the politics of hope and agency* to extend Ortner’s ideas to the historical and cultural work involved in distributing hope as well as agency within society. I do so by exploring how the relationship between hope, agency, and power is organised into what Ortner calls the “serious games of culture and history” (2006:142). This idea of “serious games” is Ortner’s way of moving questions of practice theory in new directions:

As in practice theory social life in a serious games perspective is seen as something that is actively played, oriented towards culturally constituted goals and projects, and involving both routine practices and intentionalized action. But the serious games perspective ... allows us to bring into focus more complex forms of social relations – especially relations of power – and more complex dimensions of the subjectivity of social actors – especially ... those involving “intentionality” and “agency.”

(Ortner, 2006:129)

In the following two chapters I focus on what I consider the most important “serious games” concerning my participants in PNG and India, games that involve “the intense play of multiply positioned subjects pursuing cultural goals within a matrix of local inequalities and power differentials” (Ortner, 2006:144). My aim is to provide knowledge about the histories of those games, the relations of power and inequality involved, and how hope and agency are distributed to actors engaged in the games. In

Part III I go on to discuss how the strategies my participants use in playing such games (what Bourdieu terms *practice*) create, transform and reproduce them.

In PNG I became interested in the prevalence of, and cultural value invested in, women's groups. During my fieldwork I noticed an interesting contradiction in the way that women's groups are expected to perform. On one hand they are viewed as socially acceptable – indeed, expected – ways for women to engage with development processes, thus fostering development hope. However, if they fail there is a tendency to blame women for those failures rather than any external structures or processes (in contrast to when men's initiatives fail), suggesting that women aren't really expected to succeed because they are women. In Chapter 3 I focus on the "serious games" involved in women's efforts to organise collectively. I argue that we need to move beyond blaming women for their failures and consider the wider relations of power and inequality within which women's groups operate in order to understand and address any obstacles they experience.

Chapter 4 addresses a widely held perception in India: that Islam is the reason why Muslim women occupy a low social status and have limited agency, and thus there is no hope (development or otherwise) for Muslim women. This perception, which is contested by my participants, is the "serious game" I focus on in Chapter 4. This chapter reflects on how Muslim women are generally discussed in India, where public debates and knowledge about Muslim women focus on personal laws, community identity and minority rights rather than discourses of development or poverty. I argue that the structural disadvantages of poverty and gender, and embodied perceptions that Muslim women are constrained by religious traditions, are the key factors affecting the low social status of Indian Muslim women.

Part II provides important insights into the similarities and differences in the cultural construction of hope and agency within wider historical relations of power and inequality. I discuss these insights, as well as the relationship between hope, agency, and power, at the end of Part II.

Thoughts on women's groups in Lae

[Interlude 4. Fieldnote excerpts, 14 September 2006]

The following excerpts reflect on a seminar I presented at the National Research Institute (NRI) in Port Moresby. It describes how I began thinking about the issues discussed in Chapter 3.

Today I gave my seminar at the NRI as part of my research visa requirements. About fourteen people attended, including Dr Orovu Sepoe from the University of PNG. In my seminar I described the groups I've met in Kolkata and Lae, commented on some of the similarities and differences I've noticed, and posed some questions that were raised for me during this trip to Lae. Two of the questions were as follows:

A number of people I spoke with in Lae commented on their lack of faith in the ability of the government – local, provincial and national – to achieve anything in the way of development. There seems to be widespread discontent with local level and national governments and a perception that the government is corrupt and ineffective. People have more faith in the ability of NGOs to effect any kind of change and run development projects. However, for the majority of NGOs I spoke with, money is a big problem and they aren't able to run the kind of projects they want to due to lack of funding. It seems that NGOs are being left to pick up the slack for providing civil services the government isn't, but without financial or other support. Is that an accurate perception, and what do you think of it?

I have another question related to this. I met a lot of women's groups in Lae, but only a couple of them were actively running projects due to lack of money. In Kolkata the groups I met went ahead with projects whether they had money or not – they found a way to do it regardless. There doesn't seem to be this same kind of urgency in Lae and I've been trying to understand why that is. My question is twofold: why isn't there much money available (or if there is, where is it going), and why does lack of money seem more of an obstacle here than in Kolkata?

I don't know if the audience learnt anything from my talk but I certainly gained a lot of useful feedback and information during the discussion at the end. A woman in the audience said there are three key problems with women's groups in PNG: capacity, opportunities, and expectations. She thought that many women's groups didn't have the capacity to properly acquit any funds they received. She also said that there were few business opportunities for women's groups and that people had unrealistic expectations about what women's groups could achieve.

Several people echoed the comment that the capacity of women's groups needs to be built, especially with regards to leadership and managing money. Quite a few of the people I met in Lae made similar comments, suggesting that internal leadership and organisational issues need to be overcome in order for women's groups to succeed.

One of the men present didn't like my focus on women's groups. He said he's interested in families, in community development, and in people working together. He suggested I focus on that instead. "Men and women don't exist in a vacuum."

Emerging questions/analyses

Why are women's groups so popular?

Are women's groups seen as a good way to achieve development for women?

What factors contribute to the success or failure of women's groups?

How do gender relations affect women's groups?

I've had an idea to run a workshop called "Strategies for making something from nothing". I'll develop this workshop idea to try out with a women's group on my next fieldwork trip.

.....

Chapter 3

Hope with caveats: Development and women's groups in Papua New Guinea

The number and diversity of women's groupings in Papua New Guinea is remarkable. Orovu Sepoe estimates that the majority of women in PNG belong to at least one women's group, which "operate in diverse socio-economic settings, pursue different goals and often have conflicting interests" (2000:15). During my fieldwork I met a variety of women's groups and organisations involved with development ranging in size, structure and composition from local grassroots groups to larger church and umbrella organisations to government agencies and NGOs operating at provincial, national and, in some cases, international levels. Across the country women's groups¹ engage with a host of social and development issues including education and literacy, voting rights and political education (Hopkos, 2000; Sepoe, 2000; Slarke, 2006) and conflict and peacebuilding (Garap, 2004; Hinton et al., 2008). Women also organise collectively for activities such as netball and Girl Guides (Cleland, 1996), to form business networks, savings schemes and associations of economic interest (Gewertz & Errington, 1998; Sexton, 1982; Warry, 1985) and for fellowship and service for their churches (Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Douglas, 2003). Recently, companies in the mining and oil palm industries have recognised the need to establish specific programmes targeting women and encouraged women's groups to form (Koczberski, 2007; Membup & Macintyre, 2000; Macintyre, 2003). Today, women's groups in PNG "constitute a major part of women's activities outside the home" (Sepoe, 2000:15), and provide the basis for a 'serious game'.

Many of the people I spoke with, and much of the literature I consulted, consider women's groups to have potential as effective *vehicles of development*.² Sepoe, for example, states that "Despite poor communication and transport activities, women's groups in PNG form a powerful network of community-based grassroots development organisation (sic) which sustain their respective communities" (2000:15).

¹ While recognising the diversity of women's groupings in PNG, I use the general term 'women's groups' for stylistic purposes.

² As I explained in the Introduction to this thesis, by *vehicles of development* I mean the processes, practices and mechanisms by which actors invest in the idea of development.

She also argues that women have found collective action to be the most appropriate way of engaging with the world outside the home (Sepoe, 2000:124). Organising collectively allows women in groups to form relationships with other unitary social actors (such as churches, government agencies, NGOs, and donors) sharing similar aims for social development. Women's groups are also of value to women as individuals. Although the body of work on women's groupings in PNG (or Melanesia) is not large, a brief review of some key texts suggests that women's groups can facilitate the conditions for empowerment; provide a socially respected space to discuss issues relating to family and community well-being; enable women to build solidarity, confidence, managerial and leadership experience; impart literacy and practical skills; increase income-generating opportunities; bring women into the public sphere; encourage women to assert their legal and political rights; enable women to share experience and knowledge; and present an avenue for women to have fun, socialise outside the family, and meet their social and spiritual needs (Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Douglas, 2000, 2003:9; Membup & Macintyre, 2000; Scheyvens, 1998; Sepoe, 2000:157; Sexton, 1982; Slarke, 2006; Warry, 1985). Given the poor performance of the PNG state (discussed in Chapter 2), women's groups, along with churches and other NGOs, are increasingly viewed as an alternative 'road to development'.

By facilitating access to development processes, women's groups increase the sense of possibilities that life can offer and a route by which people can achieve their development aspirations – in other words, they inspire *development hope*. However, in my research I noticed an interesting contradiction in how women's groups are perceived. On one hand, as mentioned, they are considered to have good community networks, particularly at the grassroots level, and be in a better position to improve women's lives than government initiatives. The other hand has a caveat attached. When women's groups fail to achieve their development goals (a common occurrence, unfortunately), there seems to be a tendency to blame women for those failures rather than any external structures or power relations that might hinder their efforts. In 1985 Angela Mandie commented that attitudes towards women, held by men and women alike, mean that "little confidence is put in women to perform well" (1985a:169). This perception was recently encapsulated in the opening line of a newspaper report on a meeting of the PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation in Lae, which reads: "Issues hampering the development of PNG women rest within themselves" (Yaga, 2010). In publishing a longer version of the article, a prominent PNG blogger entitled it: "Women must blame themselves for lack of development" (Nalu, 2010). Martha Macintyre discusses the double standard that prevails in accounting for failures of men's business ventures and women's groups: "When women's projects founder, people inevitably claim that it is because 'women cannot work together' or 'women do

not know how to run businesses'. Often the reasons for failure are the same as those in businesses operated by men – inexperience or incompetence, breakdown in communication or conflict between partners, misappropriation of funds, or failure to conform with legal requirements relating to the conduct of business" (2003:126).

In this chapter I discuss the serious games underlying the way that women's groups became positioned as the most effective vehicles of development for women in PNG, processes that also distributed hope and agency to women in groups. My aim is to show that failing to consider the larger social spaces in which women's groups operate can lead to women being blamed for their failures, when in actuality the reasons stem from social relations of power and inequality. I begin by outlining the history of women's groups in PNG to explain how women's groups became associated with development. Then I discuss the contemporary political context within which women's groups operate. When the efforts of women's groups are placed alongside state policies and initiatives for women since Independence, it is easy to see why people turn away from the state as an effective vehicle of development. In the final section I highlight the cultural work involved in collective organisation, discussing how gender inequalities, social relations and expectations of leaders affect grassroots women's groups in contemporary PNG.

A history of women's groups in Papua New Guinea

The history of women's groups in PNG can be traced to the arrival of missionaries in the nineteenth century. Bronwyn Douglas (2003), Anne Dickson-Waiko (2003) and Irmgard Horndasch (1999) have discussed the role of female missionaries and wives of male missionaries in encouraging women's fellowships and offering domestic training, literacy classes and religious instruction from the mid- to late 1800s. Dickson-Waiko writes that church women's groups "normally began with the intention to improve women's homemaking skills in Western-style cooking and baking, sewing, hygiene, and the care of children. This agenda was part of the (largely unsuccessful) Christian effort to replace the customary productive roles of women and restrict them to their reproductive and domestic capacities" (2003:103).³ These regular gatherings of women were the prototype for contemporary women's fellowship groups (Douglas, 2003:13).

Missionaries, like many Western observers of PNG (and other developing nations), often assumed that women had little influence in the public sphere and saw

³ Schoeffel notes that 19th century missionaries and colonisers considered it "positive and reasonable to reform the occupations of women. According to this view, making drop scones of imported flour, sugar and jam was an advance upon cooking a local dish ... Similarly, embroidering a pillowcase of imported cotton and silks was an advance on manufacturing mats, tapa cloth, shell money and other objects of local materials. The contribution of women to agriculture was simply ignored since agriculture was seen as a male sphere of activity" (1983:26-27).

them in terms of their domestic and reproductive activities. As I discussed in Chapter 2, PNG's physical environment led to the striking sociocultural diversity found within the country's many societies. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some broad observations about women in precolonial PNG. For example, precolonial societies were characterised by clearly defined and separate gender roles which saw men take charge of certain spheres of influence (including politics, ceremonial exchange, defence and warfare) and women take charge of others (such as tending crops, rearing pigs and household reproduction) (Dinnen, 2001:13; Lee, 1985:222; Mandie, 1985a:166-167; Sepoe, 2000). This undoubtedly contributed to missionaries' perceptions of women in PNG. However, Sepoe points out that while gender roles were clearly demarcated, they were of mutual value and women in precolonial societies "were decision-makers in their own right and exerted powerful influence in important social events" (2000:102).⁴

A second observation is that women in many precolonial societies did not seem to form social relations or organise collectively in the manner introduced by missionaries. Penelope Shoeffel, for instance, writes that the Tolai of East New Britain had no tradition of women's associations, which were introduced to the area in the 1870s by the Methodist Church (1983:11). According to Douglas, "The apparent rarity of organized indigenous female collectivity is no doubt partly a discursive artefact of the general invisibility of Melanesian women to Europeans, including most anthropologists."⁵ She goes on to state that "it was also an actual corollary of certain region-wide fractionating tendencies: the defensive introversion of small, autonomous settlements in the context of low-level but endemic inter-community violence; the isolation of wives in strongly kin-based, mostly virilocal settlements; the household basis of production, for which women usually took primary responsibility; the formal monopoly by men of external linkages such as ritual and exchange partnerships and marital and political alliances" (Douglas, 2003:11). Margaret Jolly points out that while precolonial societies were often characterised by the marked segregation of men and women, this did not imply that women congregated easily: "In many places where descent and land were claimed through fathers and women moved at marriage, the diverse origins of wives precluded any strong sense of shared interest between women who were, in Strathern's haunting image of Mt Hagen in the 1970s, 'in between' ..." (Jolly, 2003:135).

⁴ In her review of literature on gender relations in precolonial PNG, Sepoe (2000) takes issue with the way PNG societies have often been characterised as male-dominated and women's roles deemed subordinate to men's. Sepoe draws on M. Strathern (1988) to point out that Western concepts such as 'domination' and 'subordination' as well as 'public' and 'private' spheres do not translate easily into PNG sociality (Sepoe, 2000:77, 102).

⁵ Malinowski, for example, neglected to describe women's involvement in the *kula* exchange system in the Trobriand Islands, a bias Annette Weiner's (1976) work addresses. Kulupi (1985:135), B. Rogers (1985:174) and Sepoe (2000:67) make similar criticisms about women's invisibility in early ethnographies of precolonial PNG societies.

Women in some precolonial societies did organise collectively for various purposes, a tradition they were sometimes able to mobilise in response to the spread of colonial administration and accompanying social, political and economic changes. Lorraine Sexton describes how women in Simbu and Eastern Highlands Provinces developed a savings and exchange scheme in 1960 called *Wok Meri* (women's work) that creatively drew on and transformed traditional patterns of co-operation and kinship obligations among women. She argues that *Wok Meri*, which sees small groups of women pool their earnings and create exchange relationships between fictive 'mother' and 'daughter' groups, "is a response by women to the rapid socioeconomic changes of the fifty years since Europeans first entered the Highlands" whereby they sought to improve their deteriorating economic status and protect their money from men who would squander it on beer and card-playing (1982:167, 169; 1984:136, 138). Wayne Warry makes a similar point about the Kafaina (as *Wok Meri* is known there) movement that arose in the 1960s in Chuave District, Simbu Province. Kafaina, says Warry, is the most recent name given to a series of Chuave women's associations spanning twenty years: "The existence of nucleated settlements, the introduction of cash crops, and the rise of rural markets may all be regarded as necessary preconditions for the genesis of women's groups in this area ... The movement also arose in response to men's domination of modern political and religious institutions and gained impetus from the specific actions of councillors and mission leaders" (1985:28-29). It has been noted that men supported *Wok Meri* groups (although they did not belong to them) by taking on key roles as chairmen and bookkeepers (Sexton, 1982:190-197).

At the same time as the *Wok Meri* movements grew in the Eastern Highlands and Simbu Provinces, women's groups began to flourish in other parts of the country. According to Sepoe, in the 1950s and 1960s "the colonial administration and the churches joined forces to bring 'civilisation' and raise the welfare of local people. Women's clubs and auxiliaries were set up to teach local women European models of domestic life" (2000:108). Colonial government agencies developed informal training programmes in health and education⁶ for delivery through women's groups and clubs, which women were encouraged to establish and join (Mowbray, 2006). O'Collins discusses how government and non-government agencies vigorously sponsored women's clubs and associations in the belief that participating in formally organised groups would increase women's influence on public decision making; however, she makes the point that "Although an overall aim of these clubs was women's

⁶ Describing *The Story of Two Women*, an educational aid designed and published by the Department of Native Affairs and the South Pacific Commission in the 1950s (which contrasts a clean, family-oriented, church-going, houseproud village Women's Club attendee with an unclean woman from the same village who does not go to church or clinic or care for her frequently ill family), Mowbray (2006) argues that two objectives can be discerned: 1) to provide basic hygiene and healthcare information to women, who were perceived in terms of their domestic roles as wives and mothers; and 2) to allow the colonial administration to reframe indigenous cultural practice and extend its control into local village polity.

development, this was usually seen as related to the domestic and subsistence spheres of activity” (O’Collins, 1985:2, underlining in original).

Missionaries, their wives, and other expatriate women (such as the wives of colonial administrators) were instrumental in the growth of women’s groups after World War II. Horndasch (1999) tells the stories of the wives of Lutheran missionaries who established several girls’ schools in the late 1940s and early 1950s, gave the name ‘Gejamsao’ (women helping) to Lutheran women’s groups⁷ and set up *Wokmeri Trening Skuls* (*tok Pisin*: Women’s work training schools, different from the *Wok Meri* movement described by Sexton⁸) to teach women literacy and practical skills, including sewing and cooking, as well as how to be good Christian wives, mothers and leaders. Likewise, Dame Rachel Cleland (1996) (wife of Sir Donald Cleland, Administrator of PNG from 1951-1966) documents the stories of Australian women who established netball clubs (which, to start with, were run by committees of men⁹), Girl Guides, and branches of the YWCA and the Red Cross from the 1950s until Independence, mostly on a volunteer basis. Netball teams and Girl Guide companies saw women come together to learn new ways of cooking and sewing, how to adapt to new types of housing in urban areas, and for literacy and health classes (Cleland, 1996:177).

In considering the historical processes underlying the development of women’s groups in PNG, four themes can be seen in my discussion so far. The first is the shift in gender relations that has occurred since precolonial times. Although gender *roles* have not necessarily changed much as a result of colonialism, development and widespread social change, gender *relations* have, often to the detriment of women (Korare, 2002:40; Meggitt, 1989; Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997:118-119). This is a point Sepoe makes throughout her book, showing how gender relations have become increasingly unequal as specific historical conditions converged, and that women¹⁰ in contemporary PNG are socially, economically and politically devalued and marginalised (2000:102, 189). As noted above, Sexton and Warry both argue that the *Wok Meri* movement arose in response to changing gender relations and women’s deteriorating social status within

⁷ One of the first Gejamsao groups was in Butibam (Horndasch, 1999:108). Several women I met in Lae (including Bing, my research assistant) told me their mothers had belonged to this group in the 1950s. Currently around 29,000 women belong to Gejamsao groups in Morobe Province.

⁸ According to Sexton, the introduction of Lutheran women’s fellowships in the late 1950s provided the immediate impetus for *Wok Meri* in Simbu Province (1984:149). Dickson-Waiko states that Highland *Wok Meri* groups “focus on fundraising, exchange, and sociality rather than spiritual development. They were not sanctioned by either of the two Lutheran Churches and should not be confused with Lutheran *wokmeri* groups” (2003:109).

⁹ Cleland describes the male netball committees as an “odd circumstance”, interpreting it as “a solution to the conflict between the male desire for their women to catch up in modern activities and a fear of them getting out of hand. If men ran the netball, they would know what the women were up to and a successful club would give them prestige in the village. From the women’s point of view, they could operate more freely with male support” (1996:174). However, as Sexton (1982) and Sepoe (2000:37) note, although women and men had clearly defined gender roles and certain ceremonies were for men or women only, PNG sociality did see women and men cooperate in various spheres; indeed, Sepoe’s conceptualisation of “women organising” does not exclude men.

¹⁰ Several authors have pointed out the ways in which men, too, have been adversely affected by development (M. Strathern, 1985:3; Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997:119).

their societies. Gender relations, and gender inequalities, are important factors affecting women's groups in contemporary PNG, and I return to this theme later in this chapter.

The second theme concerns how women's groups enabled women to organise in new collectivities beyond the forms traditionally available to them. Following M. Strathern (1988), one could view women's groups as providing women with a way to periodically detach themselves from the relationships that constitute them and see themselves in a new light, as individuals and as collective actors in a women's group. For example, groups incorporating traditional relations along lines of kinship and place, such as the *Wok Meri* movement, opened up new possibilities in terms of collective action and interpersonal relationships. Christian women's groups offered opportunities for local collective action and to make connections with the outside world, as Debra McDougall observes of women's fellowships in the Solomon Islands, and allowed people to imagine that they were part of a universal faith-based polity (2003:66). The new relationships and serious games facilitated by women's groups also created possibilities for collective hope and collective agency, distributing more power and access to economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital to women in groups than women as individuals. Jolly explains: "Both the process of their formation and their practical efforts as collectivities evince a powerful agency which is more than the combined congregation of strong and highly motivated individual women" (2003:136). However, these new ways of organising are not always easy to manage, in part due to the fact that many women had no history of collective organisation or working in single-sex groups, as I discuss later in this chapter.

The third theme arising from my discussion is that indigenous women's active interest (what Bourdieu might term *illusio*, which leads to agency) was vital for the widespread uptake and popularity of women's fellowships and groups (Douglas, 2003:11; Jolly, 2003:135).¹¹ Horndasch (1999), who also tells the stories of local women involved with the Lutheran Church, describes their enthusiasm for Christianity, education, and classes in sewing and cooking. *Wokmeri Trening Skuls*, for example, were set up in response to local women's calls for help with various problems, such as when they moved to towns with their husbands and ended up in settlements with no gardens or *wantoks* and no ability to read or write (Horndasch, 1999:93). Cleland notes how eager local girls were for netball and Girl Guides, commenting that during the 1950s and 1960s there were hundreds of Australian women regularly travelling to villages across PNG to set up groups who, "having trained local girls to be Leaders of their own Brownie or Guide Companies, would succumb to the pleas of girls in another village to come and start Guides there" (1996:282-283). Cleland also remarks that it was difficult

¹¹ In a similar vein, authors such as Burridge (1960), Douglas (2003), Jolly & Macintyre (1989), Jolly (2003), Robbins (2004) and Van Heekeren (2004) emphasise indigenous interest and action in discussing the ways in which Christianity has been creatively appropriated and transformed in PNG.

to form new, active branches of the Red Cross without grassroots support (1996:100), highlighting the importance of indigenous women's interest and investment to the success of such activities. Indigenous groups, such as the *Wok Meri* movements described above, are also evidence of *illusio* and agency (in the sense of agentive acts made with some goal in mind rather than routine practices) in the women's efforts to respond to social change and growing gender inequalities.

The fourth theme concerns the type of welfare-oriented activities (the culturally constructed projects) undertaken by colonial-era women's groups. Missionaries emphasised women's domestic and reproductive roles in promoting what Dickson-Waiko calls "the classic Christian women's trilogy of religion, service, and family" (2003:107). Women's groups established in the 1950s and 1960s were products of their time and, like church groups, tended to focus on domestic activities and family and community welfare.¹² This focus had two outcomes. First, it reinforced women's reproductive roles as wives and mothers and set the scene for women's groups to be associated with development along those lines. Second, it drew criticism for setting a precedent for contemporary women's groups. Lee, for example, describes these groups as leaving an "unhelpful legacy" of advancement based on 'drop scones and pillowslips' (see Schoeffel, 1983), asserting that "Many women's groups fail because they are hampered by Western notions of domesticity and activities undertaken in the past" (Lee, 1985:223). Arguments like this pay little attention to women's voice and agency, however. Recent research by Regina Scheyvens (1995, 1998, 2003), Douglas (2003) and Sepoe (2000) has shown that the *process* of organising collectively, even if it is to learn how to cook or sew, can and does lead to women's empowerment in Melanesia. Jolly expresses it well when she writes: "**All** women involved in women's groups are committed to some transformations **they** see as making their lives better" (2003:140, emphasis in original).

This section has shown that women's groups in PNG have long been associated with development, and that they create possibilities for collective agency by encouraging women to pursue culturally and historically constructed "projects" and negotiate relations of power as collectives. I also discussed how women's interest (*illusio*) in development plays an important role in the origins and activities of women's groups, which often reinforce women's status as carers for their families and communities. Women's groups, which developed in response to specific historical conjunctures, are today considered a socially acceptable and expected way for women to pursue *being* and development in PNG – they distribute collective hope as well as

¹² Donald Denoon's (1989) discussion of medical care in colonial PNG similarly shows that both government and non-government (e.g. Red Cross and mission) health initiatives modelled particular gender roles for healthcare workers (men were doctors, women nurses) and focused on women's reproductive roles, viewing them as mothers first, wives second, and women last.

development hope to women in groups. In the next section I describe the political conditions that shape the social spaces in which women's groups operate. I focus on government attitudes towards women's development since Independence to show how, in the absence of effective state interventions, women's groups came to be perceived as an alternative 'road to development', and thus a 'serious game', for women.

“Rhetoric and reality”: Women's development since Independence

The independent state of Papua New Guinea was formed at an auspicious time for women. The early 1970s saw critiques of women's invisibility in the development process arise, with Ester Boserup (1970) among the first to argue that modernisation theory was biased and ignored women's productive roles.¹³ Conventional World Bank philosophies of economic growth, and policies which focused on the productive sector and ignored regional and national inequalities in income or welfare, were also being challenged, and in this context British economist Mike Faber was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme and the Australian administration to produce “new development proposals” (Connell, 1997:26; Fitzpatrick, 1985:22). Known as the Faber Report, it “became a landmark for the conceptualisation of development issues in PNG” (Connell, 1997:26) and influenced the Eight Point Plan (also called the

¹³ In modernisation theory, the focus on the ‘public’ economic and productive spheres, combined with Western assumptions about women in developing nations being confined to ‘private’ domestic and reproductive activities (Western concepts which, as mentioned previously, M. Strathern, 1988 has shown do not apply in the Melanesian context), meant that women were largely invisible in writings on development. Using gender as an analytical category, Boserup (1970) demonstrates that women in African societies – like those in PNG – play important productive roles, especially in agriculture. Boserup also argues that development initiatives were in fact detrimental to women and resulted in their social status being undermined. Although not without its critiques (see Benería & Sen, 1986), Boserup's research, with that of others such as Tinker, Bramsen, & Buvinic (1976), contributed to the ‘Women in Development’ (WID) approach that arose in the 1970s. WID was concerned with incorporating women into the development process so they could achieve equality with men (see Antrobus, 2004; Moser, 1989; Rathgeber, 1990; Young, 2002). Boserup's work also influenced the United Nations' declaration of 1975 as the International Year for Women, followed by the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), from which the term WID emerged. The evolution of thought concerning the relationship between women and development is commonly referred to as WID, WAD (‘Women and Development’) and GAD (‘Gender and Development’). The WAD (or what Rathgeber (1990:492) terms the “neo-Marxist feminist”) approach, which arose in the mid-1970s as a critique of WID and modernisation theory, argues that women have always been actors in development processes. The GAD approach emerged in the 1980s as an alternative to WID, and Rathgeber describes it as not concerned with women *per se* but with the social construction of gender roles and power relations (1990:494). GAD recognises what Caroline Moser describes as women's “triple role”, namely their reproductive, productive and community management work (1993:27). The GAD approach is “presently the discourse used by most scholars, policy planners, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to discuss the relationship between development processes and women's inequality” (Bhavnani, Foran, & Kurian, 2003:5). There are other ways of approaching the relationship between women and development, such as the empowerment approach proposed by DAWN (‘Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era’ – see G. Sen & Grown, 1987) or Bhavnani et al.'s (2003) WCD (‘Women, Culture, Development’) paradigm, but the WID-WAD-GAD trajectory has received the most attention in the literature. For various critiques of the WID, WAD and GAD discourses, see Chant & Gutmann (2002), Cornwall (2000), Gardner & Lewis (1996), Kabeer (1994), Marchand & Parpart (1995), Moser (1993), Rathgeber (1990), Stewart-Withers (2007), and Young (2002).

Eight Aims) for development introduced by Michael Somare when PNG secured home rule in 1973.¹⁴ Of relevance here is point seven, which proposed:

‘a rapid increase in the active and equal participation of women in all types of social activity’, to include ‘a) government programmes to emphasize equal opportunity to women; b) increasing the proportion of women in higher educational and vocational training institutions; c) a programme to help women become more effective in the money economy and to help them adjust to urban life’ (Department of Chief Minister, 1973).

(Meggitt, 1989:141)

Point seven was reaffirmed in the second National Goal of the Constitution, which is entitled “Equality and participation” and calls for “equal participation by women citizens in all political, economic, social and religious activities” (Constitution of Papua New Guinea, 1975).

Dickson-Waiko and Sepoe identify the political climate of the 1970s, particularly the Women in Development approach (which was inspired by Boserup’s work), as an important condition affecting the decision to incorporate gender equality into the Constitution. However, as Connell points out, little serious attention was given to the aim of gender equality and “Political parties have ignored women in their policy statements” (1997:33). Indeed, in her presentation at a 1982 Waigani Seminar assessing the performance of the PNG government since the launch of the Eight Point Plan,¹⁵ Mandie described the government’s call for equal participation as “something of a joke. Without women’s input, PNG would be much less self-reliant than it is. Perhaps a Ninth Point could be added to the Eight Aims calling for equal participation from men in this vital area of the economy” (1985a:168). Dickson-Waiko writes that by 1985, ten years after the launch of the Eight Point Plan, “nothing much had been done to bring about meaningful change in women’s lives ... By the 1990s, the Eight Point Plan had been jettisoned and women now seem to be the only people who continue to refer to it” (2003:101). Sepoe, who describes the decision to embrace gender equality as “political opportunism”, notes that in the mid-1990s women in PNG identified and brought ten “critical issues”¹⁶ to the government’s attention when the document ‘PNG Platform for Action’ was developed, but “Despite official guarantees, women have experienced

¹⁴ Dickson-Waiko comments that the Faber Report did not mention women’s equality: “Fitzpatrick (1985, 24) notes that ‘there was only one difference between the first and final drafts of the Eight Aims, namely the inclusion of the seventh aim’. Curiously, he does not say on whose insistence the seventh point was included, only that ‘promoting the participation of women, was included with some difficulty’” (2009:283).

¹⁵ The papers presented at the seminar were published in an edited collection entitled *From Rhetoric to Reality?* in which the editors note that educated women, who took their role in national development seriously, now “see a contradiction between rhetoric and reality – talk of equal development on the one hand and evidence of increasing differentials in power and wealth on the other” (King et al., 1985:3).

¹⁶ The ten critical issues were: 1) health; 2) education, training and literacy; 3) mechanisms and shared decision-making; 4) economic empowerment and employment opportunities and conditions; 5) legal and human rights (violence, peace and national unity); 6) culture and family (young women and girls, special groups of women); 7) transport, shelter, water and communication; 8) agriculture and fisheries (resources, foreign investment); 9) environment and development; and 10) sustainable development and poverty (Sepoe, 2000:198; see also Brouwer, Harris, & Tanaka, 1998:57-59).

disproportionately more exclusion and neglect in the overall development processes than any other social group in PNG" (2000:11, 188, 198). In her review of government policies targeting women since Independence, Dickson-Waiko states that women's development is given a very low priority: "No government, with the exception of the first Somare-led government, has paid attention to gender issues in a systematic way. Recognizing women's disadvantaged position and encouraging them to participate in all forms of public life is one thing; recognizing gender as a development issue is quite another" (2009:290).

Several authors discuss the problems associated with developing and implementing policies for women in PNG (Dickson-Waiko, 2003, 2009; Kekedo, 1985; Nakikus, 1985; Sepoe, 2000). Common themes include: the lack of consistency arising from the way "women's affairs" is shuffled between government departments that are constantly reorganised and restructured;¹⁷ that political parties only recognise the low social status of women as rhetoric; the policy vacuum for women resulting from a lack of direction about how to integrate women into development; and how programmes overemphasised women's domestic roles at the expense of their productive ones. Even more authors discuss problems with the National Council of Women (NCW), a unified body designed to represent all women in PNG established by the newly independent government in 1975.¹⁸ Dickson-Waiko makes an important point about the difficulties arising from the way the postcolonial state constructs women as gendered beings (mothers, wives, daughters, sisters) before citizens:

In practice, women have been incorporated into the state as mothers rather than as citizens with the same rights as male citizens. This construction of women by the postcolonial state mirrors the terms used in the rural areas where kin-based communities conceive women relationally as family, clan, and community members and women normally represent themselves as *yumi ol mama*, 'us mothers' in Tok Pisin, or *yumi mama meri*, 'us women mothers'; young women are referred to by another familial term, *susa*, 'sister'. While citizenship is supposedly an individual's relationship with the state, Papua New Guinean women have great difficulty in claiming rights as individual citizens. They enter the political domain as sexed beings and this construction interferes with and even sabotages their claims for equal citizenship.

(Dickson-Waiko, 2003:101-102)

¹⁷ Appendix 2 of Brouwer et al. (1998:57-59), which provides a chronology of the women's movement in PNG from 1950-1995, also traces the trajectory of "women's affairs" in government departments.

¹⁸ The NCW was initially mandated to institutionalise the country's many women's clubs and groups, administer provincial and district councils of women, and integrate women into development, but unfortunately had limited success due to problems with structure, strategy and resources (Bonnell, 1985; Cleland, 1996; Douglas, 2003:14; Dickson-Waiko, 2009:285-286; Lee, 1985:225-226; Mandie, 1985b; Schoeffel, 1983:24-25; Sepoe, 2000). One of the problems was the NCW's top-down approach, and although Sepoe concludes that the NCW (which is now a non-governmental organisation) remains a "significant actor in 'women's development'", she also warns that "Expectations of power wielders for women to channel women's concerns into one single body, NCW or other such body, are unrealistic" (2000:135, 136).

Another difficulty stems from a political environment of “entrenched, male-gendered bureaucracy” (Dickson-Waiko, 2009:294). Sepoe comments that efforts to create and implement effective policies for women’s development would require “a strong movement towards *transforming State institutions themselves*; and efforts towards instilling a greater sense of awareness about gender issues *in their daily operations*” (2000:171, emphasis in original). These discussions echo the findings of a World Bank analysis of gender in PNG, which notes that one of the biggest difficulties “is the passive resistance to change among male decision-makers, whether in the formal sector or in village communities. Policies or projects that promote the advancement of women may be agreed upon, but there is no serious commitment to implementation” (Brouwer et al., 1998:37).

The low priority accorded to women’s development, and by extension, women as citizens, is reflected in the 2004 Millennium Development Goals Progress Report for Papua New Guinea. The report states that PNG is unlikely to achieve MDG 3, which aims to promote gender equality and empower women, by 2015 (Government of Papua New Guinea & United Nations in Papua New Guinea, 2004:28).¹⁹ Gender disparities can be seen in the areas of education and literacy (discussed further in Part III), formal employment, and political representation. For example, literacy rates for adults over the age of 15 in PNG are low in general (49.2%), but the literacy rate for women (43.9%) is lower than that for men (55.2%) (Government of Papua New Guinea & United Nations in Papua New Guinea, 2004:iv). The report also notes that in 2000, “only a very small percentage (5.3%) of all employed women had a wage job (compared to 15.2 per cent for men)” (Government of Papua New Guinea & United Nations in Papua New Guinea, 2004:18). Dame Carol Kidu, Minister for Community Development, is PNG’s only female member of parliament. PNG has one of the world’s lowest levels of female representation in parliament (0.9% of seats), a situation Dame Kidu constantly seeks to change but with limited success so far.²⁰

Clearly, government policies have not succeeded in bringing about gender equality or promoting women’s development in PNG since Independence. According to Sepoe, “it is women’s activities, agendas and demands at the collective level that have contributed to the changes for women achieved thus far in PNG” (2000:136). As

¹⁹ The 2004 report is the latest available. The next Progress Report was due to be released 2010 (it had not been published at the time of writing). Although figures were not available the UN website states that “While much has been achieved, there is considerable work to be done if PNG is to come anywhere near attaining the goals” (United Nations Development Programme, 2010). Similarly, the Australian Government comments, “PNG is unlikely to meet any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)” (Australian Agency for International Development, 2010b).

²⁰ It is difficult for women to make gains in national politics. Robyn Slarke’s (2006) documentary “It is not an easy road” highlights the violence and intimidation experienced by women candidates in the 2002/2003 national PNG elections. Men are not solely to blame for this, as Douglas notes: “Women are effectively excluded from formal politics and public affairs in Melanesia by virtue of male prejudice and their own lack of education and opportunity but also by choice: notoriously, women rarely vote for female candidates and most women, especially uneducated rural-dwellers, agree with men that politics is men’s business” (2003:18).

women's groups have long been associated with women's development, it is easy to understand why scholars such as Douglas (2003:12-13) comment that people turn to "organizations of civil society" (e.g. women's groups, churches and NGOs) in seeking alternative and more effective "roads to development". This does not prevent people from expecting a reciprocal relationship with the state, though. "There have been successes as well as failures, nevertheless, women are continuously seeking ways and means of actually making the state accountable to women by accommodating and incorporating their needs and issues," writes Sepoe (2000:183). Sepoe believes that women's collective organisation creates a political space for *elite* women to influence government policy (2000:194), providing a strong basis for social change. However, she also notes that while *grassroots* women experience the impact of state policies in their everyday lives, they generally do not relate their life experiences to external structures or processes and see women's groups as a sphere of activity distinct from the formal political process (Sepoe, 2000:123, 194). To me, this indicates that *grassroots* women have a sense of their gendered position in social space, a sense based on gender norms that reproduces gender roles and relations. Bourdieu describes this as "the practical mastery of the social structure as a whole":

The categories of perception of the social world are, as regards their most essential features, the product of the internalization, the incorporation, of the objective structures of social space. Consequently, they incline agents to accept the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than to rebel against it, to counterpose to it different, even antagonistic, possibilities. The sense of one's place, as a sense of what one can or cannot "permit oneself," implies a tacit acceptance of one's place, a sense of limits ("that's not for the likes of us," etc.), or, which amounts to the same thing, a sense of distances, to be marked and kept, respected or expected.

(Bourdieu, 1985:728).

My aim in the next section is to make those connections in order to show that external structures and political processes do have an impact on grassroots women's groups.

How gender relations, collective organisation, and leadership affect women's groups in contemporary Papua New Guinea

In this section I return to two themes I raised earlier, namely gender relations and opportunities for new collectivities afforded by women's groups, to highlight the key relations of power affecting grassroots women's groups in contemporary PNG. I begin by discussing how gender relations affect women's participation in development processes. Then I describe some of the problems associated with the way women's groups were historically constructed, showing that my participants prefer to include men rather than organise exclusively as women. I conclude by discussing some of the

issues involved with managing the relationships that accompany new collectivities, in particular the leadership roles required of women in groups.

As I explained above, gender relations have become increasingly unequal as a result of specific historical conjunctures, and contemporary PNG is characterised by marked gender inequalities. Janet Seeley and Kate Butcher summarise data from a range of sources to provide an overview of the disadvantaged status of women:

Although the cultural diversity of PNG makes generalisations difficult and unwise, the literature consistently records that women throughout PNG have less access to health care and education than men, have relatively heavier workloads, and are ... vulnerable to sexual violence. Maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world, and women's participation in local government is between 3 per cent and 9 per cent. Women make up only 18 per cent of the formal labour force, and hold only 12 per cent of management positions (Asian Development Bank 2002). Despite constitutional and legal provisions, women still often face discrimination. Violence against women (including domestic violence and gang – or 'pack' – rape) affects the day-to-day lives of all women in PNG (Yawa n.d.). PNG is, in the words of an Asian Development Bank review, 'a man's world' ... particularly in the highlands where 'the dominance and high status of men [are] in contrast to the submission and low status of women' (Yawa n.d.). In many places, men exert control over women's fertility, labour and freedom of movement. A World Bank report concluded that 'the rights of kinsmen to chastise and punish women were pervasive, and the majority of men and women in PNG still uphold many of men's rights over women' (Brouwer et al. 1998, 11).

(Seeley & Butcher, 2006:107)

Gender inequalities affect women's participation in development processes in a variety of ways. For example, several studies have documented how women's low social status in PNG means they have little control over capital, especially money and the products of their labour (Bradley, 1985; Brouwer et al., 1998; Koczberski, 2007; Nagari, 1985; Sexton, 1984). Discussing a development project involving women's networks in West New Britain Province, Appleford writes that "In many cases, women would quite openly request loans on behalf of their husbands or other family members" (2000:86). This also happens in Lae, as I found during an interview in 2007 with Josephine Yoss from the Small Enterprise Development Project run by ADRA. Josephine told me that women who join savings groups or receive small loans often cannot control their money once it enters the household.

"Some women hide the fact that they're members of a savings group," she said during our conversation. "They don't want their husbands to know what they're doing in case they try to force them to take out loans and give them the money. Actually, there are a lot of cases of women taking out loans, sometimes against their will, just so their husbands or fathers can get money. Then they're stuck with the repayments but they have no cash to start something that might give them an income, like a small poultry farm or fishpond."

The ability to appropriate capital clearly affects the success or failure of women's groups; if women are burdened with the responsibility of repaying a loan they did not get to use, they are more likely to default on repayments and put the entire group at risk of failure. Control over economic capital is often a problem for women throughout the world, as many scholars have noted in critiques of microcredit and microfinance programmes (see Fernando, 2005; Mahmud, 2003; Leach & Sitaram, 2002).

"How do women hide that they belong to a savings group from family members?" I asked Josephine.

"If women want to keep it secret, when they go to savings group meetings they just tell their husbands that they're going to fellowship or church meetings."

What Josephine's comments indicate, apart from the fact that church groups are a socially acceptable way for women to gather, is that family support (particularly from husbands, fathers and brothers) is vital for the success of women's groups in PNG. For many women, their domestic responsibilities limit the amount of time they have available to participate in outside activities. As I discuss in Chapter 7, several Tensiti Literacy Programme members said that they would not be able to attend classes without the support of their husbands and children. This is an important point and I return to it shortly.

Many of the development extension workers I interviewed identified gender inequalities within the household as a key factor affecting women's groups, particularly at the grassroots level. Often gender inequality was posited as a "cultural" issue, as can be seen in a conversation I had in 2007 with Ruddie Artango, a farmer with 11 years experience in agricultural extension work.

"Our culture is good and there are aspects that we have to hold on to because that's our pride and our right, but some we have to do away with because we want development," said Ruddie as we discussed the training she provides to women and men in rural villages. "The main aspect I emphasise is equality with women. We need to do away with the idea that men are above women, that women are unequal to men, that women are low-class people in the village. Let's change that."

However, as Ruddie and others I spoke with stressed, this is not the type of change that women alone can bring about. My point here is that it will take the combined efforts of a range of social actors to address the sociocultural structures (such as entrenched gender inequalities and "cultural" attitudes towards women) affecting the success or failure of grassroots women's groups in PNG.

The second theme I raised earlier, regarding how women's groups created possibilities for women to organise in new collectivities, also affects gender relations and has implications for the success of women's groups. As I pointed out, women from

many precolonial societies did not organise collectively and had no cultural precedents to draw on in doing so. “In Lihir, as elsewhere, even during the colonial period, women’s communal work was directed by men,” explains Macintyre in discussing why a women’s organisation promoted by a mining company in New Ireland Province failed. “Thus there is no tradition of women working cooperatively as a distinct group defined entirely in terms of sex, apart from church organisations” (Macintyre, 2003:127). Single-sex women’s groups often augmented divisions between men and women in ways that have not necessarily been beneficial. “Attitudes and structures introduced by agents of change from industrialized Western societies have been instrumental in imposing a sharper separation of men’s and women’s spheres than existed in many societies in the pre-colonial period,” writes O’Collins. “The concepts of cooperation as equal partners have given way to concepts of separate development to help women compete on equal terms with men” (O’Collins, 1985:4, underlining in original). A recurring motif in just about all of my conversations with Bing, and throughout most of my interviews and fieldnotes, was that in order for women’s groups to achieve their development goals, they need to work with men as well as women. “To be acceptable and effective,” states Douglas, “programs for women have to take account of men” (2000:6; see also Scheyvens, 2003:28). In terms of development theory and practice, an approach that emphasises social relations (which, as I discussed in Chapter 2, is an important basis for social organisation and Melanesian sociality) and cultural context might be described as an amalgam of GAD and WCD discourses. In later chapters I show how members of Tensiti Literacy Programme and Butibam Women’s Flower Group construct their collective “projects”, taking into account social relationships they consider important and cultural traditions they want to uphold and maintain.

Managing relationships within groups has been a challenge for women organising in new collectivities. My two case studies illustrate some of the different relationships involved in grassroots women’s groups. Butibam Women’s Flower Group, which I describe in Chapter 8, comprises women aged around 50 or over who are connected by kinship as well as religion (the group is part of the Yabim District Gejamsao circuit) and place (Butibam village). The group’s aim is to generate income through floriculture, which requires individual members to make significant contributions in terms of money, land and time. In order to achieve their goals, Butibam Women’s Flower Group members must manage pre-existing kin and place-based relationships; as Jolly might say, they are more “than simply **women** in groups” (2003:135, emphasis in original). They must also negotiate what M. Strathern calls “a contrast between collective action (based on shared identities and aims) and particular relations (based on the difference and interdependence between them)” (1988:97) by

working to ensure that collective profits are distributed equally to individual women. In contrast, the Tensiti Literacy Programme (see Chapter 7) began as a women's group but now comprises women and men – who are not necessarily related – who meet to learn how to read and write. Group membership is not limited to residents of Tensiti settlement and members differ in age (from children to grandparents) and Christian denomination as well as gender. Group members are, often, simply women in groups (rather than affines) and it is easier for them to see how the benefits of their collective action – literacy – accrue for individuals.

Grassroots women's groups with no tradition of managing the relationships that accompany new collectivities can find it difficult to resolve conflicts or organise effectively, especially as women are often reluctant to accept leadership roles. "The main problem is not necessarily lack of money, although this is a concern," said Bing as we discussed issues facing grassroots women's groups in Lae in August 2007. "It's more a lack of leadership, organisation and cooperation." Bing said that shyness, lack of confidence, jealousy, and fear of 'gossip' all limit the way grassroots women participate in women's groups and, as a consequence, the efficacy of the groups, a point Douglas (2003:16) also makes. Leadership is regularly identified as one of the key constraints on women's groups in PNG, as I discuss next in concluding the chapter.

"Along with the intrusion of capitalism into New Guinea," writes Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi, "Western education, missionization, new forms of state and local government, and the emergence of sex, generational, and class differences have promoted a diversification of leadership roles (e.g. village councillor, priest, parliamentarian, rascal gang leader) and new sources of conflict over the better 'roads' to success and happiness" (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997:108). I would add women's groups to that list as they require women, who are often used to performing complementary and supportive roles to men's social and political leadership, to adopt new leadership roles. In PNG a leader (such as the 'Big Man') is usually someone who skilfully manages complex systems of obligation and reciprocity by distributing goods and wealth. There are strong social expectations of leaders, especially by kin and *wantoks*, and Douglas speculates that threats of public disapproval or private envy, including sorcery, to which ambitious and successful men are exposed, "apparently discourage many women from taking on the leadership of women's groups and organizations or harass those who do" (2003:10). Macintyre agrees, stating that "the fierce egalitarianism that characterizes Papua New Guinean political structures is expressed in a reluctance on the part of women to take on tasks that are potentially controversial. One effect of this is that women are very happy to work extremely hard on a project when an outsider, such as an expatriate advisor or consultant, takes responsibility but will not take the initiative to begin a process" (2003:128). Poor

leadership frequently results in the failure of women's groups and projects. In her excellent discussion of leadership problems in women's groups in New Ireland Province, Macintyre explains that aid agencies and NGOs often misinterpret that failure and attempt to reinforce the leader's role by providing "endless training for 'capacity building'", which can exacerbate rather than solve the problem (2003:128).

One could interpret such leadership problems as the women's way of recognising, and resisting, the social position (that is, leader) offered to them by development processes. As Macintyre's comment indicates, it is not that women do not want to participate in development projects. However, they are aware (consciously or unconsciously through *habitus*) that being a leader comes with specific responsibilities. Recognising their limited access to the capital necessary to fulfil social expectations regarding leadership, they develop strategies to play these serious games in ways they deem best, thus appropriating the process to engage with development projects they might not otherwise have initiated. In order for leadership problems within women's groups to be addressed, the wider relations of power and inequality they negotiate must be taken into account.

In this chapter I have described the historical processes involved in constructing women's groups in PNG during the colonial era, processes which contributed to a shift in gender relations, provided new possibilities for women to organise collectively (distributing collective agency and collective hope to women in groups), and which were the result of a combination of external influences and women's interests and actions (*illusio*). I also explained how women's groups came to be positioned as more effective vehicles of development than the independent state of PNG. In the final section I drew on two related themes (gender relations and opportunities for new collectivities afforded by women's groups) to highlight some of the sociocultural factors affecting grassroots women's groups in contemporary PNG, including entrenched gender inequalities, household gender relations, the sharp divide brought about by women's segregation into single-sex groups, internal group relationships, and leadership. This chapter has shown that wider relations of power and inequality affect the success or failure of grassroots women's groups in PNG, structures that cannot be challenged or changed by the efforts of women's groups alone. To conclude, I suggest a better way of phrasing one of the headlines quoted at the beginning of this chapter would be to say that "Issues hampering the development of PNG women rest with everyone". In the next chapter I use the same framework – the politics of hope and agency – to approach an important and comparable 'serious game' concerning Muslim women in India.

“You cannot even imagine how much freedom women have in Islam”

[Interlude 5. Tabassum on Islam]

“I love your keen interest in Islam!” Tabassum said to me one day as she prepared vegetables for lunch at her house in Park Circus. I had once again turned the conversation to a subject I wanted to learn more about – the role her faith plays in her work – and Tabassum was more than happy to oblige. “There is a misconception that Islam disempowers women,” she told me. “There are some restrictions, such as *purdah*, but nobody can force you to do anything you don’t want to.” Later she said, “You cannot even imagine how much freedom women have in Islam.”

For Tabassum, many of the problems facing Muslim women today stem from lack of knowledge, not from Islam itself.

“So many problems arise because people don’t have any real knowledge of Islam,” she said. “Some people teach that in Islam, ‘girls cannot talk about this or that,’ but girls *can* talk. Unless you know your rights, how can you fight for them? You have to *learn* first. And the first word in the *Quran* means ‘learn’, but how many people tell us to learn today?”

“How do you think it got this way?” I asked her.

Tabassum thought about my question for a minute.

“Over time we didn’t get education and we began to rely on whatever *maulvis*¹ told us. We started believing that they were right. We didn’t go through the books that we had ourselves, so we had to depend on them and what they were saying. Slowly and gradually someone said this, someone else said that, and that’s how it happened.”

Tabassum also believes that high levels of illiteracy compound the situation. “We never read the *Quran* properly, that’s why we have these problems,” she said. “The Prophet never mentioned that only men should get education and that women cannot. He never said that. We people made it that way ... men say that women don’t need education. But the Prophet told us that ‘A mother’s lap is her child’s first school’ and that she *should* be educated.”

.....

¹ Religious scholars.

Chapter 4

No hope for Muslim women? How “being Muslim” affects Muslim women in India

“Muslim women are viewed as oppressed, without rights, and having no significant part in socio-economic life, but the treatment of women is not due to Islam,” said Dr MKA Siddiqui as he addressed a small audience – scholars, researchers, and activists, many of them Muslim – gathered around a large table in the meeting room at the Institute of Objective Studies (IOS) in Kolkata city. “Many people will jump on that bandwagon without understanding the factors,” he continued, facing me as we sat at the head of the table. “Anyone with some capability will discern that there are variables at play here, and the variables are slums, poverty, discrimination ... all these things are correlated. So you have to understand all the factors in this way.”

It was 6pm on a dusty winter evening in February 2007 and Dr Siddiqui was facilitating a workshop at which I was guest speaker. This was not my first time at the IOS, but it was the first year I had been warned against speaking there because of the Institute’s pro-Muslim agenda and alleged links with al-Qaeda.¹ The IOS is a non-governmental organisation that promotes social science research on issues facing Indians in general and Muslims in particular. I first met Dr Siddiqui, who co-ordinates the IOS Kolkata Chapter, in 2005. Now in his early 80s, Dr Siddiqui has had a long career as an anthropologist and has published extensively on Muslims and other minority communities in India. In 2006 he invited me to speak about my research at the

¹ al-Qaeda is a Sunni, Islamist network widely considered responsible for the September 11 attacks against the U.S. in 2001 (known as 9/11). It has been labelled a terrorist movement. Mahmood Mamdani (2004) has discussed how the act of terrorism as carried out by political Islamists became equated with Islam – a cultural-religious identity – in U.S. discourse (what he calls Culture Talk) following 9/11. Muslims everywhere have felt the effects of post-9/11 discourses on terrorism and are regularly viewed with suspicion (Afghanistan’s Taliban, for example, have come to be synonymous with terrorists – see Abu-Lughod, 2002). India is no exception, as a comment made by the leader of a right-wing Hindu organisation in March 2002 illustrates: “All Muslims may not be terrorists, but most terrorists are Muslims” (cited in P. Chatterjee, 2004:115). Anti-Muslim sentiments were recently heightened in the wake of the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai (Nayeem, 2008). I was surprised to hear this comment, which came from an educated person familiar with the history of Islam in India but who had not actually visited the IOS. The comment, and other sweeping generalisations I heard non-Muslims make about Muslims and Islam (some of whom had no interaction with Muslims), indicates the large social and cognitive distance between different social groups. As Ramaswamy pointed out in an email to me, “while an association composed entirely of Muslims would be seen as a Muslim organisation, an association composed entirely of Hindu people could be simply presumed to be a civic or a national organisation” (personal communication).

IOS, which I did, and when he invited me back in 2007 I asked if we could hold an interactive discussion with interested participants. Dr Siddiqui agreed and obligingly hosted a workshop on the educational and economic status of Muslim women in Kolkata.

Dr Siddiqui's comments at the IOS workshop picked up the thread of earlier conversations we'd had about this topic. Worldwide, discussions of Muslim women are often framed in terms of religious traditions, and one does not have to look far for examples of the perception that Muslim women are constrained by *purdah* (veiling, seclusion), polygamy, and personal laws (whereby the rule of religion governs personal, social and civil matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and kinship). For instance, in her article *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?*, Lila Abu-Lughod (2002:784) critically examines how the plight of the "Muslim woman" was enlisted by the United States government in justifying its "War on Terrorism" in Afghanistan.² She argues that conflating the separate historical sociocultural causes of women's disadvantage with more recent and visible restrictions imposed by the Taliban prevents us from exploring the structural factors at the root of inequality, discrimination and human suffering (Abu-Lughod, 2002:784).

My aim in this chapter is to draw attention to the historical sociocultural processes and relations of power and inequality that contributed to low social status of Muslim women in India. Like PNG, Indian society is characterised by clearly defined gender roles whereby men govern certain spheres of influence (including politics and religious institutions) and women are responsible for others (such as upholding personal, family and community honour in their everyday practices, clothing, and deportment).³ Although generalising about a society as complex and diverse as India's is problematic, women do tend to occupy subordinate economic and social positions and experience gender-based discrimination, sometimes with dramatic consequences. For example, the preference for having sons rather than daughters has had a major impact on female-male ratios and female mortality rates, resulting in millions of "missing women" in India (Croll, 2000; A. Sen, 1999).⁴ However, there are significant

² The idea of "saving" women has a historical legacy and was often used by colonisers as a way of justifying their rule on moral grounds, as Abu-Lughod points out (2002:784).

³ Bourdieu might view Indian women as repositories of symbolic capital which is "appropriated and deployed by men as assets in their jostlings for position with one another" (Lovell, 2000:21). For Bourdieu, women occupy lower social positions in all modes of production (economic, social, capital, symbolic) because "men are the *subjects* of matrimonial strategies through which they work to maintain or to increase their symbolic capital" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:173).

⁴ A. Sen coined the term "missing women" to refer to the millions of women in the world who are not alive due to gender inequalities and artificially high female mortality rates. In Europe, North America, Japan, New Zealand and other 'Western' countries women generally tend to outnumber men (the ratio of women to men often exceeds 1.05) and there is evidence that women are biologically 'hardier' than men (A. Sen, 1999:105). All things being equal, we could reasonably expect to find similar ratios in all parts of the world. However, there are striking variations in female-male ratios and India's female-male ratio of 0.93 is among the lowest in the world (Drèze & Sen, 2002:229, 230). Drèze and Sen argue that the preferential treatment of boys and deliberate neglect of female children has resulted in a sharp deficit of women in India (2002:230, 233). They also discuss regional differences in female-male ratios

differences between women from different socio-religious communities, and Muslim women are particularly disadvantaged in areas of education and economic power. Hasan and Menon caution against assuming that Indian women share experiences of discrimination and disadvantage across cultural and religious difference: "... we do not mean to either minimize commonalities in the forms of women's oppression or to suggest the need for separate treatment of Muslim women. There is, however, the uncomfortable truth that outcomes of economic and social development processes, even when primarily state-led, have not been the same across communities and regions" (Hasan & Menon, 2005a:4).

Although religion is not the only factor influencing the social status of Indian Muslim women, the fact remains that there are disparities in access to economic, cultural, and social capital between socio-religious groups, with Muslim women living in poverty at a consistent disadvantage (see Basu, 2008; Government of India, 2006; Hasan & Menon, 2004; Samanta, 2004). Hasan and Menon sketch the "stark reality" of a Muslim woman's life, compiled from their all-India Muslim Women's Survey:

She is typically among the poorest, whether she lives in urban or rural India, and is illiterate for the most part; if educated, she seldom progresses beyond primary school; she is married by the age of 15 years, usually has three children by the time she is 20 years old, and is plagued by ill-health for most of her life. Low skills and education, as well as seclusion and a severe lack of mobility, limit her chances of paid work outside the home, making for almost complete economic dependence on her husband – who is likely to be poor and disadvantaged himself. Violence, or the threat of violence within the home – where she spends the greater part of her life – and the lack of any viable options to it keep her in a highly subordinated and often abusive relationship, while cultural and social norms, suffused with a pervasive patriarchy, allow her little choice or decisional autonomy in practically every aspect of her life.
(Hasan & Menon, 2004:241)

During my fieldwork I found that many non-Muslim people I met held the perception that the low social status of Muslim women was due to Islam, and on more than one occasion I was asked whether I had any "hope" for Muslim women. In this chapter I discuss how being Muslim is a 'serious game' that affects how hope and agency are distributed amongst urban poor Muslim women in Kolkata and Howrah. I argue that their specific, historically constructed religio-political identity as members of a minority community ("being Muslim") is an important factor in their disadvantage that is further compounded by their gendered identities and poverty.

This chapter is divided into three related sections. Geopolitical and historical context is essential to any understanding of Indian Muslim identity, and in the first

and challenge the perception that the areas with the lowest ratios are those which have the largest "Muslim influence", instead showing that regional factors are more important than religious ones: "there is no evidence of any overall tendency for the female disadvantage to be larger among Muslims" (Drèze & Sen, 2002:233, 234).

section I take my cue from discussions at the IOS workshop and outline the processes by which this identity developed and became politicised during the British colonial era. In the second section I look at the ways in which gender, religion and politics became intertwined in debates over personal law and how this positioned “Muslim women” first as members of a minority community then as gendered citizens, offering them differential access to capital and other social resources. Finally, the third section discusses “the contribution that agents make towards constructing the view of the social world, and through this, towards constructing this world” (Bourdieu, 1985:727) by exploring perceptions of Muslim women and their consequences.

Before I begin, I should point out that I do not discuss whether or how Islam oppresses women (although my participants certainly had their own views on this subject, as later chapters show) as it is beyond the scope of my argument about religio-political identity. See Abu-Lughod (2006), Mahmood (2005), Merry (2006), and Nussbaum (2000) for varying perspectives on the debate about religion and women’s rights.

Religion and politics in the British colonial era

The relationship between religion and politics was an important theme running throughout the IOS workshop. Here I describe how British colonial processes helped construct political categories out of religious identities in India, while keeping in mind that “Muslim social identities in different parts of the subcontinent were being formed by patterns of social and economic relations linked to the fact of British colonial rule without being wholly shaped by it” (Bose & Jalal, 1998:167). My discussion focuses on two key historical processes⁵ identified as important by workshop participants: the British colonial narrative of Indian history, and the educational apparatus of British India.

At the IOS workshop, Dr Siddiqui was concerned that I should appreciate two “basic issues”. The first was that Islam has been in India for centuries. Mughal power was established in northwestern Bengal in 1243-44 but Muslim traders and travellers, along with Buddhist missionaries and many other visitors, had been coming to India for at least 300 years before then (Eaton, 1993:xxi; Ghosh, 1994). Several scholars have described how Islam came to different parts of the country over a long period of time and was adopted in different ways, resulting in distinct regional variations in its practice (see Bilgrami, 2006; Bose & Jalal, 1998; Eaton, 1993; M. Hasan, 1997; Hasan & Roy, 2005; Kulke & Rothermund, 2004). One consistent feature of Mughal rule,

⁵ The IOS workshop quickly became a discussion of historical processes as participants drew on the past to explain the present situation of education and employment opportunities for Muslim women. This is another example of the “enthusiasm for history” (Chakrabarty, 2008:170) I observed during my fieldwork.

however, was that it did not cause Hindu traditions to disappear; instead, new cultural traditions were formed as elements from Hinduism and Islam were incorporated into local beliefs and practices. This was the second “basic issue” Dr Siddiqui wanted me to appreciate. Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, two leading Indian and Pakistani historians, write that “in the fourteenth century a true Indo-Muslim culture was forged, based on Hindu-Muslim alliance-building and reciprocity” (1998:28). This Indo-Muslim culture included a growing number of indigenous Indians who gradually converted to Islam.

In Bengal, the majority of the indigenous population adopted Islam, something that did not happen in other parts of India under Mughal rule. Although Hinduism and Islam have important philosophical and metaphysical differences in their guiding principles, Richard Eaton argues that premodern Bengali society was not defined in terms of binary religious categories: “Instead of visualizing two separate and self-contained social groups, Hindus and Muslims, participating in rites in which each stepped beyond its “natural” communal boundaries, one may see instead a single undifferentiated mass of Bengali villagers who, in their ongoing struggle with life’s usual tribulations, unsystematically picked and chose from an array of reputed instruments – a holy man here, a holy river there – in order to tap superhuman power” (1993:281).

This was not how British colonisers saw Bengal.⁶ The British colonial narrative of Indian history promoted the idea that religion defines India and constructed an essentialised vision of Hinduism and Islam as separate religious systems. Hindus and Muslims were viewed as culturally different and ‘other’ not only to the British, but also to one another. “The colonial narrative of Indian history, first formulated in the late eighteenth century, had been to position Muslims as foreigners, thus making British rule seem less intrusive and, by vilifying Muslim rule, more benign,” explains historian Barbara Metcalf. “Key elements of that narrative were appropriated by Indians generally to account for their subjection. Today, Hindu extremists justify ethnic cleansing on the basis of this same narrative of Muslims as foreigners” (Metcalf, 2005:395). Contemporary Indian historians, including Bose and Jalal (1998:26), criticise this division and the misconceptions to which it gives rise. In fact, many examples of the historical interaction between Muslim and Hindu traditions can be seen in music, film, architecture, poetry, literature, paintings, and artistic culture in general, as Peter Manuel (1996) points out. Rabindranath Tagore, one of Bengal’s most famous literary figures, frequently commented on the different cultural ideas that India had absorbed and is often quoted as describing his Bengali family as the product of a confluence of Hindu, Muslim, and British cultures. The practices of one culture or religion can offend

⁶ It is likely that British attitudes towards Muslims were informed by their memories of the Christian crusades against Islam spanning the 11th to 13th centuries, and by the ways in which Christianity in Europe constituted itself and Islam as two opposing and antithetical entities (see Sarkar, 1997:17).

adherents of another and lead to tension and conflict but, as Dr Siddiqui noted at the IOS workshop: “We Hindus and Muslims and other people here were not two or three different races. The Muslim population in this country has largely grown out of local populations.”

Notwithstanding the Indo-Muslim culture that developed in Bengal, British historiography assumed that Muslims were a culturally coherent, homogenous group. This is an example of the “myth of Muslim unity” Mushiral Hasan argues Muslims⁷ are subject to (1996, 1997). This myth gained credence during the British colonial period when it was commonly believed that Islam in India was the same as in other parts of the world and its adherents a well-knit religious entity whose unity transcended “considerations of race, class, language, and religion” (M. Hasan, 1996:189). Conceptualising ‘Indian Muslims’ in this manner is problematic, however. “The myth not only projects Muslims as a homogenous, culturally cohesive group, but presupposes that one hundred million people may be defined (as well as define themselves) solely in terms of religious identity,” writes Keri Olsen. “This not only ignores vast differences in background, practice, and perspective, but links groups of people to an associated set of images and connotations” (Olsen, 2005:347-348).

British assumptions about Muslims were divisive in the years following the 1857 Mutiny (discussed in Chapter 1), especially in its immediate aftermath where many “British officials exaggerated the religious factor when they singled out Muslims as the main rebels and explained the rebellion as an insidious plot by Muslim fanatics” (Bose & Jalal, 1998:168). Although Muslims and Hindus had rallied together against colonial rule during the Mutiny, tensions between them arose during it and worsened after. At the IOS workshop Dr Siddiqui pointed out that while several factors contributed to the deteriorating relationship, the British played a key role, stating: “The British blackened the image of the Mughals in the mind of the Hindus”. Dalrymple explains:

For the British after 1857, the Indian Muslim became an almost subhuman creature, to be classified in unembarrassedly racist imperial literature alongside such other despised and subject specimens, such as Irish Catholics or ‘the Wandering Jew’ ... The profound contempt that the British so openly expressed for Indian Muslim and Mughal culture proved contagious, particularly to the ascendant Hindus, who quickly hardened their attitudes to all things Islamic, but also to many young Muslims, who now believed that their own ancient and much-cherished civilisation had been irretrievably discredited.

(Dalrymple, 2006:477).⁸

⁷ This myth could easily be extended to other groups, e.g., ‘Hindus’ and ‘Christians’ as well as ethnic groups such as ‘Australian Aborigines’ and ‘the Māori’ in New Zealand.

⁸ The British displayed the same contempt for the Bengali babu, as Dutta (2003:34-35) discusses. Both Muslim men and Bengali babu were represented as more effeminate in contrast to the hyper-virile masculinity of British, and then Sikh, men.

Many British administrators viewed Muslims as hostile to their Christian rulers, resentful of the British presence and keen to shake British power and regain their former dominance (M. Hasan, 1997:14-15). However, Hasan explains that there was little evidence to support such views: "British officials would have known from their own interactions and administrative experience that most Muslims were prepared to make the colonial government work, and seek adjustments within, and gain benefits from, administrative and bureaucratic structures," he notes. "Yet most of them stuck to their inherited frameworks and legitimised those policies that were designed to tame and humble the supposedly recalcitrant Muslims" (M. Hasan, 1997:29).

Although it was not designed specifically with Muslims in mind, the English Education Act of 1835 did have a significant impact on Muslims. Colonial powers often sought to 'civilise' and 'enlighten' the supposedly immoral and intellectually inferior native subjects through education, and one of the main purposes of state education in India was to produce reliable public servants from the local population (see Bose & Jalal, 1998:84; M. Roy, 1994). The 1835 Act made English the medium of instruction in Indian education. It also saw the teaching of English taken out of local institutions (including the Mohammedan College in Calcutta) and confined to institutions devoted to studies conducted entirely in English (Viswanathan, 1989:41). This affected *madrasahs* (Muslim learning institutions) as well as Hindu centres of learning, which had previously enjoyed the patronage and funding of British officials. When resources were redirected to institutions teaching exclusively in English, the quality of *madrasah* education deteriorated. "We had very high calibre *madrasahs* prior to British rule," said one woman during a heated discussion of the topic at the IOS workshop. "They had science, they had architecture, engineering. You don't have that type of *madrasah* education now because the British systematically destroyed them."⁹

Governor-General William Bentinck, who sponsored the English Education Act, also replaced Persian with English as the official language of the government and the higher courts in 1835 (Bose & Jalal, 1998:84), effectively making English the official language of British India and a prerequisite for employment in the colonial administration (M. Roy, 1994:88). "The Calcutta Hindus seemed on the whole more eager for English than the Muslims and, some Englishmen believed, were also much easier to instruct," writes Gauri Viswanathan of the quick response of the Hindu literate castes to the societal opportunities afforded by state education. "A less flattering explanation was that they were fonder of gain and other lucrative employments that required knowledge of English" (Viswanathan, 1989:43-44). According to Moorhouse, "The first effective thing the educational apparatus of nineteenth century Calcutta did

⁹ Dalrymple cites a Delhi source as noting one of the causes of unrest before the 1857 Mutiny was that "the British had closed the madrasahs" (2006:23).

for the Hindu Bengalis (from whom the *bhadralok*¹⁰ exclusively came) was to draw them far ahead of the Bengali Muslims in power and influence” (1971:193). This was because the majority of Muslims remained aloof from British state education, as Bose and Jalal point out: “Smarting from the loss of sovereignty and state power Muslims, especially in urban areas, resented the imposition of English and responded with much greater enthusiasm to reformist movements seeking an internal regeneration of Islam” (Bose & Jalal, 1998:85).¹¹

The British educational apparatus of the 19th century was very effective in establishing new forms of power in Bengal. It created new forms of distinction¹² and made state education an important societal route for the pursuit of capital and being (societal hope, in Hage’s terms). Cultural capital in the form of an English education, and knowledge of the English language, facilitated access to administrative positions in the colonial government in Calcutta, a principal means of economic and political influence. Such opportunities enabled a small class of Hindu elites to gain economic power in Calcutta and by the 1920s the vast majority of land in Bengal was in Hindu hands (McPherson, 1974:13). McPherson notes that education and employment had become major sources of contention for Muslims by this time (themes which continue in the present) and that Muslims perceived themselves “as the “have nots” of Bengali society” (1974:13). McPherson describes a growing sense of communal consciousness among Muslim peasants, factory workers and educated elites who otherwise had little in common apart from their faith: “all were united by a negative attitude towards the political, economic and social domination of the Hindu elite” (1974:vi).

A host of events contributed to communal tension, growing inequalities and social stratification, both between and within socio-religious communities. Although they were not discussed at the IOS workshop, I briefly mention them here in order to move from the colonial era into the present. Some key events included: British-initiated

¹⁰ *Bhadralok* (respectable folk) is a Bengali term used to designate “the social elite that emerged out of the economic transformations – the ruins as well as the opportunities – wrought by East India Company land reform and trade policies” (Mani, 1998:43). Contrary to Moorhouse’s claim, *bhadralok* were not exclusively Hindu; a small group of Muslims belonged to this class (see Amin, 1996:5-8). For example, the famous Bengali reformer Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was a Muslim *bhadramahila* (woman of this elite class) who lobbied for girls’ education, campaigned against practices of seclusion (which affected Hindu and Muslim women alike), and wrote *Sultana’s Dream* (Hossain, 1905/1988) in which a utopian world saw men secluded and women in charge. Many Calcutta *bhadralok* sought to reform Bengali society from what Mani describes as “a bewildering array of positions” (1998:46). Rammohun Roy and Radhakanta Deb, for example, were “both Calcutta *bhadralok* and symbols, respectively, of the anti-*sati* and pro-*sati* lobbies” (Mani, 1998:46). Some *bhadralok* formed the centre of resistance against colonial rule (see Bose & Jalal, 1998; Dutta, 2003; M. Hasan, 1997; Sarkar, 1989, 1997).

¹¹ These reformist movements were not the result of interaction with Western values or models, and were instead “rooted in an indigenous pattern of religious reform that had gained strength at the end of the previous century” (Metcalf, 2004:10). The approaches taken by “modernist” Aligarh Muslim University and Deoband’s “traditional” Dar al-ulum, Islamic centres of learning established in the years following 1857, are often cited as contrasting styles of religious reform (see A. S. Ahmed, 1988; M. Hasan, 1997; Metcalf, 2004).

¹² For instance, Viswanathan describes how state education created “different tests of fitness” which brought “a new breed of professional men to the fore” and contributed to occupational patterns along lines of religion and caste (1989:192-193). In Chapter 1 I discussed how occupational patterns are expressed in physical space in Kolkata and Howrah.

censuses;¹³ the 1905 partition of Bengal¹⁴ (reversed in 1911, largely due to the success of the *Swadeshi* movement¹⁵); the 1909 Morley-Minto government reforms, which linked religious difference to political representation and institutionalised group identities by creating electoral constituencies along such lines;¹⁶ the display of Hindu-Muslim unity during the Gandhian non-cooperation and Khilafat movements of the 1920s;¹⁷ and partition in 1947.¹⁸ The 1947 partition was an emotional, violent time where tens of thousands of women were abducted and raped, over a million people were killed and millions more displaced; it was also a time that saw Muslims and Hindus personally helping one another, as recent research by Ashis Nandy has documented (Lakshmi, 2008). Partition divided Bengal physically and created new habitats for Hindus and Muslims,¹⁹ and in its aftermath the antagonism between religious communities (known as communalism) seemed to worsen in scale and intensity.²⁰ The late 1980s saw the rise

¹³ Colonial censuses used terms such as 'Muslim,' 'Hindu,' 'minority' and 'majority' for the first time to classify population groups, affecting the caste system and religious identities (see Appadurai, 1993; Bose & Jalal, 1998:108; Dirks, 2001; Ludden, 1996). As Appadurai notes, enumerating the population in this manner "sets the ground for group difference to be the central principle of politics" (1993:330).

¹⁴ Bengal was a large administrative province and Lord Curzon's decision to partition it into two provinces (Bengal in the west, and East Bengal and Assam in the east) was justified on grounds of better governance and "administrative efficiency" (Bose & Jalal, 1998:117). Sarkar (1989), P. Chatterjee (1999) and Hardy (1972) discuss the political motivations underlying the decision to partition Bengal, including the British strategy of divide and rule.

¹⁵ The *Swadeshi* movement encouraged self-sufficiency, revived traditional handicrafts and other production techniques, and boycotted British imports. Tagore (1915/1985) provides a compelling account of the spirit of *Swadeshi*, as well as the communal tensions and class differences surrounding the movement (adapted into a film titled *Ghare Baire* by Satyajit Ray, 1984). Sarkar (1989:113-125) discusses the different components of the political movement in Bengal during this time (including boycott and *Swadeshi*, national education, labour unions, and *samitis* or 'national volunteers', often equated with the beginning of the terrorist wing of the freedom movement in East Bengal). Sarkar (1989), Bose & Jalal (1998) and P. Chatterjee (1999) also discuss how *Swadeshi* laid the groundwork that would characterise nationalist politics in the years to come.

¹⁶ "Separate electorates, along with reservations and weightages, gave birth to a sense of Muslims being a religio-political entity in the colonial image," writes M. Hasan of the 1909 Act. "In this way separate electorates created a space for reinforcing religious identities, a process which was, both in conception and articulation, profoundly divisive" (M. Hasan, 1997:35). Creating separate electorates and special communal representation meant that those seeking patronage or the attention of the colonial state had to use bureaucratically recognised categories and emphasise religious identity (M. Hasan, 1996:194; Bose & Jalal, 1998:108, 109; Metcalf, 2004:100).

¹⁷ See Bose & Jalal (1998), Hardy (1972), M. Hasan (1997), McPherson (1974) and Metcalf (2004) for discussions of these movements.

¹⁸ In 1947 British India was divided into two independent nation-states, India and Pakistan. In Bengal the area with the majority of Muslims became East Pakistan (Bangladesh since 1971) and the remainder of the region, which had the lowest population of Muslims, became West Bengal in independent India. Outgoing British rulers gave political power to the majority Hindu population, rendering Muslims a political and numerical minority community. For analyses of the events leading up to Partition in 1947 and its impact on India, Hindu-Muslim relations, and a variety of related issues, see Bose & Jalal (1998), Butalia (2000), P. Chatterjee (1999), Hardy (1972), M. Hasan (1997), Menon & Bhasin (1998), Pandey (2001), Sarkar (1989), and a collection of essays edited by Hasan & Roy (2005). The bibliographic essay in Metcalf & Metcalf (2006) is also useful.

¹⁹ Chatterji discusses how Partition created new divisions and forms of social stratification among West Bengal's Muslims, for example between those who could afford to leave and those who had to stay, and between those who found a secure place in the new social order and those who did not (2005:236). In addition, Partition "set in train a process by which the physical space occupied by Muslims was progressively reduced and rearranged", forcing Muslims into "ghettos" (Chatterji, 2005:239-240) and further shaping the habitats described in Chapter 1.

²⁰ Chakrabarty suggests the historical contestation that pitted one social group against another gained real momentum in the political bargaining of the 1930s and 1940s (2008:174). Calcutta saw riots in the 1920s and was rocked by the "Great Calcutta Killing" of 1946. More anti-Muslim violence occurred in Calcutta in the decades following 1947 (in the 1950 Howrah riots, the 1964 Calcutta riots, and following the 1992 demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, to name just three events). A short list of texts that

of political organisations promoting Hindu nationalism with significant ramifications for Hindu-Muslim relations and Indian politics in the 1990s and 2000s.²¹

Two key themes can be seen in my discussion so far. The first is that Muslims, as co-religionists, came to be constituted as a “community” for political purposes during the British colonial era. In this way, religiously informed cultural identities – which are only one component of a social agent’s multiple identities, as Bose & Jalal (1998:167) point out – were used as markers of difference, becoming a ‘serious game’ linked with political categories and providing the grounds for communal tension. Today, Muslims are classified as a “minority community”, citizens who have a relationship with the state as “Muslims” and who are guaranteed the right to religious freedom under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India. In contemporary Indian society, “being Muslim” means occupying a lower social status in relation to other communities, as evidenced in a high profile report assessing the social, economic and educational status of India’s Muslims released shortly before the IOS workshop. The Sachar Report²² (Government of India, 2006) reiterates what other researchers have already documented about the marginalised status of Indian Muslims,²³ finding that overall Muslims are worse off than other socio-religious communities in terms of poverty and access to physical infrastructure (discussed in Chapter 1), literacy levels and female schooling,²⁴ and formal and public sector employment.²⁵

The second theme in my discussion is that colonial processes contributed to, but were not solely responsible for, Indian religio-political identities. Indian social tradition as we know it today was not a nineteenth century British colonial invention, as Bose & Jalal (1998) and van der Veer (1996) discuss, and attributing too much power to colonial rule leaves little room for local agency (actions taken by local agents with some goal in mind). Metcalf points out that Indians, who were excluded from many aspects of

discuss the events listed here, and the 2002 violence against Muslims in Gujarat, include Bose & Jalal (1998), S. Das (2000), V. Das (1990), R. G. Fox (1996), M. Hasan (1997), Kulke & Rothermund (2004), Ludden (1996), Metcalf & Metcalf (2006), Needham & Sunder Rajan (2007), Asim Roy (2005) and van der Veer (1996).

²¹ See Hansen (1999), M. Hasan (1997), Sarkar (1996), Sunder Rajan & Needham (2007), van der Veer (1994) and Zavos (2005) for discussions of religious nationalism and democratic politics in India.

²² Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh commissioned this report in 2005. It is popularly known as the Sachar Report after Justice Rajindar Sachar, the chairperson of the committee that prepared the report.

²³ For example, M. Hasan (1997), Hasan & Menon (2004). Steven Wilkinson makes a similar point in his comments on the analysis in the Sachar Report, which he describes as “detailed, though not very new” (2007:832). One of the criticisms levelled at the Sachar Report is that while it is descriptively valid, it does not tell us what being Muslim has to do with their social status. The Report’s authors take care to point out that while many Muslims *perceive* the problems they face as community-specific, poverty and low socio-economic indicators are not exclusive to Muslims; they are experienced by all disadvantaged socio-religious communities in India (Government of India, 2006:25). However, as Wilkinson points out, the Report does not tell us why Muslims should be worse off or what India can do about it (2007:833).

²⁴ For example in West Bengal, where Muslims constitute 25.2% of the population, the literacy levels in urban areas are 84% for Hindus (89% for males and 78% for females) and 66% for Muslims (72% for males and 59% for females) (Government of India, 2006:288).

²⁵ This is particularly the case for Muslim women. While approximately 44% of Indian women aged between 15-64 participate in the workforce (compared with 85% of men), on average Muslim women have the lowest workforce participation rate of 25% overall, with just 18% in urban areas, mostly concentrated in home-based activities (Government of India, 2006:90, 96).

political life, found permissible arenas of power in creating domains of “religion” and “community”, commenting that “Indians, not just Britons, were active participants in shaping the colonial experience” (2004:100). In the next section I turn to one of the arenas in which Muslims could exercise power: personal law.

Symbols of a community: Personal law and Muslim women

Personal law is arguably the biggest factor shaping the social status of Muslim women in India. As Metcalf states, “the colonial context is critical” when we turn to the subject of Muslim women (2004:101), so I begin this section by explaining how religious personal laws were institutionalised in a dual legal system during the colonial era. Then I draw on the case of Shah Bano to discuss how gender, religion and politics became inextricably linked, positioning Muslim women as symbols of very serious games about religious identity and minority rights.

The British colonial state intervened in a number of Indian social practices affecting women, perhaps most famously in the 1829 Act abolishing *sati* (widow immolation) in Bengal.²⁶ Historian Lata Mani (1998) argues that this was not because Christian sensibilities were offended by this practice, as the colonial narrative might suggest,²⁷ and is instead another example of British assumptions about religion (in this case, that *sati* is a religious practice, that religion structures social life, and all religious practices derive from scriptural texts) becoming institutionalised in law. She notes that after the East India Company assumed control of Bengal in 1765, British administrators followed the Mughal practice of uniformly enforcing Islamic law in all criminal cases (Mani, 1998:16). However, in the case of civil law issues (such as marriage, divorce, maintenance, succession, adoption and inheritance, which Pathak & Sunder Rajan, 1989/2001 argue concern women intimately), administrators established a new principle: personal laws would govern different religious communities (Mani, 1998:16).

²⁶ Ironically, more cases of *sati* occurred after the law was passed, just as in PNG the incidence of European women being harassed by PNG men increased following the White Women’s Protection Act of 1926 (see Inglis, 1974). According to Spivak, the British decision to abolish *sati* can generally be understood as a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men,” against which Indian nativists argued “The women actually wanted to die” (1988:297). Both statements ignore women’s voice and agency, leading Spivak to ask her now-famous question, can the subaltern speak? (Her answer is no, the female subaltern cannot speak, or when she does it remains inaudible.) See Mani (1998) for a critique of Spivak’s argument and a discussion of eyewitness accounts of *sati* that foregrounds women’s agency. For more general discussions of discourses on *sati* and laws concerning women in the colonial era, including the different stances taken by Bengali reformers on “the woman question”, see Abu-Lughod (2006), P. Chatterjee (1989a, 1989b), Kumar (1993), Mani (1989), Nair (1996), Narayan (1997), and collections edited by Joshi (1975) and Sangari & Vaid (1989). Aleaz (2009) and Metcalf (2004) discuss different reformist movements relating to Muslim women in British India.

²⁷ “That story goes like this: the British came; they recognized the depravity of purdah, widow burning, child marriage, and female infanticide; sensible Indians immediately recognized a superior culture when they saw one, and, thanks to British tutelage, they began the ‘regeneration’ their society needed” (Metcalf, 2004:99). Metcalf goes on to say that historians like Mani “have convincingly demonstrated that the British used certain customs (including *sati* which involved only the tiniest fraction of the population) as the site to at once legitimize their rule and also to identify an Indian ‘tradition’ that was in fact of limited provenance and importance” (2004:99-100).

The British institutionalised personal laws because they recognised that state interference in matters of religion could be highly contentious and destabilise their rule. Partha Chatterjee explains that after assuming power in 1858, the British Crown took the significant step of instituting equality before the law by “enacting uniform codes of civil and criminal law. The area left out, however, was that of personal law which continued to be governed by the respective religious laws as recognised and interpreted by the courts” (1994:1769).²⁸

This dual legal structure was further entrenched by the 1937 Shariat Law which decrees that in matters relating to the family, Islamic laws (*shariat*) govern Muslims in India (Pathak & Sunder Rajan, 1989/2001:196). The Constitution of Independent India continues to recognise separate personal laws, although one of its objectives is for India to adopt a uniform civil code. This has not yet been realised.²⁹ Hindu personal laws were reformed by Nehru’s Congress government in the 1950s, going some way towards gender equity, but the state was reluctant to reform the personal laws of minority communities (Z. Hasan, 2010:942). Personal law emerged as an increasingly important symbol of identity for Muslims in the wake of growing communal tension after Partition.³⁰ Muslim personal laws have remained largely unchanged and unreformed since then, becoming “a key marker of the identity of ‘the community’ in the postcolonial era” (Kirmani, 2009:60). From a serious games perspective, debates over personal law could be viewed as a site of intense play where Muslims (a minority community) struggle among themselves to determine their group identity and also with members of the Hindu majority, who occupy dominant positions in social space (see also Bourdieu, 1985:735).

The *Shah Bano* case illustrates how Muslim women came to be firmly linked with personal law and the Muslim community, thus symbolising Muslim identity. In 1978 Shah Bano, an elderly Muslim women whose husband threw her out after 44 years of marriage by the triple pronouncement of *talaq* (oral and unilateral divorce), moved the courts for regular alimony or maintenance payments from him. The High Court of

²⁸ Kirmani describes how the system of separate personal laws was first established during the British colonial era: “... religious clerics, Hindu *pundits* and Muslim *maulvis*, were called upon to ‘translate’ religious texts for the colonial authorities in order to be codified into laws, which the colonial state could use to manage Indian society. For Muslims, personal laws were based on particular interpretations of *shariat*, or Islamic laws, while for Hindus these laws were derived from Brahmanical interpretations of ancient Hindu texts” (2009:60).

²⁹ As Basu notes, personal law is “arguably one of the most politically charged issues in India over the last two decades” (2008:496). Adopting a uniform civil code in a state that guarantees each citizen religious freedom raises difficult questions, such as who should instigate religious reform (e.g., can a Hindu majority parliament reform the personal laws of minority communities who are disadvantaged, underrepresented, and unwilling to change?), and whether minority communities should be accorded special treatment by a secular state. See P. Chatterjee (1994, 1995), M. Hasan (1997), Z. Hasan (2010) and Pathak & Sunder Rajan (1989/2001) for discussions of personal laws and the contentious issue of a uniform civil code in India.

³⁰ According to Pathak & Sunder Rajan, communal tension was one of the reasons why the authors of India’s Constitution continued the separate system of personal laws, envisioning it “as a temporary accommodation of a contemporary reality (the partition of the country attended by large-scale communal riots)” (1989/2001:205).

Madhya Pradesh granted her maintenance, which her husband disputed in the Supreme Court of India as a violation of Muslim personal law (Kirmani, 2009:60 note 62). In April 1985 the Supreme Court awarded in her favour, dismissing her husband's appeal and ruling that Shah Bano was entitled to maintenance payments under the Criminal Procedure Code: "The Court ruled that Section 125, as part of the criminal rather than civil law, overrides all personal law and is uniformly applicable to all women, including Muslim women" (Z. Hasan, 2010:943). The judgement also called for a uniform civil code which would give all women equal rights regardless of religion (Z. Hasan, 2010:943).

The *Shah Bano* judgement created a furore unequalled since "the great upheaval of 1857," as one journal described it (Pathak & Sunder Rajan, 1989/2001:195). Many Muslims saw it as an attack on personal law and voted against the ruling party (the Congress), which had supported it, in a by-election shortly after the decision. This took the ruling party by surprise. In what is widely recognised as an exercise in electoral politics (for example, mobilising political support around religious identity in a bid to retain power), it reversed its decision and supported a bill to save Muslim personal law, which had been introduced by an independent Muslim member of parliament after the *Shah Bano* judgement (Pathak & Sunder Rajan, 1989/2001:195). This bill became the controversial 1986 Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, which excludes divorced Muslim women from Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and codifies Muslim personal law as their only recourse, effectively positioning them as 'Muslim' first, 'women' second, and citizens last (see Pathak & Sunder Rajan, 1989/2001:197; Hasan & Menon, 2005a:3). In this way, state policy failed Muslim women by prioritising the rights of a minority community over women's rights and gender equality, which are also guaranteed in the Constitution. The bill sparked as much crisis as the Supreme Court judgement by polarising the Muslim community, outraging feminists and women's rights groups, and incensing anti-Muslim sentiment among fundamentalist Hindus (who are often members of extremist political groups).³¹ Under pressure from the Muslim community, Shah Bano herself eventually rejected the Supreme Court decision as contrary to Islamic *shariat*, asserting her religious identity as a Muslim over her class and gendered identity as a poor woman seeking maintenance from her ex-husband (Pathak & Sunder Rajan, 1989/2001:204). The events surrounding the *Shah Bano* case helped construct Muslim women as symbols of personal law, which in turn became synonymous with Muslim identity and minority rights.

³¹ Pathak & Sunder Rajan (1989/2001) provide an excellent discussion of the various discourses (religious, communal, protectionist, reformist, fundamentalist) surrounding the *Shah Bano* judgement and the 1986 Act that followed it. For other comprehensive discussions of the relationship between personal law, politics and gender, see Engineer (1987), Hasan & Menon (2005a), Z. Hasan (2010), and Narain (2001). Fazalbhoy (2005) and Vatuk (2005) counter some commonly held perceptions of Muslims in their discussions of Muslim women's experiences with personal law in India.

Today, Muslim women's rights are the subject of much public debate with "an inordinate emphasis on personal laws as the stumbling block to their empowerment" (Z. Hasan, 2010:950; see also Hasan & Menon, 2004:2).³² Nida Kirmani discusses how various discursive channels (the media, the state, academia, religious groups and leaders) construct the category of "Muslim women in India" by focusing largely on personal law and select cases such as the *Shah Bano* trial (2009). Such constructions offer Muslim women particular social positions within structured social spaces, first as members of a minority community then as gendered citizens. Researcher Sanam Roohi, who attended the IOS workshop, argues that Muslim women in Kolkata are not offered "a 'place' (Massey 1994) of their own which allows them to articulate or appropriate claims on citizenship rights for justice and equity in the way they deem fit" (Roohi, n.d.:9). She explains that Muslim women are "doubly marginalized by virtue of being what is referred to as 'minorities within minorities' ... To locate women of any particular community, seeking justice, one had to understand her negotiation takes place twice. In the case of a Muslim woman, she has to bargain for her rights first as a minority Muslim and secondly as a member of the marginalized gender" (Roohi, n.d.:2).

My discussion in this section has shown that the relationship between politics, religious identity, personal law, and gender, and the ensuing social status of Muslim women, is complex and highly contested. When other structural factors such as poverty and class are added to the conversation, we can see that Muslim women are further marginalised. Hasan and Menon point out that the "overarching focus on personal laws and identity issues has left socio-economic status and gender under-examined in relation to Muslim women" (2005a:4). They argue that Muslim women are triply disadvantaged: "as members of a minority community, as women, and most of all as poor women (Hasan & Menon, 2005a:7). Muslim women's triple disadvantage can restrict access to certain resources (for example, Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure) while enabling access to others (such as legislated provisions for minority communities). This triple disadvantage is generally not widely discussed, however. Debates on personal law continue to have particular consequences for Muslim women, as I discuss next.

Perceptions of Muslim women and their consequences

I found that much of the literature on women in India tends to view Muslim women as a distinct, coherent group with shared interests and experiences (see Mohanty, 1988), and to locate the cause of Muslim women's low social status in

³² According to Zoya Hasan, all debates tend to revolve around two proposed solutions: reform personal laws from within the community in order to preserve Muslim identity, or transcend the community and work towards a uniform civil code for all regardless of religion (2010:950).

religious and cultural traditions (especially personal laws, as discussed in the previous section) rather than economic, social or political factors. In this final section I discuss how such perceptions of “Muslim women,” informed by the processes outlined in the previous two sections, in turn construct social spaces when they are internalised and reproduced through intense play or practice, affecting the distribution of hope and agency within society.

The perception that Muslim women are a homogenous group is akin to the “myth of Muslim unity” discussed above. Recent studies, such as those presented in Hasan and Menon’s *The Diversity of Muslim Women’s Lives in India* (2005b), demonstrate that Muslim women have vastly different experiences depending on factors such as habitat (as is the case in PNG, India has striking regional variations) and education. They also show that religion is only one component of Muslim women’s multiple identities. For example, Hasan and Menon’s all-India Muslim Women’s Survey found that poverty influenced the social status of Muslim women more than religion, and “Muslim women, depending upon their income group, location, or work status, may have much more in common with Hindu women than with other Muslim women” (2005a:6; 2004). Like Kirmani (2009), I found that beyond faith, there are often more differences than commonalities between educated, middle-class Muslim women and Muslim women living in *bastis*. A brief description of the friction that arose between Amina (coordinator of Howrah Pilot Project) and a research assistant I employed illustrates this point.

As I discussed in the *Étude*, I decided to work with a research assistant in Howrah in order to overcome any language and cultural barriers between me and Amina. I had several criteria for my research assistant: she had to be Muslim, fluent in English, Hindi and Urdu, and she had to be willing to travel to *bastis*. On the recommendation of a respected Muslim scholar, I hired a highly educated Muslim woman I’ll call Nawal who lived in a middle class area of Kolkata city with her husband and two children. While she met my criteria, Nawal had almost nothing in common with the women at Howrah Pilot Project, as I quickly discovered on her first and only trip to Priya Manna (PM) Basti in 2005. I took Nawal to PM Basti so I could introduce her to Amina and see how they got on. To my dismay, she disagreed with Amina on many issues, for example by telling her that she shouldn’t do family planning work because she was unmarried and implying she was a bad Muslim for promoting tubal ligations.³³ She also became visibly upset at the matter-of-fact ways in which the women spoke of domestic violence, poverty, and other hardships they face in the *basti*. On top of that, she did a poor job of translating, and twice asked for what I thought was an unreasonably large pay rise on our trip back to Kolkata city. I did not

³³ Some religious leaders believe that tubal ligations and vasectomies do permanent harm and are therefore unacceptable to Islam.

feel good about this experience. A couple of days after it I received a phone call from Sita (my supervisor) in New Zealand,³⁴ who advised me to fire Nawal immediately. I rang Amina to see how she was and whether I could visit the next day. She explained that they were uncomfortable with Nawal for several reasons and asked me not to bring her back. I agreed, of course, and phoned Nawal to tell her I no longer required her services. The differences between Amina and Nawal in terms of education, class, habitat, and behaviour alerted me to the extent of social stratification in Howrah and Kolkata cities, and to the diversity of Muslim women's lives. Other differences between my research participants due to habitat, class and marital status will become apparent in later chapters. "Muslim women" are clearly not a coherent group with shared interests, dispositions and practices.

Diversity notwithstanding, the historical sociocultural processes described in the first two sections contribute to the lingering external perception that Muslim women are a coherent group, and that their low social status is uniform and due to personal laws. When such perceptions (which are specific to Muslim women) are embodied, they affect Muslim women by offering differential access to employment, education and other social resources, thus circumscribing Muslim women's capacity for agency. For example, in exploring the reasons why Indian Muslim women have low labour-force participation rates, Maitreyi Bordia Das (2005) found that hiring practices are affected by employer perceptions that Muslim women are uneducated and restricted in their movements outside of the home. She also comments that cultural norms are "all too frequently emphasized" in explaining the lower visibility of Muslim women in politics, economic leadership, and high status occupations: "Thus, it would appear that we know all that we need to about Muslim women's employment, and if cultural explanations are at the core of these women's restriction to the home, it is not the job of policy to create incentives for them to change their traditional way of life" (M. B. Das, 2005:170).

The perceptions Muslims hold regarding their low socioeconomic status, and the status of Muslim women, were prominent themes in the Sachar Report (Government of India, 2006). The second chapter of the Report is dedicated to presenting the views expressed by the men, women and youth consulted by the authors and shows that Muslims perceive discrimination, particularly in access to housing,³⁵ education and

³⁴ It seems pertinent here to mention that Sita, who is highly educated, grew up in a middle-class Hindu family in Kolkata and speaks fluent Bengali and Hindi (as well as several other languages). Amina had called Sita to explain in Hindi what had happened, asking Sita to communicate her concerns to me as her command of English was not then adequate for the task.

³⁵ The perception that most terrorists are Muslims has had consequences for Muslims in India, as I mentioned at the start of this chapter. Following the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, *The Washington Post* reported that Muslims faced discrimination in the housing market as non-Muslim landlords refused to take on Muslim tenants or directed them to poor quality houses in Muslim-dominated "ghettos" (Wax, 2009, April 19). The Sachar Report found that India's Muslims feel they

employment opportunities, based on their religious identity. The Sachar Report indicates that many Muslims share the view articulated by Dr Siddiqui at the start of this chapter:

Many suggested that gender issues in the Community are also given a Muslim slant. To the exclusion of all other aspects of a Muslim woman's life (income, jobs, education, security and even caloric intake), the rules of marriage, right to divorce and maintenance have become the benchmarks of a gender-just existence. The obsessive focus on select cases of Muslim women passionately discussed in the media results in identifying the Muslim religion as the sole locus of gender-injustice in the Community. Consequently, the civil society and the State locate Muslim women's deprivation not in terms of the 'objective' reality of societal discrimination and faulty development policies, but in the religious-community space. This allows the State to shift the blame to the Community and to absolve itself of neglect.

(Government of India, 2006:12-13)

The quotes above indicate that perceptions of Muslim women can have significant consequences at the level of policy and state interventions. When religion is perceived as the cause of Muslim women's disadvantage, debates about strategies to improve their social status revolve around minority rights and religion rather than wider discourses of poverty, gender and development. Recognising this, Hasan and Menon have sought to move beyond debates that link Muslim women with personal law to the more secular discourse of development. "By reformulating questions relating to Muslim women ... we hope to indicate that solutions to the problems posed by poverty, low educational attainment, negligible workforce participation, and social disadvantage will have to be found in the social and political realm; and that the causes of discrimination and subordination will, similarly, have to be viewed within patriarchal arrangements (of which religion is one) that are systemic and societal" (2005a:16).

I agree with Hasan and Menon that solutions to the low social status of Muslim women need to come from the social and political realms of society, and that we need to move beyond serious games about personal law reform which, while critical, tend to frame the situation of Muslim women as a "Muslim problem". Furthermore, discourses focusing on personal law ignore women's voice and agency, as authors such as Mani (1998), Pathak & Sunder Rajan (1989/2001), and Spivak (1988) have noted. As I show in Chapters 5 and 6, my participants locate the main causes of their disadvantage in relations of power and inequality, identifying the problems associated with patriarchy and living in "forgotten places" (discussed in Chapter 1) – such as government failure to provide adequate sanitation or educational facilities – as the biggest factors affecting

"need to prove on a daily basis that they are not "anti-national" and "terrorists"" (Government of India, 2006:11).

their lives. The ways in which they hope and act to improve their lives are grounded in their culturally and historically constructed social worlds.

It is important to recognise that religious and cultural norms do play a role in distributing agency to Muslim women by restricting their movements and access to education and employment. In Chapters 5 and 6 I show how Amina and Tabassum negotiate perceptions, enacted by Muslims, about “good” Muslim girls that can prevent Muslim girls from receiving an education and gaining skilled employment outside the home. Constraints on female mobility influence employer perceptions of Muslim women and subsequent hiring practices, as M. B. Das (2005) noted above. This, in turn, can fuel perceptions held by Muslims about discrimination in employment (for men as well as women) due to their religious identity, as the Sachar Report indicated. At the IOS workshop Dr Siddiqui pointed out that if Muslims *perceive* discrimination and limited social opportunities for employment, they are unlikely to invest in education as a pathway or “project” for improving their lives, which results in low literacy levels, actual discrimination, and fewer opportunities in the social world. Another consequence of such perceptions is that it can be difficult for feelings of hopefulness to flourish among Muslims, and non-Muslims also have a sense that there is “no hope” for Muslim women. Perceptions become self-fulfilling prophecy when they are internalised and enacted, shaping how we play these particular serious games, and in this way reproduce and create those perceptions as well as the structures of social space. While this is a complicated process, it serves to illustrate Bourdieu’s argument that perceptions of social space are doubly structured: by the “objective” distribution of capital, agency and power in social space, and by the “subjective” ways in which we perceive and respond to that space, which are informed by the structure of the space (Bourdieu, 1985:727-728; 2000:183).

In this chapter I described the processes that contributed to the low social status of Indian Muslim women. Taking my cue from discussions at the IOS workshop, I discussed how the religio-political identity “Indian Muslim” was constructed during the British colonial era, explaining that today “being Muslim” means being a member of a marginalised and disadvantaged minority community. I also suggested that “being Muslim” has resulted in further disadvantage for Muslim women, primarily due to debates over personal law and minority rights in a secular democratic state governed by members of the majority Hindu population. These debates construct “Muslim women” first as members of a minority community, then as women, and finally as gendered citizens, offering them differential access to capital and other social resources from structured social positions. In the final section I discussed the relationship between the social status of Muslim women, and *perceptions* of their social status, to

show how hope and agency are distributed within society. Next I conclude Part II by drawing together insights from Chapters 3 and 4 and comparing these different ethnographic sites.

Discussion

The serious games described in Part II serve two purposes. First, they show how important it is to consider historical processes in understanding social practice. In PNG, for example, the historical legacy of women's groups as introduced by Christian missionaries is evident in the types of welfare-oriented development projects actively pursued by many today (history present in materialised form, in Bourdieuan terms, 1985:738), and in how women are disposed to avoid or renegotiate leadership roles within groups (cultural history present in embodied form). History is also present in institutions, such as the dual legal structure of personal laws for religious communities in India that was established during the British colonial era. Second, these serious games show that hope and agency are always located within culturally constructed relations of power and inequality. While Part II raises a number of themes that invite comparative analysis (how different religious traditions are introduced and appropriated; how collective identities and groups of interest are formed; how women are culturally constructed as gendered citizens and their ensuing relationship with the postcolonial state; the efficacy of government policies designed to achieve gender equality, which is a Constitutional goal in both countries), in what follows I discuss the central issues of this thesis: the ways in which relations of power and inequality affect the distribution of hope and agency in PNG and India.

Sherry Ortner posits that agency has two fields of meaning:

In one field of meaning "agency" is about intentionality and the pursuit of (culturally defined) projects. In the other field of meaning agency is about power, about acting within relations of social inequality, asymmetry, and force. In fact "agency" is never merely one or the other. Its two "faces" – as (the pursuit of) "projects" or as (the exercise of or against) "power" – either blend or bleed into one another or else retain their distinctiveness but intertwine in a Moebius-type relationship.

(Ortner, 2006:139)

These two "faces" of agency, and how they affect each other, is a useful way of thinking about how the relationship between hope, agency and power is organised into serious games in India and PNG.

My interest in the serious game described in Chapter 4 stems from the widely held perception that low social status of Muslim women is due to Islam (rather than structural disadvantages of gender and poverty, or their status as members of a minority community), and thus there is “no hope” for Muslim women. I saw a connection between Muslim women’s perceived capacity for agency – whereby non-Muslim social agents consider Muslim women to be restricted in their movements outside of the home due to religious traditions – and the unequal distribution of societal hope. Chapter 4 highlights the relationship between power, agency and hope by showing how embodied perceptions can reproduce the low social status of Muslim women and distribute less societal hope to Muslim women and Muslims in general. This chapter also draws attention to what Ortner calls agency as “power”.

Chapter 4 outlined the larger relations of power and domination shaping the social spaces inhabited by my participants. I discussed how Indian Muslims actively sought to retain their religious traditions and rights as a minority community by maintaining separate personal laws for Muslims within the Indian legal system, with significant consequences for Muslim women. The power relations at stake here are colonialism, communal politics, and gender. According to Ortner, “People in positions of power “have” – legitimately or not – what might be thought of as “a lot of agency,” but the dominated too always have certain capacities, and sometimes very significant capacities, to exercise some sort of influence over the ways in which events unfold” (2006:144). Chapter 4 makes the point that Indians as well as Britons were actively involved in constructing religio-political identities such as “Indian Muslim” and contributed to the growth of communal tensions during the colonial era, and that it is erroneous to attribute too much power to external processes of colonialism. It also shows the strong cultural and political value Muslims invest in maintaining personal law, and that the minority Muslim community can exercise collective agency-as-power within a postcolonial state governed by a majority Hindu population – a cultural project to protect personal law “on the margins of power” (Ortner, 2006:144). There are unequal power relations within the Muslim community, of course, as the furore surrounding the *Shah Bano* case shows. In Part III I discuss the relations of power and inequality my participants negotiate as they actively pursue their culturally constructed projects.

In PNG, as in India, I became interested in the serious games described in Chapter 3 because of the connotations of hope involved. In PNG women’s groups are of value to women for a variety of reasons. The cultural value I focused on was the way women’s groups have been positioned as the most effective vehicles of development for women. Women’s groups inspire development hope because they are considered to have more potential to change women’s lives than the weak state. I also suggested that

women's groups foster collective hope when individual women organise collectively to pursue shared projects. Although women are expected to travel the 'road to development' via women's groups, if they fail to achieve their goals the blame is often placed on women within those groups rather than any larger relations of power or structural forces, in contrast to the explanations given for the failure of men's initiatives. PNG has an environment of high development hope, as I discussed in Chapter 2, but that hope is not distributed equally. Chapter 3 shows that there is a gendered dimension to the distribution of development hope, with caveats attached to women's capacity to enact their culturally defined projects.

Despite their extremely different historical and cultural contexts, Chapters 3 and 4 both illustrate that social agents in dominated positions can still have the capacity to influence the ways in which events unfold – that is, agency as “power” (Ortner, 2006:144). Chapter 3 points out that women's groups, introduced by missionaries and other social agents (including the colonial state) during the colonial era as a way of ‘civilising’ and bringing Christian moral values to local women, would not have become as popular and widespread as they are today if local women had not actively invested in them. An example of agency as the resistance to power can be seen in women's reluctance to take on leadership roles within women's groups.

As well as discussing the macro relations of power and inequality shaping the social spaces my participants inhabit (colonialism, politics, development discourses), Chapter 3 calls attention to “the workings of agency in contexts in which such relations can be – however momentarily, however partially – held at bay” (Ortner, 2006:143). In particular, I focused on how women organise collectively in pursuit of their culturally defined projects. I argued that collective agency was and is distributed to women in groups (a sharp contrast to Muslim women in India)¹ and discussed how internal relationships of power, the cultural politics of gender difference, and the emphasis on social relations, affect the capacity of women to enact that collective agency. I take a closer look at these processes in Part III when I describe how my participants construct and pursue their projects.

Part II has focused on the historically and culturally constructed relations of power and inequality that affect my participants in their efforts to create better lives for themselves, their families, and the larger communities in which they live. I argued that the ways in which we hope and act are grounded in the habitats in which we live and the relations of power we negotiate with other social agents. “It is no doubt the case that playing the game tends to reproduce both the public structures of rules and

¹ In PNG, Christianity is the dominant religion and women's groups are considered an acceptable way for women to gather outside of the home. An interesting area of further research might investigate whether or how women from other religions, such as Islam, form women's groups in PNG.

assumptions, and the private subjectivity / consciousness / habitus of the players, and thus that playing the game – as Bourdieu unhappily and critically insists – almost always results in social reproduction,” writes Ortner. “Yet ultimately games do change ...” (Ortner, 2006:149). In Part III I discuss the strategies or practices my participants use as they actively pursue their culturally constructed projects, which often aim to change the serious games they play.

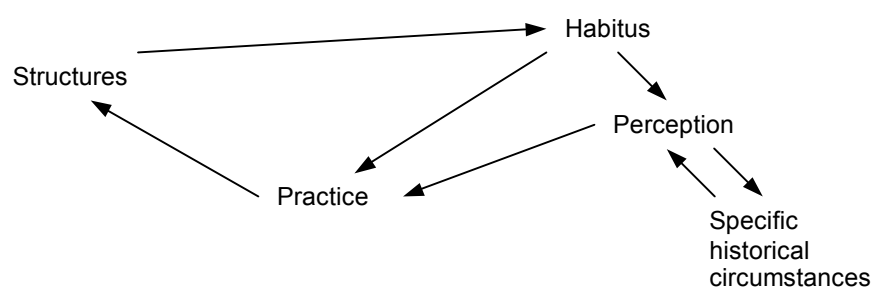
PART III

The ‘side effects’ of development in India and Papua New Guinea

Parts I and II raise an important question: in the absence of effective state interventions, what should be done to improve the lives of those living in urban poor habitats? The grassroots developments initiatives discussed in the following four chapters can be viewed as my participants’ responses to that question. Part III describes Howrah Pilot Project, Rehnuma-e-Niswaan, Tensiti Literacy Programme, and Butibam Women’s Flower Group. These chapters, which focus on my participants’ practices as they work to transform their lives, provide an ethnographic counterpoint to Parts I and II. Part III contributes to my thesis aims by showing how collective hope and agency (among other things) emerge as ‘side effects’ of their development initiatives.

These four organisations have unique histories and operate in different habitats. I used a range of methods in generating data (as discussed in the *Étude*), and my fieldwork encounters are included in the following chapters in order to be reflexive about the data collection process and my relation to my participants. In the Introduction to this thesis I explain why Bourdieu’s theory of practice is useful in understanding the relationship between hope, agency, and historical sociocultural structures. I use this conceptual framework in Part III to approach the very different ethnographic data I collected about these groups. Each chapter focuses on the processes and experiences of organising collectively at the grassroots level using Bourdieu’s model of reproduction and change (visually depicted in Figure 8) to show how my participants’ practices contribute to social reproduction as well as to social change.

Figure 8. Bourdieu’s model of social reproduction and change



Source: Harker, 1990:101

Part III begins in Howrah with an Interlude that outlines how people in PM Basti invest in their futures through Howrah Pilot Project. Chapter 5 focuses on Talimi Haq School, one of the initiatives of Howrah Pilot Project. It describes how Amina, Binod and the other volunteer teachers work to raise the social value of education within PM Basti, illustrating their commitment to their students and their investment in education. Moving to Kolkata, Chapter 6 tells the story of Rehnuma-e-Niswaan and the social relations Tabassum negotiates in her quest to economically empower girls and women living in *bastis* through vocational training.

The subsequent two chapters explore the experiences of women's groups in Lae, with an Interlude that introduces Bing, my research assistant. Tensiti Literacy Programme, the subject of Chapter 7, began as a women's group but has since expanded to provide nonformal education to children and men as well as women. This is a story of resourcefulness and determination in their efforts to become literate. Chapter 8 describes Butibam Women's Flower Group, the newest of the four organisations. Because this group was in its initial formative stages, this chapter recounts my interactions with the women and provides valuable insight into the processes involved in forming a new collective income-generating enterprise.

Despite their differences, these organisations all share an important commonality: they envision and collectively engage with a hoped-for future of better and more meaningful lives for themselves, their families, and the wider communities in which they live (augmenting their *being*, in Bourdieu's terms) that stems from current inequalities. Appadurai notes that practice theory in anthropology sometimes "does not directly take up the matter of how collective horizons are shaped and of how they constitute the basis for collective aspirations ..." (2004:61). Part III is theoretically important because it highlights collective hopes and practices. In telling their stories, I illustrate how their practices as collectives, and the culturally constructed projects they pursue, are informed by the historical, sociocultural, and structural factors outlined in Parts I and II. I also show how poverty and other structural disadvantages can provide the basis for collective action, and that habitus and practice are not wholly determined by structure. Part III concludes with a discussion of the major themes arising from these chapters.

Saving for the future with Howrah Pilot Project

[Interlude 6. Emails from Kolkata]

The following extracts are from emails I sent to my husband during my 2007 fieldwork visit to Kolkata. I usually composed emails to him after writing my fieldnotes in the evenings and found it a useful way of summarising my observations and activities. These extracts describe the savings scheme coordinated by HPP. Although not discussed in the following chapter on Talimi Haq School, it is an important initiative within PM Basti that illustrates how people engage with, and invest in, their futures through HPP.

I've been learning more about the savings scheme HPP runs for women from PM Basti. The savings scheme is not the same as micro-credit, it's more like an informal bank. Amina tells me that each woman has a passbook, like a bank account, and they pay what they can, when they can into this account. Most make daily deposits of between five and fifty rupees. They can only withdraw money from their own accounts if they have a minimum of twenty rupees available. Money is not pooled and they don't give loans, so it's not like Grameen Bank-style micro-credit programmes. Amina has received training from SEWA in Ahmedabad and the HPP savings scheme is modelled along those lines. There are around 160 women in the savings scheme, organised into groups of twenty which different HPP volunteers take responsibility for managing. Amina and Yasmin visit women at their homes to collect money, but Binod says he and Sarfaraz take deposits from their group members (or members' children, who go to Talimi Haq School and bring in money before class) at the HPP office because it's not appropriate for unrelated men to visit women at home like that. Women use their savings to pay for things like rice, *masalas*, cooking materials and utensils, school fees, medicine, and to pay back loans taken from other sources.
(13 February 2007)

Today I met some of the young students (aged around 7-8) from Talimi Haq School who have joined the savings scheme that HPP coordinates [see Photograph 6]. Amina is meticulous in how she runs it (to avoid the spectacular failure they experienced last time¹) and it seems to be working well. One of the girls said she skips breakfast so she can save the one rupee she's given to buy breakfast every day. I asked her what she's saving for – her birthday, she told me. I think it's good that they're learning the value of saving for the future but it would be better if she didn't have to go without breakfast to do so!
(14 February 2007)

¹ This is the second time HPP has coordinated a savings scheme. The first effort failed for a variety of reasons including poor record keeping and mismanagement, and almost brought an end to the entire organisation when money paid into the scheme “disappeared”. Amina, who was volunteering for HPP and was not yet coordinator, told me that the person responsible for that first savings scheme left the organisation and that she and other volunteers had to work very hard (without pay for several months) to repay debts, regain trust, and keep HPP afloat. Amina asked me not to describe the failure in detail, saying “it's not good to air dirty laundry” and its aftermath made life “extremely difficult” for her. A couple of years after the first savings scheme failed, and once Amina had become coordinator of HPP, some women from PM Basti asked her to run a new savings scheme. Many women are illiterate and have neither the skills nor confidence to open savings accounts in formal banks, and some fear that their husbands might access and withdraw money from banks without their knowledge or consent (which does not happen at HPP). Determined to learn from past mistakes, Amina undertook training through SEWA and maintains a robust and transparent financial management system.

Photograph 6. Young Howrah Pilot Project savings scheme participants



Yasmin (left), one of Talimi Haq School's volunteer teachers, collects money from young savings scheme participants at the HPP office, recording the amount in their passbooks (shown) and a separate ledger. HPP volunteers tally ledgers daily and deposit money in a secure, undisclosed location.

.....

Chapter 5

Creating bright futures at Talimi Haq School

This chapter describes the educational initiatives of Talimi Haq School, the central activity of Howrah Pilot Project. Talimi Haq¹ School is a school for informal learning for children from PM Basti. It caters to children from poor households that cannot afford formal school fees and to working children who do not attend school. “We do not give them any degree or certificate, but we try to make them into good human beings,” said Amina in describing the school’s goals. I start with a description of PM Basti to give a sense of the habitat within which Talimi Haq School operates. I then provide some background information about HPP, an initiative of Ramaswamy’s from which Talimi Haq School emerged. Third, I describe a typical day at Talimi Haq School to illustrate Amina and Binod’s commitment to their students. In the fourth section I discuss how the school’s teachers work to raise the social value of education within PM Basti. I conclude the chapter by sharing what some of Talimi Haq School’s students had to say about their experiences at the school. This chapter shows how Talimi Haq School generates hope and agency as ‘side effects’ of development within PM Basti.

Priya Manna Basti

On a cool morning in January 2007 I sat on the ferry taking me to Ramkrishnapur *ghat*² in Howrah, passing a boat weighed down with commuters travelling the reverse route halfway across the murky Hoogly river. Babu Ghat, where I boarded my ferry, is one of Kolkata’s busiest *ghats* in the mornings due to its central location (near Eden Gardens) and bus terminal, where one can take a bus to just about anywhere in Kolkata city. There were few people on my ferry and I had a bench to myself. I could see children diving off the *ghat* at Ramkrishnapur, people bathing, and a

¹ The term *haq* (or *hak*) has a special significance in Urdu. Ramaswamy reflects on the term’s meanings in recounting his thoughts when naming Talimi Haq School: “*Al Hak*, or The Truth, is also one of the names of God, Allah, the Most Merciful and Compassionate. The term *hak* also means right, in the sense of ‘correct’, which in turn is the basis for right as in ‘just claim’ or entitlement” (Ramaswamy & Chakravarti, 1997a). *Talimi Haq* means “right to education” in Urdu. It also means “truth is learning”.

² A broad set of stairs leading to a landing on a river.

long queue at the jetty I was approaching. I couldn't yet see Amina but knew that she was there to meet me: traffic was diverted along Grand Trunk Road that morning and she wanted to make sure I didn't get lost in taking a different route. I found her outside the ferry terminal, immaculately attired as always and waving at me from a cycle rickshaw.

*"Asalam wa alaikum!"*³ she said, smiling broadly as I approached.

"Wa alaikum salam," I replied as I climbed up next to her. "How are you? Thanks for coming to meet me."

"I'm fine! It's no problem," Amina said. "Let's go. We'll go by the old jute mill."

I don't recall the name of the mill we passed or much of its history, which Amina shared with me as we travelled toward PM Basti. The old building is still impressive even with birds nesting in broken chimneys and crumbling brickwork seemingly held in place by creeping vines. Nearby, Howrah Jute Mills is one of the few still operating in this area.⁴ I do remember Amina worrying about the latest action taken by jute mill owners who, following a week of industrial action by trade union members, had locked workers out of the factories for the past few days. Many of the children who attend Talimi Haq School have family members employed at the mills. "They won't be paid during the lock-out," Amina said, frowning. "It's going to be a very difficult time."

We alighted from our cycle rickshaw near the by-lane that leads to HPP's office and wove through lanes filled with people, animals (chickens, dogs, goats) and the occasional small shop. The physical environment was a marked contrast with the more affluent suburbs of southern Kolkata where I usually stay (see Photograph 7 and 8 below). Loudspeakers strapped to tall posts at regular intervals broadcast *azaan*⁵ throughout the day, indicating this is a *basti* predominantly inhabited by Muslims. PM Basti originally grew as a settlement for jute mill workers, as I discussed in Chapter 1, and today spreads over 12.5 acres of land leased from Howrah Jute Mills. With around 50,000 inhabitants – mainly Urdu-speaking Muslim families, some of which have been there for three generations or more – it is one of Howrah's most densely populated areas (Ramaswamy et al., 2010:293). Firdos's household survey of PM Basti⁶ found that the majority of its residents are employed, or seek employment, in jute mills. According to Amina, most of the population is uneducated and those not working in the mills find employment as "owners of small shops, fruit and vegetable-sellers, rickshaw-drivers or workers in shops in Kolkata's Barrabazaar" (Khaton, 2009b:1). People also work in various forms of light industry and manufacturing:

³ This Islamic spoken greeting is often translated as 'peace be upon you'.

⁴ See Fernandes (1997) for a discussion of class and gender relations in Kolkata's jute mills.

⁵ The Islamic call to prayer.

⁶ Amina and Binod were involved in administering Firdos's survey in PM Basti in 2005.

Photograph 7. Jodhpur Park, South Kolkata

A view of the street where I shared an apartment with Sandra, a PhD candidate from Portugal, and her partner Fernando, a photographer, in December 2005.



Photograph 8. Priya Manna Basti, Howrah

A view of a lane in PM Basti from the HPP office in January 2006.



“Among the products made here are knives, footwear, hair clips, bangles, *bindis*, polished vessels, zari embroidery,⁷ and toys. There are also a few *nihariyas*⁸ who extract precious metals from floor sweepings of goldsmith shops” (Khatoon, 2009b:2).

Ramaswamy summarises life for the poorest households in this *basti*, which “revolves around daily survival in the margins of society”:

It is estimated that about 10 percent of the slum households are in the poorest category. Few in this category avail themselves of primary education and children begin working from as early as the age of five, either in the home or outside. Girls are married by the time they are sixteen, and they raise their own children in the same manner. Illiteracy is almost universal in this poorest class. Attitudes among the uneducated regarding female education and women’s activities outside the home are conservative. Typically, the bread-winning male earns his daily wage of between one hundred rupees⁹ and one hundred and fifty rupees, performing manual labor, petty vending, rickshawpulling, and the like. Family sizes are large, with at least five children being the norm and in some cases more than ten. Shelter consists of a single (rented) room of about 100 square feet. ... Lacking any vocational skills the livelihood options for youth, and especially girls, are extremely limited.

(Ramaswamy et al., 2010:293)

Amina’s house, a clean and tidy single room, is typical of those found in PM Basti. It has one entrance facing a narrow lane crowded with dozens of similar dwellings. Amina’s mother runs a small stall outside their house selling goods such as *bidi* (hand-rolled cigarettes), *paan* (spices and other fillings wrapped in betel leaves), and *kachori* (fried spicy snacks). Their room is small – it could fit a bicycle lengthwise inside – with a small alcove near the entrance for cooking utensils. It has an electricity line rented (illegally) from a “lender” but no bathroom, kitchen, or running water. Cooking is done over a coal fire in the alcove or outside on boards laid across the open drain. The room contains a bed, where Amina’s older brother (a fruit and vegetable vendor) and his wife sleep, and sleeping mats for their two young children and Amina’s mother to roll out on the concrete floor at night. The bright paint on the concrete walls doesn’t always withstand the humidity and has cracked and fallen away in places. Pictures, plates and other possessions decorate the room. On the wall next to the bed a series of narrow iron rungs leads to a trap door in the low ceiling. This is Amina’s room, “upstairs” in a small gap between the ceiling and the roof. (Ramaswamy used to joke with Amina about this, calling her place *kabutar-khana* (pigeon coop) and giving her the nickname *kabutar* (pigeon).) Amina has her own tiny television and is proud of the fact that she takes care of her electricity bills and other expenses herself. Her room leaks during monsoon season and she has to be careful about how she stores her clothes so that rats don’t nest in the boxes.

⁷ Zari (also known as Zardozi) is a type of embroidery using gold and silver thread.

⁸ People who work with gold and silver.

⁹ In 2010, one New Zealand dollar = approximately 33 Indian rupees.

Amina has a ration card with the letters 'BPL' stamped across it in red, indicating that her household is one of those in the poorest category, Below the Poverty Line. This stamp allows her to buy basic items such as kerosene and rice at discounted prices from a ration shop.

"The ration card facility is not good, though," said Amina as we discussed the quality of rice one could purchase from a ration shop.

"Rice costs ten rupees per kg at ration shops, and between twelve and twenty-seven rupees per kg outside ration shops," Binod explained. Binod Shaw is a young Hindu man,¹⁰ about Amina's age, who is second-in-command at HPP. "However, ration shop rice has a lot of dust in it. Out of one kg of rice, about three hundred grams would be dust."

"What sort of rice costs twenty-seven rupees per kilo?" I asked.

"That's expensive rice, what you would use for *biriyani*¹¹ at a festival or wedding," said Amina. "Most people use rice that costs nine or ten rupees per kg."

"Not Amina's family, though!" Binod interrupted. "They buy rice that costs fifteen rupees per kg – rich people!" he said in a deadpan voice before everyone burst into laughter.

Laughter, jokes and song often punctuated my conversations with Amina and Binod. "Why not be happy?" she frequently said. "When you live in a *basti* you never know what's going to happen tomorrow, so you should enjoy each day." However, Amina quickly became serious when discussing her family's struggle to make ends meet or the fights she had with them over her determination to complete higher education. She is also passionate about social issues in the *basti*, such as the extreme and pervasive violence against women; child labour; the pornography ring and human trafficking racket that targeted young girls in the mid-2000s; corruption (by landlords, police, and politicians) and illegal housing construction; the poor quality of education available at local government schools (the cost of which is beyond the reach of many families); sanitation problems caused by insufficient toilet facilities and open drains; sexual and reproductive health problems she says are experienced by around 90% of women in the *basti*; and other health problems such as diarrhoea, tuberculosis, and inadequate and expensive local medical facilities. She has written about such issues in her six-part series of articles on urban poverty in PM Basti, entitled *See the City from Here* (Khatoon, 2009a). In our conversations Amina was quick to point out what she

¹⁰ Binod is the eldest son and main income earner in a Hindu family, and lives in a neighbouring *basti* with his parents, his brother, one of his sisters, and two uncles. His father retired from a local jute mill a few years ago, his uncles are unemployed, and his siblings attend school. Binod was somewhat reticent in talking about his family and I did not visit his home. "My family background is very poor," he told me on one occasion. "My father studied, I don't know how much but he can only write his name and a few other words. My mother is illiterate." Binod also avoided my questions about whether he had experienced any problems working in PM Basti because of his faith, saying that people quickly became used to him.

¹¹ A dish made of basmati rice and spices with meat, potatoes, eggs, or vegetables.

saw as the root of many of the problems in PM Basti: illiteracy, lack of knowledge, and unemployment. This is the context in which HPP operates. I describe its origins in the next section.

Howrah Pilot Project and Talimi Haq School

HPP came into being in August 1997. Ramaswamy formed the grassroots organisation with the help of Prodyut Paul (a political activist associated with the CPI(M) and social worker from Howrah) following his experiences with a community-based environmental management project. From 1995 to 1997, Ramaswamy worked as social development coordinator of the Calcutta Environmental Management Strategy and Action Plan (CEMSAP), a project run by the West Bengal Department of Environment (with support from Britain's Department for International Development). This pilot project successfully constructed ten toilet blocks in *bastis* in two of Howrah's municipal wards (see Ramaswamy, 2006b; Ramaswamy & Chakravarti, 1997b). Invigorated by this success, and by the strong relationships forged with community members in PM Basti, Ramaswamy and Prodyut started HPP as an independent follow-up to CEMSAP.¹² HPP's goal is to renew the community, *basti*, and city by beginning with the poorest and most socially and environmentally degraded 'forgotten places'. "Environmental improvement and poverty reduction in metropolitan Calcutta can succeed only by building capable leadership for community development at the grassroots," Ramaswamy wrote in an essay entitled *In Search of Ramrajya*. "And this is what Howrah Pilot Project has been doing" (Ramaswamy, 2007).

Ramaswamy established Talimi Haq School on 1 June 1998 following his unsuccessful attempts in 1997 to start a night school on the premises of the local government-aided school (his efforts were hindered by people who could not see how the night school would benefit local community members). Inspired by the work of educationalists such as Rabindranath Tagore, Paulo Freire and Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Ramaswamy sought to create an atmosphere of "joyful learning" for working children who did not attend school, for poor children who could not afford to attend formal school, and for those who found little joy within the formal education system and dropped out.¹³ Talimi Haq School aims to inspire its students, instil a love of learning,

¹² In a recent email to me, Ramaswamy wrote that his drive to work in PM Basti in 1996-1997 came from "an inner transformation or explosion, something spiritual, religious, ethical, social, political, and deeply personal while being innately public" (personal communication). Everything Ramaswamy has done in Howrah was influenced by the events following the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, as he explains in one of his reflective pieces (2007). In his recent email he also commented that he fully engaged with "the Muslim question" in the aftermath of the mosque destruction of 1992 and the riots in the following months, in the context of the rise of sanctioned bigotry and hatred through the Hindutva movement – as a self-annihilating personal act of urgent expiation" (personal communication).

¹³ See Ramaswamy et al. (2010:296 note 212), M. Weiner (1991) and a collection edited by Chopra & Jeffrey (2005) for critiques of India's state-led education system.

and give them a basic education in preparation for formal school. “The whole emphasis, approach and objective of the school will be to stimulate the bodies, minds, feelings, creative and expressive faculties of the children,” he wrote on the *Talimi Haq School* blog. “The school shall aim to equip the children to be honest, hard-working, capable and loving adults” (Ramaswamy, 2006a). Volunteer teachers (including Amina and Binod, who joined HPP as teenagers in July 1998) were recruited from the community and trained through Sister Cyril’s Loreto Day School in Kolkata city, and classes were taught at the HPP office, which today comprises two rooms located on the first floor of a tall concrete building not far from Amina’s house.¹⁴

PM Basti has a history of community-led educational initiatives. Community leaders started a school in 1931 that ran until 1940 (closing due to the advent of World War II) with the support of Howrah Jute Mills, which paid teachers’ salaries (Khatoon, 2009d). In the early 1950s, community leaders again set up a local Urdu-medium school, ensuring that it complied with government regulations so it could be recognised as a formal school and receive funding. After the school’s name was changed from Muslim Free School (which authorities opposed) to Howrah Upper Primary School in 1953, it gained government recognition and funding (Khatoon, 2009d). Community members, including a group of children, also started libraries and other grassroots social initiatives in PM Basti in the 1940s and 1960s (Khatoon, 2009d). Amina records that the community-founded Urdu-medium school¹⁵ received recognition as a junior high school in 1978 and achieved high school status in 1986 (Khatoon, 2009d). PM Basti’s schools “generated large numbers of educated men, several of whom went on to acquire respectable and remunerative jobs. Realizing the importance of schooling and education for women, community leaders in PM Basti set up a separate girls section of the Howrah High School to educate young women. Graduates from these schools would in turn send their own girls to school and university” (Ramaswamy et al., 2010:296).

Despite these initiatives, the majority of people from PM Basti’s poorest households are uneducated, as I noted above. Amina and Binod pointed to a range of reasons for this during our conversations. A key factor is the prohibitive cost of formal school fees and private tuitions.¹⁶ Another issue is the pervasive perception that there are limited employment opportunities for urban poor Muslim youth so education is pointless (which I discuss later in this chapter). School-age children (6-14 years old) who work often do not attend school. Boys work in the labour market as ragpickers, as

¹⁴ HPP moved its field office here in 2005.

¹⁵ The Sachar Report (discussed in Chapter 4) comments on the lack of quality Urdu-medium government schools, which adversely affects India’s Muslims (Urdu is often their first language), and recommends that the Government of India take steps to educate Muslim children in Urdu (Government of India, 2006:15-16, 80, 83).

¹⁶ As Samanta (2005:15 note x) explains, private tuitions are expensive but considered necessary across all social classes to prepare students for exams.

assistants in small stores, or by helping family members with *zari*-work and embroidery (Khatoon, 2009c:5). Girls work within the home to support household reproduction (fetching water, cooking, caring for siblings) or contribute to household income by assisting their mothers with bead-work, toy-making and sewing (Khatoon, 2009c:5). Other problems stem from overcrowded classrooms,¹⁷ lack of space in small, single-room homes that make it difficult to study, and widespread illiteracy which means parents find it hard to assist children with their studies. Conservative attitudes regarding female movement outside the *basti* are also a factor, as I discuss later. Amina thinks these conservative attitudes are the result of illiteracy, patriarchal power and lack of knowledge rather than anything in the *Quran*, which many of those in PM Basti's poorest households are unable to read.

Talimi Haq School is just one of HPP's initiatives, which a core group of volunteers work on from the HPP office (see Photograph 9 overleaf). HPP's volunteers are paid a small stipend that neither reflects the valuable contribution they make nor brings their households above the poverty line. Amina and Binod often spend their token salaries on essential supplies for Talimi Haq School as HPP is not a wealthy or well-funded organisation. HPP has occasionally received grants for vocational projects but for the most part the school is funded by profits from the *masala* enterprise,¹⁸ contributions from friends and supporters¹⁹ and, when money is really short, from Ramaswamy's own pocket.

Talimi Haq School taps into the historical enthusiasm for education found within PM Basti. It also fills a gap left by state schools in targeting children living in poverty, and an award certificate on the office wall records that it has won recognition as a school for excellence from a local newspaper. The next section describes a typical day at Talimi Haq School, constructed from my visits between 2005-2007.²⁰

¹⁷ Some Talimi Haq School students who also attend formal school told me that some classes have more than 100 students per teacher and that they sometimes have to sit on one another's laps (see also Khatoon, 2009c, Ramaswamy et al., 2010:295, or Siddiqui, 2005). They said that it is hard to hear the lesson or concentrate when the room is full of noise and one's desk is far from the blackboard.

¹⁸ I have not described the *masala* enterprise due to constraints of space, but plan to do so in future publications.

¹⁹ Ramaswamy has invested much time and energy into raising the profiles of HPP and Talimi Haq School in India and abroad. This includes using his extensive networks from his travels, blogs, seminars and publications (social capital, in Bourdieuan terms) to bring visitors from India and abroad to HPP. The money he has earned by writing and giving lectures about slum-related issues from 1997 onwards has also helped support HPP's work. By bringing visitors to HPP Ramaswamy counters perceptions commonly held by people in developed countries about Howrah's poor being charity cases or beggars. Instead, visitors see a social movement involving people living in poverty who are articulate, intelligent, and actively struggling to create meaningful lives for themselves and their families.

²⁰ An earlier version of this section appears in my contribution to Ramaswamy et al. (2010).

Photograph 9. Talimi Haq School's volunteer teachers



Left to right: Yasmin, Lorena, Amina, Sarwari, Binod, Aziz, Rehana.

A day at Talimi Haq School

Following a precedent set by Ramaswamy, who worked long hours at HPP for six days a week between 1997-2000, Amina and Binod spend most of their waking hours at HPP and devote much of their energies to Talimi Haq School. The time they spend there (which sometimes causes conflict within their families as it means they do not always fulfil their duties at home) reflects their level of commitment to, and investment in, the school. Amina usually fetches water to clean the two rooms that double as HPP's office and classrooms at 6:30am then heads home for a quick breakfast. By 9am Amina and Binod are both at the office, preparing for the day's activities and answering the door to a slowly increasing stream of visitors. A few young children trickle in and out during the morning to see whether anything interesting is happening and to meet and play with friends; older students arrive to hang out with Amina *bhaji* (elder sister) and Binod *bhai* (elder brother); some women visit to discuss HPP's other initiatives (family planning services and the *masala* enterprise) with Amina. The other volunteer teachers (Rehana, Yasmin, and Sarfaraz, all from PM Basti) start work later in the morning. On her way to the office Yasmin visits the homes of savings scheme participants (described in Interlude 6 above) to collect any money they might want to add to their passbooks. If Amina has errands to run she does so between 11am and 2pm, trying to squeeze in lunch before heading back to the office in time for school.

At 3pm the voices of eighty children raised in prayer fill the HPP office, signalling the start of the Talimi Haq School day (see Photograph 10). Most of the children are first-generation school attendees. These children like going to school: they start arriving well before 3pm to greet their teachers affectionately, meet friends, and play. After prayers the school's teachers assemble the children into four groups based on their level of schooling. Classes run in two shifts, with primary school classes taught at 3pm and middle school classes starting at 4.30pm. Each teacher sets up a blackboard at either end of the two rooms and students sit in their groups facing their teacher. There are no desks or chairs. Students sit on straw mats on a concrete floor. After a while some of them slowly rock back and forth to ease the pressure of sitting on a cold, hard surface. The rooms are sparsely furnished: a computer sits on a desk in one room alongside a filing cabinet, a small bookshelf, an oven used to dry *masalas*, and some treadle sewing machines; the other room contains a wooden bench, some blackboards, a sink and separate small washroom/toilet, and shelves stacked with books, teaching materials, and resources for the other HPP initiatives. The glassless, barred windows overlooking neighbouring houses regularly let in smoke from coal cooking fires.

Photograph 10. Prayer time at Talimi Haq School



Photo: Binod Shaw

The school provides old, worn slates for children to work on. Some older students might have pencils and paper. Two classes are taught simultaneously in each room with one teacher, usually Amina, monitoring the situation and assisting where required. Teaching four groups of children at one time means noise levels can become

uncomfortable, especially when young Class 2 students are learning to sing nursery rhymes or the English alphabet, but overall the students appear disciplined and focused on the work at hand.

There is no formal syllabus or curriculum. Teachers plan lessons to meet key indicators, such as a level of proficiency in Hindi or mathematics that will enable students to enrol in formal school. They teach classes in English, Urdu, Hindi, maths, history, geography, Islamic religion and moral education, nature and environmental sciences, social awareness, hygiene and cleanliness, drawing and painting, crafts, singing, drama, computer and internet literacy, and physical culture. Children pay a nominal fee to attend the school and there are no costs associated with books or school uniforms.

In May 2007 there were 125 girls and boys ranging in age from four to fifteen enrolled at the school, and the newly added Montessori class for two to three year olds attracted 25 more students. Amina and Binod believe that young children are most in need of a positive educational experience.

“A child’s main educational background is built here,” said Amina. “If this primary education is weak, he or she won’t study later or have a bright future.”

At 7pm things become quiet again, giving Amina and Binod a chance to return to their homes and eat before coming back to tidy up and plan future activities, play indoor cricket or sing songs with older students, work on HPP’s other initiatives, and discuss funding. Amina and Binod worry constantly about the school’s future and seek practical solutions to their funding problems. Binod encourages the older students to join the school as volunteer teachers once they graduate from formal school, commenting that “some of them now teach the smaller children without any salary.” Amina has plans to expand the *masala* enterprise so that women in the *basti* can gain an income, surplus profit can support the school, and “the future of the children, lost in darkness today, will also be brightened,” as she expressed it. At Amina’s request I spent some time searching for funding opportunities but I found that most funding opportunities are tied to projects; few organisations offer ongoing financial support for the type of long-term outcomes that HPP works toward.

Amina and Binod frequently use metaphors of light and darkness to describe the lives of the poorest children living in PM Basti. They often said that they sought to create brighter futures for Talimi Haq School students, children whose futures would otherwise remain “in darkness.” To me, their actions demonstrate a commitment to the future and a method of collectively working toward a hoped-for world that is not yet here: in other words, they generate collective hope. In the next section I describe how Talimi Haq School’s teachers strive to create bright futures by raising the social value of education within PM Basti.

Raising the social value of education within PM Basti

More than 700 of PM Basti's poorest children have attended Talimi Haq School since it started in 1998. Over 550 Talimi Haq School graduates have gone on to join local formal schools, which is a major achievement given widespread illiteracy and parents' perceptions that education is pointless. In this section I draw on two of Talimi Haq School's activities – educational fieldtrips and a school play – to describe how the school's teachers challenge perceptions concerning Muslims and work to raise the social value of education within PM Basti.

Earlier I discussed how the historical enthusiasm for education within PM Basti is tempered by poverty and the fact that children need to work to supplement household incomes. Talimi Haq School was created to cater to such children, and in 1997 HPP volunteers conducted a survey to identify potential students from the *basti*. Seema Tewari, a young woman from a Brahmin²¹ family in Kolkata city, worked with Ramaswamy as an HPP volunteer and played an important role in establishing Talimi Haq School in 1998. Discussing the 1997 survey she was involved with, she writes:

The people in PM Basti could be divided into those who were educated, and sent their children to school as a matter of course, and those who were almost entirely outside the pale of education. I was surprised to find that the girls were sent to school and that there was no male-child bias. In fact, in many poor households, people felt there was no point in the boys going to school, since they would have to take up some manual work sooner or later. People had also started preferring educated daughters-in-law.

(Tewari, 2001)

Tewari's comments highlight two important perceptions concerning Muslims that I discussed in Chapter 4. The first is that Muslim girls are kept out of school, which is not always the case in PM Basti. The second is that Muslims living in poverty do not view education as a societal route for better employment opportunities. I return to this second point shortly; first I discuss attitudes towards girls' schooling.

Firdos's 2005 household survey of PM Basti found that more boys (17%) than girls (13%) between the ages of 5 and 19 had never attended school, and that of those who did attend school, girls were more likely to continue with schooling (57%) than boys (51%) until adolescence (Khatoon, 2009c:5). In his survey of Muslim *basti*-dwellers from the Park Circus-Topsia area of Kolkata city, Zakir Husain (2005) found that most Muslim parents expressed an interest in educating their children regardless of gender. In fact, Husain's survey respondents argued that education was more important for the

²¹ From the outset, HPP created a social space in PM Basti that transgressed boundaries of religion, gender, class and caste. This is no small feat in light of the political issues of surrounding communalism and religious identity discussed in Chapter 4, and in the context of the social and class polarisation exacerbated by India's economic growth from the 1990s. As Sita notes, "this kind of space had to be deliberately and assiduously created" and is "an illustration of Ramaswamy's role and the style of his interventions" which took years of dedicated and painstaking work (Ramaswamy et al., 2010:305 note 316).

girl child because it enhanced her marriage prospects and enabled her to be independent after marriage, providing some security in the event her husband deserted her (2005:139, 140, 141).

Although pre-adolescent girls in PM Basti are more likely to attend primary and middle school than boys of the same age, conservative attitudes regarding female mobility affect the education of adolescent girls.²² For example, Firdos found that enrolment ratios for girls and boys in PM Basti plummeted sharply (from over 70% to less than 20%) at high school level (Classes 9-13), and twice as many girls dropped out of high school than boys (Khatoon, 2009c:5).

I observed how conservative attitudes affected student participation in one of Talimi Haq School's educational initiatives: fieldtrips. As part of the school's philosophy of creative learning in all aspects of life, not just the classroom, Amina and Binod organise educational fieldtrips for school students (when funds permit) to places

Photograph 11. Amina with Talimi Haq School students outside the Indian Museum



in Howrah and Kolkata cities. I participated in trips to the Botanical Gardens, the Indian Museum (see Photograph 11), and Science City (a large complex in Kolkata city that contains interactive science and technology exhibits and science-themed parks) as a teachers' aide, and was able to observe how teachers linked indoor classroom lessons to outdoor games and activities, and how much fun the students had during our outings. I also noted the amount of time and energy Amina invested in ensuring that families gave permission for their girls, and the female volunteer teachers, to travel outside PM Basti.

²² Once girls reach puberty, they are often withdrawn from school and kept close to home in order to maintain their chastity and, with it, family honour. "Ironically, this restriction may exercise a positive effect on (a girl's) education," writes Husain. "Unlike her more mobile brother, the girl is restricted to her immediate neighbourhood and to her nearby school. This increases her focus and may lead to higher levels of attainment for girls" (Husain, 2005:146). Obviously this depends upon having an affordable school nearby and the quality of education it provides.

The majority of girls attending the fieldtrips appeared to be under the age of 12. During the trips, Amina and the other female teachers (Rehana, Yasmin and, before her marriage, Sarwari²³) commented on the opposition they faced from their families in seeking to travel outside PM Basti. From my conversations with Amina, I knew this problem extended beyond school fieldtrips to their very involvement with HPP. Amina's recollections of her determination to attend teacher training in Kolkata city when she first joined HPP highlight these problems.

"My brother was very angry with me," Amina told me. "He said, 'You're going to Kolkata to meet boys, you have a bad character'. Sarwari had the same problem. Her brother said, 'why are you teaching at a school for bad girls? Why are you going to Kolkata? There are boys there. Are you talking to boys? You're bad!'"²⁴

It took years for Amina to win her family's confidence and trust and she is proud of the fact that they now support her. "Now I have even been outside of Kolkata, to Mumbai, Bangalore, Ahmenabad, and I go alone," she said. "I just inform my family that I have to go to this place on this day and nobody asks me any questions as to why, how, or when because now they trust me and they know that their girl won't do anything wrong. Previously I used to get beatings just for going to my neighbour's place, but there is nothing like that now." She credits much of this to the support and guidance she has received from Ramaswamy: "I have had a lot of support from Sir."²⁵ If he hadn't changed my mind about continuing my education then maybe today I would have been married to someone and would have had lots of kids and that would have been the end of my life."²⁶

Not doing "anything wrong" for Amina means embodying her devotion to Islam and being "good and true" in her clothing and demeanour. She does not challenge Islam²⁷ but describes her work for HPP as "an Islamic choice," saying that

²³ After her marriage in 2007, Sarwari stopped teaching at Talimi Haq School as her new in-laws imposed restrictions on her movements outside the home. She came to visit HPP one day in a full-length *burqa*. "Yes, I like wearing it," she said in response to my question. "I *want* to wear it." Sarwari said she knew getting married would mean sacrificing her freedom, but she wanted to be married and is very happy with her new husband and life with her in-laws (with whom she now lives).

²⁴ Chakraborty (2009, 2010) discusses what it means to be a "good Muslim girl" in conservative Muslim *bastis* in Kolkata city.

²⁵ Amina calls Ramaswamy 'Sir' as a sign of respect. Their relationship is unconventional and transgresses a variety of structural factors (including class, gender, and religion). Amina told me that she views Ramaswamy as her teacher, mentor, and respected elder, and both she and her mother commented that they will never forget the time and energy he has invested in guiding her. Over the years their relationship has evolved as Amina has matured into a strong, confident, and very competent young woman. They are now closer to peers than teacher and student, although Amina will always call him 'Sir'. Ramaswamy (who I consider a natural teacher based on my own interactions with him and the guidance he has provided me) continues to encourage Amina and Binod to expand their horizons through various exposures and experiences.

²⁶ Although I have not described it here, Amina's life story exemplifies the conservative attitudes young Muslim girls from urban poor habitats experience in pursuing education. Amina's father played an important role in encouraging her to attend school until his death, after which time her family opposed her desire to complete her schooling. She dropped out of school, re-enrolling later with Ramaswamy's encouragement.

²⁷ Challenging Islam would require a great deal of courage, critical reflection, and distancing. Amina is a devout Muslim, as I have noted, and while she has thought about her faith she does not reject it. It is

people who once tried to dissuade her (including relatives and local political party activists) now bring their daughters to Talimi Haq School with the directive, “keep her with you”. Working at HPP has transformed Amina’s life, as she noted in an essay she wrote about her faith entitled *Beyond Four Walls*:

My life too could well have been like that of all the other girls who are born, grow up, get married, go away, produce children, stay at home, and die. I consider myself different from them today. I did not compromise my dignity. By staying within the limits of what is good, and living within the same society, I tried to change myself. In doing this I faced many difficulties and challenges. But I never admitted defeat before anyone.

(Amina, personal communication)

Amina has the freedom to organise fieldtrips, attend training courses, and speak at conferences without anyone from PM Basti questioning her morals or character. In July 2008 she travelled to Italy on a Talimi Haq School fieldtrip with Binod, Ramaswamy, and some teenage students (boys *and* girls), and in 2009 she went to Bangkok alone to speak at an environmental conference. She has become a role model within PM Basti, showing that a young Muslim woman can gain a university degree and travel outside the *basti* while upholding faith and family honour. I believe she achieved this freedom by embracing her identity as a Muslim woman (capitalising on the symbolic power associated with religious faith, in Bourdieu’s terms)²⁸ and finding a socially acceptable path within, rather than seeking to transgress, normative gender expectations, although she tests them by pursuing higher education and choosing not to get married.²⁹

The second perception highlighted in Tewari’s comments (above) is that Muslims living in poverty do not view education as a societal route for better employment opportunities. Dr Siddiqui made a similar point at the IOS workshop (see Chapter 4) describing a conversation he had with a young boy who worked as a street vendor. Dr Siddiqui asked him why he had dropped out of school.

“Sir, I could go to school, but what will I get out of it?” the boy replied. “I have asked my brother not to waste money on education. I’m going to end up working here anyway so I might as well start earning money now.”

not easy for someone like Amina to create and maintain a critical distance from religion and the community within which she is so immersed. Her rationalisation enables her to work in the community while being critical of various aspects of it.

²⁸ In a similar vein, F. E. Ahmed (2008) argues that Muslim women in Bangladesh use the notion of *bodhi* (intelligence or wisdom) as a tool to gain agency in a patriarchal society, basing their interpretation of *bodhi* on the Islamic tradition of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning).

²⁹ Amina is unusual in that she is not yet married – another entrenched social norm in Kolkata and Howrah (see Chakraborty, 2009; Samanta, 2005) – and she often spoke of wanting to find a husband who is similarly “good and true”. While she aspires to marriage, she worries that it would curtail her freedom. “Here when a woman gets married her life is over,” she said as we chatted about our families one day. “She has to stay at home, do whatever her husband says, and give him a child every year. I wouldn’t be able to work at HPP.” Her thoughts regarding marriage provide an interesting contrast with Tabassum, coordinator of Rehnuma-e-Niswaan and married mother of two, as Chapter 6 shows.

Husain's survey results indicate that while Muslims living in poverty perceive anti-Muslim bias in the job market (especially against boys), they value education in a general sense, as well as functional literacy and numeracy, in their daily lives (2005:139).³⁰ Just how much value is placed on education is affected by parental illiteracy. If illiterate parents do not perceive education to be an asset in seeking employment, they might not continue their children's education once they have sufficient literacy to use in daily life. During Talimi Haq School's early years, its volunteer teachers had to repeatedly visit parents in their homes in order to convince them to send their children to the school.

"It's hard when the parents are illiterate," Amina told me. "They don't understand why education is important."

Amina's views on education, which we often discussed, echo much of the literature I consulted on gender, education and development.³¹ For example, she believes that educating males and females will help improve the lives of all family members by leading to better health and hygiene practices and improved family health, more economic opportunities and increased household income, women having fewer children, empowerment for girls and women, girls getting married at a later age, knowledge of the *Quran* and the *Hadith*,³² and better relations between husbands and wives.

"We decided to create a drama about education for our school's annual programme," Amina said during a conversation I had with her and Binod one day.

"We based this drama on how people think," added Binod. "Here there are lots of problems in getting water. Food is a problem too, but even when you can't do anything about food, water is still a must, so we set the drama at a water pump."

I have recreated Amina and Binod's description of the play, performed by Talimi Haq School students in 2006, as stage directions.

SCENE: *The early morning queue at a water pump.*

(SULTANA has herded her seven children to stand in the queue with her. Her children don't go to school; instead they get into mischief and roam the streets from dawn until dusk, playing in water, dirt and dust. She struggles to keep them still and carries her 6-month old baby on her hip. RANI, who sends all of her own children to school, joins the queue alone. But the queue is long and the water supply is cut before they can fill their buckets.)

³⁰ Husain (2005) also provides evidence to counter the perception that low literacy levels among Muslims are due to conservative Islamic values.

³¹ Many authors critically discuss the benefits to society of educating girls and women, which can lead to women's empowerment and improved development indicators but that can also reproduce inequalities (see Basu, 2002; Bhasin, 1987; Brill, 1996; Croll, 2000; Herz & Sperling, 2004; Hill & King, 1993; Longwe, 1998; Nussbaum, 2003; A. Sen, 1999; Stromquist, 2002; Unterhalter, 2005).

³² Narrations concerning the words, deeds, and things approved by Prophet Muhammad.

RANI: (*To SULTANA, looking at the fidgeting children*) You come along with all your kids?

SULTANA: (*Turns to look at RANI and sighs*) What else can I do? I need to collect water.

RANI: Why don't you send your children to school? Send them to school!

SULTANA: (*Tells her boys to stop kicking dust around*) I am not able to make proper arrangements for food. How will I send them to school? (*Moves her baby from one hip to the other*) Anyway, what's the point of studying?

RANI: If you send your children to school, regardless of whether or not the children are being taught, they will be given food every day.³³ Your child will be given clothes, rice, and along with that, textbooks. And it's free. So why don't you send your children there? (*Pauses to see whether she has SULTANA'S attention*) I send all my children to school. One of my boys is only three years old, but I told the school he is five years old and got him admission. The rice that is given there, I keep enough for all of us to eat and I sell the rest. This way, I get some money to take care of the other household expenses.

SULTANA: (*looking interested*) But I have never been to a school. Who go with me to get my children admission?

RANI: I know how to do this. You come along with me and I will get your children in to school.

"So she goes along with all the children and gains admission into the school," said Amina, concluding the story. "This drama was based on what we thought parents think about sending their children to school. Whether the child is being taught, whether the child actually attends school, whether the child studies at home, nobody sees to any of this. The mothers are only concerned about whether the child will bring home rice from school. The mothers are quick to go to the school to complain, 'why was my child not given an egg in her meal when that other child got an egg?' They will definitely complain about that sort of thing. But they never complain about other things, like 'why wasn't my child's copybook checked? Why wasn't my child given any homework? Why wasn't he taught anything at school today?'"

"They only send their children to school for the free meal, or to keep them from roaming around the *basti*," added Binod. "What kind of future will that give the children?"

I view this play as an effort to legitimise education as a valuable form of cultural capital within PM Basti. By using scenes and concepts with which the audience is familiar, and presenting them in an accessible and entertaining format, Amina and

³³ In 2001 the Supreme Court of India directed all state-led primary schools to provide a free lunch to school children on all working days (known as the Mid-day Meal Programme). See Rana (2004) for a discussion of the Mid-day Meal Programme in West Bengal, which enhanced school attendance rates for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and Muslim children.

Binod can begin a larger conversation with parents about the purpose of education. Talimi Haq School teachers also discuss these issues with their students, and it will be interesting to see the intergenerational effects of the teachers' efforts on students' agency, hopes, and attitudes towards education in the future.

“Love, education, and discipline” at Talimi Haq School

In the final section of this chapter I relate what some of Talimi Haq School's students had to say about their experiences at the school. With Binod's assistance, I informally interviewed the eight older Talimi Haq School students who participated in the introductory social anthropology class I taught in 2007 (see Interlude 1 above).³⁴ All of the students attend, or had attended, a local formal school in addition to Talimi Haq School. I was curious to know what the students liked most about Talimi Haq School and asked semi-structured questions along those lines. All said they enjoyed learning English and meeting foreigners like me, indicating that they value the social opportunities afforded by Talimi Haq School. In fact, most of the students I spoke with listed English as their favourite subject. Amina, Binod and the other teachers were just as keen as their students to practice speaking English with me and other foreign visitors to the school. As I pointed out in previous chapters, the ability to speak English is an important form of distinction in Howrah and Kolkata, not necessarily as a signifier of an elite lifestyle but because it provides access to valued forms of employment (and economic capital) and is linked with higher education (cultural capital) and political power (see also R. Andrews, 2006:503, and M. Roy, 1994:103-104). Drawing on Ortnner (2006), their shared desire to learn English can be viewed as an expression of collective agency in pursuit of a culturally constructed project.

Another common theme was the love they receive from their teachers, as the following responses show:

What is my favourite thing about Talimi Haq School?

Teachers' love.

My favourite teachers are Sarfaraz *bhai* because his English is very good,
and Binod *bhai*.

He's great.

(Sohail)

³⁴ The students were Akbar (15), Mini (13), Taslim (13), Ezaz (13), Sohail (13), Sabir (13), Shahana (10) and Sabina (10). They unanimously said they enjoyed being in a class taught by a foreigner. For my part, it was a joy to teach students so intelligent, enthusiastic, and quick to learn. I have known most of them since my first trip in 2004 and am interested in following their future activities to see what kinds of choices they make regarding further education, employment, and marriage.

I like all the teachers at the school, although my favourite is Amina *bhaji*.
My formal school just had discipline and education.
Here we have love, education, and discipline.

(Akbar)

The teachers here are great.
In my formal school, if they ask us a question and we don't know the
answer, they beat us.
Here, there are no beatings.
If we don't understand a question or a sentence they repeat it and explain
it to us.
No teachers here beat any students.
They love us.
That's why most of the students want to live with their teachers at Talimi
Haq School instead of at home.

(Mini)

These responses indicate that Talimi Haq School's teachers show their students that they are valued, worthy and loved on a daily basis. This is an important component of providing a positive and joyful learning environment, and I recently learnt that Amina and Binod were awarded Vocational Excellence Awards from Rotary International in recognition of their efforts.³⁵

Talimi Haq School's teachers have influenced students' expectations of education, as Sita found in her survey of the school's students and their parents. Sita comments that some of the students who had gone on to formal school "could not sustain their enthusiasm for learning within the formal school environment. One parent voiced her disappointment thus: "He couldn't get the kind of attention and affection he received at Talimi Haq School, so he dropped out"" (Ramaswamy et al., 2010:307). Talimi Haq School clearly fills an important gap within the larger education system for children from the poorest households in PM Basti. Whether the students are able to transform their education into other forms of capital remains to be seen and will be influenced by the larger historical sociocultural structures that shape life in the *basti*.

It seems fitting to conclude this chapter with an excerpt from one of Amina's articles, which describes the school's hopes for the future:

³⁵ Binod emailed me with the news that Rotary had provided the school with 150 educational bags (containing a pencil box, pencils, erasers, etc.) for its students along with Vocational Excellence Awards for him and Amina.

Talimi Haq School attempts to function as an island of love, decency and learning in the existing degraded social environment. The school's objective is to educate children to become good citizens, good human beings, and good parents whose children can dream and hope to realise their dreams.³⁶ Talimi Haq School too has a dream – of becoming a full-fledged high school that can transform the lives of poor children by providing them a world class education befitting the 21st century, right here in Priya Manna Basti.

(Khatoon, 2009c:8)

This chapter has shown that Talimi Haq School fills an important gap in PM Basti, a 'forgotten place' with a history of grassroots educational initiatives. Talimi Haq School does more than impart a basic education to some of PM Basti's poorest children, many of whom do not attend formal school. It also generates collective hope and collective agency through the efforts of its teachers, whose devotion to the school and their students I have attempted to convey here. I have shown how Talimi Haq School negotiates rather than challenges gender norms regarding female mobility – it can hardly do otherwise if its teachers want to retain their students and the support of family and community members – and how Amina and Binod work to raise the social value of education within PM Basti. While their practices can reproduce existing social structures, the teachers' collective efforts and their conduct as role models also slowly transform them. In the next chapter I describe Rehnuma-e-Niswaan, the grassroots organisation I worked with in Kolkata city, and explore how Tabassum negotiates similar gender norms regarding female mobility in Narkeldanga.

³⁶ These sentiments remind me of Sardar's (1997) discussion about the Islamic concept of *falah* (loosely translated as 'human well-being') replacing western notions of development. Ramaswamy has also written about the concept, linking it with *haq*: "*Falahak* would ... mean both becoming as well as the right to self-development. One may therefore use the term *Falahak*, to express the goals for the community in PM Basti. In a Muslim context, where great significance is attached to the spoken and written word, *Falahak* would also be an appropriate term to signify the spiritual inspiration underlying the community action agenda. *Falahak* shall begin from PM Basti, *Inshallah*, God's will. The movement begun in PM Basti could realise this potential" (Ramaswamy & Chakravarti, 1997a:31-32).

Chapter 6

“I will not stop, *Inshallah*”: Rehnuma-e-Niswaan

I first met Tabassum Siddiqi in November 2004. Tabassum is founder and coordinator of Rehnuma-e-Niswaan, a grassroots organisation committed to social welfare that provides vocational training for girls and women from *bastis* in Narkeldanga, Raja Bazaar,¹ and Park Circus. Sita and I had travelled to Raja Bazaar to participate in a meeting Tabassum had called at the school where she held sewing classes for girls after hours. Tabassum needed to gather demographic information in order to strengthen funding applications for Rehnuma-e-Niswaan and she wanted to identify potential markets for the garments and other goods (soft toys, embroidered products) her students created. We were there to discuss setting up Firdos's survey to measure poverty in the area and joined several women from Rehnuma-e-Niswaan. One woman became very vocal and animated as the meeting progressed.

“What’s she so upset about?” I whispered to Sita, nodding toward the woman.

“She says she has become disillusioned with Rehnuma-e-Niswaan because it has no funding or community support,” Sita replied. “Her family is opposed to her taking part in it, especially her brother, who has been badmouthing Tabassum.” I tucked this piece of information away and watched Tabassum acknowledge the woman’s concerns and try to move forward with the discussion at hand.

This chapter describes Rehnuma-e-Niswaan and Tabassum’s efforts to economically empower women from urban poor areas through vocational training. First I describe Narkeldanga and explain why Tabassum is passionate about working there. This is followed with the story of Rehnuma-e-Niswaan’s origins. In the third section I discuss how Tabassum attempts to foster collective agency through her vocational training courses and highlight some of the challenges she has had to overcome. I then describe our efforts to organise a picnic outside Narkeldanga to illustrate how Tabassum negotiates gender norms within the *basti*. The chapter concludes by recounting conversations Tabassum and I had about her future plans.

¹ Raja Bazaar is in the same slum cluster as Narkeldanga, where Tabassum grew up.

“I cannot stop working there now”: From Narkeldanga to Park Circus

A tall and striking woman in her early thirties, Tabassum is articulate in English, has successfully completed higher education and has a history of working with women and children. She grew up in Narkeldanga, sharing a single room with her father, mother, and three brothers. After her “love marriage”² in May 2004 she moved to live with her new husband, his father and brother in Park Circus, an area of east central Kolkata city known for its predominantly Muslim population. Her apartment, which they own, is at the top of an unlit flight of concrete stairs in the corner of a relatively new apartment block. With three rooms overlooking the narrow lane below, a tiny kitchen and their own bathroom, her marital apartment is much larger and better equipped than her family home. Her husband, Shaharyaar, is a physiotherapist who spends much of his time at work, and they employ a Muslim maidservant.

Park Circus is a large area encompassing several municipal wards, including Narkeldanga. The heterogeneity of Kolkata city’s Muslim population is visible in Park Circus. For example, there are commercially developed middle-class areas whose educated residents work in the formal sector and live in good quality housing in close proximity to a range of different *bastis*. Husain (2005) describes three types of *bastis* in the Park Circus area: high, medium, and low-income. High-income *bastis* are characterised by *pukka* housing (made of durable material) with tiled roofs, small family size, men employed in the service sector, and children who are actively encouraged to pursue education. Husain (2005:138) compares such residents to “working class families” with aspirations of upward social mobility. Medium-income *bastis* have houses constructed (often without official sanction) from poorer quality materials, limited access to water, large family sizes, and women and children as well as men working in informal economies (Husain, 2005:138-139). Low income settlements are home to those who could be considered the poorest of the poor, people with little to no education who live in *khaldhar* (temporary unauthorised settlements) made of bamboo and mud along canal banks, have limited material possessions, no access to electricity or water, where men find unstable employment as daily wage labourers and families deal with alcoholism and other social problems in their daily struggle for survival (Husain, 2005:139). I follow Tabassum’s practice of using ‘Narkeldanga’ to refer to Ward 29 of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, and ‘Park Circus’ to mean the ward she lives in now, which I would characterise as a middle-class area.

“The population here, economically their position is better compared with Narkeldanga,” she said in response to my question about the differences between Park

² While arranged marriage is still common for the majority in India, some couples who have met independently and developed a romantic relationship can initiate the marriage process themselves with one another in mind. These are known as “love marriages.”

Circus and Narkeldanga. “And they are interested in sending their children to school. Some of our neighbours in this building work for the Indian administration, some are in the military. Working in the Indian administration, that’s a prestigious job. If you are in a nice office you can easily earn a lot of money. There’s not so much need [for Rehnuma-e-Niswaan] here.”

Although she no longer lives there, Tabassum is committed to working with girls and women in Narkeldanga. “You remember that meeting you came to in Raja Bazaar last year?” she asked me as I visited her in December 2005. Tabassum cradled 9-month-old Yashfeen (her eldest daughter) as we chatted, sitting as we usually did on the large bed in her room. I nodded. “Sita spoke to me afterwards,” she continued. “She thought that I should focus on working here, in Park Circus,³ rather than Narkeldanga. I told her ‘no’. There are some people who are against me, true, but so many people there help me too. I cannot stop working there now.”

Narkeldanga is near a major cattle and goat trading centre and many seek employment in tanneries and factories, as butchers, green grocers and tailors, or in a wide variety of light industry and home-centred⁴ manufacturing (Siddiqui, 1974/2005). It looks, sounds, and smells quite different to PM Basti. Goats are regularly herded through Narkeldanga’s narrow and congested lanes and one has to tread carefully to avoid stepping in anything undesirable. The main streets are lined with vendors selling carcasses, cooked meat, and leather (among other things), and I had to work hard to control my reactions to the flies and smells that accompany such goods and services. I was not comfortable taking photographs in Narkeldanga as my height and obvious foreignness quickly attracted unwanted attention from crowds of children asking for money, and twice Tabassum engaged in verbal confrontations with men who demanded to know what I was doing in the *basti*. A number of features signify that this is a Muslim area, including loudspeakers attached to electricity poles to broadcast *azaan* from nearby mosques, the predominance of Urdu rather than Bengali in spoken language, and women wearing *burqa*.

98.8% of Narkeldanga’s population of 46,814 reside in *bastis* (Census of India 2001, 2001b; Firdos, 2007). Like PM Basti, Narkeldanga is another ‘forgotten place’ where people have limited access to basic civic amenities such as water, education, and

³ Shortly after her move to Park Circus, some girls from Tiljala, a large nearby *basti*, approached Tabassum and told her about their living conditions. Tabassum visited it and found that “conditions are very bad, even worse than Narkeldanga”. She soon began planning for Rehnuma-e-Niswaan to run classes in Park Circus and in 2007 Tabassum was looking for a new, larger venue for her classes.

⁴ Following Mallika Bose, I use the term ‘home-centred’ to refer to “income-generating work that is performed at or near home when the location of the work and its associated socio-spatial dimension is a critical determinant of job choice” (2007:274). This is a broader term than ‘home-based work’ that recognises the social constraints on women’s mobility and encompasses “those engaged in piece-rated work, petty commodity production, vendors, hawkers, rag pickers and domestic service workers who work at or near their homes. It also includes teleworkers who work out of their homes, but not those who work from an office and have the choice of occasionally working from home” (M. Bose, 2007:274).

health services. Tabassum described Narkeldanga's demographic profile in a funding application, which she shared with me:

The high population density and the fact that more than 70% of the population lives below the poverty line and has impaired or no access to the basic amenities of life, translate into deprivation and increased hardship for the women of this area. The entrenched patriarchy and rigidities of the culture often mean that women are not capable of leaving their houses and taking control of their economic destinies or involving themselves in productive vocations. ... Most of the population is daily wage earning labourers with irregular incomes and low wage levels. Families have large numbers and the men's earnings are not sufficient to meet the needs of all family members. Unemployment and underemployment are prevalent. Of the two government-aided schools in Narkeldanga, the one catering to women is insufficient to meet the educational needs of all women in the area. This has led to widespread illiteracy, not to mention the fact that the standard of education in the school is very poor. This has resulted in the low socioeconomic status of women. Most women are married at a very young age and are usually confined to their homes. They have to bear a large number of children at a very young age, which leads to a range of reproductive health problems which are widespread but rarely, if ever, addressed and treated. All of these factors effectively disempower and disenfranchise women.

(Tabassum, personal communication)

Tabassum grew up in a house at the end of a narrow alley along a smaller side lane in Kasai Basti. The alley leads to a courtyard surrounded by four houses, three of which are inhabited by Tabassum's relatives. Such courtyards, which cannot be seen from the street, could be interpreted as a spatial expression of *purdah* (another example of habitus inscribed in habitat, discussed in Part I) whereby women remain out of public view. Her family home is a large room (over twice the size of Amina's house⁵) with a single entrance facing the courtyard. It has no bathroom or kitchen; those activities are performed in the shared courtyard. When I visited in 2005 and 2006 Tabassum's mother and her relatives lived there. We would talk while sitting on the bed or on mats on the floor, joined regularly by Tabassum's female relatives and their children who would pop in to see what we were doing. I observed that Tabassum would confidently leave her daughter in the care of her many female relatives when in Narkeldanga (a resource she did not have in Park Circus) and turn her attention to Rehnuma-e-Niswaan. M. Bose notes that for Muslim women living in *bastis* in Kolkata city, "the spatial proximity of female family members seems to be key for women,

⁵ This is one of the many markers of class difference between Amina and Tabassum (afforded in part by growing up in Narkeldanga, which is a distinctly different social and physical habitat from PM Basti). Other markers of cultural, social and economic capital include Tabassum's fluency in English, her postgraduate qualification, their residences, her family's traditional occupation (as butchers), and her brothers' current occupations (one is a banker in Kolkata, one works for the government in Delhi, and one is a filmmaker in Canada). Amina's background is more humble, and because she still lives in PM Basti she is more deeply immersed in its daily life than Tabassum is in Narkeldanga. One person I met, who was acquainted with both women, said that this makes Amina more daring and more effective in her outreach. Unlike Tabassum (and anthropologists like me, who can leave the field at any time), Amina has nowhere else to go when challenged by community members or faced with conflict.

especially those with young children, trying to juggle household work with remunerated work” (2007:287). By 2007 Tabassum’s mother had moved to live with her youngest son and his new wife in a large apartment nearby. Tabassum was using the room as the venue for her sewing classes, giving Rehnuma-e-Niswaan an important physical presence in the *basti*.

Not all of the homes I visited in Narkeldanga were as spacious, as I found when Tabassum took me to visit some of the girls and women who were involved with Rehnuma-e-Niswaan as students or teachers. Their single-room houses all had electricity (bought illegally from a “lender”) and most had a small television perched on a corner shelf and a small alcove by the entrance for cooking, but the room was usually very small – about half the size of Tabassum’s – with six or more residents (see Photograph 12). Rather than facing courtyards hidden at the end of alleys, many were spaced along narrow lanes or hallways of larger buildings with little light or ventilation.

Photograph 12. A home in Narkeldanga



Veenat (centre in red), one of Rehnuma-e-Niswaan’s students, with her family in February 2007.

In 2005 we called upon some teenage girls who had completed one of Tabassum’s courses and were employed by a local middleman⁶ to do fine needlework

⁶ Middlemen are subcontractors who mediate between home-centred workers (who occupy the lowest rung of the subcontracting ladder) and other subcontractors or suppliers. Tabassum, who loathes this system, said that middlemen usually provide raw materials (saris, sequins, thread) and only pay for garments they have inspected and accepted. As M. Bose explains, “the employer benefits from not having to pay for defective work, and not having to bear the overhead costs of space, machinery,

on expensive saris. Their tiny windowless room housed a family of ten. The girls were shy but eager to show us some of the garments they were working on,⁷ spreading the carefully folded material out on the large bed that dominated the room. Each sari took one girl about three hours to finish stitching by hand, for which she was paid five rupees (NZ\$0.14). I noticed that their mother, who did not say much throughout our visit, sat listlessly breastfeeding her baby. Apart from moving to fetch her guests something to eat and drink, she did not otherwise engage with us or seem to notice the tall foreign woman in her house, although she perked up a little when I offered to take photos of her with her girls.⁸ After we left I asked Tabassum if she was okay.

"No, actually, she has lost her mind a little as a result of her situation," said Tabassum quietly.

"Why is that?"

"Well, she has seven daughters and only one son. Money is a problem, not only to eat but how is she going to marry them all? Her husband is out all the time. If he's not working he's gambling or drinking. It is very hard for her and she has lost all hope in life."

My heart wrenched as I tried to imagine what her life must be like.

"This is why I *have* to do something," Tabassum said.

This section has described why Tabassum works to improve the lives of girls and women in Narkeldanga. The next section discusses how she formed Rehnuma-e-Niswaan.

Rehnuma-e-Niswaan: Guiding the girls

Rehnuma-e-Niswaan began in 1997 when Tabassum, then headmistress of a school in the area, decided to utilise the classrooms after school hours by offering stitching, tailoring and embroidery classes to local Muslim girls who had dropped out of school. "It was just an accident, actually," she said. "When I started I never knew that it would become a big organisation or that I could help so many people. I saw that after school hours the school was empty, and I thought that we could use the building then. I wasn't thinking of starting any sort of organisation. I spoke to the school authorities and said since the place was empty I'd like to use it for something constructive."

electricity and other required inputs. Moreover, these workers are responsible for all incidental expenses and enjoy neither benefits nor job security; furthermore, a dearth of jobs often leads to competition among the large pool of women vying for work, forcing down the low piece-rate even further ..." (2007:277).

⁷ M. Bose's study of female Muslim home-centred workers in *bastis* in Kolkata city shows that piece-rated workers often work collectively within their families to increase their earnings (2007:285).

⁸ I always offered to photograph the people whose homes I visited in PM Basti and Narkeldanga, returning with printed copies as a way of thanking them for their hospitality. For some families, the photos I took were the only ones they possessed.

After obtaining permission, Tabassum recruited young female dropouts from the *basti*. “These girls were teenagers, so I visited their parents and said that I wanted to teach classes in stitching, tailoring, hand embroidery,” she told me. “At first their parents refused. They didn’t want to send their adolescent girls. They had this idea that if girls go to school, maybe they’ll get to know about the world and argue or fight for their rights. They didn’t want that. But I convinced them. I said, ‘I am a girl from your area, you have known me since my childhood, do you see anything bad in me?’ They came then because I am a local girl and they saw that I wanted to do something good.”

“How did you come up with the concept of training girls in embroidery and tailoring?” I asked.

“I thought of it because the girls in this area are very talented,” she replied. “They do embroidery without any training, in their homes. When I saw some of their samples I thought I should give them some professional training so they can earn from this. And hand embroidery is very much in fashion, too.”

“Did it have anything do with the fact that they can do this work at home and don’t have to go out?”

Tabassum thought about that.

“Yes, maybe,” she said. “You could say that one of the main reasons they don’t want to leave this area is because of their parents. They don’t allow them to go out to work or for classes either. Going out to work is a very big deal. But for learning, they don’t want to let their daughters or their sisters go out of this particular area. So because they can learn here, and they can earn here, that’s why I started the class.”

The conservative attitudes towards female mobility in Muslim communities are well documented, as Chapter 4 indicates (see also Chakraborty, 2009; Samanta, 2005; Hasan & Menon, 2004, 2005a). It is likely that this is one of the reasons why Kolkata’s leading development agency, the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, promotes home-centred work “as a major component of economic development programmes targeting women” (M. Bose, 2007:272). In Narkeldanga (as elsewhere) many women from the poorest households are compelled to work in order to survive, especially if their husbands have deserted them or died, and do so by taking on home-centred work and, in some cases, work in other households (as maidservants, for example). In this way, poverty overrides some of the restrictions on female movement to which more affluent households might adhere. Nevertheless, girls and women face more restrictions than boys and men and are usually confined to their immediate neighbourhoods. Tabassum was more explicit about constraints on women’s mobility in a funding application she prepared:

To improve the condition of women in the slum clusters in a way that is culturally sensitive yet empowering, it is vital that women in the area be provided with vocational training that they can execute from within the

confines of their homes, and at the same time ensure that the product has a ready market. It is also important that the training be provided by an organisation that is run and controlled by women so that it can be justified in the patriarchal climate as a women's activity, thereby avoiding cultural ire and resistance.

(Tabassum, personal communication)

Her aunts and uncles were among the first people she convinced to support her. They began sending their daughters, some of whom started to help by teaching what they knew alongside Tabassum. A year or so after classes commenced the West Bengal Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (WBMDFC) approached Tabassum about a vocational training programme that it was trying – unsuccessfully – to start for Muslim girls in another area. Tabassum met with the general manager.

“He told me that they were offering classes in how to make soft toys, flowers, dolls, hand embroidery, but that they weren't getting any students. They had started classes in an area where the Muslim population was maybe zero point one per cent,” she said incredulously. “We have a very conservative society. People will not allow their daughters to travel far. He asked me if I could send any girls to their classes. I said, ‘Don't you know that you cannot get Muslim girls to travel so far for something like that?’ Then he asked me what they could do about it. I said, ‘If you want, I can provide classes. I can get 300 students if you start classes in my area’. He agreed. It took almost a year of inspections and meetings but they finally sent me two teachers.”

Tabassum succeeded where the WBMDFC had failed and her organisation grew in numbers and reputation. “People heard about us, a member of parliament came to visit, and people from the local council too,” she said. When the first course finished she held an exhibition of the girls' work (see Photograph 13).



Photograph 13.
Rehnuma-e-Niswaan
garments on display

This photo was taken in December 2005 at the WBMDFC's annual Milan Mela (fair), where Tabassum had a stall displaying some of her high-fashion garments.

Tabassum had also been regularly interacting with Ramaswamy (founder of HPP) and Hasnain Imam (another social activist) during this period. Tabassum first met Ramaswamy in late 2000 at a seminar organised by the IOS, after which time he and Hasnain began visiting her in Kasai Basti in Narkeldanga. Ramaswamy encouraged her to formally set up the organisation and suggested a name for it.

“Mr Ramaswamy said ‘you are doing so many things, which banner are you organising under?’ I told him I didn’t know. I said ‘organisation? What organisation?’” recalled Tabassum. “He said that since I was doing so many things, I should have some sort of banner to organise under. He helped me a lot, him and Hasnain Imam. Mr Ramaswamy gave me the name of our organisation. He said ‘If you like, you can call it Rehnuma-e-Niswaan.’”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“*Rehnuma* means to guide or lead. *Niswaan* means girls. Guiding the girls. So from that day we never looked back. We started this to help girls in Narkeldanga because they are working but don’t have any confidence in themselves. We just try to give them some hope, to show the path.” With Ramaswamy’s assistance, Tabassum formally registered her organisation under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act 1961, and since then she has twice received awards for her work with Muslim girls from the WBMDFC. In the next section I discuss some of the negative attitudes Tabassum has faced in running Rehnuma-e-Niswaan and how she draws strength from her family and her faith to overcome them.

“They’d win if I gave up”

Tabassum coordinates Rehnuma-e-Niswaan in conjunction with a small volunteer committee made up of local women who help recruit and teach students. Training courses are usually six months in length and students learn hand embroidery, *zardozi*, tailoring, and how to manufacture soft toys. Although all of Rehnuma-e-Niswaan’s students are Muslim, classes are open to women from all faiths. Students range in age from teens to late thirties, while the teachers Tabassum employs are in their early twenties to early thirties. Tabassum used to teach classes herself but now enlists the help of others to do so. In 2007 she employed one woman to teach a class of 31 girls in Narkeldanga. Although she has received support from the WBMDFC, for the most part Tabassum and her husband fund her work themselves, paying teacher’s salaries, providing venues and purchasing raw materials. Married and unmarried women attend classes.

“Now married women want me to teach them how to work,” she said. “They have so many children and not enough money, so they *have* to work.”

Over the years, Tabassum began teaching her students about other concepts as part of her aim to economically empower women and improve their quality of life. She has sought to create a safe, acceptable social space for women where she can provide training in life skills, health and hygiene, family planning techniques, and religious education. In what I view as an effort to foster collective agency, she also encourages women to form groups in order to provide each other with social support and security, and to undertake income-generating activities collectively. In addition, Tabassum, like Amina, capitalises on the symbolic power associated with being a devout Muslim woman, which she expresses through Rehnuma-e-Niswaan's vocational training programmes.

"We always give classes in religion once a month," Tabassum said one day as we chatted at her family home in Narkeldanga. "Their knowledge of Islam is also developing. Most of the problems in the *basti* arise because they don't have any knowledge of anything, civic, religious, whatever."

"So it's not just vocational training, then," I said.

"You could say it's a personality development course. We want to give them some ideas about how to live life honestly, in a good way, and be good human beings. This is personality development. Married women can think about how to develop themselves and improve the lives of their children. Unmarried girls can think about their futures, including how they will handle marriage. I think this is good because if you know what the problem is, you can plan a solution. If you can't identify a problem, then how can you solve it? So we give them ideas and tools so they can identify what types of problems they might find in their lives and how to solve them."

By the year 2000 Rehnuma-e-Niswaan was quite well known within Narkeldanga. According to Tabassum, some community members started questioning her aims.

"Most of the negative attitudes I get are from the men in our society," she told me. "They saw that I was becoming independent. I'd placed some girls who completed our first course in a boutique⁹ (see Photograph 14) and they started earning money. When the men saw that girls were becoming independent and would ask about their rights, they saw it in very negative way and started making things difficult for me. They never did it openly but they started planning to stop me from teaching classes at

⁹ I visited this boutique with Tabassum in 2007 and met four of the young women (all in their late teens) who completed Rehnuma-e-Niswaan's first six-month course. They work from 10am to 6pm, six days per week, and are each paid Rs. 1500 per month. They sit in a separate room away from male employees, hand-stitching saris and other high-fashion garments. Tabassum said to start with the boutique's owner was unsure about hiring Muslim girls because she did not think they would be permitted to work the hours required, but she is pleased with the quality of their work and had recently asked Tabassum to send her more students. The women were excited to see Tabassum and proudly showed her their work, asking her to start her own boutique so they could work for her. Tabassum's activities extend beyond providing vocational training; she also seeks employment for her students, keeps in touch with those she has placed to make sure they have good working conditions, and researches latest fashion trends so students produce quality goods with market appeal.

the school. If we didn't have that place, where would we go? Slowly and gradually people said 'no, this is not for you, this place after school hours', you know, things like that. And my close relatives were involved too, those who never wanted me to stand."

Photograph 14. Rehnuma-e-Niswaan graduates working at a boutique



Tabassum (far right) visits her former students, who she had placed in employment at a boutique not far from Park Circus. Tabassum was nearly eight months pregnant at the time.

Tabassum felt particularly targeted by one of her male relatives who publicly humiliated and shamed her. He would make snide comments about her and twist the name of her organisation, referring to it as something that "led girls astray" rather than guided them. "He was a jealous person, you could say. Very jealous and mean-minded. He didn't think that anybody should develop, financially or socially."

Tabassum confronted her detractors. "I told them, 'the school is not your personal property, you must not close it because this is not yours. I am doing something good for the community. Can you tell me where I am wrong? Can you tell me how I am misguiding the girls? Show me!' I organised religious classes but they must have thought 'no, she is doing something else with them.' They started saying 'no, you can't continue your classes here.' I fought with them. I said 'No! This is not your personal property, you cannot stop me.'"

Nevertheless, over a long period she felt slowly but surely edged out of the school. "They started doing things, not directly but indirectly. They tortured me mentally. Under compulsion I had to leave that school." Tabassum spoke slowly, eyes downcast, as she recalled what was clearly a painful time. "I got married during that

period ... I could have left the school anyway, but not like this. We didn't have classes for six or seven months."

Tabassum left in 2004, around the time Sita and I attended the meeting she had called. The pool of volunteers who form Rehnuma-e-Niswaan's organising committee also shrank. "Their families made them leave our organisation. Now we have only a few members. But offers are coming in. A lot of women want to join Rehnuma-e-Niswaan, but I won't take them at the moment," she said. "I don't want to face the same situation again so I have to look at them very seriously and decide."

Tabassum also felt pressure from community members to discontinue her work during her pregnancies. Tabassum and Shaharyaar have two daughters; she was expecting their first child when I met her in 2004, and she was heavily pregnant during my last visit to Kolkata in 2007. Shaharyaar, who also has a background in social and community work, supports Rehnuma-e-Niswaan financially and had no problem with her working while pregnant or independently moving around the city. He would often call her for quick chats during the day (via my cellphone if we were out) and I could hear the laughter and affection in Tabassum's voice as she spoke with him.

I asked Shaharyaar what he thought of his wife's work. "Of course I support what she does," he said. "She is doing something good for others, and I think a good person is one who tries to make life better for others, to support and develop their community."

Having seen much to confirm what I had read about conservative attitudes towards female mobility, I initially thought Shaharyaar's attitude towards his wife's independence and movements was unusual, and said so. He disagreed, telling me that a "good Muslim" is one who acts as well as believes.¹⁰ Tabassum introduced me to several Muslim men she knew with similar views who told me of the Prophet Muhammad's respect for women and pointed out that the Prophet's first wife was a successful businesswoman. Their comments support the point I made in Chapter 4: Islamic traditions can be oppressive but are not necessarily so, and perceptions that Islam is the sole reason for Muslim women's oppression uncritically privilege the significance of Islam in people's daily lives and prevent other structural causes from being investigated and addressed.¹¹

¹⁰ His comments reminded me of a phrase in Unni Wikan's book *Tomorrow, God Willing* (1996). She writes: "Islam is different from Christianity in that it emphasizes pious action rather than pious belief. To be a Muslim is to submit oneself to God by performing the five actions considered the pillars of Islam: saying 'there is no god but Allah, and Mohamed is his prophet'; praying five times a day; fasting during Ramadan; giving alms to the poor; and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca (if one can afford it)" (Wikan, 1996:184).

¹¹ F. E. Ahmed states that "Muslim men and notions of manhood in Islam have, in fact, been little studied in development studies," suggesting that in gender and development circles, "Islam and, by implication, Muslim men, are viewed as anti-women and anti-development" (2008:543; see also Hunter & Malik, 2005). A valuable area of future research might investigate how Muslim men in Kolkata and Howrah feel about the women in their lives (wives, sisters, daughters) becoming educated and employed and participating in organisations like Rehnuma-e-Niswaan, how it fits with their views

"I've had problems, sometimes there have been social or financial problems, and sometimes my work has been slow, but I never stopped," said Tabassum during one of our conversations. "That's exactly what they want. They'd win if I gave up."

"It sounds like you've faced a lot of negative attitudes and setbacks in your work," I said. "How did you get through?"

"My family supported me. Financially, morally, emotionally. And thanks be to God, of course, God's might is there. Having a good husband and parents is important. Parents can support you. My mother is a very positive person. If someone says something against you, my father, mother, husband, my brothers, they will say 'listen, she is my sister, I know what she is doing and why she is doing it. You people don't have the right to say anything.' And I believe that good things follow bad."

"Something like that saying, 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger'?"

"Yes. My father used to say to me, 'when people start criticising you, don't lose heart. Know that you are doing something good. People only criticise others when they're doing something good'."

"That's good advice. I would have liked to have met your father," I said. Tabassum's father died when she was younger but she often mentioned him and how he inspired what Bourdieu (2000:240) might call her social mission or investment (*illusio*) in Rehnuma-e-Niswaan.

"He was a very good man. Everything I'm doing today, it is because of my father. I saw him struggling throughout his life for others' happiness, for others' survival." She paused, remembering. "He was like ... you cannot even imagine a person like him. Thirty-five or forty years back he completed his MBBS¹² so he was a little bit famous. He was a social and political activist and most people know me because of my father. He was highly qualified but he never went for money. You have seen my house in Narkeldanga with only one room. He could have earned *lakhs*¹³ but he didn't work for money, he wanted to help others. I inherited the job from him," she said with a laugh. "So, because of my father, I know that I can do something positive in my future. I know very well that I *have* to."

A picnic in Narkeldanga

In this section I draw on two group interviews I conducted with Rehnuma-e-Niswaan students to highlight the patience and perseverance with which Tabassum approaches her work. In February 2007, 31 girls and women were enrolled in a six-month sewing course taught from Tabassum's family home in Kasai Basti (see

about Islam, whether habitat and class differences shape attitudes, and how they negotiate social relationships (with men as well as women) in their communities.

¹² Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS).

¹³ One *lakh* is equal to one hundred thousand units.

Photograph 15). Classes were on hold due to a death in the teacher's family but some of them continued to meet anyway "because we like spending time and talking with others," as one said. I held two group interviews with around fifteen of the students who ranged in age from 13 to 34. Some of the unmarried girls attended a local formal school and most undertook home-centred work (such as making kites or paper bags, or sewing garments). Married women said they were kept busy with household duties and some also performed home-centred work. All said their families were happy for them to attend the course.

Photograph 15. Rehnuma-e-Niswaan students in Narkeldanga



Rehnuma-e-Niswaan students bring some of their work to show Tabassum (in blue, on the right) at her family home in Kasai Basti, Narkeldanga, in February 2007.

"My father knows that if I can earn some money, he doesn't have to pay for me from his own pocket," said one young woman. "After learning hand embroidery, if I get the chance to work in a boutique I will."

"Will that be in Narkeldanga or would you go somewhere else?" I asked, aware that there were few opportunities for such work in their *basti*.

"There are more jobs in Park Circus or Beckbagan," said one of the married women. "It's okay to learn these skills here, but if I want to work outside Narkeldanga I have to ask my husband."

There was a chorus of agreement and some discussion about this. Tabassum, who neither internalises nor embodies these gender norms, tried to encourage them by using me as an example.

“Look, she has spent thousands of rupees to come here to learn,” she said, pointing at me. “She came all the way from New Zealand to India for her education. And you’re telling me you cannot go outside of Narkeldanga?”

For my part, I thought that Tabassum was a good role model who showed her students how a Muslim woman could be married with children and retain her freedom. I was curious to know whether any of those present during the group interviews knew of similar women in Narkeldanga. They didn’t. I asked Tabassum why she thought there weren’t more women like her.

“Actually a lot of the women have the same ideas as me, and their families support them, but their in-laws might not agree. There are a lot of reasons,” she said.

The group interviews gave me an opportunity to observe how Tabassum negotiates conservative social norms regarding female mobility. Tabassum commented on how much the girls and women were enjoying themselves during the first interview.

“Lorena, we must plan a picnic with them,” she said between bouts of laughter.

“That’s a great idea,” I agreed.

Tabassum put the idea to the girls, who responded enthusiastically (“We can go anywhere with you!” said one). We began planning the picnic, which would involve a trip outside the *basti* for all women enrolled in the course, and agreed to meet again once they had asked their families for permission. At the second meeting Tabassum started discussing venues (the favoured option being the zoological gardens), bus fares, and calculating how much the picnic would cost. Less than half of the women would go. Some did not get permission from their husbands or fathers and money was an issue for others.

“If it is twenty rupees for the picnic I don’t know if I can afford that,” said one. “My husband only gives me five rupees per week for myself.”

“You must try,” Tabassum urged her.

“Money isn’t the problem here,” she told me afterwards. “It’s because the men don’t want the women to go out of Narkeldanga and experience a picnic.”

In the end we compromised and held the picnic at Tabassum’s family home with much laughter and noise. “It’s the same with the course,” Tabassum said later. “You have seen, no? They didn’t go to the picnic because their families didn’t allow it. But I know that after three or four times their families will also allow them to go on picnics. That I know.”

Tabassum's determination and conviction were also apparent in the way she spoke of the future. She has a lot of well-conceived plans for Rehnuma-e-Niswaan. In fact, most of the time I spent with Tabassum involved discussing her future plans rather than observing current activities, as more often than not she had experienced small but significant setbacks that meant no classes ran during my visits (a teacher had to postpone classes after the death of a close relative, for example, or they simply had no money to pay for materials). I turn to her plans in the final section of this chapter.

“Rehnuma-e-Niswaan will become a very famous organisation”

In this section I focus on the two main themes arising from the majority of my conversations with Tabassum: future plans and her search for funding. As part of her goal to economically empower women, Tabassum plans to introduce classes about marketing as well as how to stitch and tailor, “otherwise they will learn the skills and sit idle at home without knowing how to sell their products.” She also recognises the need for training in functional literacy and numeracy, saying “these girls are not always literate. We should give them education because without literacy they cannot change their lifestyles.” Another plan involves offering training programmes for boys and men.

“What I have seen in our locality is that girls and women are very conscientious in their work, more conscious about their future, and more hardworking in comparison with boys. They *want* to change their lifestyle,” said Tabassum. “We are working with girls first because getting men to join is quite difficult. If girls' lives can change, if they can become strong financially and socially, then they can convince their fathers, their brothers and their uncles to come to us, and they can come to learn.”

“That's a good strategy, non-confrontational,” I said.

“Yes, first we have to work with girls because we want it to run smoothly. Then of course we will work with boys and men too.”

Tabassum also plans to encourage micro-credit and small savings groups. “I got this idea (for savings groups and micro-credit initiatives) from the West Bengal Minorities Development and Finance Corporation a few years ago,” she told me. “I saw a group of fishermen associated with it form a savings scheme. They had more than twenty thousand members who contributed one rupee every day and had saved five hundred thousand rupees. Yes, that much!” she said in response to my raised eyebrows.

“Is it a bit like SEWA?” I asked, curious to know what she thought of the Self Employed Women's Association.

“I have heard of SEWA but I don't know any people involved with it.”

“What about the Grameen Bank?” was my next question.

“In Bangladesh? I have heard of it, but I don’t know them. I called someone from that fishing collective and from the West Bengal Minorities Development and Finance Corporation. He helped me a lot. We made a lot of plans a few years back, but somehow the micro-credit programme failed. *Inshallah* when we start our new project we’ll begin micro-credit.”

“How will you run it?”

“At the end of each course, which will have twenty five women, we will encourage them to form a support group which can collectively undertake the economic activities they have been trained for. We’ll tell them to contribute some money and use it to ensure they have startup costs and the means for their initial products. After two years we should have six groups that can network with each other. This will help ensure long-term social security.”

I suggest that Tabassum’s emphasis on networking and social security can be viewed as an effort to generate collective agency and social capital as well as economic capital. She is well aware of the constraints caused by insufficient economic capital – as I indicated earlier, Tabassum and her husband carry all of the financial responsibility for Rehnuma-e-Niswaan. Our conversations often turned to the subject of funding. She has submitted applications to various organisations over the years but only received support from the WBMDFC, which provided teachers. Tabassum decided to approach overseas donors for funding, particularly those in the United States and United Kingdom, because a small grant in dollars or pounds would become a huge sum in Indian rupees.

“I will start a new course soon,” she commented frequently. “I will not stop, *Inshallah*. Rehnuma-e-Niswaan will become a very famous organisation.”

In January 2007 Tabassum told me about her latest plans for a year-long Master course in embroidery and fashion design for girls who had already completed initial classes in tailoring and embroidery. This course would extend the training package to include classes in high value embroidery, batik printing, fabric painting, and pattern design, creating exquisite products to sell in local boutiques and for export. She also planned to start her micro-credit programme. Through her contact with Ramaswamy, Tabassum met Sita (my supervisor) and her mother, Gomathy Venkateswar. Gomathy’s networks with organisations such as the US-based Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund (VGIF), and her concerted efforts to help Tabassum, opened up new opportunities for Rehnuma-e-Niswaan,¹⁴ and in 2007 Tabassum succeeded in obtaining a grant from VGIF to pay for materials and the salary of a master sewing teacher.

¹⁴ This is one of the reasons why Tabassum holds Ramaswamy in high esteem. His sustained and unconventional efforts, and the altruistic nature of his engagements, were vital to the creation of Rehnuma-e-Niswaan (as well as HPP and Talimi Haq School). Ramaswamy deployed his social capital in introducing Tabassum (and HPP’s volunteers) to various people in his networks – me included – and his individual efforts have had a snowball effect in helping to transform people’s lives.

Unfortunately it has been difficult to remain in contact with Tabassum and I do not know how the course went, although I understand she has exhibited and sold the students' creations.¹⁵ I also understand that some of her girls have returned to school to complete their education and are considering college (as tertiary education centres are called in India). Others have asked her to run a makeup artistry course so they can increase their income-generating capabilities by providing makeup services at weddings. These outcomes indicate that Tabassum has achieved her aim to "give girls dreams".

"I cannot change society into what I want," she said one day. "I cannot change it, but at least I can give them some ideas. I can change their ideas. So this is my goal, this is my aim. I want to give them dreams so they can achieve their goals."

"Do you mean hope?" I asked.

After a pause, she said: "Yeah, hope. I also tell them that I am giving you dreams. I heard a woman say in an interview once, 'beggars aren't people without money. One can't have money every day. I think beggars are those without dreams'. I agree with her. If you don't have dreams, you cannot go anywhere, you just exist and don't strive for anything." She paused, thinking. "After you give them hope they think 'I can actually do this'. And women are happy with their lives. They are *living*."

This chapter has described how Rehnuma-e-Niswaan works to improve the lives of Muslim girls and women in Narkeldanga, Raja Bazaar and Park Circus through initiatives that in the short term can sometimes reproduce existing inequalities (e.g., by reinforcing home-centred work), but ultimately aim to transform them. Like Talimi Haq School, Rehnuma-e-Niswaan does more than provide vocational training to girls and women from some of the poorest households in these areas: it also generates collective agency and helps its graduates convert their vocational skills into economic and social capital. Tabassum's future plans, and the way she engages in the present with a world that is not yet here, illustrate how hope and agency are always embedded in social relations.

In describing Tabassum's efforts to economically empower women, this chapter has also told a story of resilience and determination in the face of adversity. Determination is also a key theme in the next chapter, which explores the experiences of women in a very different setting: Lae, PNG. This next chapter provides an opportunity to examine the similarities and differences in the way that women organise collectively to achieve their goals in a very different context. First, however, I provide a brief interlude that reflects on my experiences of working with Bing.

¹⁵ I will follow up with Tabassum when I return to share my research findings in 2011.

Working with Bing

[Interlude 7. Reflections]

I first met Bing Sawanga in 2001 and have spent time with her on each subsequent visit to Lae. In 2007 I was fortunate to find Bing between consultancy contracts and she agreed to work as my research assistant. Bing, who began her career as a science teacher for grades 7-10, has a long history of involvement with community development work and over the years has taken on a variety of roles including literacy trainer, community liaison officer, committee member and project co-ordinator for organisations including ADRA, CDS, VDT,¹ the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the PNG Department of Education,² the Japanese International Corporation Agency (JICA), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).³ She has received travel awards from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that enabled her to visit Thailand, India and Nepal to produce material on literacy and informal training for adult women and to study community learning centres. In addition to working full-time, Bing actively volunteers for several organisations including the YWCA and Soroptimists International. "It's just an interest of mine, to encourage women in literacy," she said in response to my comment that she must have fantastic time-management skills.

Bing belongs to the Butibam and Yalu clans, two of Lae's traditional landowning groups. Bing's mother worked as a *hausmeri* for German Lutheran missionaries in the area and was taught to read and write. Bing's mother was also a member of Lae's original Gejamsao group⁴ in the 1950s. Bing remembers going along to meetings, which often involved playing basketball, sewing and cooking as well as bible study and that had "an atmosphere of fun, excitement and motivation". As a child Bing was among the first group to attend the primary school on the Lutheran compound. Bing and her husband have three children, two of whom are completing higher education and her eldest daughter works as an intellectual property lawyer in Port Moresby.

Working with Bing proved invaluable to my research. She is efficient and has a wealth of experience with women's groups. She is just as comfortable in a *meri* blouse as she is Western-style clothing, is quick to find common ground with people from a

¹ Bing worked as VDT's Gender Development Programme coordinator.

² Bing coordinated the Department of Education's Elementary Education Reform programme from 1994-2000. See Avalos (1993), Weeks (1993), Siegel (1997) or Kale & Marimyas (2003) for discussions of the Education Reform.

³ She coordinated an ADB-funded water and sanitation project promoting ventilated pit toilets, health education and sanitation awareness for communities in Lae.

⁴ As I mentioned in Chapter 3, 'Gejamsao' was the name given to Lutheran women's groups (see Horndasch, 1999).

range of different backgrounds, and is a confident public speaker. Bing acted as interpreter, translated my information sheets into *tok Pisin*, made contact with the groups on my behalf, facilitated group meetings, and reflected on meetings and interviews with me afterwards. The reflective conversations I had with Bing gave me an insider's perspective on group dynamics and issues I had missed as an outsider. My fieldnotes are replete with comments like the one below:

Working with Bing as a research assistant is great. Because she's been so involved in these networks for many years, she knows a lot about these organisations and can prompt the women to talk about things that I don't know to ask about. She also asks very insightful questions, as much for her own knowledge as mine I think. She's *interested* in my research and thinks I'm working on some very important issues, so I feel like she's 100% behind me and my project. I'm very confident in my data and happy to work with her.

(Fieldnotes, 7 August 2007)

Bing played a significant role in shaping my research by advising me on the best methods to use (focus groups, group interviews, individual interviews and participant-observation) and suggesting groups I could meet with. Based on her knowledge of the area and understanding of what I wanted to achieve, we decided to visit a group in a peri-urban settlement and another group of urban traditional landowners so I could see the differences between these two contexts. Tensiti Literacy Programme was the peri-urban settlement she selected as she had heard about their efforts and was keen to visit them herself. Butibam Women's Flower Group, a newly established group of older women living in Butibam village, was the traditional landowning group she selected. These two organisations are described in the following chapters.

Chapter 7

“I’ll know many things when I can read and write”: Tensiti Literacy Programme

Tensiti Literacy Programme is a grassroots, volunteer-led initiative that teaches children, women and men how to read and write in *tok Pisin* and English. In 2007 over two hundred women attended adult literacy classes when they could, some travelling hours by bus from settlements other than Tensiti, and a few men had recently joined the class. They meet in a small schoolhouse on Mondays to Thursdays from 4-6pm. During the day the schoolhouse is used to teach around seventy children from Tensiti settlement whose parents can’t afford formal school fees. Salea Zerie, a teacher at Tensiti Primary School, teaches the afternoon adult classes, coordinates teachers from her school to teach the free daytime elementary classes, and supplies learning materials.

This chapter discusses how Tensiti Literacy Programme contributes to my participants’ quest to create more meaningful lives for themselves and their families. My interaction with Tensiti Literacy Programme participants was quite different from the time I spent with my participants in Howrah and Kolkata (as I discussed in the *Étude*), so I begin by providing a brief description of my visits to Tensiti. This is followed with the story of Tensiti Literacy Programme. I then discuss two roads to literacy in PNG (transportation networks and money) in order to understand why the country has such low levels of literacy and education for women. In the final section I explore the women’s reasons for attending classes at Tensiti Literacy Programme, identifying three culturally constructed projects related to literacy in their responses and illustrating a range of literacy practices in urban areas of PNG.

“Welcome to another city of Lae”

Potholes and security concerns shaped my first visit to Tensiti, as I noted in Chapter 2. On a humid, overcast August afternoon I collected my passengers – Wendy and her friends for ‘security’, Bing, and Aba Bamua from the Lae District Council of

Women¹ – from various locations in town before driving out to Tensiti. Aba directed us through a series of narrow dirt roads within Tensiti, finally coming to a halt outside a schoolhouse set back on a grassy field. We piled out of the jeep and went to stand by two palm leaves that had been propped up by the entrance to the school grounds (see Photograph 16). Around thirty children, some adorned with leaves and skirts made from grass or rice sacks, and twenty adults eventually gathered behind the palm leaves. Salea and Enny Mepore came out to greet us.

Photograph 16. Tensiti Literacy Programme participants preparing to greet us



Men, women and children gather behind palm leaves as they prepare for our arrival. The schoolhouse roof is visible in the background.

“Welcome to another city of Lae!” said Salea, smiling broadly as she shook our hands. Salea is a primary school teacher, as I mentioned above, who teaches the adult literacy classes and is fluent in English. “This is Enny,” she said, introducing us. “She’s one of the main driving forces behind the school.”

Enny’s English was not as fluent but she explained that they were nearly ready and asked us to line up by the entrance, which we did (except for our male ‘security’ escort, who stayed by the jeep). Two men with guitars started playing quietly while some women ceremoniously removed the palm leaves. The children sang a welcome

¹ Aba networks with 23 women’s groups in Lae as part of her work as President of the Lae District Council of Women (LDCW). The LDCW provides training for women and women’s groups (literacy classes, vocational training, courses in organisation and management), operates a micro-credit scheme for women, and works to ensure women have opportunities to participate in local tourism and other promotional activities. Tensiti Literacy Programme is part of Aba’s network and she accompanied us in order to introduce us to the group.

song and placed garlands made of leaves over our heads. After a prayer, the adults and children formed an aisle and we walked through them to stand in front of the schoolhouse for another prayer and to watch more singing and dancing. This welcome ceremony reminded me of pōwhiri² I have attended in New Zealand, particularly when we shook hands with everyone present before being ushered inside.

Built in 2006, the two-roomed schoolhouse is made from traditional bush materials (wooden walls, thatched roof) with a gap between the walls and the roof to allow air to circulate. Rooms are furnished with a large blackboard, a desk for the teacher, woven mats on the ground, and a couple of chairs for guests. The walls are decorated with learning materials (pictures with words in *tok Pisin* and English) that are removed when classes are not in session so they are not damaged by rain or children's play (see Photograph 17).

Photograph 17. Tensiti Literacy Programme's schoolhouse



Salea (standing) was teaching a class when we arrived on our second trip to Tensiti.
Enny (seated) is wearing a yellow shirt.

Bing, Aba and I sat on the chairs at the front of one of the rooms while Salea sat at her desk and everyone else crowded in to sit on the mats. Aba introduced us and Bing explained the purpose of my research and our visit to the group. The visit took the form of a semi-formal focus group discussion with me asking questions and the women in turn asking me questions about my family, my education, and how my research

² A Māori ceremony used to formally greet and welcome visitors.

could help them. Bing and Aba also asked their own questions of the group. At the end of the discussion Bing congratulated the women on their efforts and the changes they were making in their families' lives, informed them about fundraising options and upcoming events they might not have known about, and emphasised how important it was to network with other groups. I informally interviewed Salea before the visit concluded with a shared meal. My subsequent visit to Tensiti followed a similar but less formal format (there was no welcome ceremony, for example). We had another group discussion and sang songs together in English, after which three of the oldest women (who Salea described as the "slowest to learn") stood up to recite their names and a few other phrases in *tok ples*, *tok Pisin* and English.

Tensiti Literacy Programme's liklik stori

In this section I recount the *liklik stori*³ of the Tensiti Literacy Programme as told by Salea and Enny. Salea is approaching retirement age and has lived in Tensiti for many years, originally coming to Lae from a coastal village in 1960. Enny, who is younger than Salea, moved from a rural village to Lae after getting married. She lives in Tensiti with her husband and children and has successfully repaid small loans from the Lae District Council of Women's micro-credit scheme, which she used to start income-generating projects (such as a fishpond and small chicken farm). This is a story of resourcefulness, collective agency, and investment in literacy.

Like a large number of literacy and vocational training initiatives in PNG, the Tensiti Literacy Programme was established by a church organisation. Two volunteers working for the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society (NZBMS) started an adult literacy class for women living in Tensiti (not all of whom necessarily belonged to the church) in the early 2000s. The volunteers also encouraged the women to farm chickens and rabbits and donated five sewing machines for them to learn how to sew clothes as another income-generating activity. When the volunteers came to the end of their service in 2002 they returned to New Zealand.⁴ Although the women have tried to remain in contact with the NZBMS, they have not heard from the volunteers since.

"We didn't give up when they left," said Enny. "We mothers⁵ worked hard. We invited people to visit so they would support us. We prepared food for them and

³ Short or little story.

⁴ I heard rumours that the female NZBMS volunteer's house in Tensiti was burgled and she might have been terrorised and/or attacked by *raskols*, causing her to return to NZ early in fear. Whether or not the rumours are true, they illustrate how Tensiti is portrayed as a dangerous, unsafe place, especially for women.

⁵ The women referred to themselves as "mothers." C. Fox notes that in PNG, "the identity 'woman' is about being a 'wife' and 'mother'" (1999:35). Dickson-Waiko (2003:101-102) comments that the postcolonial state in PNG constructs women in gendered terms (as mothers before citizens) in reflection of the relational way that women view themselves, as I discussed in Chapter 3.

showed them what we were doing. We didn't have this land then, we used to meet under a tree for classes. We found volunteer teachers to help us out."

Tensiti Literacy Programme provides an example of a women-led group that does not experience the kind of leadership issues described in Chapter 3. The group does face another common problem that can lead to failure, however: lack of funding. The group was not successful in attracting funding or external support for the school (except for a K400 grant from the Lae District Administration to purchase chairs and tables). Also, none of the volunteer teachers lasted very long.

"All these mothers were too difficult to handle because they just can't learn to speak [a new language] and write quickly at this age," Salea explained. "When you teach little kids they learn very fast. They are faster than their mothers. The teachers found it very hard and left. I was here and knew what was going on, but I left to teach in a remote area for three years."

Enny continued her story, standing amidst the seated group that had gathered in the schoolhouse and speaking in *tok Pisin*. "When Salea went away, we didn't learn because we had no teacher. But we didn't give up. When we heard that Salea had returned in 2005, we had no teacher so decided to go to her. We visited her and asked for her help. She said no, she didn't want to, and she gave many excuses. We said 'please, we really need to learn how to read and write'. We went to her house again and again. Five times we called on her until she finally said, 'yes!'" Some of the women listening to Enny murmured their approval and applauded this comment.

"I was busy with work teaching at a primary school and I'd get home late. When they came to see me in the evenings I was very tired," Salea said. "With them continually coming to my home, it told me that their interest was great so I knew I wouldn't be wasting my time. That's why I decided to come back and help them. I found out what they had already and what they needed. They said that they were having classes under a tree. I said 'okay, then let's do something about that'."

That first 'something' took the form of a wheelbarrow push⁶ through the settlement and market in early 2006, raising K97. In 2008 the national minimum weekly wage rate was K37.20 (Bank of Papua New Guinea, 2008), so K97 was a significant amount of money. Enny then approached the Lae City Council for help. The Council offered to pay her for cutting the grass on the sides of the roads, so Enny organised a group of women to perform that task.

"The council paid us a cheque, six hundred kina," said Enny. "We cashed it at the bank and told all of the mothers to come and have a meeting. We agreed to build a little schoolhouse with the six hundred and ninety seven kina we had."

⁶ A fundraising activity whereby people throw monetary donations into a wheelbarrow.

One of the group's major achievements was securing the land upon which their schoolhouse is built. In this instance, the land was reserved by the Department of Lands for educational purposes. Enny approached the Department and was told to submit a tender for the land, which needed to include plans for elementary⁷ as well as primary school classes. Being part of a group gave Enny and the other women the means to access land (a form of wealth Bourdieu might describe as economic capital) that would not have been available to them as individuals. The lack of land available for development is a serious concern for planners in Lae, as I noted in Chapter 2, and competition was tough.

"There were four groups fighting for this land. We were awarded the title and the land was given to the Tensiti Literacy Programme here," Salea said. After winning the tender in 2006, Enny organised for the schoolhouse to be built. "She did it all by herself, with her little children," recalled Salea. "When she bought the materials, she and the women built it themselves, with their children and young boys from nearby working for them. That's how much interest there was."

Adult literacy classes began in earnest once the schoolhouse was built. "The mothers wanted to have classes from morning to afternoon like any children, normal school hours," said Salea. "I said, 'you need to find someone who can spend all their time here because I'm engaged to another profession, I can't do that. If you still want me, my time will be from four to six pm'. They said 'okay, we'll just have to go with that'. So I made the time available to them from Monday to Thursday and I come in when I've finished work at the primary school."

As I mentioned earlier, around 200 women and a few men⁸ attend classes on a semi-regular basis. "The numbers are increasing every now and then, but many of them are unemployed so sometimes they come, sometimes they don't," said Salea, explaining that attendance fluctuates because most of the women are housewives who also participate in informal economies (e.g., selling cooked food, betel nut and vegetables at markets).⁹ "They don't come when they have to use their time to look for things¹⁰ to help their families. When they have spare time, they come in."

⁷ Elementary schools cater for the first three years of a child's formal schooling in PNG. Children begin elementary school at age six and classes are taught in *tok ples* (the local language) in rural areas. Elementary schools in urban settlements like Tensiti, where people speak a variety of *tok ples*, also teach classes in *tok Pisin* as it is a common language. Elementary schools prepare children for formal primary school (Grades 3-8), where a transition in language of instruction is made from *tok ples* to *tok Pisin* and English. The PNG government introduced elementary education into the formal school system in the 1995 Education (Amendment) Act as part of the Education Reform (Guy, 2009; see also Kale & Marimyas, 2003; Kidu, 2005; C. Fox, 1999; and Siegel, 1997).

⁸ I did not interview the men individually so did not hear their perspectives on being part of what began as a women's group.

⁹ There are few ethnographic accounts of the experiences of girls and women in urban settlements in Lae and other towns in PNG, an area of research I am interested in pursuing. Zimmer-Tamakoshi (1998b) discusses the role of housewives in an urban settlement in Goroka. Toft's (1985) account of marital violence in Port Moresby provides some insight into the stress that can arise from living in urban areas.

¹⁰ Such as food, firewood and money, obtained through the kind of informal economies described by Barber (1993).

To start with, Salea taught the women how to read and write in *tok Pisin* but she soon introduced English language lessons. “We started off with *Pisin* but they all said, ‘we speak *Pisin* all the time at home. But when we go to shops, when we go anywhere in town, all the writing is in English. You just throw away your *Pisin* and teach us English.’ I started at the elementary level, ABC and that. We are now at grade three level.”

The schoolhouse also had its own tap, a recent addition.¹¹ “With this new water supply,¹² we have our first class of elementary school children,” Salea said, indicating the children sitting on the mat and playing outside the schoolhouse. “All of these children you see, about sixty-nine of them, they are the ones whose parents cannot afford to pay school fees at the elementary level. They are left out. So we bring them in and provide free education.”

“I supply most of the [material] things,” said Salea in concluding her story. “The knowledge, I come and give it. I also engage my elementary teachers [from Tensiti Primary School] to teach. One went away for a training course this year and came back and didn’t want to continue here. We didn’t want the school to close so we found another three teachers. They are now here, and that’s how far we’ve gone. We built the schoolhouse, we have the water supply, now the elementary class. All this has been done by these mothers, initiated and led by Enny and Priscilla. I’m very grateful for what they have done so far. Already they have achieved literacy for mothers and I am really proud to work with them. I hope when I retire I will continue to make this place a youth learning centre. *Liklik stori tasol. Em tasol.*”¹³

Roads to literacy for women in PNG

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, PNG has very low literacy rates for women (43.9%) and men (55.2%) over the age of 15 (Government of Papua New Guinea & United Nations in Papua New Guinea, 2004:iv). There are significant regional differences: at 64%, adult literacy rates in Morobe Province are above the national average of 49.2%, possibly because it has a higher urban population (around one

¹¹ In 1994 Kaitilla found that almost 90% of the households surveyed in Tensiti were connected to the town water supply (the remainder collected rainwater), whereas only 18.8% were connected to an electricity supply (1994a:318). This situation is reversed in PM Basti and Narkeldanga, where most homes have an electricity connection but limited access to water.

¹² Access to drinking water is a key factor preventing girls from attending school, as a report entitled *Establishing Child Friendly Schools in 6 Provinces* (Tovika, Kabekabe, & Buia, 2004) highlighted. According to the authors, the schools they visited all sourced water from rain collection tanks which were insufficient in number and ran dry for between three and six months of the year (Tovika et al., 2004:12). In addition, girls complained about boys “pushing them out” of long queues at the water tanks: “They say they are helpless because the boys are stronger and there is no code of conduct governing girls and boys behavior toward each other in schools” (sic) (Tovika et al., 2004:12). Many of the children in that study carried their own water to school, but C. Fox (1999) notes how unequal gender relations can affect this practice in her research on schooling in PNG: “Some boys grabbed the containers that girls had brought with them. Other boys actually went without water and risked becoming sick rather than carry their own to school – ‘that is a girl’s job,’ they said” (C. Fox, 1999:39).

¹³ “That’s our little story. That’s all”

quarter of Morobe's population of 539,404 lives in urban areas) compared with other provinces such as Enga or Southern Highlands, where literacy rates are far below the national average (Government of Papua New Guinea & United Nations in Papua New Guinea, 2004:iv; Morobe Provincial Government, 2008b:24; National Statistical Office, 2002). In this section I draw on Tensiti Literacy Programme's *liklik stori* to discuss how transportation networks and money (as physical and metaphorical roads to development) contribute to low levels of literacy and education for women in PNG.

The first road is a literal one and concerns physical access to schools. As I discussed in Chapter 2, PNG's rugged terrain means that transportation networks play a vital role in delivering education and other services. People living in remote areas are less likely to attend school if roads are poorly maintained and travel time (by vehicle, foot or canoe) is high (Romaine, 1992:75). A recent study by Gibson and Rozelle demonstrates a strong correlation between poverty, school attainment, and access to roads in PNG, showing that on average, people in the Momase region have to walk more than an hour to reach the nearest road or elementary school and almost five hours to reach a secondary school (2003:166-168).

The Morobe Provincial Government reports that its rural literacy rates are approximately 25% lower than urban literacy rates (Morobe Provincial Government, 2008b:24), indicating that physical location affects literacy and education. Gender disparities in adult literacy rates are also greater in rural areas (63% for men, 50.2% for women) than urban areas (86.8% for men, 79.8% for women) of Morobe Province (Morobe Provincial Government, 2008b:24).¹⁴ Inadequate infrastructure and access to schools (as well as markets and health services) are key reasons for rural-urban migration, as I noted in Chapter 2, and a recent analysis of Lae District's 2007 pupil enrolment data indicates that migrants seeking education place pressure on schools in urban areas: "Lae District does not have an adequate supply of schools to meet the increasing demand for education. The high demand for education is caused by internal and external migration of children, particularly from the Markham and Huon-Gulf Districts, and the Highlands and Momase Provinces" (Kukari, 2010:9).

Salea, Enny, and many of the women involved in Tensiti Literacy Programme migrated to Lae from remote areas. Salea is originally from a coastal village within Morobe Province and came to Lae in 1960 to attend primary school. She values education highly and is especially passionate about teaching in remote areas with no educational services.

¹⁴ Although there are regional variations, the gender bias against girls and women in PNG is well documented (see Dickson-Waiko, 2009; C. Fox, 1999; Gibson & Rozelle, 2004; Macintyre, 1998; Sepoe, 2000). Gibson and Rozelle (2004) found that while there is a gender bias in favour of boys in the 7-14 age group in rural areas (based on an analysis of household expenditure on adult goods), there is no evidence of bias against girls in urban areas, lending weight to the suggestion that place affects literacy and education. Chapter 3 discusses the low social status of women and changing gender relations in PNG.

"I come from a very remote area and my village, and villages nearby, don't have schools," she told me. "Everyone wants to read and write, but in order for their children to make a change in their families, all children must come to Lae to stay with families and *wantoks* to get an education. I went through that system. For that reason I left Lae city and went back to my village. I did the groundwork so at least they'd have a school there and this is the first year that my village has teacher. I thought I'd go back and start another school for adults, but at the same time I can see a vision for these mothers and fathers in bringing their kids here, to town."

Physical access to schools is uneven in urban areas, however, especially in unauthorised settlements with little or no civic amenities. Some of the women travel to Tensiti by PMV¹⁵ from other settlements in order to attend adult literacy classes. Wendy, who joined us inside the schoolhouse at Tensiti while her friends kept watch over our vehicle, was impressed with some of the women's travel stories.

"One of those ladies lives near One Mile," Wendy said later as we reflected on the meeting.¹⁶ "She heard that there was a school to teach mothers to read and write and she goes all the way to Tensiti for that. There's another lady too, they both go to Tensiti to learn to read and write." Wendy shook her head.

Sensing a tone of awe in Wendy's voice, I asked, "How long would that trip take on a PMV?"

"One Mile is ... do you remember that service station on the way to Yalu?"

I nodded. Wendy, Bing and I had driven to Yalu village in order to make an appointment to return and meet with a women's group there on another occasion. Many of the women I met with had no phone or vehicle, so access to transport and roads were vital to my own education about women's groups in PNG.

"From there to Tensiti, I wouldn't like it. You can't go direct. You have to get a PMV from One Mile to Eriku, then another from Eriku to Kamkumung, Kamkumung to Uni Gate, then Uni Gate to Tensiti. But at Tensiti the PMV won't go inside, it's not safe. It'll stop and you have to walk all the way down [to the access road nearest the school], then all the way into the block, just to learn to read and write," said Wendy, drawing out the vowel in 'all' to emphasise the distance. "Forget it! I'll be a *kanaka*¹⁷ for the rest of my life," she laughed.

Another woman described her PMV journey to Tensiti. "I have to find my own fare, it's one kina," she said in response to Salea's question about how she paid for her trips. "The journey isn't too bad. I take a PMV to town then catch another one direct to

¹⁵ Public motor vehicle, generally a run-down mini-bus.

¹⁶ Wendy's presence during meetings and group interviews proved invaluable when we would get home and discuss the day's activities. Wendy was often able to get a different perspective from Bing or me by sitting at the back of meetings with the women.

¹⁷ *Kanaka*, an archaic term for villager, is sometimes used in a derogatory manner to refer to illiterate or 'backward' people. Romaine (1992:15 note 13) discusses the etymology of the term in Melanesia. Wendy is literate in English and *tok Pisin* but sometimes jokingly referred to herself as a *kanaka*.

Tensiti. It goes down the back road. Sometimes I don't leave here until six o'clock and it's seven o'clock or later by the time I get home in the evening, but I really want to learn to read and write. When I can pay the fare, I come to Tensiti."

The second road to literacy concerns money, a necessity to pay for PMV fares, school fees,¹⁸ and to adequately fund school services. The cost of education, and who should pay for it, is a complex issue in PNG. PNG's various governments have instituted numerous 'user pays' and 'free' education policies¹⁹ in the years since Independence, as Guy (2009) discusses. To ensure financial sustainability in the formal education system, the national government settled on a "shared responsibility policy" in 2003 whereby the Department of Education and provincial governments subsidise infrastructure and maintenance activities, and parents are expected to pay school and project fees which fund basic materials and supplies for classroom use (Guy, 2009:142). However, parents' inability to pay school fees is often ranked first in lists of the major barriers to literacy and education in PNG (see C. Fox, 1999:41; Tovika et al., 2004:11).

The Tensiti Literacy Programme began classes for elementary children who are "left out" of the formal education system because their parents cannot afford to pay school fees, as noted earlier. Salea did not discuss the gender bias affecting household decisions about which children should go to school²⁰ so I do not know whether this is an issue in Tensiti. Most of the women present said that their husbands and children supported them in attending literacy classes,²¹ illustrating how important social relations are to their quest for literacy. However, Salea did mention the problems Tensiti Literacy Programme had in funding activities and retaining volunteer teachers. Insufficient teachers (especially in remote areas), high turnover (partly due to low

¹⁸ Access to education can be extremely uneven in urban areas due to school fees, as Connell (1997:244) notes, with divisions arising between highly-paid expatriate and *elite* residents who can afford to send their children to high quality international schools, and those who can't.

¹⁹ Such policies were part of the structural adjustments suggested by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and implemented by the Government of PNG in the late 1980s and mid-1990s. In 1993, Avalos commented: "A popular and current argument against free education is that it encourages a 'hand-out mentality'. Parents who do not take responsibility for financing their children's education are seen as developing a dependent attitude which expects that everything will be given to them by the State" (Avalos, 1993:276-277). Kulick & Stroud (1993), Romaine (1992) and Swatridge (1985) discuss the links between literacy, education, the English language, Christianity, and 'hand-out' or cargo-type expectations.

²⁰ C. Fox comments: "If parents have to pay fees, and money is short, then the boys in the family take precedence over girls" (1999:42). Tovika et al. (2004:11) also report that "education, especially girls' education, is not a priority expenditure item [for families]. Large families tend to prioritise payment for boys' school fees." There are a variety of reasons for this, including perceptions of the low returns to education for girls (education does not add value to brideprice, for example, and girls move away from the family home after marriage, taking the benefits of their education with them) and access to cash, which is primarily controlled by men who might favour spending it on boys (see Gibson & Rozelle, 2004; C. Fox, 1999; Koczberski, 2007; Macintyre, 1998; Tovika et al., 2004).

²¹ Many of the men I spoke with in settlements recognised that their wives could contribute to household income through informal economies if they increased their literacy skills. Some had even taken over responsibility for household duties, such as caring for children and preparing meals, because their wives earned more money than they did. For the most part, women performed their household duties before going to class in the afternoons. A woman who travels to Tensiti from another settlement said that her sons bring in the laundry and cook dinner when she's out, keeping some aside for her and coming to meet her at the PMV so she doesn't have to walk alone at night. Changing gender relations in urban settlements would make a fruitful area of further study.

remuneration), poor teacher training, and teacher absenteeism are all important factors contributing to low literacy and education rates in PNG (Ahai & Bopp, 1995; C. Fox, 1999; Tovika et al., 2004).

Later, as we reflected on our visit, Bing used the concept of integral human development to describe their activities.²² I heard her emphasise the importance of integral human development at several of our meetings so asked her to elaborate. She said that when she trains teachers to teach at community schools like this that do not receive external funding, she encourages community members to reciprocate their teachers' efforts by bringing them food, firewood or other small goods, or cash.²³

"This kind of thing is now being built into how the community supports its own literacy teacher," she explained. "These teachers commit their time, taking away time from their own families, to help the community. A lot of people ask, 'Who's going to pay her?' I say, 'You are, because she's helping *you*. I am not benefiting. I'm helping to train her, but you help her to teach you so that you can fulfil your dreams.' The community should take ownership. This is the concept of contributing to help yourself if you have a need. If you were hungry, you would pay for a packet of rice. If you want to learn more so you can help yourself and improve your life, you pay something for that, in kind or in cash. In settlements we encourage people to come in with a packet of rice or biscuits as their contribution to the teacher's food. It's been successful in some communities, but some teachers want to be paid [a salary]. You also need a teacher like Salea who is committed to the community."

This section has outlined some of the key factors contributing to low literacy rates for girls and women in PNG. Next I describe the women's reasons for attending classes at Tensiti Literacy Programme and discuss literacy practices in urban areas of PNG.

Social practices involving literacy in Lae's urban areas

During our visits to Tensiti I asked the women why they wanted to learn to read, write, and speak English. Their answers encompassed a wide range of social practices involving literacy. Following Ortner (2006), I view their collective efforts for

²² Integral human development and self-reliance in education are principles of the Constitution of Independent Papua New Guinea, which reads:

"1. Integral human development.

We declare our first goal to be for every person to be dynamically involved in the process of freeing himself or herself from every form of domination or oppression so that each man or woman will have the opportunity to develop as a whole person in relationship with others.

WE ACCORDINGLY CALL FOR – [...]

(2) education to be based on mutual respect and dialogue, and to promote awareness of our human potential and motivation to achieve our National Goals through *self-reliant effort* ..." ("Constitution of the Independent state of Papua New Guinea", 1975, emphasis added).

²³ This is a common practice in Lae, as I found during interviews with people from various organisations. The YWCA, for example, provides teacher training programmes and encourages communities to take responsibility for their needs by building schoolhouses and assisting teachers with food (personal communication with Irong Narakou, General Secretary of the YWCA, August 2007).

literacy as expressions of agency in the pursuit of culturally defined projects. In this section I share some of the women's responses to illustrate how they conceptualise literacy and the social opportunities it affords. I have identified three interrelated projects in their answers: coping with the demands of everyday life in urban areas, the English language, and Christianity.

The first project involves the literacy practices necessary for everyday life in urban areas.²⁴ One woman commented on the prevalence of written text in Lae, a marked contrast from the village she grew up in:

We had a big problem when we came to town.
Everywhere we go, in offices and the stores, they write everything down.
So we *must* know how to read and write,²⁵ otherwise we won't be able to
read the prices of things we want to buy.
We won't know how much things cost.
And everything is written in English so we must learn that.

Another spoke of the cooking and sewing skills she needed to learn upon moving to Tensiti from her village after her marriage. Many of the women sell cooked food, clothes and handicrafts at markets to supplement household incomes and pursue literacy to learn these practical skills:

I want to learn to read and write so I can cook.
I don't know how to bake scones or bread or anything like that.
If I know how to read and write I'll be able to read recipes.
I'll know how many cups of flour to use, how much baking powder, how
much yeast.
It's hard to cook that type of food if you can't read.
I want to sew too.
I need to know how to read patterns so I can cut material and make
clothes.
I'll know many things when I can read and write.
I want to do good things like teach my children to go to church, and I also
want to cook food, earn money and support my family.

²⁴ Although some of their practices could be described as 'functional literacy', I do not use this term as it is not broad enough to encompass the range of literacy practices the women engage in. As Rogers, Patkar, & Saraswathi (2004:117) point out, functional literacy is a term often applied to literacy learning programmes in developing societies rather than the varying social uses of literacy, which involve more than the (often employment-related) skills necessary to "function" in society.

²⁵ Most of the women restated my question in their responses and repeated certain phrases as they spoke, indicating to me that they were used to speaking in a traditional oratorical style. I was interested to note Wendy's frustration with this style of speaking.

"Women, they talk round in circles. Makes me feel like I don't want to hear it," she complained after a meeting. "They must tell their stories *straight*. That's why we wasted lots of time out there, because they *stori*. You must get to the point, not 'oh we caught the bus, and then in the evening we cook and do this and that'," she said in exasperation.

"I like to hear that though," I said. "I don't know these things."

Wendy laughed. "You like it, yeah. But me, I don't like it. When I hear a good story I like it. Enny and Salea *stori* good, they go to the point."

I suspect that Wendy's exposure to English (in formal schooling and through employment for English-speaking residents) has shaped her view of traditional oratory.

Literacy is also necessary to qualify for small loans offered by organisations such as the Lae District Council of Women, which are used to generate income.²⁶ On a related note, one woman connected literacy with economic independence in the face of domestic violence. This can be an important reason why women pursue literacy in urban settlements, especially if they have moved to an area where they are without the support of close relatives or *wantoks* and feel isolated and dependent on their husbands. In this case, she wanted to improve her family's welfare through income-generating activities:

I want to learn to read and write to look after my family and have my own money.

My husband is a working man.

Sometimes when he comes home he drinks.

Sometimes he doesn't buy any food.

When I ask him where the money is he beats me, so I have to learn how to read and write to earn my own money.

I want to know how to make my own money so I don't have to rely on my husband.

Having the confidence to participate in social activities outside the home, such as attending public meetings, was also frequently mentioned:

There was a big meeting for a health programme.

They told us to go inside and see what it was about.

The men were talking and I saw that many people were writing.

I said, 'I don't know how to read and write, how can I go to this meeting?'

They said, 'just go in and listen'.

But I didn't feel good about that.

When I came out, I felt upset.

I knew that I *must* learn how to read and write.

Another said:

I never went to school.

When I got married and had children, I put my children in school.

When they were at community school I would go to the parents' meetings.

Meetings were in *Pisin* and I understood everything.

Now they go to high school and the parents' meetings are in English.

I don't go to the meetings now.

If I go and they speak to me in English, what will I say to them?

They would laugh at me, so I don't go.

I just stay at home.

The kids come home and tell me what happened.

²⁶ For discussions of the relationship between education and economic development see Bruthiaux (2002), Gannicott & Avalos (1994), Rogers, Hunter, & Uddin (2007), and a collection edited by Robinson-Pant (2004).

As the comments above suggest, being able to communicate in English is an important component of the women's literacy practices in urban areas, and this is the second project I address. Most of the women attending literacy classes and learning English at Tensiti would have been primary school age in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. At that time, government policy decreed that all schools receiving government subsidies were to teach in English only, so unless they had access to a mission or nonformal school that taught in their *tok ples* or *tok Pisin*, it is likely that language posed an obstacle to literacy and education. In a country with over 800 languages, language use in education is hotly debated. PNG's Constitution calls for "all persons and governmental bodies to endeavour to achieve universal literacy in Pisin, Hiri Motu or English, and in "tok ples" or "ita eda tano gado"" ("Constitution of the Independent state of Papua New Guinea", 1975) and government policy regarding language use in education has undergone significant changes over the years.²⁷ Current policy sees formal elementary schools provide education in various *tok ples* and *tok Pisin*, with a transition to English as the language of instruction occurring at primary school.

During her fieldwork in Morobe Province between 1986-1987, Romaine noticed a "linguistic hierarchy" in schools whereby *tok ples* was devalued in relation to *tok Pisin* and English (1992:20). As was the case in India, knowledge of English facilitated access to waged employment in colonial and post-colonial PNG and became a marker of difference between *elites* and *grassroots*. Thus, people with more cultural capital in the form of literacy in English had more opportunities to generate other forms of capital than those without. The women's comments indicate that English literacy is a form of cultural capital that can be used in a range of social situations in town, from purchasing goods and attending school meetings (mentioned above) to enhancing economic capital through employment:

My brother wanted to find a job so I went into town with him.
 I want to work too but you have to speak English at all of the jobs.
 They talk to you in English, which frightens me.
 I didn't know what they were saying so I didn't ask for a job.
 Then I heard about this school for mothers so I came to classes.

Learning English is an empowering process for these women, who gain confidence when they can understand and communicate in English with others

²⁷ See Guy (2009) for a discussion of PNG's history of educational policies. Ahai & Bopp (1995), Avalos (1993), Crossley (1998), Kale & Marimyas (2003), Romaine (1992), Siegel (1997) and Weeks (1993) also discuss language use, literacy and education in colonial and independent PNG.

(including foreign visitors like me). They also pursue English to help further their children's education.²⁸

I come here because I want to help my children when they go to school.

I know how to read and write a little in *Pisin*, but I don't know English.

I want to learn how to read and write in English so I can help my children.

They find it hard at school and I want to help them learn their ABCs and do their homework.

And I want to read the Bible in church.

English was frequently linked with Christianity, the third culturally constructed project I address. As well as introducing women's groups to PNG (see Chapter 3), missionaries also established the first schools in Papua as early as 1872 (Lett, 1944:141) with others following suit in New Guinea in the early 1880s. Although they had different priorities (reflected in curricula and language of instruction), mission schools of the various Christian denominations had common goals: to proselytise, teach people how to read the Bible, and 'civilise' or 'develop' the native population by providing agricultural and practical skills alongside reading, writing, arithmetic, and instruction on how to live good Christian lives (see Ahai & Bopp, 1995; Crossley, 1998; H. Nelson, 1982:153; Romaine, 1992; Swatridge, 1985). Mission schools had the biggest influence on local populations until well after the colonial government phase of schooling began following World War II.²⁹ Literacy, education, and the English language have long been associated with Christianity in PNG (see Kulick & Stroud, 1993; Robbins, 2004; Romaine, 1992), so it is not surprising that the women mentioned Christian literacy practices:

A lot of our children here have never gone to school.

They hang out on the roads and *raskol*.

We don't want them to find trouble or get killed.

We want to learn to read and write to teach them the Christian way, so they will go to church and be good children and stay good.

Another said:

I used to sing in the *Pisin* choir at church.

Since coming to this school I know how to read in English.

I've only been coming a few months but now I can read the Bible in English.

Not the hard words, though.

²⁸ As in PM Basti, some of the children living in Tensiti have higher levels of literacy and education than their parents. An audience member who attended a seminar I gave at the NRI in Port Moresby suggested that the education gap between parents and children in urban settlements was an important factor contributing to family conflict and children becoming alienated from their ancestral villages and *tok ples*. Investigating this gap and its consequences would be a valuable area of future research.

²⁹ Romaine notes that government primary school enrolment figures did not exceed those in Church schools until 1983 (1992:70).

I read the newspaper too, the *Post Courier*.
I can't read hard words but I try.
And now I sing from the English hymnbook in the choir at church.
God is good!

“I’ve got big hopes”

I conclude this chapter with Salea’s response to a question I asked at the end of our first group meeting. “You’ve made such huge achievements in the past few years,” I said. “Where do you see yourselves going in the future?”

“Okay, our vision is this school, now it’s a *morata haus*³⁰ (see Photograph 18). In time, God willing, we will become an institution where life skills will be introduced and taught here. And that’s where it is a tool. Young people and mothers and fathers who come here, they’ll walk out with those tools. The aim is that they will go and develop their own selves. Papua New Guinea is rich with everything you can make money with, but it’s the *knowledge* they don’t have. If they go out with the right tools, they can make their own living to the expectation of the many who are winners.

“Also, my dream is that this school will one day become an adult literacy college. I will administer it. I’ll make sure that teachers from all nine districts in Morobe Province come here for training then go back to remote areas to implement adult literacy classes in their districts.

“Now, we haven’t got money to do what we want but we don’t give a shit. We make sure that everybody is educated and one day they go out with these proper tools. That’s our vision. I’ve got big hopes. I feel very strongly about it, having been a teacher I know we will succeed. And I know God will make it possible.”

This chapter has shown that in organising collectively, the women involved with Tensiti Literacy Programme have more power and ability to pursue hope and *being* through literacy than they do as individuals – they express collective agency. Although becoming literate is the primary motivating factor for the women (and men) who attend these classes, Tensiti Literacy Programme imparts more than literacy training. For these women, becoming literate and learning English is accompanied by an increased sense of confidence, solidarity, empowerment, and knowledge. Because they conceive of themselves relationally (as mothers or wives), *social relations* is a theme unifying the various ways in which they construct projects involving literacy. The range of literacy practices described above, and the culturally constructed projects they pursue, show that these women invest in literacy as a way to construct more meaningful futures for themselves and their families.

³⁰ Building made from bush materials.

Photograph 18. Tensiti Literacy Programme's *morata haus*



Tensiti Literacy Programme's *morata haus* and some of its students.
The two men in the front are Bai (standing) and Noah (kneeling), Wendy's friends from Kamkumung settlement and our 'security' escort. Wendy (wearing a cap) is kneeling between Noah and Salea (who is waving). Bing is just visible, standing in the centre at the back (in green), as is Enny (in yellow).

The next chapter explores the experiences of another group of women from one of Lae's traditional villages. These women are slightly older than those from Tensiti and have decided to participate in PNG's emerging floriculture industry. Together, these two chapters provide an opportunity to explore the similarities and differences involved in collective organisation at the grassroots level in urban and peri-urban areas of Lae.

Chapter 8

Growing flowers and relationships with Butibam Women's Flower Group

Butibam Women's Flower Group is a small, grassroots initiative operating in Butibam village. When I met this group in August 2007, it had 63 members and the group's aim was to grow and sell flowers in order to generate some income and improve the well-being of the group's members, their families, and the Butibam community. Butibam Women's Flower Group differs from those described in previous chapters in two important respects. First, it was founded in early 2007 and is the most recently established of my four case studies. As such, the women were still in the early planning stages and while they had formed an executive committee and carried out some fundraising activities, they had not yet started to grow flowers as a collective. Second, its members are older women, comprising mainly grandmothers and widows who live in Butibam – which is not a settlement – and are related as kin or *wantoks*. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Butibam is one of the six original Ahi villages around which the city of Lae grew, and the women in this group all belong to Ahi clans through birth or marriage. This chapter provides valuable insight into the processes involved when elderly women from one of Lae's original villages decide to establish a small floriculture enterprise and organise collectively to achieve their goals.

Since Butibam Women's Flower Group was in its initial stages when I visited, this chapter recounts my interactions with the women as well as conversations I had with Bing. There are three sections in this chapter. First I describe Butibam Women's Flower Group and PNG's emerging floriculture industry. In the second section I discuss what I learnt about the group's vision, needs, and activities they had initiated, based on a workshop we ran entitled "Strategies for making something from nothing". Finally, I discuss the group's investment in building relationships and networks, which are just as important as growing flowers.

“Butibam’s Blooming”

My involvement with Butibam Women’s Flower Group originated in the same place as my first trip to Tensiti: during a meeting with Bing and Aba at Aba’s office in Lae’s business district (known as Top Town). As I mentioned earlier, Aba’s role as President of the Lae District Council of Women means she has good networks with Lae’s women’s groups, and Bing had arranged a meeting with her so we could select groups that might be interested in participating in my research. Bing suggested Butibam Women’s Flower Group and Aba offered to approach the group on my behalf. A few days later Aba informed me that the women from Butibam wanted to meet me, so we arranged a visit. In what follows I describe that first visit, outline how the group formed and why growing flowers can be viewed as a culturally constructed project, and discuss PNG’s emerging floriculture industry.

Butibam is not an urban settlement so my first visit was not shaped by the kind of security precautions I took in going to Tensiti, although Wendy still accompanied us as our ‘security escort’. (A lecturer I met from Lae’s Unitech once compared Butibam with Hanuabada, the Motu village around which Port Moresby developed, saying, “If you’re looking for a tough urban settlement where women have had to carve out a social space for themselves, you won’t find it in Butibam.”) As usual, I borrowed a

Photograph 19. Butibam meeting house



Butibam Women’s Flower Group members gather after our meeting.

vehicle from my hosts, Alex and Jonika, and drove with Wendy to pick up Bing and her niece from Bing’s home on a warm and sunny August morning. Bing, who belongs to two Ahi clans by birth and marriage (Yalu and Butibam) and is well known in Butibam, directed us along the wide roads leading to Butibam village, and then down narrower lanes leading to a communal meeting house within the village. We parked next to it and were greeted by Aba (who lives in Butibam) and the waiting women.

The meeting house, an open, rectangular structure comprising several large wooden posts supporting a high thatched roof (see Photograph 19), is used by various groups for prayer as well as public meetings. It is

surrounded by household gardens and houses built of timber and corrugated iron rather than traditional materials, some on stilts. The posts were decorated with varieties of heliconia, orchid, frangipani, ginger flowers, hibiscus, and variegated foliage, all from the women's home gardens. Some of the thirty or so women who gathered also carried their own specimens of heliconia and ginger flowers, demonstrating the diversity of the species (a result of PNG's varied terrain).

In preparation for our visit, the women had placed chairs and a small table draped with a crisp yellow tablecloth at one end of the meeting house and spread woven mats on the gravel inside. They had arranged cut flowers on the table alongside a newspaper article with the headline "Butibam's Blooming" (see Photograph 20), which described how they had recently participated in a city-wide backyard beautification effort, and one of the "Best Gardener" certificates of participation some had been awarded as a result. A blue tarpaulin sheltered a longer table set up just outside the structure for the plates of food we had all brought. Bing, Aba and I joined the group's executive committee next to the smaller table while the rest of the women (including Wendy, who did not want to sit "up the front" with us) seated themselves in a circle inside the meeting house.

Our welcome to Butibam Women's Flower Group followed the kind of formalities I have experienced as a guest speaker at branch meetings of Save the Children and Rotary in New Zealand. Silynne Gaya, the group's elected president, formally welcomed us to Butibam and opened the meeting with a prayer. Aba spoke next, introducing me and Bing to the group. I stood to talk once Aba had finished, introducing myself and where I was from in *tok Pisin* then switching to English to describe my research and the purpose of our visit. I also explained that Bing would be facilitating our discussion and translating for me. Bing then spoke, repeating what I had said in *tok Pisin* and inviting the women to share their stories with me. Bing is an experienced facilitator and it did not take long for the formal atmosphere to relax and

Photograph 20. "Butibam's blooming"



The newspaper article presented on the table.

the women to begin speaking in English, *tok Pisin* and their *tok ples*.¹ We spent most of the morning at Butibam and at the end of our meeting Bing and Aba encouraged the women to work hard to achieve their goals before we sat down to a shared meal.

Rachael Geali formally founded Butibam Women's Flower Group in early 2007. Rachael is a confident public speaker and was one of the first to stand and talk to the group. According to the newspaper article they had clipped (without retaining any of the publication details researchers like to cite), Rachael, a nurse at Angau Memorial Hospital, is "a self-initiator who involves herself with the Butibam mothers² when she finds the time. Much of what she has started is either at her own expense or by the mothers themselves". Rachael displayed some of the flowers she grows at the 2003 Morobe Agricultural Show, where she met Endo Guaf, Education Officer at the PNG Forest Research Institute (PNGFRI). After the show Rachael started visiting Endo, who encouraged her to think about selling her flowers and invited her to visit the National Botanical Gardens in Lae, which the PNGFRI administers. Rachael spoke to some of the women from Butibam village and organised a group tour of the National Botanical Gardens. Interest grew from there and a few of the women began selling their flowers at various shows in Lae. After seeing that there was a market for potted plants, floral arrangements and cut flowers, Rachael decided to form the group in order to engage with PNG's emerging floriculture industry.

Later I learnt that this was not the group's first incarnation. Some of the women previously organised under different group names for a variety of projects, including a small micro-credit scheme, none of which had sustained. One of their efforts in the late 1980s involved fundraising for a trip to Cairns to visit a flower nursery. They raised enough money to visit Cairns and enjoyed their trip, but upon coming home they "slept on" the idea for a decade before deciding to act.

As noted above, the women I met at Butibam all enjoy growing flowers, displaying flowers at shows, and beautifying their home gardens. They are also active members of Gejamsao Butibam Women's Fellowship, which in turn is part of the Yabim District Gejamsao Circuit,³ and take pride in tending their church's garden and creating floral arrangements for church services. This interest in ornamental gardens could be viewed as a culturally constructed project, one introduced by missionaries during the colonial era and linked with contemporary Christian practices.

¹ Language marked another important difference between my interactions with Butibam Women's Flower Group and Tensiti Literacy Programme. Aba and Bing took turns translating for me when the other was speaking in *tok ples*. I also recorded the discussions, which Bing later translated.

² As I noted in Chapter 7, women are often described (and describe themselves) in relational terms.

³ Yabim is one of the 16 geographical districts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea. Each district is further divided into smaller areas, known as circuits, and within each circuit are local parishes and congregations.

Food gardens have always been important in PNG (as elsewhere), a country with a ten thousand-year history of innovation and diversity in agricultural production (see Bourke, 2009), and the role of food in maintaining social relations has been the subject of much anthropological research (e.g., Kahn, 1986; Malinowski, 1935; Mauss, 1954/2002; Van Heekeren, 2004; A. B. Weiner, 1988). Foliage and flowers have long been used in rituals and performances, and in food gardens to attract bees and draw pests away from crops. Colonial-era missionaries introduced the practice of growing flowers in ornamental gardens to decorate homes inside and out. In her article “Better Homes and Gardens”, Macintyre (1989) discusses how missionaries in Tubetube established “model gardens” and introduced new crops and ornamental flowers to the area, which local populations gradually emulated. Cut flowers became a symbol of “white culture” in the early 1900s, as Margaret Mead (1975:303) notes, and missionaries encouraged local women to decorate their homes and church buildings with floral arrangements. In one instance flower decorations became associated with “cargo cult” behaviour (see Hermann, 2004),⁴ but for the most part they became a widely established practice associated with Christianity. Flowers are now viewed as a means to generate income and engage in the floriculture industry as well as to beautify homes, gardens and churches.⁵

Floriculture, a branch of ornamental horticulture concerned with cultivating flowers and ornamental plants, is increasingly promoted in local newspaper articles (“Flowers have big potential to help PNG economy”, 2004; “PNG climate, soils suit flower business”, 2007) and blogs (Manuk, 2009; Vuvu, 2010) as a promising new ‘road to development’ for women in PNG.⁶ One month before my 2007 fieldwork trip, the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby announced that the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC) were funding a six-month scoping study into the potential for floriculture to contribute to economic development in PNG (Australian High Commission, 2007). This scoping study found that while PNG has the potential to develop a worthwhile domestic cut flower market, it was unlikely to develop a major

⁴ Hermann conducted research at Yasaburing village in Madang Province, which is famous for being the home of Yali, the main character of Lawrence’s *Road Belong Cargo* (1964/1967). She interviewed Yali’s widow, Bikmeri, who pointed out that “both Australians and European missionaries taught Yali to decorate the table with flowers, a practice that was then denounced as cargo cult, the moment he and his followers introduced it in Yasaburing” (Hermann, 2004:49). Bikmeri’s flower decorations were viewed as evidence of “cargo cult” behaviour and she was charged and subsequently jailed for this practice (Hermann, 2004:48-49).

⁵ I am interested in pursuing further research into these changing flower growing and consumption practices in PNG. Some important work has been done on the changing role of flowers in the social lives and identities of contemporary Polynesian communities (see Bedford, Longhurst, & Underhill-Sem, 2001), and I envisage extending some of these research themes into Papua New Guinea.

⁶ All of the articles and blogs I read specifically associated floriculture with women, possibly because in many PNG societies women are responsible for household gardens (although men might build and fence them). The Government of Papua New Guinea’s National Agricultural Development Plan (2007-2016) lists promoting floriculture to women and young people as one of its strategies (McGregor, Stice, Burness, & Taylor, 2008:114).

export industry for cut flowers due to problems with physical infrastructure (especially transportation), availability of rural finance, and fragmented institutional support (McGregor et al., 2008). The study noted that an overarching policy framework was in place, however, and that the PNG government had produced two long-term policy documents⁷ that included strategies to develop the floriculture industry (McGregor et al., 2008:113-115). ACIAR recently launched a new four-year project to develop and evaluate strategies for improving indigenous livelihoods through floricultural activities and enterprises in PNG, Fiji and Solomon Islands (Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, 2010).

In July 2007, Bing and many of the women from Butibam attended a meeting in Lae that simultaneously served as the opening of the ACIAR/SPC Floriculture Scoping Study and as the third planning meeting of a newly established organisation, Papua New Guinea Women in Agriculture Development Foundation (PNGWiADF) (which I discuss later in this chapter). PNG's National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) reported on that meeting in one of its newsletters, commenting that the women were "captivated" by the potential of the floriculture sector and that the meeting "reignited their passion in cultivating flowers and flowering plants to a new height" (Anonymous, 2007). This enthusiasm for floriculture – seen as a way for women to generate economic capital from an activity they enjoy – was apparent during my visits to Butibam Women's Flower Group. However, lack of resources and technical knowledge hindered their efforts to build a small floriculture enterprise.

"Basically we've started our group but it's come to halt as we don't have the money or resources to take it any further," explained Rachael. "We need pots to grow plants in, a nursery, a garden for our plants, and land for the nursery and garden. We need someone to show us how to do floral arrangements. We also need someone to train us in how to grow, market, and export our flowers. We need someone to come in and help us with all of this. We don't see how we can do it ourselves. It's hard to raise money. When we do manage to save any, we need to spend it on our families and on food."

Rachael's comments were echoed by many of the women during the "Strategies for making something from nothing" workshop we ran at Butibam, which I discuss in the next section.

⁷ The White Paper on Agriculture (2005-2014: Toward National Food Security) and the National Agricultural Development Plan (2007-2016) (McGregor et al., 2008:114).

“Strategies for making something from nothing”

During the initial meeting with Bing and Aba at Aba’s office, I told them about an idea I had for a workshop entitled “Strategies for making something from nothing” (see Interlude 4 above). I explained that the workshop title reflects what I had learnt about women’s groups in Lae,⁸ namely that their biggest problems stem from lack of material resources, and that participants would be asked to describe what they hope to achieve by organising collectively, identify what they fear will happen if things go wrong, and discuss strategies to achieve their hopes and avoid their fears. Bing and Aba thought it was a good idea. Bing suggested that the workshop would be best suited to Butibam where it might serve as an informal needs assessment or awareness raising activity for the newly established group, and we spent some time planning it. Bing facilitated the workshop, which we ran informally over two group meetings in Butibam. The first meeting is described above; the second involved most of the same participants, with a few additions – including two husbands⁹ – and another shared meal. I later prepared a report for the group summarising their achievements to date and the needs they identified during the workshop. In this section I draw on the workshop as well as conversations I had with Bing to discuss their visions for the group, their needs, and the activities they had initiated in pursuit of their visions.

The first topic we raised concerned the women’s visions and what they hoped to achieve through the group. From what Bing and other development extension workers I spoke with said, I knew that lack of long-term planning was a key reason for the stasis of many women’s groups.

⁸ I later realised that the title embodies the attitudes of many development extension workers I met. In PNG, it is common to hear people involved in development work discuss how to encourage ‘self-help’ philosophies and discourage ‘hand-out mentality’ (where the state is expected to deliver development to a passive citizenry), ‘donor mentality’ (where NGOs and donor agencies are expected to provide development to passively recipient communities) and ‘cargo mentality’ (where development becomes a form of cargo either provided by external agents to passive recipients or achieved through agentive, ritualistic activities often unrelated to the development project at hand). Two resource books for development workers that were recommended to me, the *Liklik Buk: A sourcebook for development workers in Papua New Guinea* (Koian, 2003) and the *Working with your community* trainer’s manual (Rau, Sau, & Hershey, 2002a), both discuss how to combat what they respectively term “cargo cult mentality” (Westerhout, 2003:449) and “cargo development” (Rau, Sau, & Hershey, 2002b:29). In a similar vein, Gewertz and Errington discuss how the leaders of Sepik Women in Trade insisted on individual, rather than group, membership to their organisation in order to reduce reliance on “handouts” or an expectation of “something for nothing”, which they said was “generally understood as responsible for a multitude of widely recognized Papua New Guinea ills: economic stagnation, corruption and general moral decline (especially of the youth)” (1999:49). These attitudes align with the structural adjustments suggested by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and implemented by PNG’s governments in the late 1980s and mid-1990s. They also echo what Maxine Molyneux calls the “new development agenda” outlined by the World Bank in its 1997 report, which lauds self-help, voluntary work, and self-reliance and calls for “greater efforts to take the burden off the state by involving citizens and communities in the delivery of core goods” (World Bank, 1997:117 cited in Molyneux, 2002:175).

⁹ I asked the women why more men weren’t involved with their group. Some said that their husbands lived far away, others said they were widows, and those whose husbands lived in the village thought that they were “standing back” because flowers were “women’s work”. They were confident that their husbands would “stand beside them” once the group look like it would succeed rather than “fall over”, however, and that they would help by building plant nurseries and communal gardens.

"I've found that women I work with want to do a lot of things, but they don't sit down and look ahead," Bing told me during one of our interviews. "In *tok Pisin* it's *driman* [dream], you sit and you look ahead and think 'if I do this, how will I succeed'? This doesn't happen with a lot of groups, especially ones who keep coming together. They form a group and do some things but when they have problems, like leadership or financial problems, they just stop."

The women all expressed an interest in beautifying their homes, displaying their flowers, and making money to improve their families' well-being. They also emphasised their hopes for the group as a collective. These included building a communal nursery and garden, cementing affiliations with other groups (such as NARI, PNGFRI, and PNGWiADF), establishing a flower shop in Lae, exporting their flowers to Australia, and going on a trip to Australia. Geob Gware, a member of the executive committee, was very clear about where she saw the group going.

"I have a big dream," said Geob. "I want to grow flowers so my family can benefit, but not only that. I want all of us to benefit from this. My vision is for us to have one big communal garden. What we make from that, we can use to set up other agricultural projects. We can set up chicken projects, duck projects, fishponds. My dream is to start with flowers then branch into other things."

Geob's comments, which were received with murmurs of agreement, illustrate two issues. First, they show that these women value organising collectively, especially as a way of engaging in development processes (see Chapter 3). Second, they provide an example of how collective hope is formed. As I explained in the Introduction, collective hope emerges from individual hopes to become genuinely and critically shared by a group (Braithwaite, 2004:7). Hope becomes collective "when individuals see themselves as hoping and so acting in concert for ends that they communally endorse" (McGeer, 2004:125).

Next, we asked the women to identify their fears and any obstacles that might prevent them from achieving their goals. They were a little hesitant in their replies and Bing later explained that they did not want to name their fears.

"Remember when you asked about their fears and problems?" Bing said to me as we translated a recording of the workshop. I nodded. "They started talking in *tok ples*. They were scared to speak out about some of the worst problems that they might face with this project. I encouraged them and said that your question was just an open one about their worries or fears, and that they could tell you."

"Why were they scared?" I asked.

"They think that there are some things they cannot talk about," she replied. "Actually, the most important thing holding back most of the women I move around with is that they don't take the time to find out their needs. They think 'we know the

problems'. They list their problems quickly without trying to *understand* them and don't take it any further. It's good to identify problems but I like to try to work on them. I do that by restating them as needs, which they are happier to talk about. I encouraged [the women at Butibam] to think about their problems as needs so we could try to find ways to address them."

Bing's approach worked and the majority of the two-part workshop ended up focusing on the various needs they identified. At the first meeting we developed a list of five key needs. At the second meeting I asked the women to rank them in order of importance. Those needs were: (1) finance to support capacity-building; (2) organisational training, e.g., project proposals, planning, financial management; (3) training in cultivation and plant management including horticulture, pest control, fertiliser, pruning, which plants to grow, and whether individuals should specialise in particular species or have everyone grow the same plants; (4) training in harvesting, floral arrangement, and plant storage; and (5) training in marketing for domestic and export purposes.¹⁰ Afterwards, Bing suggested that their needs could be grouped into two categories: finance, and training/capacity-building. During the workshop I noticed that discussions about training often started or ended with funding, reinforcing the comment Rachael made above. In what follows I discuss two of the topics raised by the women – building a communal garden and plant nursery, and developing a project proposal – in order to make connections with some of the main themes arising in Chapters 2 and 3.

As noted earlier, many of the women envisioned building a communal garden and nursery for the group, and they spent a considerable amount of time at the workshop discussing how they might achieve that. I asked them how they would set up a nursery and learnt that they had opened a bank account for the group. Group members pay an initial K5 membership fee, and at each meeting the women contribute some money as a way of creating a starting fund for the nursery. However, they said they had "a long way to go" as most of them do not work and cannot afford to contribute regularly. Bing suggested that they start growing outdoor plants while they plan for a nursery, which led to a discussion of money, access to land, and security.

"I would like us to have one communal garden where we can all learn from the garden together and benefit together," said Geob during the discussion. "But where can we do that? We should look around and talk to our clans to see if one will help us."¹¹ A clan might allocate a piece of land to us for a communal garden."

¹⁰ Participants at the ACIAR/SPC Floriculture Scoping Study workshop in Lae identified similar needs and requested assistance to: organise training sessions; attend floriculture conferences; access existing women's networks to identify markets; conduct research to identify which flowers have the best market potential; gain access to new flower varieties; establish a central nursery to distribute materials to contract growers; establish a wholesale distribution centre; and work with a floriculture scientist (McGregor et al., 2008:91).

¹¹ Each clan has its own land-holding in Butibam.

Land is a primary asset of Butibam villagers, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Although it is often pointed out that about 97% of land in PNG is held in customary ownership (e.g., Anderson, 2006:140; Connell, 1997:78; Lea, 2004), in Lae it is a form of capital the Ahi Landowners' Association¹² actively works to protect in the face of urban development and encroaching settlements. Geob's suggestion that one of their clans might support them with a grant of land points to an important contrast with Tensiti Literacy Programme, whose members are not traditional landowners in Lae and had to engage in a competitive tender process for the land on which their schoolhouse is built. Women at the Butibam workshop agreed to ask their clans about gaining access to land but quickly identified another problem: security.

"It might be better to set out our flower gardens next to our houses," said one. "If we plant in a communal garden that isn't close to any of our houses, someone will steal our flowers. If it's outside and far away, we won't be able to look after it. We will need to pay for proper security."

Her fears are well founded. As I discussed in Chapter 2, discourses concerning security are prominent in Lae and most people I met had been the victims of burglary, carjacking or petty theft. An unprotected communal flower garden is likely to be raided. On trips to a supermarket in Eriku I was sometimes approached by young men offering to sell me freshly dug orchids or ginger plants. I asked them where the plants had come from, to which they replied "just a garden" or shrugged noncommittally. People I was with at the time suggested they had stolen the plants from home gardens as growing flowers is "women's work" (i.e., not an activity these youths would have performed). The women from Butibam were very interested to see the security arrangements made by Rose Gendua, who runs a small, successful floriculture enterprise in Bubia, during a garden and nursery tour I arranged for the group (see Photographs 21 and 22).¹³

Bing had her own reservations about a communal garden, which she discussed with me after the workshop.

¹² The Ahi Association formed in 1971 to protest urban intrusion into villages of traditional landowning clans. May, who describes it as a micronationalist movement, writes that it "was created in the first instance to prevent the imposition of town plan proposals which were considered contrary to the interests of the villages and to take up claims against the government for compensation in respect of alienated land" (May, 2004:64).

¹³ I decided to organise a trip to different nurseries and gardens in Lae as my way of contributing to a need the women from Butibam had identified for more training and networking. I discussed my idea for a nursery tour with Bing and Jonika, who thought it was worth pursuing, and coordinated with Bing and Endo Guaf to arrange it. I hired a vehicle and driver, paid for transport and training fees, and took a group of six women from Butibam (plus Bing, Endo, and Wendy) to visit Rose Gendua, who lives at Bubia, and Mandy Omot, who lives near Markham Valley. As well as running a plant nursery, Rose grows *haleconia*, ginger, and other large plants on a block of land she purchased near her home in Bubia, employing a "garden boy" to live on site and look after it. The Butibam women said they enjoyed the trip (which they called an "awareness-raising experience") and came away motivated to start growing plants in their backyards using resources they already had. This trip became an important source of data that taught me much about the value placed on networking.

“I have had different experiences with communal gardens,” she said. “At [one village] the communal gardening project was not successful. Everyone planted but then only a few women tended the garden on a regular basis. When it came time to sell the produce, everyone wanted to participate in the profits. But do you remember Gapsongkeg?”

“Yes, of course.” Bing and I first met on a trip to Gapsongkeg in 2001, as I discussed in the Introduction, and I visited the village again in 2005.

“There it was successful but they had divided a communal plot into five sections and each plot was the responsibility of one family. This worked well. Each family took care of its own plot and they all made money.”

“Why didn’t you share your experiences with the women at Butibam?” I asked.

“They’re just starting and I don’t want to discourage them. They have a lot of ideas and they’re excited. I could give them my advice, but I don’t want it to get in the way of their ideas. I’ve told them to come to me if they want some help. But I do think that it’s hard to be successful with communal gardens. A lot of women are territorial and it’s hard for them to share their gardens. There will be arguments about who owns the land and the flowers. I worry that it will end up with a few women doing the work and all of them wanting to reap the benefits, which will cause resentment. It might be better for each woman to tend her own plot and specialise in one type of flower, but they need to try it for themselves and learn. They know they can come to me if they want help.”

Photograph 21. Butibam Women’s Flower Group members visit a plant nursery in Bubia



Members of Butibam Women’s Flower Group inspect Rose Genuda’s plant nursery during the garden and nursery tour I organised. Wendy, a keen gardener, is in the denim skirt on the left.

Photograph 22. Visiting a garden in Bubia



Butibam Women's Flower Group members visit Rose's garden in Bubia.
Bing (in a blue *meri* blouse) is on the far right, next to Rose.

Bing's concerns highlight some of the issues that can arise when women organise collectively, which I discussed in Chapter 3. One issue is the relationships that women need to manage when they organise in new collectivities. Although this is not the first time these women have organised collectively, Butibam Women's Flower Group has a new purpose, structure and executive committee and I noticed some interesting dynamics as the women settled into their appointed roles. For example, while they had elected a president, she was not as confident in speaking to the group as some of the others, who sometimes rose to speak in her place or started by saying "what our President meant to say was ...". Also, as Rachael's earlier comment that they need "someone to come in and help us with all of this" suggests, they might prefer an outsider to fulfil leadership responsibilities, at least in the group's initial stages. The discussions that took place over a project proposal one of the women had prepared illustrate some of these tensions. I describe it here not to suggest that Butibam Women's Flower Group members have difficulty in managing relationships – Sepoe also found that women's group meetings could "get rowdy because everybody seem (sic) to talk at the same time" (2000:157) – but to demonstrate some of the organisational issues all groups (not just women's groups in PNG) work through when they form.

During the second meeting we had organised (part two of the workshop), Arosi Noah, one of the groups' younger members and part of the executive committee, informed the group that she had prepared a policy statement and project proposal on their behalf, with her husband's help. While this news was generally well received,

some of the women expressed reservations about it and said they would have liked a group discussion beforehand so they could contribute to the plans.

"I think there was a bit of, ah, tension about that," Bing later told me. "Perhaps some unspoken language that she'd done this without consulting them. I suggested that anything like this should involve a group discussion and encouraged them to work together."

Wendy, who had sat amongst the women rather than at the table with us, also picked up on the tension. "I really liked that lady," she said afterwards as we chatted about the meetings. "She went and drew up that report with her husband but the other ladies didn't like that. I don't know why they didn't, she's just trying to help."

Arosi's initiative was raised later at the meeting, after a tea break, suggesting to me that the women weren't quite clear about what was involved. Arosi was quick to explain that this was a draft only and that she wanted the group to have something to begin working from.

"I assured them that it's good to have someone prepare a draft, but that it is also good for them to all sit together and look at it, confirm whether they're happy with it, and come up with the final draft," Bing said as she translated what she'd said to them in *tok ples*. "Many of them do not know that they need this sort of technical document if they want to apply for funding or support from other places. Actually most grassroots women's groups don't know about these things. They are not really aware of these kinds of technical processes, needs assessments and proposal writing. Some groups have a few smart people who take advantage of that situation, but Arosi will share what she has done with the group. I think we raised an important issue for them that will help them later. They acknowledged that it was important to talk about how to work together and plan for the future, and said that lack of planning was a problem they'd had in the past. I told them not to worry about it, they're not the only ones!" said Bing with a laugh.

I conclude this section by describing a strategy the women at Butibam had already initiated in pursuit of their goals: fundraising. Their fundraising activities included 'bring-and-buy' food meetings on Fridays (where each woman donates a plate of food and buys one of the other donated plates with a small cash contribution) and *senisim basket* (basket exchange, where women exchange baskets of food and other store-bought products before contributing money), which are commonly practiced by women's groups and church fellowships. The group also co-ordinated with two other groups, Bubia Floriculturalists and Nasuapum Women's Flower Group, to organise a food and flower sale at a hall in Bubia (just outside Lae) owned by NARI. These three groups together form the Morobe Floriculture Group, and they were fundraising to

earn the K300 membership fee needed to join the new PNGWiADF (described in the next section).

Some of the development extension workers I spoke with suggested that such fundraising activities can sometimes cause hardship for women in grassroots women's groups, especially if they have little household income and have to choose between supporting their church/group or providing for their families. Sepoe makes a similar observation about women's groups that are expected to fill gaps left by the state but are not provided with resources to do so: "women in the village struggle with meagre resources and give more (in terms of labour and time) than they receive. The act of giving is very common ... Women rely on the customary practice of reciprocity, but in the contemporary context this strategy of accessing resources does not prove very effective" (2000:155). I share concerns that such activities place extra burdens on women who might struggle to find or earn cash, especially as they can have a competitive aspect. However, the women at Butibam appeared to manage and they clearly valued these fundraising methods. McDougall's description of the United Church Women's Fellowship in Ranongga (Solomon Islands) highlights how such activities do more than simply raise money:

If raising money was the single goal of fundraising, such endeavours may be judged extremely inefficient. And yet, they achieve something that a more efficient, tax-like collection of fees does not. Exchange and fundraising events make visible and public the transformation of cash acquired by individual engagement in a market economy into a source of community potency ...

(McDougall, 2003:71)

The fundraising activities described here were all public events that served to generate economic capital, raise the group's profile, and strengthen relationships within the Butibam Women's Flower Group and between the three groups in the Morobe Floriculture Group. During the "Strategies for making something from nothing" workshop described in this section, the women at Butibam frequently discussed how to build relationships and network with other unitary social bodies – in Bourdieu's terms, how to generate social capital. Networking and social capital are the topics of the next section.

"The power of networking"

In this section I use Bourdieu's ideas about social capital¹⁴ as a framework for

¹⁴ Social capital has become a popular concept in development discourse in recent years. The World Bank described it as "the missing link" in development in the late 1990s (see Harriss & de Renzio, 1997:921). Initially I was excited to see what I assumed would be Bourdieuan-inspired discussions of social capital appearing in development literature, but I quickly discovered that Bourdieu's theories were not often utilised in early articles (although more recent articles do draw on Bourdieu). As Harriss and de Renzio (1997:919-920) explain, social capital made its way into development discourse via Robert

thinking about how Butibam Women's Flower Group members actively invest in what Bing termed "the power of networking" as part of their quest to improve their lives. Social capital is generated through networks and relationships; it is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu, 1986:51). In what follows I discuss why the women from Butibam value networking and outline the social and economic opportunities they sought through joining the Morobe branch of the PNGWiADF.

The PNGWiADF is a national organisation that was officially launched in 2007 and aims to bring women farmer's voices to the attention of donors and government agencies, influence government policy regarding sustainable agricultural development, implement a strategic plan for women in agriculture, and assist with networking opportunities (Papua New Guinea Women in Agriculture Development Foundation, 2008; Peter, 2010). Maria Linibi, a farmer from Markham Valley in Morobe Province, initiated the Foundation and is currently its elected president. Today the Foundation has 23 registered groups and 12 associate members from 13 provinces, and has partnerships with ACIAR, AusAID, NARI, NZAID, and other national and international public and private sector organisations (Peter, 2010; Yaga, 2010).

In August and September 2007 I accompanied Bing to several meetings held at PNGFRI's building next to the Botanical Gardens. Bing explained that the purpose of the meetings was to establish a Morobe branch of the PNGWiADF and that she had been elected to the branch's interim committee. Many of the women from Butibam also attended these initial meetings, as did women from the Bubia and Nasuapum flower groups mentioned in the previous section, representatives from NARI, and women involved in agriculture as farmers and development extension workers. One of the meetings was held in the afternoon following the workshop we ran in Butibam and

Putnam's *Making democracy work* (1993). Putnam uses the term 'social capital' to refer to "features of organization, such as trust, norms, and network, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam et al., 1993:167). Putnam argues that improvements in government performance in northern medieval Italy were made possible by "the norms and networks of civic engagement", networks built on horizontal ties of collaboration, reciprocity and civic solidarity which fostered a strong civic society and a more responsive government (Putnam et al., 1993:88, 129). Putnam's ideas were appropriated by the World Bank in its "new development agenda" (see Molyneux, 2002:175; Harriss & de Renzio, 1997). de Renzio & Kavanamur (1999) discuss how the *wantok* network can be viewed as a source of social capital and harnessed for development in PNG, and Luker (2004) suggests that churches are also an important source of social capital. There is a large body of scholarship debating the concept's usefulness in development theory and practice. Two major contributors to this debate are Anthony Bebbington (Bebbington, Guggenheim, Olson, & Woolcock, 2004; Bebbington, 2004, 2007), who was involved in early discussions about social capital at the World Bank, and Ben Fine (2001, 2007a, 2007b, 2010), who is highly critical of the concept's use in Development Studies. A short list of other useful discussions, from a variety of perspectives, includes Cleaver (2005), Harriss (2002), Molyneux (2002), Portes (1998), Thieme & Siegmann (2010), and Woolcock (1998).

featured a guest speaker from PNGFRI, who discussed issues relating to plant management and cultivation. The women from Butibam were excited to hear the speaker address some of the training needs they had identified at our workshop and thought it no small coincidence that I had just that morning asked them to articulate their problems.¹⁵ Bing shared their enthusiasm and described it as “the power of networking”.

Joining a women’s group, and forming relationships and networks with other women’s groups and organisations, is a common practice in PNG, a country where social relations form an important basis for social organisation (as I discussed in Chapter 2). Whereas I struggled to understand where the group might fit within what seemed to me a complex system of umbrella organisations, provincial branches and local sub-groups (like the Morobe Floriculture Group), the women from Butibam had no such problems and drew on their experience with Gejamsao groups to describe their position in the floriculture industry. I asked the executive committee members why they wanted to join the Foundation’s Morobe branch. One thought that it would help “to make this organisation actually viable.” Other replies all shared a common theme: they saw it as a road, a way to access training, knowledge, advice, support, markets, and other social actors who might provide further opportunities to achieve their goals as a group and as individuals. Using Bourdieu’s economic metaphors, they saw it as a way to increase their collective and individual volumes of social capital, which they could then credit for cultural capital (knowledge, training, contact with experts), economic capital (cash from sales), and more social capital (networks with others).

Networking can generate collective agency and collective hope, distributing power and access to capital to women in groups. However, these resources are not distributed equally. In this case, registering with the Foundation requires an initial outlay of economic capital that might prove a barrier to grassroots women’s groups, and will almost certainly exclude individual *grassroots* women who don’t have the same economic power as *elite* women. Other forms of capital, such as time and transport, are also necessary to attend meetings and participate in networking and relationship-building activities. The capacity to acquire social capital through networking is shaped by sociocultural factors such as class, habitat, and age. In his discussion of “negative social capital”, Alejandro Portes (1998:15) points out that the mechanisms involved in generating social capital can also reproduce current social inequalities, for example by excluding those with less power and capital and imposing excess claims on group

¹⁵ Two women viewed my interest in their group in religious terms. One said she thought I’d been “sent by God” to help them succeed, while another described it as an “answer to our prayers”. Bing thought some of their excitement could be attributed to my status as a foreigner, saying “it was very empowering for them to have a foreign woman come in just as they were starting their group, help them identify their needs, listen to their stories, and help them meet one of their needs by organising a small trip”.

members (as noted above, not all of the members of Butibam Women's Flower Group can afford to contribute to the group on a weekly basis, and might face financial hardship if they were required to do so). My point here is that even when seeking to improve and transform their lives through "the power of networking", social actors can reproduce historical sociocultural structures at the same time.

This chapter has provided a glimpse into the processes involved when older women from one of Lae's original villages decide to form a women's group to engage with PNG's emerging floriculture industry. Butibam Women's Flower Group might have little in the way of funding, but this chapter has shown that they were starting with a desire to organise collectively and an important base of pre-existing social relations, a form of social capital they could potentially transform into access to land (as economic capital). I have also drawn attention to the value placed on networking and relationship building, activities the women invest in as a way to improve their opportunities as a collective and as individuals. When I left in September 2007, Butibam Women's Flower Group members seemed enthusiastic and motivated, especially as they had just learned that they had raised enough money to join the PNGWiADF. However, whether they were able to capitalise on the social capital they generated and draw on their collective agency and collective hopes as long-term motivation remains to be seen.

I have now described the four organisations I worked with in Howrah, Kolkata and Lae. I conclude Part III by discussing the main themes arising from Chapters 5-8 and comparing the similarities and differences between these ethnographic sites.

Discussion

These case studies illustrate the diversity of social practices concerning grassroots-level development initiatives within and between Howrah, Kolkata and Lae. Although the people involved in these organisations (or *vehicles of development*, to use the phrase I defined in the Introduction) undoubtedly have different ideas about what a better future might look like, they all pursue hope and *being* through two commonly travelled roads to development: education and income-generation. In each chapter I have shown the various ‘side effects’ of development that emerge as my participants labour to accumulate more cultural, economic, and social capital (to use Bourdieu’s terminology) in their quest to augment *being*. These ‘side effects’ include hope, agency, empowerment, solidarity, confidence, resilience, and knowledge. My participants might not always achieve social change for a variety of reasons, but I argue that ‘side effects’ such as collective hope and collective agency play an important role in sustaining action in the face of adversity and in replenishing their investment in what I called the *idea of development*.

In a similar vein to Part II, the chapters in Part III raise a number of issues that could be fruitfully analysed from a comparative perspective (how their religious identities give these women the strength and purpose to forge ahead for themselves and enable others to come along, for example, or the diversity of women’s lives within each place). In this final discussion I draw together two central themes of this thesis: the relationship between structure, agency, and hope; and how collective action is sustained.

Structure, agency, and hope

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the ways in which we hope and act are shaped by objective social structures, and the case studies described in Part III illustrate the dialectical relationship between structure and practice. I have shown that all four organisations strive to increase the sense of movement within society through development initiatives – in other words, that they inspire what I termed *development*

hope. While their practices vary, they share an important commonality in that they all stem from “structures of inequality” (Ortner, 2006:147). These structures of inequality shape my participants’ practices by simultaneously providing a basis for action and constraining their actions. Gibson-Graham argue that “Poverty and seeming powerlessness become the base from which daily action is sustained, rather than a grounds for its postponement. Possibilities for influencing change are identified in the face of a realistic understanding of the extent and limits of the forces that constrain them. Particulars of authority, domination, and coercion that might neutralize or negate their interventions are examined and *ways to exercise power* are found” (2006:xxv, emphasis in original).

I have shown that poverty and other structures of inequality are primary motivating factors in each of my case studies, although they appear differently in each place as a result of specific historical circumstances. For example, Chapters 5 and 7 outlined how Talimi Haq School and Tensiti Literacy Programme, which pursue *being* through education, both arose in order to provide free classes to children and adults who cannot afford formal school fees. This struggle against poverty also underpins the initiatives of Rehnuma-e-Niswaan and Butibam Women’s Flower Group, which pursue *being* through income-generating initiatives. In Chapters 6 and 8 I discussed how these organisations aim to economically empower women whose income-generating opportunities are variously influenced by structures of gender, class, habitat, age, education, and religious identity. These chapters demonstrate that my participants’ practices are shaped by larger structural forces and by their positions within the social worlds that are already there. Although my participants do not necessarily articulate an awareness of these factors in the theoretical terms I use, I have shown that they do find socially acceptable ways to exercise what Ortner calls agency as “power” (2006:139). These chapters also illustrate a point Bourdieu repeatedly makes: that their practices can often reproduce the structures they are trying to transform.

In addition, I have tried to show that their strategies are responsive to and can break from, rather than be wholly shaped by, the structures that affect habitus and practice. For Bourdieu, “The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of un-making and re-making it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do with it from the position they occupy within it” (1985:734). I suggest that my participants’ collective efforts demonstrate “realistic knowledge” of the social world and, accordingly, generate *responsive* hope and agency. The following examples support my argument.

In Chapter 5 I discussed how Talimi Haq School operates in one of Howrah’s ‘forgotten places’ where poverty, insufficient state-led schools, perceptions about the value of education for Muslims, and conservative attitudes towards the mobility of

adolescent girls manifest in low school enrolment rates, high levels of illiteracy, and low societal hope in education as a pathway to a more meaningful life. Amina and Binod are conscious of these factors and created a school play to draw attention to them and raise the social value of education within PM Basti. Talimi Haq School's aim to teach its students how to "become good citizens, good human beings, and good parents whose children can dream and hope to realise their dreams" (as Amina described it) is further evidence of efforts to generate responsive hope and agency. Aware of their limited ability to change the historical sociocultural structures that make it difficult for Muslim youth to convert cultural capital into economic capital, its teachers instead link education with factors they can influence, such as how to be good human beings.

Tabassum also recognises that she "cannot change society" into what she wants, as I discussed in Chapter 6. Tabassum has been accused of "leading girls astray" through Rehnuma-e-Niswaan and the opposition she faced from community members in Narkeldanga led her to use strategies that negotiate, rather than challenge, the conservative attitudes that can constrain the lives of Muslim women. I discussed how providing vocational training in sewing and embroidery can reinforce gender norms and reproduce the notion that Muslim women should aspire to home-centred work, but I also drew attention to the patience and perseverance with which Tabassum slowly works toward her goal of changing her students' ideas about the social world and their positions within it.

Patience and determination were key themes in Chapter 7, which described Tensiti Literacy Programme. As I discussed, Enny and some of the "mothers" (as they call themselves) from Tensiti approached local government bodies for assistance in continuing their literacy programme, but for the most part they relied on their own efforts to raise money, build a schoolhouse, recruit volunteer teachers, connect a water supply, and become literate. I suggest these actions reflect a "realistic knowledge" of the governance issues discussed in Part I, whereby people in Lae simultaneously hold high expectations of the state to deliver development (including education) and turn elsewhere when it fails to meet their expectations. Another example of responsive hope and agency can be seen in the reasons they gave for pursuing literacy. While some of their literacy practices can reproduce their gendered roles, learning English (a form of cultural capital they can convert into economic capital and use in a range of social situations) enables them to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers as well as participate in potentially transformative practices (such as taking out small loans or engaging in informal economies and gaining access to cash, a resource primarily controlled by men).

In Chapter 8 I described how members of Butibam Women's Flower Group, the most newly formed of my four case studies, had not yet started growing flowers but

had nevertheless formed a group and initiated some collective fundraising activities. Butibam Women's Flower Group is similar to Rehnuma-e-Niswaan in that both organisations pursue socially acceptable income-generating activities for women (examples of what Scheyvens, 1998 calls "subtle strategies for women's empowerment"). I pointed out that the women from Butibam recognise that organising collectively is the best way to achieve their goals, and that their investment in women's groups was expressed in their previous group incarnations and in their efforts to network with other organisations involved in PNG's emerging floriculture industry. This can be viewed as "realistic knowledge" of the fact that women in PNG are expected to engage with development processes in groups, as I discussed in Part II.

In discussing how structural inequalities such as poverty provide a common basis for inspiring and sustaining action, I do not suggest that they can ever be viewed in positive terms. I worry about the potential implications of my decision to focus on extraordinary women engaged in a vital struggle for life in urban poor areas. Bourgois highlights the risks involved in representing people living in poverty by quoting a warning issued by Laura Nader in the early 1970s: "Don't study the poor and powerless because everything you say about them will be used against them" (Bourgois, 1996:18). I want to make it clear that structural inequalities are unacceptable and must be eliminated, not viewed as an inevitability that can be cultivated or harnessed for action. As Appadurai states: "Poverty is many things, all of them bad. It is material deprivation and desperation. It is lack of security and dignity. It is exposure to risk and high costs for thin comforts. It is inequality materialized. It diminishes its victims" (2004:64). Poverty and other structures of inequality are extremely difficult to challenge, especially for grassroots-level organisations like the ones described here whose members must act from the positions they occupy in their social worlds (which I described in Parts I and II). Part III shows that my participants are often constrained by existing structures, lack of capital, and social norms in their efforts to gain community support and "live sanely" in the world, as Zigon (2009:259) expressed it, and that their practices can sometimes reproduce the structures they are trying to transform.

In this section I argued that in organising collectively the women I worked with generate collective forms of agency and hope that reflect a realistic appreciation of the social world and their positions within it, but that also break from existing constraints to imagine and pursue a hoped-for future. Gibson-Graham's description of what they term "a politics of collective action" captures this conscious, collective process, which requires "an expansive vision of what is possible, a careful analysis of what can be drawn upon to begin the building process, the courage to make a realistic assessment of what might stand in the way of success, and the decision to go forward with a mixture

of creative disrespect and protective caution” (2006:xxxvi). Next I shift the focus of this discussion to some of the issues associated with sustaining long-term collective action.

Sustaining collective action

A refrain throughout this thesis is that my key participants are collectively organising to improve their lives, the lives of their families, and the wider communities in which they live. I do not suggest that these women are inherently more community-minded or family-oriented than men, and caution against what Molyneux describes as the “familiar assumption that women are naturally predisposed to serve their families or communities either because they are less motivated by a self serving individualism or, more materially, because of their social ‘embeddedness’ in family and neighbourhood ties due to their responsibility for the domain of social reproduction” (2002:178). Nevertheless the case studies in Part III show that my participants do view themselves relationally, suggesting that M. Strathern’s (1988:321) assertion that social relations are a precondition for action in Melanesia can be applied to Howrah and Kolkata as well (similarly in India much of the voluminous academic literature on caste, e.g., Dirks, 2001 or Dumont, 1972, discusses how it informs social relations and social action). Social relations also provide the grounds from which the ‘side effects’ of development emerge. I contend that social relations are vital for sustaining collective action.

Networks and social relations (social capital, in Bourdieu’s terms) are important resources for women organising collectively at the grassroots level, and each chapter has illustrated the different ways in which my participants draw on support from family, friends, *wantoks*, clans, and community members in pursuing their goals and sustaining collective action. In Chapter 5, for example, I described how Binod encourages former students to join Talimi Haq School as volunteer teachers, thus increasing the pool of volunteers. Amina’s plans to expand the *masala* enterprise will encourage long-term sustainability by creating surplus profits which can support Talimi Haq School, and by ensuring that women from PM Basti invest in HPP as a way to generate income for themselves and their families. Tabassum does seek external funding, as I mentioned in Chapter 6, but in its absence she continued to fund Rehnuma-e-Niswaan herself (with her husband’s support) and the moral, emotional, and spiritual support she receives from her family is another vital resource. She also plans to foster long-term financial sustainability for her students by establishing small micro-credit groups. Chapters 7 and 8 have both shown how important social relations are to women’s groups in PNG, although in different ways. In Tensiti, for example, women from different clans, villages and provinces, supported by their husbands and children, have organised collectively in pursuit of literacy (exemplifying what Bing

approvingly described as ‘integral human development’, as I discussed), and their achievements serve to inspire further reciprocal collective action. As members of Lae’s original landowning clans, Butibam Women’s Flower Group members had different resources available to them (such as land) and actively sought to increase the group’s volume of social capital by networking and fundraising, as I discussed in Chapter 8.

Each chapter also clearly indicated that lack of economic capital is a serious concern for my participants and that structures such as class and gender affect their ability to generate and mobilise social capital. Social relations can be both enabling and constraining, and I make some general observations here based on my research. First, building networks takes time, a resource often in short supply for women in urban poor areas who are dependent on their own labour for their daily survival. As Molyneux (2002) discusses, maintaining social capital can come at a high cost to women, whose workloads are often increased when they are targeted for self-help projects and volunteer work. Women from different habitats, social locations, and age groups with varying volumes of capital can find it difficult to forge reciprocal relationships. For example, the differences between what Dickson-Waiko (2003:115) describes as *ol grassroots mama* (grassroots mothers, usually barely literate women from settlements and rural villages) and *ol save meri* (women who know / are educated, usually young aspiring professional women in urban areas) in PNG often result in different interests and purposes in organising collectively, although Chapters 7 and 8 show that educated women like Bing and Salea do often work with *ol grassroots mama*. Women from similar social locations might find it difficult to organise collectively if they are reluctant to take on leadership roles or have internalised social norms regarding female mobility. Membership fees can pose a problem for grassroots organisations seeking to join larger associations. Access to cash can prevent women from attending social activities such as picnics. The very poor are likely to be excluded from networking opportunities altogether. Other funding-related problems include competition (between and within groups), illiteracy and lack of knowledge (which can hinder efforts to seek external funding), and the fact that many women do not have the financial literacy necessary to manage and acquit funding in a transparent or sustainable manner. An emphasis on ‘self-help’ financing can also constrain grassroots organisations, as Macintyre (2003) and Pollard (2003) discuss.

Echoing authors such as Douglas (2003:16), Lister (2004) and Ananya Roy (2003:228-229), my point here is that it is important to avoid romanticizing the capabilities of women-led grassroots organisations. When such organisations are overloaded with responsibilities and expectations in regards to community development, as many are in the absence of effective state interventions, issues such as the ones raised above can lead to failure and stifle long-term collective action. Social

relations are important, but they are also just one component of fostering collective action. The resourcefulness and resilience demonstrated by the women in these stories need to be augmented by responsive structural conditions in order to sustain collective action. This is why it is important to be attentive to failure as well as success in development processes, and why Bourdieu's theory of practice is useful in exploring the factors affecting social change and social reproduction.

CODA

I began this research with the desire to understand the relationship between hope, agency, and development in the context of exceptional women organising collectively for social change in urban poor areas of Howrah, Kolkata, and Lae. In this thesis I have shown that *social relations* play a vital role in providing the grounds for collective hope, in sustaining collective action, and in (re)producing the structural inequalities my participants actively strive to transform through what Bourdieu terms the quest for *being*. In addition, I have presented an argument for focusing on the ‘side effects’ that emerge in pursuing development as well as intended goals, successes and failures. An approach that foregrounds people’s hopes, agency, and the processes and practices involved in organising collectively allows for a reading of development in terms of *possibility* which, as I have shown, is integral to the idea of development.

My research embodies a comparative method anchored in specific historical circumstances rather than overarching explanations, so I do not present any cross-cultural comparisons or general conclusions about hope, agency, or development as a conclusion here. Nor do I recapitulate the main themes arising within this thesis: I have already done that in the discussions concluding each Part. Instead, I reflect on the theoretical and methodological contributions of my work and consider possibilities for future research.

This thesis contributes to anthropological theory by demonstrating how one might develop a theory of hope. I have done so by thinking with Bourdieu (1977, 1985, 1986, 2000, and Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), about hope and agency, and by extending Ghassan Hage’s (2003a) work on hope to an empirical study of development. Hope is a prominent theme in development discourses, as I have shown, but only a few scholars have investigated the relationship between hope and development. This thesis is distinctive in that it provides the first attempt to define what an anthropology of hope might look like with development as its central object of study.

My thesis also makes an important contribution to comparative research methodologies. Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice, it offers a conceptual framework for analysis that I have used to generate new knowledge about the way that development acts as a mechanism for generating and distributing hope within Kolkata, Howrah and Lae. Following Bourdieu, I believe that in order to understand and explain social practice, we must explore how social agents have been constituted and how the social structures they operate within have been constructed. This thesis provides an example of how collective development practices in different countries can be

understood through careful comparative analysis. Like Bourdieu's approach, the strength of my framework is that it is flexible enough to generate comparable data from multiple sites yet remains firmly grounded in the specifics of each place. In presenting my data, I write in conversation with other anthropologists (such as Farmer, 2003; Tsing, 2005; Venkateswar, 2004) who create qualitative, in-depth ethnographies using a comparative perspective to increase our knowledge about development, poverty, and structural inequalities.

Shifting now to look toward the future, I have a number of ideas for ways to extend the scope of my research, as I have noted throughout this thesis. Rather than summarise those research ideas, I want to consider what hope can yield analytically about the people whose lives my research participants are working to transform. My thesis is about *extraordinary* woman organising for social change at the grassroots level. They stand out because of their agency, resourcefulness, and resilience, and are not representative of all those living in urban poverty. However, one does not have to be extraordinary to struggle against poverty and other structural inequalities. The theory of hope I have advanced could be used to understand how ordinary people living in *bastis* and settlements in Kolkata, Howrah, and Lae strive to acquire *being*. Poverty can provide the basis for agency, as I argued, but it can also severely constrain one's sense of the possibilities in life and the ability to hope and dream of a better future. Raymond Williams once said, "To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing" (as cited in Richards, 2002:27), and I want to understand what it would take to make hope possible for people like the woman I met in Narkeldanga who Tabassum described as having "lost all hope in life".

I have not given religion a central place in my analysis, but future research could do so by comparing the relationship between religion, feminism, and development. For example, one could explore the ways in which Muslim women in India and Christian women in PNG (or women from different faiths within the same country) use religious texts or the symbolic power associated with faith to transform constraining gender norms and live meaningful lives. An investigation into the similarities and differences between Islamic and Christian accounts of hope might reveal new perspectives on development, as would a comparison of the role that faith plays in my participants' development initiatives.

I conclude this thesis by sharing my own hopes for future research engagements. While I have not been successful in maintaining contact with all of my research participants, I do plan to return to Howrah, Kolkata, and Lae in 2011 to present them with my research findings and investigate future research plans. I am committed to producing research that is easy to access, understand, and use, and consider it my responsibility to communicate my findings with the people whose

generosity made this thesis possible. I will seek guidance from Amina, Binod, Tabassum, and Bing to make sure I do so in an appropriate manner. I will also endeavour to bring their stories to the attention of a wider audience, including politicians and those in a position to help these organisations achieve their goals, in the hope that such actions will go some way towards ensuring my research has made a difference.

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