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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

pardah – 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