

## Grant Report: Workshop on Discourses of Development, Gender and Intergenerational Aspirations in Asia

### Grant details

Gender Institute funding supported a two-day socio-cultural anthropology workshop exploring the relationships between imaginaries of ‘development’, changing gender roles, and familial socio-economic mobility in Asia. Comparing ethnographic settings in five countries, participants explored how imaginaries of ‘development’, ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’ shape and reflect familial aspirations and intergenerational expectations. We also considered how these articulate with changing gender roles, new subject positions, and idealised life paths, and what happens when hoped for futures fail to materialise.

Among other outcomes, the event enabled participants from four universities to intensively workshop pre-circulated draft papers, share our work with and elicit ideas from a broader audience through a public panel discussion, and map overarching themes. Outputs include six revised papers for a journal special issue.

### Event details

**Title:** *Discourses of Development, Gender and Intergenerational Aspirations in Asia*

**Dates:** 22-23 November 2019

**Convenor:** Dr Hannah Bulloch

**Description:**

With the rise of capitalism, mass media, migration and education, now is a time of profound socio-economic change throughout Asia. While social scientists often examine such changes through large-scale patterns, the changes are lived as deeply personal and relational. Within communities, young people are often viewed as instrumental to upward familial mobility, and this effects divisions of labour, norms of domestic moral economy, expectations of marriage and childbearing, and distributions of power. It creates new subject positions, but it also generates tensions and slippages where ideals compete or become nearly impossible to achieve. Giving particular attention to the lives of girls and women, panellists explored how old and new dreams – some emphasising autonomy, while others stress familial obligation – conjoin, elide and compete, and how people negotiate associated life path expectations. We also considered how dreams find limits, requiring redreaming and rerouting.

The two-day program incorporated a public panel discussion in which panellists considered similarities and differences between our fieldsites in the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia India and Nepal, and welcomed reflections from the audience. The second day consisted of a closed workshop in which participants intensively discussed pre-circulated draft papers, discussed connecting themes and determined the group’s preferred publication avenue. Participants identified strengths and areas for improvement in each paper. Drawing the day’s discussions, the convenor then prepared a successful proposal for a special issue in an anthropology journal, and the participants revised and submitted their papers (see appendix below for abstracts).

Overall the workshop exceeded expectations. It proved an extremely productive exchange of ideas, and participants reflected that it provided an excellent model through which to undertake

collaborative work of this nature in future. We also appreciated the opportunity to become better acquainted with fellow scholars with shared research interests.

**Panellists:**

*Dr Hannah Bulloch*

*Australian National University (now School of Social Sciences, University of Otago)*

Hannah's work focuses on discourses of development, gender and domestic moral economy in the Philippines. She has also published on wellbeing, migration, foetal personhood, postcolonial identity, Indigenous freshwater rights, community-based healthcare services, and bilateral poverty policy.

*Dr Margaret Becker*

*Anthropology and Development Studies, University of Adelaide*

Margaret specialises in gender, critical development, women's empowerment, rights, and social change. She has extensive experience working with culturally and linguistically diverse groups, particularly in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu.

*Dr Annie McCarthy*

*Global Studies, University of Canberra*

Annie's work focuses on children, non-governmental organisations and notions of development in India, including long-term fieldwork in a Delhi slum community. Drawing on multidisciplinary approaches, she has particularly explored the way marginalised children negotiate and challenge the institutions that seek to preserve, foster or establish 'childhood.'

*Dr Justine Chambers*

*Culture, History and Language, ANU*

Justine is Associate Director of the Myanmar Research Centre. Her research focuses on understandings of morality and goodness among Karen in Myanmar, and also include ethnic conflict, communal violence, land tenure, youth, migration and debt.

*Associate Professor Tanya Jakimow*

*School of Social Sciences, UNSW Sydney (now Culture, History and Language, ANU)*

Tanya is currently undertaking a comparative ethnography of women political actors in India and Indonesia. Her most recent monograph focuses on volunteers in a community-driven development program in Medan, Indonesia, and with women Municipal Councillors in Dehra Dun, India.

## Impact

Five panellists/contributors (early and mid-career researchers) participated in the full two days of workshop. Nineteen people attended the open workshop, including academics from other universities and members of the public.

The workshop was instrumental in assisting the core participants achieve our goal of generating a volume on intergenerational aspirations in Asia, providing a space for us to intensively compare material and collectively brainstorm ideas. As such, indirect outputs include a successful special issue proposal to a prominent anthropology journal, and six papers submitted to the journal for peer review (the five workshopped at the event, plus the Introduction based partly on the day's discussions).

The articles emerging from the project are:

- Introduction: Development, Gender and Intergenerational Aspirations in Asia, by Hannah Bulloch
- Multiple Developments: Intergenerational Aspiration and Contested Childhoods in a Delhi NGO, by Annie McCarthy
- ‘It’s All about Education’: Women’s Aspirations for Choice, Freedom and Modernity in Urban Nepal by Margaret Becker
- Personifying Progress: Young Women and Intergenerational Conflict in the Philippines, by Hannah Bulloch,
- Chasing Eudaimonic Wellbeing in a Contested Moral Landscape: Karen Youth Hopes and Virtuous Potential in Myanmar, by Justine Chambers
- Middle-aged Women and Intergenerational Aspirations in Dehradun, India: Mobility as Social Achievement During Post-active Motherhood, by Tanya Jakimow

We thank the ANU Gender Institute for its support, which has enabled valuable collaboration and assisted us in editing a volume for publication.



## Appendix A: Article Abstracts

### **Introduction: Development, Gender and Intergenerational Aspirations in Asia**

*Hannah Bulloch*

The guest editor’s introduction explores key themes and differences between the articles, linking this with the broader literature on discourses of development and family, particularly from an anthropological perspective. This includes considering the relationships between discourses of development and cross-regional trends of migration, education, marriage, and employment; exploring changing concepts of self and service to others, including freedom, consumerism, reciprocity and filial piety; and theorising the space where formal conceptions of development meet imaginaries of personal growth and social mobility.

### **Multiple developments: Intergenerational aspiration and contested childhoods in a Delhi NGO**

*Annie McCarthy*

In slum communities in Delhi, aspirations typically transcend individual lifespans, with children regarded as both the beneficiaries and means of achieving their family’s goals of development. Yet these children, and the familial projects of development they carry with them, come up against institutionalised and formalised concepts of development in the space of the local NGOs that increasingly surround their community. This article explores what happens when these two traditions of development come together, describing the ways children, their parents, and NGO workers navigate the very different histories and forms of aspiring that led them to Delhi’s slums. Specifically, by focussing on organisations that seek to engage children with development through extra-curricular activities, this paper explores the role of neo-liberal subjectivities in producing specific temporalities of development and aspiration.

### **Chasing Eudaimonic Wellbeing in a Contested Moral Landscape: Karen Youth Hopes and Virtuous Potential in Myanmar**

*Justine Chambers*

In the last five years, major social, political and economic transformations have taken place in southeastern Karen State, Myanmar. In the context of the political transition, non-state educational sites have become important actors in young Karen people’s lives, restructuring social imaginaries and moral matrices of aspiration and success. Within these spaces, a developmentalist metanarrative has achieved a hegemonic narrative, positioning youth as blank sheets of paper through which to write their own history. Drawing from Hirokazu Miyazaki’s (2004) conceptualisation of hope as a “method of knowledge production”, in this paper I explore the hopes of young men and women to reorient their knowledge and personal subjectivities through these new learning centres. Examining the tensions between the traditional habitus of morality as embedded in filial obligations and the utopian ideas of youth education as a means for individual self-development, I critique linear trajectories of education. In attending to the tangled web of intergenerational, institutional and affective practices which shape young people’s hopes and aspirations towards upward social mobility, I show that the manner in which development and its associated subjectivity is formed, is a complex, fractious and often, ambiguous process.

### **Personifying Progress: Young Women and Intergenerational Conflict in the Philippines**

*Hannah Bulloch*

On the Philippine island of Siquijor, young adults are assigned a pivotal role in helping their families ‘get ahead’ in an age of mobility and rapid economic transformation. Parents from small-scale fishing and farming backgrounds invest considerably in their children’s tertiary educations, partly in hope that they will gain ‘professional’ employment and send money home. Despite the pressures on young people this entails, Siquijodnon characterise the period of pre-marital education and employment in terms of freedom and modernity, contrasting it to the restrictions and obligations that soon come with marriage and child-rearing. This paper explores the fine balance of expectations that befall young women as ‘agents of progress’, highlighted by prevalent intergenerational conflict over young women’s life paths and, in particular, relationship choices. It critically investigates what such conflicts tell us about the tensions between individualism and relationality in an increasingly globalised world.

### **‘It’s all about education’: women’s aspirations of choice, freedom and modernity in urban Nepal**

*Margaret Becker*

State-sponsored and internationally funded development initiatives have brought modernity to Nepal, including the rhetoric of universalist notions of ‘progress’ and ‘empowerment’ to Nepal. Nevertheless, there exists a contradiction between the promises of modernity and the social realities of Nepali people, particularly for women, as powerful gender norms and patriarchal family structures remain entrenched. This paper examines the experiences of modernity for young, middle-class, high-caste women in Kathmandu. Drawing on ethnographic research, the paper highlights how young women participate in the cultural processes of modernity and the transformations this engagement brings. Education has afforded young women new possibilities and aspirations, compared particularly in contrast to earlier generations, such as ‘choice’ and ‘freedom’. However, these desires often come up against tightly held values of the women’s families, especially in relation to marriage. Thus, while being ‘modern’ is defined by the standards of ‘development’, there is a slippage between desire and reality where these promises of modernity are unable to be fully realised.

### **Middle-aged women and intergenerational aspirations in Dehradun, India: Mobility as social achievement during post-active motherhood**

*Tanya Jakimow*

Post-active motherhood can be a period of flourishing for many women. Aspirations for social achievement beyond the domestic sphere become imaginable or realizable as women are released from the more intensive work of raising children. This article examines this period of life for a cohort of women in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India. After years of social service and political activities, these women seek social advancement through the formal status as municipal councillor for their ward. Such projects are frustrated, unachievable due to not having the right type of capital, resulting in mobility in imagination, immobility in fact. In revealing how such projects are frustrated I draw attention to the constrained mobility of women in post-active motherhood as a feminist and social issue.

## Appendix B: Schedule

### Day 1: Friday 22 November

<i>Time</i>	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Event</i>
10.00 – 11.00	Hedley Bull 2	Participants can choose to attend ASAA AGM
11.15 – 12.30	Hedley Bull 3	Writing workshop writing
12.30 – 1.30		Lunch
1.30 – 3.15		
3.15 – 4.45	Hedley Bull 3	Panel discussion (public event)
6.00	Spicy Ginger 25 Childers St	Dinner

### Day 2: Saturday 23 November (closed workshop)

Venue: Conference Room, third floor, John Yencken Building

9.00	Arrive, tea and coffee, overview of day's format
9.15 – 10.00	Discussion of Paper 1
10.15 – 11.00	Discussion of Paper 2
11.15 – 12.00	Discussion of Paper 3
12.00 – 1.00	Lunch
1.00 – 1.45	Discussion of Paper 4
2.00 – 2.45	Discussion of Paper 5
3.00 – 5.00	Brainstorming Introduction and planning next steps