Mark James Studentship (Geography Department, Birkbeck)

**Project Title:** Intersectional and intergenerational gendered experiences of climate change in urban India

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**Project description**

**Rationale and aims:**

The disproportional effects of climate change on women and girls were highlighted during Glasgow’s COP26. This illustrates the increasing awareness that climate vulnerability is exacerbated by gender and other social inequalities. However, research on the topic is yet to be translated into policies which tend to focus on technocratic solutions to the biophysical impacts of climate change. This project contributes to climate change studies with an investigation of how climate change and environmental risks intersect with other forms of systemic exclusion to produce differentiated impacts on diversely situated women and girls. It does so by applying a feminist political ecology approach to analyse the everyday politics of water practices in one of India’s second-tier cites, with a focus on the ways in which urban inequalities in access to water infrastructures exacerbate environmental risk.

India is a relevant research site due to its vulnerability to urban flooding as well as significant and widening deficits on access to water and sanitation infrastructures. By 2030, the country’s water demand is projected to be twice the available supply in part due to failing monsoons, glacial retreat and surface warming (IPCC, 2017). A growing body of literature on urban India is attentive to how water infrastructures are shaped by social and spatial inequalities (Anand 2017) with some attention to gender (Truelove, 2019). Much of this work focuses on India’s mega-cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta) overlooking the situation faced by the largest proportion of urban dwellers in India and the Global South: those living in “ordinary cities”. The study will focus on one of India’s second-tier cities in order to understand how diverse groups of women in India’s urban areas are affected by and cope with inequalities in water infrastructure.

The project will analyse how the gendered consequences of water scarcity and flooding differ across class, caste, age and religion. Where intersectionality has been tackled by the literature, the focus is generally on prime-age poor women from rural areas, informal settlements or resettlement colonies. This research innovates by applying a comparative approach that looks at women from different group ages living in both middle-class and
poor areas to understand how inequalities in water infrastructures are produced relationally and have changed over time. The project focuses on everyday life, which is key for understanding how responses to crises - such as floods or droughts - are shaped by quotidian experiences. It thus responds to the call in contemporary resilience debates for a wider, intersectional, understanding of how resilience-building is rooted in people’s lived realities.

**Research aims (RA):**

1. To examine how gendered everyday experiences surrounding access to water infrastructure vary across social groups according to factors such as caste, class, age, religion and disability.
2. To analyse how changes in urban waterscapes have impacted the life chances of different categories of women.
3. To understand how the perpetuation of these inequalities, through water access and flood control, affect resilience and adaptation capacities.

**Significance:**

The project responds to the urgent challenges created by climate change in the context of rapid urbanisation, demographic change, and increasing inequality. By building a qualitative data base of differentiated impacts of climate change on diversely situated women, it will provide key expertise for shaping socially just policy responses and adaptation strategies. In broadening the scope of urban climate change research to include second-tier cities it will facilitate productive comparative exercises with existing literature on mega-cities and rural areas. The project addresses fundamental gaps in the literature by making a contribution at the intersection of gender, urban development and environmental studies, opening up dialogues with at least three of our research clusters.

**Methodology:**

The research will use a qualitative comparative case-study approach combining various methods of data collection (e.g. focus groups, participant observation, semi-structured and life-story interviews). The case selection will be carried out by the selected PhD student.

We envisage a comparison between three settlements, to capture the key axes of difference (RA1). For instance, the settlements could comprise a predominantly middle-class settlement, a low caste, informal settlement and a Muslim settlement. Research participants should be recruited from different age groups, allowing for RA2 to be tackled through the use of life-story interviews. Finally, engagement with various bottom-up organisations will provide the data needed for RA3. Fieldwork will take 12 months to capture seasonal variations in the waterscape.

Interviews will focus on women’s and girls’ everyday experiences surrounding water access and flooding vis-a-vis those of men/boys. We anticipate the need for approximately 60 interviews with female residents and 15 with males. Additionally, interviews will be carried out with local leaders and various actors involved in the provision of water and sewage
services. We expect the use of participant observation and/or shadowing, which includes observing and recording people as they carry out their day-to-day activities and tasks. Focus groups may be used to capture gendered and intergenerational differences in experience. Research will be conducted in the local language.

**Candidate Requirements:**

We invite applications from outstanding and highly motivated candidates who have a Master’s degree in Sociology, Anthropology, Geography or other relevant discipline at merit or distinction level (with a minimum grade of 65% for their dissertation). Experience of living, travelling or working in India as well as relevant language skills would be advantageous.

**Subject areas/keywords:**

- Urban inequalities
- Climate Change
- Gender
- Intersectionality
- Water governance

**Key References:**


**Further information:**

Further information about PhDs at Birkbeck is available from the research section of the Birkbeck website.

Application forms and instructions on how to apply are available from the Geography, Environment and Development Studies programme page.

The application will prompt you to confirm details of any scholarships or grants (for your proposed study at Birkbeck).
Please ensure that you respond with: ‘Mark James Scholarship’. (Failing to do so means that your application may not be considered for the scholarship.)

Please also ensure that, in the section where you identify your potential supervisor, you add the name of the supervisors and the title of the project you are applying for.

1. Check that you meet the entry requirements, including English language requirements, as below:

If English is not your first language or you have not previously studied in English, our usual requirement is the equivalent of an International English Language Testing System (IELTS Academic Test) score of 7.0, with not less than 6.5 in each of the sub-tests.

Visit the International section of our website to find out more about our English language entry requirements and relevant requirements by country.

2. We request the following documents from each applicant:

- A recent CV
- Transcripts of relevant studies and – where appropriate – a letter from your course coordinator predicting the expected degree result (for those who are currently enrolled in a Master’s-level programme or equivalent);
- A sample of writing such as your MA dissertation, or similar.
- A supporting statement. In the case of a Mark James scholarship, you will be applying for a specific project, which means you are not expected to submit your own research proposal. Instead, please state clearly in your application which project you are applying for, and use the Supporting Statement in the application to explain what attracted you to the project and why you are a suitable candidate for this research.

3. References

Referees will be automatically prompted to upload their references when you submit your application.

Please note that all references must be uploaded by 18 April 2022. We strongly encourage you to contact your referees in advance to ensure they are prepared to upload their reference following submission of your application.

Closing date for applications is: 11 April 2022.

If you have any questions, please contact the respective supervisor(s) of the project you wish to apply for.