



Biomedicine in an Unstable Place: Infrastructure and Personhood in a Papua New Guinean Hospital (Experimental Futures)

Alice Street

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Biomedicine in an Unstable Place is the story of people's struggle to make biomedicine work in a public hospital in Papua New Guinea. It is a story encompassing the history of hospital infrastructures as sites of colonial and postcolonial governance, the simultaneous production of Papua New Guinea as a site of global medical research and public health, and people's encounters with urban institutions and biomedical technologies. In Papua New Guinea, a century of state building has weakened already inadequate colonial infrastructures, and people experience the hospital as a space of institutional, medical, and ontological instability.

In the hospital's clinics, biomedical practitioners struggle amid severe resource shortages to make the diseased body visible and knowable to the clinical gaze. That struggle is entangled with attempts by doctors, nurses, and patients to make themselves visible to external others—to kin, clinical experts, global scientists, politicians, and international development workers—as socially recognizable and valuable persons. Here hospital infrastructures emerge as relational technologies that are fundamentally fragile but also offer crucial opportunities for making people visible and knowable in new, unpredictable, and powerful ways.

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