

SYNOPSIS

Gendered Informality: Life, Work and the Politics of Livelihood in Kolkata's Street Economy

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Introduction

This is a dissertation on the institutionalisation of street hawking and the gendered and ethnic/racial production of space in the post-colonial urban context. It intends to offer a critique of trade unionism among the street hawkers by showing the terms through which inclusions and exclusions in the trade union space take place. As a means to the above end, the dissertation traces how the hawkers, and especially the woman hawkers, have struggled in a changing world, how they have experienced and negotiated that change, and how the histories of the market and the state are closely connected to the saga of their everyday lives. While scholarship in the fields of the informal economy, urban studies and labour studies have focussed extensively on street hawking and the politics of space-making, the gendered relationship involved in hawking and livelihood practices on the streets has not received much academic attention. Moreover, a comprehensive analysis of selective amnesia, which is an important component of any process of institutionalisation, is quite rare.

In the historiography of street hawking, a missing link is the deeper conversation between micro-history related to urban geography and the trajectories of space and labour studies. The aim of this PhD project is to study the continuities and changes, considering the micro-geographies of a phenomenon and its macro-structural manifestations in street hawking. I have tried to connect the diverse urban economies, governance structures, and histories of street hawking present across different cities of India through different eras. The thesis portrays the transformation of Calcutta's cityscape, focussing on the historical understanding of space-making and the practice of hawking. Scholars working on informal economy, urban studies, and labour studies have contributed immensely to the literature on street-hawking and the politics of space. Nevertheless, there is a gap in knowledge on gendered relationships and livelihood practices on the streets. This dissertation studies street hawking through the lens of gender and offers a critique of trade unionism that thrived in this sector over the last four decades.

a) Focus of Research

I have worked in two sites—Calcutta and Imphal—presenting two distinct urban contexts to study how gender relations evolve according to local political, social, and patriarchal cultures and how they shape the politics of street hawking. The idea is to arrive at a trans-cultural and a trans-urban interrogation whereby I deploy one city context to ask questions of another. There are several reasons for choosing these two sites for my study. Calcutta exemplifies the metropolitan and a 'mainland' political context, whereas Imphal reflects the politics of the 'periphery'. In Calcutta, street hawking is historically a male-dominated livelihood activity, while in Imphal, women dominate the profession, practices, and the public space. This contrast between the two urban contexts offers a melded perspective to launch a study of gender and street hawking in contemporary India. Although, focused on a particular group that is embedded in the cultural economy of these two cities, the scope of our discussion is not restricted to the urban politics of Calcutta and Imphal. I have connected the specific political articulations of a postcolonial locale and the everyday life histories of mobile, mercantile capital. The thesis will be a valuable addition to the critical literature on postcolonial urban histories and gender studies.

b) Hypothesis

In the course of the four chapters, I present an account of the processes of institutionalization among the street hawkers who constitute a particular segment of the 'informal economy'. I view institutionalization as a dialectical exchange between the formalizing impulses of governmental politics and the mobilization impulses of organizational politics. I examine this process in three different areas—the city space, trade unions, and the archive. All these areas have been analysed through the lens of gender to understand the specific exclusions in what came to be known as the hawkers' movement. In the retelling of the history of the trade unions, the role played by women have been largely ignored, while specific female figures have been iconized; this work explores how this iconization has strategically resulted in the erasure of the larger female narrative in the hawkers' movement.

1. Literature Review

The term "informal economy" became popular in public policy, labour, and development studies literature from the 1970s onwards, after Keith Hart's (1973) seminal research on street vending in Accra, Ghana. This research was conducted under the aegis of the ILO. Since then numerous researches have been conducted, especially in the contexts of the 'developing world' cities on economic activities beyond the 'formal contractual regime of capital' (Bandyopadhyay 2010; also see Sanyal 2007).¹ What is the informal economy, and why is street hawking considered a veritable instance of economic informality?

In the informal economy, a typical player keeps their initial stock intact and meets their daily needs by using the surplus. For instance, a player in the informal economy will take all measures to keep their enterprise on keeping its size intact. Typically, they can not reproduce their enterprise at an expanded scale as big corporations do in the previous circuit. Their surplus comes from their own work as labourers in the enterprise and from the unpaid labour of their partner, siblings, kids, and other kinsmen. At times, they do employ workers, but this might not be a permanent feature of that enterprise. Because of self-exploitation and unpaid family labour that goes into the transformation of a commodity, they can keep the commodity price low. The initial literature on informality delved primarily into the economic aspects of it.

Scholars have studied its relationship with the formal sector, forward and backward linkages (McGhee 1971, Dasgupta 1992).² In the past couple of decades, however, a shift in emphasis on the politics of informality in this literature has been observed by various scholars (Anjaria 2008, Bandyopadhyay 2010).³ The new scholarship began to take an interest in unravelling complex transactions between subalternity, public space and resistance (Anjaria 2008, Bandyopadhyay

¹Sanyal, K. 2007. *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-Colonial Capitalism*. Routledge: New Delhi

² McGee, T. G. 1973. *Hawkers in Hong Kong: A Study of Planning and Policy in a Third World City*. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong.

³Anjaria, J. S. 2008. *Unruly Streets: Everyday Practices and Promises of Globality in Mumbai*. PhD Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz.

———. 2010. "The Politics of Illegality: Mumbai Hawkers, Public Space and the Everyday Life of the Law," In *Street Vendors in the Global Urban Economy*, ed. S Bhawmik, New Delhi: Routledge.

2010).⁴ As a result, interdisciplinary literature on street vending developed, which explored how vendors negotiated and resisted the market and government forces in various cities in the neoliberal context (Cross 1998, Stoller 1996 and 2002, Duneier 1999, Rajagopal 2001, Popke and Ballard 2004, Stillerman 2006 and Donovan 2008).⁵ Thus, in the last two decades, the literature on street vending transitioned from purely economic analysis to anthropological and sociological studies of the marginal populations and their ‘tactics’ (Bandyopadhyay 2010).⁶

Literature on the informal economy in general and street hawking, in particular, has primarily remained a province of anthropology and development studies with a strong focus on contemporary processes. Only very recently have historians become interested in studying informality, casualization, and non-wage labour relations. (Bhattacharya and Lucassen 2005).⁷ Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay (2010) says that there could be two reasons for historians’ new thrust towards/ informality.⁸ First, as labour history shifted to the erstwhile colonies and the postcolonial societies, the Western (specifically British social-historical) model of the labour-capital relationship began to feel inadequate to the scholars (Chakrabarty 1981).⁹ Along with class and gender, caste too began to play a role in understanding working-class histories, especially in the context of South Asia. Second, these new histories of labour shared a temporal overlap with "the reversal of the process of formalization (in four decades since the Great Depression) with trade liberalization (Bhattacharya and Lucassen 2005).¹⁰ While a group of historians have questioned the very boundary between wage worker and non-wage worker, self-employed, homemaker, a few others, most notably Prabhu Mohapatra (2005), attempted to historically situate the informal economy in colonial India in its interface with law, state power and market” (Bandyopadhyay 2010).¹¹

2. Research gaps and questions

In light of the literature discussed so far, it is possible now to approach with a greater degree of clarity the particular blind spots in this field of study. In this thesis, I present an account of the processes of institutionalization among the street hawkers who constitute a particular segment of the ‘informal economy’. As stated earlier, this thesis views institutionalization as a dialectical exchange between the formalizing impulses of governmental politics and the mobilization impulses of organizational politics, examined in three different areas—the city space, trade

⁴Ibid.

⁵Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti .2010. *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces Of Kolkata’s Footpaths, 1975-2005*. PhD Thesis. Faculty of Arts, Jadavpur University.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Bhattacharya, S. and J. Lucassen. 2005. *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800-2000*. New Delhi: Macmillan.

⁸Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti .2010. *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces Of Kolkata’s Footpaths, 1975-2005*. PhD Thesis. Faculty of Arts, Jadavpur University.

⁹Chakrabarty, D. 1981. “Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal’s Jute Mill-hands in the 1890s.” *Past and Present* 91: 140-169.

¹⁰Bhattacharya, S. and J. Lucassen. 2005. *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800-2000*. New Delhi: Macmillan.

¹¹Mohapatra, P. 2005. “Regulated Informality: Legal Constructions of Labour Relations in Colonial India 1814-1926.” In *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800-2000*, ed. S Bhattacharya and J Lucassen. New Delhi: Macmillan and see Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti .2010. *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata’s Footpaths, 1975-2005*. PhD Thesis. Faculty of Arts, Jadavpur University.

unions, and the archive—and analysed through the lens of gender. In doing so, the work will analyse the erasure of women's narrative from the history of the hawkers' movement.

The dissertation frames a feminist critique of the materiality and the discourses of street hawking in Calcutta. The study highlights three major themes in feminist critique. Firstly, it unravels the gendered nature of the space of work such as the street, the footpath, and the railway platform. How are these spaces conceived in 'plans' and perceived and lived through by different constituencies, especially the women who participate in hawking? In what follows, I study the ways in which the politics of a certain livelihood practice (i.e., street hawking) and the politics of public space complement and develop each other in the city. The dissertation studies the kinds of alliances that were forged and fractions that emerged in the process of institutionalization over the last few decades in both Calcutta and Imphal. To what extent can research on negotiated claim-makings to the streets and urban infrastructures enable us to understand the changing registers of rights and the politics of space production in the context of the current conjuncture of revanchist urban development?¹²

The scholarship in this field is rich and diverse. We know, in the last couple of decades, Lefebvre's call for 'right to the city' has acquired a new public life in the cities of Latin America, Asia and Africa.¹³ Popular politics in these cities have demanded and sustained social rights in the face of neoliberal reforms. Thus, Article I of 'World Charter on the Right to the City' (2004) declares:

*The Right to the City is defined as the equitable enjoyment of the cities while respecting the principles of sustainability, democracy, and social justice. It is a collective right of all city inhabitants, especially the vulnerable and disfavoured on whom is further conferred legality for such actions and organization as their culture and custom suggest as a means of achieving the complete enjoyment of the right to an adequate standard of living. The Right to the City is interdependent to all recognized international human rights, and its conception is based on an integral view, which includes civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights enshrined in the International Human Rights Treaties. It also includes the right to liberty of association and organization; the respect for minorities and racial, ethnic, sexual, and cultural plurality; respect for immigrants; and the guarantee of the preservation of historical and cultural heritages.*¹⁴

However, despite a progressive radicalization of the right to the city, in the last several decades, the academic literature has paid little attention to how the rights in question are often gendered. On the contrary, feminist and queer scholarship in urban studies unravels a much more complex nature of spatial negotiations and contestations by marginalized social groups. This brings us to the second key theme of this dissertation. It suggests that we need a much more subtle and sensitive approach to 'the gendered mediation of everyday experiences' and undertakes 'more inclusive forms of intervention in urban space' (Beebejaun 2017).¹⁵ To accomplish this task, I study the gendered labour process in understanding street hawking. How do women street vendors sell and circulate? Where and what do they sell? What explains their concentration in a few places and in a few commodity markets? To what extent does the women's experience of street hawking differ from that of their male colleagues? What kind of everyday violence do they

¹²KunduRatula, Mukherjee Anushyama, unpublished paper Changing Spatial Claims and Everyday Negotiations: A Study of Street Vendors in Kolkata.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/World_Charter_on_the_Right_to_the_City.htm#:~:text=ARTICLE%20I,principles%20and%20norms%20established%20herein.

¹⁵<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07352166.2016.1255526?needAccess=true>

face? Is there a gendered nature of violence? How is women's contribution at the preparatory stages of street hawking (for instance, cooking food, producing materials on sale) marginalized in the prevailing discourses of street vending?

The marginalization of women in the 'economics' of street hawking is compounded by the erasure of their role in the political sphere, i.e. in the space of the trade union. This takes us to the third and most significant theme of this dissertation. In this endeavour, I track how gender difference has been inscribed in the process of institutionalization of street hawking itself. In other words, I study the gendered modes of organizing and mobilizing street hawkers. Who organizes and who gets mobilized? What happens when one finds herself already included in the existing patriarchal mechanisms of organization? How can one make an analytical distinction between organization and mobilization using a gender lens?

3. Theoretical Considerations

In attempting to answer the research problems, it will not be out of place to reflect on a gradually developing framework that could specifically focus on the mechanics and the politics of invisibilization and how this has been embedded within the organizational structure of the hawkers' movement itself. This thesis attempts to historicize the hawker's movements from a gender perspective. One of the theoretical frameworks that has helped in this thesis has been that of social reproduction theory.

The 'feminist turn' in labour studies and its marriage to Marxism ever since the 1970s pointed out that the lack of accurate data on women's contribution to the informal economy was due to "gender bias" in relevant scholarship. Biased scholars, they argued, contributed to women's continued invisibility in the sector (Nunez 1993).¹⁶ In this context, Tinker (1987) suggested that the existing paradigm of measurement needed to be changed to account for their "overwhelming" contribution in the informal economy".¹⁷ Tinker pointed out that data were generally collected from workshops and enterprises where men dominated. But, if the household and the domestic sphere of life came to the focus of our research, the data about women's participation would look quite different. Tinker asked us to measure unpaid work that women do as part of their task of social reproduction.

This view signalled a powerful Marxist-Feminist theory known as "social reproduction theory". Lise Vogel (2017) stated, "...social reproduction theory without discarding the strengths of intersectionality thinking, especially its ability to develop nuanced descriptive and historical accounts of various 'categories of social difference'".¹⁸ Vogel argues that women's capacity to

¹⁶Lorena Nunez, (October.30,1993) "*Women on the Streets: Vending and Public Space in Chile*" Economic and Political Weekly, Oct . 30,1993, Vol.28,No.44,pp.Accessed from [http:// www.jstor.org/stable/4400348](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4400348).

¹⁷Tinker, Irene(1987): 'Street Food: Testing Assumptions about Informal Sector Activity by Women and Men' in *Current Sociology*, Vol35, No3, Winter.

Lise Vogel, "Domestic Labor Revisited," *Science & Society*, 64, no. 2 (2000): 151–70; reprinted in Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013 [1983]), 183–98.

bear children plays a critical role in class society as in subordinate classes they contribute to producing the 'direct producers' and this female labour has very little cost for capital (Bhattacharya, 2013).

As the debate progressed, feminist scholars in the field began to emphasize how we could factor in women's role in the informal economy (Conolly 1985, and Mac Ewen Scott 1991).¹⁹ While explaining gendered segmentation in the informal economy, Mac Ewen Scott emphasized family as the key locus and institution at the heart of petty commodity production.²⁰ One may see the predominance of males in Calcutta's street vending. If we scratch the surface, we see how women at home played significant roles in not just the male vendor's social reproduction but also in producing the commodity he is selling. In my numerous interactions with male street vendors—especially in the food sector—I found that women at home played a key role in transforming raw materials into eatable food items. In my field ethnography of the DLF area in the New Town area, I located a discrepancy in wages of women and male employees of the food hawkers.

Secondly, I have explored how race is an important player in the realm of hawking and the politics of unionization as is evident from the absence of Chinese representatives in the hawkers' unions. I conceived that it was not merely ignorance that formed an obstacle on part of the unions to unionise the hawkers of the Chinatown rather it was a 'social construct'²¹ and institutional racism²² about the Chinese people that implicitly prevented the unions from bringing them under their aegis.

¹⁹Lorena Nunez, (October.30,1993) "*Women on the Streets:Vending and Public Space in Chile*" Economic and Political Weekly, Oct . 30 ,1993,Vol.28,No.44,pp.Accessed from [http:// www.jstor.org/stable/4400348](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4400348).

²⁰Mac Ewen Scott, Alison (1991): 'Informal Sector or Female Sector?: Gender Bias in Urban Labour Market Model' in *Male Bias in the Development Process*, Diane Elsm(ed), Manchester University Press, pp104-31.

²¹This sheer ignorance can be perceived as can be socially 'constructed ignorance'.To unpack the ignorance of the leaders of hawker union, I wish to use ignorance as a social category to understand the phenomenon. Does ignorance mean simply lack of knowledge of such as uncertainty, mistakes, negative knowledge, liminal knowledge, tacit knowledge and intuition?²¹The constructivist approach of ignorance as an analytical tool would better enable understand the cause of obliviousness of the people of the breakfast market. In constructivist approach, ignorance is not viewed as lack, negative or opposite of knowledge rather perceived as a separate construct far more complex and differentiated and it is formed through various social constructions(cf. Schütz&Luckmann, 1979; Weinstein & Weinstein, 1978).²¹ Thus Ignorance as a construct may have also been created deliberately by an individual; this is described as 'cultivated ignorance' (Rapp, 1972 p. 159). The 'individual ignorance' is often shaped by the environment of an individual or experiences (Schütz&Luckmann, 1979 p. 203f). Daniel Dorniook writes that a "according to Weinstein and Weinstein, ignorance can also be converted into knowledge, more specifically into knowledge that is accepted as 'correct' by the society".²¹ I intend to borrow the analytical framework of individual ignorance where ignorance is converted into knowledge that is accepted by the society.

²²In an essay published in 1979, Carol Camp Yeakey posited that racism operates on both a covert and an overt level and takes two related forms: "The first is on an individual level. The second in an institutional level where racism as a normative, societal ideology operates within and among the organizations, institutions, and processes of the larger society. And the overt acts of individual racism and the more covert acts of institutional racism have a mutually reinforcing effect" I tried to understand the issue of ignorance of Chinese hawker's existence and lack of intend on part of the state and unions to represent the community within the larger paradigm of institutional racism commenced after Sino-China war of 1962.

4. Sources

Since my childhood, I had been familiar with terms such as 'Hawker' and 'uchhhed'(eviction), even without knowing their epistemological meaning. My father (hereafter Baba) was associated with the hawkers' movements from the 1970s and this blurred for me the spatial concept of field and home. The perception of space and its public and private binaries have remained obscure for me. From the early years of my birth, my parents inhabited separate living spaces, and Baba used to live in the Union office. The Union Office was synonymous with his private space. There I first encountered the word 'hawker'. Who were the hawkers? How were they different from us? They were mainly people who used to hawk in different parts of Calcutta in the late 80s. Many of them hailed from the neighbouring state of Bihar and communicated with me in broken Bengali. Baba would start holding a meeting with them from early morning, discussing the diverse problems faced by the hawker community in general and individuals in particular. Within a few years, I had developed an informal relationship with the hawkers who often visited the office. This informal connection with the present subjects of my dissertation has lent me a much wider and deeper understanding of the discourse.

The methodological focus for this thesis is on ethnographic fieldwork, oral history, and archival data. The archival sources and multi-sited ethnography were collected from January 2017 till the end of 2019. The ethnographic research was conducted mainly to go beyond the textual representations of my subject community –women street hawkers – and capture their self-representation.

During my fieldwork in Imphal, I have found that the oral narratives of solidarity among various women groups often cloaked stories of discrimination and discrepancies, raised questions about gender hierarchies in the same gendered space. I have extensively studied the membership structures of the National Hawker Federation in multiple cities which have a high proportion of women members. I have undertaken semi-structured interviews of women hawkers and women leaders of all member unions using the random sampling method to ensure representative coverage.

I used the 'Daily Notes Files' of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police to trace the several hawker evictions and mobilization associated with it from the 1980s to 1998. I even tried to get access to classified files. During 2018 most of the files were in the process of digitalization, which caused immense pressure to get hold of the files. Most of the files connected to Mamata Banerjee in 'Operation Sunshine' were missing. Ethnography of the archives also shed much valuable light on why and how files get missing and what kinds of information are classified.

Apart from this, I have developed an understanding of the feminist ethnographic methods and exposed myself to various urban spaces to develop a feminist critique of urban sociality with a special focus on street vending in Kolkata and Imphal. I have engaged with ethnographic fieldwork among the 'Mootiyars' of Sealdah and with the residents around LatutoPara Basti to record their journey to the point to analyse their spatial claims in contrast with the women hawkers of Sealdah. Additionally, I have used the Town Hall Library, the Archives of National Library and Archives of the Calcutta Improvement Trust, now digitally available in Jadhunath Sarkar Resource Centre, a wing of CSSSC, to illustrate the changing landscape of Kolkata. I have also used various newspaper reports to analyse the print media's representation of hawker movements at different from of time from 1980s.

Further, my analysis and ethnography are both informed by my background and long-term association with the hawkers' movement in Kolkata. As a feminist ethnographer, I do not feel the need to attempt to erase this past association prior to undertaking research. Rather, I use my

memories and past associations and productively read them against the present. My long-term proximity to the movement allows me a rare, close reading of it. However, this advantage is also tempered by awareness on my part of the limitations that come with the same. Whilst attempting to establish a relationship with respondents and trying to achieve mutuality of exchange, I do negotiate with the fact that my family association with the movement probably precedes me and might restrict what information and narratives are shared with me.

5. Chapters and Arguments

5.1 Chapter 1: Sealdah: Unrecorded Voices and Stories of Women Hawker

The first chapter of the thesis studies the politics of space-making that existed in colonial and postcolonial Sealdah at large, as a particular transit point where the presence of hawkers is ubiquitous. In revisiting this important aspect of the politics of space, I discuss how modalities of infrastructural development impacted the lives of the hawkers and how the struggle of unionized hawkers differs from those who remained outside the banner of affiliated unions. In this chapter, I have tried to weave together two aspects of Street hawking in the Sealdah area. First, I started with a historical analysis of the little talked about anti-eviction mobilization taking place between two well-documented mobilizations of street hawkers in 1972-1975 and 1996-1997. As I have shown how the historiography of these two movements has a male-only narrative. My research explores how the story of hawkers' mobilization involved substantial and predominant participation of women vendors such as Hela Nasker and Basanti Mondal.

The second aspect of this thesis largely deals with the everyday lives of women street vendors in the locality where the old group of women who participated in the 1981 movement and a new generation of women vegetable vendors coexist. Hence, the study takes a comparative dimension and reveals that the older group of women vendors have an intense emotional attachment with their space of vending and more stable access to the network of supply. They also have fixed hours of occupation, which largely corresponds with the regular working schedule in the city and much stronger access to the political establishment and local community, which means that even in a transit centre where the prevailing population is bound to be floating in character, they possess a stable clientele. Another reason for their intra-group solidarity is that they share a collective past of migration and movements and cling to these memories. Most of these women come from villages and towns of North 24 Parganas where in the 1950s, the government set up many rehabilitation settlements for refugees. On the other hand, the new generation of women vendors represent an entirely different story of owning the urban space. Predominantly they are a product of agrarian disorder in inland West Bengal. They come from the far-away districts of Murshidabad and Malda, rent out dwellings in the City's Southern suburbs, and are ready to serve the city at the oddest of hours. Several of them gather around Koley Market during the times of the wholesale delivery process. Perhaps the new generation of women vendors has less bonding with the city as well as limited access to a stable community of the working class, given their odd working hours. However, their vulnerability (which is multi-layered), including their predominantly marginalized Muslim identity, makes them bond with each other very intimately. While the older group of women have forged solidarity based on their shared history of unified struggle, the newer generation is yet to experience such a transformative moment and the lack of unity leaves them vulnerable to local extortion rackets and other exploitative power dynamics.

Finally, I try to understand why, despite high records of women hawkers courting arrest and taking part in various radical events of the movement, they have not found a place in the archives. I show that while the SB reports find mention of even ordinary members of the unions, the women hawkers were unrecorded. I finally try to analyse how and why histories of women's radicalism in the hawkers' movement failed to capture the popular imagination and remained buried under the 'community history' of hawkers.

5.2 Chapter 2: Hawkers of a Different Kind: *Chinepara*

The name of the chapter suggests a different narrative of hawker's representation in the popular imagination. This chapter talks about the arrival of the Chinese community in Kolkata and how they were gradually able to carve out a niche and formed the Chinese quarter within the heart of the city. This Chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I studied the emigrational journey of the Chinese community and looked at how, to suit their community needs, they started a "breakfast Market", and I focussed on the process of how an informal small practice breakfast preparation for a handful of people gradually transformed into a full-fledged market which only specializes in Chinese breakfast and continues to exist till date. The next section deals with stories of "oblivion and otherness". Here, I tried to indicate the lack of initiative and incentive on the part of the unions around the area to unionize them. Perhaps the ignorance surrounding the existence of the Chinese community had started much before the hawker union in central Kolkata was formed. The 1962 Sino-Indian War had wiped out the entire community from popular imagination. The chapter details their tale of isolation imposed on the community by the successive state governments. In the last section, I have focussed on how the Chinese remained outside the government's reform initiative in the food-hawking sector. The union never attempted to bring them under the umbrella of hawker's unions because of their subtle notion of the bhadralok neighbourhood, who always abhorred the presence of this languishing community and never thought it to be a potent player in their politics of space. Thus, Nevertheless (THE STREET VENDORS (PROTECTION OF LIVELIHOOD AND REGULATION OF STREET VENDING) ACT, 2014 ACT NO. 7 OF 2014)²³ clearly marks out the criterion in order to be considered a hawker, and henceforth, I argue the Chinese of Teritti Bazar can be claimed as the first food hawkers of Calcutta.

5.3 Chapter3: 'Operation Sunshine': The Politics of Organisational Memory

The chapter studies how the changes in the urban landscape of Kolkata²⁴ stem from a constant contention among those who vie for control over the city's public space. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section analyses the micro-history of an eviction movement, "Operation Sunshine" in 1996, which remained outside the realm of scholarly discussion. The thick description of the movement enabled us to understand how the then Government equipped and prepared itself as if it was a 'war'. This hawker eviction was based on twin

²³THE STREET VENDORS (PROTECTION OF LIVELIHOOD AND REGULATION OF STREET VENDING) ACT, 2014 ACT NO. 7 OF 2014),s an Act of the Parliament of India enacted to regulate street vendors in public areas and protect their rights. It was introduced in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Parliament of India) on 6 September 2012 by then Union Minister of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Kumari Selja.[1] The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on 6 September 2013 and by the Rajya Sabha (upper house) on 19 February 2014.[2][3][4] The bill received the assent of the President of India on 4 March 2014.[5] The Act came into force from 1 May 2014.

²⁴Calcutta and Kolkata refer to the same city. In 2001, Calcutta was renamed Kolkata so I have used the latter for events that took place after the beginning of this millennium.

objectives of free movement of traffic flow and to clean the city of encroachers. "Operation Sunshine" was the first large scale eviction of hawkers in the postcolonial period. The urban refugee poor have always been one of the important sections of the vote bank for the Communist Party of West Bengal; however, with the onset of neoliberal economy in the early 90s, this class began to become irrelevant and a change in the Government's perception of the urban poor was visible. The second section focused on two premises: first, I studied radical female leadership, particularly in Gariahat. The gender lens enabled me to analyse how hierarchies and patriarchy worked in hawker's union and how discriminations were institutionalized by the union, and how far "carpeting of women" is also applicable in this movement.²⁵

5.4 Chapter 4: Woman Vendor's Struggle in Manipur: A Study from Gender Perspective

In the fourth chapter I analyse sets of arguments premised on critique of trade unionism. It analyses the role of Gita Mukherjee, the veteran woman leader of the Communist Party of India, in the politics of women vendors' struggles in Manipur and the process of mobilization under her leadership. I try to chronicle a history of the organized women vendors' movement based on memory and photographs recovered during my ethnographic fieldwork in Imphal, Manipur; while using the archive to substantiate my point, I came across certain things. In the first place, in the entire State Archive or in the newspaper, particularly *Kalantra*, such a successful attempt of Gita Mukherjee to conserve the Ema Market remained invisible. This phenomenon of women's invisibility and the preceding acts of erasure are the dominant themes of my thesis. Secondly, I study the organisational politics of Ema Market. I focus on the notion of sisterhood²⁶ where leadership from Ema Market tries to forge an alliance with the licensed and unlicensed hawkers to stop Government's constant demolitions and eviction of the market. Here, I interviewed both the licensed and unlicensed hawkers and tried to understand what kind of relationship exists between the licensed and unlicensed women vendors. Perhaps, women's agency has been generated through several united movements between the licensed and unlicensed hawker, but for me, what was significant was to understand how far the notion of sisterhood showcased by the leaders was adequate. The bonds of sisterhood among the license holder and unlicensed vendors are understood through the process of mobilization and unionization to claim their respective rights. The show of solidarity is often fractured by the culture of nepotism and favouritism. First, I try to reconstruct from the scattered evidence a case of selective amnesia regarding the role of women in trade unionism. And secondly, I contend that in many ways that the concept of same gender space being more emancipating and empowering is a paradox. The everyday experiences of hawking and the organisational and structural exercise of the trade unions of women hawkers in Manipur reveals hegemony and hierarchy existing

²⁵Carpeting of women meant, efforts and works of women leaders or the women vendors have often been trivialised by the patriarchal structure of history writing and kept outside the purview of hawker's historiography. In this context, I want to bring an allegory with what Smith argues (*THE GENDER OF HISTORY: MEN, WOMEN, AND HISTORICAL PRACTICE* (Smith, Bonnie G., 1940) that the theme is the gendering of historical practice, from the seminar to the archive and the increasing emphasis on the 'disembodied [read male] scholar.' Similarly for me the preceding literatures in the subject, remained gendered. The entire process of understanding the past of the hawker's historiography remained oblivion of women's narratives.

²⁶Sisterhood was a key feature of second wave feminism, providing a collective sense of unity and purpose but also demonstrating the solidarity of the feminist movement (Morgan, 1970). Sisterhood emphasises relationships between women that are horizontal instead of vertical, avoiding the hierarchy inherent in the mother/daughter trope, which I use this notion in case of Imphal to study the solidarity between licensed and unlicensed women hawker. To understand how far the trope of sisterhood is applicable in the case of hawkers.

within the same-gender space and organization can also lead to complete suppression of female agency and erasure of their narrative as a whole.

5.5 Conclusion

The Conclusion intends to tie the various theoretical and argumentative threads together to focus on institutionalization and the subtle process involved in this institutionalization inscribed in the historiography of Hawkers' movement. It also tries to look forward to the transition that takes place within the Hawkers' organization in 2000, as with the onset of the new millennium, the Hawker's organization expanded its base from local or regional to national. The Conclusion demarcates areas that might prove to be of interest to future researchers and highlights the ways in which this research can be extended.

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