Precarious entanglements: Exploring the everyday lives of women working as street vendors in Bengaluru marketplaces

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Precariousness (noun): the state of being dangerously likely to fall or collapse or the state of being uncertain or dependent on chance.

Entanglements (plural noun): the action or fact of entangling or being entangled, a complicated or compromising relationship or situation.

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Abstract

This research explores the precarious everyday lives of women working as street vendors in Bengaluru marketplaces. In August 2015, I travelled to Bengaluru, India where I spent time hanging out in marketplaces around the city and had informal conversations with approximately fifty women working as vendors. I initially went to Bengaluru to ask them about the provision of toilets and sanitation in their workspaces, however, while they faced a number of issues with provision, the women were deeply embedded in a struggle over public spaces for vending and were experiencing constant evictions. This was a more immediate and serious issue, as it directly jeopardised their ability to vend, and earn a livelihood to support themselves and their families.

In response to what was revealed in the fieldwork, this research broadened to look at the provision of public space for vending and the impact a lack of safe and secure spaces has on the daily life of women vendors working in a rapidly urbanising environment. Importantly, the conversations showed that the women in my study did not have the option of challenging the evictions or access to support that would enable them to advocate for more secure spaces. Consequently, the women made several compromises including working long hours, taking on large amounts of debt and vending in spaces that impacted their health and wellbeing, while maintaining daily routines and caring for multiple family members.

To understand the experiences of the women, I have positioned this work within contemporary anthropology on precarity and everyday life, specifically the work of Veena Das (2006), Clara Han (2012), Bhrigupati Singh (2014) and Kathleen Millar (2018). Their ideas created a framework which enabled me to understand and comment on precarity in relation to how it is experienced by the women in my study, focusing on how they live through a varying forms and fluctuations of precarity in daily life. This places the women at the center of thought but also highlights how the economic, political and social systems they are embedded within impacts their capacity to endure.

Sharing the conversations with the women, alongside my observations of their context, draws attention to the small realities of everyday life as a woman working as a vendor. While these are often stories of hardship and adversity, they are also accounts of everyday life, and show how the women work to keep life functioning and continue working, even when faced with immensely difficult challenges, revealing precarity in its rawest form – embedded within the small actions and compromises in everyday life.

Key words: Bengaluru, Bangalore, informal work, street vending, precarity, precariousness, sanitation, toilets, vendors, KR Market

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Figure 1: Vendors working on the outskirts of KR Market

Eviction is a cause, not just a condition of poverty. (Desmond, 2016, pg.299)

Entering marketplaces

In the early hours of the morning, in the space between the moon beginning its descent and the sun rising, Krishna Rejendra Market (KR Market) in Bengaluru (Bangalore) comes into life. Every morning, trucks arrive from all over Karnataka State, as people work quickly to unload and sort a colourful array of common and exotic flowers, fruit, vegetables and spices. Dahlias, lilies, orchids, chrysanthemums, and all shades of roses infiltrate the market, their collective fragrances merging as they are sorted into piles, in anticipation of the vendors and customers who will soon arrive.

The main market building is located prominently in the centre of the market. Inside are thousands of flowers and spices piled high on the tables, their aroma filling the huge room and posing a challenge to the smell of traffic pollution and sewage outside. Little cubicles and booths packed to the brim with

sacks overflowing with flowers line the pathways, the space living up to its status as the largest flower market in Asia.

Outside the building, alongside thousands of people, a steady stream of cars, trucks, auto rickshaws, scooters, motorbikes, oxen and cows make their way through the market paths that wrap their way around the building. Traffic increases as the day progresses, with incessant honking drowning out the sounds of people going about their business.

Joining and veering apart, paths haphazardly weave their way around the marketplace, creating an uncertain pattern, but also work as a thoroughfare, connecting one side of the city to the other. Piles of rubbish, comprised of pieces of cardboard and paper littered with offcuts of flowers, colourful plastics, and vegetable leaves, fill up much of the remaining empty space, slowly building up as more people arrive. Cows also wander by, attracted by the food scraps they stop to sift through, their bones visibly rubbing against their skin as they methodically chew the offcuts of vegetables and other rubbish.

Over the course of a morning, hundreds of women also arrive. They buy small quantities of flowers, fruit and vegetables from the sellers in the main building to sell that day on the ground along the sides of the paths that wind around the market building, their stillness a stark contrast to the movement surrounding them. The greens, reds, purples, yellows, and blues of their saris contrast against the dirt paths and rubbish as they work to arrange the variety of items neatly on metal trays, or bowls, or spread them out on pieces of newspaper and worn sacks - each space unique to the women who created it.

As the heat of the day escalates, the fumes from the traffic begin to weigh heavily in the air, mixing with the smell of sewage that emerges from the public toilets in the market, making it difficult to breathe. Some women put up umbrellas which provide them a brief reprieve from the sharp rays of the sun, but these offer no respite from the strong smells and heat enveloping the market. The market changes from one moment to the next. At times it is too loud to hear individual voices, at other times the noise dies down slightly and in those short moments it is possible to hear the snippets of conversations between the women and their customers, or make out the sounds of crows overhead as they swoop to land on the powerlines that hang disconcertingly close to the women's spaces.

Throughout the ebbs and flows of the market, the women continue working to constantly replace items as people buy them, peel and sort vegetables or fruit, some also multitasking tending to children or washing and drying the produce. The tiny spaces they occupy, and the goods they sell, are miniscule in comparison to those selling inside the building itself. The women often work until late in the evening, sometimes staying in their spaces until well after the sun has set, at which point they pack up what they have left and carry it with them as they start the journey back to their home.

It is here, with this group of women, this research is situated.

Overview of this research

Marketplaces in Bengaluru, like KR Market described above, are dynamic spaces and vary greatly in composition, number of vendors, structure and types or quality of produce. Some markets are well established, often signposted with the existence of a solidly built main building, others are informal, and comprised of several vendors selling on the side of a road or in public spaces near popular landmarks or on the streets close to their homes in residential neighbourhoods. Women working in informal spaces in and near markets make up a significant proportion of vendors, and these women are integral to providing fresh food and flowers at lower prices for a sizable percentage of the 11 million people in Bengaluru.

In August 2015, I travelled to Bengaluru, India, where I spent time speaking with approximately fifty of these women who were vending in various informal spaces in KR Market, as well as few other marketplaces across the city. The initial intention of my research was to speak with this group of women about how they navigate a lack of provision of toilets and sanitation in their everyday working life. Through these conversations and my observations of spaces they interacted with while vending (i.e. marketplaces and public toilets), I could see there was a lack of provision of toilets, however, at the time the women were deeply embedded in a struggle over public spaces for vending and were experiencing constant evictions.

Evictions were a more immediate and serious issue as displacement directly jeopardised their ability to vend and earn a livelihood to support themselves and their families. Furthermore, it became clear that their needs are not considered in the development and ongoing maintenance and provision of public space and the provision of resources within that space (e.g. toilets), because of the informality of their work and their gender. In response, my research broadened to look at provision of public spaces for vending and the different ways this group of women navigate a precarious everyday life in this context.

What became clear during fieldwork was that the women were working and living within a context that caused and perpetuated their precarity, but also created a scenario where there were points in time where precariousness was more accentuated than others. This was evidenced through how they were required to respond to moments of need, uncertainty or an event that compromised (or could in the future compromise) their capacity to endure. Significantly, these small actions were very much part of their everyday life. For this reason, the actions spoke to the realities of what living a precarious life means for this group of women and how they are entangled within a political, social and economic context that offers them no reprieve.

To tell the story of how the women navigate a precarious everyday life and to comment on the wider context that perpetuates their precarity, there are two findings chapters, comprised of conversations

with the women and my observations of their context. The first looks at provision of toilets and sanitation, and how the women navigated a lack provision while working, specifically focusing on the compromises they need to make when toilets and sanitation are not provided (e.g. having to interact with unclean spaces, not eating or drinking and working in discomfort when menstruating). The second findings chapter looks at provision of public spaces more broadly and the evictions that were occurring. It also explores how these led to experiences of increased precariousness and how the women were required to strategise and compromise in response to this however possible to keep life going for themselves and their families, including working long hours, taking on large amounts of debt and vending in inadequate spaces.

This thesis aims to fill some gaps within current research. It fits within academic research on street vending and informal work, with a focus on the women's experiences of this type of informal employment. The study also aims to provide insight into how rights to public space are realised and denied in a rapidly urbansing city, and the challenges informal workers face when they are denied rights to safe and secure public spaces for vending. This is particularly important because evictions from public space can often mean that street vendors are unable to provide for themselves and their families.

Additionally, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of what living a precarious life means. To accurately capture the experiences of the women I spoke with, I have positioned this work within contemporary anthropological theory, drawing on the ethnographic work of Veena Das (2006), Clara Han (2012), Bhrigupati Singh (2014;2015) and Kathleen Millar (2018). Doing so has enabled me to move away from previous (and more usual) ways understanding of precarity as a form of employment or as an ontological condition, to redefining precarity in relation to what it does and how it is experienced. This keeps the women at the centre while providing insight into how the economic, political and social systems they are embedded can impact their capacity to endure.

In light of recent events arising from COVID-19, it is highly possible that many of the women in this work will be severely impacted by the closing of marketplaces, from their exposure to crowds of people and from a lack of provision of sanitation and health care. Even though this work does not cover COVID-19, or the impacts the virus has likely had on this group of women, it is timely that this research is submitted now. Discussing their situation and everyday life (pre-COVID), will draw awareness to the potential impacts of a global pandemic on a group of people who are already navigating a precarious present everyday life, and how it could push them even further into precarity – the impacts of which are likely catastrophic.

Chapter summary

Chapter Two provides background information on the city of Bengaluru and street vending with the aim of providing a contextual framing for the subsequent chapters. Importantly, this chapter looks at how vendors in Bengaluru are situated within a city where infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth, and this has decreased the quality and quantity of public space for vending. I consider vending as a type of informal work and situate vending in the wider context of the informal economy, identifying some of the key challenges this poses for vendors, with a specific focus on the challenges women face in informal work (and street vending).

Following this, I explore rights to public space, with a specific focus on current literature on the denial of rights to public space for vendors and how this is evidenced in experiences of harassment, evictions and extortion. I look at how in Bengaluru intensive urban development has increased conflict over such space, resulting in evictions of vendors from many of these spaces with women vendors being disproportionately impacted. To conclude, I highlight some of the recent political and legislative changes that have taken place to improve access to public spaces for vendors in India and Bengaluru.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical framework and sets out the theory on precarity and precariousness. I identify how the concept of precarity has been used in anthropology as a category of employment (that is, as precarious labour), and as an ontological condition (as a precarious life – i.e. all lives are precarious by nature). Current approaches to precarity look at the relationship between the two, and in anthropology, ethnographic work looks at redefining precarity through what it does, in relation to the lived experience.

I introduce anthropologists whose work has informed my thinking, including, Veena Das (2006), Clara Han (2012), Bhrigupati Singh (2014;2015) and Kathleen Millar (2018). I discuss how their work intersects with mine and how the way they talk about precarity, and the everyday lives of others, can be a lens through which precarity is understood. Their work provided a framework for the methodology of the fieldwork and for how I analysed and understood what I found.

In **Chapter Four,** I set out the methodology and discuss how I planned, conducted, and analysed this research. In the first half of this chapter I explain how I completed fieldwork through hanging out in a range of marketplaces in the city, and having brief conversations with approximately fifty women working as vendors in informal spaces (i.e. not the main market buildings). I also introduce Meena who worked as my translator and helped me have the conversations with the women.

In the second half of this chapter, I discuss how the research, analysis and writing, did not proceed as expected and how I had to adapt the fieldwork methods to the context and the needs of the women. Additionally, I explain how due to the information that emerged, alongside an eviction of vendors from

KR Market that occurred during fieldwork, the research broadened from only looking at provision of toilets and sanitation to consider access to public space and the impacts of evictions. I conclude the chapter with some of the ethical challenges in this work and how I have mitigated these.

In **Chapter Five** the focus is on the provision of toilets and sanitation in markets and this is an entry point to understanding the precariousness of everyday life for women working as vendors. This chapter is a compilation of my observations of toilet blocks, and conversations with women, and highlights the specific needs women have for toilets and sanitation. The first half of the chapter focuses on issues pertaining to a lack of provision of toilets and sanitation, supplemented with photographs which depict the condition of the spaces the women interacted with.

In the second section, I highlight how the women mitigated a lack of provision and the impact this has on daily life – especially focusing on how their needs can fluctuate from moment to moment. In the final section, I draw attention to the invisibility of the needs that women have for toilets and sanitation by the municipal government and other organisations, and how these political systems work against them. This includes how they are disadvantaged through the current pay-to-use system for women's public toilets in the city.

Chapter Six picks up where Chapter Five ended and covers the second major focus of the fieldwork, looking more broadly at provision of public spaces for vending and what living a precarious life means for this group of women. I begin by exploring the conflict between vendors and local authorities over public space, particularly focusing on a major eviction from KR Market which occurred during fieldwork.

In addition to exploring why the evictions were occurring, I look at the rights to public space that women vendors have in Bengaluru and some of the challenges that arise when working in informal spaces, such as being at increased risk of evictions and harassment, and exposure to the elements. Following this, I emphasis how as with advocating for better provision of toilets and sanitation, the women also do not have access to support or a forum through which they can advocate for safer and more secure public spaces for vending. Instead the women need to focus on living through a precarious present and in the final section, I look at how they do this through working long hours, working in inadequate spaces, multitasking family responsibilities and work, and taking on debt.

In the **concluding chapter** I provide a summary of the research and potential avenues for future research in which I acknowledge the potential impact of COVID-19. In conclusion, I provide some final reflections on doing this fieldwork and the subsequent analysis that took place.

Chapter Two: Understanding the research context

Figure 2: Vending cart on the side of the road

Place is not fixed and as we create places to make sense of the spaces we are engaging with we are also created by the places we are within. This makes place-making the foundation for everyday experiences. (Coles, 2014, pg.518)

Introduction

This thesis is primarily concerned with the precarious everyday lives of women working as street vendors in Bengaluru. The purpose of this chapter is to provide insight into their unique context and outline the social, economic and political systemic factors that create challenges for this group of women. It also aims to situate this research within current academic literature that helped inform the planning and findings in of this project and understand the experiences of the women I spoke with.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a brief history of Bengaluru, highlighting recent changes that have impacted the quality and quantity of public spaces for vendors. It also provides an overview of marketplaces in the city and KR Market, where I spent most of my time. The second section examines the economic context, providing an overview of how street vending

operates within the wider context of the informal economy and how informal work, despite current challenges, is a vital source of employment for many people in Bengaluru. I then explore this in relation to the experiences of women in informal work, specifically looking at research showing how women working as street vendors are more likely to be impacted by poor working conditions, such as low incomes and long working hours.

The final section provides background information and research on the political and legislative context the women are working in, with a discussion on the rights to the city and public spaces. This is important for framing this research because there is currently conflict over public spaces for vending in the broader Indian context and globally. Importantly, I draw out what a denial of rights to public space looks like and why some groups of people are more impacted than others, including women. This leads to a discussion on recent legislative and political changes to improve working conditions and provision of public spaces for street vendors in India and Bengaluru, and current issues with implementation.

Background on Bengaluru and its marketplaces

Bengaluru

Bengaluru is located in the Southern Indian State of Karnataka on the Mysore Plateau. The city is historically referred to as the Garden City of India due to the extensive vegetation, green spaces, gardens, and trees that were once spread across the city (Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021).

Figure 3: Location of Bengaluru (Google maps, 2021)

In the 16th century, the geography of the plateau meant that water flowing from the surrounding valleys could be dammed and stored. At this time, around 800 reservoirs were constructed throughout the city which stored a mixture of rainwater and underground springs of water, which created an interconnected

system of lakes, rich in biodiversity and used by local communities for fishing, washing and irrigation for farming (Roy, 2009; D'Souza & Nagendra, 2011). During monsoon season and heavy rainfall, excess water would build up in the catchments and when at capacity would flow through a series of open storm water drains (runoffs) to the other lakes, creating a system of rivers that traversed the city. In addition to maintaining the unique microclimate, this system worked as a form of water filtration, providing a regular supply of clean drinking water to the local population and supported the agricultural development of the region (Roy, 2009)

Figure 4: Bengaluru City taken from the Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens

The social and environmental landscape of Bengaluru went through a period of significant change during the British era, prior to independence (1947) (Patel, Fulan & Grosvald, 2021). During this time, large scale industrialisation meant a shift from the state supporting agriculture as a way of life, to focusing on growing the private sector and businesses. In the 1970s, post-independence, the implementation of neoliberal policies in India further perpetuated the focus on supporting the growth and development of the private sector, leading to increased population growth due to migration as people moved from rural areas in search of employment (Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021; Roy, 2009; Sadoway & Gopakumar, 2017). This shift has meant that over the past twenty years, the city has doubled

in size from a population of five million to over ten million people (Rahman, 2020; Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021; Roy, 2009; Sadoway & Gopakumar, 2017).

During this time, the Indian government developed the Smart Cities Mission (previously the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) which had the aim of accelerating economic growth (Bhagat, 2017). In Bengaluru, this was adopted and helped promote and support the expansion of the Information Technology (IT) industry and due to its growth, the city is now referred to as the IT capital of India. Importantly, this led to the redevelopment of urban spaces, resulting in the prioritisation of the formal workforce for public space and subsequent displacement vendors (Bhagat, 2017).

Many buildings have been removed to make room for modern multistorey buildings and infrastructure (e.g. roads), and some markets and public spaces, once used for vending, have been replaced with malls and supermarkets and roads have been widened to support increased traffic – these changes reducing the amount of public space for vending (Ray, Clarke & Waley, 2020; Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021; Shashikala, 2018, Ghertner, 2014; Baindur, 2014; Derkzen, et al, 2017; Lefebvre, 1991; Hanser, 2016; Deore & Lathia, 2019; Jain & Moraglio, 2014; Lucas, 2014; Etzold, 2014; Goplan, 2014). Urban development has also exacerbated socio-economic inequality and resulted in the removal of people from land they traditionally had rights to, with low-income, rural, and low-caste people disproportionately impacted[1] (Rahman, 2020; Derkzen, Nagendra, Van Teefflelen, Purushotham, & Verburg, 2017; Ghertner, 2014).

Throughout the city, some traditional buildings, and roads, referred to as 'Old Bengaluru' still exist. A broad juxtaposition, and similar to other large and expanding cities, but with a sense that this has happened at a much quicker pace; the existing infrastructure struggling desperately to keep up with expanding usage and straining under the weight of increased traffic, sewage, and rubbish (Ray, Clarke & Waley, 2020; Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021). Bengaluru is now characterized by high rates of traffic congestion due to inadequate road infrastructure and while there have been some efforts to fix this, street vendors are disproportionally disadvantaged by the lack of action as they locate themselves on the sides of roads. (Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021).

[1] To construct Bangalore's Kempegowda International Airport, the municipal government displaced several villages of people to construct the road to the airport moving them to alternative places providing them very little amenities and services in their new location (or compensation for the land they lost). https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/karnataka-villagers-plight-continue-as-airport-lands-on-failed-government-promises/articleshow/55348852.cms
In 2013, the BBMP government bulldozed 1,500 homes and evicted over 5,000 people who were living in a low income area – Ejipura/Koramangala: EjipuraFoV2017.pdf (fieldsofview.in). In 2015 residents were evicted from the villages surrounding the Bellandur lake Risk to the City: Bellandur Lake area evictions, Bangalore | (wordpress.com).

Urban development has also had an impact on the natural environment, which is important to consider as vendors interact with public spaces while working. The lakes have become heavily polluted, with raw sewage, rubbish, e-waste, and chemicals, and have been encroached upon by urban development, rendering many unusable and some disappearing altogether. Out of the original 800 lakes, as of 2011, approximately, 80 lakes remain, with most of these rapidly deteriorating (D'Souza & Nagendra, 2011). The storm water drains now transport water which is polluted with sewage, chemicals and rubbish, the toxic mixture on occasion overflowing with froth or catching fire (D'Souza & Nagendra, 2011). As I discuss in Chapter Five, water was expensive to pump from the ground and a lack of water provision became a topic of conversation with the women, because it necessary for using toilets.

Figure 5: Nagavara Lake - one of the Bengaluru lakes at the Botanical Gardens

Figure 6: Run off from one of the lakes with rubbish accumulated by the banks

Marketplaces in Bengaluru

Marketplaces are critical to the social, economic and cultural life of Bengaluru and are used by most of the population to obtain food, spices, and flowers for daily living and for festivals. Markets vary in nature, and it is important to make distinctions between these because the type of market impacts the amount and quality of spaces, the types of services available and the amount of money vendors can earn. Some marketplaces, like KR Market, are well established, with hundreds of vendors selling a wide range of produce and commercial goods in designated spaces, in buildings or from stalls (usually these spots are taken by men). In these markets, small-scale vendors who are mainly women, set up their spaces in the vicinity of market buildings, as close to the wholesale sellers in the main building as possible, so they are in the best position to be visible to those coming and going.

Smaller informal marketplaces are found in convenient places around the city, such as on the street corners or footpaths and spare pieces of public land - spaces not officially designated for vending (i.e. spaces that are not inside a building or in a built structure). While not always evident on a map, the local community are aware of the placement of these and most have been in existence for many years. In contrast to larger markets, informal markets have a significantly smaller number of vendors selling only one or two types of produce. The turnover of produce and profitability is much lower than the larger markets due to fewer customers, and for this reason, while more space may be available, they may be less appealing to vendors.

Krishna Rajendra Market (KR Market)

The largest marketplace in Bengaluru is KR Market, and I conducted much of my fieldwork here. The market is a place of significance to Bengaluru, operating as a central buying and selling hub connecting sellers, vendors and the public to various goods and services, thus enabling the movement of goods throughout the city. Most vendors interact with KR Market, whether they vend there, or travel there to purchase items to sell at another location. The market is heavily dominated by commercial sellers selling massive quantities of wholesale goods inside the main building (Patel, 2019). High volumes of people making their way through each day makes the outdoor areas an ideal vending space for women selling small amounts of fruit, vegetables, and flowers. For many years these women, and often their mothers and grandmothers, have been setting up vending places here (Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021).

KR Market has historical significance and rapid urbanisation is reflected in recent changes to the market. Originally, the area was a reservoir, and source of water for the local community in the Bengaluru Pete, an urban area to the east consisting of concentrated networks of streets.[2] In 1790s,

[2] KR Market is now prone to flooding and I will look at this in Chapter Six as the women vending outside had to frequently contend with this reality (especially during monsoon season).

during the Anglo-Mysore wars, its placement between the Bengaluru Pete to the east, and the Bengaluru Fort to the west, meant it became an area of strategic importance and was turned into a battlefield between the British and the Indian army (Patel, 2019). After the British occupied the Bengaluru Fort, the battlefield was turned into a neutral public space where people could gather for various events, over time becoming a small marketplace for vendors from nearby villages (Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021). In 1921, to support its continuing growth and enable expansion, a market building was constructed and named after Krishna Rajendra, Maharaja of Mysore, or as is now more commonly known, KR Market (Patel, 2019; Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021)).

In the 1990s, the marketplace had grown into the largest flower market in Asia, and in response to high numbers of large scale sellers and to support economic development, the municipal government provided the addition of a three-story building in the centre (Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021). This was notable as it was the first public building in Bengaluru to obtain electricity and this move was a critical part of turning Bengaluru into a more modern city where economic growth would be supported (Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021). The renovation resulted in the removal of many small-scale vendors from their traditional vending spaces, relocating them to the outskirts of the building and surrounding streets, to enable commercial and larger-scale flower and spice sellers to use the main building (Patel, 2019). Remnants of the old marketplace from the 1920s have withstood renovations, with the entry gate (Figure 7 below) still serving as the main entry point.

Figure 7: Entry gate to KR Market

Street vending and the informal economy

Street vending

A street vendor is defined by the National Association of Street Vendors in India (NASVI) as:

> A person who offers goods or services for sale to the public without having a permanently built structure but with a temporary static structure or mobile stall (or head-load). Street vendors could be stationary and occupy space on the pavements or other public/private areas, or could be mobile, and move from place to place carrying their wares on push carts or in cycles or baskets on their heads, or could sell their wares in moving buses. The Government of India has used the term 'urban vendor' as inclusive of both traders and service providers, stationary as well as mobile, and incorporates all other local/region specific terms used to describe them, such as, hawker, pheriwalla, rehri-patri walla, footpath dukandars, sidewalk traders, and more. (NASVI, 2021)

Street vendors are critical to Bengaluru and by vending in accessible locations such as marketplaces and on the sides of streets, they connect communities with goods at low prices, decreasing food insecurity for the urban poor (Williams & Gurtoo, 2012; Basu & Nagendra, 2020; Bhowmik, 2001; Bhowmik, 2010; Brown, 2006; Deore & Lathia, 2019; Chan, 2017). Vending is a well-established occupation around the world, and in India, and because it requires no education and minimal startup costs, it is an accessible form of work, especially for women or migrants (Shashikala, 2018; Anjaria, 2011, Millar, 2014; Sekhani, Mohan & Medipally, 2019). It is estimated that around ten million people work as street vendor in India (2.5 percent of the urban population), and forty percent of these are women[3] (Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018; Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021). Approximately 30,000 vendors are in Bengaluru, a number which is increasing steadily due to rising numbers of migrants moving from rural areas in search of employment (Basu & Nagendra, 2020; Wongtada, 2013; Sekhani, Mohan & Medipally, 2019; Sekhani, Mohan & Roy, 2019).

Importantly, these numbers are estimates and vendors are largely invisible in workforce statistics because they are often situated in the same category as other informal workers. The conflation of data means it is unclear exactly how many people are vending and how much they earn in relation to the rest of the informal workforce (Jhabvala, 2010; Brown, 2006). By not separating vending from other informal work, the specific challenges faced by vendors (e.g. the need for secure spaces or provision of

[3] This varies between markets. For example, in KR Market, it is estimated that 70 per cent of the vendors are women (Patel, 2019).

toilets and sanitation, as discussed in this thesis) and their working conditions are also not easily understood or addressed (Jhabvala, 2010; Bhowmik, 2010; Wilson & Ebert, 2013). Through exploring the everyday lives of women, specific challenges faced while vending are brought into focus, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of this type of informal work.

Situating street vending in the informal economy

As already mentioned, vendors are part of the informal workforce which includes all work that sits outside of legislation, regulation and worker rights. The informal workforce encompasses a wide range of jobs, from street vending to rubbish pickers, and these occupations are characterized by small-scale self-employment, low incomes, irregular working conditions, limited access to social protection and a lack of education (Brown, 2006; Sekhani, Mohan & Medipally, 2019; Basu & Nagendra, 2020). The informal workforce contributes to the informal economy, and these create what is termed the 'informal sector'. The informal sector is defined as:

> The production and employment that takes place in unincorporated small or unregistered enterprises; informal employment refers to employment without legal and social protection—both inside and outside the informal sector; and the informal economy refers to all units, activities, and workers so defined and the output from them. Together, they form the broad base of the workforce and economy, both nationally and globally. (Chen, 2012, pg.8)

The informal sector was first conceptualised in the 1960s and 1970s, even though it existed well before then. During this time, governments focused on regulating the economy and labour market and on increasing urban development to stimulate economic growth, resulting in the delineation of the informal and formal workforce (Pilz & Uma, 2015). Until this point, the informal sector was for many countries, the norm. A shifting focus meant that informal work became a category of work existing in relation to, and outside of, what is formal – even though it was the preferred from of employment for many people (Pilz & Uma, 2015). In India, it was assumed that as the workforce became increasingly regulated, traditional forms of employment would be subsumed into the formal economy and disappear. For example, it was thought that vending, due to its traditional background, would slowly be replaced with structures and services such as shopping malls (Williams & Gurtoo, 2012).

Notwithstanding these assumptions, today a sizeable proportion of the working population of many countries are in informal work, and an estimated sixty percent of these workers are women (Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018; Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021; Sahoo, 2012). In India, approximately ninety percent of the non-agricultural working population are informal workers, and the informal economy is responsible for around sixty percent of the overall economic output of the country (Pilz &Uma, 2015). Informal work, especially street vending, is a desirable form of employment for many people as the

formal sector is often seen as being too restrictive, in terms of working hours and choice (Sekhan, Mohan & Medipally, 2018; Williams & Gurtoo, 2012; Millar, 2018; Sahoo, 2012). This challenges the perception that informal work is a last resort and demonstrates how it enables people to cope with multiple forms of insecurity elsewhere in their lives (Millar, 2018; Sekhani, Mohan & Medipally, 2019). For this reason, any discussion on informal work needs to consider the value it adds for people, especially women working as vendors.

Women and informal work

In India and Bengaluru, factors such as limited education, patriarchy, caste oppression and early forced marriage can mean women have vastly different experiences in employment than men, especially women in informal work (Scaria, 2014; Fudge and Owens, 2006). For example, studies looking at informal workers (which included women vendors), in India show that women are more likely to experience greater workplace insecurity, and more likely to be subjected to difficult and poor working conditions than men (Roever & Skinner, 2016; Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018).

One way this is evident is through income. While street vending is critical to alleviating poverty, in India, women's work is under remunerated and it is estimated that women vendors can earn as little as Rs.60 to Rs.80 per day (NZ$1.16-$1.54) (Shashikala, 2018).[4] Studies show[5] that women vendors incomes are low because they sell lower-value perishable items in insecure spaces and without shelter (this is in comparison to men who are more likely to sell higher priced and non-perishable items within the shelter of buildings) (Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018; Fudge and Owens, 2006; Mitullah, 2005).[6] Importantly, a substantial proportion of women vendors and are the sole income earner and completely reliant on their income to support themselves and their families, meaning that a low income, or any disruption to it can jeprodise survival (Shashikala, 2018). One of the major issues resulting from low and insecure incomes is debt. Research shows that women vendors generally borrow through private financing companies (often referred to as microcredit loans) because they are unable to use banks because the procedures and criteria are complicated, and they often have limited (or no) literacy (Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018). These loans are used to supplement income for daily living and for

[4] This was the case for the women in my research. Even though earned very little, the majority had several dependants they needed to support, and their reliance on income increased the extent to which they needed to compromise to continue vending.

[5] This was in line with my study. Women were usually selling lower priced and perishable goods in unsheltered spaces – compared to men who vended inside or in stalls.

[6] Small-scale vendors, which are usually women earn on average earn between Rs.50 and Rs.80 per day, with some earning more than Rs.150 per day, depending on the type of goods being sold. Other studies show that it is between 300 and 500 per day but these are rough estimates (Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018).

maintaining a vending business, as the money enables them to buy produce in bulk to on-sell. While microcredit is often considered to be positive in terms of poverty alleviation, for women, this type of borrowing can make them vulnerable to exploitation through high interest, more debt and harassment from those collecting the loans (Rahman, 2020).

Another way women vendors experience poor working conditions is through the number of hours worked. Studies show that street vendors can work on average between eight to fifteen hours per day[7], but these approximations do not account for associated required tasks such as travelling to wholesale markets and cleaning or sorting produce (Sekhani, Mohan & Roy, 2019; Ray, Clarke & Waley, 2020; Panwar & Garg, 2015). Women are likely to be more impacted by this because alongside working, they are often juggling numerous family responsibilities and household tasks, (e.g. cleaning, food preparation, fetching water and caring for children). For this reason, a key aspect of this thesis is looking at how, as part of everyday life, women experience what is commonly termed a 'double burden' of work and home life (Kumari, 1995; Scaria, 2014; Qadir, 2013). I will not be referring to this as a double burden, but I will draw attention to aspects of daily life like working hours and tasks they do alongside vending, as well as the emotional and physical labour required.

Street vending and the rights to the city

Conflict over public space and evictions

Vendors use a variety of different types of public spaces[8] to sell items (e.g. inside buildings or outside on the footpath or side of the street). Being able to occupy these spaces for vending is important because it provides the capacity to create a livelihood and can generate feelings of empowerment from engaging in society as an entrepreneur (Lucas, 2014; Simon, 2003; Peteet, 2005; Palacios, 2016). Despite this necessity, public space is not equally available in quantity or quality for everyone and is controlled by a complex system of rights (Carr, Rivlin & Stone, 1992; Bhuyan, 2013). As part of establishing the context for this research project it is important to highlight some of the complexities around rights to public space and exploring why rights are denied for some groups of people. To understand this, it is also important to consider the role of the government in enabling groups of people, like vendors, who are living in poverty to be able to access secure and safe spaces to earn a living.

[7] Some studies show that street vendors work anywhere between eight to fifteen hours a day. Each study differed depending on multiple factors – however all were over eight hours a day (Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018).

[8] Public space is defined as the physical non-private spaces of a city, differing from private spaces, which are areas a person cannot enter without negotiation (Brown, 2006; Bhuyan, 2013; Carr, Rivlin & Stone, 1992).

Rights to public space can be understood at both the individual level and the collective level. In their article, titled, *Migration, Gender and Right to the City*, Bhagat (2017) considers the importance of realising collective rights to the city as a way of alleviating poverty:

> When considering the denial of rights, it is important to keep in mind that the right to the city is not an exclusive individual right. Rather it is a collective right, which aims to unify different exploited classes to build an alternative city that eradicates poverty and inequality and heals the wounds of environmental degradation…it is also pertinent to argue that individual and collective rights should not be seen as separate or unrelated; the fulfilment of individual rights may be transformative step in realising collective rights to the city. (Bhagat, 2017, pg.39)

The quote above highlights that while the denial of rights can be observed at the individual level (i.e. through a physical eviction), it is important that any discussion on rights also recognises the denial or realisation of rights for *groups* of people – especially those already marginalised and disadvantaged. This is important when looking at rights to public space for street vendors in India, which is a context where evictions and displacement are frequent occurrences for low income groups of people, and for those already experiencing marginalisation (Kumar & Mishra, 2018; Bhagat, 2017). As part of this work, I look at the individual experiences of rights to public space but also reflect on the way in which women vendors, as a group of people, are denied rights to public spaces.

Denial of rights can be observable in a variety of ways, from a lack of physical space (or spaces that are unsafe because they pose a health and safety risk), to experiences of conflict through harassment, extortion and evictions. For example, when vendors do have access to public space, it is often not free and is traded through informal systems of corruption, such as bribes and fines, with vendors sometimes paying up to 20 percent of their earnings in bribes to municipal authorities (Carr, Rivlin & Stone, 1992; Williams & Gurtoo, 2012; Sekhani, Mohan & Roy, 2019; Ray, Clarke & Waley, 2020; Patel, 2019). Importantly, in the current social and political context (and in the context of this fieldwork) there is usually a substantial amount of conflict that occurs each day over public space, between vendors and the local authorities, also involving the police and sometimes other members of the public.

One reason conflict is generated is because the allocation of public space within a city is often based on a set of values (usually values that are based on negative discourses about informal workers) that provides some groups the mandate to control and create boundaries, which can subsequently prioritise the needs of some over others (e.g. private business can be provided the space over street vendors who are then moved to accommodate this) (Lucas, 2014; Lombard, 2014; Krishnamurthy, 2016). In Bengaluru, vending as a type of informal work has become deeply embedded within discourses of disorder, and is devalued in relation to the formal workforce. In public spaces around the city (particularly those near roads or public landmarks), constant visibility means vendors are frequently

termed a nuisance, and are the subject of public complaints, ranging from the space they take up on the pavement, block traffic, or that they create too much waste from food scraps (Bhowmik, 2010; Basu & Nagendra, 2020; Anjaria, 2006; Saha, 2011). Consequently, vendors are considered to conflict with the 'modern vision' of the city and are denied rights to the city and evicted as a way of 'cleaning up' the streets (Kamath & Vijayaybaskar, 2014; Benjaman, 2000; Fernandes, 2004; Bromley, 2000; Clark, 1988; Seligmann, 2004 Derkzen, et al, 2017; Ghertner, 2014; Brown, 2006).

Currently, forced removal from public spaces is a common problem facing vendors in Bengaluru and India (and for vendors in many countries around the world [9]) and this is one of the key issues vendors face as they can significantly reduce income security and severely destablise daily life (Carr, 2019; Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018; Roy, 2011; Thompson, Russell & Simmons, 2014; McFarlane, Desai & Graham, 2014; Cuvi, 2016; Widjajanti, 2015; Boonjubun, 2017, Hunt, 2009; Roever, 2014; Roever & Skinner, 2016; Derkzen, et al, 2017; Ghertner, 2014). I discuss this further in Chapter Six, when I describe an eviction of vendors from outside KR Market during my fieldwork, and the negative impact this had on the women in my study.

Women and the rights to the city

It is important to consider how public spaces are developed to meet the needs of different groups of people, and this includes women vendors (Basu & Nagendra, 2020; Deore & Lathia, 2019; Mandanipour, 1999). Research shows that in markets vendors have flourished economically and socially when they have been well supported by the municipal authorities and governments through the provision of public spaces for vending and services within these spaces, such as sanitation, water, toilets, and shelter (Deore & Lathia, 2019; Massey, 1994; Simon, 2003; Main & Sandoval, 2015). In writing about the importance of the rights to the city for women, Bhagat (2017) states:

> As many women have to take care of household and workplace duties, the lack of such basic services represents a failure of the state and reinforces the patriarchal structure of society and denies them their right to the city. (Bhagat, 2017, pg.36)

As part of this research I am interested in what provision of public space is like for women and how their needs are considered in the development of these spaces. This is important because when the built environment does not meet the needs of women, it can become unsafe (e.g. ensuring public spaces are well-lit which makes them safer in the evenings to avoid acts of violence taking place against women). Additionally, some groups of women are more at risk in these spaces than others, including women

[9] In Brazil, the police used tear gas to remove vendors. In Spain, the 2015 the reform of the public security legislation recriminalized street vending leaving vendors subject to large fines, and prison terms (Carr, 2019)

from lower castes, poor migrant women and informal workers who frequently use public spaces (Bhagat, 2017; McDowell & Sharp, 1997; Massey, 1994).

As already mentioned, realisation of rights to public space (and the city more generally) for women are also evident in provision of safe and secure vending spaces. However, it for a space to be 'safe and secure' it also includes the provision of basic amenities within those spaces (e.g. water and sanitation, adequate infrastructure, good access to public transportation, shelter and waste management). Women are often required to vend in informal spaces, and this can mean they may be more likely to be dependent on the provision of these and the corresponding infrastructure. When these amenities are provided women, due to their use of informal space, can be exposed to harmful elements such as sewage, traffic congestion and rubbish – especially in Bengaluru, where urban infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth. Research shows that vending in these types of spaces can result in health issues, including pain, backaches from sitting on the ground all day or carrying heavy loads to a vending space if it is far away from their home or public transport stops, and boils on their feet from walking on unclean surfaces (Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018).

The provision of public amenities such as toilets and sanitation in public spaces is particularly important and can give insight into the realisation of rights women have to the city, and the rights they have to public spaces within that city (Reddy & Snehalatha, 2011). Women are disproportionately impacted by a lack sanitation provision, and have reported a range of challenges when toilets and sanitation are not present including, harassment and abuse, missing school, or work when menstruating, discomfort and difficulty maintaining good hygiene as well as susceptibility to outbreaks of illnesses and diseases (Shashikala, 2018; Joseph, Bhaskaran, Saya, Kotian, & Menezes, 2012; Jewitt & Ryley, 2014; Frost, 2014; Sharma, 2006; Travasso, Rajaraman & Heymann, 2013).

Supporting vendors to realize their rights to public space

Over the past thirty years, there has been a growing awareness in Bengaluru and India of the challenges vendors face, resulting in several legislative and political developments to improve their rights to public space. In 1989, the Supreme Court of India declared that vendors have a fundamental right to use public space, within certain restrictions set by each Indian state. This was followed in 2005, with the creation of a National Urban Street Vending Policy (Shalini & Roever, 2011; Narang & Sabharwal, 2019). Even though it was not legally binding, the policy was an important first step in the development of legislation to protect the rights vendors have for public spaces (WIEGO, 2011; Shalini & Roever, 2011).

Resulting from this, in 2014, the Indian Government established the 2014 Street Vendors (Protection of the Livelihoods and Regulating Street Vending) Act. The Act required municipal governments to establish Town Vending Committee to oversee the implementation of the Act at the regional and local

levels and to put in place vending zones and provide licenses to all street vendors (te LIntelo, 2017; Narang & Sabharwal, 2019).

These were important developments as they provided a national framework that aimed to establish and protect the rights vendors have to public space. However, implementation of both the legislation and the Street Vending Policy is highly dependent on the attitudes and actions of municipal governments, and has not been implemented fully (Narang & Sabharwa, 2019; Baghat, 2017; Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021; Gidwani & Reddy, 2011; McFarlane, Desai & Graham, 2014). Currently, only a third of India's urban local bodies have established Town Vending Committees, vending zones in most places remain ambiguous, and licences have not been provided (Narang & Sabharwal, 2019; Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021). Due to high levels of ambiguity about which spaces vendors can vend in, evictions are still a frequent occurrence and when evictions have been challenged legally, courts have sided with the government and upheld evictions (Narang & Sabharwal, 2019; Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021).

In the state of Karnataka, (where Bengaluru is situated) municipal councils are required to provide for suitable places for vending and licenses to vendors, but most vendors do not have a license, nor are public spaces always safe and secure (Bhowmik & Saha, 2012; Ray, Clarke & Waley, 2020; Shalini & Roever, 2011). As a result, in the city, vendors work wherever they can find spaces and fill up the roadside pavements, perpetuating instances of bribes which they generally pay because as it is the only option they have for 'securing' a space, as there is no licence available (Patel, Furlan & Grosvald, 2021)

Nationally, several organisations have been formed to help vendors collaborate to ensure laws and regulations are upheld and some of these are targeted at women in the informal sector. One of the most well-known is the Indian Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA).[10] SEWA is a cooperative organization made up of informal women workers and one of the largest trade unions in India (SEWA, 2020). Their primary goal is to protect the rights of informal workers, including street vendors, and to support women to be economically self-reliant and represented in decision making, with their needs accommodated in the planning of urban spaces (SEWA, 2020; Britwum, Douglas & Ledwith, 2012; Sahoo, 2012, Pratt, 2002). SEWA formed the National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI)[11] a union that works to support vendors and create a dialogue between them and decision makers (SEWA, 2020; Cohen, 2000).

[10] SEWA website: Home - Self Employed Women's Association (sewa.org)

[11] The National Association of Street Vendors of India is an organization that works to protect the livelihood rights of vendors across India and were established in 2003. The organisation is made up a national street vendor organisations who work together to improve rights for vendors. About NASVI | National Association of Street Vendors of India - NASVI (nasvinet.org)

While activism focusing on access to public space in Bengaluru has increased, collective action remains temporary and limited, and constant evictions means it is difficult for vendors to form and maintain connections with activist groups and NGOs, such as SEWA and NASVI (Goldman, Gidwani & Upadhya, 2017; Kisson, 2015; Lucas, 2014; Baindur, 2014; Derkzen et al, 2017; Wilson & Ebert, 2013; Millar, 2014; Britwum, Douglas & Ledwith, 2012; Gidwani & Reddy, 2011; McFarlane, Desai & Graham, 2014). Studies on vending have also noted that there are 'women's groups' who work with vendors, but this is usually for lending money - not helping to leverage bargaining power or to improve awareness on issues that vendors are facing (Kambara & Mutharayappa, 2018). Looking at the relationship the women in my study have with these organsiations provides insight into the extent to which they are supported by the social and political context. It was also important when looking at the impacts of evictions at their ability to form relationships with NGOs and other vendors to prevent the evictions from occurring.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided the contextual background for this work, situating the women in my study within their context and the relevant academic literature on street vending and informal work. One of the key points raised is the importance of public space for vending, and how some of the recent economic and environmental changes to Bengaluru have increased instances of conflict over space. The way conflict over public space occurs reflects how the needs of some groups of people are valued over others, with many women facing evictions and increased insecurity in where and when they can vend. Compounding this, activism for helping improve working conditions and rights to public space for vendors is usually minimal and usually only for short periods of time.

The following chapter sets out the theoretical framework which intersects with this chapter, specifically on access to public space and what this means for street vendors in terms of living a precarious everyday life. It also explores how street vending is important as it provides a critical service to the local community while enabling women to earn an income. For this reason, it is essential to consider the possibility of the creation of a space where informal workers, such as street vendors, have rights to public space and social protection while engaging in informal work.

Chapter Three: Framing precarity

Figure 8: An informal marketplace in Bengaluru on the side of the road

Normality in our part of the world is a bit like a boiled egg: its humdrum surface conceals at its heart a yolk of egregious violence. It is our constant anxiety about that violence, our memory of its past labours and our dread of its future manifestations, that lays down the rules for how a people as complex and as diverse as we continue to coexist – continue to live together, tolerate each other …As long as the center holds, as long as the yolk doesn't run, we'll be fine. In moments of crisis it helps to take the long view. (Roy, 2017, pg.150-151)

Introduction

The concept of precarity provides a lens through which I analysed and understood this research. Drawing on the ideas and research from several anthropologists has enabled me to understand the complexities of what living a precarious life looks like for the women I spoke with, and identify how the systems they are embedded within create and perpetuate their experiences of precarity. The purpose

of this chapter is to situate this work within contemporary anthropological theory and academic literature on precarity and precariousness.

The chapter is divided three sections. In section one, I lay the foundation for subsequent sections by outlining how precarity is defined and used in academic literature. I specifically look at the emergence of the term, and the two ways it has been used in anthropology - to describe a type of labour (precarious employment), and as an ontological condition (precarious life). Within this, I pull out some of the key issues with these approaches, and the relevance for this work.

In the second section, I move into a body of academic literature that focuses on rethinking key concepts relating to the lived experience and discuss how approaches to precarity in anthropology have changed in response to this. As opposed to considering precarity as a form of labour or a universal state of being, recent work looks at the relationship between the two. I discuss the work of Bhrigupati Singh in his publications, *How Concepts Make the World Look Different (2014)* and *Poverty and the Quest for Life: Spiritual and Material Striving in Rural India (2015)* where he shows the importance of questioning concepts that have been defined by academia and remaking them in relation to the lived experience. I also draw attention to the work of Kathleen Millar and her ethnography, *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rio's Garbage Dump (2018)*, and Clara Han's ethnography, *Life in Debt: Times of Care and Violence in Neoliberal Chile (2012)*. These anthropologists highlight the complexity of the concept of precarity and how it can be experienced, as well as focusing on how people act within the systems they are embedded.

In the closing section, I look at how everyday life is important to understanding precarity and explain why this is the entry point for this research. I use the term 'the art of living through the precarious present' from Millar's work (2018), and to explore this I look at two key areas of everyday life. Firstly, I outline how precarity in everyday life can be understood through observing the way people engage with the spaces around them and the relationship they have with those spaces, especially insecure spaces that are in a constant state of change. Secondly, I examine how women remake daily life and routines in response to critical moments and the way they navigate these can reflect precarity. To show this, I turn to the work of Veena Das, and her ethnography, *Life and Words: Violence and a Descent into the Ordinary (2006)* and Clara Han's work (2012) on the emergence of 'critical moments' in daily life.

Defining Precarity

Precarity in the academic literature

The term precarity came into prominence in the 1970s in the context of emerging neoliberalism, capitalism, and increased globalisation (Vij, 2019; Mendes & Lau, 2020). Since then, the concept of

precarity has been drawn on in anthropology, and spans across other disciplines, from, sociology and political science, to economics, gender studies and environmental studies. Studies adopting this concept include those on precarious migrants or refugees (Kisson, 2015), homelessness (Rennels & Rurnell, 2017) and precarious youth (Johnson & Gilligan, 2020), or ethnographies looking at the precarity of things such as highways, roads and towns (Stewart, 2012), and mushrooms (Tsing, 2015).

Given the multiplicity of usage, it is evident there is no one set way of understanding what precarity and precariousness is, and the term has been heavily debated. Precarity has often been used interchangeably with vulnerability, and there are competing views about how the concepts differ, or intersect (Mendes & Lau, 2020). Questions have also been raised as to whether precarity can (or should be) a concept for challenging social exclusion or addressing social injustice (Millar, 2017). I will now look at the two main ways precarity has traditionally been discussed in anthropology: as a category of employment/labour (or as a socio-economic position), or as a precarious life (an ontological condition).

Precarity as a category of work

Precarity is often associated with informal employment. As a category of employment, precarious labour broadly describes labour characterised by low incomes, poor working conditions, insecurity, high risk and unpredictably (Kalleberg, 2009; Wilson & Ebert, 2013; Han, 2018; Millar, 2014; Prentice, 2020). In this context, precarity is understood as vulnerability resulting from insecure work that is created and perpetuated by capitalism and neoliberalism (Kalleberg, 2009; Wilson & Ebert 2013; Han, 2018). In his early work anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu spoke about the divide between formal and informal workers in Algeria in the 1960s, labelling the latter précarité (Bourdieu, 1990; Mendes & Lau, 2020). Bourdieu argued that precariousness occurs when there is a surplus of labour, resulting in this group of workers viewed as expendable (Bourdieu, 1990; Hyde & Willis, 2020; Millar 2017).

More recently, Allison, (2013) in her work, *Precarious Japan*, noted how labour has changed due to capitalism and globalisation, and defines precarity as a loss of job stability and a loss of social and economic support:

> Precarity references a particular notion of, and social contract around work. Work that is secure; work that secures not only income and job but identity and lifestyle, linking capitalism and intimacy in an affective desire for security itself. Precarity marks the loss of this – the loss of something that only certain countries, at certain historical periods, and certain workers ever had in the first place. (Allison 2013, pg. 5)

Anthropologists have found this a useful construct as it has enabled an analysis of experiences within different forms of labour, and the harmful working conditions typically associated with this type of employment. This can show how unstable work can destabilise daily living through increased income

insecurity, and subsequent challenges like food insecurity, poor housing and lack of access to facilities (e.g. sanitation). In particular, work looks to identify how informal labour is increasing the experience of exploitation and dispossession, with people viewed as victims of neoliberalist thought and policies (Mendes & Nasu, 2020). These insights are critical to this thesis because it is based in India, where most workers are in informal work, and the known associated labour conditions are prevalent.

Not surprisingly, research on street vendors, tends to be situated within discussions about informal work and takes the approach of focusing on the characteristics of working as a vendor such as poor working conditions, low incomes, and experiences of evictions. Research focusing on gendered experiences in informal work is framed in this way with women depicted as disadvantaged and vulnerable and as an exploitable form of labour (Safa, 1995). For example, when setting up microenterprises or engaging in employment (e.g. vending), studies look at how women have fewer opportunities, due to less access to capital and limitations on mobility (Barton, 2005; Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Brown, 2006; Parpet, 1993; Rathgeber, 1990; Razavi & Miller, 2005).

While this is accurate, and it can be helpful for identifying experiences in informal work, this approach places the type of labour at the centre of discussions, without considering wider experiences outside of work, nor does it consider the value informal work offers (Millar, 2017; Prentice, 2020; Wilson & Ebert, 2013; Muehlebach, 2013; Han, 2018). This is an important consideration in this work, as despite the challenges that come with informal work, the informal nature of vending enabled the women I spoke with to manage multiple aspects of insecurity in daily life.

Precarity as an ontological condition

Alternatively, as an ontological condition, precarity is viewed as a generalised condition, in that all lives are by nature, precarious. Judith Butler, one of the key thinkers in this area, writes,

> Precariousness and precarity are intersecting concepts. Lives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed. (Butler, 2009(a), pg.25)

Within this framing, precarity is used to describe overlapping challenges in everyday life, from the constant risk of death, to experiences of poverty, loss of social networks due to displacement, lack of social protection, and marginalisation (Han, 2018; Butler, 2008; 2009(a)(b); Johnson & Gillian, 2020). While Butler (2009(a)) argues that all lives are precarious, she recognises that experiences of precarity can be vastly different, and the extent to which a life is precarious is dependent on a range of factors (Millar, 2014; Butler, 2009(b)). As Butler writes:

> ...by precarity we may be talking about populations that starve or who near starvation, but we might also be talking about sex workers who have to defend themselves against both street violence and police harassment. (Butler, 2009(b), pg.ii)

For Butler, precarity is a 'politically induced condition' and is created through the relationships people have with others" (Butler, 2004; pg.26; Butler, 2009(a)(b)). The level of precariousness is determined by how at-risk a person is within these relationships, how at risk they are of harm from disease, poverty and displacement, and the level of social and economic protection they have access to (Butler, 2004). As such, it is the role of social and political institutions to identify and minimise precarity through addressing factors that threaten survival or increase risk.

While this is a useful approach as it unpacks the varying ways in which people experience risk and vulnerability, precarity is often understood through describing several dispositions based on preconceptions of vulnerability, poverty, and suffering, coupled with a lack of agency (Han, 2014; Muehlebach, 2013). This is problematic because the lived experience does not always match that construction and saying all lives are precarious, can be a way for privileged groups to imply equal vulnerability, diminishing the importance of how power operates, and how vulnerability is unequally distributed (Zembylas, 2018; Ettlinger, 2020).

Reframing precarity

Taking a relational approach to understanding precarity

These ways of thinking about precarity have been extended by anthropology to reflect the lived experience, and anthropology has shifted from looking at how precarity is defined, to exploring what it does. Instead of understanding precarity in terms of a category of employment or as an ontological condition, the focus is on the relationship between the two (Millar, 2018; Ettlinger, 2020). As Millar (2018) writes:

> A relational approach to precarity also provides a method of inquiry, opening up the question of how precarious labour and precarious life intersect in particular times and places…shifting the question from what precarity is to what precarity does. (Millar, 2017, pg.5.)

Taking a relational approach to precarity explores how the lived experience intersects with political and the economic systems, placing the individual at the centre, while enabling a critique of those systems. Subsequently, this can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how people live, and how they feel while acting within their context, regardless of the situation, or how it may appear (Prentice, 2020; Ettlinger, 2020). This approach reflects a wider shift in anthropology which aims to look beyond

concepts traditionally used to understand others to questioning concepts *because* the lived experiences of those we are talking about requires us to (Singh, 2014; Shore & Trnka, 2015; Ingold, 2014).

As a postgraduate student, I studied the text, *The Ground Between, Anthropologists Engage With Philosophy (2014)*, where I was introduced to the work of anthropologists Clara Han, Veena Das and Bhrigupati Singh, who deeply question and consider prior approaches and concepts for understanding everyday life. They focus on the value philosophy offers to anthropology, in that it enables the questioning of prior concepts, moving away from the idea that academia alone defines concepts (Singh, 2014). In his chapter, *How Concepts Make the World Look Different*, Singh (2014) draws attention to the need for the anthropologist to pay attention to how concepts are generated within the academic world, and produced within everyday life (Singh, 2014). Bringing this to the forefront demonstrates the need to understand and acknowledge how our perception of the world creates a lens through which analysis and understanding takes place. This thinking is also reflected in his ethnography, *Poverty and the Quest for Life: Spiritual and Material Striving in Rural India (2015)*, where he writes:

> Books about concepts sometimes attain precision by joining themselves to a single root, posing one question they aim to answer. This book is a rhizome, growing in different directions. (Singh, 2015, pg.3)

This approach prioritises an engagement in the everyday lives of people, whereby through being fully attuned to the present moment we can observe what life is like for people in a specific time and place. Doing so enables us to remake concepts because we are able to directly and indirectly witness how people experience and define inequality, rights, precarity, injustice, kindness, violence and suffering in their everyday lives (Singh, 2014;2015). Concepts like precarity are not viewed in absolutes, and the researcher can witness how people can experience precarity in ways not previously associated with those concepts (Singh, 2014). For example, anthropologist Clara Han (2018), in her article critiquing historical and more recent perspectives on precarity, articulates this:

> … a general theory risks creating not only an account of precarity that is external to a world in which such circumstances are endured but also one that would either replicate or be easily absorbed into state categories of the poor and the vulnerable...We might think of Butler as providing a conceptual schema for precarity. And yet, we can also ask if, by doing so, the bits and pieces of social life get put into a grid under precarity as a master concept rather than present routes to a set of smaller, experience-laden concepts. (Han, 2018, pg.338-339)

Han (2018) emphasises how precarity is often understood as a concept, based on a set of concepts (e.g. vulnerability and poverty) and experiences are retrofitted into this, discounting actions, and experiences outside of that construct. This is important because it can mean that instead of acknowledging the

significance of action and agency, people are viewed as objects of vulnerability, identified in relation to their suffering (Stewart, 2012; Freire, 2014). Reflecting on this approach in relation to my work has helped create the foundation for how I have explored and understood the precariousness of the lives of the women I spoke with. As opposed to looking at experiences as a consequence of informal labour, or the general precariousness of their lives based on prior constructs of suffering and vulnerability, I will seek to explore what this means for the women in my research through how they act within their context.

The importance of understanding vulnerability and action

Critical to understanding precarity, is understanding how people act within their context and how precarity can be experienced through a range of different actions and feelings (it is therefore not simply a case of being vulnerable to one's context). I had originally referred to this as agency, however, upon reading Singh's work (2014;2015), I note that Singh acknowledges that agency as a concept has traditionally been used as a way of defining and understanding how people act within their social milieu:

> As I got to know Kalli better, I understood her life not simply as a unidirectional story of "empowerment" or "agency" but as a fluctuation between forms of strength and vulnerability. (Singh, 2014, pg.171)

The issue with this is that agency has predominantly been constructed and observed as an action. However, Singh provides an alternative to this and shows a person can be both vulnerable and strong at the same time, capturing a state of being within the world and the fluctuations that come with this– as opposed to someone acting on it or within it. I will be taking this approach in my work to show how for this group of women, experiences of precarity incorporated both vulnerability and strength, which is evident in their everyday actions and how they speak about their situation.

To demonstrate the importance of understanding actions in relation to precarity, I will deviate for a moment from ethnography into the world of fiction with one of the most powerful examples I have seen, depicting precarity. In her novel, *the Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), author and activist, Arundhati Roy tells the story of Anjum, a hijra (transgender woman) who after surviving the Gujarat riots in India in 2002, sets up a place for herself in a graveyard, to avoid any further injury and trauma (Roy, 2017). Roy writes:

> It became home; a place of predictable, reassuring sorry – awful, but reliable…As the fort of Desolation scaled down, Anjum's tin shack scaled up. It grew first into a hut that could accommodate a bed, and then into a small house with a little kitchen. So as not to attract undue attention, she left the exterior walls rough and unfinished. The inside she plastered and painted an unusual shade of fuchsia. She put in a sandstone room supported on iron girders, which gave her a terrace on which, in the winter, she would put out a plastic chair and dry her hair

> and sun her chapped scaly shins while she surveyed the dominion of the dead. (Roy, 2018, pg.66-67)

Roy beautifully explores how Anjum takes on more precarity and decides what to endure in her everyday life (Mendes & Lau, 2020). My reasons for discussing this is not to downplay the impacts of poverty, but to show the importance of highlighting the compromises, actions and strategies people use within everyday life in response to their context. From this perspective, it is then possible to step back and look at the different systems they are embedded within and draw attention to where changes could be made, while keeping the person at the centre. This can show a powerful picture of the lived experience, how people inhabit their spaces and how they conceptualise their present through orientating themselves towards a future (Das, 2007; York University, 2010; Freire, 2014).

In anthropology, Clara Han's work approaches precarity in this way, but through a slightly different angle, where she looks at varying experiences of strength and vulnerability within everyday life. Her ethnography, *Life in Debt* (2012) is situated in La Pincoya, Chile, in the context of a country that has experienced significant neoliberal changes, which have led to unstable employment and the privatisation of the public service. A consequence of this is the emergence of a credit economy which has resulted in the urban poor taking on elevated levels of debt through obtaining credit for necessities and material items (Han, 2012). An increase in debt has meant they are trapped in a continuous struggle with multiple competing priorities, including caring for family, struggling to make debt payments, and maintaining a quality of life, alongside increased mental health difficulties and addiction (Han, 2012). Han highlights that precariousness is not only evident through actions based on survival, instead it can also be evident through looking at how individuals work towards achieving personal desires. Below is a conversation with her participant Valentina.

> Pointing to the TV, Valentina joined in: "But, they do not understand this achievement. That we achieved buying this tele when he was working well, overworking, more hours because we wanted to buy the tele. And, now, what do I do? Like most people around here, take the tele to the house of a friend, hide this table, hide the stereo system and the refrigerator, to show that, yes, we are poor. Today, things are so bad. It's bad will". (Han, 2012, pg. 63)

The conversation with Valentia demonstrates the complexity of how people act within political and economic systems and shows how the urban poor do not act only with survival in mind. Recognising actions, in terms of working towards personal needs and desires, transforms the person from a victim to someone who can rework the present and feel both vulnerable and powerful at the same time, regardless of how dire their situation may appear to be (Martin, 2007; Singh, 2014; Das, 2014). Interestingly, in this instance in Han's ethnography, the Government does not consider the trade-off

involved (in terms of working even longer hours) to obtain the television - because they have one, it is determined they do not need any assistance (i.e it is not until they are deprived of goods that a person as someone in need of state intervention). This reflects how prior concepts can influence policy and the subsequent actions within a context that people live and work within.

Understanding the precarious lives of the urban poor

Taking this thinking into consideration, the purpose of this thesis is not to define precarity as such. It is instead to provide insight into everyday life, and not rely on previous, well established, definitions of what agency or precarity mean. To understand how to do this I spent time engaging with contemporary ethnography that takes a relational approach to precarity and looks at it in a different way. In her ethnography, *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and labor on Rio's Garbage Dump,* (2018) Kathleen Millar looks at the precarious lives of the catadores and moradores (rubbish pickers) who work in a rubbish dump in Rio de Janerio. On the surface, rubbish picking could be considered to be one of the most precarious forms of labour, especially considering the potential health consequences. Instead, what Millar shows in this ethnography is that the way they speak about their work draws attention to how rubbish picking provides security by enabling catadores to manage insecurities in other part of their lives and during everyday emergencies (e.g. paying of debts). While the dump was a place of hardship, it is also a place of refuge (Millar, 2018). As such, they choose to return to working at the dump each day, forgoing formal work, even when they are offered this. The following is an excerpt from her ethnography:

> Cash earnings were not the only way the dump provided the resources with which moradores could sustain their daily existence and care for each other. Meals were another clear example. Ingredients were assembled from whatever each morador happened to find in the garbage, which was why soup was their most common meal. And as illustrated in Vidal's use of "crystal" glasses, moradores repurposed an assortment of containers retrieved from the garbage as cooking pots, bowls, plates, and cups. These meals were collective in part because they had to be. "Even without wanting to, one makes friends here," Fabinho told me, "because each one depends on the other."….The entanglements of the dump and addiction furthermore laid bare the familial, social, and institutional failings from which many of the moradores sought refuge. I left that life, Vidal told me, and I don't ever want to go back!". (Millar, 2018, pg.115)

The conversation with Vidal and Fabinho, shows how rubbish picking provides security and autonomy and enables them to navigate uncertainty elsewhere in their lives (Millar, 2018). For them, navigating the uncertainty and having access to flexible work was more important than the 'security' of income gained from waged employment. For example, the social networks they had built up within the rubbish

community enabled them to rely on each other for support in terms of preparing meals and finding food. To move into waged employment would be lose those networks as their social, economic and political context was not set up in a way that would support them. This was not viewed by the catadores as an either-or situation, this was how it is and how it had to be, in order to endure and keep providing for their families, and community.

The art of living through a precarious present

Why the everyday is important

The common thread running through this chapter is the importance of everyday life and how by observing the actions and relationships within daily life, precarity can be revealed (Han, 2018; Das & Randeria, 2015). Approaches within anthropology focusing on everyday life capture and recognise the mundane actions and routines of daily tasks and the social relationships that are present (Neal & Murji, 2015). Anthropologist Clara Han (2012) describes this process below:

> Everyday life is a scene to which I am drawn, rather than a set of routines, practices, or interviews that I observe, evaluate, and extrapolate judgements from...I became implicated in the lives of others in various ways, I had to engage norms in their lives: to appreciate the work of domestic relations, the stakes in concealing need, the delicate struggles over intimate relationships in which the body was staked, or the small neglects and denials that also made up everyday life. (Han, 2012, pg.26)

I was inspired to take this approach in large part because of the work of anthropologist Veena Das. She situates much of her ethnography in scholarship of everyday life and how people live within a precarious present. She writes:

> Often the story goes without comment because it is before our eyes hidden in the uneventful repetitions of the everyday and the threats contained in it can be conceptualised through the image of the domestic, of the common and of the familiar. (Das, 2014, pg.282)

Han and Das recognise how everyday experiences are ingrained in the ordinary and encompass an inherent sense of normality, manifested in a layering of routines and relationships. It also gives insight into how these are juxtaposed with challenges of injustice, inequality, and hardship in a variety of ways (Das, 2007). Das's work is useful to mine, as her insights explore the way in which the routines of everyday life can reveal and give insight into lived experiences of injustice, inequality, and hardship (Das, 2007). Importantly, it is the extent to which people need to navigate their precarious present, that

gives insight into how precarious their lives are. I appreciate how Millar (2018) captures the way people navigate a precarious life and situation by writing:

> The art of living through the precarious present, as that which makes possible continued, shared existence in delicate times. (Millar, 2018, pg.91)

I will be using the term the "art of living through the precarious present" (Millar, 2018, pg.91) in my work as it captures the way the women speak about their life but also the routines, actions, choices and compromises they need to make on a daily basis, not just that which is out of the ordinary. In this sense, it is in the simplicity and normality of everyday life where the greatest insight into the lived experience is held, and from there precarity can be understood and commented on.

Understanding precarious spaces

Everyday life occurs within different spaces which are in a perpetual state of composition and comprised of moments, things, and people coming together and interacting at various times in a variety of ways (Stewart, 2012). Observing the relationship people have with their spaces and the extent to which individuals respond to challenges that arise within those spaces is an important part of understanding everyday life as well as identity (Thompson, Russell & Simmons, 2014; Lucas, 2014; Neal & Murji, 2015; Pugh, 2017; Vannini, 2015; Stewart, 2012; Das, 2014; Main & Sandoval, 2015).

As part of this work, I will explore access to adequate vending spaces with a particular focus on toilets and look closely at the relationship women have with these spaces. Especially relevant is how people experience conflict over space and how exploring the dimensions of conflict can highlight the relationship people have with their political and social context. Conflict is created when there are competing ideas over how a space should be used, and when the needs of some groups of people are valued over others, this conflict can result in their exclusion or removal (Lucas, 2014; Roy, 2011; Lombard, 2014; Peteet, 2015; Lefebvre, 1991; Thompson, Russell & Simmons, 2014; Kisson, 2015).

For this reason, noticing how displacement or exclusion from spaces occurs draws attention to which groups of people are excluded, and provides insight into the various factors that value some groups of people over others which lead to that displacement or exclusion (Cresswell, 2010). What is important here is the link between conflict over spaces and experiences of precarity, especially considering the women in this study are all informal workers and reliant on public space to earn a living[12]. Observing this relationship can provide insight into how precariousness is experienced and what it does. For

[12] See Chapter Two on informal work and the experiences of women in using public space to earn a livelihood.

example, how it constrains choices and opportunities, breaks down social relationships, impedes people from being able to meet their basic needs and connect with others (Lombard, 2014 Kisson, 2015).

An example that reflects the impacts of conflict over public space for vendors is seen in the research by Basu and Nagendra (2020), *The street as a workspace: Assessing street vendors' rights to trees in Hyderabad, India*. This is a context similar to my work, and while not solely focused on women they did speak with a number of women working as street vendors who have been displaced from their traditional vending spaces. In this work they comment on how access to green spaces (trees and shade) has decreased in the city due to intensive urban development, having a significant impact on vendors as they lost their shade and their vending spaces.

This research demonstrates how changes to the landscape of a city due to urban development created a new form of everyday politics and competition between vendors for spaces that still have trees. Higher earning vendors (usually men) have priority for the shaded spaces, whereas women distanced themselves from the conflict, moving to an alternative, and less comfortable location. The women accepted this as 'fate' and considered that selling is more important than vending in comfort. For example, one vendor they spoke with in their research articulated this*:*

> …I was very comfortably located under a huge tree, but due to the construction of the Metro, I had to shift to this place. It is very difficult. I feel extremely tired the whole day and unable to work after going home. – woman, 67 years. (Basu & Ngendra, 2020, pg.6)

While the women 'accepted' their situation, the loss of space had a very marked negative impact on the quality of everyday life and led to feelings of loss, alongside a disruption to their social networks that previously provided them support. Everyday life for them had changed significantly, leaving these women in a situation where they needed to adapt to uncomfortable and unsuitable spaces through whatever means possible, often vending in spaces that were uncomfortable and inadequate. What is critical to note here is that despite the conflict and the negative circumstances, they continued vending and adjusted their expectations accordingly.

Restoring daily life

Being attuned to and noticing the unfolding of everyday life provides the opportunity to recognize precariousness through understanding how the lives of others are 'hanging together' and 'falling apart' sometimes simultaneously in different spaces, and why (Stewart, 2012, pg.519; Vannini, 2015*).* Han (2018) refers to these as 'critical moments', and they are characterised as events out of the 'norm' that disrupt routines and pose additional challenges which threaten the sense of normality and security that enables enduring, or survival, to continue (Han, 2014, pg.60; Han, 2018). Describing these moments, Han writes:

> Critical moments are what women call the times when money runs short in the household and, despite the strong ethic to endure by bounding hardship within family affairs, signs and symptoms seep into the street. Those moments are met with acts of silent kindness, in which a neighbor invites a hungry child over for lunch or a contact for work is passed to a struggling neighbor in a nonchalant manner. These acts cannot be read in terms of individual laments and intentions, but rather in terms of an ethics of proximity that resides within everyday life. (Han, 2018, pg.339)

The women in this work had several critical moments they need to respond to, including, evictions from their vending spaces and a lack of provision of toilets and sanitation which meant they were unable to meet their bodily needs. Veena Das's work shows how women keep life going by restoring and maintaining daily routines during times of constant instability (Martin, 2007). In her work *Life and words: Violence and Decent into the Ordinary* Das looks at two key events in Indian history - the Partition between India and Pakistan in 1947 and the violence from riots after Indira Gandhi's assassination (Das, 1996; 2007; 2014). She shows how the recovery of everyday routines in response to traumatic and critical events can mean these events become 'folded into everyday life' and are embedded within memories, thoughts, language, and actions (Martin, 2007; Das, 2014; 2008; 2007; 1996; Han, 2004).

Importantly, it is the degree to which women need to work to restore daily life and routines that reflects the extent to which they are impacted (Das, 2007; Han, 2018). She writes:

> In the literary rendering of the Partition…this loss was seen as the inability of the women to find a way of telling their story as part of the story of the nation – but in their small communities defined by everyday relations, women were able to redefine themselves through the work of repair they performed. So one has to understand not only the themes of loss and concealment and the almost hallucinatory quality of the speech generated in the riots but also the themes of how one might shift one's gaze to the inhabitation that comes not from the knowing subject but from the subject as engaged in the work of stitching, quilting and putting together relationships in everyday life. (Das, 2017, pg.161)

Das's work is important because it shows that just because a person does directly speak about, or protest, vulnerability, injustice and trauma it does not mean that it is not being experienced in the present. Instead, she shows how it can also be evident in different dispositions and emotions, such as courage, despair, anger, laughter, hate, fear, joy and pain, as well as in the mundane and normal daily tasks, actions and routines (Han, 2014; Martin, 2007; Das, 2007; 2008; 2014). I will be referring to her work

throughout the findings chapters in relation to how women continue to adapt and compromise however possible as part of daily life, and the extent they do this demonstrates how precarious their lives are.

Another entry point to exploring everyday life and precarity is observing how social relationships work to enable people to endure critical moments. For example, in her work in Chile, Clara Han (2014) draws attention to how social relationships enable people to endure when critical moments arise (Han, 2012; 2014). To avoid the shame that could potentially occur when asking for help or the acknowledgement of uncertainty that exists in these moments, acts of silence work in the form of what Han describes as a 'silent gift' from one person to another as required (Han, 2014). Acts of kindness are twofold. They are a response to observing how dignity can be often being eroded by several factors and they are also a method of preserving a way of life.

In relation to this work, focusing on relationships, and the boundaries that exist within them (e.g. kinship, neighbourliness, friendships), can provide insight into how the women are able to endure and how they rely, or are not able to rely (or the extent to which they can rely), on these relationships to do so (Han, 2012; 2014). It will also shed light on how the women collectively acknowledge and form connections based on shared vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the theoretical framework for this thesis and identified the body of academic work and research it is situated within. While discussing the different concepts that will be used to frame this work and to understand the experiences of women, this chapter has covered a substantial amount of theoretical ground. I have explored the work of Bhrigupati Singh, Kathleen Millar, Veena Das and Clara Han, identifying how their work intersects with mine in terms of understanding experiences of precariousness.

Precarity has historically been understood as a category of work or as an ontological condition. However, contemporary ethnography looks to redefine precarity through the relationship between the two, with a focus on the lived experience within their social milieu. I will be centring my research on this approach, and the entry point to doing so will be everyday life. This will enable me to comment on the wider social, political, and economic systems the women are entangled within, while placing the focus on how they act within this context based on their perception of their experiences.

Understanding how people respond to critical moments was a key element of this chapter and will also be important for this thesis as on several occasions I look at how women are faced with events or moments that destablise everyday life, and the way this can fluctuate form moment to moment. Importantly, the anthropologists I have referenced in this chapter provide a framework for

understanding the impact of these through observing actions and relationships within everyday life. I draw on this framework to explore social relationships within markets and how the nature of these relationships speaks to the precarious everyday lives of the women.

In the next chapter I will outline and discuss the methodology for this research. This will build on this chapter, and I will draw out some of the ways I observed the everyday lives of the women I spoke to and how I engaged with the spaces they are embedded within.

Chapter Four: Methodology and fieldwork

Figure 9: Busy scene from inside KR Market

Fieldwork is a process of writing about people that involves more than just describing customs and routines. It also needs to describe people and their context by building layers of descriptions of the encounters alongside a description of how we view those encounters in the present moment and retrospectively. (Ingold, 2015, pg.385-386)

Introduction

In August 2015, I travelled to Bengaluru India, where I spent time 'hanging out 'in marketplaces around the city and speaking with women working as street vendors about the challenges they faced in their everyday lives. This chapter shares the approach I took to doing the fieldwork and writing this ethnography, and how the work went through a process of coming together, falling apart and then coming back together again, as I struggled to figure out what I was doing and to make sense of what I found out. The reflections and insights in this chapter provide details of the methodology for this

research, the approaches I used, and how I figured out how to do ethnography and consider, question, and contemplate my own positioning within the fieldwork.

In the first section, I outline the process for developing this research topic, how I planned the fieldwork, and details about the fieldwork such as who the women were and the location. The second section focuses on how the research took place and my approach to fieldwork. I explain the two key methods for collecting findings, firstly, hanging out in marketplaces and observing the context the vendors were situated within, and secondly, a series of conversations with approximately fifty women working as vendors in markets across the city. Of note is my connection to Meena who worked as my translator, and accompanied me to markets, enabling me to speak with the women.

Conducting analysis during and after fieldwork was a critical component of this thesis and in the third section, I discuss this process. As the research unfolded, the most crucial development was a broadening of the research topic. This led to a process of making and remaking the direction of the research in light of what I was learning, resulting in an expansion of the overall focus. I also discuss how I compiled the chapters within this work through combining conversations and observations. To conclude, I discuss the ethical considerations and my reflections on my role as a researcher conducting fieldwork.

Fieldwork overview

Developing a research topic and question

As a postgraduate student, I had the opportunity to be involved in a summer scholarship project on sanitation justice in South Asia. When looking at the literature, I realised there was a gap in information on the everyday experiences of women working without access to toilets or sanitation. This became a potential research topic as I was interested in finding out more about how women navigate this challenge, especially in the context of a rapidly urbanising city in India. I chose to base my research in Bengaluru as it fit these criteria and was where my supervisor's research was based, which meant I could connect with Meena, the translator she worked with and the NGOs she had relationships with such as the Street Vendors Union. From preliminary research on Bengaluru, I also knew it was likely that street vendors were easily accessible, and there would be women I could potentially speak to.

Location

I stayed in a hotel in Domlur, a suburb in eastern Bengaluru, as it is close to the main bus terminal with most busses leading to KR Market. I initially travelled around by autorickshaw but when I became more confident using public transport, I took the bus. Meena suggested I base myself at KR Market, but also visit other markets, which theoretically would provide the opportunity to speak to the same vendors a

few times and ask additional questions. This did not eventuate for reasons I will cover later in this chapter.

Over the month I spent in the city, I went to four formal markets and three informal ones, however, I spent most of my time at KR Market, which is where most interviews took place. As mentioned in Chapter Two, KR Market is the largest marketplace in Bengaluru with an estimated 15,000-20,000 people visiting each day (Patel, 2019). Outside the main building women tend to set up spaces to vend, and this is where I selected different women to speak to.

I have provided a map below (Figure 10), to show what KR Market looks like and how it is set out. The large rectangle in the middle is the main market building and in here as well as in the smaller blue and red squares around it, was where most of the men were. The women were situated outside of those areas in the 'free spaces' (depicted by the light cream/yellow area on the map). Following this diagram, Figure 11 and Figure 12 provide photographs of the outside and inside of the market.

Figure 10: Map/drawing of K.R Market (Patel, 2019)

Figure 11: Outside KR Market

Figure 12: Inside KR Market during the middle of the day

Participants

As previously mentioned, I spoke with around fifty women working in a range of public spaces in and around markets across the city. I spoke only with women vending in informal spaces, either on the sides of the road or working outside the market buildings (not vendors working in a building or under any form of shelter). The women were all small-scale vendors, and sold a range of items, generally small quantities of fruit, vegetables, or flowers. I did speak with one woman who was selling bags, but this was an exception.

The women used a variety of equipment to display their items, from newspaper, to sacks or bowls, others used metal trays and some scales they brought with them to the market. I have included some photographs below (Figures 13-16) to show some of the items they used, and what their spaces look like.

Figure 13: Metal trays the women used for displaying produce

Figure 14: Scales used to weigh items

Figure 15: Women working as vendors at KR Market

The ages of the women ranged from 20 to 57. Most spoke Kannada, but also spoke other South Indian Languages.[13] A high number of the women were from Bengaluru, and many had migrated with their families when they were children or had migrated later in life in search of employment. Some women had been vending in these spaces, or within a particular market, for many years and learned about vending from their mothers and grandmothers.

The women came from a variety of locations around the city, some travelling long distances to get to the market each day, which ranged from fifteen minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the amount of traffic and where they were vending that day. Importantly, the women all had families and dependents to care for - from children, to their husbands or parents. Most were the sole income earner and the women earned between Rs.50 and Rs.150 per day (which is the equivalent of NZ$1.00-$1.50 per day).[14]

[13] Meena also spoke Hindi and a range of other South Indian languages and was able to translate when required.

[14] Income varied greatly between days and weeks and was dependent on how busy the market was, the location they had access to vend in and the quality of produce they had to sell.

Fieldwork methods

The focus of this research is everyday life and I needed to use methods that would help provide insight into what daily life was like working as a vendor, and insight into the spaces and general context they interacted with on a regular basis. As this research was taking place within a one-month period, and in a busy congested context, the methods used needed to be flexible enough to enable me to adapt to this context and collect enough information to gauge some of the potential challenges they experience.

As I have noted, there were two components to this fieldwork: Hanging out in marketplaces and observing the context, and conversations with vendors. Meena accompanied me seven times to do the interviews, and on the other days I spent time travelling around, exploring the city and returning to observe the markets I had been to with Meena.

Hanging out in markets & sensory ethnography

To observe the everyday life of vendors, I spent time in a range of marketplaces around the city, walking around, observing how the spaces operate and the various events that took place. I observed the role of vendors in marketplaces, how they create spaces, weigh and sort items, peel vegetables or make garlands; sometimes multitasking with selling to customers and parenting. I was there in the heat of the day, when it rained, and on the days where it was so crowded, I could not see more than half a meter in front of me.

I handwrote my experiences, describing in detail what I could hear, see, feel, and smell and recorded my perception of movement, time, and the use of space. This included noticing who was moving and why, and juxtapositions such as the constant movement of people and traffic and the stillness of vendors. Hanging out in this informal way I noticed what was constant and what changes, and observed how vendors responded to events that interfered with their spaces, such as being pushed out of the way by oncoming cars and motorbikes or moving their items when it rained.

This approach is loosely based on the method of 'deep hanging out, first used by anthropologist Renato Rosaldo in 1989, in his work *Culture and Truth: the remaking of Social Analysis* (Rosaldo, 1989; Clifford, 1996; Redman, 2019).[15] Deep hanging out is a process and way of spending time in spaces for prolonged periods of time and observing those spaces and paying attention to aspects that would not be

[15] Renato Rosaldo first use this term in relation to ethnographic methodology. It was subsequently used by James Clifford in his article "Anthropology and/as Travel published in 1996. The term is now most commonly known from Clifford Geertz's 1998 essay, "Deep Hanging Out" where he reflects on Clifford's article, from the New York Review of Books. Also see: Deep Hanging Out as Historical Research Methodology: The National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian Institution – History of Anthropology Review (histanthro.org)

noticed unless there for that specific purpose (Rosaldo, 1989; Clifford, 1996; Geertz, 2000; Stewart. 2012; Moen, 2006). [16]

The method used for observing spaces in this way was based on the key principles of sensory anthropology. Sensory anthropology, as an ethnographic method, is an approach to fieldwork that uses and integrates the senses, creating a more embodied ethnography (Shore & Trnka, 2015; Ingold, 2011). Using the five senses alongside perceptions of height, width, depth, movement and time, the anthropologist observes and records what is happening and compiles a description of the context (Blandy & Bolin, 2015). It includes accounting for feelings of being in a particular space and observing how space is constructed by becoming attuned to aspects such as time and movement (Sunderland et al, 2012; Blandy & Bolin, 2015).[17]

Taking this approach enables thinking about how different spaces are constructed, how people engage with them and what this can say about the human experience. For example, how a block of toilets comes together with multiple elements which people engage with in diverse ways, or how marketplaces are formed by things coming together in particular places in a certain way at various points in time. In terms of space composition and commenting on precarity, this was important because the way the spaces were constructed often had a negative impact on the women.

Unable to digitally record anything due to the noise, I handwrote on paper in cramped spaces, or while walking, or on a few occasions I had to rely on my memory and later write what I saw or heard. I wrote up the notes each evening as I was not sure if weeks later my writing would be legible, and I was concerned that my memory may have dropped vital pieces of information about the context and the women. I was uncertain at the time about what this meant for the fieldwork, and I turned to anthropologist Kathleen Stewart's writing about doing fieldwork, in those moments of uncertainty about this process, as she writes:

> The fieldwork began and ended with hanging out with people and stopping to talk to people on the street. I used a tape recorder when I could, but, as they say in the hills, "thangs happen" and more often than not I was forced to rely on memory. I would run off to scribble notes in shorthand and then fill them in in as much detail as I could in long hours dwelling on every phrase and word and scanning for signs of "culture". (Stewart, 1996, pg.7-8)

[16] My method was only loosely based on this due to the time constraints and because the context was busier than anticipated - it was difficult to spend long periods of time in these spaces.

[17] Paying attention to how time felt was particularly interesting as I often found that less time had passed than I thought it had because the context was so busy and exhausting.

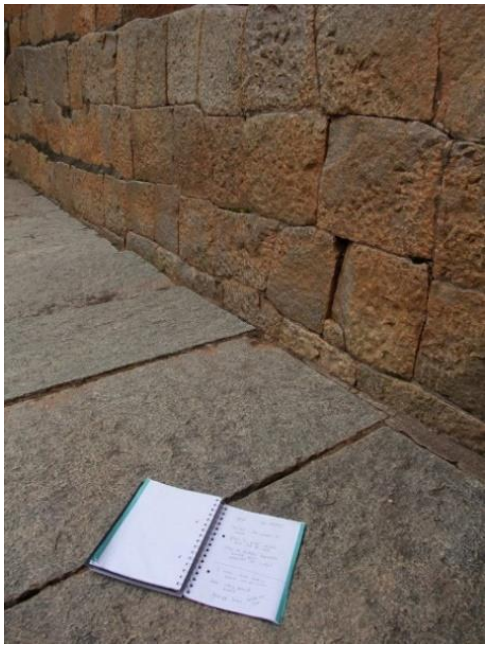

Figure 16: My field journal – taken inside the Bengaluru Fort

While hanging out I also took photographs around Bengaluru and of toilets which worked as a visual aid to the writing. These photographs are dispersed throughout the thesis, where relevant. Later, as I was writing, these enabled me to recall contextual elements in a more in-depth way.

Conversations with vendors and NGOs

Conversations with street vendors

The second component to the fieldwork was a series of informal conversations with around fifty women working as vendors. It may have been slightly more or slightly less, but it was difficult to tell as sometimes we spoke to women briefly but did not get the opportunity to engage in much of a back-and-forth dialogue as markets are busy places and it was difficult to hear. This means the conversations recorded in my journal (and throughout this thesis) are short snippets, not the lengthy in-depth conversations I had initially imagined and planned.

Our paths only crossed for very brief periods of time, due to how busy the women were when they were vending. A moment taken to speak to me, was a moment they were not earning money, therefore, I tried to keep the conversations as short and to the point as possible as I did not want my presence and this work to jeopardise their vending in any way - especially as it became increasingly evident how dependent they were on using every moment to earn to support their families. In an odd sort of way, the short interactions were familiar to them and not out of the ordinary. I think this is because this type of fast interaction is indicative of the general nature of marketplaces which are inherently places of transience and movement, where you come in for a fleeting period, do what you need to, and leave.

I approached and talked with women based on their availability (i.e. not engaging with a customer) or because they would call me over, curious as to what I was doing. As the research progressed, Meena and I got better at stopping and starting conversations as people wanting to buy items would approach. Simultaneously, we attempted to perfect the art of trying to look a slightly less conspicuous with what we were doing, so as not to deter customers from approaching. When I realised how busy vendors were, I initially thought I could manage this by having short conversations first, with follow up ones later to ask further questions. While a promising idea in theory, this did not eventuate as whenever I returned to the marketplaces with Meena, the women were not there, or possibly vending in a different space and we could not find them.

The questions I asked were centred around three themes, toilets, and water; personal circumstances and everyday life; access to space and evictions. As indicated earlier, I initially focused on toilets and access to water. For example, where the toilets in the market are, how clean they are, if they use them and if there were toilets why they didn't use them. I also asked questions about some of the challenges or issues they found with the toilets when they were available. The women were more than happy to speak with me about how their everyday life and routines worked, and their personal situation and experiences. Later in the fieldwork these questions became slightly deeper as they discussed the way they needed to compromise to make sure they could continue vending, and how they strategised however possible to make ends meet. The line of questioning took a noticeable shift halfway through the fieldwork after the evictions had taken place (as I describe in Chapter Six), and from that point onwards I incorporated questions about access to space, evictions, bribes, and harassment into the conversations.

Conversations with NGOs and Street Vendors Union

Through Meena and my supervisor, I was provided the contact details for the Street Vendors Union and planned to make contact when I arrived. I also organised to spend a day at Environmental Sustainability Group, where Meena worked,[18] to learn about the current environmental and political challenges facing Bengaluru. This means that in addition to speaking with the women I also had informal conversations with representatives at the Bengaluru branch of the Street Vendors Union and with others working at ESG. The purpose of these conversations was to understand what support was available for this group of women and to supplement my understanding of the context.

[18] ESG is a small NGO operating in Bangalore who aim to work on environmental and social justice initiatives across India. Their focus is on research, education, campaign support and advocacy working to reform environmental decision-making processes in the city. Environment Support Group - Environmental, Social Justice & Governance Initiatives (esgindia.org)

The conversation with ESG took place at their head office where I spent the day, participating in a day long workshop which had different group activities based on increasing sustainability practices in the city. I spoke with the Street Vendors Union in the final week of fieldwork, after a major eviction had taken place at KR Market. I asked the representative specific questions about the historical and current political and environmental context of Bengaluru and questions about their work in this space. It was interesting to speak with them about their work and to share with them the insights I had so far. The conversations helped me understand the women's experiences more comprehensively and are built into Chapters Five and Six.

Working with a translator

A translator was a critical component of this work as I did not speak Kannada, the state's vernacular language, so Meena was a significant part of this work. She frequently accompanied me to marketplaces to translate so I could converse with the vendors. Travelling around the city with Meena provided me an opportunity to ask her questions about the history of Bengaluru and current issues with infrastructure in the city. She had a wealth of knowledge on how the city landscape had changed to make way for the development of buildings and malls to support the growing IT industry. Her insights afforded me a more comprehensive understanding of the context that underpinned the conversations we had, and what I had observed.

In preparation for fieldwork, I had two skype conversations with Meena to discuss the research topic and the potential questions I could ask vendors. She felt this was an area that was worth exploring and it also intersected with her job for ESG.

I was reliant on Meena to explain the research topic and hold the conversation on my behalf through translating questions and answers back and forth. My concern with this process was not a reflection on Meena's ability to do this, but more so my own anxiety around missing something that may later be important. Double checking with her after each conversation was important to ensuring I understood what the women said and incorporating her explanations of various cultural nuances.

Despite Meena's involvement, at times the women I spoke with felt inaccessible due to the language barrier. I could not escape the feeling that we were from two quite different lifeworlds, colliding in an artificial way. However, over time, through several exchanges, smiles and nods of understanding as Meena worked to pass questions, answers, and stories back and forth, I felt connections were formed. Learning how to say hello and repeating their names and saying my name in broken Kannada was always a highlight, even though my attempts at repeating names or phrases often induced laughter.

On some trips to the marketplace without Meena, some of the same women would recognise me and shout out my name. I would go over and say hello and my name and repeat their name several times until I would finally get it right, and the surrounding vendors names too. Small acts of kindness from

the women towards Meena and I sit with me: Handing me a crate to sit on, actively making space so we could be more comfortable or offering me little bunches of flowers to take with me. All these exchanges were small, but most certainly significant and I felt, and still feel, deeply humbled by these and by the effort they made to accommodate me into their little spaces.

Analysis, writing and ethical considerations

Analysis

It took a long time to consider what took place during fieldwork and the best way to approach writing about what I had observed and heard. During fieldwork, I gathered tiny insights each time I went to the market, fusing these together to provide more complex insights. The more time spent in these spaces resulted in a deeper and more realistic perception, resulting in the research topic broadening accordingly. I was at times uncertain about what each small observation meant, simultaneously noting that it was not revealing what I thought it would.

While I initially set out to look at barriers to accessing toilets and how the women navigated these, as I noted earlier, halfway through the fieldwork there was a noticeable shift in the conversations as the vendors had been recently evicted from their spaces. From this point, while I tried to maintain the line of questioning about toilets, they wanted to speak about the evictions and access to space more generally. Consequently, the focus extended from provision of toilets for women vendors, to the provision of public space and to the precariousness of daily life within their context.

After I returned to New Zealand I continued with the analysis, grouping conversations into various themes. To understand my experiences, I engaged with anthropological theory and ethnography which helped inform my thinking and shaped the approach I was taking. The analysis stalled for a period as I struggled to make sense of what it meant outside of access to toilets, and I kept trying to retrofit what I had observed into that prior expectation from the research. I played around with various concepts like vulnerability and looking more deeply into sociological and anthropological theory on attachment to places, but it did not capture the experiences the women had relayed to me.

As I grappled with the various concepts and themes that emerged, I knew at the time the answers where there, but I was not in a place at that point in time where I was able to make sense of it in the way I needed to. After numerous drafts, and it still not falling into place, I took a break from writing to reassess and consider what it was that needed to be said. When I returned to this work, I reflected on my own life experiences and incorporated these into my thinking and was better able to consider the

themes more deeply. This also meant I turned to using precarity as a lens (and concept)[19] through which I understood their experiences, as it captured the way the women spoke about their lives.

Writing

In terms of writing and thesis construction, I have constructed this thesis with two findings chapters. The first is focused on access to toilets. The second findings chapter picks up where the toilets chapter ends and focuses on a major eviction of vendors that took place in KR Market which triggered the shift during research. Descriptive writing is a key element of this work. In the findings chapters I have layered the short snippets of conversations with the vendors within descriptions of the context and in doing so, I want to emphasise how the actions of people do not occur in isolation of the context.

Ethical considerations

Starting any conversation with a question about toilets is (in hindsight) is an immensely difficult thing to do – unless one is simply asking for the location of them, which is an acceptable topic of conversation, or at the very least a reasonable reason for approaching a person and interrupting their day. Conversations that go deeper and seek to find out what someone does when they don't have one, or if they use one, are more complicated. I was aware that I was asking the women to speak about something that is generally regarded as personal (within New Zealand society), and topics such as what the women do when they are menstruating and manage that while working (with or without a toilet).

When planning this research, I had considered this briefly and thought it could potentially be a minor consideration when initiating the conversations. However, I recall while waiting for Meena at the entrance of the marketplace on the first day of interviews, this 'minor consideration' was no longer minor. The questions regarding toilets that I had carefully formulated and worded prior to arriving, felt daunting with the realisation that the women I had imagined, were now physically in front of me and I was about to interrupt their day with very personal questions. I did not know these women and I had no idea how they were going to respond and the prospect of these conversations not going well took full prominence in my mind. However, despite my trepidation, the women were more than happy to discuss access to toilets and some of the challenges faced, including talking about menstruation, as long as there were no men present.

The accounts in this work do not speak for all vendors and when I refer to them collectively and draw conclusions it does not mean that they are a homogeneous group. I have used pseudonyms for the women's names to protect their privacy and kept most marketplaces ambiguous and unnamed (except KR Market). It has been almost six years since the completion of fieldwork it would be incredibly

[19] I discuss this in Chapter Three in more detail.

difficult to find the women, even with the details about their lives and family situation. The women did not sign consent forms as Meena, and I, felt it inappropriate given the context and how busy they were. However, I explained the research topic and that I would be writing a thesis and asked for permission to include their views, while explaining I would maintain their privacy.

I cannot fully understand the effect that my presence had on the women that I met. While I do not suppose that I had a profound influence on what happened to them next or the impacts of these brief interactions, I do not know. For example, did my presence create or highlight issues where there once was none or did bringing up toilets made them think unnecessarily about the lack of toilets? Did speaking about evictions cause further anxiety about being displaced, or provide the impression that solutions were on the way because someone was asking them about this?

As part of this work I recognise that any conclusions are underpinned by my own view of the world and biases (Howes, 2010; Ingold, 2014). I agree with Veena Das when she writes that experiences are not universally subjective, and the anthropologist can never fully understand what is intended by words and actions. We can only make assumptions and draw conclusions from those, based on our prior experiences (Das, 2014). I was aware of this throughout the analytical process and while writing and made sure I was aware of how my own worldview and experiences were informing the conclusions I came to, and what I placed emphasis on.

Ethnographic fieldwork can create an ethical tension, coming to existence when you seek to highlight and pull out an issue, problem or injustice and are not able to fix that which you have identified. This tension exists for me when reflecting on this work. I contemplate what happened to these women after I had left as the realisation of how precarious their lives are, has deeply unsettled me. Many of the women had experienced an immense amount of loss and loss was, in a way, inextricably linked to vending. Whether it was a loss of their husbands and children, a produce which enabled their small business to survive, or a loss of space. I wonder sometimes if I came in and took something from them, leaving me with the desire to, in some way, hand their stories back to them.

When considering the complexities of this, I have come to realise that this work is a small step in the right direction of finding answers, and it is within the capacity of what I can do right now with what I have. It is important I aim to treat their words and stories with care, carefully unpacking what they said and ensuring that it is respectful while being transparent in terms of my own subjectivities and biases.

Conclusion

This chapter sets out the methodology for this research, from how the research topic was conceptualised and developed, to how fieldwork took place, the methods used, and the analysis that took place. Since

arriving back in New Zealand I have more deeply considered how the research topic had developed, and how I needed to respond to this by broadening the research questions and topic and allowing the analytical and writing process to evolve in response to that.

I also needed to adjust the methods during fieldwork in relation to the context the women were working within, for example, having short conversations rather than lengthy interviews. Reflecting on the context the research took place in, and on the evolution of the research, it is not surprising (now) that it eventuated in the way it did, because this change reflected the precariousness of the environment within which the women were embedded. In the following chapters I discuss the findings of this fieldwork, the first is focused on the first half of fieldwork and is about provision of toilets, the second covers the second half of fieldwork and looks at provision of adequate space more generally.

Chapter Five: Conversations about toilets

Figure 17: Sign outside women's toilets in KR Market

Inadequate access to sanitation in a community is an inherently gendered problem, requiring an explicitly gendered solution. (Burt, Nelson & Ray, 2016, pg.24)

Introduction

Toilets are a physical space and structure but have the potential to highlight the social, political and cultural spaces people inhabit. Due to the specific needs women have for managing menstruation, urination and defecation, exploring the provision of sanitation and toilets can also be an entry point to understanding experiences of precarity. As women working as street vendors in Bengaluru are reliant on access to public toilets and sanitation, a critical part of this research project was to understand their experiences using the public toilets and associated impacts arising from issues with provision.

To achieve this, I had several conversations with women working as vendors and went into every toilet public block I came across, to observe the environment and take photographs. I also had conversations with the Street Vendors Union in Bengaluru and representatives from Environmental Support Group

(ESG) to supplement what I was learning in marketplaces. Through these conversations, and observations, it became evident that there are a range of issues with sanitation provision in public spaces, and if the women needed to use a toilet the spaces they mostly had to interact with were not fit for purpose and posed a health and safety risk.

In the first section of this chapter I explore some of these issues, focusing on the types of spaces the women need to interact with and navigate. This sets the foundation for subsequent sections and provides vital descriptions of these spaces alongside photographs where relevant. I found out that a lack of provision means that the women are in a position where they need to 'accept' the reality of not having access to sanitation and mitigate the impacts through whatever means possible to keep vending.

In the second section I explore how the women do this in their everyday life and keep vending. In the final section, I look at how their needs for sanitation provision are not recognized or addressed by the municipal government (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike –BBMP) and other organsations. Importantly, this meant the women did not have the opportunity to advocate for changes.

Exploring issues with sanitation provision

As part of this research I wanted to understand the issues women experience in the spaces they interact with in their everyday lives. Public toilets are one of these spaces, and I was particularly interested in the way their experiences with toilets can be an entry point to understanding experiences of precarity. This section unpacks some of the issues with public toilets and sanitation, while also highlighting the social and political systems that are responsible for these spaces and their condition.

Provision of toilets and sanitation

Due to factors such as biology and social expectations, the needs women have for urination, defecation and managing menstruation can only be met through public toilets that are clean, in nearby locations and affordable, within spaces that enable security, privacy, and modesty, with access to water and to waste disposal for menstrual hygiene products (Burt, Nelson & Ray, 2016; Reddy, Rasharem & Vedala, 2019). This means that adequate provision is measured by more than just the number of toilets available.

In Bengaluru, accelerated population growth is placing significant pressure on sanitation development and infrastructure, and the flow-on impact from this are evidenced in the provision of public toilets for women (Gandy, 2008; Chaplin, 2011).[20] A lack of sanitation infrastructure means that it is increasingly

[20] There are an estimated 500-600 public toilet complexes (3,000 toilet seats) 530 are run through the municipal government and 150 are run through private companies, however, most are in disrepair (BBMP, 2021; The

likely that women working in public spaces will not be working near a public toilet that they can get to quickly and easily. I noticed that the number of toilets varied greatly between markets. Some marketplaces had no toilets but had a working public toilet 'nearby', usually at popular landmarks (e.g. a local church), but 'nearby' could sometimes mean up to a half an hour walk away. Other markets had blocks of toilets within the marketplace. For example, in KR Market there are two toilet blocks (each with around 6-8 toilets). I spoke with Maya, a vendor at KR Market about this:

> *For so many people at the market there is only one toilet, which is not right. I must work here, and there are many people that come through.*

This is important because research shows that for women the location of toilets is a major factor in being able to use them, and when they are not in convenient places women must walk long distances to get to them or not use them at all (Sahoo, Hulland, Caruso, Swain, Freeman, Panigrahi, & Dreibelibis, 2015; Reddy, Rasharem, Vedala, 2019). As the women in my study were often situated on the outskirts of markets, or on the footpaths of the surrounding streets, it took most of them a long time to get from their vending space to the toilet and back, especially when the market is busy. From what they said, a trip to the toilet could take anywhere between 15-45 minutes. Meena and I timed this a few times, as after speaking with the women we would usually go to find the toilets they were referring to. Crossing roads to reach a toilet also added extra time due to traffic, as did the time spent waiting in lines to go into the toilet, which was often the case for the women's toilets. Vanti who was selling items on the streets near KR Market, an approximately 15-minute walk away from the toilets, spoke with me about why the time taken to use the toilets was an issue:

> *The toilet is about half a kilometer away which is a problem because I have all my things. I must ask my neighbor to look after my stall for me. It is a mutual thing that we look after each other's stalls, but she does not sell my things for me. I must wait until I get back.*

Provision also includes elements of sanitation, especially water. When water was not present, the women were unable to use the toilet as water was needed to clean themselves and clean the toilet after using it. It was vital for maintaining good hygiene, particularly when menstruating. The women told me that when taps were present, water was not always connected which meant they frequently did not work, or only worked intermittently. Madama worked as a vendor at KR Market and spoke to me about water provision at the market:

Bangalorean, 2019). Public toilets – 600 nos. – Bengaluru | Bangalorean (SWM (bbmp.gov.in)). It is unclear how many of these are allocated for women but 'seats' includes urinals and squat toilets.

There are two toilet blocks in the market, but they do not always work [as there is no water], and I must bring water from home as there is no water here to use

Most toilet blocks had basins or barrels filled with water, and buckets for the women to use which they would refill with water from the basins or barrels and use that to clean themselves and the toilets with. However, even when water was present, I noticed layers of dirt, grime, and bugs, coupled with a musty smell, indicating it had been sitting there for prolonged periods of time.

The lack of water in public toilets reflects wider issues in Bengaluru regarding water supply for sanitation and drinking (Reddy, Raharem & Vedala, 2019). As I touched on in Chapter Two, water is expensive to pump which means water supply in public spaces is limited to public connections and these are heavily regulated by the municipal government (Reddy, Rasharem, Vedala, 2019; Sahoo et al, 2015). Consequentially, most public toilets in the city were not connected to a water mains source and water had to be physically delivered every day or two by water tankers, who replenish the water in tanks (which then connect to the taps) or barrels and basins. When this did not occur frequently enough to meet demand, it meant at some points of the day or week water was scarcer than others. Yara explained her experiences with this:

The water is from a well, but it does not work all the time, so we need to wait for the water tankers to arrive when we run out.

Below are two photographs depicting this process. Figure 18 is a water tanker in Domlur, and Figure 19 is a truck with water bottles which were used to refill the water tank at the market.

Figure 18: Water truck

Figure 19: Truck bringing water bottles into KR Market

Due to water provision being critical for toilet use, I wanted to know more about the context behind the lack of provision, and I discussed issues with water supply with a worker at ESG who told me:

> *Water is an issue in Bengaluru. The city has no river, and the lakes are unusable, so we get water through using our ground water supply which is now overexploited and quickly being depleted. A huge amount of power is needed to pump the groundwater up to the surface and this is expensive and makes providing water also expensive.*
>
> *The water is contaminated. People are creating copious amounts of rubbish and waste which is being put back into the groundwater, now full of bacteria, plastic, lead and mercury. As the units that filter water are not working, the water is pumped back up and used as drinking water.*
>
> *It is a bigger issue than toilets. Bengaluru has serious issues with sewage and a large waste problem. It is a city of 11 million people which has major issues of overpopulation and a lack of infrastructure, including not enough toilets and water.*
>
> *Not enough is done about it and the effects are catastrophic, especially for women.*

When I met with the Street Vendors Union, I also asked their representative about water supply in markets for vendors and how the system operated:

There used to be more public taps in the city, but the BWSSB (Bengaluru Water Supply and Storage Board[21]) billed the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP)[22] for it, and they have stopped paying.

This means that taps in the markets have been shut down, cutting the water supply for vendors.

I was interested by these processes because water supply had a significant impact on the usability of toilets. It was also important because the uncertainty around water delivery had an impact on the women as it made it difficult for them to predict when it would be there and when they would be able to use the toilet. Importantly, men's toilets did not always have the same requirements for water because they mainly used the urinals and did not require water for cleaning themselves.

I was struck by how dependent the women were on the municipal government and those running the marketplace for water provision, and subsequently dependent on the actions of those entities to meet their needs. It was also evident that the women had very little say in ensuring water was always available. To mitigate some uncertainty stemming from inconsistent water provision, the women brought water with them to the market each day, alongside everything else they needed, usually in old soft drink bottles. However, this limited supply had to be used sparingly as it was also used for cleaning produce and drinking and could not be refilled if there was no water at the market. Below is a photograph of one of the water bottles that a woman had with her – a frequent sight in the markets:

Figure 20: Vendor's water bottle

[21] Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (bwssb.gov.in). The BWSSB is responsible for ensuring water supply meets demand, sewerage disposal, and collecting.
[22] BBMP is the administrative body responsible for civic amenities and some infrastructural assets of the Greater Bengaluru metropolitan area.

Interacting with precarious spaces

Alongside water provision, systems that enable cleaning and maintenance are also critical to the provision of toilets. In my travels around Bengaluru, I went into most public toilet blocks that I came across and where possible I observed the environment and took photographs of the spaces the women interacted with. There were a couple that I did not go into because they were far too dirty, the pungent smell was too strong or were boarded up – these factors making it dangerous or unpalatable to enter.[23]

The first thing I noted was that all women's toilets and surrounding spaces had obvious signs of disrepair and were unclean. Issues varied from cracked walls or floors, and broken sinks or squat toilet seats. Floors had visible dirt and grime, and open sewage could often be seen seeping out in between cracks forming tiny rivers, making it difficult to move around safely. I also observed how toilets are comprised of multiple essential components, and I recall saying to Meena on one occasion that 'something is always missing' (most often more than one 'something'), from missing doors (making privacy impossible) and tap handles, to buckets for disposal of menstruation products, and water for women to use to clean themselves and the toilet with.

An example that remains etched in my memory was of the first toilet block I encountered at KR Market, on my first day of conversations with the women. A vendor had directed me to some women's toilets located on the second floor of the market building. Walking out of the heat of the mid-day sun into the mugginess of the ground floor, I followed the stairs to the second floor, admiring the colorful mosaic of the piles of flowers below. The voices of groups of women scattered around the room echoed off the walls, breaking the silence of the virtually empty space. As my eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, I could smell a mixture of sewage and urine coming from the toilets tucked away in the corner, enveloping me like an invisible fog as I drew near.

Narayanamma was sitting outside the toilets and she explained that she collects money from women who want to use them and is responsible for cleaning. Handing her Rs.5, I pushed aside the faded brown curtain hanging loosely from the wooden awning attached to the top of the door and went inside the vacant toilet block, my shoes sticking to the floor as I moved across the room. I took a moment to appreciate the quieter space, the concrete walls encapsulating the toilets muffled the sounds of the market in the distance. The light streaming in from the windows overhead bounced off the mirror on the opposite wall, illuminating the room, a welcome relief from the darkness of the market building, providing the ability to observe what was before me.

[23] I only took photographs when the toilet block was empty and there were no women using them. In situations where I felt it was inappropriate I either went back at a later date or did not take photos (or observe).

The room had at one point been painted white and it was remarkable how through repeated use and a lack of deep cleaning, the floor was now stained to the point where you would be forgiven for thinking that it was initially black or brown. Patches of mold and dirt were ingrained in the linoleum and had travelled up the walls, fading to yellow as it merged into the off-white shade the upper walls were now.

With my foot, I moved the wooden door hiding the toilets, the smell emerging from the small space creating an imperceptible wall that stopped me from going any further. In the tiny space, the whiteness of the porcelain squat toilets gleamed in contrast with the dark, once completely white floor. Two small buckets sat in the vicinity of pipes, which at one point had been taps but were now just pieces of hollow metal protruding from the wall.

A large concrete sink of stagnant water was nestled in the corner of the room, a thin layer of dirt and bugs had accumulated on the top giving the water a mossy greenish color, its odor drifting and sticking to the air around it, mixing with the smell of sewage and all the smells swirling within the confines of the concrete walls. Turning on the tap over the sink, fresh water poured out, making a small dent into the layer of film on the top.

Pushing the curtain back I walked out, smiling my appreciation to Narayanamma, as I took a deep breath of slightly fresher air.

Figure 21: Outside the women's toilet blocks on the second floor at KR Market

Figure 22: Sink with stagnant water

Figure 23: Toilets at KR Market

Figure 24: Toilets upstairs at KR Market

The toilet block described above was one of many that I went into and was indicative of the state of all other toilet blocks I observed, although most were in a far worse state. Even though I was not prepared for the extent of damage and the state of uncleanliness, it was expected. These observations confirmed known issues with women's public toilets in Bengaluru, and India where public toilets have a reputation for being unclean to the point where contact with bacteria, urine and feces is often unavoidable (Sahoo et al, 2015). The significance of the unclean state of public toilets for the women I spoke with, is that it creates a disincentive for usage, as Shilpli articulated:

> *We know the toilets are unclean and we are scared that we will get infections, so we will not use them.*

Cleaning did take place on a regular basis for some of the toilets. Primarily this occurred in toilets located in more established marketplaces, however, even when cleaning took place, it was not enough to keep up with excessive usage from high volumes of people visiting the market. Madama was vending at KR Market, and when I asked her about the cleaning processes, and she explained how this works:

> *I must use the toilets 3-4 times a day, but they are not clean. If they clean them at 10pm they will clean them only one time in 24 hours, and they are often not cleaned properly.*

There are a number of actions involved with using a squat toilet and women require a certain amount of space to use the toilet and clean themselves after using it and for this reason, they likely come into contact with multiple surfaces while using one. The reality this shows is that a lack of adherence to cleaning and maintenance of toilets, and their surrounding areas, means that when the women use the toilets they had to interact with an environment that places them at risk of exposure to bacteria and infections, or alternatively, not use them at all (Saha, 2009; Cohen, 2000; Roever, 2014; Reddy, Rasharem & Vedala, 2019; Sahoo et al, 2015 Ademas, et al, 2020). To supplement this conversation, and to show in more detail what these spaces are like, I have included some photographs below of the various toilet blocks I went into (Figures 25-30).

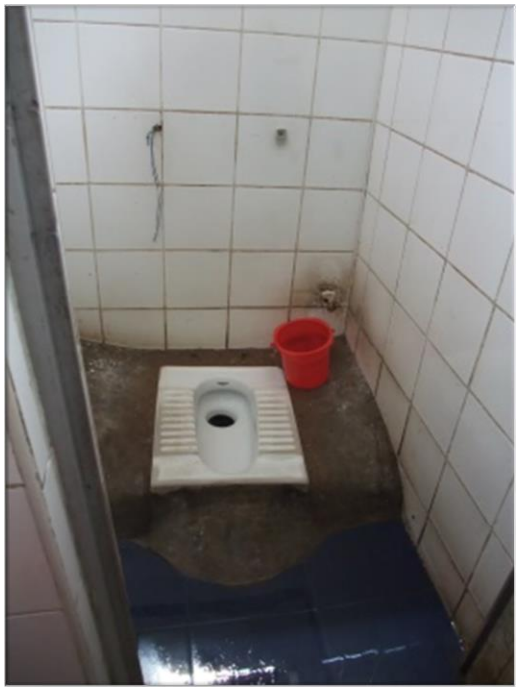

Figure 25: Squat toilet

Figure 26: Broken basins

Figure 27: Outside the entry to a toilet

Figure 28: Broken squat toilet

Figure 29: Broken basin in a toilet block

Figure 30: Entrance to women's toilets

Due to the state of the toilets, I was extremely mindful about what I came into contact with, sometimes only taking photos from the doorway and other times I was not able to enter the toilet at all due to the smell or amount of rubbish. When walking into toilet blocks, I was grateful for my shoes as they offered me some protection from what was lingering on the floors. I noted in my field journal that many of the women in the markets with did not wear shoes, and this meant that if did use the toilets, they had no protective barrier between their feet and the dirty floors.

Discussing this, I am reminded of Kathleen Millars (2018) work with catadores at rubbish dumps who interacted with spaces that were unclean and unsafe, which likely jeprodised their health. Regardless of the potential health implications, interacting with these precarious spaces was part of what it meant to be a rubbish picker. For many of the catadores, it was necessary just to continue working anyway because it gave them the opportunity to earn a livelihood as well as from critical social relationships.

In an analogous way, the women I spoke with had to mitigate the undesirable realities and potential challenges when interacting with toilets. In response to an unclean and unsafe environment that often did not have the space or tools to use a toilet, the women managed as best they could within the environments they were presented.

For example, they would step over rivers of sewage or rubbish. Also, when the spaces in the cubicles were limited and cramped, I noted on a couple of occasions the women were using the foyer area to clean themselves with the water (when it was present). This was also a strategy used when the lines outside of women waiting to use the toilet were long, as it enabled faster turnover.

Experiences of harassment

Toilets and their surrounding spaces were also precarious because of the interactions that take place there. For the women in my study, some public toilets were in places where they were at risk of harassment or had experienced harassment in the past, generating feelings of fear around using the spaces again. I spoke with Arati, and her experiences with this captured the feelings that other women had with harassment:

> *There is a temple down the road that we can go to that has toilets, but when we do the men at the temple see us and hassle us for using it because they are not happy that we do. Sometimes we either try to sneak through when no one is watching, or we hold on until late at night and go then. It is not dignified that we have no choice but to sneak through.*

Talking with the women about their experiences of harassment, I was cognisant of the literature I had read before fieldwork, which highlighted how experiences of harassment and violence were common for women when using a toilet or looking for places to defecate. I was particularly aware of this when

entering toilet blocks as there were many occasions where there were groups of men sitting outside or stationed by the entrance collecting the fee to use them, and I could see how this could be uncomfortable for women, especially given their vulnerability through the necessity of using a toilet (and the actions associated with doing so).

Meena and I were provided a small insight into harassment at one toilet block we visited. The toilets were broken into two sections, with one side for men and the other for women, like many of the other toilet blocks I had seen by that point. What was different about this particular block, was just inside the entrance, a wall separated the two with a small window in the centre and on the men's side a man was sitting by the window to take money. I realised he could likely see into the toilet stalls and with this in mind, I quickly took some photos and went to leave. As Meena and I were walking away, he yelled at us. Meena translated for me and explained to him that we were looking at the women's toilets. He replied:

> *Why are you looking at toilets for women anyway – the women here are all lazy and alcoholics and all they do is come in here and leave their cups and shit everywhere.*

While I did not feel threatened, it was interesting to observe the sentiment expressed in relation to the women using the toilet. On other occasions, when there were men sitting around outside the women's toilets, I often decided not to go into them (especially if I was on my own) as it felt too uncomfortable having men constantly staring at me, and due to the language barrier I was unable to communicate if questioned.

Living through the precarious present

In the first section I looked at some of the challenges that women vendors face with using public toilets and sanitation. All the women I spoke with either did not use the toilet at all (or could not use it) during the day or tried to use it as infrequently as possible. As the women were dependent on their income from vending to provide for themselves and their families, when there was a lack of sanitation provision near their workspaces, this meant they needed to navigate the lack of provision however possible. Not vending for any part of their day was only the last resort.

Thinking about this, I consider the relevance of Kathleen Millar's phrase, "the art of living in the precarious present" (Millar, 2018, pg.91). It accounts for how the women manage different fluctuations of need and moments of increased precarity through different actions, compromises and relationships. Living through a precarious present was a necessity for the women that I spoke with, and this next section unpacks some of the ways they did this, and how these enabled them to continue vending.

Suppressing Need

To reduce the need for urination or defecation, the women would not eat or drink water during the day, or as little as possible, even on days where the temperatures were high. In most of the conversations I had, the women explained that this was the easiest way to avoid using a toilet and it was what they had to do when a toilet was too far away. From my study, Kashmir, who worked near the outskirts of KR Market explained:

> *There is a toilet, but you must walk about 7-10 mins away and it costs Rs.5, so I do not use it. I wait until I go home. I bring a water bottle with me but do not often drink water, so I do not need to use the toilet. I get bad stomach pains from being pushed to hold on for too long.*

Withholding water and food was the norm for many of the women I spoke with and after I had spent a few weeks in markets I found myself employing the same technique, because it was a simple method and the toilets were unpleasant (at best).[24] Darshi also explained this:

> *If I do not drink water, I do not have to use the toilet very often. We must buy water or bring water with us [there is not water at the marketplace]. I bring this 2ltr bottle with me every day, but we do not drink it. When it is windy it makes you less thirsty which is good because then we do not need to use the toilets as much.*

These findings were not unexpected, but the amount of time the women had to withhold food and water did initially surprise me. Many of the women worked up to fifteen hour days in hot and humid conditions, and would spend the entire time, or a decent proportion of it, not drinking or eating.[25] Research on women generally, not just vendors, confirms that a common response to lack of provision of toilets is to adapt by withholding food and water to avoid the need to use a toilet. However, this research also shows that doing this can place a woman at increased risk of health issues such as Urinary Tract Infections and Reproductive Tract Infections (Sahoo et al, 2015).

I was curious to know more about this and asked the women follow-up questions around health issues associated with not using a toilet. Some reported that they did not experience those 'issues' or that health issues were not important – the main problem was that at times not eating or drinking, or avoiding meeting their needs by using the toilet, was uncomfortable.

[24] I was also aware that I could use any hotel and of my own privilege in this situation in that I had that access but also that I had more mobility than many of the women I spoke with who were confined to their spaces all day.

[25] I will discuss working hours in the following chapter but for now it is important to note the women worked between 10-15 hours a day and it varied from day to day and week to week and was dependent on how much they had to sell that day as they would often wait until it was all gone before leaving.

A couple of the women that I spoke to had underlying health conditions like diabetes, which meant they required a toilet more regularly and furthermore not drinking water made the condition worse for them. One strategy used to avoid the need for using a toilet in these situations was taking medication. For example, Binita, worked at a market that did not have a toilet but there was one in the church which was a 10-minute walk away. She explained how this worked for her:

> *I find this work hard because I have bad back pain and knee pain. There are no toilets here so if I want to go, I must walk far across the road to the market or I try to hold it. It is tiring to walk there so I do only use it once a day, at the most. I do not drink much water and I have frequent stomach upsets, so I take these pills that help me not have to use the toilet.*

Binita showed me the pills, but I was not able to tell what they are as they did not have labels, but there was a mixture of several types that she took each day. I remember Binita fondly as she was so happy to be speaking with us. She said Meena and I reminded her of her daughters and that was why she was comfortable discussing these personal 'issues'. What was clear was that the women did not have the privilege of factoring in the potential of longer-term health issues, because their need to vend and earn money in the short term.

I reflect on Veena Das's work to understand why the women did this and how it demonstrates experiences of precariousness (Das, 2006). Through her work, Das shows that for women a quiet acceptance of circumstances can be a way of enduring and is not simply the case that they have accepted it because it is easy to do so. In this respect, precarity is reflected in the daily compromises made to navigate a precarious context and in the way they balance needs with factors such as health and wellbeing, or income. Put simply, the women in my study were required to make choices between using a toilet or not eating or drinking. Even though this had a negative impact it was 'accepted' that to work as a vendor, these are the conditions you need to navigate. In response to the negative experiences associated with a lack of provision, the women had developed ways of enduring increasing precarious circumstances, as well as employing strategies that enabled them to prevent needs from escalating.

Managing menstruation without sanitation provision

One of the most difficult challenges the women faced was managing menstruation, which was almost impossible when components of toilets such as water and waste disposal were missing. In addition to highlighting the specific needs that women have for toilets and sanitation, looking at menstruation can also provide insight into how precarity is experienced and can be escalated in relation to those needs not being met. This was an important part of this study because menstruation for many of the women was unavoidable and added an additional set of requirements at different points in the month. Menstrual poverty is a term that encompasses multiple deprivations and covers the additional requirements that

menstruation brings with it. For example, not enough toilets, unclean surfaces, no light, inadequate water disposal and no access to water (Rheinländer, Samuelsen, Dalsgaard & Konradsen, 2010).

To manage menstruation, most of the women explained to me that they used pieces of cloth (usually from a sari that is no longer used) that are washed dried and reused, or rags. Only a couple used sanitary pads, and these were predominantly used by the younger women. It is important to note that regardless of what type of material is being used that the women were able to change this regularly. Not being able to change blood absorbing material and clean oneself often when menstruating can result in Reproductive Tract Infections and other types of infections in addition to experiences of severe discomfort or pain (Namrata, Dutta, Kamchadin, 2017; Burt, Nelson & Ray, 2016; Ademas, Adane, Sisay, Kloos, Eneyew, Keleb. Lingenew, Derso & Alema, 2020; Ajar, 2020; Saha, 2009; Cohen 2000; Roever, 2014; Rheinländer, Samuelsen, Dalsgaard, & Konradsen, 2010).

Menstrual pads are more comfortable than cloth and do not need to be changed as frequently, making them the preferred option when possible. However, the costs of pads are high, compared to cloth and they cannot be reused (unlike cloth which can be reused multiple times) making pads unaffordable and therefore difficult to access (Rheinländer, Samuelsen, Dalsgaard & Konradsen, 2010; Namrata, Dutta & Kamchadin, 2017). In my conversation with her, Chara explained how this impacted her:

> *When I have my period, I come to work, but I have a lot of bleeding, and this means that I must use pads. I usually bring two pads with me, which is an issue because the charges have gone up and they are expensive. I think there are still some women who use cloth because of this cost.*

Most of the other women I spoke with used cloth, but did so, not just because of the cost but because it was what they were accustomed to using. Regardless of whether they were using pads of cloth, in response to a lack of adequate provision, the women delayed changing this until they went home, and continued to work with a substantial amount of discomfort. Two women spoke to me about how they managed vending when menstruating without access to a toilet, waste disposal, or water:

> *Maira: When I have my period, I use cloth – my old cotton sari that I cut into pieces and use it as a pad. It is not comfortable to wear when sitting. I carry it with me when I come in the morning, but I throw it away each time I use it, as there is nowhere to wash or dry them.*

> *Bhakiti: I often do not vend when I have my period because it is difficult and tiring. I use cloth when I do have my period and when sitting outside all day my legs get irritated from it, and it is worse in the sun. It is difficult to change it here.*

Bhakiti was not the only vendor that mentioned sometimes missing work while menstruating. As mentioned earlier, deciding not to vend was only a last resort. Not being able to work means a loss of income which had serious impacts as it meant they were unable to afford necessities for the week (such as food or rent), placing additional pressure on the women. Conversations about managing menstruation led me to consider how precarity is experienced at some points in time more than others, evidenced in the comprises required. What I mean by this is that not using a toilet was sometimes managed by not eating or drinking, which was uncomfortable but somewhat manageable. In comparison, when menstruating and vending, discomfort became far more severe which they managed to withstand as much as possible. It also posed potential adverse repercussions from not being able to work, such as earning less and being in a position where they are unable to buy what they need, or are required to work longer hours on subsequent days to make ends meet.

In his work Singh (2014) describes this experience as "a fluctuation between forms of strength and vulnerability" (Singh, 2014, pg.171). For this group of women, part of living and enduring through a precarious everyday life is the experiences of fluctuating of need, oscillating between strength and vulnerability, or both at the same time.

Reliance on other women in critical moments

Needing to use a toilet and respond to bodily needs can be a 'critical moment' and it is an essential action to enabling women to work comfortably and endure through the working day. To be able to leave their space the women were reliant on having someone watch their space and stock for them, and one of the most common ways this happened was through support from other women vendors. During my conversations with them, the women often brought this up when speaking about daily life:

> *Yara: If I need to go to the toilet, I tell someone to watch my stall for me, we just know that is what we do when we need to go. It is a mutual understanding that it takes time to use the toilet and is returning the favor.*

> *Mari: We look after each other's shops – it is a mutual understanding that it takes time to go to the toilet and that is how we do it.*

The way the women spoke about reliance on one another, and the prominence this had for them in terms of managing daily life, reflected a shared understanding of biological need. From most of these conversations I got the sense that relationships in this context were temporary, and could change daily, as the women often didn't vend in the exact same space each day - especially in larger markets like KR Market where space was scarcer. As such, part of everyday life involved quickly establishing these crucial relationships with the other women that were close by. Crucial because when the women could not do this, they were not able to respond to their needs, as Bakula explained:

There are three other vendors here but if they are not here then I cannot leave my produce and things to go to the toilet. Also, cows come by and eat the food, or people take it.

Reflecting on this, and the absolute importance of those relationships for the women, I consider Clara Han's work on critical moments and the role of social relationships in enabling people to endure critical moments (Han, 2012; 2014). In a similar way to the women in Han's work, social relationships between women worked based on a shared understanding of vulnerability and enabled them to reduce moments of accentuated precarity. However, the variability of being able to form those relationships reflected their changing context and created a greater level of uncertainty for the women (i.e. was not known when arriving at the market each day if this was going to be achievable or not).

The transience of the relationships surprised me because I was expecting there to be more established and familiar social networks in the markets between vendors. At the time I was unclear as to why this was the case, but later in the fieldwork I found that frequent evictions, alongside decreasing vending spaces due to urban development, meant the women moved around more, and found it difficult to create and maintain relationships.

Advocating for increased provision of toilets and sanitation

The role of the municipal government

In Bengaluru, governance, provision, and responsibility for the maintenance of public toilets primarily sits with the municipal government. According to current information on the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike website, the municipal government run 401 public toilets and 17 community toilets, and there are an additional estimated 150 which are operated through a private partnership model with a variety of local companies – around 3000 total toilet seats (BBMP, 2021). This number is inadequate for a population of almost eleven million people. To put the inadequacy into perspective, the Swachh Bharat Mission Urban Guidelines (2017) state that there should be at least 1-2 public toilet seats for every one hundred women, and one for every two hundred men (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2017). It is also important to note, as the first section of this chapter describes, the public toilets that are there are not always in usable condition.

Due to their need for public space, vendors are completely reliant on the municipal government to recognize and prioritise their specific needs for adequate toilets and sanitation and to put in place measures to ensure provision. The women in my study did not feel this was happening. One morning during fieldwork interviews, Meena and I were speaking with a vendor working on the side of the path in KR Market, and as we were talking about the lack of water in the toilets, a water tanker drove past. As it did so, it ran over the edge of the woman's stall. As I helped her tidy up her stall, she spoke with

Meena about what had just taken place. Meena translated that in response to the issues with the truck and with the lack of toilets and water more generally, she kept saying, "what to do". This was a phrase the women commonly used when speaking about issues, they were facing and reflected how the women did not feel they could advocate for any changes and this was evident in how they spoke:

Shipli: There are so many women working here but we can't mobilise to make the toilets clean.

Niha: Go find the other toilets we must pay for those too, but it is not in our hands, and we cannot do anything about it.

Sarala:…there is nothing we can do. It is not in our hands.

As the women felt they had no opportunity to advocate for change I wanted to understand more about the relationship they had with the municipal government, and how this impacted on the provision of sanitation and toilets. One of the most interesting situations that demonstrated this was a market that previously had one public toilet for vendors and the public. The toilet had been operating for more than twenty years. However, it was not kept clean, so the municipal government decided to demolish it, rather than pay for upkeep, leaving no toilet for the vendors. Nanmani had been working at the market over this time, showed me the boarded-up toilet and told me what had happened:

There is no toilet here now. This market had a toilet, but it has been closed for five years and then it was demolished because it was stinking, and they never rebuilt it. The political party has promised that they will give us a new toilet.

After this conversation, I asked Meena for some additional insights around what Nanmani was saying. Meena explained that she was frustrated, as Nanmani knew there was no point in listening to what the political party was promising, as it would likely not eventuate. Interestingly, in this instance, the rebuilding or restoration of the toilet was spoken about as an election promise in the upcoming elections in Bengaluru. This implied an awareness at a municipal government level of the need for a working toilet in the market and reflected wider concerns for increasing the number of toilets in the city generally. Concerns which were then communicated back to the women. However, while the need itself may be recognised, it was not a priority and subsequently there has not been any action taken.

Role of the street vendors union

One of the key players in providing a forum for the rights of vendors and ensuring they are involved in sanitation planning is the Street Vendors Union. To understand what, if anything, was being done to support the women I had been speaking with, I asked the representative of the Street Vendors Union if they had any involvement in this space:

> *We [the union] are focused on evictions of street vendors and we have little time to investigate the issues to do with public toilets. The union is mainly men, and it is difficult to examine this for women as it is a private topic, especially for menstruation. It is easier for women to ask questions about this.*

This was an insightful conversation and the representative touched on a key issue. Unlike their experiences talking with women vendors, the women I spoke with had no issues in speaking with me because I was also a woman, and that generated a certain level of comfort based on a shared experience. It was also interesting from the perspective that if NGOs have mainly male representation, this means the needs of women cannot be understood or acknowledged, creating a barrier to enabling them to access the support they need – as well as a lack of women representing themselves or other women. NGOs such as the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) exist for this purpose however, they had very little contact with the Street Vendors Union, or the women vendors that I spoke with.

Pay to use system

The way the system of provision was set up and implemented had a negative impact on the women that worked against them by accentuating their precarity and the subsequent compromises required. An example of how the system works against this group of women (and women more broadly), is the pay to use system that is operated and enforced through the municipal government for women's public toilets. In Bengaluru the cost to use a women's public toilet ranged between Rs.2-Rs.5 for each use and is enforced to offset the cost of development and ongoing maintenance of women's public toilets. At the same time, there is no charge for men's toilets.[26] As most vendors I spoke with earned around Rs.150 per day, a cumulative payment of Rs.3 or Rs.5 for each use of the toilet took a sizeable proportion of their daily earnings, meaning the cost was a barrier for use. Tanvi explained how this was problematic:

> *I pay RS.5 each time I use them, but I do not like that. It is expensive and I do not make very much money, sometimes I only sell Rs.150 a day. The toilets are not clean, and we still must pay each time we use them. They should be free.*

Looking at this more broadly, it is important to consider that one of the reasons they could not afford the additional expenses of using the toilet was because they also had other expenses during the day that were required to keep vending, as Bhaanupriya explained,

[26] Men's toilets were mainly urinals and I assume that because they did not require the same amount of water or servicing this was why they were free.

As well as paying for toilets, I also must pay for the food to sell and transportation costs. I have four children and my husband does not do anything, he is very lazy and drinks a lot. I must support them on Rs.150 a day. Nothing is free here.

Figure 31: Sign outside the main toilets at KR Market

As many of the women spoke about the cost being unaffordable, I wanted to find out more about why the system was implemented, so I asked a representative at the Street Vendors Union about it. They explained:

> *Toilets were free. However, in the early 2000's there was a task force which meant private individuals set up to improve Bengaluru and policies were then centered on a public private partnership model and they started collecting money for toilets.*
>
> *...If you are poor in the city, you cannot even piss for free.*

To demonstrate the extent to which this may differ from other groups of people, in terms of affordability, some research that shows having a 'caretaker' stationed outside the toilet collecting money results in increased usage of public toilets. This is because the women felt they cleaned them more and kept them safe from harassment (Reddy, Rasharem & Vedala, 2019). I found this important because for the women I spoke with, the cost was far too high in relation to how much they earn, especially if they needed to use the toilet multiple times (this was particularly the case for women with health issues like diabetes). Looking at this within the broader context, this reality shows how the

system the women are embedded within does not provide toilets or sanitation for them that meets their needs, but it also works against them in ways that amplify experiences of precarity in moments of need.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some of the issues with provision of toilets and sanitation for women working as vendors in Bengaluru. Observing toilet blocks and highlighting some of the issues around provision draws attention to the needs that women have for adequate toilets and sanitation while vending in marketplaces. It also shows the extent to which their needs are largely invisible to local authorities. At best, promises were made by local authorities for more toilets, but these were never realised, meaning the women had to continuously mitigate the impacts of a lack of provision. This almost always came at the cost of their health and wellbeing and the women found themselves frequently working in discomfort. Or, as a very last resort, not working at all.

A lack of provision also impacted their income, through having to pay to use them, missing vending time while walking to and from the toilet or from missing work. The more their income was affected, the higher the need to compromise, creating a cycle of precarity that fluctuated with the needs that were being experienced at any point in time. This was particularly important because of their absolute dependence on that livelihood for being able to provide for themselves and their families.

Even though a lack of provision of toilets and sanitation had a range of negative impacts, this was not the main concern they had while vending. As the representative from the Street Vendor's Union pointed out, the women were constantly being evicted which jeopardised their ability to earn a livelihood and as a result, the women no longer felt their need for public space was recognised. In the next chapter, I look at how my research broadened to looking at the provision of public spaces for women vendors and the way they need to respond to this in everyday life.

Chapter Six: Evictions and the rights to public space

Figure 32: Women vending outside KR Market

The role of women is to attend, in a torn world, to the details of everyday life that allow a household to function, collecting supplies, cooking, washing, and straightening up, seeing to children, that allow life to knit back into some viable rhythm – how it is the small things that are a match for the consequences of unspeakable horror for which other necessaries are not substitutes. (Cavell, 2007, pg.xiv)

Introduction

Building on the previous chapter, this chapter adds an additional layer of understanding to what living a precarious everyday life looks like for women vendors in this reserach and highlights how their everyday life oscillates between varying forms and registers of precarity.

Halfway through the fieldwork, this project broadened from a focus on provision of toilets and sanitation, to looking at the provision of public space and how the women were experiencing frequent

evictions from their vending spaces, which severely destabilised their daily life and threatened their capacity to earn a livelihood. The frequency of evictions also meant they need to mitigate the impacts of evictions in the immediate term, but they also needed to prepare as best they could, for the potential of an eviction occurring in the future.

The first section of this chapter explores how even though vending is a well-established occupation in Bengaluru, the women experience frequent evictions and harassment. I discuss a major eviction from KR Market that occurred during fieldwork, which subsequently changed the course of this research as it led to several questions about access to public space for vending and why this group of women were at risk of evictions. I also explore the reasons behind why the evictions are taking place and the underlying negative discourses about vending and informal work which directly result in their removal.

In the second section, I look at rights to public space for women vendors, specifically focusing on the different ways they look to legitimise their use of vending spaces and the barriers they face to doing so. I discuss how, in this context, the women have little opportunity to address the evictions or improve the types of spaces they have access to for vending. Furthermore, constant evictions have impacted their ability to form connections with organisations, such as the Street Vendor's Union, which may be able to offer them support and help form collective action to advocate for better and more secure access to public space.

In the final section, I discuss how the women mitigate the impacts of evictions and associated financial insecurity. I look at the ways they do this through employing a number of strategies and making compromises that have a negative impact on their health and income, but also enable them to continue vending and enduring a precarious everyday life.

Evictions and the provision of public spaces for vending

Conversations about evictions

Two and a half weeks into this fieldwork, around 2000 vendors working in KR Market were evicted from outside the main building and surrounding streets.[27] Under the direction of the municipal government, the local authorities issued the vendors fines, forced them to leave and confiscated their belongings. The reason provided was they were being removed to clear space for the upcoming festival and because people campaigning for local government in the upcoming election wanted to 'clean up' the market. This was a significant event. While evictions did occur in KR Market from time to time, on

[27]Newspaper article in The Hindu about the eviction: https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/bbmp-clears-encroachments-at-kr-market-utility-building/article7576776.ece

this occasion the scale was unprecedented, with more vendors than usual removed. My attention was instantly captured as those evicted were part of the same cohort of women I had been speaking to about toilets. With this in mind, I thought it would be relevant to ask about the evictions.

Arriving at the market with Meena two days after the eviction, I noted the market was the busiest I had ever seen, which surprised me as I had anticipated it would be quieter due to the removal of vendors. Meena speculated that it was busy due to the upcoming festival, which was, ironically, also the reason they were evicted. Kumari was one of the women evicted and explained that Meena was correct, and she was only allowed back to sell her flowers to enable members of the public to make decorations for the festival. I asked her what happened:

> *On Monday the police came and evicted all of us. They took the food away and I had to pay a fine of Rs.100 to get it back. We have been given permission to vend today for the festival but tomorrow will be evicted again. Every time we are evicted, we lose money. So much business is lost. If we do not work, we do not get the money.*

In addition, Kumari was fearful she would no longer be able to vend at KR Market after the festival. Other women I spoke with were also told they were able to come back into the market, but only because of the upcoming festival. As the women were asked to return for this purpose, it indicated to them (and I) that they were an important part of the community as they provided goods at cheaper prices and enabled an event to take place (e.g. providing cheaper flowers for decorations). This also generated feelings of ambiguity due to mixed messaging. On the one hand, they were told they were not welcome in the marketplace, and on the other, they were told they were needed. This left the women feeling they were expendable and uncertain as to why they were removed. For example, Shanti who was vending next to Kumari spoke about this:

> *I do not know why it is a burden on them. We are not asking the government for any jobs or handouts – we just want a space to vend our things.*

Ambiguity was difficult navigate for this group of women because if they could not understand why they were being removed, it was hard to know how to prevent evictions in the future, or know when they may need to be ready to respond again. This is important due to the impacts the evictions were having both in terms of their income but also on their sense of security around being able to have a space to vend in the upcoming weeks.

As I unpacked this, I considered how Clara Han's work on 'critical moments' (2012) is a useful way of framing this discussion. A critical moment is an event, situation or emerging circumstance that can jeopardise an individual's capacity to endure, which creates a situation where they are precarious (Han,

2012). For the women I spoke with, evictions were such a moment and resulted in feelings of fear, stress and ongoing apprehension about vending in the future. Considering their absolute need to earn money and that they were often supporting multiple people, the feelings associated with being evicted were accentuated greatly. As I continued asking questions about evictions, it became clear from the conversations that the women had experienced these multiple times, contributing to feelings ongoing insecurity and vulnerably while vending.

Figure 33: Police car driving through KR Market

Increasing seriousness of evictions

I initially considered that the KR Market eviction was a one-off event, however, when I started asking questions about evictions more generally, I found that evictions were becoming increasingly common. While most women had experienced multiple evictions, they felt that over the past few years they were increasing in frequency and severity, with this latest one being the most serious. Poorvi, who had vended for almost twenty-five years at KR Market, conversed with me about this:

> *We have faced evictions many times, but this time it is more serious A new council and a big personality have come in and said, "Look at what is your market is like – Clean it up."*

Poorvi clarified that she felt it was increasingly likely she would not be able to vend in KR Market, and other markets in the city, in the future. She was not the only vendor that held this view, and other vendors like Shanti, reiterated these feelings:

> *There are different challenges in vending now. I have been working here as a street vendor for 20 years and we have faced evictions several times, but this time it is more serious.*

Meena conveyed to me multiple times over the next few days as I spoke to the women that they felt a tremendous amount of stress over not being able to return, to an extent they had not experienced before.

I was not able to notice the nuancing of this within the conversations, but I did note the frustration in their voices and hand gestures as they were speaking.

Reflecting on the conversations, I considered there were two main reasons for the perception of increased seriousness. Firstly, the fine issued alongside the eviction is significant, because despite paying the fine the women were still removed. In this respect, a fine implies a sense of lawbreaking or wrongdoing on their part for vending, opposed to an eviction that only involves removal for a particular purpose. Secondly, frequent and increased experiences of harassment by the police, public and local authorities was a constant reminder that they are considered to have no right to vend and could be removed at any moment. Shanti explained:

> *When they are not telling us to leave, the police are harassing us. What can we do about it?*

Given the immediate impact of a loss of income, and the longer-term stress over prolonged evictions I wanted to understand more about eviction and access to public spaces, and why this group of women were being targeted.

Why evictions are occurring

The evictions are occurring within a context that values the rights some groups of people have for public space over others. In Chapter Two I discussed how rights to public space are sometimes based on the prioritisation of private business and economic growth over informal work and occupations, such as street vending. These discourses were very evident in this situation as the women were told they were told they were being removed because they took up too much room and created a lot of rubbish. While vendors did create rubbish from food scraps, most of the rubbish came from trucks bringing produce into the market or was created by the general public.

Furthermore, the women had little choice in it accumulating, as the infrastructure responsible for rubbish removal was inadequate. As the local authorities wanted to 'clean up the market' removing vendors was a straightforward way to show that action had been taken and this was reflected in the way they were spoken to, which some of the women relayed to me:

> *The police say they do it because they want to protect pedestrian safety and because of this they do not care what we are doing….*
>
> *…We, the vendors, are just shooed away…*
>
> *…People in the residential complexes down the road have complained that we are a hazard and have a stench from the garbage that we bring with us.*

These conversations reflected negative stereotypes held by the public, police, and local authorities about informal work and street vending. Policies in Bengaluru are orientated in favour of developing a 'clean and modern city,' and vendors working in informal spaces are viewed as incompatible with that overarching vision and are therefore removed. In this instance, evictions and harassment disregard the contribution they make to the local economy and how vending enables them to reduce poverty for families, through offering a vital source of employment.

Another likely reason for evictions is that in Bengaluru, public spaces once used for vending have decreased due to urban development. This means that some vendors are increasingly needing to repurpose areas of public spaces not 'officially' designated for vending such as the footpath or outside buildings, leaving them at greater risk of evictions (Bhowmik, 2001; Tufa, 2017; Cohen, 2000). Other vendors have access to spaces that are under cover, or inside a building, and the variation in spaces used reflects how public space is not equally available in quantity or quality.

It is important draw attention to the diverse types of spaces used for vending because the women I spoke with were more likely to be vending outside, on the ground, compared to men who predominantly vend in the main buildings or under cover. To demonstrate the difference in types of spaces I have included two photographs below (Figure 34 & Figure 35). The first is a formal vending space and the second an informal space:

Figure 34: Formal vending space inside KR Market

Figure 35: Informal vending space

I was interested to know more about why some groups of people have access to adequate spaces in terms of protection from evictions, and others do not. A vendor named Pria articulated why there was a difference in access:

In the building you must pay for space, but outside in these spaces you do not have to.

As the women had low incomes, it is likely that the cost of a safe, permanent, and secure space that would protect them from evictions, would be unaffordable. In this respect, the way markets operate did not consider the needs of women working as small-scale vendors, while also leaving them with no choice but to vend in spaces where they were at greater risk of evictions and harassment.

Rights to public space

Provision of rights to public space

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014, is intended to regulate street vending by providing vendors with an adequate environment for vending (Street Vendors Act, 2014; Shalini & Roever, 2011). This means vendors are entitled to use some parts of public space for conducting their business, and that the women vending on the outskirts of KR Market (and other formal and informal marketplaces) legally could have right to vend in those spaces and should not be removed or harassed for vending there. While this may be the case, this right to public space is shrouded in a substantial amount of ambiguity and it is not legitimised.

For example, one way of legitimising rights to secure spaces is through obtaining a vending license. The National Policy on Urban Street Vendors (2009) sets out a process for municipal governments across India to regulate street vending by issuing licenses or certificates to vendors (as I discussed in Chapter Two). However, research on the implementation of this policy shows that vendors in Bengaluru are not provided with licenses and are still experiencing evictions and harassment, alongside having to pay bribes (Patel, 2019; Shalini & Roever, 2011; National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2009). Additionally, to obtain a license, street vendors must still pay license fees, meaning they are not easily accessible or affordable for everyone who needs one (Bhowmik & Saha, 2012).

In line with the research mentioned above, none of the women I spoke with had a vending license. They never explained the reason, but I assumed it was because the licenses cost money and require the submission of forms and identification, which they also did not have. One woman had an ID card which she showed me and explained it was essential to accessing services. It also meant she could vote, which was important to her, as the local elections were currently taking place. However, this alone did not give her access to spaces for vending. A photograph of her ID card is shown below (Figure 36):

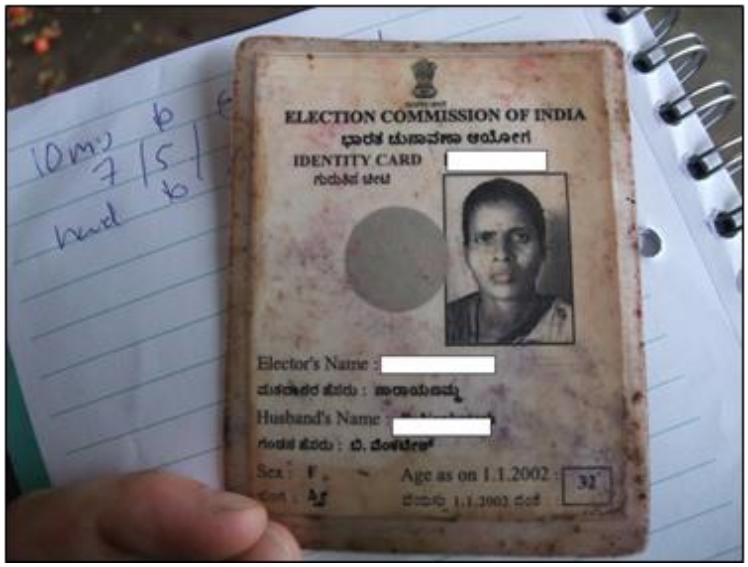

Figure 36: ID card

Fines and bribes

I assumed access to cards and licenses, and subsequent access to secure spaces, was different for the vendors who were vending in permanent spaces (from what I observed this was usually men). Especially those in the building who were likely to have a license to be able to secure those spaces.[28] As they were unable to obtain a license, the women had to secure spaces in other ways and one of the ways was

[28] It would be interesting to do a comparison, as I did not speak to any men vendors

through bribes and informal payments. Below are some of the ways the women described how this system worked:

> *The police collect Rs.50 from me each day, and we pay Rs.100 each week to the leader of the vendors who pays the police every month. Sometimes we pay Rs.50 to corporations too.*

> *The main problem is the police. We bribe them, and they take Rs.10 each day.*

> *I must pay to the leader Rs.10 a day and they pay the police.*

Payments varied in terms of how much was paid and to whom. In the short term, this helped some women feel they were securing their spaces, but in more recent days, it did not protect them from evictions or harassment. Avi expressed this to me:

> *The police collect Rs.50 from us each week and even after paying we are still now harassed. Every day we pay, and every day they still want to evict us.*

I felt the frustration in Avi's voice. Despite the payment, she was still harassed and evicted, and any security gained was only temporary. Understanding this context provides insight into how precarity is experienced by the women in this study. Their context meant they were subject to harassment and evictions but also meant that they needed to pay for spaces as required, regardless of how variable that payment is. What is interesting about this is the way they adapt to doing so and broadly accept that informal payments and insecure access to adequate public space is not certain or guaranteed and simply a part of what they need to mitigate in order to work as a vendor. Problematically, this also means the women in this study were also subject to spaces that placed them at greater risk of evictions and harassment – creating a complex and restrictive cycle of dependency that was impossible for them to get out of.

Looking at this a different way, it could be argued that if the system was working to support them, one would assume that accessing licenses would be a simpler process and they would be assisted with that process as well as the payment for it and any support needed to obtain identification. Instead, it was not, further perpetuating the gap between those who could do so and were supported in that way (which was mostly men working as vendors in permanent spaces) and those who could not.

Advocating for rights to public space

Evictions place the women in a reactive situation, providing them little time to respond. Consequently, in response to being evicted, they responded by paying to get their things back and setting up a place elsewhere to vend, as opposed to challenging the eviction or resisting it. I talked with Kailash who explained this to me:

We cannot complain as we are not supposed to be here. If a police officer sees us, we must move, it is an order from the top. It is not in our hands. What can we do?

Compounding this is an underlying fear that complaining about evictions or anything to do with their spaces, such as access to toilets or harassment, could trigger an eviction and was therefore simply not an option. Chabi, a vendor at KR Market articulated:

If we try to say anything, we are seen to be causing more issues and told to leave right away.

Another example was Veena, who was selling bags on the side of the path underneath the overhanging roof of the building in KR Market. The broken drain above was dripping a steady stream of water onto her items and she had strategically placed a piece of tarpaulin between the drain and the mat, so most of the water went onto the road. Venna explained:

There is a dripping tap, and the water falls onto my things, but the building belongs to a trust, and we are unable to tell them anything. If I say anything, they will say just take your things and go. You cannot complain and we do not know who to contact if we are facing challenges.

Figure 37: Veena's stall with her makeshift cover

I visited a market which amplified issues around the women being able to improve the provision of safe and secure spaces more generally, and the lack of action from the municipal government in ensuring this occurred. The market was located next to one of the runoffs from the lake and it was also a fish market, which meant the smell was overpowering. I spoke with a vendor named Shari who had vended at the market for around 15 years who led me across the street to a large pile of rubbish, comprised of offcuts of fish intermixed with garbage and food scraps. She explained that the vendors had repeatedly asked for the rubbish to be removed as it was keeping customers away, however, despite repeated requests, nothing had happened:

There are other more important issues [than toilets]. The rubbish is not from the vendors. It is from everyone who lives nearby, and they just dump it here. Food scraps and meat. It is a big problem because the customers do not come to this market because of the smell which means that I do not earn as much money as I could.

Two weeks later I returned, and the pile of rubbish, and stench, had grown substantially. Shari was not there, but another vendor reiterated that they were still waiting for the rubbish to be removed. The pictures below depict the change to the pile over that time.

Figure 38: Rubbish pile before

Figure 39: Rubbish pile 2 weeks later

In the previous chapter I discussed Clara Han's work on how social relationships can give insight into precarity and I was interested to understand how social networks between vendors enabled them to navigate critical moments, like evictions or advocating for spaces where their needs were met. With this in mind, I asked some of the women about how relationships with other women vendors worked in the market, in response to challenging evictions, or for supporting each other when evictions occurred. Pria explained the issue with forming social networks:

> *There are so many women working here, but we cannot mobilise. Who is going to fight? It is crowded and crazy and we work very long hours and cannot socialize as we are busy, all day every day.*

Pria identified what some of the other women also pointed out, and that is the limited extent to which the women can rely on each other for support. From what I understood based on the conversations, coupled with my observation of not being able to find the same women to speak with on subsequent visits, the women moved around a lot. This was in part due to a lack of available space but also because evictions, or on occasion the threat of harassment, created forced movement.

Frequent evictions impacted on social relationships within marketplaces. Constant movement meant they were restricted in their capacity to form collective action and in a comparable way the women were unable to find others to sell items on their behalf when they left them to use a toilet. These experiences reflected the research by Basu & Nagendra (2019). For the women in their study, as with mine, displacement had meant that the women had lost their connection with the spaces but also with each other, leading to a breakdown of critical social support networks.

In Bengaluru, public space is becoming an increasingly scarce and contested resource, and negotiation is needed to ensure safe and secure access. This has made the role of organisations, such as the Street Vendors Union, critical in terms of advocacy for the provision of public spaces as well as challenging the evictions. Despite this necessity, and the union being well established in the city, the women I spoke with did not know about the union. Kashmir explained:

> *There are no people who speak to us about these issues that we have. There is no union. There are women who raise issues from time to time but there is no time to do this, as we are at our spaces all day.*

The women who did know of the union had limited knowledge about what they did and did not know how to access them for help. Problematically, even if they did know how to contact the union, the women did not have time to go to the office to speak with anyone as it would require time away from selling which they could not afford. To better understand the relationship between the union and

vendors, I met with a representative at the Street Vendors Union in Bengaluru. Although this was a short conversation, it helped supplement what I had learned so far about evictions and why they were happening. The union were aware evictions were occurring, but they found it difficult to support vendors as there was no clear record of who they are and where they normally vend, especially women. Women using informal spaces, tend to move around within and between markets frequently, making it difficult to locate them, especially after an eviction (Personal Communication with Representative from the Street Vendors Union, 2015).

I had also found this as I had struggled to find the same women to speak with to have follow up conversations. For this reason, I could appreciate the union had limited resourcing, but I did not understand why they did not go into the marketplaces to speak with the women about the challenges. As they were aware of the time constraints the women had, this would have provided the women with the opportunity to learn about their rights to public space and where to go if they needed support. The conversations about political voice were concerning as it quickly became clear the women did not have a forum where they could negotiate access to space or voice their concerns. Instead, they are required to sit in the margins of society and remain unprotected by both the state and NGOs operating in the city.

Living through the precarious present

Evictions are a 'critical moment' as they significantly decrease income security and subsequently severely destabilised daily living (Han, 2014; Han, 2018). The women in my study were often the sole income earners and any disruption would likely have serious detrimental impacts for themselves and their families. Furthermore, as they were unable to challenge what was happening, it meant they needed to structure their daily lives around alleviating the initial economic impact as well as any future destablisation. This section looks at some of the ways they do this.

Working in precarious conditions and discomfort

Through observing the spaces women were vending in, I became acutely aware of how they are embedded within the physical structure of marketplaces and are completely reliant on that infrastructure to enable vending. Working outside on the ground means the women need to vend in informal spaces where they were very vulnerable to the impacts of failing infrastructure. For example, I observed that the women vended in small, cramped, and uncomfortable spaces and were more exposed to traffic fumes and congestion, which was compounded when the temperature was hot, as was the case all year. The women were also surrounded by piles of rubbish, compiled of food waste, paper coffee cups, pieces of plastic and mud peppered with flower petals which built up into piles throughout the day, emitting unpleasant smells and attracting swarms of flies.

To manage rubbish, larger marketplaces contract street sweepers to brush rubbish into smaller piles, to be collected by rubbish trucks later in the day. If it is not collected regularly, or if the market is busy, rubbish can build substantially and prevent flows of traffic and people, and further heightens the health risk due to exposure to bacteria (e.g. through airborne pathogens and bacteria).

Figure 40: Large pile of rubbish outside of what used to be a toilet block

Complete reliance on public space for vending and the infrastructure within in, also means the need to respond when it fails. For example, flooding due to inadequate drainage infrastructure, especially KR Market, was a frequent challenge. One morning when I was in KR Market it started raining heavily, the downpour quickly drenched the dirt path and piles of rubbish, creating streams of mud, spreading across the path, and creeping towards the edges of the women's stalls. I ducked under cover and watched as some of the vendors pulled out tarpaulins to cover their food and flowers, while others held tarpaulins and cardboard over their heads and mats.

I stepped out from under my shelter to help. One vendor piled her fruit into the bowls, and we carefully moved them out of the way of the water cascading down the side of the building and waited for the rain to stop. Downpours of this nature were a common occurrence in markets,[29] especially during monsoon season when the rainfall can be unpredictable, heavy, and frequent. Responding quickly is critical to

[29] KR Market is particularly prone to flooding as prior to being a market and a battlefield during the Anglo-Mysore wars it was a water tank/reservoir used by the local communities living in the Bangalore Pete to the east. As the lake was filled in to be used as a battlefield and market, water still tends to pool when it rains, due to unmaintained drainage systems and a lack of infrastructure.

minimising the losses, yet damage to produce inevitably takes place resulting in the loss of produce, and a loss of income.

I couldn't help but also notice that the response the downpour generated was well rehearsed. The women came to the market with tarpaulins or something to cover their food with, as they knew rain and flooding was a possibility. In this sense, while it often resulted in a loss of produce, it was an expected inconvenience that came with vending at KR Market.

Figure 41: Path after the flood

As Chapter Five discussed, in Bengaluru infrastructure has not kept up with accelerated population growth and public spaces in the city are facing a range of challenges such as increased pollution, traffic congestion and rubbish which has resulted in a shortage of vending spaces (Saha 2009, Bhowmik, 2001; Chatterji & Roy, 2016). This is problematic for vendors as they require public space for extended periods of time and reflects the disadvantage women working as vendors face. Due to the insecurity of their income and how little they earn, it was more important to them that they were able to find a space with access to high numbers of potential customers to earn a livelihood that day, rather than vending in comfort or an environment where there is not risk to their health or produce.

The spaces they were vending in were also familiar and held significance to the women as they had often vended there for many years. As two women that I spoke with, explained:

> *Mari: This is what I do. I have been vending for 15 years. I am here because my mother vended here for 25 years, and I came with her when I was younger.*
>
> *Rani: My mother has worked here for 30 years, and I have been here since I was 2 and used to come with my mother when she came to sell things, and now I sell things too.*

To relocate would elicit feelings of loss, so in this respect, the prospect of relocating to an unfamiliar space was not ideal. Despite the challenges arising from inadequate infrastructure, or the potential threat of evictions from their spaces, the women were aware that either they navigate this, or not vend, or find an alternative and likely less busy location.

Taking out loans and debt

One of the main ways the women respond to financial insecurity, is through taking out loans from small microfinancing groups (or as they described themselves as 'self-help' groups) that visit the market. Lasya was one of these women and explained how this process works:

> *There are days where we are forced to move, and we do not get very much business. This means I take loans from local finance companies. It is hard to repay it especially if we do not get much business. I have taken out loans from two different people, which cost me Rs.200 each week just to repay them. If I take out 10,000, I only get 9,000. I need the money, so I can buy the onions to sell.*

In the short term, loans can help mitigate financial insecurity, however through taking out a loan many of the women were trapped in a cycle of debt. This is because the women were charged a fee for borrowing the money, meaning the amount they borrow is not the amount that they receive, and they are charged high rates of interest. Further compounding this, the repayments, including the interest payments on interest, are high in relation to their income, so the women sometimes borrow additional money to meet those. Aarti explained this:

> *Most of my investment and money comes from money I have borrowed, so I have a lot of debt, but it is how I can keep doing business. I now have a large amount of debt…*
>
> *… I am always in debt.*

In considering how women navigate a precarious everyday life, taking on debt is a strategy that, despite the negative implications, enables them to continue vending, whether it is to fund living costs or to buy produce that they would on-sell over the coming weeks or months. In a context where they were at constant risk of evictions, coupled with experiences of extortion through paying bribes and fines, loans were a method through which the women were able to stabalise daily life in the immediate term. Living in debt, while necessary, had the potential to cause tremendous amount of stress as Pria articulates:

> *I work from 5am until 9pm at night. It is incredibly stressful. The debt piles up. If I get sick it means I must come to work and make money, or it piles up more.*

When thinking about taking on debt, I consider Clara Han's work in Chile (2012). In her ethnography, her participants obtain debt to enable them to keep their daily lives going as smoothly as possible, within a difficult economic context that requires debt for survival. Mirroring the women in Han's research, for the women vendors in Bengaluru, obtaining a loan through the 'self-help groups' is an accessible form of assistance, yet over the long term the compromise is that they are now embedded in a cycle of debt. This is a continuous struggle and it is particularly stressful and difficult. While responding to the external pressures of making debt payments, the stress is compounded because they also have other multiple competing priorities such as caring for family and making sure they are earning enough each day to survive, in addition to earning enough to pay back the loan (Han, 2011).

It is interesting to note how the women are immersed within an economic context that both assisted and constrains them. In the short term, access to loan enables them to endure financial hardship and accentuated precarity as the money supported them to continue vending (i.e. they were able to use it to pay for additional items to sell later in the week or cover costs associated with vending such as paying to use the toilets and the bribes required). However, over the longer term, as the debt mounted up, it pushed them into situations where they were facing constant dependence on debt for vending, having to work longer hours to make repayments. During these conversations I noted how the women were able to endure different registers of precarity as this was accentuated at times through increased stress and pressure from loan payments or tiredness from working long hours to pay back the loans. Looking at these experiences, precariousness for these women was experiencing and responding to their circumstances fluctuating from moment to moment, and day to day.

Problematically, the women had very little choice in who they obtained money from. Because the money was generally borrowed from parties such as 'self-help groups' and informal loan companies, they were not afforded the same security that they would from an institution like a bank. In this sense, taking on debt was an important part of navigating everyday life as a vendor entrepreneur but also reflective of the context within which they are operating and how it works against them. These are parallels with the payments required for using toilets. While a necessary payment, when looking at the financial implications of that payment and what it means for their capacity to provide for their families and business, it shows how economic and social systems can work to provide but also constrain.

Enduring a precarious everyday

For most of the women I spoke with, everyday life involved juggling multiple daily routines and tasks, and what I initially deemed to be extensive working hours. Most of them had the responsibility of caring for multiple family members, and often their husbands if they were still around, as well as keeping the household running. Quite a few of the women expressed that their husbands were alcoholics or had other problems with addition or suffered from mental health issues that left them unable to earn

money. Daily tasks included, completing household chores, such as cleaning, cooking as well as looking after the children. Panya, told me about her life and daily routine:

> *I have three daughters. I wake up at 4am every morning and go to city market to buy these things. I come back home at 6am to do the household chores, my children, cook breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I try to arrive at this market by 11am and I stay until about 10pm.*
>
> *I separated from my husband about four years ago because he never earned any money, and I had to look after him because he drank too much. Having to take care of him and the children on my own was too difficult so it was easier to leave him, vend here and take care of the children by myself.*
>
> *I have the children on my own now, but they are old enough now to look after themselves, so I leave them at home when I can. They are used to it.*

Eashwari, another woman I spoke with, told me that in addition to having to care for her children, her husband was completely dependent on her for his care and explained what her life was like:

> *I start vending at 10am. I do all the cooking and cleaning in the morning and get the children ready for school before I start. I have five children. I did have six, but one died from typhoid last year. I care for my husband too because he has gangrene and lost both of his legs.*

As Panya and Eashwari have alluded, to mitigate financial insecurity, the compromise most of the women made was to work longer hours each day so they could earn more while it possible to do so. It also enabled them to mitigate any future disruption to earning when evicted again. Working ten to fifteen hours a day was the norm for most of the women. Haina was one of these women:

> *My husband is always drunk and stays at home. I have two sons to take care of too, so I must come to work. It is difficult. I work 15 hours a day. I come here at 5 in the morning and do not leave until 10 at night.*

When they spoke about their working hours, this did not include the time taken to get to and from the marketplace, or other tasks associated with vending, such as sourcing produce, setting up their space or cleaning it. In the short term, the flexibility that vending provides enabled them to earn more and, in this respect, the physical and emotional requirement was worth it. The flexibility of hours also enabled them to adjust their hours in response to critical events (like an eviction or having to pay more as a bribe to stay in that space) and in the event they might need more money that day or week.

To endure a precarious everyday life, the women worked to restore and maintain daily life and routines, and their focus was on making sure they could continue vending, despite any hardship, so not escalate their poverty any further. I draw on the work of Veena Das to understand how women keep life functioning in response to critical events (Das, 2008; Das, 2007; Das, 1996; Han, 2004). For this group of women, as with the women in Das's work, carrying on as 'per normal' and staying 'silent' to the extent they do, enables them to endure through managing the responsibilities elsewhere in their lives and providing for their families.

To help me understand this I also thought about work of Kathleen Millar. In her ethnography, *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and labour on Rio's Garbage Dump,* (2018), Millar draws attention to how informal work provides security by enabling people manage insecurities in other parts of their lives and respond to everyday emergencies (e.g. pay debts) (Millar, 2018). In an equivalent way, vending and the informality of the occupation, also provides security and enables women to keep life going and endure within times of uncertainty and hardship.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the precarious everyday lives of women, and how they are situated within different economic, social and political systems that create and perpetuate challenges they need to endure. On the one hand the systems work to disadvantage them and heighten their precarity, however, there is a sense of reliance and importance on having access to vending as a form of work.

The most immediate and pressing issue the women in this study faced was experiences of regular evictions from their spaces. In relation to the initial research topic of looking at provision of toilets and sanitation, while provision was a problem and had negative impacts, evictions had the potential to destablise daily life, the consequences of which were far more serious. In response to the conversations about evictions, this chapter highlights how the political and social context of Bengaluru has meant that there is conflict over the use of public space between vendors and local authorities. While the women were evicted from their spaces, the only spaces they had available were in informal areas of public space, subsequently leaving them at greater risk of evictions.

As the fieldwork progressed, I became aware of how the women have no negotiating power nor support to challenge the evictions or improve their working conditions and access to public space. In addition, they struggled to form social networks within marketplaces to form collective action. They were unaware of organizations such as the Street Vendor's Union, and this, coupled with a lack of social support, meant they were left with no opportunity to advocate for change.

Little access to support means that the women need to put in place strategies to alleviate the impacts of the challenges they face while vending to ensure they can keep vending to provide for their families. The lengths to which they go to, such as working long hours, taking on debt and working in spaces that are uncomfortable, speak to the precariousness of their everyday life - these small actions and compromises highlighting the realities of what it means to work and live within this context.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Figure 42: Cow eating rubbish behind women vendors at KR Market

The moment when things throw themselves together into something that feels like something is the kind of cultural production that's often given form in literature and poetic folklore. (Stewart, 2008, pg.75)

What this means and why I have written about it

Reflections on this research process

It is the task of the anthropologist to attend to others, gather information, find out things and shed light on the things we do not know - things about the world and others that we want to know more about. The ethnographer seeks to understand what those things mean, and positions themselves to observe how things can come together to create something that feels like something else and show why that 'something' is important or essential to themselves and others (Ingold, 2014; Stewart, 2008). This thesis is based on this concept and provides insights into the precariouss everyday lives of women working as

vendors in marketplaces around Bengaluru and on how social, political and economic systems bring about challenges that create and perpetuate experiences of precarity.

Over the past six years, this research project has been through a process of coming together, falling apart, and coming back together again - evolving and fluctuating as I have, at times, struggled to make sense of what I found out, what it means and how I could provide the 'something' that was important.

The fieldwork component of this research took place in 2015. While a (slightly) ambitious topic, I wanted to fill a gap in current ethnography and draw attention to a current and pressing issue that women face. Access to toilets and sanitation was an area I was particularly interested in exploring. Having spent most of my childhood and teenage years living in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, I was acutely cognisant of the health impacts and diseases arising from a lack of toilets, water, sanitation, and healthcare, many of which have long term or fatal consequences. As part of my postgraduate study I became aware that the provision of toilets and sanitation, alongside fresh water, was a challenge for women across India, especially in rapidly growing cities like Bengaluru. Importantly, the implications on everyday life for women working without toilets were largely unknown. With this in mind, I planned the research, and travelled to Bengaluru to speak with women working as vendors in marketplaces around the city about this subject.

Reflecting on the fieldwork, the most critical actions I took were adapting methods to fit the context and the needs of the women and broadening the research topic in response to the conversations. While it is easy to say now, at the time it was hugely challenging as I had limited time in Bengaluru and was not prepared for what turned out to be a more complex project than I had imagined. Consequently, after returning to New Zealand, I struggled with analysing and articulating what I had learned. While I knew the 'answers' were there, the complexities of merging my experiences in the field with the theory I was using to understand those experiences, was not organically happening. Despite persisting, the writing was not accurately reflecting the realities of the women's everyday lives, so I made the difficult decision to give it time, stopped writing and left the Master's programme.

In June 2020, I made the decision to finish this thesis. As challenging as it was reopening the word document that I left a year and a half prior, which I knew did not reflect where I was now at personally and academically, I felt that I owed it to the women, and myself, to complete this work. Submitting the research is especially relevant now because of the emergence and persistence of COVID-19. As New Zealand went into lockdown in early 2020, the circumstances of the women I spoke with weighed heavily in my thoughts, especially when reading news reports about the extent to which India (and Bengaluru) were impacted. Due to their location in busy public spaces coupled with a lack of access to water, these women must be at greater risk of contracting COVID-19. Furthermore, as public spaces like markets are closing, any form of lockdown will potentially leave the women with no opportunity

to earn a livelihood. Sharing their stories today will show that for lives already on the margins of survival, a global pandemic would certainly have severe and catastrophic consequences for them and their families - because, as this work has shown, when living a precarious life to the extent they do, there is no safety net, no back up plan and no support.

A summary of the key themes

Over the past six years I have spent time exploring the work of several anthropologists referred to throughout this thesis, and on returning to writing last year, their ideas were instrumental in enabling the depth of analysis required. Reading their ethnographies and journal articles introduced me to the 'concept' of precarity and provided a framework for thinking about precarity in a different way, and for defining what it means in relation to the lived experience. I have been inspired by the way these anthropologists take tiny pieces of everyday life and highlight the seemingly small and mundane, making it significant. The individual is, in that moment, important, and telling their stories shows the tremendous power of capturing the human condition. This thinking has remained at the forefront of my mind over this past year as I have worked my way through the complexities of the fieldwork and more deeply considered and developed the key themes that have emerged.

Portraying the everyday lives of the women, their struggles and challenges, and drawing attention to how they endure a precarious everyday life is the key point of this work. To share the everyday lives of the women I have focused on two key areas. Firstly, I explored precarity through looking at issues relating to the provision of toilets and sanitation and the impact this has on health and income. Secondly, I looked more broadly at the provision of public space, and how the women struggle to find and maintain safe and secure public spaces for vending and are subject to frequent evictions. Importantly, most of the women with were the sole income earner and completely dependent on their income from vending to support themselves and their families. Understanding the nature of this dependence explains why they made the compromises they do - not eating or drinking for the entirety of a day to avoid using a toilet or working fifteen hours a day in uncomfortable and spaces that posed a health and safety risk.

These small actions have revealed larger unfathomable and unjust realities, and show how the systems they are entangled within work against them, in the sense that they experience displacement, harassment and poor working conditions which have a severe negative impact on their health and income. Highlighting the compromises made has provided insight into the lived experiences of precarity and the way in which it fluctuates and changes in severity from moment to moment. In response to their context, the women navigate the impacts as required to continue enduring while also trying to make sure they are preparing as best they can for any future disruptions to daily life – illuminating their capacity to go between strength and vulnerability or experiencing both at the same time. For this reason, embedded

within stories of hardship and adversity, are accounts of how they endure precariousness by keeping life functioning and how they continue to work so they can provide for themselves and their families.

What changes are required?

The reality this work highlights is that if these women were better supported by the municipal authorities the challenges and precarity they experience in everyday life would be reduced. At a system level, it is essential to consider the possibility of the creation of a space where informal workers, such as street vendors, have rights to public space and social protection while engaging in informal work. Critical to this is the implementation of international policy at a regional and local level, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 5 relates to the provision of sanitation and toilets, particularly for women and girls, Goal 6 is focused on gender equity, which includes access to public spaces and Goal 8 has a focus on supporting women in employment (United Nations, 2021). These provide a useful framework for governments and NGOs in ensuring provision of sanitation and adequate public space for women street vendors.

Evident in this work is that for these women, it is because of their profession and gender they were targeted, marginalised, and victimised by the government and the public. After the fieldwork, and over the past few years, evictions have continued in Bengaluru, with several mass evictions occurring from KR Market, despite increased efforts to prevent them from occurring (there are now several social media groups dedicated to this goal). Further action is needed to change this, especially for groups of vendors using informal spaces, such as the women I spoke with.

Part of this includes work to provide the women a forum through which they can be supported to advocate for change. A key step to addressing this is the creation of links between organisations and vendors, to support them to access safe and secure spaces for vending. Most of the women I spoke with were not aware that organisations such as the Street Vendor's Union or Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) exist, and those who did, did not have the time or resources to contact them.

At an individual level, small actions from organisations, such as going into markets to meet and form connections with women vendors is important. This provides the opportunity to ask women about the various challenges they face and work out ways in which they can be supported. It also creates a way to distribute information about where to go to access support. For example, this could be through providing cards (i.e. providing the phone number and location of the union or other organisations such as SEWA) or create networks of women where they can meet near, or in, their workspaces.

It is important to note that most of the women I spoke with are illiterate. Given this, there may be other ways to contact them through establishing offices close by markets and building up the relationships required to enable them to access support face-to-face. The point I am making here is that where possible, alternative ways to communicate information and involve women must be used and these

methods must not work against them (e.g. requiring them to take time off work to attend meetings). Building critical connections will also enable the women to represent themselves, or form groups of women vendors so their needs can be represented within NGOs, who can then advocate specifically for women's needs, and put forward relevant suggestions for changes. It could also provide a forum for women to represent themselves within these organisations. Importantly, this would mean that when evictions take place and the women are displaced, they will be supported to retain social networks and continue collective advocacy.

In terms of the provision of toilets and sanitation, in Bengaluru, ongoing environmental degradation and a depleting underground water supply remain as major issues. This will continue to impact the women while they are working, but also impact them at home (i.e. accessing clean drinking water and safe and clean toilets). While the health impacts of a lack of sanitation and water provision are well understood globally, this is an issue that needs to be strongly advocated for, and efforts to draw awareness to the scale of the problem need to continue increasing. To put this into perspective, the most recent Joint Monitoring Programme Report, *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000-2020,* by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Children's Fund, shows that 1.6 billion people around the world do not have access to safe drinking water at home. 2.8 billion people do not have access to safe sanitation, and around 494 million people still practice open defecation - a large proportion of these groups are in India (World Health Organisation & United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). These statistics are difficult to ignore, and as this work shows, the impacts on everyday life are severe, especially for women.

Opportunities for future research

As I wrote this thesis, my mind constantly turned to different areas for further research. This could include looking more comprehensively at the gendered experiences of inadequate provision of toilets and sanitation or increasing instances of evictions. Doing so would provide the opportunity to compare men's experiences with women's, and further draw out the comparisons, offering greater insight into the challenges that women face and how these differ from the experiences of men. Highlighting these inequities will enable organisations that support women vendors to better understand the challenges women face and target responses accordingly.

It would be valuable to continue this work and do a more in-depth study into precarity and preciousness and how this is experienced by women in informal work across multiple locations. As part of this, further work is needed to understand the relationship between women in informal work and other organisations that are operating to support them. This would highlight the barriers to accessing support and subsequently enable them to be reduced.

Due to the emergence of COVID-19, understanding the impacts of a pandemic on women vendors is where another focus should be. It would be relevant to return to Bengaluru, or other cities where COVID-19 has had a severe impact, and look at the aftermath, especially for these women who are unlikely to have access to healthcare and vaccinations. The longer-term implications of the pandemic are likely to be far reaching and research would enable support to be directed where it is needed most.

Final reflections on fieldwork

The field was initially conceptualised as marketplaces in Bengaluru, and the city itself. What I slowly came to realise is that the 'field' did not start and stop within the boundaries of the marketplace or the city. It was more fluid than that. Starting long before I left and continuing after I returned to New Zealand where I analysed, processed, and found my own path through this work.

I am reminded by the words of anthropologist Tim Ingold, who describes ethnographic fieldwork as the 'encounters with the world' that we have during fieldwork and the way in which we view and reflect on these encounters both in the present moment and retrospectively (Ingold, 2014, pg.386; Ingold 2015). I have pondered on these words at various points throughout this writing process, perhaps at times incorporating it before I understood it. Clarity arriving only when I returned to complete this work and understanding how it deeply reflects the journey that I went on to forming the insights within this thesis. The field for me did not start and stop only when I was enrolled in the Master's programme – it also included the time in between where I grew, learned and was able to understand more fully what I had witnessed in relation to my own life.

In this sense, the field is not necessarily a tangible place, existing only in the spaces I encounter others, but comprised of places, people who informed and shaped the lens through which I view the world, and why I observed and commented on what I did. On reflection, the field is not entirely unlike the marketplaces that I was spending time in: fluid, full of comings and goings, transience, uncertain and difficult to determine where it stopped and started – coming together, falling apart and then coming back together again. A process of making and remaking, creating something that feels like something.

I remain grateful to the women who took the time to share aspects of their lives with me, and for the process that this research took. What I did not realise until much later was that this process, and the flux within which it took place, directly reflected the precarity of the women and the precarious context they were in. Looking back on the research process and experience doing ethnography, I wonder now if in its own small way, this research, and the way it took place, reflects exactly what it is trying to say.

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